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A soldier carries a child from a group of people brought in to Dover by the Border Force after a small boat incident in the Channel last year.
Photograph: Andrew Matthews/PA

[Immigration and asylum](#)

Keir Starmer accuses Sunak of electioneering with small boats plan

Labour leader points to looming May elections as refugee groups condemn PM's proposal for deporting asylum seekers

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Mon 6 Mar 2023 10.41 ESTFirst published on Mon 6 Mar 2023 03.46 EST

Keir Starmer has accused [Rishi Sunak](#) of electioneering as the prime minister's plans to detain and swiftly deport thousands of asylum seekers

were greeted with scepticism from unions, refugee charities and some former Conservative ministers.

As more people seeking refuge in the UK arrived across the Channel in chilly conditions on Monday, the [Labour](#) leader said the plans echoed previous announcements made to shore up support before local elections.

The prime minister is to [publish legislation](#) on Tuesday which is supposed to give ministers powers to detain thousands of people and place upon the home secretary a duty to remove them “as soon as reasonably practicable” to Rwanda or another country deemed to be safe.

One part of the proposals would set out that anyone who had crossed the Channel on a small boat would not just be removed to a third country but barred permanently from re-entry or ever applying for British citizenship.

The proposals have been [widely condemned](#) by refugee groups and others as impossible to enforce and likely to lead to tens of thousands of people fleeing war and persecution being locked up.

Starmer questioned the timing of the latest attempt to tackle the Channel crossings, suggesting it was an electoral tactic for May’s local contests in England.

“We had a plan last year which was put up in lights – ‘It’s going to be an election winner.’ These bits of legislation always seem to come when we’ve got a local election coming up,” he told LBC Radio.

“It was going to break the gangs – it didn’t. Now we’ve got the next bit of legislation with almost the same billing. I don’t think that putting forward unworkable proposals is going to get us very far.”

Starmer was referring to the government’s Nationality and Borders Act, last year’s attempt to tackle the problem by bringing in a two-tier system which reduces the support available to those seeking asylum by irregular means.

In a further development, the home secretary, Suella Braverman, has vehemently denied claims that when she was attorney general in 2020, she

advised against proposals to circumvent human rights laws.

Informed sources have told the Guardian that when ministers were working on the Sovereign Borders Act which later became the Nationality and Borders Act, Braverman advised against attempting to find a way of sidestepping the European convention on human rights (ECHR).

“Suella did not want to help on derogation of the ECHR. In fact she produced advice that said it was not possible and would be in breach of an international treaty. Now she seems to say it is possible,” a source said.

But Braverman’s office has hit back at the claims, saying she was not in a position to create policy. A source said: “This is absolute drivel pushed by people who have no clue what they are talking about. The legal parameters at the time were clear. The then attorney general worked within those on behalf of the government of the day.”

Downing Street has declined to give a timescale for Sunak’s pledge to stop small boats, acknowledging there will be legal challenges.

The prime minister’s official spokesperson said: “Obviously we want to do this as quickly as possible. As we’ve always said, we recognise there will likely be challenges in many forms to this sort of legislation.”

chart

Lucy Moreton, from the Immigration Services Union, said legislation to remove people to a third country seemed “quite confusing”, given a plan to deport people to Rwanda was on hold amid legal challenges, and that arrangements to return refugees to other places in the EU where they had previously claimed asylum lapsed for the UK following Brexit.

“So unless we have a safe third country that isn’t Rwanda to send people to, this just doesn’t seem to be possible,” she told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme.

Announcing new measures against small boats would also, Moreton argued, “fuel the service” for people-smugglers, at least in the short term, who would tell would-be arrivals that they needed to travel soon.

Sir David Normington, a former permanent secretary at the Home Office, said it was “highly doubtful” that people would stop arriving in small boats because it was illegal.

“These are people many of whom are desperate. They have fled from persecution, and being told that there’s been a change in legislation in the British parliament, I don’t think is going to make a big difference to them,” he told the Today programme.

The courts have rejected previous plans to deport to Rwanda those entering the UK on small boats, but No 10 and the Home Office are proposing to insert a “brake” on human rights legislation in an attempt to stop legal challenges.

Campaigners are concerned the legislation will lead to the inhumane and costly detention of tens of thousands of refugees. The only safe routes available to those wishing to seek asylum in the UK are through limited schemes for Ukraine, Afghanistan and Hong Kong.

Emma Stevenson, the deputy chief executive of Choose Love, a provider of grassroots aid to refugees, said: “Only last week, 59 people including children and a newborn died at sea after being forced into making an impossibly dangerous journey.

“Rather than offering a genuine lifeline to prevent tragedy, the government is trying to bypass its responsibility to the European convention on human rights.”

About 45,000 people crossed the Channel last year, while officials have conceded that more than 80,000 could enter the UK this year. Sunak has made “stopping the boats” one of his five key pledges before the next election.

The bill will be published before a key summit between Sunak and the French president, Emmanuel Macron, on Friday. It is understood Sunak will seek a substantial increase in beach patrols to stop refugees leaving French shores.

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Stanley and Boris Johnson pictured together during hustings for Conservative party leadership election in 2019. Photograph: Dylan Martinez/Reuters

[Honours system](#)

'Ridiculous': opponents pour scorn on Boris Johnson's plan to knight his father

Former PM accused of having 'discredited honours system' with selections for long-delayed resignation list

- [UK politics live – latest news updates](#)

[Peter Walker](#) and [Kiran Stacey](#)

Mon 6 Mar 2023 12.54 ESTFirst published on Sun 5 Mar 2023 18.57 EST

Boris Johnson's father appears set to be made a knight in his son's resignation honours list, prompting accusations that the former prime

minister has discredited the honours system.

News of the apparent nomination, which was all but confirmed by Boris Johnson's sister, Rachel, and not denied by a spokesperson for the ex-PM, has prompted anger, with Keir Starmer calling the idea "absolutely outrageous".

It has refocused attention on the much-delayed resignation honours list, which has yet to be published but is reported to run to nearly 100 names, including peerages for a series of loyalist MPs and former staff members.

It will not, however, include any honours for Rachel Johnson or for Boris Johnson's wife, Carrie. Previous reports had suggested he was considering honours for both.

In an earlier awards list as prime minister, Johnson [made his brother](#), Jo Johnson, a peer, as he did two close friends – the former Conservative MP Zac Goldsmith and the newspaper proprietor Evgeny Lebedev.

The proposed knighthood for Stanley Johnson could create significantly more anger, in part because of the lack of apparent merit but also because of allegations about his behaviour.

In 2021, the Tory MP Caroline Nokes publicly accused the former MEP of [touching her](#) at a Conservative party conference in 2003. Nokes, the chair of the Commons women and equalities committee, accused him of forcefully smacking her on the bottom and making a vulgar comment.

Similar allegations were made by the political journalist Ailbhe Rea, while another journalist, Isabel Oakeshott, described him as "handsy". He denied all the claims.

A biography of Boris Johnson by the journalist Tom Bower, published in 2020, included allegations that his father had a violent temper and on one occasion broke his wife Charlotte's nose. Stanley Johnson declined to comment at the time.

A spokesperson for Boris Johnson did not respond when asked if Stanley Johnson had been nominated. When asked about the idea, Rachel Johnson pointedly did not discount it, and defended a possible knighthood given the work she said her father had done for the Tory party and the environment.

“People can draw their own conclusions, please don’t ask me to, as it were, sit in judgment on it,” she told the News Agents podcast. “Because it literally is too close. You’re talking about my brother and my father. That is a decision that my brother has made with regards my father or not.”

Starmer said the idea of Stanley Johnson being knighted was “ridiculous”. The Labour leader told LBC radio: “It’s classic of a man like Johnson. I mean, I think the public will just think this is absolutely outrageous. The idea of an ex-prime minister bestowing honours on his dad – for services to what?”

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The shadow health secretary, Wes Streeting, said Boris Johnson had “discredited the honours system, discredited the office of prime minister”.

Wendy Chamberlain, the Liberal Democrats’ chief whip, said the idea of a knighthood for Stanley Johnson “makes a mockery” of the honours system, and she called on Rishi Sunak to veto the entire list.

However, Sunak's official spokesperson said the honours list would go ahead. "There are longstanding rules that guide the honours process. The PM has no plans to change those that I'm aware of. And obviously it's a matter of fact that outgoing prime ministers are able to nominate people in this way," the spokesperson said.

The list is going through Cabinet Office vetting. According to reports, among those in line for peerages are the former culture secretary Nadine Dorries and the former Daily Mail editor Paul Dacre.

Other reports [have said](#) peerages could also go to Ross Kempsey, 30, who formerly worked for Rupert Murdoch's TalkTV station as political editor, and subsequently for Conservative central office and for Johnson, and to Charlotte Owen, one of the ex-prime minister's former assistants who is understood to be in her late 20s.

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[Ukraine war liveUkraine](#)

Intense fighting continues in Bakhmut as Ukraine generals support continuing defence of city – as it happened

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Ukrainian recruits and their British trainers at a military facility in southern England. Photograph: Leon Neal/Getty Images

[Defence policy](#)

British-led fund to provide weapons for Ukraine plagued by delays

Only £200m of £520m allocated and bidders complain ‘low-bureaucracy’ process is frustrating

- [Russia-Ukraine war – latest news updates](#)

Dan Sabbagh Defence and security editor

Mon 6 Mar 2023 01.00 EST Last modified on Mon 6 Mar 2023 14.53 EST

A British-led £520m international fund to provide fresh weapons for [Ukraine](#) and intended to be “low bureaucracy” has been plagued by delays, with only £200m allocated amid warnings that the rest of the funding will not provide arms at “the front until the summer”.

Bidders complain that the process, run by the UK's [Ministry of Defence](#), working with six other European countries, has been frustrating with deadlines missed – and the MoD conceded that awarding contracts “inevitably took time”.

Launched last August, the International Fund for Ukraine was intended to be “a flexible low-bureaucracy fund” that would provide new kit, training and money for repairs for Ukraine's armed forces as Kyiv battles the Russian invasion.

It was intended to be an extra way of providing military aid to Ukraine, on top of direct donations by western governments, but the delays demonstrate the challenge of ensuring military aid flows in line with politicians' ambition.

The UK contributed £250m and several other European countries enthusiastically followed suit, including the Netherlands with €100m (£89m), as well as Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Lithuania and Iceland, taking the total pledged to more than £500m.

Bidders were told they would be informed by the MoD whether their bids had succeeded “from 14 December”, and Ben Wallace, the UK defence secretary, said a day later that a decision would be made imminently.

In fact, a day later, an email went out from the MoD telling bidders they had to wait until February. No announcement about any allocation was made until 15 February, two months after the initial date.

Interest had been high, and “over 1,500” suppliers were understood to have submitted bids with a total value of £27bn. The level of offers overwhelmed the fund's secretariat, some bidders said. One supplier said it was staffed by only two people.

However, British defence sources said there was a larger team working on assessing the bids, but acknowledged the high level of interest was a complicating factor in a process designed to urgently source munitions for Ukraine.

When a public announcement was finally made by Wallace on 15 February, he said about £200m from the fund would be spent in the first instance, and that a further round would follow in due course.

“With an expected value of more than £200m, the first package will include vital capabilities in the form of artillery ammunition, maritime intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, and spare parts for equipment, including Ukraine’s current tanks,” he said at the time.

Some bidders, however, were not told whether they had succeeded at that point. Complaints of “zero communication” followed, before finally, five days later, an email went out notifying applicants if their bids were being taken forward.

Participants now fear a second round of bids could be equally lengthy, given its scope has “not yet been determined” by the fund. One said they believed the delays meant the next round of military aid for Ukraine would “not hit the front until the summer”.

A British defence source said they wanted to ensure that the fund was properly managed in a way that helped Ukraine, and that it was not intended to be a traditional competitive bidding process.

“Officials were engaged globally to explore what products were available. Submissions have amounted to £27bn of available equipment. Ensuring the first round was successful meant we refined the possible purchases from the fund. This inevitably took time,” the source said.

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2023.03.06 - Spotlight

- 'No problemo' What Gen Z are really saying with their T-shirts
- 'This is my chance!' Everything Everywhere's James Hong on bullying, 'yellowface' and his big break – at 94
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Portia, the wealthy Tanya's assistant in White Lotus, wears an Aries 'No Problemo' top. Photograph: Fabio Lovino/HBO

[Fashion](#)

'No problemo': what Gen Z are really saying with their T-shirts

Sloganwear now is hyper-specific, earnest and sarcastic all at once. It also tells us a lot about what's important to a generation that grew up with the internet



[Shaad D'Souza](#)
[@shaaddsouza](#)

Mon 6 Mar 2023 02.00 EST Last modified on Mon 6 Mar 2023 02.02 EST

Despite all manner of global catastrophes facing young people, Gen Z's preferred style of streetwear telegraphs pure ease. Garments emblazoned with the phrase "no problemo" are everywhere, from Zendaya's tortured Euphoria character to Portia, the pathologically bothered assistant in the second series of [White Lotus](#). In real life, Manchester City striker Erling Haaland and Bones and All actor Taylor Russell have been spotted wearing them. And the "no problemo" tee has become a de facto uniform for creative workers across the UK. They are the work of Aries, a London-based skater label founded in 2009 that has quickly gained cult status through its ironic and smartly designed sloganwear.

Slogan tees in general are back with a vengeance, loved by Gen Z for their social media-ready mixture of irony and earnestness – and brands that are communicating esoteric, ultra-specific moods are the flavour of the day.



Julia Fox, who shot to fame after dating Kanye West briefly, wears a ‘Starfucker’ T-shirt.

Photograph: Lexie Moreland/WWD/Getty Images

For top-tier celebs, a T-shirt will do a job that usually requires press releases, Instagram captions and interviews. On the day her last album was released, British pop star Charli XCX was papped wearing a tee reading “They don’t build statues of critics”. When she walked into a Brits afterparty empty-handed earlier this month, her shirt announced she was a “real winner”. Shortly after New York magazine published its deep-dive into the world of Hollywood “nepo babies”, Hailey Bieber, daughter of actor Stephen Baldwin, wore a top that read, simply, “nepo baby”. Olivia Rodrigo is “God’s favorite”, while Julia Fox, who shot to fame after briefly dating Kanye West, is a “starfucker”. The Instagram feeds of fashionable twentysomethings, too, are filled with “God’s favorite” handbags and “father, son, holy spirit” bikinis – both by the edgy American streetwear brand Praying.

Shirts run the gamut from the inscrutable – a “Men in Music Conference” tee by the Los Angeles-based Hollywood Gifts will only make sense to die-hard Lana Del Rey fans – to broad-based and cheekily transgressive, such as the “fag” sweatshirt sold by Boycrazy, a Los Angeles label that “celebrates queerness”.



Claire Danes wearing a ‘You Can Go Home Now’ T-shirt in the TV series Fleishman is in Trouble. Photograph: FX

Today’s slogan tees almost feel like a reaction to the daggy sloganwear that dominated millennial fashion, and which has been back in the spotlight of late thanks to the bougie Brooklyn mums of the Disney Plus drama *Fleishman Is in Trouble*, who wear tank tops that read “rosé all dé” and “boss bitch”. In the show’s final episode, one character rips into the “future is female” tees popularised around the time of Hillary Clinton’s 2016 presidential run, suggesting that they were as meaningless as “free beer tomorrow” shirts.

It’s a canny barb – if 2020s sloganwear is earnest in its message but sarcastic in tone, and almost obscurantist in vibe, the statement tees worn by millennials tended towards the peppy but shallow, embodying the glib optimism of Obama-era politics. Lingua Franca sold painfully tone-deaf £300 “poverty is sexist” jumpers; Dior charged £650 for “we should all be feminists” tees, while House of Holland became known for tonally bizarre, aggressively sexual tees bearing phrases such as “suck on my toe, Phoebe Philo” and “let’s breed, Bella Hadid”.



Dior's 2017 'We Should All Be Feminists' T-shirt carried a different vibe to today's sloganwear. Photograph: SIPA/Rex/Shutterstock

Slogan tees have been a thing for as long as Alex Bovaird, the White Lotus costume designer can remember. She says there is something about these new, popular ones that is "hyper-specific and irrelevant, so they are working on many levels". Take the "no problemo" sweatshirt she dressed Portia in: Bovaird sees it as akin to "wearing a really obscure band T-shirt" – a way to telegraph your taste and find others who share your sensibility without actively searching for them. "The more random it is, the more interesting it is."

It also "felt very Portia because she's an assistant, and everyone wears a little bit of who they want to be in Italy," she says, referring to the striver sensibilities of many White Lotus characters. For Portia, who is perpetually antagonised by her wealthy boss Tanya, "no problemo" conveys the can-do attitude of a perfect assistant.

Another key driver in the rise of sloganwear is that they "look fucking great online," says [Madeleine Kunkle](#), founder of Hollywood Gifts – the label behind Fox's "starfucker" tank. She points to Praying's "father, son, holy spirit" bikini as a garment that "people really want to post in". It feels "like that piece of clothing on its own is not as significant as the way people want

to use it in their own collage of themselves on social media,” she says. “Everyone is a creative director or a model now, and has their own vibe they curate online. People like to have a staged moment.”



‘Real winner’ ... pop star Charli XCX at a Brit awards party in 2023.
Photograph: David M Benett/Dave Benett/Getty Images for Warner Music

Wearing a tee by brands such as Praying or Hollywood Gifts, whose slogans might be read as ironic, ridiculous and totally sincere all at once, provides an easy way to speak “your truth” without having to write it sincerely yourself in a tweet or Instagram caption. If Charli XCX tweeted “screw critics” on her album release day, it would read as inflammatory or overly serious; wearing Praying’s “statues of critics” tee somewhere she knows she will be papped gets the message across in a winking, witty way.

Kunkle sees these tees as a way for “celebrities to grab back autonomy while being fun and playful”. It reminds her of the time in 2010 when Lindsay Lohan wrote “fuck you” on her nails in court, knowing she would be photographed. In a similar – but decidedly less fun – vein was the infamous “Naomi hit me and I loved it” tee that Naomi Campbell wore in 2007 alluding to her arrest after allegations that she [hit and head-butted a former assistant](#).



An Aries sweat top worn at Paris fashion week. Photograph: Claudio Lavenia/Getty Images

These are clothes that help people to carve out an identity online in an age where everyone is expected to make a statement. Many of Kunkle's designs draw from the language of internet counterculture, with tees reading "shadowbanned" (referring to the practice of social media platforms banning a user's content from showing up without notifying the them), "proud to be cringe" and "targeted individual" allowing wearers a tongue-in-cheek reclamation of the dehumanisation that can take place on apps such as Twitter and Instagram.

This isn't to say the identity carved out is always unique. "Everyone is trying to stand out – in a way that they all end up looking the same," says Bovaird. "My friends' kids, they just want to grow up to be influencers. It seems like people are making their whole identity about being original and bold and provocative."

Kunkle, though, says her tees can provide "a resistance to a homogenised, mainstream point of view". "The internet has impressed upon young people, for better or worse, a need to have an opinion – and not having an opinion is an opinion," she says. "I wouldn't take it too seriously, but I feel like these shirts come out of a playful sense of rebellion."

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James Hong: 'There were very few Asian actors in my first 60 years that played major roles.' Photograph: Irvin Rivera/Getty Images for IMDb

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‘This is my chance!’ Everything Everywhere’s James Hong on bullying, ‘yellowface’ and his big break – at 94

[Ann Lee](#)

He has worked with everyone from Clark Gable to Harrison Ford. Now the actor is finally getting the attention he deserves. He talks about hidden prejudice, tickling Kim Cattrall – and his dreams for the future



[@_ann_leee](#)

Mon 6 Mar 2023 01.00 EST Last modified on Tue 7 Mar 2023 08.35 EST

Most 94-year-olds would be happy to sit back and put their feet up, but James Hong didn’t become one of the most prolific actors in Hollywood by taking it easy. His wife, Susan, keeps asking him when he’ll retire. He’s just too busy. Even though he has more than 450 acting credits to his name, there’s still so much he wants to do. “I’d like to make a couple of other movies because this is my chance,” he says. “I’ve waited all these years to do projects and now people are going to back me.”

And that's down to Everything Everywhere All at Once. [The sci-fi martial arts fantasy](#), starring Michelle Yeoh as a frazzled Chinese American immigrant named Evelyn who suddenly finds herself swept up in a multiverse-spanning battle, was the breakout hit of 2022 and has since become an awards juggernaut, with 11 Oscar nominations. Directed by Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert, it's the frontrunner to pick up the best picture statuette at the Academy Awards this month.

Hong, who plays Evelyn's stern and old-fashioned father, is overjoyed at the film's success. "It's almost a miracle that I would be in a picture after all these years that's recognised by the industry," he says over Zoom from his home in Los Angeles. "I never dreamed that would happen." Dressed in a khaki shirt and jacket with a matching baseball cap, he looks like a hipster grandad. Susan hovers in the background, to help with any questions he struggles to hear.

Just a few days ago, Hong was at the Screen Actors Guild awards, accepting the award for outstanding performance by a cast in a motion picture. There was something he wanted to get off his chest. "My first [big] movie was with Clark Gable," he said, reminding the audience that he had been in the business for nearly 70 years. For much of the last century, Hollywood was rife with "yellowface" – white actors playing Asian roles. "The producers said the Asians were not good enough and they are not box office." Then he added triumphantly: "But look at us now!"



The cast of *Everything Everywhere All at Once* at the Screen Actors Guild awards. Photograph: Frederic J Brown/AFP/Getty Images

Over the years, many of his Asian actor friends (and even his daughter April) dropped out of the profession, discouraged by the lack of decent roles. Hong, however, embraced whatever came his way. “We were given the side parts as ‘coolies’ or distressed Asians being rescued by the white guy. We were underlings.” Out of his many TV and film appearances, alongside everyone from Gable to Lauren Bacall, James Coburn and Harrison Ford, “I can count on my two hands the roles that I got that were non-cliched. I played a doctor in a couple of series and pictures, and a scientist in the movie *Colossus: The Forbin Project*. ”

He has been heartened to see how the industry has finally increased onscreen representation in recent years. Films such as the [romcom *Crazy Rich Asians*](#) and Marvel blockbuster *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings* have shown that audiences want to see Asian actors as romantic leads and superheroes.

“We were not important people in the United States as far as the film industry was concerned,” Hong says. “Until about 10 years ago when we started to win awards. So it’s been a journey from ground zero to what it is now. But there’s still a long way to go.”



As David Lo Pan in Big Trouble in Little China. Photograph: TCD/Prod.DB/Alamy

Hong's first film role was an uncredited part as a trainee pilot in the 1954 war drama Dragonfly Squadron. He also played a cursed sorcerer in the 1986 action fantasy Big Trouble in Little China, a Japanese general pushed to the brink in the disaster spoof Airplane! and an overprotective father in the wacky comedy Wayne's World 2, as well as voicing characters in the Kung Fu Panda films, Disney's Mulan and last year's Pixar animation Turning Red. He has directed, too, on projects including the 1989 low-budget horror The Vineyard and 1979 sexploitation comedy Police Girls Academy.

Outside the movies, Hong has pushed hard for more diversity in acting. He co-founded East West Players in 1965, a theatre group created for Asian American actors so they would have the chance to perform roles beyond tired Hollywood stereotypes.

Hong was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in 1929. His parents had emigrated from Hong Kong and moved back when he was five, returning to the US when he was 10. His father owned a herb shop in Chinatown and his mother was a housewife, taking care of Hong and his brother and five sisters. The family lived above the store. At school, he was bullied for being

a foreigner. “The kids would pick on me and beat me up.” But Hong refused to be cowed. “I would get up each time they shoved me down.”



Hong in *Everything Everywhere All At Once*. Photograph: Alamy

He became fascinated with acting after some Peking Opera performers came to rehearse at his father’s shop, and he started acting in high school productions. But when it came to casting a British play, Hong recalls how his teachers chose a fair red-haired boy instead of him. “I felt very bad because I was one of the primary members of that acting group, and yet the teacher turned me down because I was yellow. And none of the girls would want to go out with me as I was a Chinese guy. There’s a lot of stories I can’t tell you in just a few minutes. The hidden prejudice in white society in Minneapolis is not something that I would want to live again.” Briefly, he looks miserable.

Hong studied civil engineering at the University of Minnesota, but when the Korean war broke out in 1950, he was drafted into the US army. He was sent to Camp Rucker in Alabama, where he would entertain soldiers after finishing his training for the day. There, a general taken with his performances asked him to stay on and organise the live shows at the camp. Hong acknowledges how lucky he was not to be deployed to the battlefield. “I’m certain that I would have died.”

After the war, Hong resumed his studies at the University of Southern California, in Los Angeles. He also formed a standup comedy double act with his friend Donald Parker and got his big break in 1954 when he appeared on Groucho Marx's gameshow *You Bet Your Life*, doing an impression of the host. "The audience just roared," he says. "Afterwards, I was told I got the second biggest fanmail ever on his programme, so that was satisfying." It also helped him land an agent.

One of his earliest roles was in the TV crime series *The New Adventures of Charlie Chan* in 1957. He was cast as Barry Chan, the "No 1 son", while J Carroll Naish, an American actor of Irish descent, played the lead role. Naish, like other white actors pretending to be Asian, would tape his eyes back. "It sickened me to watch somebody glue their eyes so that they would look Chinese," says Hong, grimacing. "That upset me inside, but I did my role."



Hong with James Coburn in 1972's *The Carey Treatment*. Photograph: Michael Ochs Archives/Getty Images

It's Naish he homes in on when I ask about the racism he has encountered during his career. The glue from the tape would burn Naish's eyelids, Hong says, and he had to remain still because of the false eyelids he wore. "So he

was very irritated, and watching me moving my head and jumping around got to him,” Hong says.

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“One day I was off stage, just giving him the lines, and he’s on camera. I happened to miss one line. He just charged up to me and said: ‘What do you think this is? A school for Chinese actors?’ I was shocked; I didn’t know what to do. He came at me and I was ready to fight. But he didn’t swing – he just went to his dressing room.” Naish told the producers it was either him or Hong. “He had me fired. That shows you the deep prejudice he had inside. That hurt a lot. It took me years to recover from that. I had to go see a psychiatrist.”

The prejudice was mostly hidden, he says. “People didn’t shout it like Naish did – but there were very few Asian actors in those first 60 years that played major roles.”

When Hong goes to film conventions to do signing sessions, his fans usually ask him to autograph photos of David Lo Pan, the villain he played in Big Trouble in Little China. While some critics have accused Lo Pan of embodying the Fu Manchu stereotype of an evil Asian with a wispy beard and exaggerated accent, Hong sticks up for the baddie. “He didn’t kill anybody, he didn’t steal money, he didn’t hurt anybody,” he says, seemingly

forgetting about the scene where he tries to murder Kurt Russell's antihero, Jack. And he had some fun making Big Trouble: Hong recalls filming a scene with Kim Cattrall where she tried to bite him. "She was tied up and looked so angry, I began to tickle her to get her to laugh. I wanted to tease her a little bit. It wasn't in the script."



With Mike Myers in Wayne's World 2. Photograph: United Archives GmbH/Alamy

For Ridley Scott's sci-fi classic Blade Runner, Hong pretended that the eyeballs his grizzled character, Hannibal Chew, designed were his children. "That's what I learned in my early lessons in acting, whether it's Stanislavski or the other methods. I came up with my own method and use all the experiences I had in Minnesota." He also imagines his mother and father's feelings during the struggles they endured, and channels those, too. "All you have to do is recall those memories and then make them work for you as an actor."

Hong shows no sign of slowing down. He has just wrapped on the coming-of-age adventure film Patsy Lee & The Keepers of the 5 Kingdoms, which he scripted, produced and starred in, and is about to reprise his role as Mr Ping, a noodle-loving goose, in Kung Fu Panda 4. He'll also be joining his Everything Everywhere All at Once co-stars Yeoh, Ke Huy Quan and

Stephanie Hsu in American Born Chinese, a Disney+ comedy series about figures from Chinese mythology.

Hong married Susan in 1977 and the couple have three daughters and eight grandchildren. He's currently working on a documentary that will look over his career and chart how Asian American actors "have become major contributors to the art of acting" in Hollywood. One of the celebrities he would like to appear in it is Jack Nicholson. The pair became good friends after appearing together in Roman Polanski's twisty mystery Chinatown and its sequel The Two Jakes. "I hope he will be in good enough health to do that." Nicholson has not been seen in public for more than a year and is rumoured to be unwell.



As Hannibal Chew in Blade Runner. Photograph: TCD/Prod.DB/Alamy

When he first arrived in Los Angeles, he was "little James Hong coming to Hollywood from Minnesota". But last year, after a crowdfunding campaign orchestrated by Lost actor Daniel Dae Kim, [Hong finally got his own star](#) on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, the oldest actor to ever receive that privilege. Jamie Lee Curtis introduced him at the ceremony, announcing with relish: "It's about fucking time." Hong celebrated by dancing with some Chinese lion performers. "It meant the world to me and to my family," he says.

There might be plans, too, he reveals excitedly, to get his hand and footprints immortalised outside Grauman's Chinese Theatre, another Hollywood accolade reserved for the greats. Hong used to walk over from his apartment down the street and place his feet into the shiny grooves left by the stars. "To have my own there – it really would be something. If I live another three years, more things are going to happen. Maybe give me an interview when I'm 100 and I'll tell you what happened."

Everything Everywhere All at Once is streaming on Prime Video and other digital platforms

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A still from MH370 The Plane That Disappeared. Photograph: Netflix
[Documentary](#)

‘The greatest aviation mystery of all time’: what really happened to flight MH370?

A Netflix docuseries tries to untangle the many theories surrounding the disappearance of the Malaysia Airlines flight that shocked the world



[Adrian Horton](#)

[@adrian_horton](#)

Mon 6 Mar 2023 01.41 EST Last modified on Mon 6 Mar 2023 10.46 EST

The mystery began as a standard red-eye flight from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing. Forty-two minutes after midnight on 8 March 2014, Malaysia Airlines flight 370, a Boeing 777 jet designated [MH370](#), climbed into the moonlit night and turned north-east, toward the South China Sea. The first officer, Fariq Hamid, was 27 years old and one training flight away from full certification. The pilot in command, Zaharie Ahmad Shah, was, at 53, one of the most senior and respected pilots for Malaysia Airlines. They led a crew of 10 flight attendants, all Malaysian, and ferried 227 passengers. The majority of those on board were Chinese, along with 38 Malaysians and citizens of Indonesia, Australia, India, France, the US, Iran, Ukraine, Canada, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Russia and Taiwan.

The first 40 minutes of the flight were unremarkable. At 1.19am, MH370 approached the end of Malaysian airspace. Malaysian air traffic control radioed to pass the flight off to Ho Chi Minh. Zaharie answered, “Good night. Malaysian three-seven-zero” – he didn’t repeat the frequency, but not unusual. It was the last anyone heard from the flight. Zaharie never checked in with Vietnamese controllers. Seconds after it crossed into Vietnamese

airspace, MH370 disappeared from radar. All subsequent attempts to contact it were unsuccessful. Commercial airplanes are supposed to be reachable at all times, known and tracked, but MH370 was gone.

What followed, as recounted in a new [Netflix](#) series on the disappearance, was delayed confusion, on the part of Malaysian controllers and the airline. Shock, as officials scrambled to find the aircraft and loved ones waited in Beijing for a flight that never arrived. Obsession, as the disappearance transfixed international audiences and prompted armchair theories for a seemingly impossible mystery. Devastation, as next of kin suffered through hours, then days, then weeks, months and years of question marks and inconclusive searches. And speculation, as aviation experts, engineers, data scientists, journalists, hobbyists and more tried for years to piece together a confounding puzzle of evidence into an explanation for the disappearance of MH370.

That explanation remains elusive. “It’s the greatest aviation mystery of all time,” said Louise Malkinson, the director of *MH370: The Plane That Disappeared*. “This is a world where we have mobile phones and radar and satellites and tracking, and so to be nearly nine years down the line … and still have so little is extraordinary.”

The three-part Netflix series attempts to piece together the timeline based on evidence that emerged in the weeks and years following the disappearance. Primary radar – as in, conventional radar that pings off objects in the sky – from the Malaysian air force indicated that following MH370’s entry into Vietnamese airspace, the flight made a sharp left turn and headed back, in a south-western direction, over the Malay peninsula. It banked around the island of Penang, flew north-west up the Strait of Malacca, and headed out over the Andaman Sea, where it dropped off radar.

But MH370 did continue to link up periodically, over the course of six hours, with a geostationary Indian Ocean satellite operated by the London-based company Inmarsat. Data from these seven electronic blips indicated, according to Inmarsat and several independent experts who appear in the series, that MH370 turned southward once it reached the Andaman Sea, flew straight for hours until it ran out of fuel, and plunged into the southern

Indian Ocean, somewhere between south-western Australia and Antarctica. Whoever was flying the plane – most point to Zaharie, who had the expertise to execute such a maneuver though no known motive – probably depressurized the cabin early on, killing everyone on board hours before MH370 dropped into the sea.

That is the “official” narrative, at least – one largely supported by a collection of aviation experts and scientists known as the Independent Group and Australian investigators, who led a futile, years-long search for MH370 in a remote slice of the Indian Ocean. It’s the one cogently argued by American aviation writer William Langewiesche in a [2019 report for the Atlantic](#), which supposed that the Malaysian government, rife with corruption and not known for transparency, knew more about Zaharie’s personal life than it let on. (The official Malaysian accident report, [released in July 2018](#), offered no definitive conclusions and did not rule out “unlawful interference by a third party”.) It’s also supported by the fact that [debris attributed to MH370](#) has been found on the coasts of Réunion, Madagascar and Mozambique.

The first episode of the series, called The Pilot, outlines this narrative: a mass murder-suicide plot by Zaharie, whose home flight simulator was found to have mapped a similar strange path to the one indicated by radar and satellite data. But subsequent episodes, delineated by theory, hear contradictory theories that regard the evidence previously cited as either inconclusive, misinterpreted or fabricated. The second episode, The Hijack, presents a [theory](#) put forth by American aviation journalist and longtime MH370 obsessive Jeff Wise that Russian operatives stole MH370 via the plane’s electronic bay, accessible by a hatch in the first-class cabin, to distract from the Crimean war. (This would ignore the satellite data, which Wise said was tampered with as a decoy.)



Photograph: Netflix

The third, *The Intercept*, features French journalist Florence de Changy, a south-east Asia correspondent for *Le Monde* who speculates that the plane was shot down over the South China Sea by the US military to prevent mysterious cargo from reaching China. (This would suppose that the radar sightings and satellite data by Inmarsat, a company that works with governments, was fabricated as part of a cover-up. Both theories assume washed-up debris was either wrongly attributed or planted.) A similar theory is proffered by Ghyslain Wattrelos, a French businessman whose wife Laurence, 17-year-old son Hadrien, and 13-year-old daughter Ambre were lost on MH370. (Wattrelos's legal case in France is currently the only ongoing investigation into the missing flight.)

It's a fine line between asking questions and conspiracy, and the latter two episodes knowingly toe it – both Wise and De Changy admit their theories sound far-fetched to them, too. Asked on the decision to proceed down the rabbit hole of doubt, dissecting or dismissing different pieces of evidence, Malkinson pointed to the experience of obsession, for those who lost someone aboard MH370 and those determined to find answers. The series was “not just about what happened”, she said. “It was about the people that have been consumed by this for the past nine years ... It’s about what does a mystery like this do to the people who are involved in it?”

Indeed, the series plays not as a Tetris game of evidence but as a slow-moving maze of facts, conjecture, blanks and grief. Major developments – the radar sighting, the Inmarsat data, the [downing of another Malaysian airlines flight](#) by the Russian military over Ukraine in July 2014, the wing flap found on Réunion, the revelation of Zaharie's flight simulator – appear in roughly chronological order over the course of three hours. The feeling is more confusion, squinting too hard at the map willing it to make sense, than conspiracy.

"These are people that have been involved in the story from the very beginning, and they are questioning what has been deemed the official narrative," said Malkinson. "They've written extensively on it, they've done a huge amount of research, and yes, they may be joining their dots together in a way that people don't agree with, but they have definitely put the time and effort into it, and they are posing questions that haven't necessarily always been answered."



A still from the show. Photograph: Netflix

"It's most likely that the plane is in the southern Indian Ocean," she said when asked which theory she found most credible. "But how and why it ended up there, we just don't know.

“There are still a lot of questions that haven’t been answered, and so I don’t know what happened,” she said. “I know that some of the theories are more far-fetched than the others, but I think what’s the most important thing for me is that the next of kin still don’t have all the answers, and that actually this mystery hasn’t been solved.”

Several loved ones of those lost, from seven different countries, testify to the pain of the mystery in the series, in addition to the grief. Some turned to political action, publicly protesting the Malaysian government’s wobbly response. Others searched for closure in the bits of debris found on Madagascan beaches. Many stay in contact with each other. “The heart of the series for me has always been the next of kin,” said Malkinson. “To try and even understand the complex trauma of ambiguous loss. The just not knowing – it’s incomprehensible.”

“The people that we’ve spoken to, their biggest fear is that this does get forgotten, and it’s just a tragic event that they have to move on from,” she added. In 2017, the Australian Transport Safety Bureau suspended the search for MH370 in the rough waters of the southern Indian Ocean. It was always an improbable mission – a vast area based on an estimated endpoint, remote and battered by storms, with seafloor caverns like the Grand Canyon.

Still, Malkinson said she hoped for a search to one day resume, for closure, confirmation and most importantly, for next of kin. “I think that we can’t be in a world that a 777 has gone missing and it’s very tragic and we have to move on – that shouldn’t happen.”

- MH370: The Plane That Disappeared is available on Netflix on 8 March



Ema Pightling, on her narrowboat outside Hebden Bridge, has been struggling to heat her home. Photograph: Charlie Smith/The Observer

[The Observer](#)[UK cost of living crisis](#)

‘Left out in the cold’: the boaters locked out of fuel support

People in canal boats moored at or visiting Hebden Bridge say the government does not understand their needs

[Charlie Smith](#)

Mon 6 Mar 2023 04.00 EST

Once thought of as [the coolest place](#) in Britain to live, Hebden Bridge in West Yorkshire has become a small hub for people in search of a bohemian paradise in the north; among them are the canal boaters who moor up in the former mill town.

Despite living in such confined quarters, this small and mobile community has, however, been finding life much more expensive as the cost of living crisis continues, and government help is only available for some.

Ema Pightling, 29, a charity worker from Bradford, lives on a narrowboat just outside Hebden Bridge town centre and has been struggling to heat the vessel as fuel costs rise. “This winter has been horrific,” she says. “We’ve been waking up at minus six degrees. It takes a lot of coal and wood to heat up. People are starting to burn possessions – old clothes, old socks, T-shirts. We’ve had times where we’ve had to because we’ve not been able to afford wood and coal.”

Boaters have seen a steep rise in the price of liquefied petroleum gas ([LPG](#)), which they use for cooking and heating. The price of red diesel – used in boat heaters and engines – has also [increased by at least 20%](#) since Russia invaded Ukraine a year ago, while costs of coal and wood have also risen.

Carolyn Edwards, 54, a lecturer at the University of Leeds, says that a 13kg bottle of propane has risen from £30 to £45 over the last year and that a bag of coal has doubled to £16 over the past two years. “In October I’d say it went up by about another 50-60% again. This winter is much more expensive.”



Lecturer Carolyn Edwards says her fuel costs have rocketed in the last year.
Photograph: Charlie Smith/The Observer

Edwards lives on a small boat in the town centre and wants some help with her energy bills, but says those living off the main electricity grid have been excluded from government assistance.

The government [said last week](#) that 900,000 off-grid households in England, Scotland and Wales that do not have mains electricity or gas can now apply for a £400 lump sum to help pay their energy bills under the Energy Bills Support Scheme Alternative Funding. However, of the 15,000 people living on [Britain's waterways](#), only boaters with permanent moorings who can prove their address are eligible. The 5,500 boaters registered as [continuous cruisers](#) – who must move on every 14 days – are not eligible for the £400.

This amounts to discrimination, says Marcus Trower, deputy chair of the National Bargee Travellers Association (NBTA), which campaigns for boat dwellers.

“This scheme was supposed to remedy the unfair exclusion of off-grid communities from a grant that most of the country received back in October 2022. Tens of thousands of people remain locked out of support due to not having a fixed address,” he says, referring to boaters and other off-grid communities such as people living in vans and caravans.

“Boaters and other itinerant populations have been left out in the cold to face the cost of living and fuel crises alone this winter, with many having to go cold or hungry whilst second-home owners received several payments months ago at a cost of £200m to the taxpayer. Now they have been deliberately excluded again in a move that looks like clear discrimination.”

Jo Allan, 78, who lives on a boat moored just outside Hebden Bridge, is among those who are not eligible. “It excludes constant cruisers, that’s myself,” he says. “We don’t get the £400 everybody was supposed to get.”

Unlike other boaters, the retired agricultural adviser from near Glasgow says she was lucky to get support with her bills, which have doubled in 18 months, during winter due to her being over 65.



Steve Bullcock says that younger boaters have been left with no support.
Photograph: Charlie Smith/The Observer

Another Hebden Bridge boater, Steve Bullcock, 71, says he has seen the prices of coal, diesel and gas go up by about 25%. Younger boaters have been left out in the cold with no support, he adds. “It costs more to heat a boat because it’s not as well insulated, so although it’s warmer than a house, pro rata you spend a lot more on fuel.”

Dom Newton, a trustee of the charity Floaty Boat, says the government does not understand people living on boats. He says there was limited progress after he held talks last week with officials of the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to help continuously cruising boaters get help with their bills.

“We’re being asked for things like, ‘How can you prove you are a continuous cruiser? Can you provide evidence of council tax exemption?’ Well, no, because we don’t pay council tax.”

Talks between boating groups and the government are ongoing, according to Newton. “It was relatively clear they don’t have a very good understanding of how a continuous cruiser’s life works, even down to the types of fuel we have to buy.”

Other boaters have also been forced into finding alternative ways to heat their floating homes this winter in an attempt to keep energy bills down. One, who asked not to be named, used wood from trees cut down due to having ash dieback fungus.

“We’ve just been really stretching the fuel this time, getting away with using one bag of coal a week just to keep the fire in,” he says. “This is why we live on a boat, so that we can absorb costs like this. When [the cost] goes up, we feel quite insulated from it.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2023/mar/06/yorkshire-canal-boaters-hebden-bridge-locked-fuel-support>

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The BBC news studio at Broadcasting House, London. Photograph: Jeff Overs/BBC/PA

[OpinionBBC](#)

The BBC news channel revamp has been a PR disaster – but it also makes perfect sense

[Jane Martinson](#)



The merger of channels is a cost-cutting measure that has provoked derision and anger. But changes needed to happen

Mon 6 Mar 2023 01.00 EST Last modified on Mon 6 Mar 2023 09.41 EST

Another hectic day for the BBC News channel yesterday. More Boris Johnson – there's always more Johnson; more charting the twists and turns of a government in a downward spiral; more on Prince Harry and the royal true-life drama; more on protests in Greece and military spending in China; more on [a historic deal](#) to protect the oceans. All slickly and calmly done, this is the BBC, but the backdrop is turmoil.

Coming at a time of great political and technological upheaval, when viewers, especially young ones, are losing faith in journalism, the pressure is on for the launch of the [new BBC News channel](#) in April. The revamped service will combine and replace BBC World News, aimed at international audiences and funded by adverts and subscriptions, and the BBC News channel, a domestic service funded by the licence fee. The ancestors of the two channels were established in a blizzard of channel launches in the 1990s – a time when they said things could only get better.

Few inside the BBC will talk openly about the changes, but one veteran of a domestic channel watched by 12 million people calls it a “shitshow”. Older presenters, often women, look to be losing out, suggesting that the BBC has learned little from the equal pay furore. [The Times quoted one journalist](#) saying: “It’s going to crash and burn like Liz Truss and Kwasi Kwarteng’s experiment.” Unlike in the 1990s, when the founders of the first rolling radio news service talked of having “[a pot of money](#) and a blank sheet”, this time there is very little money and a lot of angry people.

It is a mess, but one not wholly or even mainly of the BBC’s making. The plans also happen to make sense.

Let’s be clear: the merger of two channels meant to serve two very different audiences is mainly due to cost cutting. Successive Conservative cuts mean funding for UK services is already [30% lower](#) than a decade ago in real terms. After George Osborne’s licence fee settlement in 2010 shifted the burden of World Service news on to the BBC, the hammer blow was delivered by Nadine Dorries. The short-lived culture secretary-turned-TalkTV host [froze the licence fee](#) a year ago, leaving the BBC with a £400m-a-year funding gap by 2027 in a period of increasing inflation.

It is fair to say, as [a former BBC head of television news has](#), that BBC number crunchers had been eyeing the duplicate costs of running two live news channels for a long time. Slashed budgets and the declining numbers of viewers caring whether video is carried on a channel or online has finally allowed them to have it their way.

The new channel will be mainly funded by the licence fee, and there will be advertising for viewers outside the UK (although as rolling news has never really made much money, the point could be moot). As a result, the biggest criticism of the new channel has been that licence-fee payers will be forced to subsidise a worse service.

This is not just a matter of meeting viewer demand but the BBC meeting its licence fee obligations of universal news provision for the public good. The sort of stories the BBC has to do to fulfil its public purpose – from showing the impact of the Northern Ireland protocol to evidence of the cost of living crisis a year on – could be lost if the managers of the new channel are

distracted by news from the US that advertisers prefer. Ofcom has so far said very little about the planned service, but it will be the job of the media regulator to make sure those obligations are met.

The technology does exist to provide separate live feeds for domestic viewers when national news needs more focus. But, as ever, the proof will be in the pudding. “How is it going to work when it’s no longer the breaking news international viewers want but it still really matters in the UK?” asks one BBC veteran, who called the proposals “heartbreaking”. British viewers still care when floods in Cumbria leave villagers without a bed for the night, even if floods in Bangladesh have killed thousands.

A rare positive voice among former BBC news executives is Richard Sambrook, who says that the corporation should be able to “make a success of a channel with a higher proportion of international news – that would be a public service and differentiate it further from other commercial channels in the UK”.

The brilliant public service television provided by the current BBC news channel and its dedicated staff deserves more money, and in an ideal world would not be paired with one supported by commercial sponsorship, but we are far from living in an ideal world. This plan could work well if done in the right way: globally facing live news coverage is needed now more than ever, and not just for younger audiences. World News provided some great coverage, but it never quite made sense as a standalone beast with its own team.

Another focus, as ever when looking to the future, is on the young. [Figures from Ofcom](#) show that while a quarter of all adults watch the BBC News channel, making it the fourth biggest news source after BBC One, ITV and Facebook, just 17% of [16- to 24-year-olds do](#), after many other sources including Instagram, Twitter, TikTok and WhatsApp.

Of course, the quest for young viewers does risk making BBC executives look a bit sad. In 1997, BBC News 24 (the former incarnation of the BBC News channel) made corporation history, not for launching Auntie into the brave new digital age, but for the appearance of the BBC’s first jacketless news presenter. Gavin Esler, in a dark blue shirt and white stripy tie, was one

of a roster of new faces trying not to look like a corporate suit in order to attract younger people.

Twenty-five years later and BBC managers are encouraging reporters on the new channel to dress down, this time to improve trust. Naja Nielsen, digital director of BBC News, reportedly told staff that “sweaty and dirty” looks more “trustworthy” than those who look as if they’re at an awards ceremony. Smartphone camera reporting is encouraged for the TikTok generation. Witness the [BBC’s enthusiasm for Anna Foster](#) filming the devastation after the earthquake in Turkey with just her mobile phone.

Trust is a key challenge for all journalists in an age of deep fakes and political upheaval, but particularly for the BBC, whose history and funding make it important both for the British people and as a means of spreading “Britishness” overseas. Its public service at home has helped make it one of the most trusted news brands in the US and elsewhere. Meanwhile, the domestic BBC News channel is watched by 12 million people in the UK and was up for a Royal [Television](#) Society award for its coverage of the queen’s death. A very different channel will record the king’s coronation in May – the challenge is to convince the naysayers that the only way is not down.

- Jane Martinson is a Guardian columnist
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A protest over soaring rents and poor conditions in the rental sector in London, February 2023. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

[OpinionPensions](#)

Millennials are getting older – and their pitiful finances are a timebomb waiting to go off

[Kirsty Major](#)

Unable to save cash, less likely to own a home and with less generous pension pots than their parents, those in their 30s and 40s face a mass of problems

Mon 6 Mar 2023 02.00 ESTLast modified on Mon 6 Mar 2023 14.03 EST

Millennials are old. The most senior in this demographic cohort are now in their early 40s and many will have careers, mortgages, children and may be starting to plan for the rest of their lives.

Maybe they hope to follow in the footsteps of their grandparents and parents. Logging off work for good, they'll dip into their pension pot and enjoy a holiday somewhere warm or finally take up that long-delayed hobby. I'm here as the ghost of retirement future to tell you that there's a strong chance this won't be happening.

According to [Which?](#), an individual or couple respectively need £19,000 and £26,000 a year to enjoy a "comfortable retirement" comprising regular short-haul holidays, hobbies and the odd tipple. However, the problem facing millennials is that their private, workplace and state pension pots are all likely to be less full than those of previous generations.

The rule of thumb with pensions is that it's best to save as much as you can as early as possible in order to make the most of the eighth wonder of the world, compound interest. But try applying this guidance during a financial sector crash, a pandemic and a cost of living crisis. It's not surprising that only [about a quarter of millennials](#) have done "a great deal of planning or thinking" about retirement when it costs so much to live in the now.

Exorbitant rents and house prices have caused delays in saving for retirement, and pose an ongoing threat to financial stability in the future. According to the comprehensive [Resolution Foundation intergenerational audit](#), the proportion of millennial family units living in the private rented sector at the age of 30 is more than three times the rate of the baby boomer generation – and they are paying more. After retirement, lifelong renters will need an extra [£9,000 of annual income](#) to cover costs compared to homeowners.

Higher earners able to save for a deposit, or those who received help from the bank of Mum and Dad, may be better off than renters thanks to owning an asset, but they're not in the clear. Large mortgages will leave them financially vulnerable to rises in interest rates and falls in house prices. First-time buyers borrow on average [more than three and a half times their incomes](#), and as a result will be hit hardest by recent increased interest rates: someone who bought a property in 2022 on a mortgage that would have seen them paying £74,000 in lifetime interest costs (if interest rates had remained at pre-2022 levels) could now end up paying £153,000. If house prices drop,

as they are expected to, young people earlier on in their mortgages are more likely to end up in negative equity.

And this is before we get into the cost of living crisis, with four in 10 adults not expecting to be able to save money in 2023. After housing costs, childcare is one of the major pressures facing young families today. Between the end of parental leave and free hours kicking in between two and three years old, parents have to scrape together about £1,000 a month to put their child into a full-time nursery place. In some cases it makes more financial sense for one parent to give up their job and look after their children than it does to stay in work. This means less money is put aside each month for pensions, and also that more parents - and let's face it, mainly mothers – will leave the workforce and stop contributing to workplace pensions.

Luckily – and take the good news where you can – millennials have been automatically enrolled into workplace pensions, meaning more people will have some sort of pension pot. The downside is that these pensions are less generous than the ones currently enjoyed by baby boomers. Our parents and grandparents were more likely to have been offered final salary pensions. Now, most people are offered defined contribution schemes under which your money is invested and what you receive depends on how those investments have performed. Funds go up and down according to the vagaries of the markets, leaving millennial pensions more vulnerable to financial shocks.

Maybe it's not all bad news that millennials are going to be working until the age of 67 and potentially 68, according to recent reports. However, with an ageing population, there will be more people drawing down a state pension and a chance that the amount given to each individual will be reduced unless taxes are increased.

Of course, a frugal retirement won't be on the cards for everyone. It will become increasingly clear who the millennial haves and have-nots are – as already seen around home ownership – as wealth is passed down from generation to generation.

When I put this scenario to the head of the all-party parliamentary group for pensions, Nigel Mills, he suggested financial innovation may be the key to

solving this ticking timebomb. It seems like an overly complicated solution to an obvious problem – millennials, and in turn younger generations just behind them, need to be able to save some of their cash in the here and now.

Wages should be increased. Rents need to be capped or controlled. House prices need to be stabilised to allow wages to catch up with prices and to avoid those who bought at the peak falling into negative equity. It may sound like a lot to ask, but the writing is on the wall: if this government doesn't fix the problem, then another one further down the line will have to.

- Kirsty Major is a deputy Opinion editor for the Guardian
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‘Children know when something seems preachy and false. They can spot a euphemism miles away.’ Photograph: The Washington Post/Getty Images

[OpinionCulture](#)

Yes, Roald Dahl was a bigot. But that's no excuse to re-write his books

[Francine Prose](#)

The changes go beyond removing one or two offensive words – they're hamfisted and tin-eared exercises in bowdlerism

Mon 6 Mar 2023 03.08 EST Last modified on Mon 6 Mar 2023 15.30 EST

Recently it was announced that the novels of [Roald Dahl](#), the notoriously bigoted but gifted and enduringly popular children’s author, had been edited to eliminate words, phrases and sentiments that readers might find upsetting.

Novels such as *The Witches*, *Matilda*, and *James and the Giant Peach* have been cleansed of negative references to a character’s appearance, race or

gender. “Enormously fat” had been changed to “enormous”, “mothers” and “fathers” to the more gender-neutral “parents”. The adjective “black” was eliminated, even in reference to objects. Jokes were explained, passages modified to assure the reader that Dahl’s snarky humor was all in good fun.

Dahl died in 1990. The changes were made by his estate in partnership with Inclusive Minds, an organization that promotes diversity in books for children. Plans were made to market the doctored books as providing a more reader-friendly experience. Parents could replace their “nasty” old copies of Charlie and the Chocolate Factory with a “nicer” edition.

Just to be clear: I think it’s wrong to rewrite the words of an author, living or dead, without the author’s permission. Writers work hard to get their sentences right. Maybe Dahl preferred the sound of “enormously fat” to the sound of “enormous”. Writers are grateful when a friend or an editor spots factual mistakes, repetitions, typos. There’s a great quote from Isaac Babel: words go into hiding on the page and you can no longer see them.

Rewriting Dahl, after his death, is a minimalist version of painting clothes on the bodies in the Sistine chapel

Suggestions for improvement are welcome, in a book’s larval stage. But going in there and mucking around without permission should be the eighth deadly sin. Not to compare The BFG with Michelangelo’s masterpiece, but rewriting Dahl, after his death, is a minimalist version of painting clothes on the bodies in the Sistine chapel.

If the writer has used language that has, for all the right reasons, gone out of use, it’s important to tell young readers that people used to say things and think about other people in ways that were wrong. We no longer use those words, we no longer subscribe to those stereotypes. If Dahl says a character is ugly, it’s a teachable moment. By the time kids are old enough to read these books, they have probably heard the word ugly, possibly even said it. We can talk about the word and its uses (oil spills are ugly, right?) and the pain it can inflict. But should we pretend the word never existed?

Let's not ask if "enormous" is really less hurtful than "fat". Is it less cruel for the schoolyard bullies to call a child enormous? Let's ignore the question of whether a child will become a bully, a misogynist, a racist or a serial killer after reading a Roald Dahl novel. If I were looking for where trouble starts, I'd check the families before the bookshelves.

Oh, and let's not ask what children actually like. Lately, in our town, the first-graders were begging to go see the horror film M3GAN. Children aren't stupid. They know when something seems preachy and false. They can spot a euphemism miles away. One reason they enjoy Dahl's novels is because they are subversive, siding with the kids in that primal rebellion: the children versus the grownups.

A sentence was added to *The Witches* – who are revealed to be bald beneath their wigs – explaining that there are many reasons why a woman might wear a wig, and that it's not a bad thing. It's the kind of sentence that loses readers. When you're reading to a group of kids, you can watch their attention drift away and never come back.

And where will all this end? If children are traumatized by the word ugly, how will they feel at the end of Hans Christian Andersen's *The Red Shoes*, when the little girl gets her feet chopped off as the only cure for obsessive dancing? What about the fairy tales or myths in which children are cooked and served to their unsuspecting parents? Let's change the ethnicity of Shylock, of Oliver Twist. Othello will be tricky. Those axe murders of the old women in *Crime and Punishment* might need another look.

Disney has rewritten fairy tales and children's classics, rarely for the better. But we expect the film to diverge from the original. The book is still the book – or should be.

(Full disclosure: I've watched the 1996 film version of *Matilda* probably 15 times, with two generations of kids. It is one of my favorite films. I also liked the musical.)

Fortunately, the announcement of the Dahl revision generated considerable heat from some of the writer's notable fans – among them British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak. The plan was reworked, and the books will continue

to be available in the familiar versions, bad words and all. Cue the sigh of relief. A plot to saddle an author with an unwanted co-author has been foiled. For now.

What was behind it, anyway? Several writers, among them Christian Lorentzen and Lincoln Michel, have pointed to that rarest of motives: money. The tidying up of Dahl's work was a kind of rebranding, a marketing ploy designed to protect valuable intellectual property, and a wise move for Netflix, which has acquired the rights to Dahl's work. That seems likely, but there is also the fact that someone recognized a market for the retrofitted model, a demographic likely to spring for the "healthier" product.

This kind of revision mirrors, in many ways, the educational theories of Ron DeSantis and the extreme right

Perhaps this seems too far a reach. But it's occurred to me that this kind of revision – rewriting a published work to reflect and enforce certain assumptions about what young people should be protected from – mirrors, in many ways, the educational theories of the Florida governor, Ron DeSantis, and the extreme right.

Although far apart on the political spectrum, both groups of censors – let's call them that – pursue tighter control over what kids read, often at the expense of truth. Both are attempting to edit and revise history. With their animosity toward critical race theory, the hard right would essentially like to deny that slavery existed. No reason to feel guilty! The changes that almost altered Dahl novels would have had young readers believing that people never said fat or ugly. People were always kindly and nice, just as they are today.

We don't want our children and grandchildren exposed, before they need to be, to the horrors of the not-nice world. But we also don't want them to get accustomed to being lied to. Why not trust our kids with the truth?

Roald Dahl wrote books powered by imagination and wit, alive with characters who stay with us. That's why he's still read with such pleasure. Like most of us, he was far from perfect. But he had stories he wanted to tell

us, novels he labored to write in his own words and in his own particular way.

- Francine Prose is a former president of Pen American Center and a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences
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Age-appropriate? Deadheading the roses is surely a bog-standard activity for 48-year-olds. Photograph: Maryviolet/Getty Images/iStockphoto

[Opinion](#)[Ageing](#)

Most fortysomethings feel much younger than they really are. My mind insists I'm 400

[Emma Beddington](#)



We all have a subjective age, as well as a chronological one. Months of insomnia have left me feeling like a barnacle-coated relic

Mon 6 Mar 2023 02.00 EST Last modified on Mon 6 Mar 2023 02.12 EST

Last Saturday, I went birdwatching, poked the rose bushes, visited a garden centre and then listened to a podcast while my husband batchcooked. “Ha ha, I am so old,” I texted a friend, recounting this. That “ha ha” meant: “Look at my young-fogeyish affectation; see how old beyond my years I act.” But after sending it, I realised that no “ha ha” was necessary: all these activities are wholly age-appropriate, indeed bog standard, for a 48-year-old.

I didn’t think I felt younger than my chronological age, a phenomenon known as “subjective age”, explored in [the Atlantic](#) recently. It related how a study of [1,470 Danes](#) revealed that people over 40 consistently feel about 20% younger than their actual age, while people under 25 feel older than they are. The prevalent, fairly basic theory posits that the over-40s are in denial about ageing; the journalist suggested it could be an optimistic expression of how much living we feel we still have to do.

Surely it is also about the way older people are still represented? A much shared and derided graphic of [fitness plans for older women](#) from last year comes to mind, in which all age categories were drawn inappropriately elderly (albeit in a stylish, Iris Apfel way). The “45-50” lady seemed to have had a shampoo and set circa 1962 and carried a walking stick; the “over 65” caricature is stooped and clutching a cat. If that’s what we’re told our age looks like, it’s not surprising it doesn’t tally with how we feel.

I have always felt subjectively old, and months into apparently endless insomnia, I feel like that [400-year-old Greenland shark](#) that was alive during (though presumably not aware of) the Great Fire of London: a slow, poisonous-fleshed, barnacle-coated relic. My front-facing phone camera, turned on in error, corroborates. But now I have to assimilate the realisation that some part of me thinks I’m too young to appreciate some distant curlews, a satisfying pruning session or a garden-centre cafe scone. I’m wrong on both counts: lacking self-knowledge is a skill I have consistently mastered at all ages, real and subjective.

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Kaja Kallas, pictured as results came in on Sunday. She hopes to form a coalition government that will maintain its calls to keep pressure on Russia.
Photograph: Janis Laizans/Reuters

[Estonia](#)

Estonia's PM, Kaja Kallas, secures election win with pro-Ukraine stance

Her Reform party secured 31% against far-right's 15% but Kallas must now form a coalition to govern

Reuters in Tallinn

Sun 5 Mar 2023 18.29 EST Last modified on Sun 5 Mar 2023 18.38 EST

The Reform party of Estonia's prime minister, Kaja Kallas, secured first place in Sunday's parliamentary election, a result that should ensure Tallinn remains one of Europe's most staunchly pro-Ukraine governments.

Results with 98% ballots counted showed the far-right EKRE party in second place, with 16.1% versus 31.5% for Kallas' liberal group, reflecting

concerns among some voters over the rising cost of living in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

If Kallas, 45, succeeds in crafting a functioning coalition, it would cement the Baltic nation's pro-European direction.

Estonia, a western neighbour of Russia with a population of 1.3 million, would also stay on course to adopt more green energy and continue to accept refugees from Ukraine.

Kallas said the election left her party in a strong position to form a coalition government that would keep up calling for pressure on Russia.

"We ... have to invest in our security, our aggressive neighbour has not vanished and will not vanish, so we have to work with that," she told reporters at a central Tallinn hotel where party supporters gathered for the evening.

Reform won an election in 2019 but was then kept from power as three smaller parties formed a government. It collapsed in 2021, allowing Kallas to create a coalition and take charge.

Throughout the campaign, EKRE promised to slash energy bills by opposing the transition to green energy and to stop accepting further refugees from the Ukrainian war.

The party also criticised the extent of Kallas' policy of sending weapons to Ukraine, saying it did not take into account the country's own defence needs.

Turnout was 63.7%, in line with the previous election, and with 51% of votes cast by internet, including that of Kallas.

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US president Joe Biden and South Korea president Yoon Suk-yeol at a meeting in November 2022. Biden has welcomed a compensation plan by Seoul that seeks to resolve a long-running forced labour dispute with Japan. Photograph: President of South Korea Press Office/UPI/REX/Shutterstock

[South Korea](#)

Biden hails ‘groundbreaking’ South Korean plan to compensate victims of Japan’s forced labour

Victims groups criticise compensation deal which aims to resolve a disagreement that has long frustrated ties between Seoul and Tokyo

Reuters

Mon 6 Mar 2023 00.59 EST

South Korea said that its companies would compensate people forced to work under Japan’s 1910-1945 occupation of Korea, in a bid to improve

poor relations that have impeded trade and cooperation between the two countries for generations.

The disagreements over labour and women forced into Japanese military brothels have bedevilled ties between the two pivotal US allies for years, but South Korean president Yoon Suk-yeol has made a push to repair the relationship.

In a statement, US president Joe Biden said the announcements were “a groundbreaking new chapter of cooperation and partnership between two of the United States’ closest allies” and a “critical step to forge a future for the Korean and Japanese people that is safer, more secure, and more prosperous.”

The proposal was welcomed in Tokyo but faced immediate backlash from some victims and South Korea’s main opposition party, who accused the government of capitulating to Japan because Japanese companies will not be expected to fund it.

Under the plan, South Korea would compensate former forced labourers through an existing public foundation funded by private-sector companies, foreign minister Park Jin told a briefing.

“The soured South Korea-Japan relations should no longer be neglected, and we need to end the vicious cycle for the national interest, for the people,” Park said. He said he hoped Japan would respond sincerely, including by “implementing its previous public statements expressing remorse and apology”.

Japanese prime minister Fumio Kishida said he welcomed the proposal and would work closely with Yoon.

Japanese companies will not be expected to make any payments under the plan, but would not be blocked from donating if they want, said Japan’s foreign minister Yoshimasa Hayashi. “We welcome this as a step that returns Japan-South Korea relations to a healthy one,” he said.

Poor relations between the two have been a point of concern for the United States, which is seeking to present a more unified front with its allies against the rising power of China and threats from North Korea's expanding missile and nuclear arsenal.

US secretary of state Antony Blinken applauded the “historic” plan, and said South Korea and Japan are “two of the United States’ most important allies, and we are inspired by the work they have done to advance their bilateral relations”.

We welcome today's historic announcements by the Republic of Korea and Japanese governments regarding the conclusion of their bilateral discussions. The ROK and Japan are two of our most important allies, and we are inspired by their work.

— Secretary Antony Blinken (@SecBlinken) [March 6, 2023](#)

When Seoul first raised the proposal in January, it sparked backlash from victims and their families because it did not include contributions from Japanese companies, including those ordered by South Korean courts to pay reparations.

About a dozen protesters demonstrated outside as Park made the announcement.

“It’s a complete victory by Japan, which has said it will not pay a single yen on the forced labour issue,” Lim Jae-sung, a lawyer for several victims, said in a Facebook post on Sunday, citing initial media reports of the deal.

The main opposition Democratic party denounced the plan as “submissive diplomacy”.

“It’s a day of shame,” An Ho-young, a spokesperson for the party, said in a statement. “Japanese companies embroiled in war crimes received indulgence without even budging, and the Japanese government managed to remove a trouble by having the grace to repeat past statements.”

Asked whether Japanese companies will pitch in to compensate, Park said both Japanese and South Korean businesses were considering a plan to make voluntary payments.

South Korea's Yonhap news agency, citing unnamed government sources, had said that as part of the deal Seoul and Tokyo had tentatively agreed to create a separate "future youth fund" to sponsor scholarships with funds from companies in both countries.

Two of the companies ordered by South Korean courts to make restitution, Mitsubishi Heavy Industries and Nippon Steel, declined to comment on the agreement, referring to their long-held stance that the issue of compensating wartime labourers had been resolved under the 1965 treaty that normalised relations between South Korea and Japan.



File image of Lee Choon-shik, a victim of wartime forced labour, holding a banner that reads 'Apologise for forced labour and fulfil the compensation' at an anti-Japan protest in August 2019. Photograph: Kim Hong-Ji/Reuters

Relations plunged to their lowest point in decades after South Korea's supreme court in 2018 ordered Japanese firms to pay reparations to former forced labourers. Fifteen South Koreans have won such cases, but none has been compensated.

Japan has maintained the compensation issue was settled under the 1965 treaty, and Hayashi said his government's stance had not changed.

The row spilled over into a trade dispute, with Tokyo tightening curbs on exports to South Korea of hi-tech materials used in smartphone displays and chips.

Hayashi said the export curbs are separate from the forced labour dispute, but Yonhap reported that trade officials from both countries could make an announcement on the restrictions as soon as Monday.

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Jeepneys were originally adapted from military jeeps left by the US after the second world war and are known for their colourful decorations.
Photograph: Rolex dela Peña/EPA

[Philippines](#)

Schools and firms across Philippines shut as jeepney drivers start strike

Drivers say cost of upgrading colourful vehicles, a crucial part of transport system, completely unaffordable

[Rebecca Ratcliffe](#) in Bangkok

Mon 6 Mar 2023 04.45 EST Last modified on Mon 6 Mar 2023 16.34 EST

A week-long strike by drivers of Philippine jeepneys began on Monday, prompting schools and universities across major cities to suspend in-person classes, while businesses have also been urged to work from home.

The local authorities in Manila, Quezon City, Marikina, Muntinlupa and Pasig City in the national capital region told schools to switch to distance

learning classes due to disruption caused by the strike. The local government of Quezon City, the most populous city in the [Philippines](#), also called on businesses to work online.

Jeepneys, known as “the king of the road”, are a crucial part of the transport system in the Philippines, offering rides that are cheaper than trains, taxis or motorised tricycles.

The vehicles – which were originally adapted from military jeeps left by the US after the second world war – have iconic status, and are known for their colourful decorations.

However, the government says the vehicles are environmentally damaging and wants to replace them with more modern alternatives. Operators have been told to join cooperatives or corporations before the end of the year as part of modernisation plans, so that the sector is less fragmented.

Operators and drivers fear new guidelines could push out smaller operators and say the cost of upgrading vehicles will be completely unaffordable. A traditional jeepney costs between 150,000 to 250,000 Philippine pesos (£2,266 to £3,777), while a modern jeepney that is Euro 4-compliant can cost as much as 2.5m pesos (£37,723).

The 160,000 peso subsidy (£2,414) offered by the government isn’t enough, according to drivers, who are already struggling to recover from the impact of pandemic-related lockdowns, and the rising cost of fuel.

“It’s OK to have modernisation for those who have money,” jeepney driver Benito Garcia told the Associated Press at a protest on Monday. “But for us jeepney drivers and operators, we cannot afford.”

A jeepney driver’s average [daily take-home pay is 755](#) pesos (£11.69), according to data cited by Senator Grace Poe.

Manibela, one of the transport groups that announced the strike, said about 80% of the jeepney operations in Metro Manila were affected.

However, in a statement on Monday, the communications office of the president, Ferdinand Marcos, said there was “no disruption except in a handful of routes in the National Capital Region”. Buses had been provided to assist commuters, it said, adding that at least 11 jeepney and utility vehicle groups in Metro Manila opposed the strike.

The education secretary, Sara Duterte, called the strike “communist-inspired” and “a painful interference in our efforts to address the learning gaps and other woes in our education system”.

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Georgina Beyer, the world's first transgender member of parliament, speaking during a conference in Delhi, India, in 2006. Photograph: Vijay Mathur/Reuters

[New Zealand](#)

World's first openly transgender MP, Georgina Beyer, dies in New Zealand aged 65

The former actor, drag performer, sex worker and radio host pulled off a surprise victory as a Labour MP and later played a pivotal role in decriminalising prostitution

Australian Associated Press

Mon 6 Mar 2023 02.16 EST Last modified on Mon 6 Mar 2023 04.58 EST

Former [New Zealand](#) prime minister Helen Clark has led tributes to Georgina Beyer, the world's first openly transgender MP, who has died.

Friends announced “with the heaviest of hearts” on Facebook on Monday that the 65-year-old had died at a [Wellington](#) hospice.

“Georgie was surround by her nearest and dearest 24/7 over the past week, she accepted what was happening, was cracking jokes and had a twinkle in her eye, right until the final moment,” Scotty Kennedy wrote.

“Farewell Georgie, your love, compassion and all that you have done for the Rainbow and many other communities will live on for ever.”

Beyer, a former actor, drag performer, sex worker and radio host, was born in Wellington but moved to Australia as a young adult.

After moving back to New Zealand, she grew interested in a political career and in 1995, won the mayoralty in Carterton, a town 80 kilometres northeast of Wellington that served as a farming hub.

“It’s less of a reflection on me but a wonderful reflection on them – rural conservative New Zealand. Who would have thought?” she told the NZ Herald in a 2018 interview.

Drafted to run for parliament for the Labour party, Beyer pulled off an upset victory as Clark’s government took office.

The former prime minister said Beyer “showed tremendous courage” stepping into public life and “the public warmed to her honesty”.

“Her election speaks volumes about both Georgina’s personal skills and dedication to community service and the district’s willingness to accept her on her merits without discrimination,” she said.

In parliament, Beyer wasted no time displaying her now-legendary wit, drawing laughs from all sides of the house in her maiden speech.

“I was quoted once as saying this was the stallion that became a gelding and now she’s a mare,” she said.

“I do have to say that I have now found myself to be a member. So I have come full circle.”

As an MP, Beyer played a pivotal role decriminalising prostitution, credited with changing a handful of votes on the bill which passed 60 votes to 59.

“On the third reading of the Prostitution Reform Act, I got up and said, ‘I will assume Mr Speaker that I am the only person in this chamber who has ever worked in the sex industry’,” she said.

“I paused and looked around to see whose hands were going to go flying up. Of course there weren’t any. In that moment I guess they gave me tacit approval that I was the expert on this thing in this chamber.”

Beyer also suffered greatly during her life, alleging she was “brutalised, exploited and pack raped” during her time as a sex worker in Sydney.

“I’ve had to endure that kind of thing and it either kills you or it doesn’t. What doesn’t kill you makes you stronger,” she said.

In 2020, Beyer was made a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit for services to the rainbow community.

The Wairarapa MP Kieran McAnulty, who was baby sat by Beyer as a child, said New Zealand had “lost a great one”.

“She was a beloved family member, loyal friend, passionate advocate for the LGBTIQA+ community and a powerhouse of a local politician,” he said.

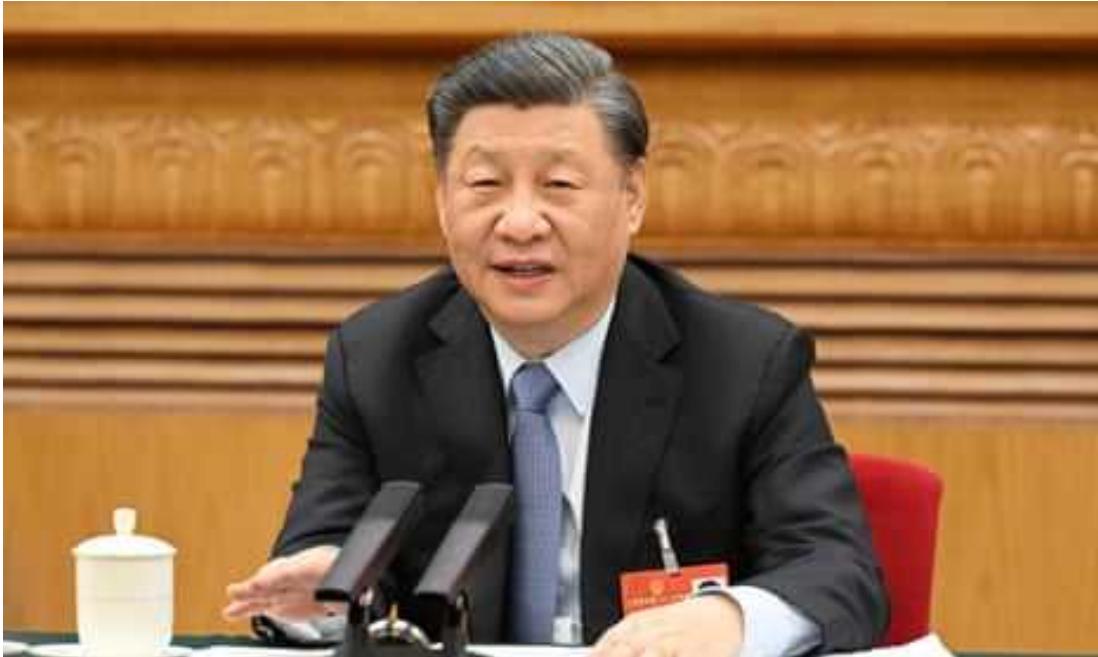
“I met up with her two weeks ago to chat about her battle with kidney disease, something that my family have also been affected by. Her spark was still very much intact.”

The New Zealand prime minister, Chris Hipkins, also offered his condolences, saying Beyer left a “lasting impression on the parliament”.

“I certainly think Georgina has blazed a trail that makes it much easier for others to follow,” he said.

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China should rely on scientific and technological innovation to foster new growth, president Xi Jinping said. Photograph: Xinhua/REX/Shutterstock

[China](#)

Xi Jinping urges China to greater self-reliance amid sanctions and trade tensions

Leader speaks of need for original and pioneering research to achieve growth in face of ‘fierce international competition’

Helen Davidson in Taipei

[@heldavidson](#)

Mon 6 Mar 2023 01.11 EST Last modified on Mon 6 Mar 2023 01.13 EST

China must speed up its science and technology development to ensure greater self-reliance, the country’s leader [Xi Jinping](#) has told an annual political meeting, as Beijing becomes more isolated by sanctions and other trade concerns.

China's technological advancement is facing global competition and increasing constraints from foreign governments such as the US, but the sector has also been hindered by Beijing's own crackdowns and controls.

In a speech to a closed-door meeting of the National People's Congress (NPC) on Sunday, Xi said greater self-reliance and strength in the science and technology field was the path to advancing "high quality development" and building China into "a great modern socialist country".

"To open up new areas and new arenas in development and foster new growth drivers and new strengths in face of fierce international competition, China should ultimately rely on scientific and technological innovation," he said, according to a state media readout.

He called for increased cooperation between Chinese industry, academia and research institutes to support "original and pioneering research".

The [annual political meeting of China's rubber-stamping parliament](#) began on Sunday and will run until next week. The meeting – which runs concurrently to the annual gathering of the Chinese Communist party's (CCP) advisory body for [an event known as the "two sessions"](#) – is largely held behind closed doors.

So far, the event has added to growing signs of China's leadership prioritising self-sustainability.

Among its concerns are [US restrictions on Chinese access to US semiconductor and AI technology](#), on national security grounds, as well as foreign sanctions or restrictions on some Chinese companies and officials over issues including the crackdowns in Hong Kong and Xinjiang, and signs of support for Russia in its invasion of Ukraine. Beijing has responded by decrying the use of sanctions.

On Monday, official state media reported what analysts said was [a potential new political slogan](#), "the two must-haves", citing manufacturing and a dependable grain and food supply that isn't vulnerable to international

markets. Draft budget figures announced on Sunday saw a more than 13% increase in funding for national stockpiling of grain and other base items.

Xi's comments on Monday were in line with [the work report speech](#) delivered the previous day by outgoing premier, Li Keqiang, who called for improvements in national-level mobilisation of resources in the sector.

The finance ministry and state planner also announced modest budget increases for the tech sector, and the acceleration of hard tech infrastructure construction, including in artificial intelligence, 5G and big data.

China's tech industry has been targeted by a broad government crackdown in recent years, as the CCP sought to rein in the increasingly independent sector and key figures such as Alibaba founder Jack Ma.

Dr Ilaria Carrozza, a senior researcher at the Peace Research Institute Oslo, had previously told the Guardian the crackdown appeared to have eased, or at least been paused, “but I don’t think we should assume they’re going to now let companies do whatever they want”.

The CCP’s challenges in maintaining control over the tech sector and the flow of information more broadly, while also pushing for greater innovation, have been demonstrated in the race to develop AI chatbots. The emergence of the hugely popular US-based ChatGPT – [and its subsequent censorship in China](#) – highlighted the difficulties Chinese tech firms are having in developing their own without upsetting the government.

Science and technology minister Wang Zhigang said on Sunday that China would have to “wait and see” if it can develop the same results as ChatGPT, adding that its ability to deliver results in real time was “very difficult to achieve”.

Reuters contributed to this report

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'I heard loud gunshots': seven people killed in Jehovah's Witnesses hall in Hamburg – video report

[Germany](#)

Hamburg shooting: seven people killed in Jehovah's Witnesses hall

Suspected gunman, also found dead, is believed to have been former member of the religious community

[Daniel Boffey](#) in Hamburg and [Jon Henley](#)

Fri 10 Mar 2023 05.48 ESTFirst published on Fri 10 Mar 2023 03.20 EST

The suspect in the shooting dead of seven people [at a Jehovah's Witness centre](#) in Hamburg is reported to have been a former member of the church.

The man, who was found dead at the scene, is believed to have been aged between 30 and 40 and to have used a handgun after forcing himself into the building close to the city centre.

One of those killed was said by the Hamburg Abendblatt newspaper to have been pregnant, although police in Hamburg were not confirming the identities of any of those involved on Friday morning as forensics teams continued to sweep the area for clues.

The paper also reported that the suspected perpetrator, who was said to have emptied one of several magazines of bullets in the shooting, had been ejected from the church about 18 months ago for reasons unknown.

Hamburg police said: "Eight people were fatally injured, apparently including the suspected perpetrator," adding that several other people were injured, "some seriously".

A coffin was ushered into the Jehovah's Witnesses centre at 11am on Friday as a crowd of TV cameras and reporters watched on, sheltering under umbrellas from heavy snow. A number of stretchers were also taken into the pebble-dashed three-storey building as the police reopened nearby roads to traffic.

[Hamburg map](#)

Hamburg has not had an incident as serious for decades and the German chancellor, Olaf Scholz, a former Hamburg mayor, described it as a “brutal act of violence”.

He tweeted: “Bad news from Hamburg. Several members of a Jehovah’s Church fell victim to a brutal act of violence last night. My thoughts are with them and their families. And with the security forces, who have had a difficult deployment.”

France’s president, Emmanuel Macron, also expressed his dismay. “Terrible news from Hamburg. I send France’s condolences to the families of the victims and to all our German friends. Our thoughts are with them,” he tweeted.

David Semonian, a US-based spokesperson for Jehovah’s Witnesses, said members “worldwide grieve for the victims of this traumatic event”.

As news of the shooting emerged, police said a major operation was under way in the Gross Borstel district of the city. Several streets were sealed off and the public were warned by text message to avoid the area. Local people were told to stay indoors and only to use their phones “in extreme emergency” so as not to overburden the network.

Police from a specialised armed unit were by chance already near the scene when the shooting happened, local media reported. They were on their way back to accommodation at their headquarters in Alsterdorf when they heard gunshots.

Heiko Sander, a reporter for the local broadcaster NDR, told the news service Tagesschau that the police nearby acted after hearing several shots

being fired. They entered the building and started evacuating people, Sander said.

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Police from a specialised armed unit were by chance already near the scene when the shooting happened, local media reported. Photograph: Jonas Walzberg/AP

When officers arrived at the scene they found several people seriously injured and some dead. “Then they heard a shot from above, they went upstairs and found one further person,” a police spokesperson said.

An unnamed witness said he heard shots being fired. “There were 12 continuous shots ... then we saw how people were taken away in black bags,” he told local media.

A 23-year-old witness named Lara Bauch said she heard “about four firing periods. During these periods, several shots were always fired, approximately 20 seconds to one minute apart.”

She looked out of the window “and saw a person running hectically from the ground floor to the first floor at the Jehovah’s Witnesses”. She said the services at the centre have always been very well attended and that the crowd was a mix of “families, older people, younger people”.

About 175,000 people in [Germany](#) are Jehovah’s Witnesses, including 3,800 in Hamburg. The Christian movement, founded in the US in the late 19th century, preaches non-violence and is known for door-to-door evangelism.

The mayor of Hamburg, Peter Tschentscher, said: “I extend my deepest sympathy to the families of the victims. Police are working at full speed to pursue the perpetrators and clarify the background.”

Germany has been rocked by several mass shootings in recent years. In February 2020, a far-right extremist [shot dead 10 people](#) and wounded five others in the central city of Hanau. And in 2019, two people were killed after a neo-Nazi tried to storm a synagogue in Halle on the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur.

Agence France-Presse and Associated Press contributed to this report

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[**Politics live with Andrew Sparrow**](#)[**Politics**](#)

Rishi Sunak announces new detention centre in northern France after meeting with Emmanuel Macron – as it happened

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Rishi Sunak meets with President of France Emmanuel Macron ahead of a bilateral meeting during the UNFCCC COP 27 climate conference in November in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt. Photograph: Getty Images

[Rishi Sunak](#)

UK ministers head to Paris to discuss Channel boat crossings

Paris gathering is first such UK-France summit in five years

Aletha Adu Political correspondent
[@alethaadu](#)

Thu 9 Mar 2023 17.30 EST Last modified on Fri 10 Mar 2023 05.33 EST

Rishi Sunak and a series of his ministers are heading to Paris for a summit at which he will push [Emmanuel Macron](#) to assist him over Channel boat crossings – but with little apparent chance of securing an immediate deal on returning people.

The gathering in Paris, the first such UK-France summit in five years, is also based around wider bilateral issues such as defence and Ukraine. However, for Sunak's domestic focus, it seems set to be dominated by the issue of small boats.

The prime minister will meet the French president for talks at the Élysée Palace, with a joint press conference afterwards.

Half a dozen cabinet ministers are also attending the summit, including [Suella Braverman](#), the home secretary; James Cleverly, the foreign secretary; Ben Wallace, the defence secretary, and energy secretary Grant Shapps who will all meet their French counterparts.

While there will be a focus on rebuilding more cordial relations following tensions over Brexit and the more abrasive approach of Boris Johnson and Liz Truss, Sunak is under domestic pressure to secure a deal over returning people who arrive from France, and for beefed-up policing of the Channel coast.

The prime minister has invested a huge amount of political capital in [the controversial new immigration bill](#) that aims to stem the arrival of small boats by criminalising anyone who arrives unofficially, with the threat of rapid deportation and a permanent ban from settling in the UK.

While the aim is to deport some to third countries such as Rwanda, a more straightforward option would be to return some arrivals to France or other EU nations, as happened before Brexit under the Dublin agreement for dealing with asylum seekers.

While Sunak ideally wants a replacement returns agreement with France, UK officials believe Macron is not likely to agree, with the focus instead expected to be on working out a new EU-wide returns deal.



Rishi Sunak meeting with Emmanuel Macron, during the COP27 summit at Sharm el-Sheikh Photograph: Reuters

Sunak's official spokesperson said the prime minister would raise the issue: "Certainly we are going in there with an ambition to go further on stopping the boats making these dangerous crossings."

Macron in turn wants the UK to agree to a multi-year funding settlement to help pay for policing efforts in northern France to prevent small boat crossings. The Times reported that the UK could offer up to £200m over three years to stop crossings "at source".

With almost 3,000 people having arrived in the UK unofficially by small boat so far this year, French police said they have stopped around the same number making the trip.

Sunak's official spokesperson said: "These are important discussions that should deepen our work with our French counterparts on stopping the boats.

"We want a EU-UK returns agreement and will push that forward. But it is equally important that there is work on the ground right now to stop the crossings we are seeing even in these winter months."

Labour, who have focused the bulk of their opposition to the bill on what they see as its ineffectiveness in tackling boat arrivals and the asylum backlog rather than concerns raised by refugee agencies and charities, have nonetheless challenged Sunak to reach a returns agreement in Paris.

Yvette Cooper, the shadow home secretary, said Sunak “will have failed if he comes back from the summit without a new returns agreement and new joint arrangements to prevent dangerous boat crossings”.

Even if there is no agreement on crossings, the summit is expected to reflect Sunak’s more pragmatic approach to the EU, as seen in the revamped protocol for post-Brexit trade in Northern Ireland.

Officials in Paris and London have classed the meeting as the “beginning of the renewal of a beautiful relationship”.

As well as defence and Ukraine, other subjects set to be discussed are post-Brexit difficulties over school visits, and ways France can learn from London’s experience of hosting the Olympics ahead of the 2024 Paris Games.

Downing Street stressed that the gathering would not be “a summit on a single issue”, also raising energy security and the “challenge posed by China” as likely to be discussed.

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Business liveBusiness

US adds 311,000 jobs in February; UK economy returns to growth; regulators take over Silicon Valley Bank – as it happened

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The chancellor, Jeremy Hunt, will announce his budget on Wednesday.
Photograph: Jordan Pettitt/PA

Economic growth (GDP)

UK economy rebounds as Jeremy Hunt finalises budget

January GDP growth of 0.3% bigger than expected, driven by education, health and recreation sectors

- [Analysis: Economic growth of sorts, but UK plc is going nowhere](#)
- [Business live updates: UK economy returns to growth](#)

Phillip Inman
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Fri 10 Mar 2023 08.48 ESTFirst published on Fri 10 Mar 2023 02.05 EST

The [UK economy](#) rebounded more than expected in January, providing a modest boost to the chancellor as he puts the finishing touches to next

week's budget.

Growth of 0.3% month on month was driven by a broad-based return of activity across the education, health and recreation sectors, including the return of football's Premier League after the winter World Cup, the [Office for National Statistics](#) (ONS) said.

The rise of private GPs and other private health services also played a part as more people with health problems went private amid lengthy NHS waiting lists.

City economists had expected growth of only 0.1% month on month after a combination of industrial action and inflation weighed on the economy. [It followed a 0.5% slump in GDP in December](#).

The latest figures are expected to give the chancellor, [Jeremy Hunt](#), a slight boost before the budget, when he will set out the government's tax and spending policies.

The prime minister, Rishi Sunak, said "confidence is returning" to the UK economy, adding it was doing "better than people had feared".

Hunt said that while the UK economy had proved more resilient than many expected, "there is a long way to go".

He added: "Next week, I will set out the next stage of our plan to halve inflation, reduce debt and grow the economy – so we can improve living standards for everyone."

[GDP graphic](#)

Most forecasts for GDP growth in 2023 have improved since the Treasury's autumn statement in November, when analysts were predicting a long recession in the wake of Liz Truss's destabilising mini-budget.

Most analysts expect a milder recession than they did at the beginning of the year, although the recovery is forecast to be equally shallow.

However, analysts said the economy lagged behind the UK's rivals in the G7 and the risk of a recession in the first half of the year was high.

The ONS said the economy was still 0.2% smaller than its pre-pandemic peak.

Darren Morgan, the ONS director of economic statistics, said a return of children to classrooms after unusually high absences in the run-up to Christmas was one of the main reasons a 0.5% fall in December was partly reversed in January.

"The Premier League clubs returned to a full schedule after the end of the World Cup and private health providers also had a strong month. Postal services also partially recovered from the effects of December's strikes," he said.

"These were somewhat offset by a notable drop in construction, with a slowdown in infrastructure projects and housebuilding having another poor month, partly due to heavy rainfall."

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Yael Selfin, the chief UK economist at KPMG, said lower wholesale energy prices would give the economy a boost, "but this may not be sufficient to

stave off a recession in the first half of this year, as consumer spending remains weak with households continuing to be squeezed by elevated prices and higher interest rates”.

Trade flows were also depressed in January, continuing a downward trend since the UK quit the EU’s single market and customs union.

Samuel Tombs, the chief UK economist at the consultancy Pantheon Macroeconomics, said analysis of the latest data showed “exports remain impeded by Brexit”, and the UK still lagged behind other industrialised economies.

The ONS said the deficit in goods and services trade widened by £3.5bn in January to £27.6bn in the three months to January, “as exports fell by more than imports”.

The ONS estimates that the pre-2021 data on exports to the EU would be about 5% higher than currently reported, if they had been based on a previous system of customs declarations.

“Accordingly, the damage from Brexit is even larger than the trade data initially suggest,” Tombs said.

Business groups said the rise in GDP would do little to ease the pressures on small firms suffering from high inflation and a rise in business taxes.

Tina McKenzie, the policy vice-chair at the Federation of Small Businesses, said: “While January’s figures are a glimmer of hope, the flat growth over the previous three months means we’re not out of the woods yet, with tough trading conditions persisting for many small firms.

“Plenty of challenges remain. Inflation has only barely eased, and the tax burden for small firms is as high as it’s been for seven decades.”

The UK economy narrowly avoided sliding into recession at the end of 2022 but the Bank of England has forecast a recession in the first half of this year, while inflation and interest rates remain high, depressing consumer spending and business investment.

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2023.03.10 - Spotlight

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Everything But the Girl: ‘We had to allow ourselves to fail. It wasn’t like we had a master plan.’ Photograph: Edward Bishop

[Pop and rock](#)

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Everything But the Girl on their unlikely return: ‘This life came into our music. We didn’t have control over it’

[Alexis Petridis](#)

They went from leftist outsiders to huge dance-pop stars, then walked away when stadiums came calling. Back after 24 years, Tracey Thorn and Ben Watt explain how lockdowns led to a new album – and why they’ve embraced Auto-Tune



Fri 10 Mar 2023 01.00 EST Last modified on Fri 10 Mar 2023 04.03 EST

In early 1997, Everything But the Girl were at the height of their fame. Fifteen years into their career, they had executed a remarkable turnaround in fortunes. Ben Watt and Tracey Thorn had been dropped by their label after the release of their 1994 album, *Amplified Heart*, only to see a Todd Terry remix of its track *Missing* belatedly become a vast global hit: No 2 in the US, double platinum in the UK, topping the charts for weeks around Europe. Their ensuing album, 1995’s *Walking Wounded*, was both their most successful, and curiously influential. Soon you couldn’t move for singer-songwriters plying their melancholy trade over drum’n’bass breaks or house

beats: everywhere from Olive's No 1 single You're Not Alone, to Dido. Roni Size and Reprazent sampled them on their Mercury prize-winning debut album, New Forms. The singer Karen Ramirez covered another old EBTG song, [I Didn't Know I Was Looking for Love](#), in the style of Missing and scored a Top 10 hit. Then U2 asked them to support their US stadium tour, news the duo received while staying in an Australian hotel room so sumptuous it had enough space for a grand piano and offered breathtaking views over Perth.

It was at precisely this point – when the call came from U2 – that Thorn pulled the plug on EBTG, with the winningly nonchalant phrase: “Actually babe, do you know what? I think I want to stop now.” Always equivocal about the anxiety-inducing task of performing, Thorn was filled with “stomach-churning horror” at the thought of appearing in front of 60,000 U2 fans a night. Moreover, she wanted herself and Watt, a couple since their teens, to start a family. So EBTG turned U2 down, made one more album – 1999’s Temperamental – did a few shows and that was that.



Everything But the Girl in the early 90s. Photograph: Avalon/Getty Images

Thorn has never played a gig since. She spent the next four years a stay-at-home mum, “happy as a clam” while Watt became a DJ, producer, club owner and boss of the deep house label [Buzzin' Fly](#). Eventually, both started

making low-key, critically acclaimed solo albums – Thorn released four, collaborated with John Grant and German house duo Tiefschwarz and embarked on a parallel career as an author; Watt, tired of “being an A&R person and doing licensing agreements for co-productions”, made three albums in the folky vein of his pre-EBTG solo release, North Marine Drive – but the question of working together again was scrupulously avoided.

“When you’re bringing up a family, there’s just a lot to deal with,” offers Watt. “It’s a big enough drain being parents to three teenage kids, and then to work together, it just all seemed too much.”

“We sort of became quite strictly independent of each other,” says Thorn. “This is my work, I’m going to finish it, you can hear it and make helpful comments, but you’re not part of it.”

And yet, here we are, in a tiny London record company office, unexpectedly discussing the first EBTG album in 24 years. Fuse was announced = nonchalantly again – by Thorn, on Twitter, late last year. Thorn thinks its appearance might have something do with lockdown, of which the couple had an extreme experience. Thanks to his struggle with the rare autoimmune disease Churg-Strauss syndrome, Watt was “on that list of people who got the letter from the government telling them what to do”, Thorn recalls: essentially, stay six feet away from everyone, and even isolate from your family if they’re socialising.

“It was difficult, because we had kids coming and going,” Thorn says. “We didn’t live like that for long, but lockdown went on for a very long time for us. A full two years of living a very quiet life. Towards the end, there was the feeling: ‘What are we going to do next? Are we going to do a project? Are we going to carry on living the life we’re living?’ I started to think: I’d love for us to at least try something with EBTG. If we don’t do it now, or soon, maybe we’ll suddenly realise it’s too late. We’re not getting any younger, you can’t just put this off for ever.”

Watt was hesitant, deterred by the potential pressure. For Thorn, it was just about the joy of collaborating. “‘We’re in this house together, we’re both musicians, no one even needs to know that we tried.’”

Watt was so trepidatious that initially, he says, he “refused to call it EBTG. All the files were just listed as TREN – Tracey and Ben. We had to allow ourselves to fail. It wasn’t like we had a master plan. But it quickly became EBTG – this life seemed to come into it that we didn’t have a lot of control over.” Their shared creative intuition kicked back in. “Sometimes we’d communicate with a look about whether things were good or bad; we seemed to have an instinctive feeling for the economy we wanted to use, the minimalism of the arrangements, the fact that the lyrics should be emotional, not sentimental. All these things that seemed to be a part of what we do suddenly all seemed to fall into place. Which is quite exciting.”



In 1982. Photograph: David Corio/Getty Images

So Fuse picks up where Temperamental left off, setting Thorn’s distinctive vocals – warm but ineffably dolorous – to stark, cutting-edge beats and experimental electronics. The songs are uniformly beautiful. Thorn sings about the need to forgive yourself in an unforgiving moral climate, about how the uncertainty and self-doubt you feel after your kids leave home can remind you of being a teenager and, on *No One Knows We’re Dancing*, about the hedonistic connectivity of a nightclub, written from the wistful perspective of a man whose need for isolation during Covid led him to take up the more sedate pastime of birdwatching. “Because it was a chance to get

out of the house and not talk to anybody,” Watt smiles. “Birders aren’t the most social of beings.”

It also reanimates EBTG’s oft-overlooked willingness to take risks, not least in using effects to render Thorn’s voice, their most celebrated musical asset, virtually unrecognisable: woozy and deep on *Interior Space*; a faintly FKA twigs-ish electronic chirrup on *When You Mess Up*. “From day one, we were going: ‘We have to fuck up my voice’,” grins Thorn. “We were *desperate* to fuck up my voice. It’s one of the key signatures of the band, so it was the most fun thing.”

“The idea of using Tracey’s voice as just another thread in the tapestry became really interesting to me because we have this reputation of: don’t mess with the voice! – that it’s sacred,” says Watt. “But we just thought: well, why?”



In 1984. Photograph: Peter Noble/Redferns

Their new enthusiasm for Auto-Tune fits the wilfulness that marked EBTG from the moment Thorn and Watt started making music together after meeting at Hull University in 1982. With the benefit of hindsight, they did give the impression of being people who might pull the plug on their career at its height if they felt like it. On one hand, they were traditionalists: the son

of Scottish big band leader [Tommy Watt](#), Ben was steeped in jazz from an early age; their debut single was a guitar-and-vocals cover of Cole Porter's Night and Day that could have been recorded at pretty much any point since 1932.

On the other, they were very much a product of the bolshie, anti-commercial post-punk environment in which they both had first come to attention – Thorn with the ramshackle Marine Girls and Watt with the oddball drone of his 1981 solo single, Cant. Their approach was stringent, even by the standards of the time: on their debut album, 1984's Eden, they wouldn't allow the drummer to hit the snare drum on grounds that the sound was "too rockist". Backing vocals were also banned for fear they would sound "too glossy, too high production, potentially vacuous". "You have to remember," says Thorn, "that we were students making up bollocks. It wasn't a clear manifesto in many ways, it was lots of different manifestos ... manifesting themselves."

Nevertheless, a certain refusenik attitude clung to EBTG. Initially, at least, they wouldn't appear on Top of the Pops, decrying the fact that the show's female dancers performed in cages as sexist. They didn't like videos, even if they were directed by underground film-maker [John Maybury](#). Thorn declined to look at the camera at all during the making of the promo clip for their 1984 single Each and Every One, staring fixedly at the floor instead. They were openly wedded to leftwing politics, part of the Labour-supporting Red Wedge collective of musicians, and ended up on the cover of NME after performing in the Soviet Union as part of the Communist party's Festival of Youth and Students. "It was a stunt," says Watt. "A lot of the young people from Moscow had been bussed out, they really didn't want them fraternising with westerners, so we ended up performing to KGB staff. Our support act at one of them was a Bulgarian juggler."



In 1986. Photograph: Dpa Picture Alliance/Alamy

In their early days, they were famously hard work for interviewers – they are, it should be noted, charm itself today – particularly if said interviewers made the mistake of lumping them in with the wave of jazz-influenced pop artists that emerged from London's early-80s club scene. "Suddenly you find yourself being likened to bands you feel you have absolutely nothing in common with: Matt Bianco, Blue Rondo à La Turk," says Watt. "It's just very startling. You start questioning yourself: did I mean that? Is that what it is to other people? When you're young, the instinct is: 'Right, we'll do something else, you fuckers!'"

Listening to EBTG's 80s catalogue, the most striking thing is how wildly different their albums are to each other: the bossa nova-inflected *Eden* was followed by the Smiths-influenced indie of 1985's *Love Not Money*; a year later, *Baby the Stars Shine Bright* delved headlong into lavishly orchestrated 60s pop some years before Scott Walker and Jimmy Webb became hip names to drop. "The record label said that production was getting really big, snare drums were this enormous sound, Trevor Horn's influence was being felt, so we thought: OK, you want a big-sounding record, we'll make you a big-sounding record – we'll orchestrate the shit out of it!" laughs Watt.

In 1990, The Language of Life offered up ultra-slick soul of the kind made by Luther Vandross. If it wasn't for Thorn's voice, you might be forgiven for thinking each was the work of a completely different artist. Thorn argues for a through-line, "a certain continuity in the songwriting, some of our melodic approaches. If there wasn't an identity there, there wouldn't have been an audience that's stuck with us."

Still, perhaps it shouldn't have been such a surprise when they threw themselves so wholeheartedly into dance music in the mid 90s. And perhaps it worked so well because they were enraptured by the sound of drum'n'bass – Watt says the syncopation of the drums reminded him of the jazz he had grown up with. They juked a plan to move to the US and record there in order to become regulars at Fabio and LTJ Bukem's midweek club Speed on Charing Cross Road and to hang around the basement of Soho's Blackmarket Records. "It really clicked with me," says Watt. "Metalheadz, Peshay, Alex Reece – I took one listen and immediately loved it. There was so much space in the records where Tracey's voice could go."

He is, he says, still plugged into dance music, despite no longer "being at the coalface" of DJing or running a house label. A quick scan of his ongoing Spotify playlist SpinCycle reveals Ross From Friends and Lord of the Isles rubbing shoulders with John Martyn, Chet Baker, old soul music and post-punk: a neat summation of the range of influences behind EBTG's sound.

As for the future, they seem uncertain whether Fuse represents a one-off, or the first stage in a more permanent return. "Without wishing to get all mindful on you, we're trying to be very present," says Thorn, "because we're never going to have this moment again, that air of surprise. No one knew we were doing it; we didn't know we were doing an EBTG record at first. So that's a great feeling."

In the past, they would already be looking to the next album, "saying: 'No, no, no, we're going to make a better record, we can see already what's wrong with this one.' We're trying not to do that. So I don't know." She shrugs, and says – nonchalantly as ever: "See what happens."

Fuse is released on 21 April via Buzzin' Fly and Virgin Records

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Emmanuel Macron (left) is hoping Rishi Sunak has ended Britain's brush with populism. Photograph: Ludovic Marin/AFP/Getty Images

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Sunak and Macron must navigate boat issues to reset Anglo-French relations

[Patrick Wintour](#) Diplomatic editor

Channel crossings and Aukus pact will be central to talks that could also improve Britain's standing with the EU

Fri 10 Mar 2023 01.00 EST

The attempt by Rishi Sunak and [Emmanuel Macron](#) to reset the Anglo-French relationship on Friday is not just important bilaterally, but also in terms of Britain's relationship with the EU.

The French president, a gatekeeper to improved relations, sees the British prime minister's [efforts to resolve the Northern Ireland trade issues](#) as a signal Britain is in the hands of a fellow technocratic nationalist, and that its brush with populism may be over.

French diplomats were in despair over Boris Johnson's willingness to use France as a prop to bolster his domestic standing, saying it corroded the trust that is at the heart of effective diplomacy. The low point probably came in November 2021 with Johnson's [release on Twitter](#) of a letter to Macron after 27 people died trying to cross the Channel. The then prime minister in effect blamed the crisis on France and proposed it should commit to taking back all asylum seekers who made it to Britain, a suggestion the French government had already rejected multiple times. The letter led to the [withdrawal of an invitation](#) to the then home secretary, Priti Patel, to a summit on the refugee crisis.

There had been similar fury two months earlier when Johnson [told Macron to “donnez-moi un break”](#) and get over his anger with the Aukus military pact signed between the UK, US and Australia in the Indo-Pacific. Johnson suggested Macron “prenez un grip” over the surprise Anglosphere pact to design and build nuclear-powered submarines for Australia, which required Canberra to dump a contract to buy diesel-powered subs from the French.

'Donnez-moi un break': Johnson says France needs to 'get a grip' over submarine deal – video

By contrast Joe Biden, belatedly aware that the announcement of the pact had been terribly handled, took Macron's sense of betrayal seriously. He met the French president in Rome a month later, signed a strategic interoperability agreement in December 2021 and a year later granted Macron a [state visit to the White House](#).

A test of Friday's summit will be the ability of the two leaders to navigate these boat issues – the inflatable rafts coming across the Channel and the multibillion-pound nuclear submarines that Australia, the US and the UK intend to build to patrol in the Indo-Pacific.

The small boats, a symbol of the wider migration crisis, have a short-term political urgency for Sunak, who will be seeking election in 2024. The replacement submarines, to counter the growing threat from China, are not due to be seaworthy until the 2040s.

The difficulty in terms of small boats is that the sides only in November reached a laboriously negotiated settlement in which the UK provided €72.2m (£64m) in return for a 40% increase in patrols and more intelligence sharing. The only probable big advance at the summit will be that Britain's ad hoc funding of French patrols will become multiyear funding, making it easier for the French to plan extra patrols.

Each side would like the other to do more. Conservative MPs want France to arrest those caught trying to cross the Channel and for the British police to patrol on French beaches alongside the gendarmerie. France for its part would like the British to introduce ID cards and take more refugees. Neither side is going to relent. But it was noticeable that Sunak in making his latest announcements this week steered clear of blaming the French for the increase in the number of boats, saying no single lever would solve the problem.

The EU's statement on Wednesday that it does not believe the new British policy of rejecting any person if they arrive illegally by boat conforms with international law carries dangers. It risks Macron being cast in the role of accomplice of British lawbreaking if he endorses the UK's plan. How he handles this will be a test of how eager the French president is to improve relations.

The other test will be Aukus. Biden took the precaution of ringing Macron this week to brief him on details of where and how nuclear-powered submarines will be built, something he will announce on Monday in San Diego alongside Sunak and the Australian prime minister, Anthony Albanese. The event will be a bitter moment for Macron.

Aukus involved Biden, as well as Canberra and London going behind Macron's back to kill off Australia's previous \$66bn contract signed in 2016 to buy French subs. It was not just the deception of an ally, it was a blow to the centrepiece of French policy in the Indo-Pacific. Not even the €555m

compensation given to the French naval group or visits by Albanese to Paris can heal the wounds.

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The risk is that the exclusion of [France](#) sharpens its instinct to approach China differently to the US and UK. In September, Macron told his diplomats about France's distinctive position about the coming power struggle between China and the US. France was not equidistant between these superpowers, he argued, but at the same time did not have a confrontational mindset.

Britain could play a role in binding France closer to US thinking on China. There has even been talk of Fraukus, the idea that France may join in the advanced technology sharing that is an essential part of Aukus.

Another path for the UK to influence French thinking is to deepen defence cooperation with France and by extension [Europe](#).

The former national security adviser Peter Ricketts has suggested the UK and the EU could start that process by meeting regularly to discuss supply chain issues over China, foreign direct investment screening or export controls of advanced technologies.

Britain's integrated defence and foreign policy review in March 2021 had very little to say about British coordination with the EU on security issues. Structured defence cooperation with Europe may be a step too far for Sunak, but a revised post-Ukraine version is due to be published on Monday as the prime minister meets Biden. Ironically there is no politician more eager to see British European cooperation on defence than the American president.

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Sons of the Forest screenshot. Photograph: Endnight Games

[Games](#)

What is Sons of the Forest, the cannibal survival game that sold 2m copies in a

day?

Endnight Games' sequel sold vast numbers on Steam. What's behind its remarkable success – and what should you know before you play it?

Rick Lane

Fri 10 Mar 2023 03.00 ESTLast modified on Fri 10 Mar 2023 03.02 EST

Late last month, a game called Sons of the Forest launched on the Steam Early Access programme, which allows players to buy unfinished games still in active development, and immediately became one of the biggest new titles of 2023. Within 24 hours, it had sold 2m copies, and it has remained near the top of Steam's top-sellers list ever since.

Sons of the Forest's phenomenal success has seemingly appeared out of nowhere, but the momentum has been quietly building for years. Canadian developer Endnight [Games](#) has carved out a niche, delivering immersive, tangible and thrilling survival games.

What is Sons of the Forest?



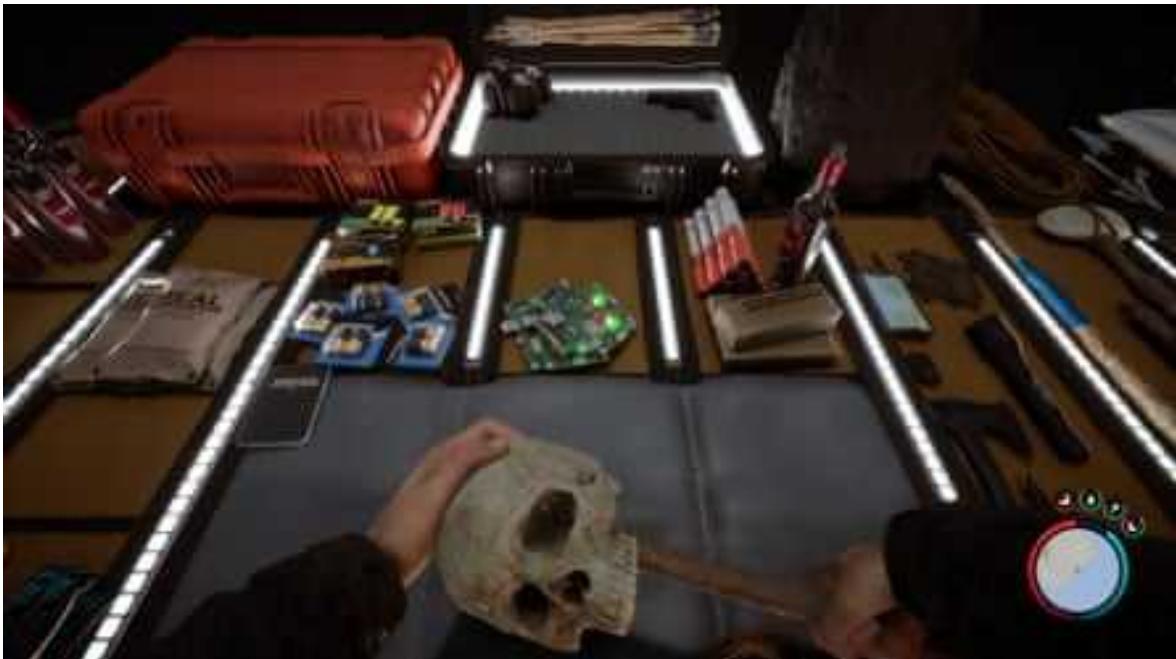
Sons of the Forest screenshot. Photograph: Endnight Games

It's a survival game that throws players into the wilderness and tasks them with staying alive for as long as possible. You play a member of a special forces team sent to track down a missing billionaire and his family on a large, forested island. But after an introductory cutscene that resembles a deleted scene from Predator, your helicopter crashes, scattering your team and leaving you stranded on a beach with most of your hi-tech equipment at the bottom of the ocean.

Like most survival games, Sons of the Forest simulates basic bodily experiences such as hunger, thirst and changing energy levels, alongside weather and temperature. Your immediate goal is to tend to physical needs. You have to locate drinkable water, find food by foraging or hunting animals, and construct a basic shelter where you can sleep. The game features elaborate crafting and building, letting you construct shelters ranging from simple tents to log cabins, and make useful items such as spears and bows to hunt and defend yourself.

This latter point hints at what separates Sons of the Forest from other survival games: Sons of the Forest isn't just about withstanding the elements. It's also a horror game, inspired by films such as The Descent and Cannibal Holocaust. The island wilderness is populated by tribes of cannibal mutants, and they're not thrilled by your arrival. Some live in the forest, periodically visiting your camp, where they may (or may not) attack you. Stranger creatures lurk in subterranean caverns, which happen to be where you'll find the most useful equipment to help you survive.

Why is it suddenly so popular?



Sons of the Forest screenshot. Photograph: Endnight Games

Well, partly because it's a sequel. In 2014, Endnight Games released *The Forest*, also on Steam Early Access. *The Forest* sold more than 5m copies, capitalising on a surge of interest in survival games that peaked in the years after the release of *Minecraft*, one of the first games to pioneer the idea of gathering resources from the environment and using them to create useful things to survive nights filled with hostile creatures.

And *The Forest* did two things better than any other survival game. The first was sheer physicality; Endnight was formed by a team of former visual effects artists, with credits on films such as *Tron: Legacy* and *The Amazing Spider-Man 2*, and that skillset is evident in how convincing the *Forest* looks and, more importantly, feels. Endnight has a knack for connecting the player with the actual tasks of surviving a wilderness, from building a fire to chopping down trees.

The Forest also excelled as a horror game, thanks to its eerie cannibal tribes. In encounters with the player, they'd display uncannily human behaviours: they could appear curious, show fear when attacked, and would often try to intimidate and deceive the player rather than go for them with a thigh bone. *Sons of the Forest* builds on all of this, but with a bigger wilderness to explore, even more tactile crafting and building, and friendly characters

alongside your mutant adversaries. It also goes even further with its body horror: all manner of unsettling creatures lurk in the woods.

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Is the game worth buying now?

That depends. It's an early access release, meaning it isn't finished yet. Core systems such as crafting, resource gathering, and combat are fully functional and fun to tinker with, but bugs and glitches are fairly common, ranging from flying corpses to large sections of the island failing to render properly when you load a game. More fundamentally, the island feels sparse and empty, while the current storyline is brief and rudimentary. If you played (and enjoyed) Endnight's previous game and don't mind a few rough edges, it's worth jumping in now. If you haven't played The Forest, maybe try that first – it's cheaper, and also finished.

Any tips for beginners?



Sons of the Forest screenshot. Photograph: Endnight Games

- On your first day in the game, don't stray too far from your starting point. Search the containers washed up on the beach, then find a nearby spot to construct a basic shelter using two sticks and a tarp. Not only will this give you a place to sleep, but it will also let you save your progress.
- Water can be drunk from freshwater sources like rivers, lakes and ponds, which are easy to find using your satellite map. As for food, foraged berries will provide a little sustenance. But the easiest way to sate your hunger is to hunt the seagulls that hover around the starting area. They land frequently and are slow to take off, making them easy targets for your hatchet.
- Craft a bow and arrows as soon as you can, as this will help you fend off mutant attacks. Arrows are made with sticks, small stones and feathers, all of which are easy to find. A bow requires sticks, duct tape, and rope. The latter two items cannot be crafted, but you'll find rolls of duct tape in the containers scattered around the beach, while a length of rope can be found near a pod of beached orcas farther up the shoreline.

- Sons of the Forest's building system is two interlinked systems that work in slightly different ways. One of these lets you build structures freely, placing individual logs, sticks and stones to create fires and shelters. The other lets you place 3D blueprints into the world, then fill those out with the appropriate materials. Pressing "B" will equip your survival handbook, which has instructions for free building and contains blueprints for predesigned structures.
-

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The economic and other costs of having a family have led millions of young women in China to delay having children, or to decide against it altogether.
Photograph: Mark Schiefelbein/AP

[China](#)

Free college and IVF help: China hunts for ways to raise its birthrate

High costs and career impacts remain barriers to having children for many women despite Beijing's efforts to lift its record-low birthrate

*Amy Hawkins Senior China correspondent
@amyhawk*

Thu 9 Mar 2023 20.54 EST Last modified on Fri 10 Mar 2023 04.11 EST

At China's annual parliamentary meeting this week, proposals to boost [China's falling birthrate](#) have come thick and fast. On Wednesday, the All China Women's Federation, a state-backed organisation, called for a national publicity campaign to "advocate a positive concept of marriage and childbearing", through film and television. Other delegates to China's parliament have called for tax breaks for companies that employ more mothers, opening up maternity insurance to college students, free college education for families who have a third child born after 2024 and allowing unmarried women to access fertility services.

Last year China's birthrate fell to 6.77 per 1,000 people, the lowest on record. In 2022 the [population shrank](#) by 850,000, the first decline since 1961, a year of famine.

Some areas have already started rolling out [pro-fertility policies](#). In February, Sichuan, a province of more than 80 million people, [removed all restrictions](#) on birth registrations, abandoning rules that had previously meant that only married couples could register newborns. Some provinces offer newlyweds paid leave in a bid to encourage marriage and boost the birthrate. In Hangzhou, the capital of Zhejiang province on the east coast, one health insurance scheme is offering couples 3,000 yuan (£364) reimbursements for IVF treatments.

Between 2016 and 2021, the number of medical institutions approved to offer assisted reproductive technology increased from 451 to 539, according

to data from the National Health and Medical Commission.

But for the millions of young women in [China](#) who are delaying having children, or deciding against it altogether, these policies barely scratch the surface on a profound generational and economic shift that has made small families the norm.

‘One child’ legacy

In 1979 China introduced a one-child policy which limited births via a brutal regime of forced abortions, sterilisations and fines. The government claims that the policy prevented 400 million births, although many demographers think that this is an overestimate. In an influential paper published in 2015, sociologists Martin King Whyte, Wang Feng and Yong Cai noted: “Despite the coercive ferocity of the campaign, China’s rapid economic development since 1980 deserves the lion’s share of the credit” for China’s declining birthrate.

And so it is perhaps unsurprising that although the policy was lifted in 2016, economic factors have continued to limit family sizes.

For Yu Ke, a 29-year-old manager in Hangzhou, there are “three big problems” preventing her having a baby.

“Firstly, the housing price is too high. Secondly, medical costs are too high. Thirdly, educational costs are too high,” she says.

Both her and her partner would need to work full-time to be able to afford an apartment big enough to raise a child in, which she estimates would cost 3m yuan (£364,000) for a 60 square metre unit in Hangzhou. But that would leave no one at home to care for the newborn. “And if our parents came to help us take care of the child, the house would be too small for everyone,” she says.



Last year China's population shrank for the first time since 1961.
Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

Maternity benefits vary depending on the province. From this year Zhejiang will offer 5,000 yuan subsidies to two-child families, and 20,000 yuan grants to third-borns. In Shanghai mothers are offered 4,200 yuan towards their childbirth-related medical expenses. But that is a drop in the ocean when faced with a lifetime of soaring costs.

Benefits ‘unlikely to work’

In 2022, the cost of raising a child in an urban area was estimated to be 630,000 yuan from birth to 17. In 2019, a study from the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences estimated that low-income families, defined as households with an annual income of less than 50,000 yuan, spend over 70% of their earnings on one child.

Government subsidies are “a joke”, says Huang Lili*, a 29-year-old lawyer in Hangzhou who is also putting off motherhood. “They have absolutely no idea how much it costs to have a child.”

Without changing workplace norms and promoting gender equality at home, benefits will have little impact, says Yun Zhou, a sociologist at the

University of Michigan. “These financial incentives have not worked elsewhere and are unlikely to work in China,” she told the Guardian.

Apart from benefits, [policies](#) aimed at easing the bureaucratic restrictions around childbirth are also limited in scope, despite grand ambitions. Sichuan’s decision to remove restrictions on birth registrations was “purely administrative”, notes Zhou. It means that the health bureau will be able to collect better data on the number of births in Sichuan, but it is not a sign that the local government will make it easier for all families, particularly single mothers, to raise children. “Unmarried mothers still face a lot of hurdles in trying to access maternal benefits,” Zhou said.

Single women are still banned from freezing their eggs, for example, despite legal challenges. And accessing maternal insurance and maternity leave often requires a marriage certificate. Even in places where the local authorities have tried to ease such restrictions, in practice local officials often demand to see marriage certificates.

When it comes to single mothers, some “discriminatory policies such as the inability to register births, the expulsion of civil servants and even the need to pay fines are changing”, says a lawyer who helps single mothers access their legal rights. But “regulations and practices are still not uniform”.

Many women, married or otherwise, fear the impact that childbearing would have on their career. Employers in China still sometimes ask women about their family planning in job interviews, despite the practice being banned in 2019. In some cases women are asked to sign contracts promising not to get pregnant within a certain timeframe.

Yu Ke worries that her status as an unmarried, childless young woman will make it hard for her to join a new company. “So having a child or not having a child, both will impact women in the workplace. Even if I tell a job that I won’t have a child, they may still suspect me.”

There is still a “pervasive sense of discrimination and inequality in the labour market,” says Zhou.

China's fertility policies emphasise a "conservative cultural ideology", says Hongwei Bao a professor at the University of Nottingham. In particular, pro-natalist policies are "hostile to young women and LGBTQ+ people".

If the government truly wants to increase the fertility rate, it needs to protect women's reproductive rights and interests, says the lawyer who helps single mothers. "Not only for married childbirths, but also for single parents and gay families". "The limitations are still greater than the support," for childrearing, she added.

Those limitations worry a generation of urban young women who are increasingly independent, outspoken and unwilling to settle into the domestic sphere. "When I talk to my girlfriends," says Huang, the lawyer in Hangzhou, "I see an awakening of female consciousness ... these women are not like the Chinese women in the past".

**Names have been changed*

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2023.03.10 - Opinion

- I once admired Russell Brand. But his grim trajectory shows us where politics is heading
- Putin's 'holy war' is terrorising Ukraine – and Russian dissenters. All they ask is that we don't forget them
- If Starmer wants a defining policy for government, this is it: childcare, childcare, childcare
- A lieutenant for Suella Braverman? Back off everyone: that job has my name on it



Russell Brand hosts the MusiCares Person of the Year Gala at the Convention Center, Los Angeles, on 24 January 2020. Photograph: Rob Latour/Rex/Shutterstock

[Opinion](#)[Russell Brand](#)

I once admired Russell Brand. But his grim trajectory shows us where politics is heading

[George Monbiot](#)



In an age of distortion, public figures have powerful tools and a responsibility. This is an object lesson in how that can go wrong

Fri 10 Mar 2023 02.00 EST Last modified on Fri 10 Mar 2023 04.06 EST

In 2014, the Guardian asked me to nominate my hero of the year. To some people's surprise, [I chose Russell Brand](#). I loved the way he energised young people who had been alienated from politics. I claimed, perhaps hyperbolically, he was "the best thing that has happened to the left in years" (in my defence, there wasn't, at the time, much competition).

Today, I can scarcely believe it's the same man. I've watched 50 of his recent [videos](#), with growing incredulity. He appears to have switched from challenging injustice to conjuring phantoms. If, as I suspect it might, politics takes a very dark turn in the next few years, it will be partly as a result of people like Brand.

It's hard to decide which is most dispiriting: the stupidity of some of the theories he recites, or the lack of originality. He repeatedly says he's not a conspiracy theorist, but, to me, he certainly sounds like one.

In 2014, he was bursting with new ideas and creative ways of presenting them. Today, he wastes his talent on tired and discredited tales: endless iterations of the alleged evils of the [World Economic Forum founder, Klaus Schwab](#), [the Great Reset](#), [Bill Gates](#), [Nancy Pelosi](#), the former US chief medical adviser, [Anthony Fauci](#), [Covid vaccines](#), medical data, the [World Health Organization](#), Pfizer, smart cities and “[the globalist masterplan](#)”.

His videos appear to [promote “natural immunity”](#) ahead of vaccines, and for a while pushed [ivermectin and hydroxychloroquine](#) as [treatments for Covid \(they aren’t\)](#).

He championed the “[Freedom Convoy](#)” that occupied Ottawa, which apparently stood proudly against the “[tyranny](#)” of Justin Trudeau’s policies. He hawks [Graham Hancock’s widely debunked](#) claims about ancient monuments.

A wildly popular [clip](#) from one of his videos [about the Dutch nitrate crisis](#) offers a classic conspiracy theory mashup: a tangle of claims that may be true in other contexts, random accusations, scapegoating and resonances with some old and very ugly tropes. He claims that “this whole fertiliser situation is a scam”. The real objective is “to bankrupt the farmers so their land can be grabbed”. This “shows you how the Great Reset operates”, using “globalist” regulations to throw farmers off their land. He claims it’s “connected to the land grab of Bill Gates” and the “corruption of companies like Monsanto”.

[‘Grow up as good revolutionaries’: Russell Brand reads Che Guevara letter](#)
Guardian

In reality, the Dutch government was forced to act by [a legal ruling](#), as levels of nitrate pollution, largely from livestock farms, break European law. Its attempts to curb this pollution have nothing to do with the World Economic Forum and its vacuous rhetoric about a “Great Reset”. Or with Bill Gates. Or with Monsanto, which hasn’t existed since 2018 when it was bought by Bayer. So why mention them? Perhaps because these terms have become potent click triggers.

Brand is repeating claims first made by [far-right conspiracists](#), who have piled into this issue, claiming that the nitrate crisis is a [pretext to seize land from farmers](#), in whom, they claim, [true Dutch identity is vested](#), and hand it to asylum seekers and other immigrants. It's a version of the "great replacement" conspiracy theory, itself a reworking of the [Nazis' blood and soil tropes](#) about protecting the "rooted" and "authentic" people – in whom "racial purity" and "true" German identity was vested – from "cosmopolitan" and "alien" forces (ie Jews). Brand may not realise this, as the language has changed a little – "cosmopolitans" have become "globalists", "aliens" have become "immigrants" – but the themes have not.

On and drearily on he goes. He manages to confuse the World Health Organization's call for better pandemic surveillance (by which it means the tracking of infectious diseases) with coercive surveillance of the population, creating "[centralised systems of control where you are ultimately a serf](#)".

Some of his many [rants about Bill Gates](#) are illustrated with an image of the man wearing a [multicoloured lapel badge](#), helpfully circled in red. This speaks to another widespread conspiracy theory: those who wear this badge are members of a secret organisation conspiring to control the world (so secret they stick it on their jackets). In reality, it shows support for the [UN sustainable development goals](#).

Such claims are not just wrong. They are wearily, boringly wrong. But, to judge by the figures (he has more than [6 million subscribers on YouTube](#)), the audience loves them.

Some of his theories, such as his recent [obsession with UFOs](#), are innocuous enough. Others have potential to do great harm. There's the risk to the people scapegoated, such as Fauci, Schwab and Pelosi: subjects of conspiracy theories often become targets of violence. There are the risks misleading claims present to public health. And bizarre stories about shadowy "elites" protect real elites from scrutiny and challenge.

While I'm not suggesting this is his purpose, it's a tactic used deliberately by powerful people to disarm those who might otherwise hold them to account. Donald Trump's former chief strategist, Steve Bannon, had a term for it: "[flood the zone with shit](#)". As [Naomi Klein has shown](#), the Great Reset

conspiracy theory was conceived by a staffer at the Heartland Institute, a US lobby group that has [promoted climate denial](#) and other billionaire-friendly positions. It's a bastardisation of her shock doctrine hypothesis, distracting people from the malfeasance of those with real power.

Worse still, conspiracism is fascism's fuel. Almost all successful conspiracy theories originate with or land with the far right. I'm not suggesting for one minute that Brand is sympathetic to fascism, but his videos are likely to assist its spread. As for his own politics, while he claims to have transcended left and right, I see a clear rightward shift. He concentrates his fire on centrists – Biden, Pelosi, Hillary Clinton, Trudeau – while appearing to support [Trump](#). He extols Trump's "[virility](#)", [which he contrasts with "Biden's senility"](#).

So what's going on? Brand has yet to reply to questions I emailed him last week, so I can only guess. I have seen other people drift into absurdity by telling their followers what they want to hear, and I wonder whether it's happening here. At one point, he [tells his audience](#): "We are amplifying the voice that you give us. We are feeding back to you the truth that you have long understood." Of Ron DeSantis, the extreme rightwing Florida governor, he says to his viewers: "[I know a lot of you guys like him](#)", which might explain his weirdly equivocal reporting of [DeSantis's vicious state censorship](#), which is everything he claims to oppose.

Until recently, I thought younger people, demanding a fairer, kinder world, would transform our politics. Now I'm not so sure. I believe Brand and others are helping to confuse and distract them in their millions, shutting down meaningful engagement. He has, in this respect, become the opposite of what he was.

- George Monbiot is a Guardian columnist
 - *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](#).*
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Illustration: Sébastien Thibault/The Guardian

[OpinionRussia](#)

Putin's 'holy war' is terrorising Ukraine – and Russian dissenters. All they ask is that we don't forget them

[Rafael Behr](#)



They know our first sympathy must be with Ukraine, as is theirs. But they need our support in this time of repression

Fri 10 Mar 2023 01.00 EST Last modified on Fri 10 Mar 2023 06.02 EST

Last April, Masha Moskaleva, a 12-year-old girl from the Tula region south of Moscow, drew a picture in her school art class that [upset the teacher](#). The teacher ran to the head; the head called the police; the police told the FSB, Russia's state security service, which interrogated Masha. Her father, a single parent, was arrested, beaten, fined and placed under house arrest. His daughter was taken into state care.

Moskaleva's crime was "discrediting the military" – an offence passed into law after the invasion of [Ukraine](#) to criminalise dissemination of the truth. It carries a maximum penalty of five years in prison. Masha's picture showed a woman and child, hand in hand, next to a Ukrainian flag. Missiles fly towards them from a Russian flag, on which is written "No to war".

Those words alone – *net voine* in Russian – are sufficient to trigger criminal prosecution. And not just the words. You can be arrested for holding a sign that merely hints at the slogan with asterisks – *** *****.

When a repressive state's demand for ideological uniformity meets the human capacity for free thought, the result is terror but also absurdity. As the gap between official versions of the truth and reality widens, the central power insists on ever more grotesque levels of acquiescence. Passive obedience is no longer sufficient. Citizens must abase themselves with displays of loyalty. Masha Moskaleva's art teacher had not asked the class to draw just any picture. The instruction was to produce something celebrating the “special military operation” in Ukraine.

The demand for performance of ideology, not mere submission, signals the path from authoritarian to totalitarian government trodden by Vladimir Putin's regime since the invasion of Ukraine.

The war was conceived in a lie: Putin's deranged notion that Ukraine was not a real country, that its people were captives of a drug-addled neo-Nazi junta and would welcome Russian invasion as a liberation by their Slavic brethren.

When Ukrainians fought back, the official Kremlin line shifted to something even more sinister. People who would not yield eagerly must be terrorised into submission. The latest indiscriminate missile bombardment, on Wednesday night in Kherson and Lviv, serves no tactical battlefield function. The goal is to debilitate the Ukrainian state as the preface to eliminating Ukraine as a distinct culture, as a nation. The tone of some punditry on Kremlin propaganda channels is explicitly genocidal. This is a second front of the war, waged against the Russian conscience – an all-out assault on facts, evidence, reality.

A recent [report by OVD-Info](#), a leading Russian human rights group, documents nearly 20,000 cases where people have been detained for anti-war actions, which can include anything from attending a demonstration to sharing links to independent media online. There are cases of people being detained for expressing dissent in private conversations, or for merely being related to people known to oppose the war. Police brutality is routine, as is unofficial enforcement of doctrinal rigour by threatening phone calls, vandalism, beatings and summary dismissals from work.

In such a climate, it is hard to discern the boundary between genuine support for Putin and fear of expressing anything else. Opinion polls are pretty unreliable in an environment where even telling your friends what you really think might be a criminal offence.

But even the most optimistic dissidents accept that they are the minority and that too many of their compatriots have internalised the official story – that the west provoked the war as part of a campaign to encircle and dismember Russia (defined not by its existing borders but as an ancient imperial entity on terrain covered by the Soviet Union).

That version of events also has considerable purchase beyond Russia's borders, shaping public opinion around the world in countries that have learned, often from their own bitter colonial experiences, to take a sceptical view of western motives in international affairs. (Putin's warped narrative of Russian victimhood also gets an indulgent hearing on the fringes of democratic societies.)

This has been the core of Kremlin mythology since long before the invasion of Ukraine. Putin's power is founded on promises to restore Russian dignity after the immiseration and endemic lawlessness that followed the collapse of Communist party rule.



Inscription reading ‘No to war’ on a wall in Moscow. Photograph: Natalia Kolesnikova/AFP/Getty Images

But instead of cleaning up oligarchic gangsterism, he nationalised it. Security services became, in effect, the dominant mafia clan with Putin as *capo di tutti capi*. Neo-Soviet revivalist dogma was the oath of loyalty.

That model didn’t amount to much as economic policy. As Russian living standards stagnated, the Kremlin relied on increasingly authoritarian measures for control, coupled with provocations against the west and neighbouring countries, inflating the foreign threat to sustain a siege mentality and depict political dissent as a species of treason.

The Ukraine war followed that trend but vastly accelerated it. Putin gambled on a quick military smash-and-grab raid, lost, and is now committed to thorough tyranny and war as a way of life; war as national mission. In presidential speeches and on Kremlin propaganda channels, the cause is depicted as a crusade. [Conscript soldiers](#) are thrown, scarcely trained and poorly armed, at Ukrainian defences as a human sacrifice to protect Russia from spiritual corruption by western depravity. It is a holy war.

Russian schoolchildren attend [mandatory propaganda lessons](#), described in the curriculum as “conversations about what is important”, with a focus on “patriotic themes” including the virtue in dying for the motherland. It is hardly surprising that hundreds of thousands of people have fled abroad. Being generally young and skilled, the exiles constitute a brain drain from a country that is sliding into mindless thuggery. Putin is probably not sorry to see them go.

And what of those who stay but keep their eyes open to the truth? Only a tiny minority raise their voices. How many more have retreated to the place that Soviet dissidents called interior emigration, cultivating two selves – one for public show and one for trusted company only? They are uncounted. I know they exist because most of my Russian friends are in that number.

They do not ask for sympathy because they know that the first duty of western compassion is to Ukrainian victims of a regime against which

Russia's democrats have proved impotent.

They ask only not to be forgotten. They ask that Kyiv's military allies think also of supporting organisations that keep alive the idea that a better Russia is possible, no matter how remote it seems today, because Ukraine cannot be safe from Russian aggression until enough Russians dare to say aloud that their country was the aggressor.

Putin's advance into Ukraine has been obstructed but there is a second front, the Russian domestic arena, where fact-based reality faces a relentless barrage of falsehood and terror. Putin has made a totalitarian bet that truth itself is subordinate to his will. Ukraine's democracy is not the only one that needs him to fail.

- Rafael Behr is a Guardian columnist
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‘A beacon and model for children’s centres, training thousands of early-years teachers and childcare specialists.’ Children at Pen Green nursery, Northamptonshire, on 28 March, 2022. Photograph: John Robertson/The Guardian

[Opinion](#)[Early years education](#)

If Starmer wants a defining policy for government, this is it: childcare, childcare, childcare

[Polly Toynbee](#)



I've visited Pen Green nursery many times, and now it faces huge cuts. Its plight shows why Labour needs the life-changing radicalism of the Sure Start years

Fri 10 Mar 2023 04.00 EST Last modified on Fri 10 Mar 2023 08.40 EST

An award-winning children's centre in Corby, Northamptonshire is [about to be hit](#) with an estimated 70% funding cut from its local council, demolishing all that it's famous for. It is the culmination of the 13-year destruction of Labour's Sure Start programme. I have been visiting Pen Green over many years; it is considered a beacon and model for children's centres, training thousands of early-years teachers and childcare specialists, and visited by people from all the world who want to copy its success.

This wilful destruction hits one of the most deprived parts of Corby, a [Labour](#) town now swallowed up by Tory North Northamptonshire. The council is taking the money to spread among three nurseries in less deprived zones, a depressing reminder of how much more damage the Conservatives can still do in their swan-song remaining months. Under threat before, Pen Green was rescued by a former Tory minister but the children's minister, Claire Coutinho, has told Pen Green she won't save it.

What bad timing amid a great groundswell of protest about the [collapsing nursery system](#) before next week's budget. Costing an unaffordable average of just under £15,000 a year for a [full-time place](#) for a child under two, nurseries are closing in droves, unable to finance the government's so-called 30 free hours, with pay so low that childcare assistants flee elsewhere. The fact is the sum the government pays to supposedly cover these hours is far too little, so nurseries struggle unless they can charge parents significant extras.

I know of no social issue that has aroused such a surprising coalition of quite different interests to demand radical reform. It would once be unthinkable that the CBI, Federation of Small Businesses, British Chambers of Commerce and Institute of Directors, along with the consultancy group PwC and a string of other business voices, [should](#) all cry out for affordable, flexible good childcare. As more women are forced out of work by the breakdown in childcare, employers urgently need those 1.7 million missing women back in their workforce: childcare failure alone [costs upwards](#) of £27bn, or 1% of GDP, says the Centre for Progressive Policy.

After arriving in the Commons seven months pregnant in 1982, Harriet Harman was greeted by hoots of derision when she asked her first question, to Margaret Thatcher, asking about the lack of childcare provision in school holidays "as most parents work to support their families". Thatcher replied, "No, I do not believe that it is up to the government to provide care for schoolchildren during the school holidays." "[Harperson](#)", as she was mockingly called, was shaken but undeterred by contempt from her own side, too: childcare was not real politics. It is now.

Though her motives were primarily feminist, Harman, as social security secretary, persuaded Gordon Brown that childcare was also a necessity to get single mothers off benefits and into work. Later, he and the Labour party, which had declared education, education, education a key objective, embraced [Sure Start](#), an ambitious social programme pursuing Labour values of social justice and equality. The shadow education secretary, Bridget Phillipson, [in a speech made on Thursday](#) to the conservative thinktank Onward, took on the current childcare collapse and again turned Labour's future early years ambitions into something far more than merely providing a holding pen for children while mothers work.

Her promise is for a [new childcare system](#) to provide affordable nurseries from the end of parental leave right through to the end of primary school, including holidays. That would be life-transforming for millions of families desperately struggling and juggling – and it would indeed send a flood of able people back into the workforce. She begins with a small promise of free [breakfast clubs](#) for every primary school in England, getting hungry children ready to learn. But she will unfold the rest and how it will be paid for as Labour calculates its budget before the election. They can't do everything, everywhere, all at once, but they can spell out the direction of travel and the steps to get there.

I was at Pen Green last year when Phillipson visited as part of her tour of the best childcare and nursery education programmes across the world. She has been to Estonia, where parents pay just £50 a month for nurseries staffed entirely by graduates, and to Australia, where Labor won the elections with [ambitious](#) childcare policies. Early years, she said, “will be my first priority”, promising a big increase in Pen Green-style state-maintained nurseries. She means it.

At Sure Start’s peak in 2010, there were 3,500 centres, based on incontrovertible evidence that earliest years matter most: the rest is catch-up in a country with a [stubborn 15% gap](#) in education achievement between least and most deprived places. In Phillipson’s analysis, Sure Start failed politically to embed itself beyond the reach of hostile future Tory governments, unlike the NHS, which no Tories have dared to try to abolish. Not next time, she says.

Phillipson is eating the Tories’ lunch, claiming that Labour is now the party of the family. It hardly needs saying, after the mammoth destruction of children’s support began with George Osborne’s first child-eating budget cutting deep into schools, children’s arts, sports, health visitors, school nurses and more.

When Labour has to make spending choices, Phillipson will argue for youngest children first (before social care and health, I would urge), if Keir Starmer’s message is to aim high for the future. That takes political determination, as children’s centres’ true results arrive far beyond one

electoral term. No doubt, in the budget, the chancellor will bung extra cash into childcare and its phoney “free hours” funding, but that won’t fix a profoundly broken system.

- Polly Toynbee is a Guardian columnist
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Britain's home secretary Suella Braverman gives a statement on the illegal migration bill in the House of Commons. Photograph: Andy Bailey/UK Parliament/AFP/Getty Images

[Opinion](#)[Suella Braverman](#)

A lieutenant for Suella Braverman? Back off everyone: that job has my name on it

[Nels Abbey](#)



Who would want to run the private office of the most divisive home secretary since the last one? Well, someone has to

Thu 9 Mar 2023 12.34 EST Last modified on Thu 9 Mar 2023 14.21 EST

Dear home secretary,

Today's Politico politics briefing alerts me to the fact that you're looking for help on [LinkedIn](#). There have been 92 applicants so far, apparently. But I'm sorry, that help is me.

For it has been my lifelong dream to play a front-seat role in the debasing of British politics and expanding the reach of extreme conservatism. I am confident I will not find a greater opportunity to play that role than in working for and alongside you, a leading catalyst of Britain's executive decline, in the capacity of running your office.

I think I have all the qualities. As a graduate of the internationally respected [Suge Knight](#) School of Office Management, the required "confidence and credibility to intervene and/or provide constructive challenge to senior stakeholders across the department and Whitehall" comes naturally to me.

Suge famously, in muscular fashion, kept a [turbulent roster of gangster rappers](#) in line to build his hip-hop empire. He is now in jail, but you get the point. “Strength through fear” would be our method of handing affairs. If a leftwing civil servant, blob lawyer or [ex-footballer](#) turned self-appointed conscience of the nation type needs to be dangled from a balcony by their ankles, as Suge was once [alleged to have done](#), I can do that. I’d like to.

The conservatism-buttressed blue-sky thinking that has driven much of my previous success (and yours) would define our regime. The so-called Guardian will be blocked on all devices. Eating (or even discussing) tofu or woke-style sustenance (eg, hummus, avocado and plantain) will also be strictly forbidden. Staff and visitors will consume nothing but red meat – the rarer, the better. Our diet will reflect the tenor of our policies.

Our office will resist all leftwing indoctrination, especially diversity. Diversity is, after all, a weakness and a threat, not a strength and certainly not an opportunity. I will cap our (paid) diverse staff intake at two: you and me. Everyone else must be indigenous with a clearly traceable lineage going back to Cheddar man, probably male and classically educated. They will be unquestioning believers. Some say detector tests don’t work; don’t believe them.

We’ll free up time. There will be no acknowledgment of Black History Month, Asian history month, International Women’s Day, LGBTQ Pride, equality, equity or any other form of liberal lunacy. We will celebrate nothing but uniformity and conformity every day. At 3pm. That sounds about right.

We will not have dress-down day. I’d prefer Great British dress-up day: when everyone comes in dressed as their favourite figure from the glory days of the empire. I’d go for [Flora Shaw](#), who, after a period at the Manchester Guardian (boo) proselytised for imperialism so well as colonial editor of the Times and is said to have coined the name Nigeria. But if you found the idea of a man in women’s clothing off-brand, I’d happily come in as her husband, [Frederick Lugard](#), who ran Nigeria as governor general with the robustness we need now to stop the migrant boats. I don’t have his whiskery moustache. I can buy one.

We would outsource your social media to GB News. That's where the ideas come from anyway.

And when things go wrong, I'll take the fall. I'll be Kwasi Kwarteng to your Liz Truss. With me at the helm of your office you will be protected from your biggest threat: yourself. Isn't that a super safety net?

Suella & Nels: we need no one else. We'd listen to no one else. Not even Rishi. Especially not Rishi (too wet by half, to be honest).

I can start immediately, and I'm keen to. You might not be in the job that long.

Yours admiringly,

Nels Abbey

- Nels Abbey is a writer, broadcaster and former banker. He is the author of the satirical book Think Like A White Man

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2023.03.10 - Around the world

- [Pacific Outgoing president of Micronesia accuses China of bribery, threats and interference](#)
- [US budget Billions included for Pacific in bid to ‘out-compete’ China](#)
- [Robert Blake Actor who was tried over wife’s killing dies at 89](#)
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Micronesia's president, David Panuelo, has claimed China is engaged in 'political warfare' in the Pacific. Photograph: Noel Celis/AFP/Getty Images
[Pacific projectMicronesia](#)

Outgoing president of Micronesia accuses China of bribery, threats and interference

In his letter, Panuelo openly canvassed the country switching its diplomatic recognition from Beijing to Taipei

[Ben Doherty](#) and [Kate Lyons](#)

Fri 10 Mar 2023 07.07 ESTFirst published on Thu 9 Mar 2023 23.58 EST

China is engaged in "political warfare" in the Pacific, the outgoing president of the Federated States of [Micronesia](#) has alleged in an excoriating letter, accusing Beijing officials of bribing elected officials in Micronesia, and even "direct threats against my personal safety".

Two months before his term as president expires, David Panuelo's letter alleged China was preparing for conflict over the island of [Taiwan](#), and that its goal in interfering in the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) was to render the country neutral in any potential Pacific war.

“China is seeking to ensure that, in the event of a war in our Blue Pacific continent between themselves and Taiwan, that the FSM is, at best, aligned with the PRC [China] instead of the United States, and, at worst, that the FSM chooses to ‘abstain’ altogether.”

The revelations come as Beijing seeks to significantly [ramp up its efforts to exert influence](#) in the Indo-Pacific region, creating an increasingly fast-paced tug-of-war battle with the US and its ally, Australia.

Last year, Beijing signed a [controversial security pact](#) with Solomon Islands, which, along with Kiribati, made a decision to [break ties with Taipei](#) in favour of Beijing in 2019.

In response, Australia has launched high-profile visits to Pacific states, while the US president, Joe Biden, invited leaders to a [US-Pacific summit in September](#), the first event of its kind. Meanwhile, Washington has rushed to reopen embassies in Pacific nations that had been closed for decades.

The FSM is a longstanding ally of the US – the countries have a formal “compact of free association” – and the US is wholly responsible for the FSM’s defence.

In his letter to the FSM’s congress and state governors, Panuelo also openly suggested switching the country’s diplomatic recognition from Beijing to Taipei, even naming a price to do so: \$50m.

He said he had met with Taiwan’s foreign minister, Joseph Wu, in February “to solicit from Taiwan what their potential assistance to the FSM could look like if we switched diplomatic relations to supporting them instead of China”.

“I was transparent with foreign minister Wu; we project we need an injection of approximately \$50m to meet our future needs. We can and will receive this, over a three-year period, if and when we establish diplomatic relations with Taiwan.”

He said the FSM would also receive an annual \$15m “assistance package” to be spent at its discretion.

The bulk of Panuelo’s letter, however, was dedicated to castigating China for its current activities in the FSM. He said he believed China was conducting espionage under the guise of “research” in the country’s maritime territory – comparing it to the recent “spy balloon” saga in the US – as well as seeking to control key communications and military infrastructure.

“Simply put, we are witnessing political warfare in our country,” he wrote, saying that included overt activities, such as political alliances, economic measures and public propaganda, and the clandestine, including “bribery, psychological warfare, and blackmail”.

Panuelo claimed he had been surveilled by Chinese officials.

“You can imagine my surprise when I was followed this past July in Fiji during the Pacific Islands forum by two Chinese men; my further surprise when it was determined that they worked for the Chinese embassy in Suva; my even further surprise when it was discovered that one of them was a PLA intelligence officer; and my continued surprise when I learned that I had multiple cabinet and staff who had met him before, and in the FSM.

“To be clear: I have had direct threats against my personal safety from PRC officials acting in an official capacity.”

Panuelo said that when the FSM government declined an offer of Chinese Covid vaccines, he and his health and foreign ministers were forced to change their phone numbers after receiving “incessant” calls from the Chinese ambassador demanding they accept.

Panuelo alleged that Micronesian elected representatives – he did not name them – had been bribed by Chinese government officials, including with

smartphones, alcohol and envelopes full of cash.

“One of the reasons that China’s political warfare is successful in so many arenas is that we are bribed to be complicit, and bribed to be silent. That’s a heavy word, but it is an accurate description regardless.

“What else do you call it when an elected official is given an envelope filled with money after a meal at the PRC embassy or after an inauguration? ... What else do you call it when a senior official explicitly asks Chinese diplomats for televisions and other ‘gifts’? ... What else do you call it when an elected official receives a cheque for a public project that our national treasury has no record of and no means of accounting for?”

Panuelo said the bribery had corroded his country’s democracy already, but that it had potentially catastrophic further ramifications.

“At worst in the short term, it means we sell our country and our sovereignty for temporary personal benefit. At worst in the long term, it means we are, ourselves, active participants in allowing a possible war to occur in our region ... where we ourselves will be indirectly responsible for the Micronesian lives lost.”

Asked about Panuelo’s comments, a Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson told a regular press briefing on Friday: “The smears and accusations against China in them do not accord with the facts. China absolutely does not accept them.”

Panuelo has previously written forthright public letters on Pacific geopolitics. In March 2022, he wrote to the prime minister of Solomon Islands, Manasseh Sogavare, detailing his concerns over a [China-Solomons security deal](#). Two months later, he wrote to Pacific island leaders about the potential consequences of Beijing’s proposed [regional trade and security agreement](#), being pushed by the then Chinese foreign minister, Wang Yi, on a multi-state trip across the Pacific islands. The agreement was ultimately rejected by Pacific leaders.

Dr Anna Powles, a senior lecturer in Pacific security studies at Massey University in New Zealand, said Chinese officials would take the threat of the FSM switching diplomatic recognition from Beijing to Taipei “extremely seriously”.

“They will be very concerned about this, they worked very hard to encourage Solomon Islands and Kiribati to switch diplomatic recognition to Beijing in 2019. That diplomatic competition has been the driver of a lot of Chinese engagement in the region.”

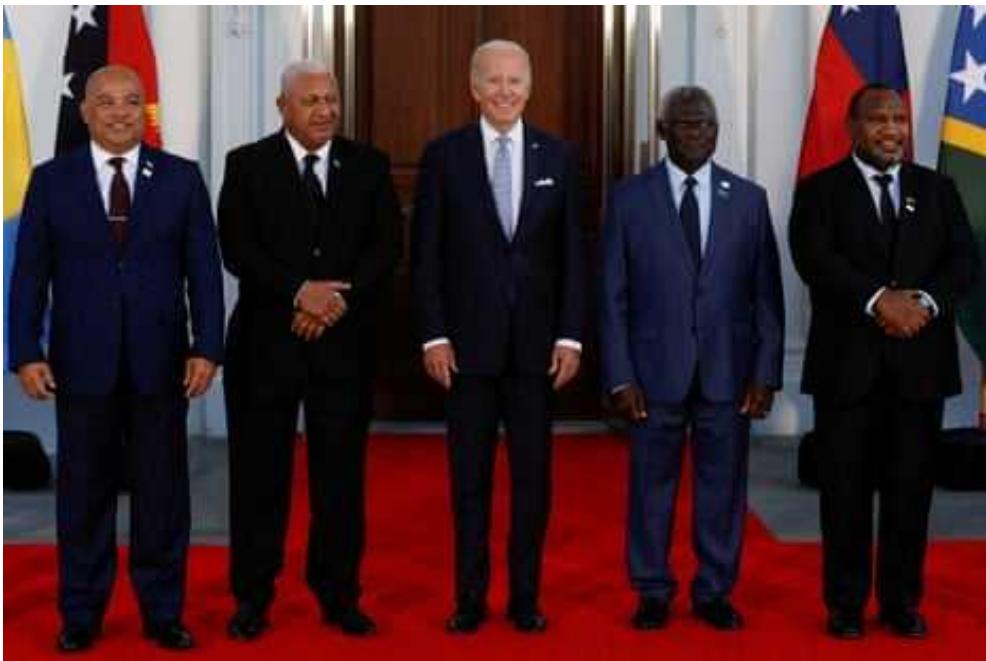
Powles said Panuelo had only another two months in office, a narrow timeframe in which to progress a proposal such as switching recognition to Taipei, and that China’s response to his attempt would be closely watched. “It would be very concerning to see if China engaged in any economic hard-power to try to dissuade FSM from switching diplomatic recognition.”

A former ambassador, the US-educated Panuelo has been president of the FSM, an archipelago of more than 600 islands in the western Pacific, since 2019. In this month’s elections he lost his seat in congress, meaning his term as president will end in May.

Panuelo said he feared retribution for speaking out against China: “I am acutely aware that informing you all of this presents risks to my personal safety [and] the safety of my family.” But he said defending the “peace and stability” of the FSM was more important.

The Guardian has approached Taiwan’s foreign minister for comment.

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Joe Biden, centre, welcomes Pacific leaders to the White House in September 2022. The US president's budget includes billions in assistance for the Marshall Islands, Micronesia and Palau to counter China's influence.

Photograph: Jonathan Ernst/Reuters

[China](#)

Biden budget includes billions for Pacific islands in bid to ‘out-compete’ China

Marshall Islands, Micronesia and Palau stand to benefit as White House warns of Beijing's intent and ability to 'reshape the international order'

Associated Press

Thu 9 Mar 2023 20.09 EST

Alarmed by China's success in wooing Pacific island nations, the Biden administration is proposing to spend billions from its federal budget to keep three of those countries in the US orbit.

President Joe Biden's spending plan, released on Thursday, includes more than \$7.1bn in funding for the Marshall Islands, Micronesia and Palau. The money is included in the \$63.1bn request for the state department and the US Agency for International Development.

The White House said the payments were part of its strategy to "out-compete China" and strengthen America's alliances and partnerships in the Indo-Pacific. But apart from direct military programs, they are the largest single budget line for the region in the spending plan.

The defence department's portion of the budget request – totalling \$842bn — prioritises ramping up the US military presence in the Indo-Pacific.

"China is the United States' only competitor with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military and technological power to do it," the White House said.

"During these unprecedented and extraordinary times, the budget requests both discretionary and mandatory resources to out-compete China and advance American prosperity globally," it said.

The money, to be paid out over 20 years, would extend agreements with the three states under which the US provides them with essential services and economic support in exchange for military basing rights and other preferential treatment.

The so-called "Compacts of Free Association" deals were due to expire later this year and next, and US officials say China has been trying to exploit extension negotiations for its own advantage.

It is unclear if Congress would approve such aid. The overall budget proposal faces certain opposition in the Republican-led House of Representatives and some Republican lawmakers are pushing for severe foreign aid cuts as they look to slash federal spending. But members of Congress have shown rare bipartisan unity on countering China, offering the prospect that the Pacific Island aid could be seen more favourably.

If approved by Congress, Micronesia would receive \$3.3bn, the Marshall Islands \$2.3bn and Palau \$890m between budget years 2024 and 2044. In addition, \$634m would be allocated to the US postal service to continue to operate the three countries' mail.

Under the Compacts of Free Association that date to the 1960s, the US provides the three countries with postal services and runs their weather forecasting, air traffic control and emergency management operations. In return, the US gets basing rights for military, intelligence, telecommunications and space exploration facilities.

However, islanders have long complained that previous agreements did not adequately address their needs or long-term environmental and health issues caused by US nuclear testing in the 1950s and 1960s.

Over the past several years, China has sought to exploit divisions between the US and the islands in a bid to expand its influence in the region, alarming both the Trump and Biden administrations, which have tried to blunt those efforts.

The present compacts with the Marshall Islands and Micronesia expire this year and the one with Palau expires in 2024. But in January the administration signed memorandums of understanding on their renewals with the Marshalls and Palau and a month later with Micronesia. All are contingent on congressional approval of the budget.

China steadily poached allies from Taiwan in the Pacific, including Kiribati and the Solomon Islands, in 2019. The US announced plans last year to [reopen an embassy in the Solomon Islands](#), which has signed a security agreement with China.

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Robert Blake in *Baretta* in 1975, the year he won an Emmy. Photograph: Universal Tv/Kobal/Rex/Shutterstock

[US news](#)

Robert Blake, actor who was tried over wife's killing, dies at 89

Emmy winner for *Baretta* was acquitted of 2001 shooting of Bonny Lee Bakley but found liable by a civil jury

Associated Press in Los Angeles

Fri 10 Mar 2023 09.04 ESTFirst published on Fri 10 Mar 2023 04.12 EST

Robert Blake, the Emmy award-winning performer who was tried and acquitted in the killing of his wife, has died age 89.

A statement released on behalf of his niece, Noreen Austin, said Blake died from heart disease, surrounded by family at home in Los Angeles.

Blake's career never recovered from the long ordeal that began with the shooting death of his wife Bonny Lee Bakley outside a Studio City restaurant on 4 May 2001.

He was adamant that he had not killed his wife, and [a jury ultimately acquitted him](#). But [a civil jury would find him liable for her death](#) and order him to pay Bakley's family \$30m, a judgment that sent him into bankruptcy.

The daughter he and Bakley had together, Rose Lenore, was raised by other relatives and went for years without seeing Blake, until they spoke in 2019. She would tell People magazine that she called him Robert, not Dad.

In his youth, Blake starred in the Our Gang comedies and acted in The Treasure of the Sierra Madre, a movie classic. As an adult, he was praised for his portrayal of the murderer Perry Smith in [the movie of Truman Capote's true crime bestseller In Cold Blood](#).

His career peaked with the 1975-78 TV cop series *Baretta*. He starred as a detective who carried a pet cockatoo on his shoulder and was fond of disguises. It was typical of his specialty, portraying tough guys with soft hearts, and its signature line “Don’t do the crime if you can’t do the time” was often quoted.



Blake outside court in 2004. Photograph: Frazer Harrison/Getty Images

Blake was nominated for an Emmy in 1977 for his portrayal of Tony Baretta, although behind the scenes the show was racked by disputes involving the temperamental star. He later admitted to struggles with alcohol and drug addiction in his early life.

In 1993, Blake received another Emmy nomination for the title role in Judgment Day: the John List Story

, portraying a soft-spoken, churchgoing man who murdered his wife and three children.

Blake's career had slowed down well before the trial. He made only a handful of screen appearances after the mid-1980s; his last project was in David Lynch's Lost Highway, released in 1997.

According to his niece, Blake spent his recent years "enjoying jazz music, playing his guitar, reading poetry and watching many Hollywood classic films."

Blake married the actor Sondra Kerr married in 1961 and they had two children, Noah and Delinah. They divorced in 1983.

His fateful meeting with Bakley came in 1999 at a jazz club where he went to escape loneliness. "Here I was, 67 or 68 years old. My life was on hold. My career was stalled out," he said in a 2002 interview. "I'd been alone for a long time."

He said he had no reason to dislike Bakley: "She took me out of the stands and put me back in the arena. I had something to live for."

When Bakley gave birth to a baby girl, she named Christian Brando – son of Marlon – as the father. But DNA tests pointed to Blake.

Blake first saw the little girl, named Rosie, when she was two months old and she became the focus of his life. He married Bakley because of the child. "Rosie is my blood. Rosie is calling to me," he said. "I have no doubt that Rosie and I are going to walk off into the sunset together."

Prosecutors would claim that he planned to kill Bakley to get sole custody of the baby and tried to hire hitmen for the job. But evidence was muddled and a jury rejected that theory.

On her last night alive, the couple dined out. He claimed she was shot when he left her in the car and returned to the restaurant to retrieve a handgun he had inadvertently left behind. Police were initially baffled and Blake was not arrested until a year later.

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President Xi Jinping holds up his fist and places his hand on China's constitution in the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. Photograph: Mark R Cristino/EPA

[Xi Jinping](#)

Xi Jinping handed unprecedented third term as China's president

Coronation sets up Xi, who has overseen consolidation of power, to become modern China's longest-serving head of state

Rhoda Kwan, [Amy Hawkins](#) and agencies

Fri 10 Mar 2023 04.05 ESTFirst published on Thu 9 Mar 2023 22.07 EST

Xi Jinping has been handed an unprecedented third term as president, capping an ascent in which he has become China's most powerful leader in generations.

In a carefully choreographed ceremony in Beijing, Xi held up his right fist and placed his left hand on a red leather copy of China's constitution. In the

oath – beamed live on state television across [China](#) – he vowed to “build a prosperous, strong, democratic, civilised, harmonious and great modern socialist country”.

The appointment by China’s rubber-stamp parliament comes after he was handed in October another five years [as head of the Chinese Communist party \(CCP\) and the military](#) – the two more significant leadership positions in Chinese politics. Friday’s appointment as the head of state is a ceremonial addition to Xi’s iron grip on power.

The 69-year-old has faced challenges including mass protests over his [zero-Covid policy](#) and its subsequent abandonment in which [countless people died](#).

Those issues have been avoided at this week’s National People’s Congress (NPC), a closely watched event in which, over the next two days, Xi’s ally [Li Qiang](#) will also be appointed as premier, putting him in charge of managing the world’s second largest economy.

The NPC on Friday passed [reforms to government institutions](#) unveiled earlier this week, including an overhaul of China’s science and technology ministry in the face of what one NPC deputy described as foreign attempts at “containment and suppression” of the country’s rise. Other reforms included the formation of a financial regulatory body and national data bureau.

The beginning of China’s new political term also saw the former vice-premier Han Zheng elected as vice-president, and Zhao Leji, the former chief of the party’s top anti-corruption commission, as parliamentary chair. Both are members of China’s highest political decision-making body, the politburo standing committee. The election process, carried out at the Great Hall of the People at Beijing’s Tiananmen Square, lasted about an hour.

Beijing also unveiled during the parliamentary meeting a growth goal of “around 5%” – one of its lowest in decades – as well as a modest increase in defence spending.

Xi's reelection is the culmination of a remarkable rise from a relatively little-known party apparatchik to the leader of a global superpower.

For decades, China, scarred by the dictatorial reign of Mao Zedong, has eschewed one-man rule in favour of a more consensus-based, but still autocratic, leadership. That model imposed term limits on the largely ceremonial role of the presidency, with Xi's predecessors Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao relinquishing power after 10 years in office.

Xi has torn up that rulebook, abolishing term limits in 2018. His coronation this week sets him up to become modern China's longest-serving head of state, and will mean Xi will rule well into his 70s and, if no challenger emerges and his health endures, even longer.

But the beginning of his unprecedented third term comes as the world's second-largest economy faces major headwinds, from slowing growth and a troubled real estate sector to a declining birthrate. Relations with the United States are also at a low not seen in decades, with the powers sparring over everything from human rights to trade and technology.

Xi is caught between trying to support China's strategic partner Russia in its invasion of Ukraine and trying to rebuild ties with Europe to help get the country's economy back on track.

So far China's support for Russia has been political, but US officials have said they believe China is considering sending arms to Russia. Many analysts think that is unlikely because of the economic sanctions China would face.

In a speech to delegates at the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, which runs alongside the NPC this week, Xi criticised Washington's "containment, encirclement and suppression of China".

China, he said, must "have the courage to fight as the country faces profound and complex changes in both the domestic and international landscape".

Xi has made it clear that he considers reunification with Taiwan a priority for his legacy, and has not ruled out the use of force. Last month William Burns, the head of the CIA, [said](#) he knew “as a matter of intelligence” that Xi had ordered the army to be ready to invade Taiwan by 2027.

But Russia’s war in Ukraine demonstrates the difficulties of attempting a military takeover of a hostile neighbour. And China faces more challenges in Taiwan than Russia does in Ukraine: 100 miles of ocean and President Joe Biden’s commitment to respond militarily if China attempts an invasion.

Xi will make a speech on Monday before the annual parliamentary session closes, as China faces multiple challenges including an economy hobbled by three years of Covid curbs and worsening relations with the west.

With Agence France-Presse and Reuters

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'They are not humans': Russia launches more than 80 strikes across Ukraine – video report

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Russia launches six hypersonic missiles in massive barrage against Ukraine

At least six people killed as energy and other infrastructure damaged in biggest Russian missile attack in weeks

[Ukraine war live – latest updates](#)

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Lorenzo Tondo in Kyiv

[@lorenzo_tondo](#)

Thu 9 Mar 2023 12.17 ESTFirst published on Thu 9 Mar 2023 00.19 EST

Russia launched six hypersonic missiles able to evade air defences in the early hours of Thursday morning as it unleashed its largest missile barrage against [Ukraine](#) in three weeks.

Critical infrastructure and residential buildings in 10 regions had been hit, the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, said. At least six people were killed in a missile strike on a residential area in the western Lviv region, 440 miles (700km) from the frontline, according to emergency services. Three buildings were destroyed by fire after the strike and rescue workers were combing through rubble looking for more possible victims.

“The occupiers can only terrorise civilians. That’s all they can do. But it won’t help them. They won’t avoid responsibility for everything they have done,” Zelenskiy said in a statement.

In the capital, Kyiv, the seven-hour alert through the night was the longest of Russia's five-month air campaign.



Rescuers work at a destroyed building in Lviv region on Thursday.
Photograph: State Emergency Service Of Ukraine/Reuters

Ukrainian officials said Moscow had fired six of its Kinzhal hypersonic missiles, an unprecedented number, which Ukraine has no way of shooting down. Russia is believed to have only a few dozen of the missiles, which the president, Vladimir Putin, regularly touts in speeches as a weapon for which Nato has no answer.

For much of Thursday the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant – Europe's largest – was forced to rely on diesel-powered generators after Ukrainian authorities said missile attacks had damaged power lines. The plant, which Russia has held since capturing it early in the war, is near the frontline and both sides have warned of a potential for nuclear accidents there caused by fighting.

The power grid operator Ukrenergo said in the afternoon that the power supply had been restored and the plant was switching away from generators. Russian-installed officials called the temporary cutoff a Ukrainian provocation.

UN nuclear chief sounds alarm as Zaporizhzhia plant reconnected – video

The UN nuclear watchdog chief, Rafael Grossi, urged again for a protection zone around the plant. “Each time we are rolling a dice. And if we allow this to continue time after time then one day our luck will run out,” he told the International Atomic Energy Agency’s 35-nation board of governors.

Ukraine’s air force said the attack comprised, in total, “81 missiles of various types”, launched from Russian aircraft and carriers in the Black Sea. Defence forces destroyed 34 cruise missiles and four drones, it added.

“Unfortunately, a missile of the Kinzhal type hit an infrastructure object,” said Serhiy Popko, the head of Kyiv region’s military administration.

The military administration said 40% of people in the capital were without heating on Thursday morning. The city’s mayor, Vitali Klitschko, said explosions were reported in the Holosiivskyi district, and two people were wounded in the Sviatoshynskyi district. Smoke could be seen rising from a facility in Holosiivskyi and police cordoned off all roads leading to it.



Forensic police survey the fragments of missiles that fell near a residential building in Kyiv’s Sviatoshynskyi district. Photograph: Alessio Mamo/The Guardian

The governor of Odesa region said a mass missile attack hit an energy facility in the port city, cutting power. Residential areas were also struck.

Kharkiv was left without electricity as a result of the overnight attack, according to [Suspilne](#), Ukraine's state broadcaster. The regional governor, Oleh Synyehubov, said the city and region had been hit by 15 strikes, with targets including infrastructure.

Synyehubov said two women in their 70s were injured in Pisochyn and an agricultural facility was damaged in Slobozhanske. Multiple settlements were shelled on Wednesday, damaging houses and commercial buildings, he added.

Other blasts were reported in the central city of Dnipro and regions throughout Ukraine.

[Missiles map](#)

The Russian defence ministry said the strikes were in response to [what Moscow called a terrorist attack in Bryansk region last week](#), when members of a group called the Russian Volunteer Corps staged an incursion from Ukraine. Russia said two civilians were killed in the incident, which Ukraine accused Moscow of staging as a false “provocation”.

The missile barrage came after Ukraine's military said late on Wednesday it had managed to push back intense Russian attacks on the city of Bakhmut, despite a Russian claim of control over its eastern half. As one of the bloodiest battles of the year-long war ground on in the small city's ruins, [Ukrainian defenders](#) – who last week appeared to be preparing for a tactical retreat – remained defiant.

[Bakhmut battle map](#)

“The enemy continued its attacks and has shown no sign of a letup in storming the city of Bakhmut,” the general staff of the Ukrainian armed forces said on Facebook. “Our defenders repelled attacks on Bakhmut and on surrounding communities.”

The battle for Bakhmut, which is still under Kyiv's control, has raged for seven months, with thousands of people killed and hundreds of buildings collapsed or charred. The few remaining civilians have been confined to basements for months with no running water, electricity or gas.

Ukrainian military and political leaders now speak of hanging on to positions and inflicting as many casualties as possible on the Russians to grind down their fighting capability.

Despite rumours of an imminent retreat of his troops, Zelenskiy said during an address on Wednesday evening that he had instructed the Ukrainian army to find forces to bolster the defence of the city. “I told the chief of staff to find the appropriate forces to help the guys in Bakhmut. There is no part of Ukraine about which one can say that it can be abandoned,” Zelenskiy said. Zelenskiy said the battle for Bakhmut and the surrounding Donbas region was “our first priority”.

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Protesters wave Georgian, Ukrainian and EU flags outside parliament in Tbilisi on Wednesday. Photograph: Vano Shlamov/AFP/Getty Images

[Georgia](#)

Georgia drops bill on ‘foreign agents’ after two nights of violent protests

After criticism law was similar to Russian legislation used to stifle dissent, ruling party says it will withdraw bill

- [Russia-Ukraine war – latest news updates](#)

Pjotr Sauer

Thu 9 Mar 2023 03.42 ESTFirst published on Wed 8 Mar 2023 20.43 EST

Georgia’s ruling party has said it will drop its bill on “foreign agents” after fierce opposition culminated in [two nights of violent protests](#) and criticism that the draft law would limit press freedom and undercut the country’s efforts to become a candidate for EU membership.

Thousands had rallied against the legislation, which was regarded as an authoritarian shift and could have undercut Tbilisi's efforts to join the EU. Protesters said the proposed "foreign agent" bill mirrors [a 2012 law in Russia](#) that has [since been used to crack down on dissent](#) and suppress western-funded NGOs and media.

The Georgian Dream party said in a statement on Thursday it would "unconditionally withdraw the bill we supported without any reservations". It cited the need to reduce "confrontation" in society.

The previous evening hundreds of police, many carrying riot shields, used water cannon and teargas in clashes in Georgia's capital. More than 100 protesters were arrested during this week's protests.

[Thousands had marched in the streets](#) to rally against the proposed law that would require any organisations receiving more than 20% of their funding from overseas to register as "foreign agents" or face substantial fines.

Protesters carrying Georgian, EU and Ukrainian flags gathered outside the parliament building and shouted: "No to the Russian law."

Demonstrators also blocked the city's central Rustaveli Avenue, after a call from the main opposition party, the United National Movement, to gather there.

The EU delegation to Georgia [welcomed](#) the announcement, saying it wanted to "encourage all political leaders in Georgia to resume pro-EU reforms, in an inclusive and constructive way".

The EU is considering Georgia's application for candidate status. Previously, the European Council president, Charles Michel, warned that the adoption of the so-called foreign agent bill "was not compatible with the EU path".

Police fire water cannon and stun grenades as thousands of Georgians protest for second day – video

Despite the bill withdrawal announcement, members of the Georgian opposition said they would stage a new rally on Thursday evening.

“There will be a rally today ... we need to get clarity on how the governments intend to recall the bill because their statements are vague,” said Tsotne Koberidze, a member of the opposition.

The opposition has also urged the authorities to release all the protesters that were detained during this week’s protests.

On Thursday evening, a crowd of several thousand people gathered in central Tbilisi.

Soon after, the Georgian ministry of interior said it had released all 133 people detained by police during the rallies, an announcement which was greeted with cheers by the demonstrators.

It was not immediately clear if the opposition would call for further protests.

Some present said they would like to continue to protest about what they said was a shift in an authoritarian, pro-Russian direction.

“I will keep on going to the rallies, we cannot stop now,” one protester said. “This is our big chance to end all ties with Russia. We want to be with the EU.”

Share your experience

How have you been affected?

We want to hear from people in Georgia about their views on the protests and the dropped 'foreign agents' bill.

Please share your story if you are 18 or over, anonymously if you wish. For more information please see our [terms of service](#) and [privacy policy](#).

Your responses, which can be anonymous, are secure as the form is encrypted and only the Guardian has access to your contributions. We will only use the data you provide us for the purpose of the feature and we will delete any personal data when we no longer require it for this purpose. For true anonymity please use our [SecureDrop](#) service instead.

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Tell us a bit about yourself (e.g. age and what you do for a living) Optional
Share your views on the proposed legislation and the protests.

Please include as much detail as possible

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Optional

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Anti-Russian feeling is common in Georgia – once part of the Soviet Union – because of longstanding Russian support for two separatist regions and [a brief Russian invasion of the country in 2008](#). Many Georgians back Ukraine in its war against Russia and the latest [polls](#) show 85% of Georgians support EU membership.

Speaking on Wednesday evening, Ukraine's president, [Volodymyr Zelenskiy](#), called for "democratic success" in Georgia.

"There is no Ukrainian who would not wish success to our friendly Georgia. Democratic success. European success," he said.

"We want to be in the [European Union](#) and we will be there. We want Georgia to be in the European Union, and I am sure it will be there. We want Moldova to be in the European Union, and I am sure it will be there. All free nations of Europe deserve this."

In his Wednesday address, Zelenskiy also voiced gratitude for Georgian support for [Ukraine](#).

"I want to thank everyone who has been holding Ukrainian flags in the squares and streets of Georgia these days. I want to express gratitude for our national anthem that was played in Tbilisi. This is respect for Ukraine and I want to express my sincere respect for Georgia."

Thousands of Georgians protesting against 'authoritarian' law clash with police – video

The Georgian Dream party has been the ruling party in Georgia since 2012. The party's founder, the eccentric Russian-connected billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili, is widely believed to exert control over it.

While the party had won elections on a pro-western platform, critics argue Ivanishvili is pushing Georgia towards Moscow's orbit, and – despite overwhelming support for [Ukraine](#) in the country – the government has not joined the west in imposing sanctions on Russia.

“The foreign agent law is just the tip of the iceberg,” said Otar Berov, a Georgian football commentator who attended the protests this week.

“It has ignited longstanding anger about the government’s absurd pro-Russian stance ... I am not sure protests will stop.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/mar/09/zelenskiy-backs-georgia-protesters-in-fight-for-democratic-success-amid-further-clashes>



Ukrainian soldiers fire a 105mm howitzer towards Russian positions near the city of Bakhmut on Wednesday. Photograph: Aris Messinis/AFP/Getty Images

[Russia-Ukraine war at a glance](#)[Ukraine](#)

Russia-Ukraine war at a glance: what we know on day 379 of the invasion

Ukraine claims to have shot down 34 cruise missiles during wave of overnight Russian strikes that have killed several in Lviv and left many without power

- [See all our Russia-Ukraine war coverage](#)

Martin Belam, Guardian staff and agencies

Thu 9 Mar 2023 10.07 ESTFirst published on Wed 8 Mar 2023 19.36 EST

- Ukraine's president Volodymyr Zelenskiy said it had been "a difficult night" as Russian strikes hit targets across Ukraine early

on Thursday, including Kyiv, the Black Sea port of Odesa and the second-largest city, Kharkiv, knocking out power to several areas. The attacks struck a wide arc of targets including cities stretching from Zhytomyr, Vinnytsia and Rivne in the west to Dnipro and Poltava in central Ukraine.

- **Ukraine's air force said Russia launched 81 missiles in total, alongside eight Shahed drones.** It claimed to have shot down 34 cruise missiles and four of the drones. Ukrainian officials said Moscow had fired six of its **Kinjal hypersonic missiles**, an unprecedented number, which Ukraine has no way of shooting down. Russia is believed to have only a few dozen of the missiles.
- **Kyiv's mayor, Vitali Klitschko, said explosions were reported in the south-western part of the city and rescue services were on their way.** Two people were injured. “After the missile attack, due to emergency power outages, 40% of the capital’s consumers are currently without heating. Water supply works normally,” he said on Telegram.
- **Maksym Kozytskyi**, the governor of Lviv, reported five people had been killed in a strike on the **Zolochiv** district. **Oleh Synyehubov**, governor of **Kharkiv**, said two women in their 70s had been injured by a strike on **Pisochyn**. Ukraine’s presidential chief of staff, **Andriy Yermak**, reported that three people were killed in the southern city of **Kherson**.
- Ukraine’s foreign minister, **Dmytro Kuleba**, has described the overnight strikes as without military purpose and “just Russian barbarism”.
- **The strikes cut off Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant from the power grid, the company Energoatom said.** “Today, the last line of communication between the occupied Zaporizhzhia NPP and the Ukrainian power system has been cut off. Fuel for operation remains for ten days,” the company said in a statement.
- In a statement, **Rafael Grossi**, the head of the UN’s nuclear watchdog, told his board of governors that urgent action was needed to protect the

site's safety and security. He said: "This is the sixth time that the plant has lost all off-site power and has had to operate in this emergency mode. Each time we are rolling a dice, and if we allow this to continue then one day our luck will run out."

- **Zelenskiy has said he will not meet Vladimir Putin until Russia leaves Ukraine.** Ukraine's president appeared on CNN on Wednesday night in a pre-recorded interview. When asked by Wolf Blitzer what it would take to get him to meet Putin, Zelenskiy said: "We don't have any circumstances to talk to the Russian Federation president because he doesn't hold his word" and "Russia should leave our territory. And after that, we're happy to join the diplomatic tools. In order to do that, we can find any format with our partners just after that."
- Russian foreign minister **Sergei Lavrov** said on Thursday, during a press conference with his Saudi counterpart, that Saudi Arabia was among the countries that had facilitated prisoner of war swaps with Ukraine.
- Russia's state-owned news agency Tass is reporting that security services in **Moldova**'s breakaway region of **Transnistria** claim to have foiled an assassination attempt on the internationally unrecognised leader, **Vadim Krasnoselsky**. Transnistria's security forces claim Ukrainian security services were the source of the plans.
- The Kremlin said on Thursday it doubted the attacks on the **Nord Stream pipelines** could have been carried out without state support, after the New York Times reported that [a pro-Ukrainian non-government group might have been responsible](#) for the blasts. Kremlin spokesperson **Dmitry Peskov** said it was vital to identify who was behind the attacks which ruptured the multi-billion dollar pipelines last September. He added that it was incomprehensible that [Russia](#) would blow up its own infrastructure.
- **Ukraine** will take part in European Union countries' scheme to jointly buy gas, the bloc's energy policy chief said on Thursday.

- **Slovakia** needs to make a decision on sending MiG-29 fighter jets to Ukraine, the country's defence minister, **Jaroslav Nad**, said on Thursday, adding **Poland** has expressed willingness to act jointly in this matter.
- **The city of Bakhmut, in Ukraine's east, could fall in the next few days, said the Nato secretary general, Jens Stoltenberg.** "What we see is that Russia is throwing more troops, more forces and what Russia lacks in quality they try to make up in quantity. They have suffered big losses, but at the same time, we cannot rule out that Bakhmut may eventually fall in the coming days," he said on Wednesday.
- **The founder of the mercenary Wagner group, Yevgeny Prigozhin**, which has been leading the Russian assault on Bakhmut, said on Wednesday Russian forces now fully control the east of the city. The claims have not been independently verified. The general staff of Ukraine's armed forces said in its Wednesday morning report: "The enemy, despite significant losses, continues to storm the town of Bakhmut."
- **Russia is unlikely to capture significantly more territory this year, according to the US director of national intelligence, Avril Haines.** She told a Senate hearing on Wednesday that the military will probably be unable to carry on its current level of fighting, even with the possible capture of Bakhmut.
- **The Pentagon has been accused of blocking the sharing of US intelligence with the international criminal court (ICC)** about Russian war crimes in Ukraine. The defence department is said to be firmly opposed to using The Hague-based ICC, as a means of holding Russian forces accountable for widespread war crimes on the grounds that the precedent could eventually be turned against US soldiers.
- **Zelenskiy has invited the US House speaker, Kevin McCarthy, to visit Ukraine** as doubts over support for Kyiv's war efforts simmer in Congress, particularly among conservatives. Zelenskiy proposed the visit in an interview with CNN on Wednesday.

- **The US obtained a warrant to seize a Boeing aircraft owned by Russian oil company Rosneft that is valued at over \$25m (£21m),** the US justice department said. The district court for the eastern district of New York authorised the seizure, based on violations of export controls and sanctions against Russia, the department said.
- **In a visit to the Ukrainian capital Kyiv on Wednesday, the UN secretary general, António Guterres, told journalists it was “critical” that a deal that allows safe passage for ships carrying grain out of Ukraine across the Black Sea be renewed,** with Ukraine traditionally being one of the world's largest exporters of grain. A senior UN trade official will meet Russian representatives to discuss the extension of the deal. The Kremlin, however, said on Thursday there were still “a lot of questions” remaining over the deal, and that there were currently no plans for a direct meeting with Guterres.
- **The EU foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, said on Wednesday he had suggested the bloc spend €1bn (£890m) for the joint procurement of ammunition for Ukraine and to refill their own stockpiles.** “I propose to mobilise another €1bn,” Reuters reported he told the media after a meeting of EU defence ministers in Stockholm.

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2023.03.09 - Spotlight

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- Study Some parents in England spending 80% of pay on childcare
- 'Mmm, straight back to the 70s!' Writers revisit the foods they loved as kids, from Smash to Angel Delight
- 'Will I die here tonight?' Growing numbers of Chinese citizens set their sights on the US – via the deadly Darién Gap



Laura Williams and family. Photograph: The Den Photograph

[Childcare](#)

‘It’s cheaper to not work’: childcare shortage in England puts strain on parents

Three families share their struggles with finding and affording nursery places and childminders



[Sarah Marsh](#)

[@sloumarsh](#)

Thu 9 Mar 2023 01.00 EST

“Before I even went to my first scan, my unborn baby’s name was down on a nursery waiting list,” says Laura Williams, 31. This was her second child and it had taken months to find a nursery spot for her first daughter, forcing her to take time off work. She had put in a request at five months pregnant but the waiting list had been a year long. “That’s crazy, seeing as a pregnancy is only nine months,” she says.

It’s a story that is playing out across England. A shortage of childcare places coupled with the huge costs of nurseries means women are questioning whether they should go back to work.

Only half (48%) of councils in England have sufficient childcare places to meet the demand of parents working full-time, down from 59% in 2022, according to Coram. The survey also found that a part-time place (25 hours a week) for a child under two in nursery now costs an average of £151 per week.

Williams, whose girls are now three and 14 months, is from Beverley, a market town in the East Riding of Yorkshire. “There is very little childcare in the area,” she says.

“The nursery we got into is on a farm, so it is spacious and fairly small. There are two other options near us.

“One of them has a maximum of 35 babies in their room, so it is overcrowded and felt like not a nice environment. The other is a preschool, so they can only join from two or three years. All the rest are childminders.”

The cost of it all is crippling: the fee of £1,400 a month is “significantly” more than the family’s mortgage.

“What is the point in going back to work when it is cheaper to not work at all?” she says, adding that the costs have recently increased from £47 to £54 a day. The rises are due to the cost of living and inflation, with food, heating and employee wages all going up.

Williams is eligible for 30 hours of free childcare but says it is difficult to use because you have to pay for wraparound care. “That is if you want to drop them off before 8am or collect after 4pm, which we do as we are teachers.

“We earn what we earn and it keeps us going but don’t have any spending money ... part of it is our choice to have kids earlier. But where is the incentive for women to go back to work?”

Meg Pattern, 33, from Aldridge, near Walsall in the West Midlands, also looked for a nursery place when she was in early pregnancy.

“The lead time would have been a year and a half,” she says. Her son is now 15 months old and the nursery they found is a 30-minute drive away, which she says is “a bit of a nightmare”.

“There is not much choice,” she says. “The nursery we have got him in at the moment has got some issues. They have a gas boiler downstairs and I’ve spoken to other parents who have been complaining about it for weeks because there is a smell of oil.

“To consider nursery before you even have a child is a weird process because anything can happen.”

The cost is huge, so they can use the nursery only twice a week. Pattern, a project manager, says her parents take their son for two days and she dropped a day at work to look after him.

“The cost for a nursery has gone up £15-£20 since we first spoke to them,” she says. “To be honest, it’s putting us off having a second child, because I want a quality of life and don’t know what is happening to the cost of living.”

Pattern is realistic and says she realises that extra government money for childcare has to come from somewhere. But she says studies have shown that supporting women means more can work, which will boost the economy.

“It stresses me out because I worry about the future,” she says. “And maternity pay for a lot of people is ridiculous. It is stressful ... everything has shot up.”



The Storey family – dad Joe, baby Ellie and mum Evie. Photograph: Mark Pinder/The Guardian

Evie Storey, 30, can relate to all these concerns, although it is not just nursery places that are hard to find. Based in Newcastle, she has struggled to find her little girl a childminder. “Other mothers have had issues and post about it on Facebook,” she says.

She cannot afford nursery and has found it stressful finding other care. “I’ve told loads of people that they have to sort out childcare while they are still pregnant,” she says.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/money/2023/mar/09/its-cheaper-to-not-work-childcare-shortage-in-england-puts-strain-on-parents>

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The figures show that a single parent earning the London living wage now has to pay about 80% of their post-tax income on childcare. Photograph: Alex Hinds/Alamy

[Childcare](#)

Some parents in England spending 80% of pay on childcare, study says

Two other studies also show there are insufficient places in half of the country's councils

[Kiran Stacey](#), [Sarah Marsh](#) and [Carmen Aguilar Garcia](#)

Wed 8 Mar 2023 17.00 EST Last modified on Wed 8 Mar 2023 17.01 EST

The scale of the childcare crisis in England has been exposed by new data showing some parents face spending as much as 80% of their take-home pay on childcare while others struggle to find a provider because of supply gaps in large parts of the country.

A study by the thinktank Nesta, seen by the Guardian, shows how hard it is for families in different parts of England to afford to pay for someone to look after their children while they work. Meanwhile, two other studies – one by the children's charity Coram and one by the [Labour](#) party – show there are insufficient places in half of the country's local authorities, with demand now more than double the country's supply.

Labour will pledge to overhaul the government's flagship scheme on Thursday, promising parents of young children 30 hours of free childcare a week if the party is elected at the next election. The overhaul will come as part of a wider reform of the childcare subsidy regime, which Labour says is "broken".

[Graph](#)

Bridget Phillipson, the shadow education secretary, will say in a speech on Thursday: "The childcare model the Conservatives have built fails everyone, denying parents the ability to work the jobs they'd like, to give their children the opportunities they'd like, and is not of the quality that staff want to provide.

"In the Britain the Conservatives will leave behind, tweaking the system we have will not deliver the ambition or scale of reform we are going to need."

UK childcare costs have been rising for years and are now [double the OECD average](#), with a two-earner family now paying a third of their post-tax income on securing a place for their child. For a single-parent family on the minimum wage, that figure is over two-thirds.

The problem has triggered alarm in the Treasury, where ministers believe it is contributing to millions of people staying at home rather than entering the workplace, and are working up plans to ease the crisis to be included in this month's budget.

The Guardian [revealed last month](#) that the education department had submitted proposals to the Treasury that would massively expand the free hours scheme to cover all children aged nine months and older.

The [study from Nesta](#) shows for the first time how affordability varies across England, with families in London facing an especially bad crunch. The figures show that a single parent earning the national minimum wage now has to pay about 80% of their post-tax income on childcare – though that figure does not include the impact of benefits payments.

The four least affordable local authorities are all in London, the data shows: Hammersmith and Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea, Camden and Brent. Manchester is the fifth least affordable.

[Graph](#)

Meanwhile, a separate survey by Coram of local authorities in England shows that only half say they have sufficient childcare places to meet the demand of parents working full-time.

The proportion of councils reporting enough places to cover the demand of full-time working parents has dropped from 59% in 2022 to 48% in 2023, and only 50% of the councils said they have sufficient places for children under two, down from 57% a year ago.

There are now 2.4 children for every childcare place in England, with a 19% decline in the number of providers since 2017, according to Labour's analysis of government figures.

Coram's research also shows that it is the most disadvantaged children who are at risk of missing out, with less than one in five (18%) local authorities in England that answered the survey reporting sufficient childcare for children with disabilities, a decrease of three percentage points compared with 2022.

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Megan Jarvie, the head of Coram Family and [Childcare](#), said: “The need for reform of the childcare system is urgent. As well as eye-watering bills, parents are facing widening gaps in availability of the childcare they need. As the chancellor decides his budget, we urge him to recognise the value of investing in childcare – it is a wise investment, enabling parents to work and boosting the outcomes of young children.”

Joeli Brearley, founder of the charity Pregnant Then Screwed, said the current system was “crumbling before our very eyes”. She added: “We’ve been warning the government this would happen for years, but we are yet to see any action, plan or strategy.”

[Map](#)

Speaking at the centre-right thinktank Onward on Thursday, Phillipson will set out a radically different vision of childcare funding in the future. In a speech designed to seize on political ground Labour feels has been abdicated by the Conservatives, Phillipson will say reforming the system will be her first priority in government.

Phillipson has been visiting other countries, including Estonia, Australia and Ireland, to see how childcare funding works abroad. Labour officials say she was particularly impressed [by the system in Estonia](#), where parents are offered a guaranteed place at kindergarten for all children aged between 18 months and seven years, at costs as low as £50 a month.

A Labour source said Phillipson would say more about how Labour would replace the free hours scheme in the coming months.

A government spokesperson said: “The number of childcare places available to families in England has remained broadly stable since 2015 and standards

remain high, with 96% of providers rated good or outstanding.

“We recognise that families and early years providers across the country are facing financial pressures, which is why we have spent more than £20bn over the past five years to support families with the cost of childcare.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/money/2023/mar/08/some-parents-england-spending-80-per-cent-pay-childcare-study>.

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Angel Delight ... but does it still delight? Composite: Alamy

[Food](#)

‘Mmm, straight back to the 70s!’ Writers revisit the foods they loved as kids, from Smash to Angel Delight

Arctic rolls are back on the menu, with sales up more than 140% at Ocado. But which other retro delights deserve a comeback? We taste-test some old favourites

[Simon Hattenstone](#), [Emma Beddington](#), [Chitra Ramaswamy](#), [Sam Wollaston](#), [Morwenna Ferrier](#), [Arifa Akbar](#), [Emine Saner](#), [Tim Dowling](#), [Claire Armitstead](#) and [Rich Pelley](#)

Thu 9 Mar 2023 01.00 EST Last modified on Thu 9 Mar 2023 03.55 EST

Simon Hattenstone

Coco Pops

I loved Rice Krispies because of the Snap! Crackle! Pop! I loved Ricicles more because they were Rice Krispies with extra sugar. And I loved Coco Pops most because they were Rice Krispies with extra sugar and chocolate. Chocolate for breakfast – dreamy! The great thing about Coco Pops is you get two meals for the price of one. Eat them immediately and you've got a fabulously feisty, crunchy breakfast. Wait a minute till they're drenched in the milk, and you get the yummiest soothing, soggy mush.

I didn't eat them for decades because I (kind of) grew up, and Coco Pops are for kids, right? Wrong. A few weeks ago I picked up a pack of Coco Pops and got straight back into the habit. Not only do they taste just as good, but they have nostalgia value these days. Who needs a time machine? I can travel back to childhood on my Coco Pops.

I've also discovered they work equally well for lunch, tea and late-night feasts. So if you're feeling lazy or self-indulgent, just stick to Coco Pops. A word of warning, though: only Kellogg's understand the magic of what makes a true crispy. Resist Choco Pops, Coco Drops, Cacky Slops, whatever the supermarkets choose to call their own-brand fakes. Rest assured they won't crunch, sog or taste like a true Coco Pop.

Emma Beddington

Tinned fruit cocktail

I had a violently sweet tooth as a child. In primary school I was once caught trying to organise an illegal raffle to buy myself more McCowan's Highland Toffee. I don't know where that early entrepreneurial spirit or audacity went, but the sweet tooth stuck, so I'm hopeful tinned fruit cocktail will still be the exotic delight I first discovered at Brownie camp. I fell hard for its tropical promise and lobbied to have it at home as often as I could persuade my reluctant mother. The warm orange peach pieces, pretty pale pear, extra-sweet pineapple chunks and the glow of jewel-like glacé cherries (two precious halves per serving): it all felt so sophisticated.



Emma Beddington in her fruit cocktail-loving days.

Opening the tin, I realise I had forgotten the grapes, which are a bit spooky, and everything seems smaller. Peach dominates and there's hardly any pineapple (supply chain issues?), but pleasingly, the cherry ratio is still observed. I pour it into a nice bowl (a sophisticated dessert deserves respect) and dig in.

Much like a bag of Revels, there's an order for eating fruit cocktail. It returns to me instantly after 40-odd years: grape, pear, peach, pineapple and cherries saved for last. I don't even like glacé cherries, but respect the rules to the letter.

How is it? Amazing. It tastes of nothing more than a whisper of fruitiness – and I can only tell which chunk I'm eating by texture – but it's a cosseting, delicious almost-nothing and I smash through the whole thing in seconds. Then I drink the “light syrup” as if my molars and pancreas mean nothing to me and enjoy a wild half-hour sugar rush before crashing into deep torpor. I thought adulthood would taste like this; I wish it did.

Chitra Ramaswamy

Findus french bread pizza

This may have been my introduction to the baguette (sorry, France). Or, rather, to a wan frozen truncheon constructed out of cardboard and bad breath, sliced down the middle and slathered with tomato sauce, cheddar cheese and a thousand terrifying cubes of tomato and green pepper. My sister and I, as major Roald Dahl fans, dubbed these cubes “vermicious knids” and they became our gateway to vegetable refusal. We took immense pleasure in tweezing each one off like small but entitled Michelin-starred chefs. All those hours playing Operation must have steadied our hands.

I recall my teeth sinking into the bread pillow, molten cheese burning the roof of my mouth. And the crap crunch, which like everything in childhood was nothing like it was on the advert.

Roughly 40 years later, Findus french bread pizzas are, like tomatoes and hope, no more. In Lidl I find the 2023 equivalent: two Chicago Town cheese and tomato subs for £1.25. Even the picture is right: the subs teem with vermicious knids. Back home I pop one in the oven and the smell of the 1980s – essentially over-sweetened tomato sauce and really bad cheese – fills the room. Once it’s out, I can’t help myself. I pick off the vermicious knids and let the ensuing Proustian flood wash over me. Here she is, my beloved mum, [who died three years ago](#), presenting these new-fangled Findus pizzas to us with excitement. Who knew a Chicago Town sub would make me cry?

Sam Wollaston

Angel Delight

My childhood was, on the whole, reasonably happy. I won’t go as far as to say that Angel Delight was the reason for this, but it certainly played a part. Never strawberry (tasted pink), only occasionally butterscotch (too vommy), generally chocolate (perfect).

It was probably the first food I ever prepared. It’s not hard to add a sachet of powder to milk, but I learned that it paid to whisk longer for a lighter, bubblier mix. And I would pour it into a glass to set, like the picture on the

packet, for a more sophisticated dessert. Sometimes I – whisper it – crumbled a Flake over the top, for extra decadence.

It's reassuring to find, in an age of bitter dark salted Belgian nonsense, that chocolate Angel Delight still exists, even if the glass on the packet has gone. Ingredients: sugar, modified starch, palm oil, fat-reduced cocoa powder, gelling agents (diphosphates, sodium phosphates) ... OK, so maybe we don't need to look too closely at the ingredients.

Quick, tear open the sachet and inhale ... mmm, straight back to the 70s. Then sprinkle into milk, whisk, leave for five minutes, and here goes ...

I remember it having more texture. Maybe there's too much milk; probably I under-whisked in my eagerness for time travel. But it just sort of oozes around the mouth and slides down without requiring much swallowing. Tastewise, I'm getting more sugar than cocoa, maybe a hint of the palm oil – not quite the chocolatey heaven I remember.

I need to try it on the next generation; here's one of my own delightful little angels. He takes a spoonful, then another. "It's OK," he says, which might not sound like a ringing endorsement, but that's about as effusive as he gets. The proof is quite literally in the pudding, a bowlful of which soon disappears.

You know those things you only get to appreciate as an adult – coffee, shellfish, smelly cheese, bitter dark salted Belgian nonsense? Well, I think Angel Delight is the opposite of them. For me that means: best before 1984.



Composite: Alamy

Morwenna Ferrier

Smash

I discovered Smash in Morrisons in Leeds, where I was at university. When I arrived, I had barely drunk, had never had a takeaway, been to a gig or smoked a cigarette. The idea that you could make mashed potato in minutes from a desiccated powder was pure *alchemy*. And it was the perfect dinner carbohydrate when you had seven minutes between lectures and pubs, and had spent most of your loan on Diesel clothes and Unkle LPs. I was too embarrassed to buy the tin so I bulk-bought the sachets. I stored them upright in my cupboard, lined up like a little library.

I often ate them late at night. My friend Roz and I would mix the ingredients with boiling water, a little milk, some butter and some salt while we defrosted peas in the halls microwave. We then sprinkled the peas on top, like so, before adding something Roz, a vegetarian, had discovered in the Arndale centre, which I can only describe as “imitation meat”. A well-rounded meal, we thought, night after night.

I didn't know you could still buy it, but you can! I'm writing this from a small hotel room in Paris, during fashion week, where I prepared my Smash in a mug using the free hot water provided in reception, and a pack of *demi-sel* butter snaffled from a restaurant. I don't have a whisk so I'm using a wooden takeout spoon I stole from Carrefour. But the result looks the same: off-yellow. The consistency is just as I remember it, too: wet, slightly too thick. But it tastes as fine and potato-like as it ever did, at worst a little cloying. *Et voilà*, Le Smash.

Arifa Akbar

Batchelors Super Noodles

When I was growing up, my mother cooked the most amazing fresh south Asian food for us on very little money, but refused to teach me or my siblings to cook because she wanted us to have bigger, less domestic, lives than she'd had. So I ended up with zero kitchen skills and a utilitarian approach to meals. Batchelors Super Noodles appealed for their wartime bunker convenience: cheap, hot and made inside of six minutes. I ate them religiously from my late teens until, shamefully, my early 30s.



Arifa Akbar with her Super Noodles and mushy peas. Photograph: Sarah Lee/The Guardian

I would twin them with tinned mushy peas – for nutritional value, you understand. But these turned out to be my biggest love. I would eat mounds, sometimes with a twist of ketchup on top and often straight from the tin, so that there wasn't even a pan to wash up afterwards.

Today, these items are a reminder of how far I've come. I forced my mum to teach me to cook about 15 years ago and now, aged 50, it's one of my biggest pleasures. The noodles look especially inedible: a hard white brick that disintegrates into glutinous yellow mush in boiling water. The chicken flavour comes in a sachet and smells of chemicals. But as I begin to open the mushy peas, I can't resist the urge to eat half of them from the tin. They are superior to the posh, bland, liquefied variety I'm served in gastropubs, and I feel the familiar but long forgotten hit of stodgy, salty, mood-lifting delight. They're definitely being added to my shopping list.

The noodles don't bring the same thrill, but I am surprised by how much I enjoy their chewing gum consistency and zingy, gloopy high. I would happily eat them again, perhaps with a few capers and slivers of anchovy or fried tofu and chilli. It's not exactly Babette's Feast, but there's a strange comfort in it.

Emine Saner

Sosmix

When I was about eight, my best friend and I set up the Animal Protection Club. It never did become an international NGO, but my vegetarianism has lasted to this day. It's easy, now, to be vegetarian, but it wasn't in a rural town in the 80s, which had a high street with two butchers and an actual livestock market.

Looking back, my childhood feels strangely old-fashioned. Other people had holidays to Spain, and ready meals and microwaves; we were impoverished, wore homemade clothes, grew vegetables and didn't have a car. My mum, who often couldn't face cooking for various reasons – not least because it was so difficult on our coal-fired Rayburn – was now faced with a daughter with dietary requirements.

At some point, on a monthly trip to Leicester, she discovered Sosmix – a powdered wheat and soya mix – at a health food shop. You mixed it with water and could shape it into sausages, and other exotic things: sausage rolls, pies, pasta sauces.

I haven't had Sosmix for nearly 30 years, [but amazingly it still exists](#), though it's sold by [only one shop in the UK](#). It arrives by courier. Add water and it becomes pink and sticky; I make sausages – you can add herbs but I keep it pure – and fry them. Not to be too disloyal to this childhood staple, but vegetarian food and fake meat has come on a lot over the decades. Nevertheless there's comfort in its blandness, it's surprisingly juicy, and it reminds me of my mum, who would go out of her way – 20 miles by bus – to get it.

Tim Dowling

Betty Crocker cake mix

When I was growing up in the US, cake came either from a bakery, in a box, or from a cake mix, in a box. Specifically this would have been Betty Crocker cake mix in the standard sponge flavour known as "yellow". I think I was in my 20s before I knew what the ingredients for an actual cake were.

There was also a mix to make a lumpy icing, but the real innovation arrived a bit later: frosting in a can. After that you could have your cake and eat it inside 45 minutes. Betty Crocker cake mix can be sourced in the UK – I know of a shop in London dedicated to fulfilling the guilty pleasures of expat Americans – but I don't think I've tried it in 30 years.

The recipe does not inspire confidence, only awe: in addition to the powder within, three eggs are required, along with a cup of water and half a cup of, erm, vegetable oil. Once the mix is in the oven, a strange aroma of synthetic vanilla fills the kitchen, then the house. "What's that smell?" says my youngest son. "The 1970s," I say. "Welcome."

I had forgotten about the generous assumptions of American convenience food manufacturers – the resulting cake is huge, and there's enough frosting

left over do another one. My family are not impressed when, with much ceremony, I finally slice into it. “It’s not terrible, but it has a very weird texture,” says my middle son. “Are you kidding?” I say. “That’s cake!”

“It tastes of something very odd,” says my youngest son. “It tastes of yellow,” I say, meaning: bland and insanely sweet. With the first bite I’m overwhelmed by a rush of associative memory: bicycle rides and burning leaves and people leaving their cars running in the parking lot while they buy milk. But by the second slice I’m feeling as if I need a dark place to lie down.



Composite: Alamy

Claire Armitstead

Sweetened condensed milk

Once long ago, when banoffee pie had yet to be invented and, to a bookish preteen, dulce de leche sounded like something nasty behind the woodshed in Cold Comfort Farm, there was one thing that could be guaranteed to see off the glums: a spoonful of sweetened condensed milk. There was always some lurking on the kitchen shelves among the jars of Bovril and tins of vegetable soup.

It was never a solitary pleasure: cranking the can open was a self-help ritual for me and my mum on those days when everything seemed out of sorts. Her excuse was that she suffered from chronic migraines, and as a child of postwar rationing she had discovered that the sugar rush it offered could restore her to herself; mine was that I was keeping her company. It was comfort and comradeship – our sickly little secret.

But as adolescence kicked in, I started to associate it with acne, and humiliating struggles to zip up too-tight loons. I cast it so far from my mind that I had almost forgotten that it existed as a pleasure in its own right.

Opening my first can in more than 40 years felt like breaking into an ancestral tomb. My first impression was how much runnier it was than I remembered: could we really have managed it with teaspoons? My second was: yes we could. Sucking it off the spoon remains an intrinsic part of a sense memory that starts with texture – it's like clingy sateen – and unfolds into flavour, a duet of cream and sugar that schmoozes your palate. But almost immediately the guilt kicked in, so strongly that (once I had finished the can) I could almost feel the pores prickling on my chin. It opened a door in my memory, but I won't be going through it again.

Rich Pelley

Fray Bentos Steak & Kidney Pie



Rich Pelley, thinking about Fray Bentos.

The first thing that strikes me as I attempt to eat my first Fray Bentos pie in 20 years is: who, in this modern world, owns a tin opener? Everything I enjoy that comes in a tin (tuna, baked beans, lager) has a ring pull. What is this? 1998?

I used to love these pies. I would regularly pick up one for lunch on sixth form half-day Thursdays to scoff home alone. Maybe it was the ease? Stick it in the oven and Ainsley Harriott, eat your heart out. Or perhaps, even then, I subconsciously knew they were a guilty pleasure; guilt that I would grow up to be the sort of man who eats pies out of the tin for dinner. Which I'm not. Honest. Well, until now.

So, after finally locating a tin opener, let's have a looksee. Jesus. Why is there a wet flannel on top? Oh, it's the uncooked pastry. Maybe things will improve after 30 minutes at 230C. My mature palate can certainly detect the sugar that my teenage taste buds happily ignored. It's not quite a pie, in that way a Big Mac is a fast food version of a burger, but it's strangely delicious. Filling: easy to chew; sweet, sweet gravy. Pastry: nice and puffy. I'm taken right back to desperately revising for my A-levels, shoving the empty tins to the bottom of the (pre-recycling) bin so nobody knew what a slob I'd

become. I want another. How many more tins can I hide at the bottom of the recycling, I wonder.

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On 1 January, Xu arrived in a Colombian beach town of Necoclí, to prepare for his journey to cross the Darién Gap, one of the world's most dangerous migrant corridors. Photograph: Alicia Chen/The Guardian

[China](#)

Growing numbers of Chinese citizens set their sights on the US – via the deadly Darién Gap

Surge in number of disillusioned Chinese citizens fleeing to the US by trekking through the dangerous jungle between Colombia and Panama

Alicia Chen in Necoclí

Wed 8 Mar 2023 20.34 EST Last modified on Thu 9 Mar 2023 21.13 EST

On the first day of 2023, Xu was in no mood to celebrate the new year. He had just arrived in the Colombian beach town of Necoclí along with dozens of other Chinese citizens, weary from a two-day bus trip from Ecuador. Their goal was the US via the Darién Gap, a [roadless, lawless and extremely dangerous stretch of rainforest](#) connecting South and Central America. He wanted to leave China far behind him.

“After I leave the country [China], I have no plans to go back alive,” says Xu later, speaking to the Guardian in a Necoclí hotel room. “I feel like this country has been deceiving us, persecuting us. I have to do something.”

Necoclí is a tourist spot known among locals for its Caribbean music festivals but it is also a major starting point for migrants heading north to [Panama](#) through the jungle. It is the only overland path from south to north America. From Panama they continue through several Central American countries to the Mexico-US border.

It is a route riddled with dangers – from the perils of the jungle’s fast-running rivers and deadly wildlife, to gangs and criminals operating in the region, but Xu is desperate.

As some compatriots eat a local pastry *dedito de queso*, the 31-year-old construction worker, who asked to only use a surname, joins others to chant “knock CCP down!”.

The march through the Darién Gap of Haitians, Venezuelans and Cubans fleeing economic collapse and political persecution has been well-documented. But far less is known about the growing number of Chinese citizens trekking through the jungles between [Colombia](#) and Panama.



Migrants take an one-hour ferry from Necoclí to Capurganá, in Colombia.
Photograph: Alicia Chen/The Guardian

Across separate trips in November and January, the Guardian interviewed several Chinese men hoping to travel through the Darién Gap and into the US. They are part of a growing trend. Panamanian government [data](#) shows about 400 Chinese citizens made the journey during the first half of 2022. In November last year, the figure rose to 377, then to 695 in December. In January 2023, a record-breaking 913 Chinese nationals crossed, making them the fourth-largest group of migrants to do so this year.

The January crossings account for 28% of the total number of Chinese migrants recorded in the Darién Gap since 2010, the International Organisation for [Migration](#) (IOM) told the Guardian.

A combination of draconian Covid lockdowns and Xi Jinping's increasingly repressive rule has pushed thousands to flee China. They term it “runology”, or *runxue* in Chinese. The relaxation of China’s zero-Covid policy and

border controls in December and January has led to higher numbers of Chinese nationals taking the perilous journey.

Darien Gap map

“I know many wanted to leave [before], but they couldn’t,” says Xu.

Xu says that he used to identify with China’s “Little Pinks”, a growing group of cyber-nationalists, but in 2021, he began learning about the Great Chinese Famine and the Tiananmen Square massacre by using virtual private networks, or VPNs. “I realised [the CCP] don’t care about human rights,” Xu says.

Yin Chengxiang, another migrant waiting to cross from Necoclí, left China in mid-December. The 55-year-old cook from Nanjing says that China’s tough pandemic rules were just one of many reasons that he wanted to escape life under the Chinese Communist party.

“I’m not afraid of them at all,” Yin says. “We would go help Taiwan fight against the CCP if China attacks Taiwan.”



Chinese citizens shop for camping gear in Necoclí. Photograph: Alicia Chen/The Guardian

‘Will I die here tonight?’

Jiang, who asked to only use his surname, thought he would not make it out alive. The 28-year-old, once a finance student in Australia, travelled to the edge of the jungle with four Venezuelans and two Chinese in late September.

On the first evening, they set up a tent close to a river after hiking up several inclines. But heavy rains came, and the water rose rapidly, soaking their belongings and forcing them to move. On the second day, Jiang’s companion was injured. Jiang helped carry his bag but lost his own tent along the way. Again, there were flash floods.

“I was so tired, hungry and cold. I almost lost my mind,” Jiang says. Finally, he found an abandoned tent, but two men from Ghana and Cameroon were already inside. As the rain continued Jiang begged the two men to share it.

“We four men slept side by side, huddling for warmth,” Jiang says. Water kept seeping into their tent. “I asked the two men, ‘will I die here tonight?’ And they encouraged me, ‘Everything will be OK, we will leave here alive’.”

Jiang managed to trek through the Darién and continued on toward the US, documenting much of his trail, including being stopped and searched by authorities, meeting other migrants, and visiting tourist sites, on social media. He was detained at the US border for 51 days before passing the asylum screening interview. He says his phone, bank card, and several documents went missing in the meantime.



Jiang, a young Chinese citizen, travelled through the dangerous Darién Gap in order to seek asylum in the US. Photograph: Supplied

“I just want to have a peaceful life,” Jiang tells the Guardian over the phone. He’s just finished his shift at a Chinese restaurant in Hawaii, where he is working illegally while waiting for his asylum claim.

“The US is not ideal, but it is a place where I can be who I am.”

The lure – and dangers – of the Darién Gap

Xu learned about his route through social media, where information about the crossing has spread, increasingly in Mandarin. Telegram groups with names like “United States DIY” or “run away to the US” have thousands of members. Migrants usually fly to Istanbul and then on to Ecuador, which is one of the few Latin American countries offering visa-free entry for Chinese nationals. From there, they travel by bus to Colombia, and Necoclí.

During zero-Covid, while Beijing prevented citizens leaving the country without “necessary and emergency” reasons, Xu spent months arranging his passport and a student visa to Italy through an immigration agent in China. He had no plans to obtain a degree – it was just an excuse for him to be allowed to leave.

He left Taizhou, in eastern Jiangsu province, on the morning of 25 November, avoiding a local lockdown by just a few hours. He travelled to Hong Kong, where his passport and documents were taken for several hours before he was allowed to board his flight to Thailand – an additional check against Chinese nationals attempting to migrate. “I was so nervous that I wouldn’t make it.”

Some migrants come from China’s working class, which suffered during the economic woes brought on by the pandemic. But many the Guardian meets, including a school teacher and a political prisoner, are middle class. On the same day the Guardian visits, more than 30 Chinese appear in the port town, including several families with children.

A Colombian official says on the condition of anonymity that most are men aged between 20 and 55. They usually stay in hotels and enjoy a few good meals before heading into the jungle as they generally have more money than other migrants.

However, money doesn’t make the trek less treacherous. “They would be exposed to dangers such as robbery and may become victims of violent crimes or even disappearances,” the official said.

The 70-mile (110km) Darien route passes through mountains and fast-running rivers. Dangers include deadly spiders and snakes, including vipers and anacondas. There are widespread reports of exploitative people traffickers, smugglers and criminal groups along the route, including the Gulf Clan, a paramilitary group and Colombia’s largest drug cartel.

“Crossing this area can take up to 10 days on foot for the most vulnerable people, who are exposed to natural hazards and also to criminal groups that perpetrate violence, including sexual abuse or robbery,” Giuseppe Loprete, chief of mission at the IOM in Panama, told the Guardian. He said many migrants arrive in hard-to-reach Panamanian Indigenous communities hungry and dehydrated, requiring medical attention from the humanitarian organisations set up to meet them.

According to the IOM, at least 207 migrants have been reported missing or dead on the route between 2014 and 2022, including 41 deaths in 2022

alone. The Guardian was told by other migrants of at least six Chinese deaths in 2022, but was unable to confirm them. IOM says it has not identified any Chinese nationals who died in the Darién jungle last year, but it does not rule out the possibility.

The mass migration has drastically altered Necoclí itself, overwhelming its health system and other services. Locals do what they can to adapt, with many businesses now catering to the migrants. Less than 100 metres from the pier where migrants line up for boats to the Darien crossing, there is now a well-visited Chinese restaurant.

Freddy Marín, director of a major ferry company in Necoclí, told Taiwanese media outlet [the Reporter](#) late last year that 80% of his business has been selling boat tickets to migrants since last year. “We have earned more money from migrants than from tourists.” Marín emphasised that local authorities permit the company to help transport migrants.

No regrets

Liang Zixuan, a Chinese immigration agent based in Tokyo, has noticed an increase in interest in reaching the US and believes plenty of Chinese migrants will still attempt the dangerous trek in the coming months. “For those who saw the government’s real face, they will leave regardless.”

Even though the Chinese government has now reopened the borders and relaxed restrictions, Xu is happy with his decision to leave. He points to the rash of suicides and family separations under zero-Covid, which were ignored by a state media only talking of a “tremendous victory”.

“They would do anything to disregard ordinary people’s pain,” he says. “I don’t know much about the US, but at least it’d be better than living in China ... We’re like animals. We migrate to a warmer place, instead of staying in a cold place. We don’t want to be frozen to death.”

Helen Davidson and Tom Phillips contributed to this report

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2023.03.09 - Opinion

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Chancellor Jeremy Hunt (right), with Grant Shapps, energy security secretary, at a meeting of UK green industry leaders at Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, east London, February 2023. Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA

[OpinionBudget 2023](#)

British voters are ready for a green, game-changing budget. What they'll get is more austerity

[Larry Elliott](#)



Labour knows the UK needs a green recovery plan like Joe Biden's, but the Tories have neither the courage nor will to follow suit

Thu 9 Mar 2023 01.00 EST Last modified on Thu 9 Mar 2023 10.01 EST

There was a time when the Institute of Directors was a hotbed of Thatcherism. Its members were gung-ho for the free market, tax cuts, privatisation and economic liberalism in its purest form. But that was in the 1980s and early 1990s and it is a different story now. Earlier this week, the IoD called on the chancellor, Jeremy Hunt, to be more than simply a bean counter in next week's budget and urged the government to come up with its own version of Joe Biden's [Inflation Reduction Act](#).

This is some change of heart. The IRA is a [\\$370bn \(£312bn\) package](#) of protectionism, state aid and subsidies designed to galvanise American business in the [fight against climate change](#). Where once the IRA would once have been everything it loathed, here was the IoD warning that "short-term budgetary concerns" should not be allowed to trump the "strategic imperative of establishing market leadership positions in green business".

The IoD – and other business groups such as the Confederation of British Industry – are likely to be disappointed. Hunt will come up with some modest measures to stimulate investment and boost employment next week but the budget is not going to be the gamechanger business is demanding.

The chancellor's priorities are to cut the UK's budget deficit, to take no risks with inflation and to keep the financial markets sweet. After the turmoil caused by Liz Truss's whirlwind premiership last autumn, the message will be that grownups are back in charge. Financial orthodoxy has returned. The Treasury is back in control of the public finances. The Bank of England is taking action to bring down inflation.

Voters, Hunt and Rishi Sunak believe, want a government that is prudent with the nation's finances rather than one committed to wild experimentation, and that is what they plan to deliver. Up to a point, the budget will be a throwback to former chancellor [George Osborne](#)'s austerity shock treatment in 2010.

But only up to a point. Osborne was broadly swimming with the tide of business and public opinion when he insisted there was no alternative to a period of financial austerity. In the run-up to the 2010 election – and in the period immediately after it – the Conservatives convinced the public that Labour was to blame for the global financial crisis. This was nonsense, but the ploy worked.

Much has happened since 2010. The economy has performed badly and been subject to two further shocks: Brexit in 2016 and the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. The vote to leave the EU was highest in the least prosperous parts of Britain and a sign of deep discontent. Whatever else it was, Brexit was certainly not a vote for the government to intervene less in the running of the economy. Had the referendum gone the other way the problems of the left-behind parts of Britain would still have needed addressing (and still do).

Covid-19 saw the state intervene in the economy to an extent never before seen in peacetime. An avowedly rightwing government paid the wages of millions of workers, showered business with grants, tax breaks and soft loans, and took over the running of the railways. Voters quickly became accustomed to state intervention on a massive scale.

Part of that intervention involved slashing interest rates and pumping up asset prices through the Bank of England's money creation programme known as quantitative easing. Already comfortably-off homeowners were the main beneficiaries.

So, to sum up, Britain has had a decade of weak growth. Millions of people expressed their unhappiness with the status quo in 2016. The pandemic required more state involvement in the running of the economy, which had positive spin-offs in terms of vaccine development, but also widened the gap between rich and poor.

Unsurprisingly, the public's views on economic issues have moved leftwards over the past 13 years, as demonstrated by support for this winter's [strikes](#), for [state ownership](#) of the public utilities and for higher government spending to be paid for by [higher taxation](#). Hunt's framing of the budget relies on a highly questionable assumption: that deep down Britain is a conservative country that won't accept change.

As one official who worked in Downing Street when Labour was in power told me this week, the shift in public attitudes means Labour leader Keir Starmer and shadow chancellor Rachel Reeves have an easier job convincing voters of the need for economic change than was the case for Tony Blair and Gordon Brown when they were in opposition in the run-up to the 1997 election.

Let's not exaggerate. Britain may have moved leftwards on the economy, but not that far leftwards. The public is not yet ready for [modern monetary theory](#) – the idea that there are no real budgetary constraints on a government that prints its own currency.

But would voters be terrified by a government that said the lesson from the past 15 years was that Britain needed an industrial strategy designed to level up and to hit net-zero targets? Would they reject out of hand the idea that greening the economy will require billions of pounds of investment from the public and private sectors? Does nurturing the growth sectors of the future really sound scarily radical given what Biden is doing on the other side of the Atlantic?

It seems unlikely. Despite what happened under Truss, voters and business would be up for what Labour is proposing with its [green recovery plan](#). That's good, because a green recovery plan – rather than the much more timid affair likely to be served up next week – is precisely what the country needs.

- Larry Elliott is the Guardian's economics editor
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An employee at an Amazon distribution centre in Leon, Guanajuato state, Mexico. Photograph: Mario Armas/AFP/Getty Images

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From near-shoring to friend-shoring: the changing face of globalisation

[Mohamed El-Erian](#)



A new operating model for the global economy is upon us – its success will depend on how policymakers adapt

Thu 9 Mar 2023 01.00 EST Last modified on Thu 9 Mar 2023 01.02 EST

For three decades, businesses and governments around the world operated under the assumption that economic and financial globalisation will continue apace. As the international order has come under strain in recent years, however, the concept of deglobalisation – the delinking of trade and investment – has increasingly gained traction with households, companies, and governments. But the available data suggest that globalisation is not ending so much as it is changing.

Not too long ago, it seemed that there were no limits to global economic and financial integration. For decades, globalisation's benefits appeared to be obvious and unassailable. The interconnectedness of production, consumption, and investment flows provided consumers with a wider range of choices at attractive prices, enabled companies to expand their markets, and improved the efficiency of their supply chains. Global capital markets expanded access to credit and lowered its cost for private and public borrowers alike. The world's governments engaged in what seemed to be a series of win-win partnerships. And technology – including, most recently,

the accelerating shift toward remote work – made national borders seem largely irrelevant.

But while globalisation made markets work better, policymakers lost sight of its adverse distributional consequences. Many communities and countries were left behind, contributing to a widespread sense of marginalisation and alienation.

The result was a backlash against globalisation, whose most visible political manifestations were the UK's vote to leave the EU and Donald Trump's election to the US presidency in 2016. Soon, the US had entered a tariff war with China, deepening the divide between the two economic powers. Western consumers, meanwhile, have increasingly pushed back against human-rights violators and countries that harm the environment. And the invasion of Ukraine has led to unprecedented sanctions on [Russia](#) (a G20 country) and the weaponisation of the international payments system.

It follows, then, that many would conclude that globalisation has ended. But, rather than a sharp reversal of the past 30 years, it seems far more likely that we are entering an era of fragmented globalisation characterised by substitution, not negation.

The sanctions regime imposed on Russia is a case in point. Over the past year, the EU-US-led restrictions have not materially reduced Russia's oil exports but redirected them elsewhere, primarily to China and India. Similarly, rather than bringing Russia's economy to its knees as many had predicted, the comprehensive sanctions shrunk its GDP by [just 2%](#), as Russian technocrats found ways to reorient and rewire domestic and external activities. Even more worryingly, Russia and some of its allies have also made progress in creating somewhat of a parallel cross-border payments and settlement system, albeit a rudimentary and inefficient one.

This trend will probably continue over the next few years, as companies increasingly diversify their supply chains away from China and as western governments resort to near-shoring and friend-shoring to maintain the production of critical inputs and sensitive exports.

In short, the combination of geopolitical shocks, corporate strategies, and changing societal values will affect trade and investment patterns along four main axes. As companies opt for resilience over efficiency, they will increasingly shift their approach to supply chains from “just in time” to “just in case.” This will come at a time when security concerns gain greater weight in commercial considerations, and companies will move away from risk-sharing and general partnerships to more narrowly designed arrangements. Meanwhile, consumers will increasingly look for an emphasis on purpose in their commercial interactions.

While this process will produce winners and losers, their identity will depend to a significant extent on how policymakers adapt to the global economy’s new operating model. [Mexico](#), for example, stands to gain from US friend-shoring, as well as the corporate sector’s shift to more diversified supply chains. Yet, as the Mexican government itself has recognised, notional demand will not be translated into effective demand unless policymakers accelerate progress on infrastructure, clean energy, deregulation, and the like.

In a world in which households actively avoid certain commercial interactions, governments and businesses will need to work harder to devise alternatives. Companies must work with governments, at home and abroad, to facilitate the inherently tricky process of rewiring supply chains and to accelerate the green transition. National and global policymakers need to revise how they think and operate. And long-term investors should incorporate more sophisticated geopolitical, sociopolitical, and environmental analyses into their allocation strategies.

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While some may consider the phrase “fragmented globalisation” an oxymoron, I believe it is the most probable scenario for the global economy. As the world increasingly divides into blocs, a few more fluid than most others, globalisation stands to become more inflationary, reducing potential growth. Avoiding this outcome depends on how national governments and multilateral institutions navigate the new economic reality. The world may not fully deglobalise, but that does not mean we should assume smooth sailing ahead.

Mohamed El-Erian is chief economic adviser at Allianz. He served as chair of Barack Obama’s Global Development Council and is a former deputy director at the IMF.

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‘The banter, the callousness, the internecine rivalries, the chaos: it all suggests a general contempt for the public.’ Matt Hancock and Gavin Williamson leave No 10 Downing Street in November 2018. Photograph: Leon Neal/Getty Images

[Opinion](#)[Matt Hancock](#)

The lesson from Matt Hancock’s WhatsApp is this: these clowns can’t govern, their only skill is covering tracks

[Zoe Williams](#)



Rightwing editorial agendas have shaped the narrative so far but what the leaks really showed was bunglers bungling in secret

Wed 8 Mar 2023 11.30 EST Last modified on Wed 8 Mar 2023 14.16 EST

What is the public interest value of Matt Hancock's huge cache of [WhatsApp messages](#)? They tell us a fair amount about him and his vanity. He has a laser-like focus on claiming credit. "I CALLED FOR THIS TWO MONTHS AGO," he writes in shouty caps, to an aide, about the plan to cut the approval time for a vaccine. "This is a Hancock triumph." His tone is jokey and casual, his response to criticism querulous and brittle. "What a bunch of absolute arses the teaching unions are," Hancock texts, to which the then education secretary, Gavin Williamson, replies: "I know they really really do just hate work." Hancock replies with two laughing emojis and a bullseye. They do not sound remotely like government ministers making high-stakes decisions: they sound like the thick two out of The Inbetweeners, moaning about their head of year and backslapping each other for their bons mots.

Hancock has a pretty high tolerance for situations that should have been intolerable to a health secretary: the "eat out to help out" policy, for example, was thought to have been driving infections – but not to worry,

because he'd "[kept it out of the news](#)". There is plenty to tease out about the man's character, but how much of it didn't we know already [from I'm a Celebrity ... Get Me Out of Here?](#) He's already [said](#) that he won't be seeking re-election; his fitness for public office is now a footnote.

The professionalism and impartiality of the head of the civil service, Simon Case, have been [called into question](#), and Michael Gove's giant ego marvelled at. The banter, the callousness, the internecine rivalries, the chaos: it all suggests a general contempt for the public. Would we have wished it otherwise? Sure, government by mature public servants would have been more reassuring. Given what we already knew, however, from the Downing Street parties to the test-and-trace fiasco, little of this comes as a huge surprise. It's hardly a smoking gun that Case [called](#) Boris Johnson a "nationally distrusted figure" – that distrust was palpable and often voiced.

We may see it all as our clearest view yet into the operating practices of government in this Tory era. The WhatsApps leaked to the Daily Telegraph do seem to confirm all the dark fears we had that the superficial, press clipping-driven approach apparent in public also underpinned the way inadequate ministers did their jobs in private during one of the most challenging periods of recent history.

Yet the medium really is the message, here: when policy is made over WhatsApp and transparency is delivered via a leak, a democratic debt opens up that cannot be easily be repaid. It can be serviced only by counterleak, by more gossip.

This has put the entire narrative in the hands of a newspaper fascinated by the rights and wrongs of lockdown, and whether the messaging around that time was fair or fearmongering (realistically, probably both – there was plenty to fear). Of course there are lessons to learn about the balance between civil liberties and public health, but this isn't the way to hold Johnson and his ministers to account. Nobody was asking them to meet a completely unprecedented pandemic with perfect judgment on abstruse and novel questions such as "How serious is this new strain of the virus?", or "Should non-cohabiting couples be allowed to see one another?". What we could legitimately ask for was probity, coherence and the proper use of

public funds, and those questions have been lost in the cacophony of a rightwing editorial agenda.

It doesn't matter so much whether Hancock did "snogging and heavy petting" with Gina Coladangelo, or whether he broke his own social distancing rules. It's far more important to follow the money: did the government break its own rules on procurement, and to what purpose – was it simple chumminess that saw vast sums finding their way to the likes of Michelle Mone or [Pharmaceuticals Direct](#), a firm [linked](#) to the Conservative donor Samir Jassal? What were the criteria to get into the "VIP lane", whether to supply PPE or focus group services?

What will it take to get full details of all government Covid-related contracts? Without those, it simply isn't possible to inquire into the pandemic response, either informally by the press or formally by committee. We don't know whether the contractors were qualified, and we can't gauge the quality of what they supplied; we won't know whether NHS staff, carers and other public sector workers could have been better protected had PPE been supplied in better time, and been of better quality. We know money was wasted, of course, but we have no way of knowing how much. We can't easily tell the difference between incompetence and corruption.

"The use of private communications," wrote the Good Law Project, seeking an appeal hearing in the supreme court, "has not only put our national security at risk, but led to the deletion of crucial records and information that should be available for public scrutiny." That case was denied in December, when the [court of appeal ruled](#) that courts should not control ministers' use of private phones and messaging services, even when they were using those to negotiate commercial deals with VIPs, in breach of their own policy.

The Lockdown Files delivered one important lesson, but not for us, unfortunately: rather for cabinet ministers, who are now purportedly putting their WhatsApps on auto-delete, prompting [a warning from the information commissioner](#). Far from opening up the pandemic period to greater scrutiny, Hancock's messages have merely flagged to his colleagues the importance of evading it.

- Zoe Williams is a Guardian columnist
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‘Despite the heroic Operation Pitting, thousands are still waiting to get out.’ Afghans board a UK plane at Kabul airport, 23 August 2021. Photograph: LPhot Ben Shread/MoD/PA

[OpinionAfghanistan](#)

Britain promised to move heaven and earth for all who helped us in Afghanistan. It wasn’t true

[Dan Jarvis](#)

The UK is shirking its responsibility – and by losing focus on that unstable country, is putting us at risk all over again

Thu 9 Mar 2023 03.00 ESTLast modified on Thu 9 Mar 2023 08.45 EST

Why does Afghanistan matter? It matters to me because I fought there. [Lost friends there](#). From a remote base in Helmand, I served alongside Afghans who I first worried might kill us, but then learned to trust with my life.

Although that feels a long time ago and a long way away, I think about it every day.

Eighteen months ago, the [Taliban's victory](#) ended everything we were fighting for in Afghanistan. Ukraine then provided the perfect excuse to policymakers already eager to forget the trauma of that failure. Ukraine is colossally important – but a year on from Russia's invasion, we forget Afghanistan at our peril.

The first reason is simple morality. We have a responsibility to those suffering in [Afghanistan](#) – particularly those who risked all for us.

Second, having invested [£27.7bn and 457 lives](#), we should preserve what we can. Because despite all the waste, the last 20 years have seen [infant mortality halve](#) and education and infrastructure improve considerably. But the greatest argument is our own interest.

The risk is high. Afghanistan is already a greater source of instability and a renewed safe haven for international extremism. That includes the Pakistani [Taliban](#), who aim to take over that nuclear-armed state just as their brethren took over Afghanistan.

Our policy reflects too little of this. The official line is enduring commitment, and promises to move heaven and earth for those most in danger. But in practice Afghanistan is being swept under the carpet. That is most starkly evident in reported plans to slash our Afghan [aid budget](#), even as need soars.

At a personal level, two schemes – the Afghan citizens resettlement scheme (ACRS) and Afghan relocations and assistance policy (Arap) – were meant to help the thousands who didn't get out, despite the heroic [Operation Pitting](#) to evacuate British nationals and eligible Afghans. But they have been so hampered by conditions, bureaucracy and delay that they are effectively dysfunctional.



‘We should engage with Afghans. Yes, including the Taliban – within tight limits.’ Taliban fighters stand guard as female students arrive for entrance exams at Kabul University, October 2022. Photograph: Wakil Kohsar/AFP/Getty Images

The damning result is that, 18 months on, not a single person has left Afghanistan under ACRS under pathway 3, open to those at-risk individuals who worked for or were affiliated with the British government. Not one. Arap has relocated 12,000 people – but more than half left before the final UK withdrawal. Contrast that with the 220,000 UK visas so far granted to Ukrainians months after the invasion.

Afghans who served and sacrificed alongside me are desperate – from the soldier who rescued an injured British officer but has waited more than a year for a decision, to the captain with seven family members executed, who was rejected outright.

Both schemes increasingly feel like unobtainable prizes dangled in front of desperate people. But even if we wanted to act, what could we do?

First, we can carefully, quickly give sanctuary to those we worked with – and to our fair share of the many facing imminent danger even without a direct foreign link.

Second, ministers must maintain our aid and diplomacy. We should assess where aid might empower the Taliban, which might mean some difficult choices. But we must not walk away, and we should commission a credible, big-hitting policy lead – a David Miliband or Rory Stewart.

Third, we should engage with relevant powers – the US, but also China, Pakistan and others. I’m sceptical the Taliban will listen, but we need to avoid conflict-fuelling rivalries and build consensus that stability is in everyone’s interests.

Lastly, we should engage with Afghans. Yes, including the Taliban – within tight limits. The hard reality is that they currently appear incapable of meaningful compromise. We should always leave the door open, but we should be extremely careful about legitimising them until that changes.

That reflects a critical point. Amid all the upheaval, our strategic interest remains fundamentally unchanged: an Afghanistan, without a long-term foreign presence, that does not incubate instability or international terrorism.

Durably achieving that requires a pluralistic government that avoids large-scale kleptocracy or abuses – the key (though not only) drivers of conflict and collapse after 2001. A basic level of democratic power-sharing, justice and rights is not idealism: indeed, the failure to seriously prioritise them was the most important reason we failed.

That means we should convene scattered Afghan civil society and political actors, as well as building up capacity and institutions as far as possible, to lay the foundation for an eventual transition to democratic pluralism when the opportunity arises again.

That may sound like wishful thinking. It may indeed require longer-term horizons. But the Taliban are repeating many of the exclusive, repressive mistakes of those they defeated. They already face internal conflict and souring regional relations. They are also less monolithic than many assume. We should not fuel conflict, but we should not assume the new status quo will last or that compromise will always be impossible.

Above all, we should stop repeating mistakes ourselves – both the post-1992 abandonment and the disastrous short-termism and misplaced objectives after 2001. It may be a lot harder now than it once was, but the right path remains the same. It is time we finally took it.

There is an Afghan saying: “*bradar ba bradar, essobesh barabar*”. Roughly translated, it means: “Between friends, the account should be settled”.

We still owe a debt – not just to Afghans, but to ourselves. We must not forget it.

- Dan Jarvis MBE is Labour MP for Barnsley Central and a former major in the Parachute Regiment
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2023.03.09 - Around the world

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- [Fiji Prosecutors to charge former prime minister Frank Bainimarama with abuse of office](#)
- [Japan Arrests made after wave of ‘sushi terrorism’ upends restaurant industry](#)
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US Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell has been taken to hospital after a fall. Photograph: Michael Brochstein/SOPA Images/REX/Shutterstock

[Republicans](#)

Mitch McConnell in hospital with concussion after fall in Washington DC

Republican Senate leader ‘tripped at a hotel during a private dinner’ and is receiving treatment, according to a spokesperson

Guardian staff and agencies

Thu 9 Mar 2023 13.58 ESTFirst published on Thu 9 Mar 2023 00.36 EST

The Senate Republican leader, Mitch McConnell, was taken to hospital in Washington DC on Wednesday night after he tripped and fell at a hotel, a spokesperson said.

David Popp said McConnell, 81, fell “during a private dinner”.

On Thursday, Popp said McConnell suffered a concussion and would remain in hospital for “a few days” for observation and treatment.

“The leader is grateful to the medical professionals for their care and to his colleagues for their warm wishes,” Popp said.

McConnell is a survivor of childhood polio. In 2019, he tripped and fell at his home in Kentucky, suffering a shoulder fracture.

In 2020, he dismissed speculation over his health, prompted by pictures of his bruised and bandaged hands and bruising around his mouth.

He did not say what caused the bruising. Snopes, a fact-checking website, [said](#) guesses ranged from “Covid-19 to the possibility that [McConnell] has a vascular disease and/or is undergoing dialysis and is taking blood thinners ... a definitive answer is not yet available.”

The Senate has recently been without several members, due to illness.

The office of the California Democrat Dianne Feinstein, 89, said she was taken to hospital last week to be treated for shingles.

The Pennsylvania Democrat John Fetterman, 53, who suffered a stroke during his campaign last year, has been in hospital, receiving care for clinical depression.

At a hearing on the Ohio train toxic spill on Thursday, Fetterman submitted questions which were posed for him.

Such absences have proven a challenge for the Senate majority leader, Chuck Schumer, who must lead with a 51-49 majority.

On the Senate floor on Thursday, Schumer said he had called McConnell and spoken with his staff “to extend my prayers and well wishes”.

“I joined every single one of my colleagues in wishing leader McConnell a speedy and full recovery,” Schumer said.

The number two Republican, John Thune of South Dakota, was at the dinner with McConnell on Wednesday – in support of a conservative Super Pac fundraising committee, the Washington Post [reported](#).

Thune told reporters that McConnell delivered remarks “as usual”.

“Evidently it happened later in the evening,” said Thune, who had moved to another reception at the hotel when McConnell fell.

On Thursday at the Capitol, Thune said he had not yet spoken to McConnell.

“We have very limited information,” Thune said. “I’m sure we’ll get more.”

McConnell was elected to the Senate in 1984. He was majority leader from 2015 to 2021. Before his election to the Senate, he was judge-executive of Jefferson county, Kentucky, from 1978.

McConnell is the longest-serving leader in Senate history, but only the fourth-oldest member of the current chamber. Feinstein is the oldest senator, three months senior to her fellow 89-year-old Chuck Grassley, a Republican from Iowa. Bernie Sanders, the Vermont independent, is 81.

Proposals for [age and term limits](#) for public officials have featured in the race for the Republican presidential nomination.

Nikki Haley, the 51-year-old former governor of South Carolina, says candidates older than 75 should be subject to mental competency tests.

The candidate who dominates polling, former president Donald Trump, is 76.

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Fiji's former prime minister Frank Bainimarama outside a police station in Suva. He has pleaded not guilty to abuse of office. Photograph: Leon Lord/AFP/Getty Images

[Fiji](#)

Former Fiji prime minister Frank Bainimarama pleads not guilty to abuse of office

Ex-PM has been accused of stopping a police investigation into former staff members at a university

Guardian staff with agencies

Thu 9 Mar 2023 23.36 ESTFirst published on Thu 9 Mar 2023 01.15 EST

Former Fijian leader Frank Bainimarama has been released on bail and said he “served with integrity,” after pleading not guilty to abusing his power as prime minister by stopping a police investigation.

“I served as prime minister with integrity and with the interests of all Fijians at heart,” he told reporters outside a courtroom in Suva on Friday.

The charges, announced on Thursday by the country’s top prosecutor, relate to a complaint to police made by the University of the South Pacific in July 2019 regarding the activities of former university staff members.

The suspended police commissioner, Sitiveni Tukaituraga Qiliho, was also charged with abuse of office and pleaded not guilty. He was also bailed, according to local media.

“The former prime minister, Voreqe Bainimarama, and the suspended police commissioner, Sitiveni Qiliho, are alleged to have arbitrarily and in abuse of the authority of their respective offices, terminated an active police investigation,” chief prosecutor Christopher Pryde said.

“The police have also been requested to undertake further investigations into other matters arising from this case and more charges may be laid against other suspects in due course.”

The two men were taken in for questioning again on Thursday and spent the night in custody.

The development adds another twist to the volatile political situation on the Pacific nation.

Bainimarama, 68, had led Fiji since taking power in a bloodless coup in 2006. He was replaced as prime minister following a [closely contested general election last December](#).

In February, parliament [suspended Bainimarama](#) until 2026 after a speech in which he criticised his successor, Sitiveni Rabuka, and president Wiliame Katonivere.

In announcing the charges, Acting Assistant Police Commissioner Sakeo Raikaci said he also wanted to “clear the air” over claims by the public that the investigation had been prolonged and subject to interference by senior officers.

“I want to reiterate the independence of the investigation processes in place, as what is being witnessed is not an attempt to purposely delay the investigation or questioning processes, but this is the proper manner in which investigations are to be conducted,” Raikaci said in a statement.

With Associated Press

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Japanese police have arrested a number of people suspected of taking part in ‘sushi terrorism’ Photograph: robertharding/Alamy

[Japan](#)

Arrests made after wave of ‘sushi terrorism’ upends Japan’s restaurant industry

Reports of deliberately unhygienic behaviour have risen in recent weeks, including an incident in which a diner drank from a soy sauce bottle

Justin McCurry in Tokyo

Wed 8 Mar 2023 23.58 EST Last modified on Thu 9 Mar 2023 16.34 EST

Police in [Japan](#) have made several arrests after the country’s multibillion dollar revolving sushi industry was rocked by a spate of “[sushi terrorism](#)”, including a case in which a customer wiped saliva on food destined for other diners.

The Kyodo news agency reported on Thursday that three people – all part of the same group of diners – had been arrested on suspicion of forcible obstruction of business.

The arrests are thought to be the first involving customers suspected of “unhygienic and harassing behaviour,” Kyodo said, and come amid reports of a rising number of food-related crimes across Japan’s budget dining sector.

Among the number arrested is a 21-year-old who is alleged to have drank from a communal soy sauce bottle at a *kaitenzushi* restaurant run by Kura Sushi in the central city of Nagoya early last month.

Two other customers, a 19-year-old man and 15-year-old girl, were also arrested for allegedly helping share a 10-second clip that showed him placing a soy sauce bottle in his mouth.

Kura Sushi said it appreciated the police’s “swift response,” according to the SoraNews 24 website. The firm said in a statement: “Such inconsiderate action … shakes the foundations of the relationship of trust we have built with our customers, and we sincerely hope that broad knowledge that such actions are a crime will prevent others from engaging in such behaviour.”

The spate of hygiene incidents – including one in which a teenager licked the rim of a teacup before placing it back on a shelf, then wiped saliva on a plate of passing sushi – first came to light earlier this year, forcing restaurant chains to take drastic measures to attract nervous customers back through their doors.

This week Choshimaru, which operates outlets in the greater Tokyo area, said it was [halting its conveyor belts](#), weeks after Sushiro, the market leader, said its sushi would be delivered only via an “express lane” to customers who order via touch-screen devices, making it harder for other diners to tamper with food.

Kura Sushi said it would soon start using cameras equipped with artificial intelligence to monitor customers’ tables, despite complaints that it was

effectively putting its clientele under surveillance.

Kaitenzushi, which has grown into a ¥740bn (£4.5bn/\$5.4bn) industry since the first restaurant opened in Osaka in 1958, is in the midst of a drive to use cutting-edge technology to speed up the delivery of food to diners and address a chronic labour shortage.

The recent changes, however, look like taking sushi back to its analogue roots, with diners at hundreds of restaurants forced to wait for their orders to be delivered by hand.

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A streaker is tackled during last week's match between the Warriors and the Newcastle Knights in Wellington. Calls are growing in New Zealand for a crackdown on pitch invasions. Photograph: Elias Rodriguez/AAP

[New Zealand](#)

'Enough is enough': calls for pitch invasion crackdown in New Zealand with Fifa World Cup on horizon

More than a dozen fans attempted to invade the pitch in the final stages of Friday night's NRL match, resulting in two security guards being injured

Guardian staff and agencies
Thu 9 Mar 2023 00.15 EST

Calls are growing in [New Zealand](#) for a crackdown on streakers and pitch invaders, after two security guards were injured at an NRL match last week.

More than a dozen fans attempted to invade the pitch in the final stages of Friday night's [NRL](#) game between the Warriors and Newcastle Knights at Wellington's Sky Stadium.

"We need to act before there is an incident which changes the sport in New Zealand forever," Sky Stadium chief executive Shane Harmon said, adding that invasions were becoming more common, more organised and more dangerous.

"We had two security guards injured. One was transported to hospital with suspected concussion, and that's the point for me where enough is enough," he said.

"I don't believe that they see themselves putting people at risk but we've had issues with people jumping over the fence and breaking a leg," he said.

"It only takes one incident ... if that was a player at the weekend, it would be major, major news."

The call comes months before the Fifa Women's World Cup, jointly hosted by New Zealand and Australia, is due to kick off.

Football authorities in England [introduced automatic club bans](#) for pitch invaders last year after an increase in incidents following the lifting of lock down rules, with offenders also being reported to police.

Nick Sautner, the chief executive of Auckland's Eden Park stadium, said an incident could "potentially jeopardise the future of large-scale international events" in the country.

"We strongly discourage any crowd behaviour, including pitch invasions, which puts anyone at risk of being hurt," he told AAP.

"While Eden Park is known as the fortress, we certainly don't want to be installing perimeter fences around our turf to guarantee the safety of the players and staff."

Friday night's pitch invaders have been banned from Sky Stadium for two years and given formal warnings by police.

Under New Zealand law, fines of up to \$5,000 or three months' imprisonment are possible for pitch invaders – but only for designated major events such as the World Cup.

Harmon said he wanted to see a law change to make hefty fines, such as those levied in Australia, available to all sporting codes.

"I have no desire to see courts and police time clogged up by so many idiots acting inappropriately," he said.

"My understanding of speaking to venues in Australia is that the \$55,000 fine [as used in NSW] has been a major deterrent."

Sport minister Grant Robertson said he would consider proposals for change. "To hear two people were seriously hurt out of [the NRL game] is really shocking," he told AAP.

"I'm aware the fines in Australia are larger than here.

"I'm sure that's something that could be contemplated, but for the most part it works. So I don't want to catastrophise."

Pitch invasions and streaking have a long history across the world, with authorities on the subject keen to point out that unless a person is completely naked, they are invaders rather than streakers.

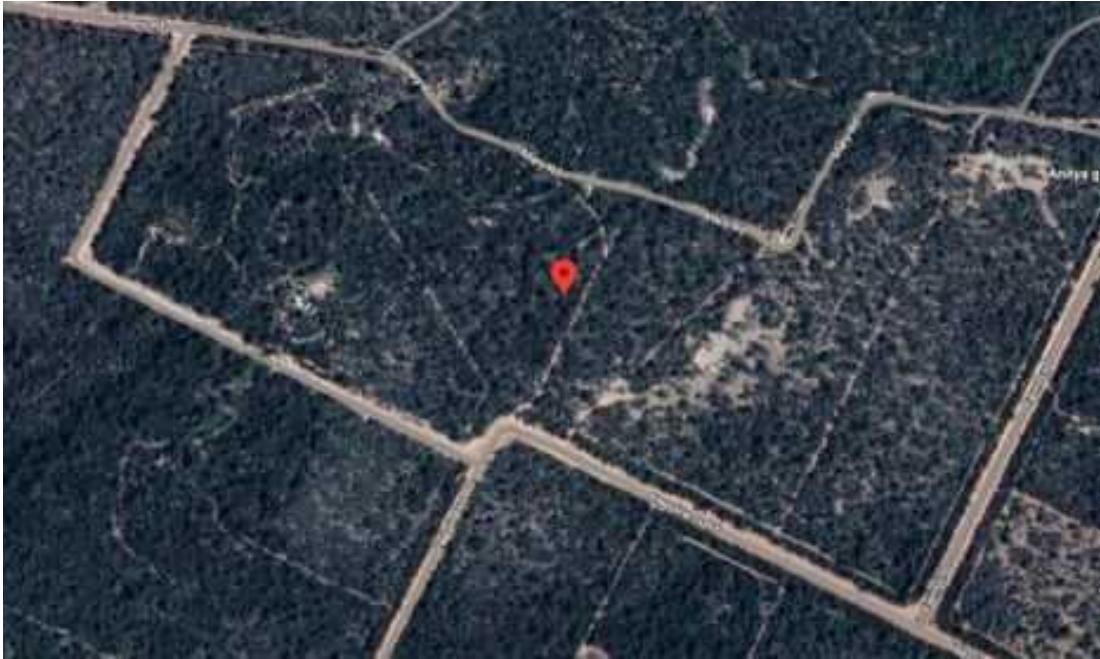
In New Zealand, the storming of a rugby pitch by anti-apartheid protesters during the 1981 Springboks tour was one of the most dramatic moments of the more than 200 demonstrations that took place during the South African team's three-month visit.

More recently, a bowls club manager said it was a sign that the sport had joined the mainstream after a streaker briefly interrupted play at the National Fours bowling tournament in Alexandra last month. "A world-first in Alexandra," Paul Jerrom [told the NZ Herald](#).

With Australian Associated Press

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/mar/09/enough-is-enough-calls-for-pitch-invasion-crackdown-in-new-zealand-with-fifa-world-cup-on-horizon>

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Pieces of Australia paid \$4,000 to secure a spot in the Academy Awards gift bag, which is sent by the company Distinctive Assets to the acting and directing nominees. Photograph: Google Maps

[Australia news](#)

Oscar nominees gifted 1 sq metre of Australian scrub – but they can't 'use' the land

Academy Awards gift bag includes 'a symbolic souvenir' of pieces of Queensland, which sell on company website for \$79.95

[Natasha May](#)

[@natasha_may](#)

Thu 9 Mar 2023 00.17 EST Last modified on Fri 10 Mar 2023 17.11 EST

Oscar nominees are set to receive 1 sq metre of land in outback Australia in their gift bags this year, but green organisations have questioned the

environmental mission of the company whose property they say is in the heart of a coal seam gas field.

Pieces of Australia is one of a number of brands to [pay \\$4,000 to secure a spot in the hamper](#) that is unaffiliated with the Academy but sent by the company Distinctive Assets to the acting and directing nominees.

The goodie bag will include Pieces of Australia's "Aussie Mate [Conservation](#) Packs", which offer a dedicated 1 sq metre of land on its "Envirocean Estate" in the Western Downs region of Queensland.

It describes it as a "flagship piece of Australian native land that we are proud to own and preserve".

The land parcels all come with a "certificate of land licence", but the terms and conditions go on to state that "you have purchased a symbolic souvenir ... of the land" and people who own a "pack" may not "take possession of the parcel; use the parcel; enter upon the parcel and/or the land without the licensor's express written consent".

The Aussie Mate pack is the most basic package the company offers, starting at \$79.95 for 1 sq metre, with other pack categories offering up to 10 sq metres for \$199.95 in the "Ultimate Bush Rangers Pack".

On Pieces of Australia's website, the coordinates listed lead to a property at 253 Happiness Road, Tara, which was last sold in October 2021 for \$35,000.

The Australian Conservation Foundation's lead investigator, Annica Schoo, said the location described "is in the heart of the Condabri coal seam gas field".

"The company states that it preserves land from development and is pursuing carbon sequestration opportunities through the [emissions reduction fund]. The available evidence suggests the land in question is being exploited for coal seam gas," Schoo said.

Realestate.com.au listed the lot size at 121,774 sq metres, meaning the profits generated could be close to \$2.5m if every sq km was sold.

The company Envirocean Pty Ltd, which controls the trading name Pieces of Australia, was registered in May 2022 to 29-year-old business developer Niels Chaneliere at an address in Bondi Beach.

Chaneliere said the land was ecological healthy Australian sub-tropical forest. The local council had provided him with a list of native species in the area, including koala, kangaroos, wallabies, birds, echidnas and red belly black snakes, he said.

On its website, Pieces of Australia acknowledges the Aboriginal people of the Barungam nation as the traditional custodians and owners of the land.

Chaneliere said he has yet to make contact with the traditional owners but has reached out to the Indigenous Carbon Industry Network (ICIN), who is yet to reply.

In a statement issued on Friday, ICIN said it was not aware of any approach from Chaneliere or Pieces of Australia. It also stated it had “no connection whatsoever to Pascha Pty Ltd, Envirocean, Distinctive Assets or the brands referred to in connection to the Oscars ‘goodie bag’ – including Pieces of Australia or the Aussie Mate Conservation Pack.”

Lash Fary, the founder of Distinctive Assets, said when the Oscars goodie bags last year gave plots of Scottish land from highland titles, which made each recipient a lord or lady, “it was a big hit and very well received, especially by the media”.

“Based on the massive press exposure, we were approached by Pieces of Australia about their unique ‘Aussie Mate’ program,” Fary said.

“We thought it was a unique and fun gift and also loved the company’s intention of making a positive environmental impact, so it was an easy yes for us,” she said.

The company states two trees will be planted with every order through one of its partners, as part of its mission “to contribute to the preservation and protection of native and underdeveloped Australian land from being exploited”.

The company's website shows the registered charity ReForest Now as the sole partner.

Kallen Marecic from ReForest Now said Pieces of Australia is a new partner and has committed to funding the planting of 20 native rainforest trees in northern NSW every month.

Marecic confirmed Pieces of Australia had donated more than \$400 to date to ReForest Now, with its first trees expected to be planted this week.

Chaneliere said the company is “for-profit but with an impact that gives back to non-profit”.

A title search of the “Envirocean Estate” in [Queensland](#) confirms the parcel of land is owned by a vehicle called Pascha Pty Ltd.

Pascha Pty Ltd shares the same address as Envirocean and also lists Chaneliere family members as directors.

Chaneliere said there is a commercial lease agreement between the trust fund and his company so that the company will eventually buy back the land in its entirety.

Schoo said Pascha Pty Ltd is a family company in NSW, which from publicly available information, “appears to have experience in industrial baking, homewares and marketing, not conservation”.

“Anyone who cares about nature conservation and is considering engaging with Pieces of Australia should do some research and assess for themselves whether this is a good use of their money,” Schoo said.

“As the government continues to create markets in carbon and biodiversity, we are likely to see more and more companies making claims about purported gains for nature and the climate.

The Wilderness Society manager of policy and strategy, Tim Beshara, was also sceptical about the impact the company's packs can have given the scale of Australia's environmental challenges.

“In Queensland alone, about half a million hectares of bushland are bulldozed every year. And overall, the conservation and restoration task is better represented in millions of sq km rather than in hectares or sq metres,” Beshara said.

“This really highlights that the scale of Australia’s environmental challenges can’t be solved without major investment from government. But for too long the Australian government has been holding back their investment in nature in the hope that philanthropy or a voluntary nature repair market will save us, and this really shows how fanciful that notion is.”

The conservation packs also include a digital handbook that includes information about “Australia’s current environmental issues, the local wildlife and fauna specific to the area, Aboriginal traditional land management & care”.

Chaneliere said \$5 per order was also donated to a koala conservation organisation.

Its website outlines a “development roadmap” that includes buying more land around Australia and installing webcams and audio equipment across the estate “to heighten the engagement for members who purchase Pieces of Australia … This deepens your connection with the land.”

The roadmap also states “in line with the Australian emissions reduction fund, we are looking into creating carbon sequestration projects to further assist reducing carbon dioxide in the air by reforesting cleared land”.

Pieces of Australia was contacted for comment.

This story was updated on 10 March 2023 to add a statement from the Indigenous Carbon Industry Network (ICAN). ICIN refute that Pieces of Australia contacted it and say they have no affiliation with the organisation.

Additional reporting by Sian Cain and Jonathan Barrett.

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Headlines tuesday 7 march 2023

- [Immigration Suella Braverman: small boats plan will push boundaries of international law](#)
- [Live Cabinet and MPs to hear details of small boats bill that has ‘pushed boundaries of international law’](#)
- [Immigration Forty-three times the Conservatives tried \(and failed\) to tackle Channel crossings](#)
- [Explained Small boats: what is Rishi Sunak’s plan, and how will it work?](#)



People are helped ashore from an RNLI lifeboat at a beach in Dungeness, Kent, after being rescued while crossing the Channel. Photograph: Ben Stansall/AFP/Getty Images

[Immigration and asylum](#)

Suella Braverman: small boats plan will push boundaries of international law

Rishi Sunak says bill will ‘take back control of our borders’ but critics argue the proposals are unworkable

- [UK politics live – latest news updates](#)

[Rajeev Syal](#) and [Peter Walker](#)

Tue 7 Mar 2023 07.39 ESTFirst published on Tue 7 Mar 2023 03.46 EST

Suella Braverman has admitted the government is attempting to push “the boundaries of international law” with legislation aimed at reducing small boat crossings in the Channel.

The law, to be disclosed to MPs at lunchtime on Tuesday, is expected to place a legal duty on the home secretary to detain and remove nearly all asylum seekers who arrive “irregularly” such as via small boats in the Channel.

The law will be backdated to allow the removal of anyone who reaches the UK from the moment the home secretary speaks to MPs, in an acknowledgment that refugees may try to cross before the law is passed.

On Monday night [Rishi Sunak](#) argued that his new bill, which is key to one of his five priorities for his premiership, will “take back control of our borders, once and for all”.

There will be constraints on the rights of migrants to use a judicial review to challenge decisions, as ministers attempt to bypass the legal wrangles that have prevented the implementation of plans to send people to Rwanda.

But critics including former Tory ministers, Labour and refugee charities have warned the proposals are unworkable and will leave thousands of people in limbo by banning them from ever claiming British citizenship again.

There are few returns agreements with other countries in place, despite more than 80,000 people expected to arrive in the UK via small boats this year. There is at present limited capacity to detain several thousand asylum seekers.

Despite plans such as forcibly removing asylum seekers to Rwanda being mired in legal challenges, ministers were expected to approach the limits of the European convention on human rights with the new legislation.

There is expected to be an admission that the legislation may not be compliant with the convention, although [Home Office](#) sources believe it does accord with international law.

Writing in the [Daily Telegraph](#), Braverman said: “We must stop the boats and that’s what our bill will do. No more sticking plasters or shying away

from the difficult decisions.

“Myself and the prime minister have been working tirelessly to ensure we have a bill that works – we’ve pushed the boundaries of international law to solve this crisis.

“If you come here illegally it must be that you cannot stay.”

Sunak told a cabinet meeting on Tuesday morning that the new law was “tough, fair and necessary action”, according to an official readout. Speaking later, Sunak’s official spokesperson said the expectation was that elements of the plan were likely to be challenged in the courts.

While there is a parallel pledge to create new legal asylum routes into the UK, Sunak’s spokesperson said these would only begin “once we have stopped the boats”, to mitigate the pressures on local authorities and others dealing with arrivals.

“Opening up more, whilst at a time not having clear sight on how many will come here illegally is, we do not think, a sustainable approach,” he said.

A duty will be placed on the home secretary to remove “as soon as reasonably practicable” anyone who arrives on a small boat, either to Rwanda or a “safe third country”.

Channel crossings

Arrivals will be prevented from claiming asylum while in the UK, with plans also to ban them from returning once removed.

Sunak spoke to Rwanda’s president, Paul Kagame, on Monday night before unveiling the proposed law, and promised to continue working with him to ensure their stalled project works.

The government has paid more than £140m to Rwanda but no flights forcibly carrying people to the capital, Kigali, have taken off because of legal challenges.

A Downing Street spokesperson said: “The leaders committed to continue working together to ensure this important partnership is delivered successfully.”

The prime minister will meet France’s president, Emmanuel Macron, on Friday to discuss further cooperation that will be required to reduce boat crossings.

Sunak admitted voters “have heard promises before” without seeing results, but insisted his legislation “will mean that those who come here on small boats can’t claim asylum here”.

He wrote in [the Sun](#): “This new law will send a clear signal that if you come to this country illegally, you will be swiftly removed.”

The Immigration Services Union representing border staff said the plans were “quite confusing” and did not seem possible without the Rwanda policy functioning.

Lucy Moreton, the union’s professional officer, also suggested on BBC Radio 4’s Today programme that smuggling gangs would tell people “quick, cross now before anything changes”, risking an increase in the number of crossings.

The Labour leader, Keir Starmer, [raised doubts about the legality and feasibility of the plans](#) after the last attempt failed “to get us very far”.

The prime minister has made “stopping the boats” one of his five priorities and has been under pressure to tackle the issue amid dire polling figures for the Tories.

Almost 3,000 people have made unauthorised crossings of the Channel already this year.

The Refugee Council chief executive, Enver Solomon, said the plans “shatter the UK’s longstanding commitment under the UN convention to give people a fair hearing regardless of the path they have taken to reach our shores”.

He added: “The government’s flawed legislation will not stop the boats but result in tens of thousands locked up in detention at huge cost, permanently in limbo and being treated as criminals simply for seeking refuge.

“It’s unworkable, costly and won’t stop the boats.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/mar/07/suella-braverman-small-boats-plan-push-boundaries-international-law-rishi-sunak>

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Politics live with Andrew Sparrow**Politics**

UN refugee agency ‘profoundly concerned’ by UK’s illegal migration bill saying it amounts to an asylum ban – as it happened

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A group of people are brought in to Dover, Kent, onboard a Border Force vessel after a small boat incident in the Channel this week. Photograph: Gareth Fuller/PA

[Immigration and asylum](#)

Forty-three times the Conservatives tried (and failed) to tackle Channel crossings

From jetski patrols to Rwanda deportations, the Tories have not been short of schemes to deter small boats

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[Archie Bland](#)

Tue 7 Mar 2023 03.08 EST Last modified on Wed 8 Mar 2023 05.09 EST

On Tuesday, Rishi Sunak and Suella Braverman [will announce a new plan](#) to deal with the small boats crisis. But from using the navy to threatening

asylum seekers with detention in Moldova to sending jetskis on patrol, the Conservatives have not been short of schemes to deter those who plan to cross the Channel since the issue came to the top of the agenda in the last weeks of 2018. Here's a guide to some of them.

2019: 1,843 people arrive by small boat crossings

January: Deploy more Border Force ships, work with France

The home secretary, Sajid Javid, [promises two extra Border Force cutters](#) to patrol the Channel, bringing the total to five. On a visit to Dover, [Javid says](#): “If you do somehow make it to the UK, we will do everything we can to make sure that you are often not successful.” This will become familiar. Meanwhile, France and the UK [agree a coordinated plan](#) to reduce crossings with more French surveillance and security on the coastline. This will also become familiar.

August: Work with France, warn people making the crossing: ‘We will send you back’

Boris Johnson [tells those attempting to cross](#): “We will send you back … If you come illegally, you are an illegal migrant.” Meanwhile, the new home secretary, Priti Patel, [holds new talks](#) with her French counterpart.

2020: 8,466 people arrive by small boat crossings

July: Work with France, invest more in border security, create new ‘intelligence cell’

Priti Patel [meets](#) the French interior minister, Gérald Darmanin; the pair “reaffirm their shared commitment to returning boats in the Channel to France”. They announce a “joint intelligence cell, which will crack down on the gangs”. A £705m investment in borders before Brexit [is announced](#), including new money for security.

August: Use the navy to force boats back, appoint a new ‘clandestine Channel threat commander’

Patel tells MPs she intends to use the navy to block crossings before boats can enter British waters. A defence official calls the idea “completely potty”, a view it retains 18 months later. She also appoints Dan O’Mahoney as clandestine Channel threat commander, tasking him with making France strengthen enforcement measures.

September: House asylum seekers in barracks, patrol on jet skis, send asylum seekers to Moldova or Papua New Guinea

The local MP Damian Collins reveals that people who have made the crossing will be housed in a former barracks near Folkestone in Kent. Meanwhile, the Home Office sets out plans to buy two jet skis to help with patrols (f). The former Border Force head Tony Smith warns that such plans are “highly dangerous”.

Later in September, the Guardian reveals that plans are under consideration to send asylum seekers to third countries for processing, with options including Moldova, Morocco and Papua New Guinea. This eventually becomes the Rwanda plan. The Home Office is already warning of the “significant” legal, diplomatic and practical obstacles to the idea.

October: Be ‘firm and fair’, stop ‘endless legal claims’

In her party conference speech, Patel says she will make it harder to appeal against asylum decisions and “expedite the removal of those who have no legitimate claim for protection”. She bemoans “decades of inaction by successive governments”.

'It's just more chaos': Tory plan to limit boat crossings makes things worse, warns Labour – video

November: Prosecute asylum seekers for steering dinghies, work with France

It emerges that new Crown Prosecution Service guidance allows asylum seekers to be prosecuted for steering dinghies as they make the crossing, even if they have no links to organised crime groups. Campaigners criticise the government for describing those steering the boats with no financial

benefit as “people smugglers”. Meanwhile, the UK and France [sign an agreement](#), agree to double French police patrols on the coastline, and promise to make the crossing unviable.

December: Facebook ads to warn would-be migrants against making the crossing, deny entry to anyone passing through safe third country

O’Mahoney announces a “[social media blitz](#)” of ads geo-targeted on the French coastline that will warn people they risk prosecution for steering boats. He says the government is “determined to make this route completely unviable”. [It later emerges](#) that three months’ worth of ads cost £90,000. Meanwhile, immigration rules are [quietly changed](#) to bar anyone who has travelled through a safe third country – such as France – from claiming asylum. There are immediate warnings that this is against international law, and enforced returns have since fallen.

2021: 28,526 people arrive by small boat crossings



People picked up at sea, after attempting to cross the Channel, are helped ashore from an RNLI lifeboat at Dungeness on the south-east coast of England. Photograph: Ben Stansall/AFP/Getty Images

March: Reduce rights for those crossing the Channel

Details of a consultation on Patel's immigration plan reveal that those deemed to have arrived in the UK illegally will not have the same rights as those taking legal routes (of which there are very few for the vast majority of potential asylum seekers). Patel also proposes to speed up removals.

June: Ban social media posts ‘glamourising’ crossings

Patel tells social media companies they will face heavy fines if they do not remove clips that “promote and even glamourise these lethal crossings”. No fines have yet been levied.

July: Offshore centres for asylum seekers, new criminal charges, block visas for countries refusing to take back asylum seekers, bone scanners to detect age of asylum applicants, work with France

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After the consultation, Patel introduces the nationality and borders bill and sets out a batch of measures that she calls the “biggest overhaul of the UK’s asylum system in decades”. Later that month, she agrees another £55m to fund French border patrols.

August: Publish a new advice website

The Home Office is censured for producing an “unethical website” that gives asylum seekers advice such as: “It is safer and easier to apply for asylum in the country you’re in now” – without making it clear that the government is behind it.

November: New policy review, work with France, annoy France

As the bill makes its way through parliament, an “exasperated” Johnson orders a new review to find novel ways of cutting the number of crossings. Meanwhile, France warns it will not be a “punchbag” for British politicians. But France and the UK agree to pursue an exciting new strategy to “prevent 100% of crossings”. The UK publishes a five-point plan for talks on Twitter instead of communicating privately with France, and Patel is disinvited from further talks.

December: Make asylum seekers wear tags on arrival in the UK, ask small boats to contact France for rescue

Reports emerge suggesting that Patel will set out a plan to make working-age people wear tags, thereby making it harder for them to seek employment in the UK. This follows reports that the British coastguard is regularly telling passengers on stricken small boats to contact France instead.

2022: 45,756 people arrive by small boat crossings

April: Send asylum seekers to Rwanda

The government sets out its plan to send tens of thousands of unauthorised migrants to Rwanda for processing. Almost a year later, nobody has yet been sent, and the plans remain on hold. But Sunak and Liz Truss say during their respective Conservative leadership campaigns that they want more Rwanda-style deals.

September: New plan to restart ‘pushbacks’ of small boats, aim to reduce crossings to zero, tell civil servants to watch more reality TV

Documents released under freedom of information laws reveal the government wants to restore its previous policy of forcing those crossing to

go back to France. Meanwhile, the new home secretary, Braverman, causes consternation in the Home Office by saying she wants to reduce the number of crossings to zero. She also tells officials to watch more “trashy TV” for the good of their mental health.

October: Work with France, blame asylum seekers

After Braverman’s notorious comment comparing those making the crossing to an “invasion”, she signs a £63m deal with France to increase patrols. It is the fourth such deal in three years. Sunak says he is “confident” numbers will be reduced. Later, when Braverman is asked about governmental failings over the crisis at the Manston processing centre, she says: “It’s the people who are breaking our rules … that’s who’s at fault.”

December: Blame civil servants

Braverman tells a committee of MPs that the backlog of asylum claims is the result of civil servants’ failure to work quickly enough. “Our asylum case-working team do a great job but their productivity, frankly, is too low,” she says.

2023: 2,950 people arrive by small boat crossings so far

January: Keep people-smugglers off social media, monitor asylum seekers, suggest children could be sent to Rwanda

After familiar suggestions on social media and an update of ankle tags to GPS tracking devices, Robert Jenrick, an immigration minister, suggests ruling out sending families to Rwanda could encourage traffickers to bring them across the Channel instead of single males. “There’s not necessarily a bar to families being removed to Rwanda,” he says.

February: Leave the European convention on human rights (ECHR), use questionnaires to clear asylum backlog

The Guardian reports that several ministers want to leave the ECHR, which is blamed for the failure of the Rwanda scheme. Sunak is reported to be

considering the move. Meanwhile, plans to replace official interviews for asylum seekers with questionnaires – which will leave claimants risking refusal if they do not reply in English within 20 days – prompt the backbencher Bob Neill to ask: “If Conservatives don’t believe in the rule of law, what do we believe in? Are we going to put ourselves in the same company as Russia and Belarus?”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/mar/07/conservatives-channel-crossings-small-boats-tories-rwanda-deportation>

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Braverman unveils small boats bill to 'swiftly remove' arrivals – video

[**Immigration and asylum**](#)

[**Explainer**](#)

Small boats: what is Rishi Sunak's plan, and how will it work?

The government is expected to unveil legislation on asylum seekers this week. Here's a guide to what we know so far

[Emine Sinmaz](#)

[@Emine_Sinmaz](#)

Sun 5 Mar 2023 11.04 ESTLast modified on Tue 7 Mar 2023 11.04 EST

The prime minister, [Rishi Sunak](#), is to announce laws stopping people entering the UK on small boats from claiming asylum. Details on the legislation, which is expected to be published on Tuesday, are scarce.

What do we know about the legislation?

It is expected to make asylum claims from those who travel to the UK on small boats inadmissible. It would see a duty placed on the home secretary, [Suella Braverman](#), to remove “as soon as reasonably practicable” – to Rwanda or a “safe third country” – anyone who arrives on a small boat.

How would it work?

The government appears to believe it has found a way round aspects of the European convention on human rights, which provides the ultimate legal authority for most deportation challenges. The Mail On Sunday reported that a clause in the new bill would apply a “rights brake”, but there are no details as yet on how this would get around the UK's obligations under the ECHR.

What happens to those who arrive by small boats?

They will be prevented from claiming asylum while in the UK, and there are plans also to ban them from returning once removed. Asylum seekers currently have the right to remain in the country to have their cases heard.

When will the plans be announced?

Braverman is expected to unveil the new law, provisionally called the illegal migration bill, to parliament on Tuesday.

More details are expected on Friday when Braverman and Sunak head to France for a summit with the French president, Emmanuel Macron, where the issue of small boats will be on the agenda.

What do the critics say?

Campaigners have already hit out at the plans. Sonya Sceats, chief executive at Freedom from Torture, called the proposals “vindictive and dysfunctional”. “This legislation will do nothing to reduce the number of deaths in the Channel or the chaos and incompetence that blights our asylum system, nor will it guarantee sanctuary for those who need it,” she said.

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Christina Marriott, executive director of strategy at the Red Cross, called the plans “extremely concerning”. “The [Home Office](#) knows from its own research that this will also do little to prevent people risking their lives to seek safety,” she said.

What happened to the Rwanda asylum plan?

The government’s scheme has been mired in legal challenges, and so far no flights carrying migrants to the Rwandan capital Kigali have departed. The first deportation flight, due to take off on 14 June 2022, was grounded and individuals removed. The high court ruled in December that the scheme was legal, but the decision is facing further challenges in the courts.

What do the statistics show?

The latest Home Office figures show that 2,950 migrants crossed the Channel on small boats this year. In 2022, more than 45,000 people arrived in the UK that way compared with 28,000 the year before. More than 160,000 people in the UK are waiting for decisions on their applications for asylum.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/mar/05/small-boats-rishi-sunak-plan-how-will-it-work>

2023.03.07 - Spotlight

- Money ‘Barclays said I was dead, so my pension was stopped and I was left isolated’
- The romcom effect Will a new movie gentrify Peckham as Richard Curtis gentrified Notting Hill?
- 'I know where the bodies are buried' One woman's mission to change how the police investigate rape
- 'If only my tastebuds could paint' How prison food art reveals life inside
- ‘The mince is shocking’ The truth about prison food



The Barclays logo outside a branch of the bank. Roper was told by staff that she was recorded as dead. Photograph: Toby Melville/Reuters

[Banks and building societies](#)

Woman, 91, loses account and pension after Barclays declares her dead

Bank apologises after error results in elderly woman having account closed and phone and energy cut off

[Anna Tims](#)

Tue 7 Mar 2023 05.14 ESTFirst published on Tue 7 Mar 2023 04.53 EST

An elderly woman was cut off from her money for three months and lost her phone line and energy supply when a banking error by [Barclays](#) marked her as deceased.

Ninety-one-year-old Marjorie Roper* discovered that her pension and benefits payments had been stopped and her direct debits cancelled after a Barclays agent recorded that she had died and closed her account.

The nightmare began in November when Roper informed Barclays that her husband had died. She asked for his name to be removed from their joint account and replaced with that of her daughter, Mary*, who has third-party access to her account. Instead, she was marked as deceased and the account was closed. Her pension and benefit payments were returned to the Department for Work and Pensions and her direct debits were stopped.

She discovered the mistake when she returned from a family Christmas to find her phone line and energy supply had been cut off and a sheaf of letters from companies and the council demanding payment.

Roper made two trips to her nearest Barclays branch and was told on both occasions by staff that she was recorded as dead. The bank refused to discuss the case with her daughter because her third-party authority had been revoked when the account was closed.

“The bank has blocked my mother’s income and it cut off her only means of contacting the outside world,” Mary Roper said. “For the last month she’s been buying food with the £250 she had left in cash and is terrified she’ll run out. To date Barclays has not responded to our demands they reinstate and claim her backdated pension payments.”

The account was eventually reopened and her payments restored and backdated after the Guardian intervened. Her phone line and energy supply had already been restored after Roper called her providers to explain.

A Barclays spokesperson said: “We apologise unreservedly for the distress and inconvenience this has caused to our loyal customer. We can confirm that the direct debits have been reinstated, the state pension payments have been received, the account has been amended into joint names and a gesture of goodwill for the disruption caused has been offered.”

Roper’s ordeal highlights the obstacles facing vulnerable customers who do not have access to online banking. A Barclays customer for 65 years, she is unable to cope with the automated menus on the customer service phone line and, since her local branch closed, she is forced to take two buses to the next town to withdraw money and manage her account.

The only available appointment to request the account change was at a branch 23 miles away where staff did not know her. She brought the required documents, but the bank refused to proceed with the requested name change because she could not recall her little-used pin number. She was told her to make another appointment when she had remembered her pin.

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“My mother is a vulnerable 91-year-old woman who has been treated without any concern for her safety, no recognition of her age or mobility issues or banking preferences,” Mary Roper said. “She and Dad had been happily married for 68 years and taking his name off the accounts was already an upsetting challenge. She feels that her phone could be cut off again without notice and this makes her feel extremely anxious.”

The situation might not have arisen if bank staff had made better provision for Roper’s needs, according to James Daley, the managing director of the campaign group Fairer Finance. “There is still a significant number of people who rely on face to face banking because they don’t feel confident using internet, phones or ATMs,” he said.

“Banks that are planning branch closures need to recognise that if customers are prepared to take two buses to their branch, that service must be essential,

and they need to accommodate customers who may not be familiar with security codes, logins and pins.”

**Names have been changed*

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Meet cute ... David Jonsson and Vivian Oparah in Rye Lane. Photograph: Chris Harris/20th Century Studios

[Movies](#)

The romcom effect: will a new movie gentrify Peckham as Richard Curtis

gentrified Notting Hill?

The likable new release Rye Lane bills itself as ‘a love letter to south London’. But, like Amélie in Montmartre, could it end up damaging the place it sets out to celebrate?



[Steve Rose](#)

[@steverose7](#)

Tue 7 Mar 2023 01.00 EST Last modified on Wed 8 Mar 2023 05.33 EST

It's always fun to see an area you know in a movie, so as a Peckham local, the new romcom [Rye Lane](#) is literally up my street. It is named after the bustling main thoroughfare of our south London neighbourhood, which is in the early stages of gentrification. African groceries and pound shops jostle up against new cocktail bars and art galleries. Go back 20 years and all Peckham was known for was working-class wheeler-dealing – largely thanks to [Only Fools and Horses](#) – and violent crime. Even our MP, Harriet Harman, wore a stab vest when she visited in 2008. Today, Peckham is a hip, popular destination, described by the New York Times as “the beating heart of London’s most dynamic art scene”. And now we’ve got our own romcom, too.

Rye Lane the movie is a very likable variation on a very familiar formula, making Rye Lane the place look somehow better and brighter on screen than in real life. Everything pops with colour as if it's had a new coat of paint. There's an absence of homeless people, drunk people, noisy schoolkids, traffic jams. Instead, there are quirky characters, like a grey-haired rhinestone cowboy who body-pops surreally across Rye Lane market as our lovestruck couple (David Jonsson and Vivian Oparah) stroll through it. When I walked through the same market the other day, the local colour took the form of a shouting match between rival stallholders.

Is the romcom a cause for celebration, though, or more of a warning sign? Director Raine Allen-Miller describes her film as “a love letter to south London”, but a love letter can also be a marketing brochure. From [London](#) to Paris to New York, edgy, up-and-coming neighbourhoods form the perfect setting for movies about young people falling in love, but by drawing attention to these areas, these films risk accelerating the commercialisation that so often ends up destroying them.



Blooming marvellous ... Hugh Grant in a beautified Notting Hill.
Photograph: Clive Coote/Polygram

A cautionary precedent is [Notting Hill](#), released in 1999, and the gentrification romcom of its day. The west London neighbourhood, historically populated by immigrants, mainly from the Caribbean, has long been at the heart of black British identity. But by the time of the film, it had become a fashionable, pricey destination, popular with post-Cool Britannia types such as Madonna, Damon Albarn and David Cameron (and the screenwriter of the film, [Richard Curtis](#)). The kind of place where a foppish independent bookstore-owner (played by Hugh Grant, let's say) might conceivably bump into an American film star (like Julia Roberts) and spill his juice over her.

The film was shot on location in Notting Hill, but observers noticed how its streets were suspiciously free of black people, and instead “wholly populated with mindless, twittering, wittering, lily-white rich”, as [writer China Miéville put it](#). Miéville, who was an extra in the movie (and is white), described it as “a dystopian image of contemporary London after the triumphant rise of some unseen fascist authority”.

This is how gentrification operates: a relatively cheap area attracts immigrants and artists who bring it to life, which in turn attracts wealthier people looking to live in a lively area. This serves to raise rents and property values, pricing out the very people who made the area so lively in the first place. Before you know it, the artists’ studios are being converted into flats, the nail salon has become a craft sake brewery, and film crews are scouting locations for a movie that attracts even more people, making the area even less affordable.

It has happened before in London: Renée Zellweger’s Bridget Jones lived in Borough – once a covered food market and little else; now a gastronomic hotspot and home to the Shard’s multimillion-pound apartments. It happened in Berlin, where *Keinohrhasen* (Rabbit Without Ears) became a huge domestic hit in 2007, just as the city was throwing off its post-Wall edginess and property prices were starting to rocket.



A spruced-up Montmartre ... Audrey Tautou in *Amélie*. Photograph: Moviestore Collection/Alamy

And it happened in Montmartre – formerly a rundown but proudly bohemian area of Paris favoured by artists and jazz musicians. In 2001, along came [Amélie](#), with Audrey Tautou flitting delightfully through a *vie en rose*-tinted version of the neighbourhood, backed by accordion music. Again, director Jean-Pierre Jeunet tarted the place up somewhat, removing graffiti and parked cars, and wringing as much retro colour out of his images as film stocks would permit. And again, the film was criticised for the lack of ethnic diversity seen around the area.

“It was already changing, but the success of this movie accelerated it,” says Albain, a writer who has lived in Montmartre since the 90s. “I wouldn’t say it was a shitty area before, but it wasn’t all clean and tidy like it is now. In the 70s and 80s, it was so cheap, even the broke artists could buy places here. But the prices have multiplied by 10 times since then, so those people either sold up or couldn’t afford to live here. A new generation has brought new kinds of shops – clothes boutiques and food shops.” Plus expat foreigners seeking to live out the *Amélie* fantasy and hordes of tourists, who can now take *Amélie*-themed walking tours.

The place where gentrification and the romcom really hit it off was New York City in the 1980s. After the urban decay and white flight of the 1970s, the city was back on the up, a new demographic moving in. As always, it seems, it started with the artists. Cheap rents on the Lower East Side attracted the Keith Haring, Jean-Michel Basquiat generation, plus a coterie of new wave musicians, punks, students, queer people, bohemians.



‘A town that existed in black and white’ ... Woody Allen and Diane Keaton in Manhattan. Photograph: Ronald Grant

That drew the curiosity of outsiders, and movie studios. For most of the 1980s, New York seemed to be the only place in America where anyone fell in love, judging by the likes of *Splash*, *Working Girl*, *Moonstruck*, *Something Wild*, *Desperately Seeking Susan* (an intriguing semi-queer variation), and *When Harry Met Sally*. Not to mention Woody Allen, whose 1979 movie *Manhattan* begins with a self-aware voiceover: “He adored New York City ... he romanticised it out of all proportion, a town that existed in black and white, and pulsated to the great tunes of George Gershwin.”

In step with gentrification, these movies often processed edgy urban culture into mainstream commodity. Academic Johan Andersson calls it “gentrification by genre”. In his essay of the same name, he notes how the romantic comedy “can bring the frequently downplayed libidinous aspect of

gentrification to the fore". No longer a place of fear and anxiety, downtown New York became a place of youth, sex and alternative culture, of potential adventure, upward mobility, social intermixing, random encounters – romance.

It goes without saying that in almost all these films, the central characters are all white. And as with Notting Hill or Amélie, people of colour are generally reduced to the status of background set dressing. Only a few filmmakers addressed gentrification from the opposite end of the telescope, including John Singleton (Laurence Fishburne gives a forceful lecture on the gentrification of Los Angeles in [Boyz N the Hood](#)) and Spike Lee, whose films of the late 80s and early 90s effectively chronicle the gentrification of his beloved Brooklyn. It's there in [Do the Right Thing](#): "Who told you to buy a brownstone on *my* block, in *my* neighbourhood, on *my* side of the street?" [Giancarlo Esposito](#) demands of the white proto-hipster who has just run over his brand new Air Jordans. "What do you want to live in a black neighbourhood for anyway? Motherfuck gentrification!" (The white hipster turns out to have been born in Brooklyn.) Ironically, despite its grim conclusion, Do the Right Thing still made Brooklyn look like an attractive place to live. Other young, white hipsters would follow.

Rye Lane shares something with Lee's work, in that it is centred on two people of colour who have grown up in the area (which, according to 2017 data, is [71% black, Asian and minority ethnic](#)). There are few white characters in the film at all and, for a change, it's their turn to be the window-dressing, like the body-popping cowboy in Rye Lane market. There is also a double take-inducing cameo by a certain romcom A-lister (no spoilers).



Ground zero of gentrification ... Peckham Levels. Photograph: Simon Turner/Alamy

And once again in Rye Lane, it's the artists who are in the vanguard. The obligatory "meet cute" takes place at an exhibition opening at Peckham Levels, a former multi-storey car park that now houses a gallery. It could be seen as the ground zero of the district's gentrification. The car park was built in the 1980s to serve the Sainsbury's supermarket next door, which later closed (it is now the beloved Peckham Plex cinema). It was about to be knocked down, but in 2007 a non-profit group named Bold Tendencies campaigned to turn the top floors of the disused structure into an art space, plus a rooftop bar – Frank's – with a spectacular view over London. The lower floors are now studios, workspaces, bars and a food court. Combined with the neighbouring [Bussey Building](#), a converted 19th-century factory housing a similar mix, it has become an appropriately gritty cultural and leisure hub.

"When we first started working in Peckham, everybody who came talked about Only Fools and Horses," says [Sven Mündner](#), regeneration expert and lecturer in spatial practices at Central Saint Martins school of art, who co-founded Bold Tendencies. "There wasn't a single journalist that didn't make the reference." Peckham's renaissance didn't quite come out of nowhere, he says. "The car park changed something, absolutely, but it also coincided

with the opening of the overground [a new rail line connecting south and central London, which opened in 2012]. And there was an underlying artistic community anyway. Peckham was never *not* a place where things happened.” Situated between two major art schools, Camberwell and Goldsmiths, the area has always been home to students and artists, including [Antony Gormley](#), who designed the distinctive bollards (local people call them the butt plugs).

It has changed for the better. I don’t want to move out of the area but I can’t afford to buy a house

What do [Peckham](#) residents think of all this? When I asked around on the streets, most were delighted to see their area celebrated on film, and were happy that it had changed for the better.

“In the 80s, it wasn’t like this,” says Denise, a market stallholder in her 60s, originally from Guyana. “You used to get a lot of killing and stabbing. At certain times you never used to want to be on the street. Now you can walk free.”

Obi, an education worker in his 30s who grew up there, agrees: “We had friends from other areas whose parents wouldn’t allow them to come to Peckham. It has changed for the better. Some people would call it gentrification, but gentrification is everywhere now. It would be nice to get some property or something, though. I don’t want to move out of the area but I can’t afford to buy a house.” Property prices have been rising precipitously. In 2019, Peckham had the [fastest house price growth in](#) the UK, having risen more than 1,000% since 1995 – and [more than doubled](#) in the previous 10 years. Long-term residents, and artists, are already selling up or being priced out.

It is possible to have regeneration without gentrification, says Mündner, who points out that local groups have successfully organised to preserve historic structures, fight off intrusive developments (although there are still plans for [27-storey apartment towers at one end of Rye Lane](#)) and retain civic spaces such as Peckham Levels. “What makes places different is the level of emotional investment; how people invest themselves in the place other than

by money,” he says. “Do they engage or do they just consume? I know lots of people who live here who really have their heart in Peckham.”

It is difficult to imagine Peckham turning into the new [Notting Hill](#) any time soon, but if it does, how much could we blame a movie like Rye Lane? Is it possible to celebrate a place on film without selling it at the same time? “There’s a responsibility in the film-makers’ court to be careful and to be aware of what they’re doing,” says Mündner. “But if they are really showing their love for a place, I think it’s one of the best things a film can do.”

In a perfect world, the people who brought the area through the bad times would benefit, the sterilising effects of gentrification would be mitigated and everyone would live happily ever after in sensibly priced homes – but life doesn’t always turn out like the movies.

Rye Lane is in cinemas from 17 March.

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‘I know where the bodies are buried’: one woman’s mission to change how the police investigate rape

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Food for Thought by MIA. Photograph: The Pentonville Prison Art Group

[Art](#)

'If only my tastebuds could paint': how prison food art reveals life inside

An art group at Pentonville prison has produced a booklet that shows how inmates get by deprived of the basic but profound freedom to eat as they like

['The mince is shocking': the truth about prison food – in pictures](#)

Guy Atkins

Tue 7 Mar 2023 02.00 ESTLast modified on Tue 7 Mar 2023 04.13 EST

Ahmed M was making a speech to members of the Pentonville prison art group. It concerned prison food. "They say a picture speaks a thousand words," he said. "If only my tastebuds could paint a picture. Being a big foodie has made food an issue for me at HMP Pentonville. Before I even arrived here, for the second time, I was dreading how much weight I would lose."

When Ahmed M finished reading his text, the art room at Pentonville erupted. Surrounded by walls of art made by past members, the group cheered so loudly that Ahmed could not help but smile. The previous week, the art group had volunteered him to write the introduction to We Are What We Eat, a booklet on prison food which the group had been working on for months. Ahmed's pithy yet lyrical writing was the final piece of work needed for the project. With more than 50 artworks completed, a long list of quotes agreed on and the inclusion of candid photographs of their wing's servery, the group had pulled off what at one point had seemed impossible.

What we eat determines how our day goes and how we feel

Ahmed M

At the end of 2021, the Museum of London asked the group to contribute to London Eats, a year-long programme which aimed to collect material from people across London on the subject of food. The art group agreed to take part but made a series of requests. They would contribute artworks as long as they could give an honest account of the food at Pentonville; the museum would pay for their art materials; the art should ultimately be made public; and members could request research to help with their art, to make up for their lack of digital access.

With the help of the prison's brilliant education team, the group succeeded in producing a compelling publication, which is [now available on the Museum of London website](#). Determined to highlight conditions to which society rarely pays attention, their work speaks powerfully in both images and words.



Reading a Book by Ahmed G. Photograph: The Pentonville Prison Art Group

In Ahmed G's Reading a Book, a masterfully-drawn cockroach relaxes on one of the prison's blue plastic plates. The insect is taking in its copy of the group's booklet, while furious conversations occur around it about food at Pentonville. Not Fit for Human Consumption foregrounds something similarly germ-ridden: artist Paul's cell toilet, at times the immediate destination for prison food. On the walls, graffiti offers direct feedback on his time in prison: "I WAZ ERE 2022 #starving".

At Pentonville, food takes on a heightened level of significance, given the small physical worlds people must inhabit. Most prisoners share a 12ft by 8ft cell between two. For the six weeks of the project spent under a Covid lockdown, they were confined to these cells for more than 23 hours a day. As Ahmed M explains, food is "an essential part of a person's day. What we eat determines how our day goes and how we feel". Yet according to the

group, prison food is so poor, and serving times so odd, people with enough money give up on the food on offer. They use funds from the outside or from prison jobs to buy ingredients from the prison, which they cook in their cell kettles.



Not Fit for Human Consumption by Paul. Photograph: The Pentonville Prison Art Group

While cooking offers moments of community for some, it also divides the prison population into those who can afford to cook for themselves and those who cannot. For vulnerable prisoners, hunger can easily lead to debt and the risk of violence. To compound matters, the tiny cells are not fit places to cook in: vermin are widespread across the prison's ageing estate; cell toilets are only screened off with loose curtains, if at all.

At the outset of the project, food seemed a neutral, if not dull, topic for the group to examine. But in different ways, each group member showed it to be central to their experience of prison. With his dreamlike art and poetic turns of phrase, Human's contributions deftly highlight the emotional significance of food. "The smells from people cooking in their cells make me jealous," he writes. "When I smell fish, I think of home."

For his part, MIA brings out how the material world changes in a prison environment. A standard-issue kettle, he observes, becomes a holy object. Meanwhile, in his still life painting, Food for Thought, two more cockroaches make their way towards his food supplies.

Inspections of Pentonville have long made clear the need for more government money to be spent there. A 2022 report described the prison as, “a cramped early Victorian relic, with claustrophobic wings and a crumbling physical infrastructure that require constant repair and refurbishment to meet the most basic standards of decency.” I would argue the group’s booklet makes an even more urgent and unsettling case for change. Through their art and texts, the men demand you feel the physical and emotional consequences of society’s refusal to acknowledge the reality of prison life.

Guy Atkins is an artist-researcher based in London. In creating the booklet, the group also worked with graphic designer Patrick Fry

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‘The mince is shocking’: the truth about prison food – in pictures

Grub’s up ... Reading a Book by Ahmed G. Photograph: The Pentonville Prison Art Group

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2023.03.07 - Opinion

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The newly reopened Joseph Toynbee fountain in Wimbledon, south-west London. Photograph: @pollytoynbee

[OpinionWater](#)

How a monument to my great-great-grandfather could help tackle the scourge of plastic pollution

[Polly Toynbee](#)



A newly restored drinking fountain commemorates my ancestor. We need more to tackle the horror of so many discarded bottles

Tue 7 Mar 2023 01.00 EST Last modified on Fri 10 Mar 2023 05.42 EST

Enough contemplation of this government's misdeeds: today I thought I'd take a break from rogue prime ministers and cabinets, a breather from their damage to the public realm. Instead, to enjoy a miniature item of good news, I attended the re-opening of a beautiful [Victorian gothic water fountain](#) in Wimbledon, south-west London, that has just been restored. Its ribbon was cut by local children involved in its current purpose: to urge people not to buy plastic water bottles but to refill their own bottles here.



Joseph Toynbee. Photograph: [@pollytoynbee](#)

I was there because the fountain was erected in 1868 in memory of my great-great-grandfather, [Joseph Toynbee](#), otologist and ear-syringer to Queen Victoria: he died young in his laboratory experimenting on himself with chloroform for tinnitus. He was a radical local campaigner who fought to save Wimbledon Common from the rapacious [Earl Spencer's attempt](#) to privatise and enclose it. He set up the [Wimbledon Village Club](#), a working men's institute for edification, entertainment, refreshments and a library, in much community use now. Family history records that his rigorous selflessness included dragging his nine children across Wimbledon Common on Christmas Day to make them donate their Christmas dinner to a Travellers' encampment. The plaque on the fountain says that working men of Wimbledon and those "interested in the public good" paid for this memorial.

Once there were a thousand or more drinking fountains in London, and many more around the country, built from the 1860s onwards to provide clean piped water for those with access only to dirty public pumps, such as the one in Soho that was proven by [John Snow](#) to be the source of a cholera outbreak. Many beautiful and often eccentric drinking fountains were built by private subscription all over the country, but they fell into disrepair, with

many demolished after the 1950s. You may pass one daily without noticing the neglected, water-less lump of stone.

The Drinking Fountain Association is trying to [track each one](#) around the country, and the Heritage of London Trust (Holt), with no public funds, is in the process of [restoring 100 of them](#). Local authorities are far from cooperative, even when not asked to contribute, claiming health and safety concerns (this is the same water that is piped into homes) or cost (grants and local fundraising can do it: the Toynbee fountain restoration cost Holt £16,789, plus Thames Water's reconnection charge.)

This is not just a fad for antiquarians. The point is to make refilling water bottles the norm and throw-away plastic unthinkable. Fountains work: when the [St Paul's recreation ground](#) fountain in Brentford was restored a year ago, engaging local children, [94% of park users](#) drank and refilled from it, with 55% saying it had stopped them from using plastic bottles. Fountains attract children who press in vain on long dead taps: restoration is an anti-plastic education campaign.



A Victorian drinking fountain in Dunkeld, Perthshire. Photograph: Doug Houghton/Alamy

[The average Londoner](#) buys three plastic water bottles a week, with 7.7bn bottles [bought nationally](#) each year, creating mountains of plastic waste that takes [20 to 500 years](#) to decompose. The City to Sea campaign estimates that if one in 10 people refilled just once a week, it would save [340m plastic bottles](#) a year. Horrifying evidence grows of harm to the sea, wildlife – and us. Seabirds have just been diagnosed with a new disease, [plasticosis](#), which destroys their digestive tracts, with chicks fed plastic pollution by parents accidentally. Humans, along the food chain, ingest an average [5 grams of plastic](#) a week, the equivalent of eating a credit card. The US and UK are the world's [highest plastic waste producers](#) per person, and [Coca-Cola](#) is [one of the worst offenders](#), despite the company sponsoring the Cop27 climate summit.

The climate crisis can look dauntingly colossal, but the plastic disaster is easier to solve and the two are closely related. Plastic, made from fossil fuels, not only causes [millions of metric tonnes](#) of greenhouse gas emissions a year, but consumes vast quantities of water in a drought-stricken world. It takes [5.3 litres of water](#) to produce a typical single-use water bottle. After Europe's [driest summer](#) in 500 years, with much of the continent suffering a winter drought, what better time to ban pointless plastic?



The Closed Loop Recycling plant in London was the first in the UK to produce food grade recycled plastic from bottle waste. Photograph: Dan

Kitwood/Getty Images

Stand in a supermarket and survey the sea of packaging: in this intensely competitive market, consumer pressure could force an end to it. Though we diligently consign plastics to the right bins, [less than 10%](#) of the UK's household plastic packaging is recycled in the UK itself; most is exported, incinerated, sent to landfill or littered. How easily [the EU banned](#) some of the polluting plastics in 2021; [the UK will follow](#) later this year but will only meet the very minimum standards. Deposit return schemes are not difficult. What could be a simpler start than banning all plastic packaging from five fruits and vegetables – potatoes, apples, bananas, carrots and onions – as called for in [petition](#) by the campaigns City to Sea and Everyday Plastic.

Yet this government ducks these easiest steps. London's mayor has set up 100 fine new [blue drinking fountains](#), with many more cafes offering free water. But, says Holt, the mayor's new ones cost more than restoring water to old monuments. If you have a derelict fountain nearby, a small but powerful gesture to alert neighbourhoods against plastic bottles is to campaign and fundraise to reopen these monuments to public spirit.

So yes, I ended up back here again, on plastic pollution as on everything else, contemplating this government's perpetual failure to do the right thing.

This article was amended on 10 March 2023 to clarify that less than 10% of the UK's household plastic packaging is recycled *in the UK itself*; an earlier version could have implied that this was the figure for all household plastic packaging recycling, including that which is exported.

- Polly Toynbee is a Guardian columnist. Her memoir *An Uneasy Inheritance: My Family and Other Radicals* is published in June

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'I don't disagree with myself, but all my arguments start in a weird place' ...
A pro-choice protest in London in 2022. Photograph: Vuk Valcic/ZUMA
Press Wire/REX/Shutterstock

[OpinionEthics](#)

**An old video of me is on the school
curriculum! Unfortunately, I am
shocked by my own arguments**

[Zoe Williams](#)



In one of my daughter's classes, she was shown footage of me talking about ethics a decade ago. The views I'm espousing made me double-take

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"You were in our PBE video," my youngest said, when she got home from school. I find it hard to disaggregate the acronym lessons in the timetable, and tend to assume everything is PE. It struck me as unlikely, however, that I'd be in a PE video, so I dredged my brain and found "philosophy, beliefs and ethics". Sure, that checks out. I have beliefs, a couple of ethics. I must have said them in a video at some point or other.

"I said you were my mum, and nobody believed me," she continued, and I said: "Why? Are you known for making up weird lies?" And she said: "That too, but also, different surnames. Then, when the teacher believed me, she asked if you'd come in and talk to the class, and I said you'd probably like that but, from my point of view, absolutely no way."

"What was I saying?" I asked, dragging her attention back to the video. She gave me an indulgent look. "I wasn't *listening*." And after that I thought no more about it.

But that was not the end of it. I started getting clips from friends whose kids are also in year nine. There's my giant face, circa 2010 (I guess), talking about Big Ethics – the death penalty, abortion, voluntary euthanasia – as the voice of humanism. It's not a formal doctrine, see; any of us can be its high priestess. The problem is, what I'm saying is wild. I was then, as now, against capital punishment, for reproductive self-determination, pro the right to die. So I don't disagree with myself, but all my arguments start in a weird place: "The death penalty is wrong because all acts of violence have their roots in the early-life brutalisation of the perpetrator." I mean: *maybe*? But not necessarily, and that's not why it's wrong. "Abortion is right because a foetus isn't a baby – only a baby is a baby": sure, but it's a bit of a "["Jackanory"](#)" way to put it.

Did my friends clip me in a peculiar way? Did the BBC? Was it just one of those days when I don't make sense? Shame that this should be the day that makes it on to the school curriculum, at exactly the point my own offspring reaches it. But, on the bright side, she wasn't listening.

- Zoe Williams is a Guardian columnist
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Alexander Lukashenko, left, greets Vladimir Putin as he arrives in Minsk for talks in December. Photograph: UPI/Rex/Shutterstock

[OpinionBelarus](#)

Western allies take note: if you want to beat Putin in Ukraine, target his wicked little helper in Belarus

[Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya](#)



Alexander Lukashenko put our airbases and resources at Russia's disposal. His fall would accelerate victory for Ukraine

Tue 7 Mar 2023 03.00 EST Last modified on Tue 7 Mar 2023 10.21 EST

Last week, residents of Machulishchy were intrigued as soldiers and police swarmed across their small town on the edge of Minsk, the capital of [Belarus](#).

Cordons and checkpoints were hastily erected for miles around the local airbase, which has played host to Russia's forces during its abominable war against [Ukraine](#).

It was clear to anyone out and about on that frosty winter morning that Belarusian security services – known as the KGB – were panicking. The Belarusian people, who are disgusted at their government's support for the Kremlin's illegal invasion of Ukraine, had struck a symbolic blow right at the heart of Russia's military.

Our anti-war partisans had flown two drones over the former Soviet airbase and [dropped bombs on an A-50U surveillance aircraft](#), a £275m Russian spy

plane used to pinpoint targets inside Ukraine. The Beriev A-50, which uses a long-range radar detection system to track up to 60 targets at a time, was severely damaged.

Unfortunately for the Belarusian KGB, the heroic resistance fighters who made a mockery of Russian military might managed to escape the checkpoints. They are now safely outside the country.

Doubtless Alexander Lukashenko, Belarus's tyrannical dictator and [solitary Kremlin ally](#), would have had an uncomfortable discussion when he next took a phone call from Vladimir Putin. Lukashenko will be particularly nervous as he owes his position to the Russian president. I beat him in the general election of 2020, before he stole it back with the help of the secret police and Putin. The Russian president sent propagandists, financial support and, eventually, tanks in a bid to prop up his old Soviet ally – then forced him to pay his debts by enlisting support for the catastrophic invasion of Ukraine 18 months later.

The vast majority of my people are horrified at what is happening in Ukraine. The attack on the Russian spy plane is not the first example of resistance. Cyber-partisans have performed a series of audacious hacks on Belarusian state databases. Resistance fighters have blown up transport networks in an attempt to constrict the supply of Russian arms into Ukraine. And hundreds of Belarusians have enlisted to fight the Russian aggressor on Ukrainian territory itself.

As long as Lukashenko barks like a Russian lapdog, the Ukrainian struggle for freedom will be tougher. There will be no secure Ukraine without a free Belarus. Lukashenko's invitation for Russian troops to perform a hybrid occupation of Belarus has placed my country at the centre of the crisis in eastern Europe. Yet it remains part of the solution. Overthrowing Lukashenko would accelerate victory for Ukraine.

Today, I am meeting Leo Docherty, the UK's Europe minister, and Lindsay Hoyle, the speaker of the House of Commons, to discuss how we can bring about a peaceful and democratic revolution inside Belarus. I am grateful for the support of the UK thus far.

The UK has led the way in imposing sanctions against the tyrant and his cronies. But it could go further. We need more monetary and secondary sanctions targeting the state economy that fuels Lukashenko's KGB intelligence agency and Putin's war machine.

Karim Khan now wields enormous influence as the [chief prosecutor](#) at the international criminal court (ICC) at The Hague. He has correctly identified the [abhorrent war crimes](#) perpetrated by Russian armed forces in Ukraine, including attacks on civilians and critical infrastructure. But Khan needs to glance across to Belarus next door. Lukashenko is also a state sponsor of terrorism.



'Most Belarusians are quintessentially European, and want to live peacefully in a democracy.' Shopping mall in Minsk. Photograph: Natalia Kolesnikova/AFP/Getty Images

The UK and the west need to fully grasp this point. We still pick up misguided signals from some allied nations that wish to believe Lukashenko is a man they can do business with. Some still like to think of him as a potential honest broker who, through no fault of his own, is trapped as a prisoner of geography and unwilling hostage of Putin. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The west needs to stop falling for his lies and understand that Lukashenko consciously desires Belarus to be a vassal state of Russia. Most Belarusians are [quintessentially European](#), and wish to live peacefully in a democracy. They want Russian troops to be withdrawn from Ukraine and from Belarus immediately. They recognise that Lukashenko is a war criminal and hope that he will eventually face justice at the ICC.

The UK and the west need to throw their wholehearted support behind these key strategic objectives. I am not pretending it will be straightforward. Tyranny is like cancer, it cannot be tackled easily. Lukashenko and Putin won't feel troubled by half-baked measures from the west.

Belarusians understand this, which is why my people continue to take extraordinary risks to show the west that they are worth fighting for. On the anniversary of the Ukrainian invasion last month, activists in Minsk managed to avoid the KGB and briefly [raise a huge Ukrainian flag](#) at the top of a high-rise building in Minsk. The message that accompanied the poignant image as it was broadcast on resistance Telegram channels said: "Belarusians raised Ukraine's flag in Minsk to mark their solidarity with the Ukrainian people. Long Live Belarus! Glory to Ukraine!" It could not be any clearer.

- Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya is the leader of the democratic opposition in Belarus
 - *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](#).*
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'How could so poised and polished a figure as Buttigieg so badly miscalculate?' Photograph: Rebecca Droke/AFP/Getty Images

[OpinionUS politics](#)

The Democrats botched the Ohio disaster response – and handed Trump a victory

[Michael Massing](#)

The failure of Pete Buttigieg, the US secretary of transportation, to appear for nearly three weeks recalls the incompetence of Fema during Hurricane Katrina

Tue 7 Mar 2023 03.17 EST Last modified on Tue 7 Mar 2023 03.18 EST

"Where's [Pete Buttigieg](#)?" someone shouted at a February 15 town hall meeting in East Palestine, Ohio. "I don't know," Mayor Trent Conaway replied.

Twelve days earlier, a Norfolk Southern train carrying hazardous chemicals had derailed near the town. Three days later, the company announced it was going to carry out a controlled burn of vinyl chloride that would send dangerous gasses into the air, forcing many of East Palestine's 4,700 residents to evacuate. They returned after receiving assurances that the air and water were safe, but a strong chemical odor clung to the town, and many continued to complain of headaches, nausea, and burning throats. And so several hundred residents had crowded into a local school to demand answers. Conaway said that two weeks had passed before anyone at the White House had contacted him, and the US secretary of transportation still hadn't materialized.

In Washington, Republicans made hay. "Secretary Buttigieg laughing about Chinese spy balloons, while ignoring the Ohio train derailment, shows you how out of touch Democrats are," Ohio congressman Jim Jordan [tweeted](#). Senator Marco Rubio [called](#) Buttigieg "an incompetent who is focused solely on his fantasies about his political future & needs to be fired".

On Fox, Tucker Carlson mocked Buttigieg for commemorating "Transit Equity Day" while remaining silent about the majority-white, struggling East Palestine. If the disaster had happened in a rich Washington DC neighborhood like Georgetown, he said, the National Guard would have been called in, and the story would have led every news channel. "But it happened to the poor benighted town of East Palestine, [Ohio](#), whose people are forgotten and in the view of people who lead this country, forgettable."

But it wasn't just the right who complained. Democratic congresswoman Ilhan Omar of Minnesota [tweeted](#) that "East Palestine railroad derailment will have a significant negative impact on the health and wellbeing of the residents for decades ... We need Congressional inquiry and direct action from @PeteButtigieg to address this tragedy." In a rare show of partisanship, Senator Ted Cruz said he "fully agreed" with her.

On 22 February, [Donald Trump](#) visited East Palestine. He distributed thousands of bottles of Trump-branded water, walked through the town with his son Donald Trump Jr and Ohio senator JD Vance, and visited a local McDonald's to buy food for first responders. "You are not forgotten," Trump

said in a speech not far from the accident site. “In too many cases, your goodness and perseverance were met with indifference and betrayal.”

The next day, Buttigieg finally showed. Surveying the site of the derailment in a hard hat and safety vest, he acknowledged that he could have spoken out “sooner” about the accident. “I was taking pains to respect the role that I have, the role that I don’t have – but that should not have stopped me from weighing in about how I felt about what was happening.” He tweeted a photo of himself at the site along with the message that he was “amazed by the resilience and decency of the people of East Palestine”.

The Department of Transportation did not have the lead role in the accident response – that fell to the Environmental Protection Agency and the National Transportation Safety Board – but the failure of the nation’s top transportation official to appear at the disaster site for nearly three weeks inevitably recalled the incompetence and disengagement of Fema director Michael Brown during Hurricane Katrina. (President George W Bush famously claimed Brown was doing “a heck of a job”.) It also allowed Trump to present himself as the champion of blue-collar America.

How could so poised and polished a figure as Buttigieg so badly miscalculate? A glowing Washington Post profile in August 2021 described him as a skilled communicator and “nimble public speaker” who “rarely makes verbal miscues”.

President Joe Biden had made Buttigieg the lead spokesman for his massive infrastructure program, offering him an opportunity to meet with local officials around the country as he promoted roads, ports, bridges and tunnels. During the presidential campaign, the former South Bend, Indiana, mayor had assumed the mantle of outsider, but, the Post observed, he had “quickly morphed into a quintessential Washington insider” – omnipresent on television, a fixture at dinners, a tireless networker seeking to advance both the president’s agenda and his own political prospects.

Buttigieg’s East Palestine no-show can help answer the question, What’s the matter with Ohio? Formerly considered a “battleground state”, it has in recent years become unshakably red. Columbiana county, where East Palestine is located, is a microcosm. In 2008, John McCain barely took the

county with 52% of the vote. Donald Trump won 68% in 2016 and 71.5% in 2020 – a reflection of the perception that the Democrats had abandoned small-town America.

In January, Biden went to Covington, Kentucky, to publicize the awarding of \$1.6bn in federal funds to reconstruct a bridge over the Ohio River to Cincinnati, a key regional artery. He was joined by Kentucky senator Mitch McConnell, Kentucky governor Andy Beshear, and Ohio governor Mike DeWine. The Democrats hope that such investments and ceremonies over the long term can help repair the damage done to the Democrats' standing in the midwest by their longstanding embrace of free trade, globalization and the outsourcing of jobs to China and Mexico.

In the short term, however, Buttigieg's no-show in East Palestine reinforces the perception that the Democrats really don't care. It didn't help that on February 20, as East Palestine was still dealing with the fallout from the derailment, Biden made his surprise visit to Kyiv. "The biggest slap in the face," Mayor Conaway called it on Fox News, adding, "that tells you right now he doesn't care about us. He can send every agency he wants to, but I found out this morning that he was in Ukraine giving millions of dollars away to people over there and not to us, and I'm furious."

All the investment in bridges, roads, and factories will not translate into political gains if the party continues to be missing in action.

Heck of a job.

- Michael Massing is the author most recently of *Fatal Discord: Erasmus, Luther, and the Fight for the Western Mind*

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2023.03.07 - Around the world

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People take part in a demonstration in Paris as part of a nationwide day of strikes and protests called by unions over a proposed pensions overhaul.
Photograph: Alain Jocard/AFP/Getty Images

[France](#)

Protests and disruption in France as transport workers start strikes

Road, rail and air services affected in protest over plans to raise pension age from 62 to 64

*Angelique Chrisafis in Paris
@achrisafis*

Tue 7 Mar 2023 08.22 ESTFirst published on Tue 7 Mar 2023 00.00 EST

France faced street protests and heavy disruption on Tuesday as transport workers and refinery staff began rolling strikes over Emmanuel Macron's plan to [raise the pension age](#) to 64.

For the sixth time since the start of the year, unions called a nationwide day of strikes and demonstrations, aiming to repeat the large turnout seen on the first major protest, on 19 January, when [more than a million](#) people marched against the pension changes.

The disruption is expected to be greater and last longer as rail unions called for rolling, open-ended strikes, which could affect all national trains as well as international routes including the Eurostar.

Local urban buses and subway trains in large cities were affected, as were airlines, with up to 30% of flights cancelled on Tuesday and Wednesday as air traffic controllers strike.



Travellers at the Gare de l'Est railway station in Paris on Tuesday morning.
Photograph: Christophe Archambault/AFP/Getty Images

“The idea is to bring [France](#) to a standstill,” said Fabrice Michaud, of the railway workers’ branch of the CGT trade union.

The transport minister, Clément Beaune, told France 3 TV station it would be “one of the most difficult” strike days for travellers since the start of the protests.

Some students, including at Rennes 2 University in Brittany, began blockading faculties on Monday night. Some schools closed on Tuesday as teachers staged a one-day strike. Bin collections were also affected in several cities.



Students in Paris take part in pension protests last month. Photograph: Samuel Boivin/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

Macron's proposals to raise the retirement age from 62 to 64 and increase the number of years of work required to claim a full pension are being debated in the French senate.

The president has been left severely undermined on the domestic front after his centrist grouping [failed to win an absolute majority](#) in parliamentary elections last June amid gains for the far right and radical left.

Without a majority, the government must rely on the rightwing Les Républicains to back pensions changes, but their senators and lawmakers are pressing for alterations.

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Discussions are forecast to end by the end of March. It is expected that a committee made up of legislators from both houses of parliament will seek a potential deal on a joint version of the text, to eventually be presented for approval at the national assembly and then the senate. But tensions remain as to the level of support.



Union members take part in a strike vote at the Exxon-Mobil refinery at Port Jérôme, Gravéchon near Le Havre. Photograph: Lou Benoist/AFP/Getty Images

The government is determined to press on with the pensions changes, and its spokesperson said there were more pressing issues facing the country than the strikes, such as the cost of living crisis.

An [Ifpo poll](#) for the Sunday paper Le Journal de Dimanche found that only 32% of French people supported Macron's pension changes.

Laurent Berger, the head of the moderate CFDT trade union, criticised Macron for not meeting trade union leaders. He said the president must listen to the French people. "He can't stay silent like he has for the past two months," Berger said.

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The wreckage of two helicopters after a collision near Sea World, on the Gold Coast of Australia. Photograph: Dave Hunt/AAP

[UK news](#)

Helicopter pilot did not hear radio call in Gold Coast crash that killed four – report

Australian transport bureau releases interim report into midair collision between sightseeing aircraft on Gold Coast

Jamie Grierson

@JamieGrierson

Tue 7 Mar 2023 03.37 EST Last modified on Tue 7 Mar 2023 04.53 EST

A helicopter pilot said he did not hear a radio call shortly before a [midair collision in Australia](#) that killed four people including two Britons, according to an interim report.

Diane and Ron Hughes, from Neston in Cheshire, died in the collision at about 2pm local time (0400 GMT) on Monday 2 January in Main Beach, not far from Sea World in the state of [Queensland](#). The pilot of one of the helicopters and a 36-year-old woman from New South Wales also died.

The Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB) has released a preliminary report in relation to a crash between the two sightseeing helicopters on the [Gold Coast](#).

At 1.55pm, the pilot of one helicopter – called XKQ in the report – commenced their scenic flight and was climbing over water in the direction of the sandbar near the helipad.

The pilot of the other helicopter, referred to as XH9 – who later survived – reported that they did not hear a taxi call over the radio from the pilot of XKQ.

“This does not necessarily mean that a taxi call was not made and this topic will be subject to detailed analysis by the ATSB investigation,” the report says. “The pilot of XH9 also reported that they did not see XKQ depart from the park helipad.”

Footage shows aftermath of fatal helicopter crash on the Gold Coast in Australia – video

It adds that two passengers on board XH9 spotted XKQ. “Understanding the helicopter would only get closer, at least one passenger attempted verbal guidance to the pilot,” the report says.

“As the verbal guidance did not work, and anticipating a potential collision, one passenger physically alerted the pilot.

“The pilot of XH9 later recalled being alerted to the other helicopter by a passenger, but the pilot did not see XKQ approaching prior to the collision.”

At a height of about 130ft, and 23 seconds into XKQ’s flight, the helicopters collided.

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The ATSB chief commissioner, Angus Mitchell, said: “The ATSB has released this preliminary report to detail the circumstances of this tragic accident as we currently understand them but it is important to stress that we are yet to make findings.

“Our findings as to the contributing factors to this accident, and the analysis to support those findings, will be detailed in a final report to be released at the conclusion of our investigation.”

He added: “The investigation will look closely at the issues both pilots faced in seeing the other helicopter.

Mitchell said the investigation would look more broadly beyond the issues of radio calls and visibility.

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Jimmy Chilimigras on WLOX-TV of Bay St Louis, Mississippi.
Photograph: WLOX-TV

[Mississippi](#)

Mississippi: 15-year-old with master's degree prepares to attend law school

James ‘Jimmy’ Chilimigras took entrance exam last year and scored 174, the highest tally in his home state, Alabama and Louisiana

[Ramon Antonio Vargas](#)

Tue 7 Mar 2023 01.00 EST Last modified on Wed 8 Mar 2023 04.38 EST

A 15-year-old [Mississippi](#) boy is reportedly preparing to start law school later this year and has the chance to become one of the youngest people ever to obtain a juris doctorate.

James “Jimmy” Chilimigras took the law school entrance exam last year when he was just 14 and scored a 174, the highest tally in his home state,

Alabama and Louisiana, according to [a report](#) from the news station WLOX, which covers his home town of Bay St Louis, Mississippi.

Jimmy, who holds bachelor's and master's degrees in accounting from the online, non-profit Western Governors University, told WLOX he is giving himself until May to choose which law school he will attend. But, he made it clear: "I'm going to law school in August – that's going to be in person, so that's interesting, [and] I'm really looking forward to it, actually."

Law school in the US typically takes three years to complete. If Jimmy finishes his studies in that time frame, he would be one of the world's youngest law school graduates, according to a list compiled by the history and culture website [oldest.org](#).

The eighth-youngest law school graduate in the world was Kelly Yang of China, who finished at Harvard University in 2005 when she was 20. Oldest.org says the globe's youngest known law school graduate is Stephen Baccus of Florida, who completed his studies at the University of Miami at age 16 in 1986.

Some on oldest.org's list did not ultimately pursue careers as attorneys. Yang went on to become a South China Morning Post columnist, and Baccus later decided to work as [a neurobiology professor](#).

Jimmy's parents, John and Erin Chilimigras, told WLOX that they realized early on that their son was highly intelligent. He spoke in full sentences when he was only two years old, and he received a diploma from St John Paul the Great high school in Bay St Louis at the unusually early age of 12.

"We always knew he was bright, but I don't think we expected he would accomplish so much so fast," Erin Chilimigras said to WLOX.

According to what John Chilimigras told WLOX, that isn't to say everything came easily to his son. Jimmy struggled with reading comprehension, for instance, despite his interest in reading, the boy prodigy's father recounted.

“We had to have some outside help to help him diagnose and when they worked through plan of figuring out how his mind worked,” John Chilimigras added in his remarks to WLOX.

Jimmy explained his trajectory by saying he simply likes learning and challenging himself, and his parents were dedicated to encouraging his interest in doing that.

“When I did well at something, we kept moving up, so it wasn’t easy,” Jimmy said. “My parents did a good job keeping me challenged.”

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A resident shovels snow after a series of winter storms dumped heavy snowfall in southern California. Photograph: Mario Tama/Getty Images
[California](#)

‘It is exhausting’: California town digs its way out after record-setting snow

Last month, a blizzard caused road closures, roof collapses and trapped residents in their homes

Associated Press

Tue 7 Mar 2023 01.00 EST Last modified on Tue 7 Mar 2023 08.35 EST

Residents of mountain towns in southern [California](#) have continued to struggle to dig out and get necessities in the aftermath of a record-setting blizzard last month that dumped so much snow that roads became impassable and roofs collapsed.

Here’s a closer look at the situation:

Survival

Free food distribution centers have been set up at five locations, including the community of Crestline, which sits at an elevation of about 4,600ft (1,400 meters).

A line of people waited there on Monday to pick up food and necessities, such as toilet paper, stacked in a parking lot.



Residents waiting in line to receive donated food outside the local grocery store in Crestline in southern California on Friday. Photograph: Mario Tama/Getty Images

“Imagine not having any food in your house after being trapped for 13 days,” resident Michelle Calkins told KTLA-TV.

Pablo Tello, another Crestline resident, picked up a replacement for a broken shovel so he could get back to helping dig snow away from homes, with special attention to buried gas lines that have been linked to several fires.

Tello said his snowshoes used to be placed over his fireplace as a decoration, but now he is using them to help his neighbors and seniors not able to leave their homes.

The blizzard

Rare blizzard warnings went into effect in late February in the mountain ranges of southern California as an arctic air mass plunged down the west coast, plastering California's coast ranges and the Sierra Nevada.

In an extremely unusual event, staggering amounts of snow fell east of Los Angeles in the San Bernardino Mountains and the adjacent San Gabriel Mountains, where thousands of people live or visit communities at high elevations reached by windy, steep highways.



Highway 108 is closed just above Strawberry, California, with several feet of snow covering the road. Photograph: Marty Bicek/Zuma Press Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

Both mountain ranges routinely have winter snowfalls, but what looked like the foundation for epic downhill ski days became a nightmare.

Big Bear City received 80in (203cm) of snow over a seven-day period, the most since these records have been tracked, according to meteorologist Alex Tardy, with the National Weather Service in San Diego. Until now, the most snow recorded in a seven-day period there was 58in (147cm) in 1979.

Gavin Newsom, the state governor, declared emergencies in 13 of California's 58 counties beginning 1 March.

Snowed in

Residents found themselves unable to leave their homes or vacation rentals, much less free their vehicles.

San Bernardino county authorities said the snowfall was so great it exceeded the capability of plows to clear roads, requiring earth-moving equipment and dump trucks to pick up and move snow.



Residents attempt to shovel out their driveway after a series of winter storms in the San Bernardino Mountains in southern California. Photograph: Mario Tama/Getty Images

A shortage of tire chains further hampered the response.

Highways were closed to all but emergency vehicles, frustrating residents who had been away when the storm hit and were forbidden to head back up to their homes.

Roof collapses due to the weight of snow were reported, including a grocery store in the community of Crestline.

Recovery

Authorities began bringing in more snow removal equipment, organized convoys of grocery trucks, set up distribution centers and requested donations of non-perishable foods, water and general supplies.

Andrew Braggins told the Associated Press that he is one of the lucky ones. His street in Crestline was plowed and he was able to dig out his driveway. Most of his neighbors' properties were still buried.

Braggins and his wife have been packing their Jeep with boxes of food from the distribution center and delivering them to neighbors. But it's not as simple as just dropping the boxes at the front doors, he said.

"We have to climb over 10ft (3-meter) snow berms and carry them through deep snow down 60-ft (18-meter) driveways. It is exhausting," Braggins said.



Ice covers communication towers as massive amounts of snow trap residents of mountain towns in San Bernardino county, California. Photograph: David

Swanson/Reuters

A national guard unit that normally fight wildfires was called in to use its shovels to help clear snow.

Clearing of state routes has been done by California department of transportation equipment.

Highways have intermittently been open to residents as conditions permit, but authorities warn that anyone who goes down may not be allowed back up.

As of Sunday, San Bernardino county estimated that it had made nearly 80% of county-maintained roads in the area passable, meaning that at least one lane was open. But the county noted that state and county plows are not allowed on to private property and residents will have to call in contractors to do those jobs.

Forecast

Southern California has largely seen a respite since the blizzard, but heavy snow has continue to pile up in the north, including the Sierra, where totals so far this season are being measured in the dozens of feet.



The marina at Pinecrest Lake is covered with snow, with the lake also covered in it. Photograph: Marty Bicek/Zuma Press Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

The stormy weather calmed down on Monday, but accumulations were forecast to continue through midweek.

The National Weather Service said the next Pacific storm is expected to arrive in California late in the week, and will be associated with a moderately strong atmospheric river, a long plume of moisture stretching back over the ocean.

Heavy rainfall and a mild airmass could cause rapid snowmelt in some areas that have received several feet of snow recently, the service said.

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Israel's finance minister and leader of the Religious Zionist party, Bezalel Smotrich. Photograph: Gil Cohen-Magen/AFP/Getty Images

[US news](#)

Biden administration urged to block extremist Israeli minister's visit

Several groups and individuals are rallying against Bezalel Smotrich's visit over his comments to 'wipe out' a Palestinian town

[Chris McGreal in New York](#)

Tue 7 Mar 2023 04.45 EST Last modified on Tue 7 Mar 2023 10.08 EST

The Biden administration is under growing pressure to block a visit by Israel's extremist finance minister, [Bezalel Smotrich](#), over his call to "wipe out" a Palestinian town that was the target of an attack by Jewish settlers.

Smotrich's plan to speak at an investment conference in Washington DC next week has drawn unusually strong criticism, including accusations that

he is promoting “Jewish supremacy”, from individuals and groups that are more usually ardent defenders of [Israel](#).

More than 100 Jewish American leaders [signed a statement](#) opposing the visit by leader of the Religious Zionism party in Benjamin Netanyahu’s far-right coalition government. It said they “reject the notion that someone must be accorded respect simply by dint of serving in the Israeli government”.

“We call on all pro-Israel Americans to understand that welcoming Smotrich here will harm, rather than help, support for Israel,” they said.

“Smotrich has long expressed views that are abhorrent to the vast majority of American Jews, from anti-Arab racism, to virulent homophobia, to a full-throated embrace of Jewish supremacy. To this list, we can now add his endorsement of violence against innocents based on their ethnic heritage.”

The pro-Israel lobby group, J Street, [called on](#) the Biden administration to consider the unprecedented step of refusing a US visa to a senior Israeli government minister, and to refuse to meet him if he is allowed into the country.

“We agree with Israeli opposition leader and former prime minister Yair Lapid that Smotrich’s comments constitute ‘incitement to a war crime’,” it said.

Israeli media reported that the US has yet to approve the visa amid discussions among White House officials about how to proceed.

Smotrich has been widely condemned for comments after a mob of several hundred religious settlers attacked Hawara a week ago, burning dozens of buildings and cars, and killing a Palestinian in what an Israeli military commander [called a “pogrom”](#).

The Israeli finance minister, whose position gives him authority over settlement construction in the occupied territories, criticised the settlers for taking matters into their own hands but said the military should act instead.

“I think the village of Hawara needs to be wiped out. I think the state of Israel should do it,” he said.

The attack on Hawara followed the shooting death of two brothers from a nearby settlement earlier in the day which in turn came after a series of Israeli military raids on the West Bank cities including on Nablus [in which 11 Palestinians, militants and civilians, were killed.](#)

Smotrich later claimed to have made “a slip of the tongue in a storm of emotions”, and that he intended only to target “terrorists and supporters of terrorism”.

His statement added to diplomatic tensions with Washington over Netanyahu’s rightwing policies after the Israeli press reported that the US ambassador, Tom Nides, said that if he was on the flight to Washington with Smotrich he would “throw him off the plane”.

The US embassy denied the remarks but Smotrich responded by accusing Nides of endangering his life, albeit unintentionally.

“I am not angry with him and am convinced that he did not mean to incite for my killing when he said that I should be thrown from the plane, just as I did not mean harm to innocents when I said that Hawara should be wiped out,” [he tweeted.](#)

The signatories of the statement include three former US ambassadors to Israel; the former director of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), Abraham Foxman; and the leaders of the Reform and Conservative Jewish religious denominations.

The former chief executive of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, Thomas Dine, also signed. Aipac itself has remained silent on Smotrich’s comments but said it had no plans to meet the minister. The ADL said “it’s inexcusable for [Smotrich] to incite mass violence against Palestinians as a form of collective punishment”.

William Daroff, CEO of the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish American Organizations, called Smotrich’s statement “irresponsible,

repugnant and disgusting”, echoing language used by the US state department.

Some Jewish American leaders have warned that Smotrich and actions by Netanyahu’s government, including its attempts to curb judicial powers which has led to large demonstrations in Israel, is doing damage to the country’s image abroad and undermining support in the US.

Israel’s ambassador to Washington, Michael Herzog, sought to dampen the criticism by distancing the government from Smotrich’s views.

“Notwithstanding the fact that Israel has been subjected to a recent wave of horrific terror attacks against its civilians, it is absolutely not Israeli policy, and it’s against our values, to respond by wiping out civilian villages,” he told CNN.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/mar/07/israel-finance-minister-visit-biden-pressure-block-bezalel-smotrich>

Headlines saturday 11 march 2023

- [Match of the Day BBC has ‘undermined its credibility’ with Lineker ‘mistake’, says ex-chief](#)
- [Match of the Day Presenters, pundits and BBC commentators pull out after Lineker suspension](#)
- [Lineker's dilemma Toe line or be social media influencer?](#)
- [Sue Gray BBC apologises for failure to scrutinise Dorries' claims](#)



Gary Lineker was suspended on Friday from the BBC for breaching impartiality guidelines. Photograph: Carl Recine/Action Images/Reuters

[BBC](#)

BBC has undermined its credibility over Gary Lineker, says Greg Dyke

Ex-director general says decision to suspend presenter for criticising government's asylum policies is mistaken

- [Gary Lineker suspension: live reaction](#)

Christy Cooney

Sat 11 Mar 2023 04.36 ESTFirst published on Sat 11 Mar 2023 04.26 EST

The BBC has undermined its own credibility with its decision to stand [Gary Lineker](#) down from hosting Match of the Day because it will be viewed as having bowed to government pressure, its former director general Greg Dyke has said.

Dyke's comments come after [the corporation suspended Lineker on Friday](#) for breaching impartiality guidelines by criticising the government's asylum policies.

Dyke told [BBC](#) Radio 4's Today programme: "There is a long-established precedent in the BBC that is that if you're an entertainment presenter or you're a football presenter, then you are not bound by those same rules.

"The real problem of today is that the BBC has undermined its own credibility by doing this because it looks like – the perception out there – that the BBC has bowed to government pressure.

"And once the BBC does that, then you're in real problems. The perception out there is going to be that Gary Lineker, a much-loved television presenter, was taken off air after government pressure on a particular issue."

Asked whether Lineker's tweet was acceptable, he said: "We live in a world of freedom of speech and therefore, yes. He didn't broadcast it on the BBC, it was a tweet he did privately.

"I think what the BBC did yesterday was mistaken. And over the years since I left the BBC I have never gone public criticising the leadership of the BBC and the decisions they take, because I know what a difficult job it is, and difficult decisions have to be taken."

But the precedent at the corporation was that "news and current affairs employees are expected to be impartial and not the rest", he said.

"If you start applying the rules of news and current affairs to everybody who works for the BBC, where does it end?

"If you thought on Match of the Day tonight he would have been talking about immigration policy, then I can understand the BBC's position, but he's on talking about football."

He added that it was "quite clear" Lineker did not intend to give the BBC any assurances about his future conduct and that "therefore I suspect this is

the end of Gary Lineker as a BBC presenter as we've known him".

Lineker's suspension came after a tweet on Tuesday in which he said a government plan to effectively ban anyone who arrives in the UK illegally from claiming asylum had been expressed in "language that is not dissimilar to that used by Germany in the 30s".

It was announced on Friday that Lineker would "step back" from hosting Match of the Day until an agreement had been reached about his use of social media.

The decision led to displays of solidarity from Lineker's co-hosts, Ian Wright and Alan Shearer, who announced that they would not be participating in Saturday's show. The BBC said in response that the show would be broadcast without a presenter or pundits.

Bristol Rovers, who play Forest Green Rovers in League One on Saturday afternoon, said their players would not be giving interviews to the BBC after the match.

"We won't be talking to the BBC before or after today's game. #BristolRovers #WeStandWithGary", the club wrote on Twitter.

The shadow foreign secretary, David Lammy, also condemned Lineker's suspension on Friday night.

"Chilling to see a great public broadcaster cowering to rightwing fanatics," he said. "Our democracy is made of tougher stuff than this."

The Labour deputy leader, Angela Rayner, tweeted: "The BBC's cowardly decision to take Gary Lineker off air is an assault on free speech in the face of political pressure from Tory politicians. They should rethink."

Nicola Sturgeon, the outgoing first minister of Scotland, said that, as a "strong supporter of public service broadcasting" she wanted to be able to defend the BBC, but the decision was indefensible.

"It is undermining free speech in the face of political pressure – and it does always seem to be rightwing pressure it caves to," she said.

Also speaking to the BBC, Patience Wheatcroft, a former editor of the Sunday Telegraph, said the corporation had failed to apply its impartiality guidelines fairly.

Citing the case of Alan Sugar, who hosts the BBC show *The Apprentice* but who endorsed the Conservatives in the 2019 election, she said: “Guidelines only work if they are applied right across the board within the scope of the guidelines. And clearly the BBC has failed on that.”

She said the BBC should “work very close with both sides [of politics] to come up with a policy that it will then apply across the board”.

Speaking on her talkshow on TalkTV, the former culture secretary Nadine Dorries defended the move.

“The people who are paying Gary Lineker’s salary are licence fee payers and they do not all agree with Gary Lineker,” she said.

“And I think the BBC has a responsibility to possibly use Gary Lineker as a line in the sand to say: ‘You can’t do this. If you’re working for the BBC, you have a responsibility, when you’re public-facing ... to retain that element of impartiality.’”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2023/mar/11/bbc-has-undermined-its-credibility-with-lineker-move-says-greg-dyke>



Gary Lineker broadcasting at an FA Cup semi-final last year. Photograph: Mark Pain/Alamy

[Gary Lineker](#)

Match of the Day to air without presenter or pundits after Gary Lineker's suspension

BBC commentators also refusing to appear after corporation takes its highest-paid presenter off air over impartiality concerns

- [BBC has ‘undermined its credibility’ with Lineker move, says former chief](#)
- [Gary Lineker suspension: live reaction](#)

[Jim Waterson](#) Media editor

[@jimwaterson](#)

Fri 10 Mar 2023 16.27 ESTFirst published on Fri 10 Mar 2023 11.51 EST

Match of the Day will be broadcast without presenters, pundits or its usual commentators this weekend, after the main host, [Gary Lineker](#), was suspended from the BBC for breaching impartiality guidelines after criticising the government's asylum policies.

In a dramatic and unexpected escalation of a crisis that has been brewing all week, the corporation took the decision to remove its highest-paid presenter from its flagship football show after he was criticised by Tory MPs and the rightwing media.

His suspension immediately led to displays of solidarity from Lineker's co-hosts Ian Wright and Alan Shearer, who publicly announced that they would not be turning up to present Saturday's show.

Quick Guide

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- Download the Guardian app from the iOS App Store on iPhone or the Google Play store on Android by searching for 'The Guardian'.
- If you already have the Guardian app, make sure you're on the most recent version.
- In the Guardian app, tap the Menu button at the bottom right, then go to Settings (the gear icon), then Notifications.
- Turn on sport notifications.

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Faced with an effective strike by its on-screen staff and unable to find willing replacements, the [BBC](#) took the unprecedented decision to announce that the Premier League highlights programme would go ahead without any hosts or studio presentation. It will feature only match footage.

A BBC spokesperson said: “Some of our pundits have said that they don’t wish to appear on the programme while we seek to resolve the situation with Gary.

“We understand their position and we have decided that the programme will focus on match action without studio presentation or punditry.”

Late on Friday, commentator Steve Wilson tweeted that the show’s commentary team had decided to pull out of the programme. “As commentators on MOTD, we have decided to step down from tomorrow night’s broadcast,” he said. “We are comforted that football fans who want to watch their teams should still be able to do so, as management can use World Feed commentary if they wish.”

The BBC has the option to use the Premier League’s world feed service.

'Of course': Gary Lineker says he stands by his criticism of government immigration bill – video

Ministers put the BBC under pressure after Lineker posted tweets this week [criticising Rishi Sunak's new asylum policy](#). He likened the language used by ministers about asylum seekers to “that used by Germany in the 30s”, a [comparison labelled “offensive”](#) by the home secretary, Suella Braverman.

A BBC spokesperson said Lineker would be off air until an agreement was reached on his future use of social media. If Lineker, who has two years left on his contract to present Match of the Day, refuses to back down, then it opens up the possibility of him leaving the corporation.

Lineker was taken off air on Friday afternoon despite making it clear that he wanted to host this weekend’s edition of the programme.

A BBC spokesperson said: “The BBC has been in extensive discussions with Gary and his team in recent days. We have said that we consider his recent social media activity to be a breach of our guidelines. The BBC has decided that he will step back from presenting Match of the Day until we’ve got an agreed and clear position on his use of social media.

“When it comes to leading our football and sports coverage, Gary is second to none. We have never said that Gary should be an opinion-free zone, or that he can’t have a view on issues that matter to him, but we have said that he should keep well away from taking sides on party political issues or political controversies.”

The Channel 5 News presenter Dan Walker was live on air while exchanging text messages with Lineker. According to Walker, Lineker emphasised that it was the BBC’s decision to take him off screen, saying: “They’ve told me I’ve had to step back.”

Wright, the former England footballer and a regular co-presenter, swiftly said he would not be working on this Saturday’s Match of the Day as a result of Lineker’s suspension. “Everybody knows what Match of the Day means to me, but I’ve told the BBC I won’t be doing it tomorrow. Solidarity,” he tweeted.

Shearer, who had also been booked to appear on Saturday’s show, confirmed that he would not turn up to work – leaving the BBC without any mainstream presenters for one of its best-known programmes.



Alan Shearer and Ian Wright announced that they would not be turning up to present Saturday’s show. Photograph: Tom Dulat/Getty Images for eSC

Regular pundit and former Manchester City defender Micah Richards backed the decision of Wright and Shearer, tweeting: “I was not due to be working on MOTD tomorrow, but if I was, I would find myself taking the same decision that @IanWright0 & @alanshearer have.”

BBC presenter Jermaine Jenas also said he was standing “with his fellow pundits and Gary Lineker”. He tweeted: “Been on air with The One Show. I wasn’t down to be doing Match of the Day tomorrow, but if I was, I would of said no and stood with my fellow pundits and @GaryLineker.”

The presenter and former Arsenal and England player Alex Scott also appeared to rule herself out of presenting Saturday’s edition of Match of the Day amid speculation that she might take over. Scott tweeted a picture of US politician Bernie Sanders saying, “Nah! Not me” alongside the caption: “FYI ...”

Mark Chapman also reportedly ruled himself out.

While suspending Lineker for breaching impartiality guidelines, the BBC chair, Richard Sharp, has faced calls to quit in recent weeks. It was recently revealed that Sharp, a previous Tory donor, had made the introductions between Boris Johnson and one of the former prime minister’s distant cousins, who became a guarantor for a substantial loan. Sharp later claimed that he had acted “in good faith” as a “go-between”. Labour said his position was “increasingly untenable”.

The journalist Jon Sopel, who has held several senior positions at the BBC, said: “Lucky there are no producer guidelines on whether you need to declare facilitating an £800k loan to a prime minister while applying for a job as chairman of a broadcasting organisation.”

The former Manchester United and England defender Gary Neville, a commentator for Sky Sports, said the decision was what happened when “you take on the Tories and the system”.

Philippa Childs, head of the entertainment trade union Bectu which represents thousands of BBC workers, said the broadcaster’s decision was

“deeply concerning”. “It will give the appearance that they have bowed to political pressure from ministers to take someone off air for disagreeing with the policies of the current government,” she said.

“Taken with the ongoing controversy over the appointment of the BBC chairman, who has a much more important role in upholding the reputation of the BBC, and who has not stepped back while under investigation, it also risks giving the impression of double standards on these issues.”

Lineker’s comments dominated coverage of the government’s new asylum policy and were publicly criticised by a number of cabinet ministers. BBC sources suggested his decision to double down on the comments in further tweets, fanning the story, exasperated senior BBC management.

One issue for the BBC is whether Lineker would be happy to walk away from presenting Match of the Day, given that he has extensive business interests outside the corporation and has shown no indication that he will retract his comments.

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Gary Lineker's tweets about the government's asylum policy left the BBC in an almost impossible position. Photograph: James Manning/PA

[Gary Lineker](#)

[Analysis](#)

Gary Lineker faces a dilemma: toe the BBC line or be a social media influencer

[Mark Sweeney](#)

Corporation is risking its reputation by making an example of its highest-paid star over his tweets on asylum policy

Fri 10 Mar 2023 13.53 EST Last modified on Fri 10 Mar 2023 15.04 EST

The BBC's decision to [take Gary Lineker off air](#) leaves its most outspoken personality with a potentially career-defining decision, as the corporation looks to risk its reputation to make a public example of one of its biggest stars.

Lineker's politically loaded tweets about the government's new asylum policy – followed by a pledge to [stand by his comments](#) – had left the BBC in an almost impossible position, balancing impartiality with freedom of expression by its staff.

The [BBC](#), which has tried to rebuild a “fragile trust” with the government, reining in perceived partiality on and off screen by implementing an ultra-strict social media policy for news staff, has been put under pressure by Conservative ministers to make an example of Lineker.

However, the Match of the Day presenter has received support from big voices including Alastair Campbell, Tony Blair's former press secretary, the former Sky News presenter Adam Boulton, ex-Newsnight presenter Emily Maitlis and Piers Morgan.

Supporters viewed the decision to remove Lineker from Match of the Day as capitulating to political pressure, which weakens its independence, at a time when its chair, the former Tory donor Richard Sharp, [is under investigation](#) over allegations he helped engineer a loan for Boris Johnson.

Strictly speaking, Lineker's official status as a freelance employee and member of the sport department means he is not governed by the same social media rules that the director general, Tim Davie, introduced to keep the views of news staff in check.

The BBC has struggled with the outspoken Lineker. Last year he was publicly reprimanded for breaking impartiality guidelines [after he tweeted](#) about the Conservative party taking money from Russian donors, but no action was taken when he questioned Qatar's human rights record during the World Cup.

Lineker had felt he had ridden out the worst of the furore over his latest posts, saying on Thursday that he was looking forward to presenting Match of the Day on Saturday, while at the same time BBC insiders were saying the situation was far from resolved.

The corporation has said Lineker will not be allowed to return to presenting until it has an “agreed and clear position” on his use of social media. Lineker, who has more than 10 million social media followers, faces a dilemma. One observer has said he has to decide between the BBC and being a social media influencer.

The multimillionaire, the corporation’s highest-paid presenter on a £6.75m deal that runs until 2025, does not need the profile or income the BBC role affords him.

“This is now social conscience stuff,” says the PR expert Mark Borkowski. “Does he stay true to the Lineker brand? If he agrees to being muzzled then he severely damages his brand.”

For the BBC, the removal of Lineker is not proving to be a step towards resolving the furore. In a show of solidarity, the pundits Ian Wright and Alan Shearer tweeted on Friday that they would not be appearing on Match of the Day on Saturday.

“The BBC are damned if they do and damned if they don’t on this one,” said Borkowski. “The BBC is going to be seen to score an own goal on this one, by one side or other, no matter what they do.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2023/mar/10/gary-lineker-faces-a-dilemma-toe-the-bbc-line-or-be-a-social-media-influencer>



Nadine Dorries made the allegations on an episode of Radio 4's World at One. Photograph: Tayfun Salci/ZUMA Press Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

[Nadine Dorries](#)

BBC apologises for failure to scrutinise Nadine Dorries' claims about Sue Gray

Former culture secretary called into question neutrality of civil servant after her appointment as Keir Starmer's chief of staff

PA Media

Fri 10 Mar 2023 16.12 EST Last modified on Fri 10 Mar 2023 17.39 EST

The BBC has apologised for the failure to properly scrutinise claims made by [Nadine Dorries](#) on a radio show, capping a day of controversies for the corporation.

The broadcaster said in a statement on Friday that “there should have been more challenge” when the former culture secretary and Boris Johnson loyalist made allegations about Sue Gray on Radio 4’s World at One.

Dorries had suggested that the report by the former civil servant on lockdown-breaking parties in Downing Street during Johnson's premiership was discredited after her decision to become chief of staff for the Labour leader, Keir Starmer.

She described the ex-mandarin as a "personal friend of Keir Starmer, someone who has been in discussion over who knows what period of time ... about taking the role as his chief of staff, with the primary objective of taking down the Tory government".

The former cabinet minister went on to allege that there may have been political motivations in the findings Gray reached over the lockdown investigation.

The comments went unchallenged, but Starmer clarified in an interview with LBC that Gray was "not a friend" and is "not in the same social circles" as him.

In a statement on Friday, the [BBC](#) said it had received complaints from listeners who felt Dorries was allowed to make "inaccurate and biased" claims.

It said: "Nadine Dorries was the first and only cabinet minister and Boris Johnson loyalist to have given an interview about Sue Gray's appointment, and the programme was keen to press her on her reaction as well as what the appointment meant for the work of the privileges committee. In hindsight, we agree that there should have been more challenge to Dorries' claims."

It added that the show's full sequence included comments made by crossbench peer Lord Kerslake, who questioned whether Gray and Starmer were friends and defended Gray's integrity as a senior civil servant.

But the corporation acknowledged that his remarks had not been heard directly after Dorries', which may have left some listeners thinking her claims were uncontested.

The controversy comes on a tumultuous day for the BBC, with rows breaking out over Match of the Day presenter Gary Lineker, Question Time

presenter Fiona Bruce and the broadcasting of a show by Sir David Attenborough.

The corporation was on Friday forced to defend Bruce against accusations that she trivialised domestic abuse during a discussion about Stanley Johnson.

The presenter had interrupted while a panel member was describing the father of Boris Johnson as a “wife-beater”, explaining that his friends had stated he attacked his wife but it was “a one-off”.

The BBC said in a statement that Bruce had an obligation to follow right of reply rules when serious allegations were made about people on air, and that she had not been expressing “personal opinion”.

A statement issued later on Friday by the domestic abuse charity Refuge, for which Bruce is a long-standing ambassador, said the presenter was “deeply upset that this has been triggering for survivors”.

The charity said: “We have spoken to Fiona today, and she is appalled that any of her words have been understood as her minimising domestic violence. We know she is deeply upset that this has been triggering for survivors.”

It added: “Fiona is deeply sorry that last night’s programme has distressed survivors of domestic abuse. Refuge stands by her and all survivors today.”

The Guardian [reported on Friday that the BBC decided not to broadcast an episode of Attenborough's new series](#) on British wildlife because of fears that its themes of the destruction of nature would risk a backlash from Tory politicians and the rightwing press.

The BBC strongly denied that this was the case, and insisted the episode in question was never intended for broadcast.

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2023.03.11 - Spotlight

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- Blind date It was more of a fourth-date kind of menu
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- What makes a great sports photo? ‘Ali’s not going to knock him out again if you didn’t get it’
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[How to have a healthy brain](#)[Science](#)

Don't forget to floss: the science behind dementia and the four things you should

do to prevent it

A picture is emerging of a healthy lifestyle which is key to the condition's prevention – exercise, being sociable, and looking after your ears



[Ian Sample](#) Science editor
[@iansample](#)

Sat 11 Mar 2023 02.00 EST Last modified on Sat 11 Mar 2023 12.42 EST

The idea was simple. Recruit hundreds of people in their 80s and 90s, equip them with fitness trackers, and monitor their physical activity. Then, when the participants died, collect their brains and examine the tissue. Is there evidence, lurking in the tissue, that exercise benefits the brain?

The results, from a 2022 collaboration between the University of California in San Francisco and the University of British Columbia, [were striking](#). Physical exercise, late in life, seemed to protect the ageing connections between brain cells – the synapses where memories are made. The work, if backed up by further studies, could see exercise, and potentially drugs that mimic biochemical aspects of activity – prescribed to help slow the onset of [dementia](#).

We know there is a 30%-80% reduced risk of dementia in people who exercise

“We know there is a 30%-80% reduced risk of dementia in people who exercise,” says Kaitlin Casaleotto, the lead author on the study and an assistant professor in neurology at UCSF. “My question was, wouldn’t it be cool if we could figure out exactly how this is happening? If we could identify some of the mechanisms of exercise for brain health? These are potential therapeutic targets we can bottle.”

A small mountain of work has linked physical exercise to better brain health and lower risk of dementia in older age. One [recent study](#) of nearly 80,000 people in the UK found that the risk of dementia was halved in people who reached the goal of 10,000 steps a day. But much is still unclear. Part of the observed benefit could be down to people with healthier brains simply exercising more. While there are definite benefits to be had from exercise – greater blood flow to the brain, better cardiovascular health, lower blood pressure, less obesity and diabetes – there is still plenty to nail down.

Dementia is the number one killer in the UK, with the disorder affecting about 900,000 people. Most cases, about two-thirds, are driven by [Alzheimer’s](#) disease, but it is far from the only cause. Other forms, namely vascular dementia, dementia with [Lewy bodies](#), and [frontotemporal](#) dementia, arise from other processes. Whatever the cause, the steady destruction of brain cells erodes memory, thinking, movement and personality. In old age, dementia can be several of these conditions at once.

Some of the highest rates of dementia are found in [developed countries with older populations](#). In Germany, Italy and Japan, more than 20 in every 1,000 people have dementia compared with fewer than nine per 1,000 in proportionally younger countries including Mexico, Turkey and South Africa. The UK sits in the middle. [Indigenous groups](#) in the Amazon have some of the lowest rates. In [one recent study](#), researchers confirmed only six cases among 604 Bolivian Tsimane and Moseten people aged 60 and over, suggesting that lifelong physical activity and healthier preindustrial diets substantially reduce the risk. Over the next three decades, global dementia is due to rise substantially, particularly in north Africa, the Middle East and

eastern sub-Saharan Africa, where population growth and ageing will be among the driving forces.

But dementia is not inevitable, nor is it the reward for dodging other fatal conditions. Take all of the risk factors that we as individuals, or nations through their policies, might improve, and potentially 40% of cases could be prevented or delayed. We would not eradicate dementia, and many people who did everything to keep their brains healthy would still succumb to the disease. We could, however, dramatically reduce the risk, meaning more years of sound thinking, intact memories and independent living. “That figure, 40%, is an enormous percentage,” says James Rowe, professor of cognitive neurology at the University of Cambridge. “If we had a drug that could cut dementia by 40%, it would be a phenomenal success.”

Our brains change even with healthy ageing. People vary tremendously, but vocabulary often improves past retirement age, while processing speed, the ease of learning new information, cognitive flexibility, and working memory – for example, how many digits of a phone number you can remember – weaken. Learning more slowly in older age is often framed as a negative, but it has its advantages. Young people know so little that learning everything fast makes sense. But older people weigh new information against a lifetime’s learning. Does it fit with what I know to be true? Is it reliable? Does it deserve to be learned? “When you are born, you are fast but know little. When you are old, you are slower but knowledgeable. Which is better? It depends on the situation,” says Rowe.

Dementia is very different to healthy ageing. It is what happens when brain cells are destroyed by disease. A healthy older person can expect a gradual decline in memory and thinking skills, but people with dementia can develop profound problems with memory, judgment, language, concentration and personality. The sharp decline in performance is mirrored by a pronounced shrinkage of the brain.

Last year, researchers at the universities of Cambridge and Pennsylvania [stitched together 125,000 brain scans](#) to reveal how the human brain changes from a 15-week-old foetus to a 100-year-old adult. The work was a tour de force. Ultimately, it should allow doctors to assess how a person’s brain is ageing over their lifetime, much as paediatric growth charts allow them to

check whether children are developing normally. For example, a person's brain might be in the 50th centile at age 45, but if it falls significantly on subsequent scans there may be a problem. The researchers already see stark shifts in scans from people diagnosed with Alzheimer's. "We see those individuals crashing through the centiles," says Richard Bethlehem, an assistant professor in neuroinformatics at Cambridge.

A lot of the seeds of poor brain health are sown in childhood and then built on through early adult life and middle age

Because dementia is seen as a problem of old age, this might seem like the time to act. But ageing is a lifelong process: the better the brain ages, the better it can stave off or withstand dementia. "A lot of the seeds of poor brain health, including dementia, are sown well and truly in childhood and then built on through early adult life and middle age," says Rowe. "The state of our brain health in late life, when we are conventionally worried about dementia, depends on a whole lifespan of lifestyle and activities."

In 2020, 28 world leading experts published a major report called the [Lancet Commission on dementia](#). It identifies a dozen "potentially modifiable" factors that affect our risk of developing dementia. Which matters most depends on age. In youth, a good education makes an enormous difference, and benefits brain health for the rest of life. In midlife, not boozing too heavily and controlling blood pressure all come into play. In later life, not smoking, exercising regularly and keeping socially engaged stand out.

How these help to prevent dementia is not always straightforward. A good education doesn't happen in a vacuum. It can reflect a child's circumstances: their home environment, household income and expectations all play a part in sculpting the brain. Armed with a good education, people are better equipped to look after themselves. But education seems to act directly on the brain too, creating what researchers call cognitive reserve and resilience. Build up brain capacity early in life and that reserve becomes a shield against future damage. Likewise, education boosts resilience, the brain's ability to compensate when diseases like Alzheimer's arise. The impact can be striking. "For people with a very high education, when you look at the brain postmortem, they can have a lot of neuropathology without having had

any symptoms,” says Gill Livingston, professor of psychiatry of older people at University College London and lead author of the Lancet report. In short, the disease is there, but the brain can withstand it, at least to the point that obvious symptoms never manifest.

According to the Lancet Commission, poor education accounts for 7% of dementia worldwide. But the benefits of stretching one’s brain don’t end in youth. People who do cognitively challenging jobs [have a lower risk of dementia](#), too, regardless of their education. As the Lancet report puts it: “The use it or lose it hypothesis suggests that mental activity, in general, might improve cognitive function.” The impact of other brain-stretching activities is far from clear, however. Despite a flurry of brain training programmes being developed to boost cognitive skills, there is [no good evidence](#) that people improve at anything apart from the particular task they practise.

One message that runs through all the research on dementia prevention is that a healthy lifestyle helps. Diet is important: you cannot grow a good brain without good nutrition, and a healthy diet helps to maintain it. A [recent meta-analysis of studies](#), involving nearly 35,000 people, found that strict adherence to the [Mediterranean diet](#) was associated with a 21% lower risk of cognitive disorders and a 40% lower risk of Alzheimer’s. Whether specific nutrients and compounds are directly beneficial to the brain is the focus of intensive research, but [healthy diets](#) are encouraged regardless, because they reduce risks caused by other disorders, such as high blood pressure, poor vascular health, obesity and diabetes.

Which single intervention could reduce dementia risk the most?
Preventing hearing loss

Which single intervention could reduce dementia risk the most? The answer is one that even some researchers find surprising: preventing [hearing loss](#). Globally, hearing impairment is believed to account for about 8% of dementia. Hearing loss means less stimulation for the brain, but also more social isolation for the individual. The brain appears to shrink more rapidly, or at least the temporal lobes, which focus on sound processing, emotions and memories. What’s striking is that the link between hearing loss and

dementia is all but absent if people wear hearing aids. Livingston believes this is a huge opportunity. While people with poor eyesight tend to have it corrected, a large proportion of those who cannot hear well either think other people mumble, or are reluctant to wear a hearing aid. Correcting hearing loss as well as we correct poor sight could be a gamechanger, if enacted globally. “I think wearing a hearing aid is still stigmatised,” Livingston says, but she wonders, with more and more people now wearing earbuds, whether that barrier will soon fall too.

The picture emerging from decades of research is that the best protection against dementia comes from building a good brain, keeping it healthy and active, and avoiding too much damage. The latter can happen in seconds or years. [Brain injuries](#), from traffic accidents, military service, falls, or impacts during sports such as boxing, rugby and horse riding, all increase the risk of dementia. So does the sustained damage that comes with smoking, air pollution and excessive alcohol intake – over 21 units a week. Brain injuries are thought to account for about 3% of dementia, with heavy drinking and smoking making up 1% and 5% respectively. Air pollution accounts for around 1% of dementia.

As might be expected, some experts in the field already take steps to reduce their risk. Because it is unclear which exercises are most protective, Dr Casaletto does weekly [yoga](#), but she also jogs and includes high-intensity sprints in her routine. She eats healthily, maximising the vegetables, whole grains, olive oil, fish and legumes of the Mediterranean diet. Then there is the cognitive component. She tries to stay socially and mentally curious – pushing herself at work, broadening her collaborations, and hanging out with people she wouldn’t normally socialise with. “I think novelty is really important,” she says. “If we are doing the same thing over and over, we are not going to be pushing our brains into forming new connections.”

As part of her own risk-reducing lifestyle, Prof Livingston lifts weights and tries to reach 10,000 steps a day, even though she acknowledges it is “not a magic number”. She reads and writes. And she is wary of the impact of giving up work. “I can see that not being retired keeps you so much more active in lots of ways,” she says. “It might make me less likely to retire.

Though I do hope that if I get to the stage when I ought to because I can't function, that my colleagues will tactfully let me know."

Four changes to make now

Dementia research, like all research, comes with caveats. Most studies cannot prove that doing X instead of Y helps fend off dementia. More commonly, scientists find associations, such as older people who exercise develop less dementia. But there is always the risk of reverse causation. What if people prone to dementia simply exercise less? Whether, and to what extent, exercise protects people's brains can take some unpicking. The bottom line on whether this or that action keeps dementia at bay is rarely clear cut. Often the picture emerges with time, as evidence builds from different directions. But these are some things that you can do to help reduce the risk.

Get sweaty



Illustration: Fran Pulido/The Guardian

Keeping physically active matters. By combining the results from [multiple studies](#), scientists find have found [time](#) and [again](#) that dementia and Alzheimer's are less common in people who exercise. Sustained exercise in

midlife, and possibly later life, appears to protect against dementia. A mix of [aerobic exercise and strength training](#) seems most effective. For aerobic exercise, breaking into a sweat at least once a week or doing more than 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous exercise each week have both been shown to be protective. How exercise helps is a focus of ongoing research, but at the least, it can reduce the risk of obesity and diabetes while boosting cardiovascular fitness, all of which lower dementia risk. Other gains can be had from quitting smoking and not drinking too much alcohol.

Use a hearing aid (if you need one)



Illustration: Fran Pulido/The Guardian

Less intuitive than mental and physical fitness is the impact of hearing loss. Poor hearing in middle age is thought to be one of the most significant drivers of dementia that people can act on. The mechanisms are still being teased out, but brain scans have linked poor hearing to faster brain shrinkage, itself a driver of dementia. Hearing loss also drives up social isolation, which compounds the problem, as people withdraw from social gatherings and the conversations they entail. But there is good news emerging: the marked declines seen in people with hearing impairments are [not as dramatic in people who wear hearing aids](#), suggesting that correcting the problem can help keep dementia at bay.

Keep on learning



Illustration: Fran Pulido/The Guardian

A good chunk of people's resilience to dementia comes from early life education. But even after school or university, keeping the brain mentally engaged matters. It is important for the brain to be making new connections. This means challenging yourself mentally, setting your brain to work on varied, unfamiliar and cognitively complex issues. A [mentally challenging job may help](#), but so should lifelong learning, engaging hobbies and [keeping socially active](#), especially if you mix with people you wouldn't normally hang out with. Being [more sociable in your 50s and 60s](#) is linked to better cognitive performance and a lower risk of dementia later in life, perhaps because it gets people using their memory and language skills. Keeping the brain active builds "cognitive reserve", researchers say, meaning the brain is better able to cope as the pathologies that drive dementia take hold.

Prioritise dental hygiene



Illustration: Fran Pulido/The Guardian

One of the more speculative ideas on how to reduce dementia risk comes from research into bugs in the mouth. A [recent study](#) in the US found that people with gum disease and mouth infections were [more likely to develop Alzheimer's](#), the most common cause of dementia. Work is now under way to check whether bacteria such as *Porphyromonas gingivalis* help drive the condition, or simply proliferate in people in the early stages of dementia. If bacteria raise the risk, there will be even more reason to properly brush and floss twice a day.

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Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

[Blind date](#)[Relationships](#)

Blind date: ‘It was more of a fourth-date kind of menu’

Divya, 25, a tech consultant, meets Kishan, 27, a cancer research technician

Sat 11 Mar 2023 01.00 EST

Divya on Kishan



What were you hoping for?

True love ... or at least a good dating story for my friends.

First impressions?

Smart, well read (he was reading a book when I came in), nice.

What did you talk about?

Where we live/grew up. Our Indian roots. Lord of the Rings. Standup comedy. Our worst travel experiences.

Most awkward moment?

When I tried to get some of the fries we were sharing on to my plate and they dropped unceremoniously off my fork.

Good table manners?

Well, we were eating loaded fried-chicken burgers and fries, so considering

that, yeah, definitely.

Best thing about Kishan?

He was really friendly and easy to speak to.

Would you introduce Kishan to your friends?

Yeah, he'd get on with them.

Describe Kishan in three words.

Nice, funny and easy-going.

What do you think Kishan made of you?

Only good things, I hope!

Did you go on somewhere?

No, I think we were both exhausted after a long day of work, and we both had work again the next day.

And ... did you kiss?

Nope, just a hug before we left.

If you could change one thing about the evening what would it be?

The food was amazing but a bit messy – it was definitely more of a fourth- or fifth-date kind of menu.

Marks out of 10?

It was a good first date is all I'll say.

Would you meet again?

Yes.

Q&A

Fancy a blind date?

Show

Blind date is Saturday's dating column: every week, two strangers are paired up for dinner and drinks, and then spill the beans to us, answering a set of

questions. This runs, with a photograph we take of each dater before the date, in Saturday magazine (in the UK) and online at theguardian.com every Saturday. It's been running since 2009 – you can [read all about how we put it together here](#).

What questions will I be asked?

We ask about age, location, occupation, hobbies, interests and the type of person you are looking to meet. If you do not think these questions cover everything you would like to know, tell us what's on your mind.

Can I choose who I match with?

No, it's a blind date! But we do ask you a bit about your interests, preferences, etc – the more you tell us, the better the match is likely to be.

Can I pick the photograph?

No, but don't worry: we'll choose the nicest ones.

What personal details will appear?

Your first name, job and age.

How should I answer?

Honestly but respectfully. Be mindful of how it will read to your date, and that Blind date reaches a large audience, in print and online.

Will I see the other person's answers?

No. We may edit yours and theirs for a range of reasons, including length, and we may ask you for more details.

Will you find me The One?

We'll try! Marriage! Babies!

Can I do it in my home town?

Only if it's in the UK. Many of our applicants live in London, but we would love to hear from people living elsewhere.

How to apply

Email blind.date@theguardian.com

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.



Kishan and Divya on their date

Kishan on Divya



What were you hoping for?

Someone fun and interesting.

First impressions?

Easygoing and sweet. She made the night very relaxing.

What did you talk about?

Travel stories. Our favourite TV shows ... we ended up quoting scenes from Modern Family to each other.

Most awkward moment?

The burgers – not the most graceful of meals to eat on a first date.

Good table manners?

Like I said, messy burger, so in that context I didn't notice anything out of the ordinary.

Best thing about Divya?

Her confidence: she knows what she wants.

Would you introduce Divya to your friends?

Yeah, I'm sure she'd get on well with them.

Describe Divya in three words.

Fun, confident and sweet.

What do you think Divya made of you?

I hope I came across as interesting and funny.

Did you go on somewhere?

No, it was a weeknight.

And ... did you kiss?

Only pecks on the cheek.

If you could change one thing about the evening what would it be?

I wish it hadn't been a school night, so we could have stayed longer.

Marks out of 10?

I'm not going to use numbers.

Would you meet again?

We've exchanged phone numbers, so let's see what happens.

*Divya and Kishan ate at [Valderrama's](#), London N1. Fancy a blind date?
Email blind.date@theguardian.com*

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‘We could feel the gravity of it. It was electrifying’: 50 photographs that reshaped sport

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2023/mar/11/we-could-feel-the-gravity-of-it-it-was-electrifying-50-photographs-that-reshaped-sport>



Muhammad Ali knocks out Cleveland Williams in the 1966 world heavyweight title. Photograph: Neil Leifer/Sports Illustrated/Getty Images
[Sport](#)

‘Ali’s not going to knock him out again if you didn’t get it’: what makes a great sports photo?

The Guardian’s Tom Jenkins – who has been capturing sport on camera for decades – on the luck, skill and planning required to catch fleeting moments of athletic greatness

[Plus 50 photos that shaped sport](#)

[Simon Hattenstone](#) with [Tom Jenkins](#)

Sat 11 Mar 2023 03.00 EST Last modified on Sat 11 Mar 2023 04.51 EST

“You make your own luck in this game, kid.” That was the mantra of the celebrated photographer [Eamonn McCabe](#), who died last year. McCabe made his name as a sports photographer, and the saying couldn’t be truer of

his specialism. Talk to any top sports photographer and you'll discover the huge amount of work and knowledge that goes into capturing a microsecond on camera.

Sports photos can be memorable as action shots, portraits, art, comedy, news. They move us because they capture emotional extremes, historical events and the wonderful – occasionally tragic – chaos of live action.

I've been lucky enough to work with two of Britain's greatest sports photographers, McCabe and his protege [Tom Jenkins](#), when interviewing athletes. But the real sports photography – capturing the action at an arena – is a solitary pursuit. No matter how many fellow snappers are there, sports photographers are alone behind their lens, hoping that their angle will be the unique one.

Jenkins dreamed of being a professional sportsman. When he realised he wasn't good enough to make it at any sport (snooker was the closest he got), he turned to photography. McCabe visited his school to talk about sports photography, and Jenkins discovered you could get the same buzz from taking photos of great events as competing in them. "It's as close to being a sportsperson as you can get because, like them, you've got no second chances. Ali's not going to knock that guy out again if you didn't get it first time. There are no action replays here."

McCabe and [Chris Smith](#) revolutionised sports photography in Britain. "They showed me it didn't always have to be peak-of-the-action stuff," Jenkins says. "They made sports photography more featuresy." For him, the American Neil Leifer is the greatest sports photographer. He talks about two astonishing pictures of Muhammad Ali: one (above) of him towering over the defeated Sonny Liston; the other a gorgeous shot, taken from the rafters, of Cleveland Williams flat on his back and a triumphant Ali at the far end of the ring. The picture is simply beautiful – the colours, the choreography, the symmetry, the ring white as a ski slope, surrounded by rows of colourful press photographers. (It's surprising how often the great photos not only capture the action, but also capture the capturing of the action.) "This is why Leifer's images are constantly voted the greatest sports pictures of all time," Jenkins says. "All the stars have aligned in that moment. It took a huge

amount of work for him to get that camera into the roof. But he set that camera up hoping there'd be a knockout. He was putting himself and his camera in a position so if the luck did go for him that day, he would get a beautiful picture."



'I knew one of these days the luck would go for me': Nina Carberry's fall at the Grand National in 2016. Photograph: Tom Jenkins/The Guardian

Jenkins won sports photo of the year at the World Press Photo awards in 2017 for his shot of jockey Nina Carberry going flying at the Grand National. He says [this photo was 25 years in the making](#). Every year he'd set up remote cameras at different angles at the Chair, the biggest fence on the course. "I knew one of these days the luck would go for me. Where the cameras were positioned was too dangerous for me to be. They wouldn't have let me lie on the grass beneath the fence, but they didn't mind the cameras being there."

Many of Jenkins's favourite photos have a surreal element. Take Bob Martin's image of the Paralympic swimmer Javier Torres diving into the pool, with his prosthetic legs parked in the background, or the American school football match being played while the school building burns in the background. The second looks like a film still, a set-up, but it isn't. Even the title, Bad Day at Mount Hermon, could be a movie.

Some of the best sports photos are funny: the policeman using his helmet to cover a streaker's privates or Vinnie Jones squeezing Paul Gascoigne's balls. But being funny isn't enough to make it a classic. Both photos are perfectly framed, and the Jones/Gazza pic tells you everything you need to know about the two men – Jones looks positively malign, while Gazza could be the wronged half of a comedy double act.



A policeman covers up a streaker at Twickenham in 1974. Photograph: Bradshaw Ian/Mirrorpix

Sports photos can be memorable for their humanity. Jenkins's beautifully composed shot of England cricketer Andrew Flintoff comforting Australia's Brett Lee reminds us of one of the key elements of sport – sporting behaviour. England have just won the second Ashes Test of 2005 by two runs, and while the rest of the team are celebrating, Flintoff comforts Lee. Beautiful.

Some of the most powerful photos aren't necessarily great ones. Oscar Pistorius running in the Olympics is memorable now for what came next – a few months later he was charged with murder. Nelson Mandela presenting the Rugby World Cup to the South African team in 1995 is famous because it was the first major sporting event held post-apartheid. Jesse Owens

saluting at the 1936 Olympics surrounded by Sieg Heiling Germans may not be a great photo, but it is a great image.

Sports imagery can be horrifying. Look at Evander Holyfield's ear after Mike Tyson has bitten a chunk out of it. What makes it a great photo is not just the blood and missing flesh, but the angle, the beads of sweat, the action. Perhaps the most traumatic image in sports photography was taken by McCabe, at the Heysel stadium in 1985, of supporters trying to escape the fatal crush. "After that night I thought, if this is sport you can have it." He gave up sports photography after Heysel.

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Sometimes it is difficult to define what a sports photograph is. Jenkins says ultimately it has to be taken at an event and not be pre-planned. "Portraiture and sports photography are at opposite ends of the scale. Portraiture is about the photographer being in control, creating whatever they want in front of their lens, whereas in sport you have no control."

Sport is the toughest photography genre to excel in. To capture the fastest athletes in the world, the photographer's got to be fast. When manufacturers produce new kit, they look to sports photographers to try it out. "They know how punishing sports photography is to a camera," Jenkins says. "We're out

in extremes of heat and cold – all the things electronics hate. Sports photographers need incredible lenses and the fastest shutter speeds, and are pushing the limits of cameras as far as they can go.”

Technology advances all the time, which means photographers can now take pictures that would have been impossible a few years ago. (Oli Scarff’s photo of synchronised swimmer Anita Álvarez being rescued underwater was taken by a robotic camera fixed to the bottom of the pool.) Equipment has become cheaper and more accessible, which has democratised sports photography. “It was so white and male-dominated, but it’s beginning to change,” Jenkins says. “People don’t think it’s a closed shop now whereas in the past it might have been because the prices of the equipment were so high that it ruled out many people.”



‘I was waiting behind the goal, hoping something might happen’: Lionel Messi carrying the World Cup last year. Photograph: Tom Jenkins/The Guardian

Jenkins has worked at the Guardian for 33 years. Does sports photography still give him the same thrill? Yes, and then some, he says. He tells me of capturing Lionel Messi [carrying the World Cup on the shoulders of Sergio Agüero at last year's final](#) – another photo he had hoped for, and one that echoes Maradona being carried by fans around the pitch in 1986 after

winning the World Cup. “I was waiting behind the goal, hoping something might happen, then suddenly this tidal wave of people comes through the goal they’ve dismantled and right in front of me, on Sergio’s shoulders at the top of this wave, is Lionel holding up the trophy.” And he’s getting the buzz all over again, just thinking about it. “The World Cup final is the biggest sporting event on the planet. It has more eyeballs on it than any other event, and as a photographer you’re right there at the centre of it. It’s just the most amazing feeling!”

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**‘Torture porn or serious literature?’:
the love-hate phenomenon of cult novel
A Little Life**

One million copies sold, sobbing superfans on TikTok and a new stage adaptation starring James Norton – yet Hanya Yanagihara's 2015 book continues to divides readers



Alex Needham
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Sat 11 Mar 2023 04.00 ESTLast modified on Sat 11 Mar 2023 07.12 EST

On the cover of the American edition of Hanya Yanagihara's *A Little Life* is a photograph by the late [Peter Hujar](#). It shows a handsome young man who, with his eyes screwed shut and his head resting on his hand, looks utterly overcome with despair. Look at the small print and you see that the picture is called [Orgasmic Man](#), one of a series Hujar made in 1969. The man isn't crying. He's coming.

It's a remarkably apt image for a book which has hit the commercial motherlode by wallowing in abject misery. Since it was published in 2015, *A Little Life* has sold more than 1m copies and is now a bona fide cult classic. There are [multiple Reddit threads](#) devoted to it; on Pinterest, people show off their [A Little Life-inspired tattoos](#); and the style magazine i-D [recently quoted a woman](#) called Kristin Curtis saying that her friends would send each other selfies while sobbing when they reached the novel's conclusion. On TikTok, the search terms “*A Little Life*” and “*A Little Life* book” have

200m page views between them, although not all of the content is positive. “I would not recommend this book to my worst enemy,” declares [declares BookTokker @sivanreads](#), disapprovingly brandishing her copy, and representing the many readers who were appalled – rather than moved – by this famously divisive text.

Now, a few years after [a TV version failed to get off the ground](#), A Little Life’s superfans can meet in the stalls of the Harold Pinter theatre in London, where [a stage adaptation](#) by the celebrated Belgian director Ivo van Hove will land on 25 March. When it was first performed in Amsterdam in 2018, the play was four hours long (not surprising, given that the novel weighs in at 720 pages) and in Dutch. That version was performed with subtitles [at the Edinburgh international festival](#) and in New York last year. It has now been condensed somewhat and is in English for the first time, with James Norton, the villain from Happy Valley, playing the tragic central figure, Jude.

A man whose productions often conclude with fluids raining from the ceiling, Van Hove’s take on A Little Life does not stint on the book’s gore – audience members have fainted. “I didn’t see the Dutch production, but friends said that it goes there,” Omari Douglas, who is in the British cast and plays JB, tells me as rehearsals commence. “They don’t pussyfoot around anything, the images are vivid and they’re strong and you see what is described in the novel, done very theatrically of course.”

The story has been deemed so harrowing that the stage production has a therapist on hand for the cast

A Little Life is the story of four men – Jude, JB, Willem and Malcolm – who meet at university, move to New York, and all have improbably stratospheric careers as, respectively, a lawyer, artist, actor and architect. Jude, who is disabled for reasons divulged towards the end of the novel, also self-harms, and through a grisly series of flashbacks, Yanagihara reveals that as a child he suffered years of sexual abuse at the hands of evil care workers, a monstrous doctor who took him prisoner, and the countless men who paid to rape him after he was pimped out by the depraved monk Brother Luke. The

book juxtaposes Jude's childhood story with the adult relationships he has with his friends, particularly Willem, and asks whether the love of a chosen family is enough to provide a salve for deep trauma, before concluding – spoiler warning – that it isn't.

It's a story that has been deemed so harrowing that the stage production has a psychotherapist on hand in case performing it affects the cast's mental wellbeing. "I'm really happy that we've got that in place because we're dealing with really sensitive, heavy stuff," Douglas says. "There's a preconception that you can just go in and do the thing and shrug it off, [but] there is an element of taking it home with you."

"We want to make sure that the actors, offstage departments and creatives who have chosen to be part of the production have support available should they feel they need it," Victoria Abbott, the therapist in question, who works for an organisation called [Applause for Thought](#), tells me in an email. "Furthermore, we aim to provide enough resources about content and themes to allow potential audience members to make an informed decision about whether this production feels suitable for them before viewing a performance."

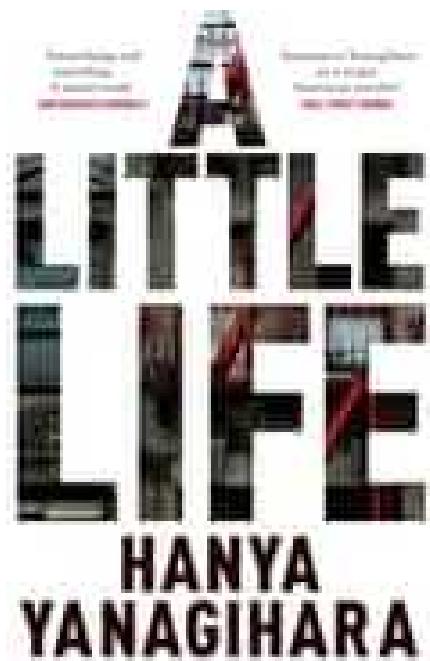


James Norton and Luke Thompson in the new production. Photograph: Jan Versweyveld

Nonetheless, it's probably the book's fixation on trauma and abuse that has made it so potent for young readers who are deeply concerned with their identity and mental health, and who feel that the world is a profoundly callous place, with friendship the only bulwark. In its own brutally forceful way, *A Little Life* has intersected with the fears and obsessions of our times.

"As a fan of the book myself, it was the theme of friendship that resonated most," Abbott writes. "What Hanya depicts is this gloriously nuanced, beautiful, difficult but meaningful connection between four men. Research shows that one in 20 adults feel lonely 'often/always' in England and the theme of never quite feeling like you've made those 'friends for life' is a familiar one in my therapy room. Perhaps *A Little Life* reveals that it is possible to create a loving chosen family even amidst adversity."

But what about the cruelty perpetrated by the book's myriad evil characters? "For some, the book will reflect trauma and suffering in a way that might validate a reader's own experience," Abbot writes. "This is especially poignant considering the rising prevalence of the themes contained in the plot. For instance, the most recent NSPCC statistics estimate that around [half a million](#) children experience either neglect, physical, emotional or sexual abuse every year in the UK and approximately 2.4 million people are involved in some kind of domestic violence."



This is the argument fans deploy against those who feel the book's treatment of abuse and trauma is schlocky and exploitative. [In a discussion about the novel on website the Niche](#), the writer Peyton Thomas (who claims to read A Little Life every year) says: "Everything that happens to Jude is something that happens to real people," though Jude's progress, from a baby abandoned in an alley to a double amputee with an eating disorder, seems more like the life of an early Christian martyr than a living, breathing person. Especially since, in his adult life, he's a vastly wealthy and successful lawyer – and in his spare time, not just an exquisite singer of Schubert's lieder but also a professional-grade baker.

A Little Life's polarising qualities became apparent when the book was reviewed. While the New Yorker [acclaimed its "subversive brilliance"](#) and Garth Greenwell, in a much-quoted review for the Atlantic, [described it as a great gay novel](#), it was [panned in the LRB](#), and the New York Review of Books' criticism [provoked a complaint from the novel's publisher](#) ("What I do object to ... is his implication that my author has somehow, to use his word, 'duped' its readers into feeling the emotions of pity and terror and sadness and compassion," wrote Gerald Howard, executive editor of Doubleday).

Despite this ambivalence from literature's gatekeepers, and the fact that it's more of an emotional white-knuckle ride than an exemplar of great literary style, A Little Life ended up on the Booker prize shortlist, where it lost to Marlon James's [A Brief History of Seven Killings](#). "I think the way it worked is that it's more like a fairytale or grand opera, it exists in that scale of very heightened emotions," says critic Sam Leith, who was on the judging panel that year. "It's like what Noël Coward says about the power of cheap music. I thought it was great but I can't really explain why."

While there are nods to Dickens and, in Jude's name, perhaps to Hardy, "it doesn't in an obvious way stand in any particular literary tradition, apart from the misery memoir," Leith says. A Little Life is certainly as gruesomely compelling as a misery memoir, but its true ancestors lie in the world of fanfic, particularly the genre called "[hurt/comfort](#)" or "whump", in which a male character is put through the mill, physically and emotionally, and then given tender solace by a friend, also male.

Usually written by women, this kind of fanfic can be a fantasy of male vulnerability, motivated by BDSM kink, and/or the urge to tear away the facades of masculinity and see the pain and weakness beneath. As in A Little Life, the trauma in hurt/comfort fanfic often takes the shape of sexual violence. “I think sometimes it can feel safer, if you’re a cis woman, if you’re writing about a body that is distinct from your own, and there’s an element of distance there which can be helpful to work through issues and your own thoughts,” says [Mikaella Clements](#), an author and fanfic expert.

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Hanya Yanagihara. Photograph: Sian Davey/The Observer

Clements recognised the parallels between hurt/comfort fanfic and *A Little Life* after reading Yanagihara's book. "The thing I find interesting about hurt/comfort is that the character going through the pain has this really fascinating psychic pull," she tells me. "In fan fiction you see it happening so often to the more beloved characters within a fandom – for example Bucky from Captain America – and similarly with Jude, I think he's such a nuanced and real character, and then to watch him go through these extremes is equal parts awful and super-engaging." This fascination – or identification – with Jude's suffering is borne out by the unofficial merchandise fans of the book have [created for sale on Etsy](#). As well as a pendant inscribed with the four main characters' names, and a navy sweatshirt with two hands clasped against a sprig of leaves and a quotation from the book, there is fan art, a typical subject being [a despairing Willem visiting a bandaged Jude in hospital](#) and nestling his head in his lap. "I think what's interesting about the hurt/comfort genre is that it's this fantasy of pain being recognised," Clements says. "So you're the person being hurt, but it's also the fantasy of getting to tend to a beloved object so you're the comforter as well. The power balance is quite difficult to track."

Hysterical tragedy, laced with romance and BDSM? In many other works of literary fiction, these elements may have been employed for darkly comic

purposes – but the only irony in *A Little Life* is the title, given the novel's great length. Nonetheless, the book's determination to avoid levity is one reason it compels, Leith suggests. “Part of its force is the way it leans into its subject matter so aggressively,” he says. “It’s like standing in the front row of a Mogwai gig.”

As well as anticipating the hard-pressed Gen Z's understandable preoccupation with trauma and mental distress, Yanagihara was also prescient in her idiosyncratic treatment of sexual identity. Whether or not *A Little Life* can be regarded as a gay book depends on who you ask. Interestingly Douglas, who previously starred in *It's a Sin*, Russell T Davies's Channel 4 saga about a group of gay friends during the Aids crisis, doesn't regard *A Little Life* as “a queer story per se”, pointing out that only JB identifies as gay. “There’s a section in the book where Willem says he doesn’t necessarily refer to himself as gay, he just says that he fell in love with Jude,” Douglas says, “and I think those are the kinds of conversations that we’re all having today. If you look at the public discourse about queerness and people putting labels on things, it’s so complex and nuanced.”

The characters' fuzzily defied sexuality chimes with the modern expansion of the idea of queerness as a state of mind or collection of values, rather than an indication of the people one chooses to sleep with. But it also means that, unlike *It's a Sin*, *A Little Life* doesn't have to deal with the substance of real gay lives. Jude's abusers have infected him with a nameless, incurable STD of which he's deeply ashamed, but if Yanagihara called it Aids, she would have to talk about treatment, and activism, and a wider gay community. Instead, *A Little Life* takes place in a strange hothouse bubble on which the real world barely impinges. As some critics have pointed out, 9/11 presumably happens at some point in the novel's timeline, but it goes entirely unmentioned by these four supposed New Yorkers.

As a woman, Yanagihara has taken some heat from those who believe only members of a particular community are qualified to write about its pain, though peers including author Alexander Chee have rushed to her defence: [Chee tweeted](#) that in the mid-90s Yanagihara edited an anthology of queer Asian American writing, and that as editor of the New York Times supplement T, “she has given unprecedented mainstream coverage to queer writing and art, showing again and again she is no tourist to our lives”. On

the other hand, her use of Orgasmic Man, argues cultural critic Kevin Brazil in his book [Whatever Happened to Queer Happiness](#), is appropriation, an attempt to locate A Little Life in an underground tradition in which it doesn't fit.

Yet where does A Little Life fit? Is it torture porn or serious literature? Fanfic or grand opera? Something to sob over while taking selfies, or merely an airport novel with A-levels? Even people who hate the book usually admit to the weirdly haunting effect of Yanagihara's netherworld, the kind that makes you want to discuss it with someone else, whether in a book group or on TikTok. In i-D, a fan called Erika Veurink said: "When you match with another person and realise they're also an A Little Life person, there's this moment of instant connection. It's like, if you can tolerate this, then we can cut the bullshit."

And for all the readers who regard A Little Life as trashy and sensationalist, there are others for whom it validates their own experience of trauma and pain – in the modern parlance, they feel seen. "It's not a redemption story," says Clements, "but it kind of is, because you become devoted to Jude. A Little Life is this dream of having people recognise that you have been through something awful, and love and look after you."

A Little Life opens at the [Harold Pinter theatre](#), London, on 25 March.

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2023.03.11 - Opinion

- Gary Lineker spoke his mind. Now we should too: fate could have put any one of us in those migrant boats
- For all of us detained at Guantánamo, making art was a lifeline. Why won't Joe Biden let us keep our work?
- Greek tragedies like Medea are an ethical nightmare. That's why we need them
- Cartoon Martin Rowson on the Anglo-French refugee deal



A group of people thought to be migrants arrive in Dover, Kent, on board a Border Force vessel on 6 March, 2023. Photograph: Gareth Fuller/PA

[Opinion](#)[Immigration and asylum](#)

Gary Lineker spoke his mind. Now we should too: fate could have put any one of us in those migrant boats

[Jonathan Freedland](#)



The BBC presenter's sidelining will delight ministers eager for a distraction. The last thing they want is for us to see refugees as real people

Fri 10 Mar 2023 12.16 EST Last modified on Fri 10 Mar 2023 13.48 EST

Even to talk about it is a distraction, but let's be clear: Gary Lineker is not the villain here. On the contrary, he deserves admiration for speaking out against a naked injustice, for taking a stance that has now required him to "[step back](#)" from presenting Match of the Day while he and the BBC work out what he is, and is not, allowed to say on social media.

True, he deployed the wrong analogy: the Conservative government's policy and language on refugees are foul, but they are not a match for either the policy or language of "[Germany in the 30s](#)", as he tweeted. When the home secretary, Suella Braverman, speaks of desperate people as an "[invasion](#)" she dehumanises them, and that is appalling enough – but even in the earliest stages of the Nazi dehumanisation of the Jews, both the words and the deeds were [worse](#).

So Lineker erred by making the one comparison that makes this government look less bad than the alternative. In the process, he allowed the culture war

machine to crank itself up to full heat, thereby diverting attention from what actually matters. Because every minute we are talking about Lineker is a minute looking away from the actual villain: this cruel and useless government and its reprehensible plan to mistreat refugees.

It's wrong on every level, except perhaps party politically – with Tory strategists detecting an advantage to be had in “red wall” seats by talking tough on migration. But practically, legally and morally, it is a disgrace.

The proposed new legislation would, in the words of the UN High Commissioner on Refugees, “amount to an asylum ban – extinguishing the right to seek refugee protection in the United Kingdom for those who arrive irregularly, no matter how genuine and compelling their claim may be”. Some might read that sentence and think the obvious solution is for genuine refugees to arrive “regularly”. The trouble is, for most people seeking asylum in the UK no such route exists.

There are schemes for those from Ukraine, Afghanistan and Hong Kong. But for a person fleeing from somewhere else, there is no office they can walk into, no form they can fill in. A small boat, or the back of a lorry, might be their only way to safety. Yet the government wants automatically to deny such people the right even to apply for asylum: instead, they will be detained and then deported within 28 days. Where would they be held? Where would they be moved? The government has no answers.

As the UNHCR notes, that's a “clear breach of the refugee convention”. Written on the face of the bill is Braverman's admission that the new law may be incompatible with the European convention on human rights. Rather appropriately, it's called the illegal migration bill: it's almost certainly illegal. It's also the second time this government has asked the Commons to pass legislation that it admits is at odds with international law.

The Conservatives' justification is that the UK faces that supposed “invasion” of would-be migrants and refugees. But besides being grotesque and inhuman language – a dog-whistle that's been heard by the far right, turning out in force outside places where new arrivals are housed – it's also wholly false. Numbers from the Migration Observatory show that the UK is, in fact, a laggard when it comes to taking in those in need.

The UK granted asylum to 13,000 people in 2021, a fraction of the 60,000 taken in by Germany and much less than half of those admitted by France. Spain, Italy and Greece all took in more than we did. In other words, this is not some unique challenge faced by Britain. Far from it. Asylum claims went up across the entire EU last year, and globally we are scarcely doing the bare minimum. The biggest refugee populations are in [Turkey and Colombia](#); Germany is home to 2.2 million refugees. In Britain, there are 232,000.

At this point, ministers and their allies insist they're not trying to keep out genuine refugees, but economic migrants – people who are not fleeing from peril, but rather seeking a better life. Put aside that the new approach will treat both categories of people the same: if you arrive here irregularly, you'll be shut out of the asylum system, no matter what hell you've fled from. Put aside, too, the [Refugee Council's figures](#) showing that two-thirds of those crossing the Channel qualify as refugees – and the fact that plenty of long-established Britons, some of them in the cabinet, are the descendants of people who were economic migrants. Focus instead on those who are described that way now.

Chief among them are Albanians, who have become a ready target for the anti-migrant crowd. They're easily cast as abusers of British generosity: from somewhere officially deemed a “safe country”, what right do they have to come here? Except more than half of the asylum claims [lodged by Albanians](#) are upheld: it turns out they are refugees after all. Most of those are women and children, often the victims of trafficking and exploitation. But young Albanian men, those most easily demonised, are often victims too, whether fleeing violence and blood feuds back home or abducted into a modern form of slavery once here. [Consider the case](#) of the trafficked 16-year-old boy who was locked into a cannabis farm in Leeds for three months, before he was freed in a police raid.

Of course, some of those coming here will be acting on the eternal and universal human impulse to move in search of a brighter future. We could follow Braverman's dream to put them on a plane to Rwanda – or we might note that, at the very moment the government launches this rancid bill, it is “quietly” seeking to bring in more overseas workers to plug a chronic shortage in the labour market, “starting with looser rules for the construction

sector,” [according to the FT](#). It can’t be beyond the wit of even this government to see the connection – and come up with a scheme that would open up a regular route for people who could help fill some of the 1.2m UK jobs that remain stubbornly vacant.

We need to see this whole question differently. To realise that migration is a global challenge, like the climate crisis, that will require nations to work together, forging arrangements such as [those agreed on Friday](#) by Rishi Sunak and Emmanuel Macron, and each country to do its bit: there’s no escaping it, Britain will have to take in its share of people. To see that those people can be like every cohort of refugees and migrants that has come before it: a huge asset for a country in need of extra hands now, and down the generations. And to remember what exactly it is that these people are fleeing – whether from Iran, where schoolgirls have been targeted by a [wave of poisonings](#) credibly suspected to be the work of those in power, from Eritrea, where [torture and executions](#) have become routine, or Afghanistan, where the Taliban are once again barring women from the fundamentals of a human life. Above all, to reflect that, but for the lottery of fate, it would not be them on those boats – it would be us.

- Jonathan Freedland is a Guardian columnist
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'In Guantánamo, from the very beginning, we made art'. A painting by Sabri al-Qurashi. Photograph: Sabri al-Qurashi

[Opinion](#)[Guantánamo Bay](#)

For all of us detained at Guantánamo, making art was a lifeline. Why won't Joe Biden let us keep our work?

[Mansoor Adayfi](#)

Art freed our minds and helped us survive. It cannot be right to argue that, even now, the fruits of our creativity belong to the state

- Mansoor Adayfi is CAGE's Guantánamo project coordinator, an artist, activist, writer and former Guantánamo prisoner

Sat 11 Mar 2023 04.00 EST Last modified on Sat 11 Mar 2023 12.41 EST



Mansoor Adayfi

Last month, the [Pentagon partially lifted](#) the Trump administration's ban on the release of artwork made by prisoners at Guantánamo Bay. Prisoners will be able to take "a practicable quantity of their art" if they are transferred out of the prison. It's unclear what "practicable" means, and whether this ambiguous term means prisoners will only be allowed to take a small portion of the artwork they have created during years of captivity.

In Guantánamo, from the very beginning, we made art. We had nothing, so we made art out of nothing. We drew with tea powder on toilet paper. We painted our walls with soap, and carved Styrofoam cups and food containers. We sang, danced, recited poetry and composed songs. We were always punished for making art or singing.

In 2010 the rules changed: we then had real paper, pens and paints – colours we hadn't seen for years. We no longer had to hide our writings, paintings, poems and songs, which had meant hiding parts of ourselves. We no longer were punished for painting or singing. We could reveal parts of ourselves that were long hidden.



‘Our art helped us survive, freed us from years of solitary confinement.’ A painting by Mansoor Adayfi.

Art was our way to heal ourselves, to escape the feeling of being imprisoned and free ourselves, just for a little while. We made [the sea](#), trees, the beautiful blue sky and [ships](#). Our art helped us survive, freed us from years of solitary confinement that corroded our memories and distanced us from who we are, where all we could see was cages, tarps and chains.

And we shared our artwork. Artwork moved from one block to another in Camp 6, so we could see each other’s efforts. We gave our art to our lawyers and families as well as guards and camp staff. We started to share our artwork with the world. In 2017, an [exhibition](#) was organised, Ode to the Sea, curated by Erin Thompson in New York at John Jay College.

In response, the Department of Defense threatened to [shut down](#) the exhibition and [to burn the art](#), as it claimed the pieces were US government property. The news shocked us all. The increased public attention on the prison angered the Trump administration, which responded by [banning art from leaving Guantánamo](#). The Pentagon spokesperson Maj Ben Sakrisson confirmed at the time that the [government’s position](#) was that “items produced by detainees at Guantánamo Bay remain the property of the US government”.

For years before the ban, the camp administration had permitted detainees to send their artwork to their families through the International Committee of the Red Cross. Also, lawyers for the prisoners were permitted to take their clients' art off the US Navy base. All the artwork went through a security screening that analysed it for secret messages with national security implications. In the instance of some model ships made by Moath al-Alwi, troops went so far as to make and study an X-ray of them. Some detainees transferred off the base had also been allowed to take their works of art with them.

Ironically, the US government was the first to exhibit our artwork. In 2010, with the launch of a prison art programme, and for years until the ban, the artwork was featured during tours of Guantánamo's detention facilities given to reporters and other delegations. Journalists were encouraged to photograph it. Once the ban was imposed, reporters were no longer allowed to see the artwork.



'In the instance of some model ships made by Moath al-Alwi, troops went so far as to make and study an X-ray of them.' One of Moath al-Alwi's model ships.

Along with Guantánamo's lawyers, activists and NGOs appealing to the US government, we have been working since the ban was imposed to free the

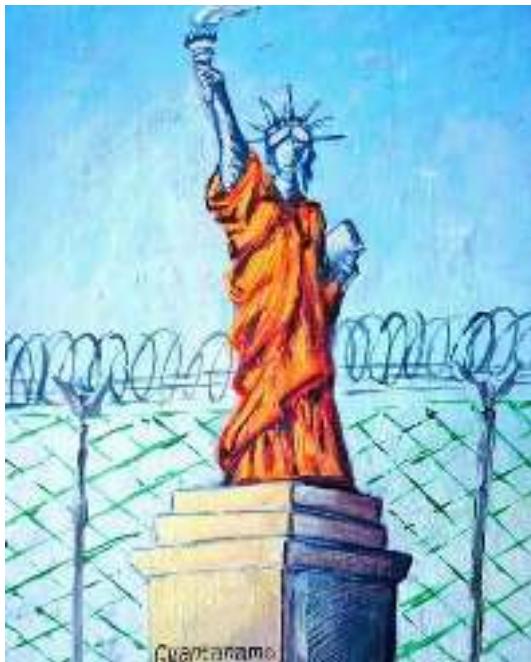
artwork. Last year, eight former Guantánamo prisoners wrote a [letter to the president, Joe Biden](#), asking him to release artwork from Guantánamo; it was signed by hundreds of people. Lawyers who represent some of the Guantánamo prisoners also contacted the UN. Last year, two rapporteurs for the UN [wrote](#) to the secretary of state, Antony J Blinken, inquiring about the artwork policy.

The Biden administration has not yet replied to UN officials. One of the rapporteurs, [Fionnuala Ní Aoláin](#), visited the military prison at Guantánamo last month. The artwork was one topic she was planning to discuss. The partial lifting of the ban is welcome, but it is not enough.

The questions we must ask the defence department, specifically, are: what makes detainees' artwork US property? Where exactly in the US constitution does it state that prisoners' artwork belongs to the government? What about detainees' intellect? What about their creativity? Are these also the government's property? Who owns the copyright to the prisoners' artworks? If it is government property, how are they going to treat it? Where is it now?

This is slavery, theft and cruelty. The defence department needs to explain its future policy regarding detainees' artwork. People need to know what will happen, and current and former prisoners have the right to know too.

The art these men created is often precious to them. [Sufyian Barhoumi](#), who was released last April back to his home country, Algeria, said “they took all my artwork and even my legal documents including letters from my lawyers. My lawyers are trying to contact the US government about my legal documents and my paintings but there is no answer ... I’m afraid they will just throw it away or destroy it.”



‘Each painting holds moments of our lives, secrets, tears, pain and hope.’ A painting by Sabri al-Qurashi.

[Al-Alwi](#), who was cleared for release in January 2022, [told his lawyer](#) that he would rather his artwork be released than himself. “As far as I am concerned, I’m done, my life and my dreams are shattered,” he said. “But if my artwork is released, it will be the sole witness for posterity.”

And [Khalid Qasim](#), who was cleared for release in July 2022 but remains imprisoned, asked his brother in a call on 3 August of that year to spread a message to the free people of the world: “I ask you all to help me to free my artwork from Guantánamo. My artworks are part of me and my life. If the US government does not agree to release my artwork, I will refuse to leave Guantánamo without it.”

Guantánamo symbolises injustice, torture and oppression. It is where humanity and beauty are sentenced to death. We still demand its closure, alongside an official apology from the US government and reparation for its victims. But the [art from Guantánamo](#) became part of our lives and of who we are. It was borne from the ordeal we lived through. Each painting holds moments of our lives, secrets, tears, pain and hope. Our artwork makes up

parts of ourselves. We are still not free while these parts of us are still imprisoned at.

- Mansoor Adayfi is CAGE's Guantánamo project coordinator, an artist, activist, writer and former Guantánamo prisoner. He is the author of [Don't Forget Us Here, Lost and Found at Guantánamo](#)
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Sophie Okonedo as Medea and Ben Daniels as Jason, in Dominic Cooke's production of the Euripides play. Photograph: Johan Persson

[OpinionTheatre](#)

Greek tragedies like Medea are an ethical nightmare. That's why we need them

[Charlotte Higgins](#)



Ancient classics can reinforce patriarchal lies about women, but they also take us back to the origins of pernicious narratives

Sat 11 Mar 2023 03.00 EST Last modified on Sat 11 Mar 2023 06.16 EST

Last week, I found myself – at the end of a gloomy day – shot through with a burst of fierce, electric energy. It came from watching Sophie Okonedo's 90 minutes of flat-out fury as [she played Medea](#), opposite Ben Daniels's Jason, in Dominic Cooke's production of the Euripides play.

Afterwards, I registered the fact that the woman sitting by me had actually put her hands over her face when Medea decided to murder her own children. I, on the other hand, had not. Why did I mentally urge her on towards the unspeakable deeds, inwardly channelling all the pent-up anti-patriarchal rage at my disposal? Wasn't there something deeply disturbing about that? Or was the play precisely doing its job in Aristotelian terms: providing a catharsis?

Medea's murder of her children is the nuclear button when it comes to punishing her faithless husband, who has cast her aside like an old rag: their sons are the symbol and reality of inherited male power. Since Jason has just

openly voiced his fantasy that men might give birth to sons without the need for women at all, there's a magnificent, if gruesome, logic to her crime.

My theatre date quizzed me. She had found Medea a surprisingly sympathetic character ... well, for most of the play, and had the script been updated? It had, but not that much: the essentials of Medea's character were intact, including her immortal words, "It is easier to stand in battle three times in the front line ... than to bear one child."

The audience at the premiere, in Athens in 431BC, mostly male, would have received the story very differently. Athenian women, particularly high-born women, were expected to be silent and remain out of sight and mind of men; in public, they would be veiled. The same year that the play premiered, the Athenian statesman Pericles gave a famous speech in which he said that women's greatest glory was not to be spoken about. It crossed my mind that my friend had once been a correspondent in Afghanistan.

What on earth do we do with these strange, knotty, difficult texts from the past? [Roald Dahl](#) has nothing on Greek tragedy, and yet we seem always to be coming back for more. Okonedo's Medea was the second brilliant performance I'd seen in a year, after [Adura Onashile's](#), for the National Theatre of Scotland, last summer. And then there is [Phaedra](#) at the National Theatre, starring a magnificent Janet McTeer. The play, by Simon Stone, who also directs, is "after" Euripides's Hippolytus, Seneca's Phaedra and Racine's Phèdre. Those plays tell of how Phaedra, queen of Athens, falls in lust with her stepson, Hippolytus. After he rejects her, she accuses him, falsely, of rape.



‘Phaedra’s tale is intensely potent, but it’s powerful in a destructive way.’ Janet McTeer in the title role of Phaedra by Simon Stone. Photograph: Johan Persson

I was intensely curious to see how Stone would deal with this storyline. Phaedra’s tale is enormously potent and has parallels in other cultures; for example, the biblical story of Potiphar’s wife. But it’s powerful in a destructive way. It reinforces the patriarchal lie that women, far from being overwhelmingly the victims of sexual violence and abuse, routinely accuse men of rape falsely.

If you disagree that a myth like that can still have a foothold in the modern world, I would politely refer you to the [alleged statement](#) by Stephen House, a former Metropolitan police deputy commissioner, that the bulk of rape accusations are, in fact, “regretful sex”. (He denies having used the phrase or believing the statement.) For such reasons, I decided not to include the story of Phaedra in my book [Greek Myths: A New Retelling](#).

As it turned out, Stone also refused the fence. His Phaedra (renamed Helen) does many terrible things, including causing, directly or indirectly, at least two deaths. But in his version of the story, she does not falsely accuse anyone of rape. “What I have her do in my version is no less heinous,” Stone told me. “But it’s not an act that reduces her to a set of clichés that certain

parts of society currently use to try to hinder the essential progress towards gender equality.” Is inventing a rape claim worse than causing people’s death? What are we supposed to do with these stories that take you into a world way beyond the boundaries of the taboo?

A couple of weeks ago, I saw another, quite different approach to Greek tragedy, in the Gulbenkian Arts Centre in Canterbury. Several years ago, the playwright David Greig and the director Ramin Grey worked on a hit production, performed in London, Dublin, Manchester, Belfast and Edinburgh, of Aeschylus’s play [Suppliants](#). The story tells of how the 50 daughters of Danaus, forced into marriage with the 50 sons of Aegyptus, flee their homeland in Africa and claim asylum in Argos.

What I saw in Canterbury was the second part of the story, the middle play of what originally would have been a trilogy of tragedies. The twist is that only that first, *Suppliants*, actually survives. Of the second, *Egyptians*, only a single word remains, and, of the third, little beyond a few lines hymning Aphrodite. So the [play I saw](#) was a complete (bar one word) reconstruction. Greig’s idea, a crazy and quixotic one, was to imagine himself into Aeschylus’s shoes and to build the play without modernising, recuperating, softening or reclaiming it. Impossible, of course, but a fascinating quest.

The result was mesmerising to watch – a thing that both was and wasn’t Greek. It put me in mind of Ossian, whose poems, purporting to be ancient Gaelic epics, were actually faked by the 18th-century Scottish poet James Macpherson – by which I mean it struck me that in years to come, the play will, like Macpherson’s poems, be more revealing of the moment in which it was created than of the culture it aims to reconstruct.

Greig had, I thought, done a good job of being Aeschylean. That is, he had written a play whose likely outcome was the mass rape of 50 women; in which his major female character slits her own throat; and in which the other female character exists solely to uphold the patriarchal values of marriage and family represented by the goddess Hera, whose priestess she is. It’s true that in the next play, which Greig is also planning to write, 49 of the 50 brides murder their rapists/bridegrooms – but Aeschylus was no feminist, and nor, even, was Euripides.

I left with a nagging sense of what a strange – and yet intriguing – thing it was to put a play like this into the world when what the world actually needs is space for the untold stories of women and girls.

And yet we do need difficult, violent intractable texts such as Euripides's Phaedra with its false rape claim, because the play tracks us back to the origins of a pernicious narrative, but also because Euripides's play Hippolytus is otherwise ravishingly beautiful (read Anne Carson's translation in her volume [Grief Lessons](#)).

We do need Medea and her horrific child-killing. We need the literature of the past in its spikiness and indigestibility, with its people whom we love and hate, who remind us of ourselves and yet are alien to us. It is one of the few ways we have left of understanding ourselves and other humans in all our destructiveness, and all our deadliness, and all our magnificence.

- Charlotte Higgins is the Guardian's chief culture writer
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Guardian Opinion cartoon

Rishi Sunak

Martin Rowson on the Anglo-French refugee deal – cartoon

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2023.03.11 - Around the world

- [China President Xi Jinping names Li Qiang as premier at meeting of National People's Congress](#)
- [Protest Hong Kong court jails Tiananmen anniversary vigil organisers](#)
- ['Lachlan's in the mire' Fox News case spells trouble for Murdoch heir](#)
- [Women Annalena Baerbock's 'feminist foreign policy' focuses minds in Iraq](#)



Xi Jinping, left, and China's incoming premier, Li Qiang, at the National People's Congress meeting on Saturday in Beijing. Photograph: Lintao Zhang/Getty Images

[China](#)

Li Qiang: Xi Jinping, China's president, names next premier

Nomination at annual meeting of National People's Congress confirms replacement of Li Keqiang

['A defeated person': sidelined by Xi, Li Keqiang bows out as premier](#)

Guardian staff and agencies

Fri 10 Mar 2023 20.39 EST Last modified on Sat 11 Mar 2023 00.30 EST

Xi Jinping has nominated Li Qiang, 63, to become premier during the continuing annual meeting of China's rubber-stamp parliament, the official Xinhua news agency has reported.

Li Qiang will replace [Li Keqiang, who became premier in 2013](#) amid high hopes he would usher in liberal reforms. But his power was curbed by Xi, who increasingly sidelined Li Keqiang and placed allies in key strategic positions over him.

Li Qiang is the [former Communist party chief of Shanghai](#), China's largest city. Li Keqiang is retiring during the National People's Congress session that ends on Monday, after serving two five-year terms.

Li Qiang is a close ally of Xi, serving as his chief of staff between 2004 and 2007, when Xi was provincial party secretary of eastern China's Zhejiang province.

He was put on track for premier in October, when he was appointed to the number-two role on the politburo standing committee during the Communist party congress, held every five years.

Xi is installing a slate of loyalists in key positions amid the biggest government reshuffle in a decade, as a generation of more reform-minded officials retires and Xi further consolidates power after being elected president for an unprecedented third term on Friday.

On Saturday, Liu Jinguo was nominated as a candidate for director of the National Commission of Supervision, which oversees the government's anti-corruption work, Xinhua reported.

Separately, Zhang Jun was nominated candidate for the president of the supreme people's court, and Ying Yong was nominated candidate for procurator general of China's supreme people's procuratorate.

With Reuters

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Chow Hang Tung, centre, at a vigil in Victoria Park, Hong Kong, for Tiananmen Square victims. Photograph: Kin Cheung/AP

[Hong Kong](#)

Hong Kong court jails Tiananmen anniversary vigil organisers

Prosecutors said Chow Hang-Tung, Tang Ngok-kwan and Tsui Hon-kwong were under foreign influence but refused to say who it was

Guardian staff and agencies
Sat 11 Mar 2023 00.18 EST

A [Hong Kong](#) court has jailed three former members of a group that organised annual vigils to mark the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown in China.

Chow Hang-tung, 38, a prominent Hong Kong pro-democracy activist and former vice-chairperson of the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic

Democratic Movements in [China](#), was among those convicted by a magistrate's court. The two others were Tang Ngok-kwan and Tsui Hon-kwong.

The three were jailed on Saturday for four-and-a-half months for not complying with a national security police request for information.

Speaking before sentencing, Chow was defiant, criticising what she described as the “political” nature of the case and the decision of the court to withhold key facts.

“We will continue doing what we have always done, that is to fight falsehood with truth, indignity with dignity, secrecy with openness, madness with reason, division with solidarity. We will fight these injustices wherever we must, be it on the streets, in the courtroom or from a prison cell,” Chow said from the dock, in a speech that was interrupted several times by the magistrate, Peter Law.

Law said “national security is cardinally important to public interests and the whole nation”.

The custodial sentence is less than the six-month maximum jail term for the charge.

The now-disbanded Alliance was the main organiser of Hong Kong’s 4 June candlelight vigil for victims of China’s Tiananmen Square crackdown. Every year it drew tens of thousands of people in the largest public commemoration of its kind on Chinese soil.

Some key details of the case were redacted, including the overseas organisations and individual alleged to have ties to the Alliance, after the prosecution applied for “public interest immunity”.

The Alliance was accused by the prosecutor, Ivan Cheung, of being a “foreign agent” for an unidentified organisation from which it allegedly receiving HK\$20,000 (US\$2,563).

A defence lawyer, Philip Dykes, said “not knowing the identity” of the alleged foreign government or entity was highly unusual and made any mitigation difficult given the foreign agent allegation.

Law said while [pronouncing the verdict on 4 March](#) that the prosecution need not prove the subject organisation was a “foreign agent” and that non-disclosure of materials would not undermine a fair trial.

The national security law punishes acts including subversion and collusion with foreign forces. It has been criticised by some western governments as a tool to crush dissent.

The Chinese government and the mainland-controlled Hong Kong government say the law has brought stability since it was enacted in 2020 in response to mass pro-democracy protests in 2019.

With Reuters

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Lachlan Murdoch once said: 'All news organisations, when they get something wrong they have an absolute responsibility to correct it and to apologise for it.' Fox News has yet to apologise for its spreading of Donald Trump's election big lie. Photograph: Drew Angerer/Getty Images

[Lachlan Murdoch](#)

‘Lachlan’s in the mire’: Fox News case spells trouble for Murdoch heir

Rupert Murdoch’s eldest son, who oversaw the network’s slavishly pro-Trump line, features prominently in evidence revealed in the Dominion Voting Systems defamation lawsuit



*[Ed Pilkington](#)in New York
[@edpilkington](#)*

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On 1 November 2018 Lachlan Murdoch, the eldest son of the media tycoon Rupert Murdoch, made a [rare public appearance](#) at a New York Times DealBook conference. Dressed in a sharp blue suit and open-necked white shirt, he looked relaxed and on top of the world.

He had just been named chief executive and chairman of Fox’s TV businesses, while his brother James, a possible rival for the top job, was heading for the company exit. Lachlan was finally emerging as his father’s sole and undisputed heir.

Not that everything was plain sailing at the Fox ship. A few days before Lachlan took the stage, a gunman opened fire at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, killing 11 Jewish worshippers.

Before the attack the alleged shooter had repeated on social media a number of [Fox News](#) talking points about Central American migrants “invading” America. He had also posted a Fox News report that showed a truck stamped with the Star of David carrying asylum seekers to the US border.

On stage, DealBook’s Andrew Ross Sorkin, asked Murdoch what he thought about the many false flags and conspiracy theories that Fox News routinely trafficked. “When you see that stuff, are you proud?”

Murdoch, [appearing unruffled](#), tried to characterize the material as opinion broadcast separately from the network’s news reporting. But he did say this: “All news organisations, when they get something wrong they have an absolute responsibility to correct it and to apologise for it.”

His fingerprints are not absent here – he is part of this

David Folkenflik

Five years on from that rare expression of public accountability, Murdoch, 51, might wish he had taken his own advice. He now finds himself deeply embroiled in the latest scandal to engulf his father’s media empire, one that threatens to destabilise the Fox News vessel and with it the well-laid plans for his own succession.

“Lachlan is in the mire,” said David Folkenflik, media correspondent for National Public Radio and author of [Murdoch’s World](#): The Last of the Old Media Empires. “This is an incredible signal moment for him, and his fingerprints are not absent here – he is part of this.”

The “this” to which Folkenflik was referring is the \$1.6bn defamation lawsuit that has been brought against Fox News Network (FNN) and its parent company Fox Corp – of which [Lachlan Murdoch](#) is executive chairman and CEO – by Dominion Voting Systems. The firm, one of the largest providers of electronic vote counting machines in North America, is

claiming that its business was harmed by falsehoods aired by Fox News hosts and their guests in the wake of the 2020 presidential election based on Donald Trump's lie that the election was stolen from him.

On Friday Lachlan Murdoch gave his [first public comments](#) on the Dominion case since Fox was swamped by new revelations about the behavior of its top executives and stars. Speaking at a Morgan Stanley conference, he tried to belittle the scandal as so much "noise", and stood by Fox News coverage of the 2020 election saying it had done its job "without fear or favour".

That phrase sits uneasily with the [devastating picture](#) of the inside workings of the media empire that has emerged from Dominion court filings. As Folkenflik intimated, Murdoch's fingerprints are liberally scattered through the documents.

Dominion claims that Murdoch played a central role in allowing lies to be broadcast about its machines flipping votes from Trump to Joe Biden to steal the election. His involvement was more than theoretical, "it was direct".



A person walks past the Fox News Headquarters at the News Corporation building in New York City on Thursday. Photograph: Timothy A Clary/AFP/Getty Images

In the days after the November 2020 election, Lachlan and his father kept in close contact with the CEO of Fox News, Suzanne Scott. When Lachlan was deposed by Dominion lawyers, he testified that he gave “specific direction on both the tone and narrative of Fox’s news coverage”.

According to Dominion, Murdoch admitted that he suggested which guests should appear on Fox shows, the content of those programs, and even specific questions to ask interviewees. He went so far as to criticize individual chyrons at the bottom of the screen, complaining that they were “anti-Trump”.

The thrust of Murdoch’s interventions, Dominion argues, was to rein back criticism of Trump and portray him in a more favorable light, in tune with the former president’s overwhelming popularity among Fox viewers. Ten days after the election, he told Scott to make sure that reporters were careful in their coverage of a Trump rally that was happening in real time.

“So far some of the side comments are slightly anti, and they shouldn’t be. The narrative should be this is a huge celebration of the president,” he said.

Fox has insisted that Murdoch’s comments were not intended to be pro- or anti-Trump, rather they were designed to ensure coverage was “respectful to all viewpoints”.

The period around the election was one of turmoil, even panic, for Fox. In the wake of Fox News’s early calling of the key battleground state of Arizona for Biden, the channel was under fire from its own incensed Trump-supporting audience, which was defecting in droves to even more extreme rightwing outlets such as Newsmax and One America News Network (OANN).

On 8 November 2020, a day after Fox and other major news outlets had called the election for Biden, Lachlan, his father and Scott had what Dominion describes as a “long talk” about the “direction Fox should take” in response to falling ratings and viewer backlash. It was at that meeting, Dominion claims, that the trio decided to allow Fox hosts such as Sean Hannity and Lou Dobbs to continue airing election denial lies even though they knew the information was untrue and anti-democratic.

It was business first, then politics and political influence, then the ideological agenda, and only then came journalism, which looks like a distant fifth

David Folkenflik

Dominion concludes its billion-dollar lawsuit by accusing Lachlan bluntly of being “involved in all aspects of FNN and responsible for the defamatory broadcasts”.

Folkenflik pointed out that Dominion had so far only shown slices of the evidence, and that a full picture of what happened would have to wait for the trial that is scheduled to start on 17 April. “Having said that, everything we’ve seen from Lachlan so far suggests that he was very front-of-mind worried about appeasing and serving their audiences. It was business first, then politics and political influence, then the ideological agenda, and only then came journalism, which looks like a distant fifth right now.”

The Guardian reached out to Fox Corp for its response to the charges against Lachlan Murdoch.

The company did not comment on the case made against him, but a spokesperson did accuse Dominion of using “distortions and misinformation in their PR campaign to smear Fox News and trample on free speech and freedom of the press. We already know they will say and do anything to try to win this case, but to twist and even misattribute quotes to the highest levels of our company is truly beyond the pale.”



Rupert Murdoch poses for a photograph with his sons Lachlan, left, and James at St Bride's church to celebrate the wedding of Murdoch Jerry Hall in London in 2016. The couple have since divorced. Photograph: Peter Nicholls/Reuters

Born in London, raised in the US from the age of three, married to an Australian actor, with mansions in Sydney and LA, Lachlan Murdoch epitomises the globalised elite that his networks rail against. He entered the family business at 18, and by 22 was running his first Queensland newspaper, with the national title the Australian falling into his hands the following year.

By 2005 it was clear he was being groomed for greatness. By then he was the third most senior executive in News Corp, in charge of several Fox TV franchises in the US as well as the New York Post.

Murdoch grew weary of tensions with other senior figures within the hierarchy and unexpectedly withdrew to branch out on his own. He spent the next 10 years in the Murdoch wilderness, founding a private investment firm, Illyria, in Australia, and carving out his own profile as a media player all his own.

As a result of his decade-long hiatus, Lachlan was able to immunize himself against the first great scandal to befall the empire – the 2011 phone hacking furore in which British journalists working for News International were revealed to have broken into the phones of celebrities, royalty and even a murder victim. The scandal [damaged the prospects](#) of brother James, but gave Lachlan a valuable pass.

“It was a win on multiple levels,” Folkenflik said. “He could be supportive of his father, act as a trusted counsellor, without worrying about having to clean up his own mess.”

As the dust settled over the crisis, Lachlan made his [return to the family stable](#) in 2014 dubbed the [“prodigal son”](#). When the next great scandal broke in 2016 – the sexual harassment perpetrated by the Fox News chairman, Roger Ailes – Murdoch was this time as hands-on as he had been hands-off during phone hacking.

As his unauthorized biographer, Paddy Manning, writes in [The Successor](#), “Lachlan was right in the thick of Ailes’ downfall.”

Ailes’s resignation in July 2016 was an inflection point for the company. Should the Murdochs, as James was counselling, radically refocus Fox in a less partisan, more mainstream direction?

I still believe that it is an iron law in the Murdoch empire that no one is indispensable, except at the vertex

Paddy Manning

Or should they continue the path laid down by Ailes, and march ever more rightwards in search of ratings and profits? Lachlan was firmly with his father on taking the second road, which he saw as “a winning strategy”.

Similar hard-headed, business-first logic has defined Murdoch’s approach to Trump. “Whether he loved Trump or loathed him, for Lachlan there was an overwhelming commercial logic in following the news cycle and in creating audiences where there was a gap in the market, on the right,” Manning writes.

The watchdog Media Matters for America has noted that the lock-tight relationship between Fox and Trump coincided with Lachlan's rise within the family business. "Fox News' transformation into an unchained pro-Trump propaganda outlet came as Lachlan Murdoch's control over the network steadily increased," [it reported](#).

The hand of Lachlan can be seen behind the emergence of Tucker Carlson as Fox's provocateur-in-chief. When Carlson has shocked even Fox sensibilities by suggesting that immigrants [make America "dirtier"](#) or by embracing the white supremacist "great replacement" theory, it was Murdoch who [rushed to his defense](#).



The hand of Lachlan can be seen behind the emergence of Tucker Carlson as Fox's provocateur-in-chief. Photograph: Brendan McDermid/Reuters

Yet again this week Carlson pushed the limits of Fox credibility by [airing security footage](#) of the 6 January 2021 insurrection at the US Capitol and distorting it to make the event seem like "peaceful chaos". His latest escapade earned a rebuke from the Republican leader in the US Senate, Mitch McConnell, and denoted a level of hypocrisy given that Dominion documents were simultaneously exposing Carlson as having said in private that "I hate [Trump] passionately".

“Lachlan has defended Tucker Carlson in the past, and this week’s January 6 effort suggests he continues to defend him,” Manning, speaking from Tasmania, told the Guardian. “The question is, will he do so in the future? I still believe that it is an iron law in the Murdoch empire that no one is indispensable, except at the vertex.”

Following his own formula, Manning sees Lachlan Murdoch as indispensable for as long as his father, who is 91, is alive and in the driving seat. “There is no question that Lachlan is the designated successor, and while Rupert is around his position is secure.”

But thereafter?

Lachlan already finds himself firefighting on two fronts. He has opted to open up a second legal front in Australia by suing a small independent outlet in Melbourne.

Murdoch claims that Crikey defamed him by posting a column last year that described Murdoch as Trump’s January 6 “unindicted co-conspirator” (a phrase attached to Richard Nixon during Watergate). His hopes that Australian libel law will play to his advantage may be dashed by a new [“public interest” defense](#) that Crikey is deploying.

Meanwhile in the US, Dominion continues to sap his strength. “The Dominion case has exposed a failure of leadership at the heart of Fox, a failure to rein in the talent. That could be problematic once Rupert is gone,” Manning said.

Under the trust that was set up for the Murdoch children, Lachlan has to contend with three of his siblings – Prudence, Elisabeth and James – who jointly control with him the family stake in the business. In recent years James has become increasingly outspoken about Fox News which he clearly sees as a threat to democratic values.

Just days after the January 6 riot, James told the [Financial Times](#) that “outlets that propagate lies to their audience have unleashed insidious and uncontrollable forces that will be with us for years”. He didn’t name names, but then he didn’t have to.

Can James Murdoch and the other siblings be relied upon to go quietly into the night as Lachlan is anointed as successor? After Dominion, Folkenflik believes, all bets are off.

“Could this affect things? Absolutely,” he said. “The Dominion case will certainly be fodder for James, or other Murdoch children, if they want to challenge Lachlan over a smooth ascent.”

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Annalena Baerbock visits a camp for displaced Yazidis in Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan region. Photograph: Ismael Adnan/AFP/Getty Images

Women

Annalena Baerbock's 'feminist foreign policy' focuses minds in Iraq

German foreign minister's trip is chance to show how diplomacy can better represent women's interests – especially those in Yazidi camps



[Philip Oltermann](#) in Duhok

[@philipoltermann](#)

Sat 11 Mar 2023 03.00 EST

A bunch of pink and orange roses awaited Annalena Baerbock as she arrived at the Qadiya refugee camp in the Kurdistan region of northern Iraq, but the German foreign minister could not get rid of her gift quickly enough. “It’s not just International Women’s Day for ministers,” she said while frantically pulling the bouquet apart and handing out individual flowers to the throng around her.

She looked decidedly more in her element when she started walking around the camp south of the city of Zakho, joining an all-girls five-a-side football match and crunching into a tackle seconds after kick-off, or hitting uppercuts into punch mitts at a boxing club for girls.

Baerbock, Germany’s youngest ever foreign minister and the first woman to hold the role, has strong ideas about how diplomacy can better represent women’s interests, which she recently presented in a manifesto on “feminist foreign policy”. Her critics say the concept is little more concrete than

designating a day to celebrate womanhood. But watching Baerbock in action, it is clear that the very act of getting stuck in is a vital part.

That the 42-year-old Green politician does not shy from conflict has been apparent to the rest of the world at least since last month's UN general assembly, where she [publicly clashed with China](#) while rebutting the claim that the west was escalating the war in Ukraine.

Baerbock's persistent harrying of the chancellor, Olaf Scholz, in favour of more material military support has won her admirers in Kyiv but also enemies at home. At "peace" rallies in Germany, she has been painted as a warmonger; one party ally from the Greens' pacifist wing recently called her "the shrillest trumpeter of Nato's antagonistic new strategy".

The programme of her four-day trip to [Iraq](#) this week – the longest visit to a foreign state in her 16-month tenure – was also dominated by the repercussion of Russia's war of aggression, as western allies try to hold together an international consensus in condemnation of the invasion.



Annalena Baerbock holds talks with the Iraqi foreign minister, Fuad Hussein, in Baghdad. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Iraq is situated in what Baerbock diplomatically called a “complicated neighbourhood”, with armed conflicts in Syria and Iran repeatedly spilling out on to its turf. And while the prime minister, Mohammed Shia al-Sudani, needs the US military that remains in the country at his government’s request to keep a fragile peace, it is also reliant on gas and electricity imports from Russia-allied Iran. Last month, the Russian foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, landed in Baghdad with heads of energy companies in tow.

Having stayed out of the US-led invasion 20 years ago, Germany has a trusted standing in Iraq that it hopes will allow it to nudge the country away from Iran and Russia’s advances.

Travelling to Baghdad in Lavrov’s wake, Baerbock vowed to keep up support for Iraq’s fight against Islamic State, whose command structure was defeated in 2017 but is believed to still have cells in the country waiting their turn. In the presence of German envoys, Iraqi officials on Tuesday signed a deal tasking the German company Siemens Energy to help the country generate up to 6GW of additional homemade electricity.

For Baerbock, however, the trip to Iraq is also an opportunity to demonstrate that “feminist foreign policy” could become more than just a slogan. The concept – first championed by Sweden’s former foreign minister Margot Wallström almost a decade ago, and since claimed with varying degrees of vigour by governments in France, Canada, Chile, the Netherlands and Spain – is not new. But with Sweden’s new conservative government recently publicly disowning the concept, Baerbock is now its most prolific champion.

In Germany, her guideline paper on [“shaping feminist foreign policy”](#) was mocked even in Green-friendly media for relying too heavily on academic jargon and trying to sell established diplomatic practices as a radical fresh start.

In Erbil, the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan, Baerbock did not exactly deflect allegations of woolly thinking when she described German support of the war-torn region’s military forces as “part of our feminist foreign policy”, since “living in dignity does not entail having to hide in your house all day”.

As an attitude rather than an idea, however, feminist foreign policy proved capable of focusing the minds of the minister and her hosts.

At a press conference with the Kurdistan region's prime minister, Masrour Barzani, Baerbock made a statement almost identical to one she had voiced after meeting the Iraqi foreign minister, Fuad Hussein, the previous day and [the Nigerian foreign minister in Abuja last December](#): "Societies live in more stable and peaceful coexistence if women can take part in shaping them," she said, while holding her male counterpart's gaze.

Such comments can risk coming across as lectures delivered mainly to a western audience, especially in a country such as Iraq, with [memories of grand speeches about women's liberation](#) as a mere prelude to the US-led invasion 20 years ago. But when presented with a degree of brazenness by a female politician in front of exclusively male counterparts, such lines also have force.

When Germany declined to join the US-led invasion in 2003, it was another Green foreign minister, Joschka Fischer, who led the resistance, telling Donald Rumsfeld at the Munich security conference that year he was "not convinced" of the need for military action.

Baerbock's inspiration for joining the Greens, however, was not Fischer in 2003 but his decision four years earlier to lead Germany into Kosovo as part of the Nato campaign to stop ethnic cleansing. Iraq to her generation of German Greens is less of a place where the west fatally burned its fingers, than somewhere where it was right to hold out a protecting hand over endangered minorities, as part of an anti-IS coalition in 2014.

In Erbil, she urged Barzani to address the situation of children born of Yazidi women who were raped by IS fighters.

The Spiritual Council, the highest religious authority among the Iraqi religious minority, said in 2019 it encouraged female Yazidi survivors to return with their children, but explicitly excluded those born of rape since it considers them Muslims. Since Iraqi law requires fathers to authorise passports for minors, most of these children remain in legal limbo.



Baerbock and the Kurdistan region's prime minister, Masrour Barzani, hold a joint press conference in Erbil. Photograph: Kurdistan Regional Government/AFP/Getty Images

"Like all children in this world these children have human rights," Baerbock said. "That also means the right to their own surname."

Located about 12 miles from the border with Turkey and surrounded by green fields and rolling hills, the Qadiya camp, where some such children live, holds more than 12,000 people, almost all of them Yazidis who were driven out of the Sinjar region by militias eight years ago.

With their homelands still devastated and politically volatile, the number of people in the camp has grown rather than shrunk, and hopelessness has been rising.

Germany, which is home to by far the largest Yazidi diaspora community worldwide and whose parliament in January declared IS crimes against the minority a genocide, has a justifiable stake in their fate.

"Gender-sensitive budgeting," one of the phrases from Baerbock's guidelines mocked in the press, may in practice mean nothing more and nothing less than assessing whether all sexes benefit equally from aid

projects targeting communities in need such as Iraq's Yazidis, and readdressing the balance if they do not.

The project [Háwar.help](#), which the German ministry starts funding in April, offers psychological care and a suicide prevention programme especially for women in Yazidi camps, among whom an estimated 10% have contemplated taking their life.

“If we want to have stability in Kurdistan, we need to find ways to bring peace to this region,” said Düzen Tekkal, a German entrepreneur of Kurdish-Yazidi descent who founded Háwar.help. “We need to start recognising that this is a German problem too.”

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