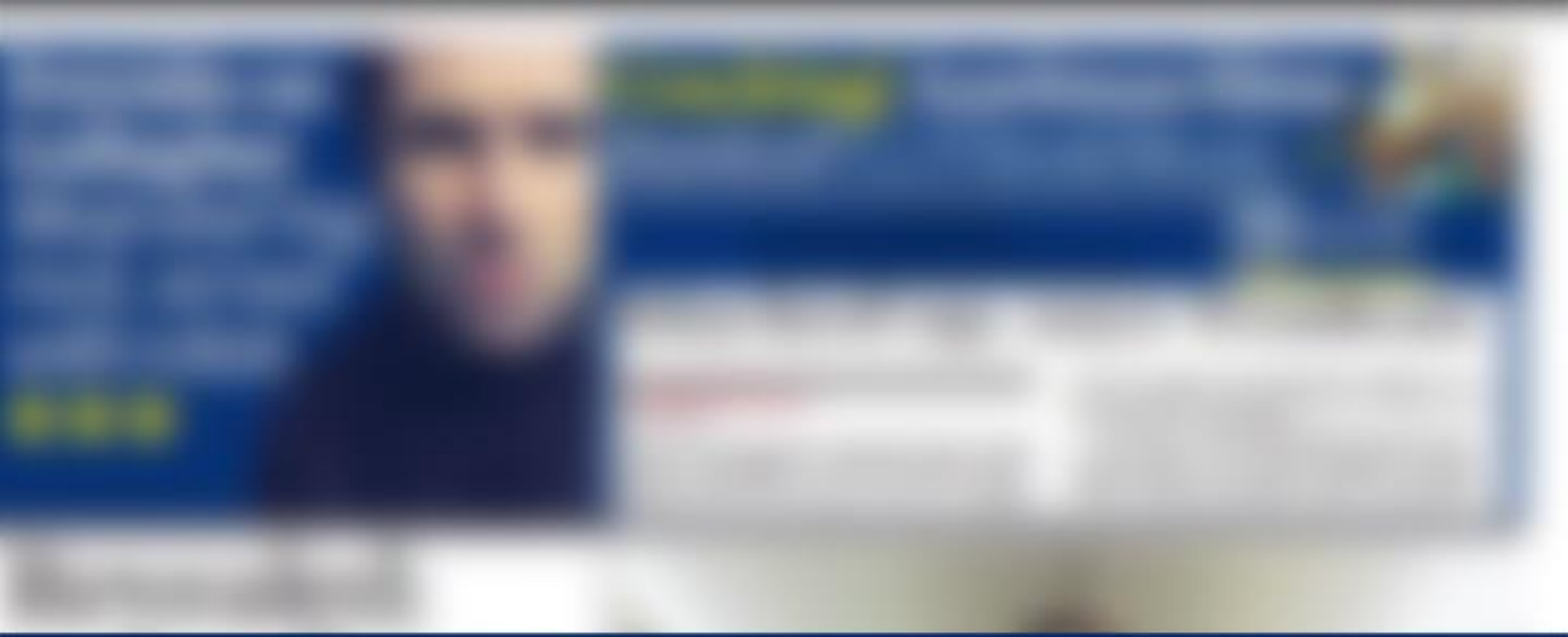

The Guardian

卫报

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Headlines tuesday 4 july 2023

- **Live Average five-year mortgage rate hits 6%; food inflation ‘starting to fall’**
- **Mortgages Average rate on five-year fixed deal in UK climbs above 6%**
- **Savings Watchdog summons UK bank bosses to discuss weak rates**
- **Food Inflation starting to fall, says Sainsbury’s as sales rise**

Business liveBusiness

Five-year mortgage rate hits 6% as savings lag behind; UK ‘only G7 member with rising inflation’ – as it happened

New housing under construction in York. Financial markets expect UK base interest rates to hit 6% by the end of the year. Photograph: Gary Calton/The Observer

Mortgage rates

Average rate on five-year fixed mortgage deal in UK climbs above 6%

Rate is at highest level since last November, and average two-year fix is now 6.47%

Zoe Wood and *Ben Quinn*
Tue 4 Jul 2023 05.54 EDTLast modified on Tue 4 Jul 2023 21.31 EDT

A typical five-year fixed mortgage deal in the UK now has an interest rate of more than 6%, putting further pressure on borrowers who are hoping to buy a home or reaching the end of their existing deals.

Data from the financial information firm Moneyfacts shows the cost of a five-year deal for homeowners rose to 6.01% on Tuesday, up from 5.97% on

Monday. It is the highest level since last November, after mortgage rates had been driven up by the mini-budget chaos of last autumn.

The average two-year fixed deal is now 6.47%, up from 6.42% on Monday.

Mortgage lenders have been increasing rates and withdrawing deals after the Bank of England raised interest rates by half a point to 5% last month in an attempt to curb high inflation.

Rates chart

Threadneedle Street has now raised interest rates 13 times since December 2021. But inflation – which measures the rate at which prices are rising – remained stubbornly high at 8.7% in May. The UK's official inflation target is 2%.

The rapid rise in the base rate is bad news for millions of borrowers whose home loan deals are due to end in the coming weeks and months, as many currently enjoy a rate of less than 2%. The prospect of a huge jump in mortgage payments comes as Britons struggle to cope with higher food and energy bills.

Recently the consumer champion Martin Lewis said the mortgage "ticking timebomb" had exploded. The financial markets are predicting UK interest rates will hit 6% by the end of the year and remain at that level until next summer.

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After the last rate rise, Jeremy Hunt met Britain's biggest lenders to discuss their response to the crisis. At the summit, lenders including NatWest, Lloyds, Santander and Barclays agreed to a new "mortgage charter".

Among the main measures agreed to help consumers ride out the storm was that no home would be repossessed within 12 months of a first missed payment. Lenders also agreed that customers could seek advice without it affecting their credit score.

Struggling homeowners could switch to an interest-only deal for six months or extend their mortgage term and revert back within six months, the banks said. Neither option requires an affordability check or will affect their credit score.

Asked on Tuesday if the prime minister was concerned the average five-year fixed rate was now above 6%, his spokesperson said: "We've recognised this is a very difficult time for mortgage holders and indeed renters as well.

"The single biggest thing government can do is to work with the Bank of England in lockstep to reduce inflation, which is driving some of these high mortgage rates that we are seeing. In the short term, there is specific support available to mortgage holders. And we encourage anyone eligible to take up that help. And of course, we are already helping everybody by paying half their energy bills."

The average rate on an easy access savings account is just 2.45%. Photograph: Andriy Popov/Alamy

Banking

Watchdog summons UK bank bosses to discuss weak savings rates

Financial Conduct Authority to meet executives on Thursday as part of its investigation into savings market

Julia Kollewe and *Kalyeena Makortoff*
Tue 4 Jul 2023 04.32 EDTLast modified on Tue 4 Jul 2023 21.31 EDT

UK bank bosses have been summoned to a meeting with the financial watchdog this week amid mounting concerns that they are profiting from rising interest rates by offering paltry savings rates to customers.

Executives from the big high street names Lloyds Banking Group, NatWest, HSBC and Barclays, as well as from smaller lenders, are due to attend a meeting at the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) on Thursday to discuss

concerns that savings rates are lagging far behind the soaring costs of mortgages and loans.

The Bank of England has raised its base rate to 5% and further increases are expected. The move has pushed the average rate of a two-year fixed mortgage to 6.47%, according to Moneyfacts, while the average rate on an easy access savings account is 2.45%.

The FCA summoned bosses as part of its investigation into the savings market, which will result in a report later this month. The regulator's executive director of consumer and competition, Sheldon Mills, who will lead the meeting, also hopes it will focus minds before the FCA's new consumer duty regulations come into force at the end of July, the Guardian understands.

The new rules will require all City firms including banks to explain pricing decisions, including how quickly they raise savings rates, and show they are acting in good faith and prioritising customer needs.

The meeting, which was organised nearly two weeks ago, will take place days after MPs on the Commons Treasury committee accused high street banks of "profiteering" and failing in their "social duty" to promote saving, resulting in a fresh round of letters to the chief executives of the UK's four largest lenders.

The committee's chair, the Conservative MP Harriett Baldwin, described the savings rates being offered by banks as "measly".

Speaking on BBC Radio 4's Today programme, Baldwin said: "All year, we've been putting pressure on the banks … because it's been very evident that on the day the Bank of England hikes rates, which they need to do to tackle inflation, people get a call from their mortgage provider saying your rate is going up, if they're variable. But savings rates have languished."

The committee has flagged its concerns to the regulator after hauling bank bosses in for questioning in March.

“We’re quite sure that these rates are measly and that the banks are not treating our constituents fairly,” Baldwin said. “We’re particularly concerned about some of our older constituents who have savings, who are unable to use internet banking and find it difficult to switch.” She said this was a particular concern and she expected the regulator to focus on this.

Cost of living concerns recently led banks to sign a “mortgage charter” orchestrated by the Treasury and led by the chancellor, Jeremy Hunt. The agreement with high street lenders offers struggling homeowners forbearance measures such as a 12-month grace period before a home is repossessed.

It is not clear whether a similar savings charter could follow. A source with knowledge of the FCA’s meeting said the goal had not been decided.

According to the consumer champion Martin Lewis’s website Moneysavingexpert, the top rate for an easy access savings account is Yorkshire Building Society’s 4.25%.

Sainsbury’s said grocery sales jumped 11% while general merchandise such as household goods grew by 4%. Photograph: Toby Melville/Reuters

J Sainsbury

Food inflation starting to fall, says Sainsbury’s as sales rise

Like-for-like sales up 9.8% in quarter and supermarket says it has put more than £60m into cutting prices of basics

Sarah Butler and *Julia Kollewe*
Tue 4 Jul 2023 06.02 EDTFirst published on Tue 4 Jul 2023 03.18 EDT

Food inflation is starting to fall, according to the boss of Sainsbury’s, who said shoppers were putting more items in their baskets as it began to cut prices on some basics.

Simon Roberts, the chief executive, said the supermarket was “putting all our energy and focus into battling inflation” as household budgets were “under more pressure than ever”.

“We have zero complacency on this issue,” he said, pointing to the chain’s Aldi price-matching tactic and introduction of special price cuts for its Nectar loyalty-scheme members. “Inflation is still going to be a challenge and customers need to be assured we are really on their side.”

Grocery prices are still rising rapidly: Office for National Statistics figures showed the rate of food and drink price rises has slowed, to 18.3% in May from 19% in April – still among the fastest rates in decades.

Roberts agreed with recent comments by the boss of Tesco, that food prices would not return to levels seen before the start of the cost of living crisis. He said “the cost of producing food was clearly elevated” as higher wages were “locked in” for both retailers and their suppliers, while energy prices remained stubbornly high.

“We all want energy costs to come down quicker but that is taking some time,” he said.

Roberts said relatively high food price inflation would continue until at least the end of the year with inflation on packaged goods taking longer to reduce than on fresh foods.

The UK’s second largest supermarket chain, which also owns Argos, reported that like-for-like sales – those in stores open for more than a year – excluding fuel rose by a better than expected 9.8% in the 16 weeks to 24 June, partly thanks to an increase in the number of items sold, reversing a trend of shoppers cutting back.

Grocery sales jumped 11% while general merchandise such as household goods grew by 4%, including a 5.1% rise at Argos, helped by the warmer weather towards the end of the period and the string of bank holidays. Clothing sales fell 3.7%, held back by the cool start to the spring.

Sainsbury’s said it had put more than £60m into cutting the prices of basics including bread, milk, pasta, chicken and toilet roll since March in a market where prices continued to rise.

Roberts said Sainsbury's shoppers were only experiencing about half the rate of inflation indicated by government figures as they were sticking to budgets by buying "what they need rather than what they might want" and swapping to cheaper brands, including own-label ranges. He said the chain was also increasing prices at a slower rate than its rivals.

The retailer has increased the size of its cheapest range – now called Stamford Street – by 10%, or 20 products. Roberts indicated that sales of the range had increased by far more than that, making it the group's fastest growing line, as shoppers looked for ways to save cash.

Supermarkets have come under public pressure to do more to alleviate the cost of living crisis amid accusations of "greedflation" – using high inflation as an excuse to raise prices further.

The competition watchdog is investigating whether supermarkets are keeping prices higher than they need to be, with a separate investigation into fuel reporting this week that supermarkets had increased profit margins during the pandemic.

Roberts would not comment on Sainsbury's profit margins on fuel, but indicated that any gains made there were being passed on to shoppers by

keeping food prices down with overall profit margins at their lowest level ever.

The retail boss refused to point the finger at food producers for keeping prices high, saying: “I don’t think there is much value to be gained from blaming different parts of the system. The only way we are going to solve [inflation] is to work together.”

Roberts said: “Food inflation is starting to fall and we are fully committed to passing on savings to our customers.”

2023.07.04 - Spotlight

- **‘I’m not this happy person all the time’ Rosie Jones on death threats, anxiety and anger**
- **How we survive I was lost in the desert for nine and a half days – and sustained myself with raw bats and urine**
- **Tedious, pointless, cringe-inducing Why The Idol was a failure from start to finish**
- **The Idol finale review One of the worst programmes ever made**
- **‘The result was amazing’ One man’s mission to reforest a barren Irish hillside**

‘Do I get discriminated against? Yeah, every day’ … Rosie Jones. Photograph: Ejatu Shaw/The Guardian, Hair & Make-Up: Nicole Fairfield

Rosie Jones

Interview

Rosie Jones on death threats, anxiety and anger: ‘I’m not this happy person all the time’

Frances Ryan

As a comedian, Jones is known for her wit and enthusiasm, but her new documentary tackles the horrendous abuse she and other disabled people face. She discusses fame, therapy, flaws and backlash

@drfrancesryan
Tue 4 Jul 2023 05.00 EDTLast modified on Tue 4 Jul 2023 08.31 EDT

Rosie Jones always wears earphones when she’s out alone. She jokes it is for pleasurable reasons – “a chance to listen to Steps” – but it is actually to block out something much more menacing: when strangers see her walk down the street with her movement affected by cerebral palsy, they shout abuse at her.

Jones, 33, doesn’t need to go outside to be harassed. As one of the few disabled women regularly on British television, Jones can be in her north-east London flat and get a similar reaction on Twitter, where she has 220,000

followers. “I try to have a healthy relationship with social media, but there’s this ableist abuse,” she says. “You can’t avoid it.”

We’ve met to discuss Jones’s upcoming Channel 4 documentary, Am I a R*tard?, about the online abuse she’s received since finding fame, and within wider society. The title has proved controversial even before the show has been broadcast. Last week, some disabled contributors pulled out of the programme over “a number of issues in the process”, including producers allegedly resisting their calls to remove the slur from the title.

“I understand that there are some people who are unhappy with the title,” Jones tells me. “The production company and the channel had many, many discussions about it. I’m not attempting to speak for the entire disabled community in any way. This film is about my experience as a person with a physical disability [and a] word that’s still used extremely frequently, and thrown towards me in the street or on social media. This title is not used to shock. It’s about education and starting the conversation about how damaging the casual use of ableist language is. I’m taking back control of a word that’s been thrown at me as a weapon all of my life.”

It is uncharacteristically dark territory for a comedian known for her wide grin and Energizer Bunny-levels of enthusiasm but, at first glance, Jones shows no signs of it bringing her down. When we talk, she is sleep-deprived after five consecutive nights of shows (“I only got back to London at 2am this morning”), but still on a high. “I’m very, very happy,” she says. “I had my mum, my dad and all their friends in the audience. It was the first time my parents had seen this show. I think they find it hard to comprehend.”

> I’m out there being disabled, sexual, proud, rude, flawed … That’s scary for a lot of people

You can’t blame them. Six years ago, Jones was working by day as a researcher for Channel 4 comedy and gigging in standup clubs every night. “Now I’m on the shows I used to work on.”

Born in Bridlington, east Yorkshire to teacher parents, Jones's star has risen rapidly since her debut show at the Edinburgh fringe in 2017. Cutting her teeth as a regular on TV shows such as The Last Leg, she went on to front the wonderfully chaotic travel show Trip Hazard: My Great British Adventure and picked up a Bafta nomination in the process. That's not to mention her stint in the writer's room for Netflix's award-winning Sex Education, acting jobs from Casualty to Silent Witness, or her two books for children.

If success has come quickly, it hasn't been easy. Jones has been working non-stop since she quit her day job – "I probably haven't had a full day off in four years" – but stresses it is entirely her choice (her agent, she admits, often asks if she wants a break). Today is, on paper, a day off but she's here speaking to me, then taking meetings and writing an article. "If something's exciting, you've got to press go," she says.

Rosie Jones performing on Friday Night Live in 2022. Photograph: Ash Knotek/REX/Shutterstock

Now embarking on her first UK headline tour, Triple Threat (a joyously on-brand nod to being gay, female and disabled), the reality is that these characteristics also bring her triple the amount of online vitriol. Even so, it is ableism – defined as prejudice against disabled people – that plagues Jones

the most, and something she believes is treated much less seriously than other forms of bigotry. “I feel like if you asked the average person in the street what racism or sexism was, they’d be able to tell you in a few words. But when it comes to ableism, some people have never even heard of the word. Others have but can’t define it. They go: ‘Really, is that a thing? Do you get discriminated against?’ ‘Yeah, every fucking day!”

From her very first television appearance – on the panel show 8 Out of 10 Cats in 2017 – Jones has received ableist trolling, ranging from the patronising (“Where’s her carer? Poor thing”) to the hateful (“Stop letting crip(s) think they’re funny”). When she went on Question Time in 2020, the abuse exploded. “I attracted a new audience: people who didn’t agree with my political beliefs,” she says. “They couldn’t find the words to express it so they just attacked my disability or appearance. They’re the low hanging fruits. The amount of abuse I got was overwhelming. Even the strongest person couldn’t deal with that.”

This is not ‘just’ the rough and tumble women and minorities in the public eye are somehow expected to endure in the age of social media. Jones has been told she should be “put in a cage”. She has received death threats. “I’m going to hunt you down, pour acid down your throat and rape you,” read one tweet. Jones didn’t feel she could go to the police. “I don’t know how seriously it would be taken.” The deluge of abuse got so bad that two years ago Jones hired a company to help her use social media without seeing the hateful comments.

> The media portrays people with disabilities as victims and burdens … I thought we’d moved on, but clearly we haven’t

“For my sake,” she says, “but for my followers, too. No one should have to see that.” The company effectively blocks out the trolls in lieu of social media companies taking the responsibility. “Social media platforms aren’t interested in being accountable,” she stresses. “They’re fuelled by hate. That’s how they get more users, more money.”

At one point in the documentary, Jones temporarily removes the paid-for moderation and is shown hundreds of abusive tweets on a huge cinema

screen. Some verge on the legal definition of hate speech. Jones is visibly upset but it's still only a hint at what she's felt behind the camera in recent years. "I don't think anybody could read that much abuse directed at them and not have it take a toll on their mental health," she says. "I feel anxious whenever I need to go on social media, I find it difficult to ignore. But I'm trying."

Last year, Jones started therapy to help cope. "Filming the documentary was also taking its toll on me. I found myself using jokes more as a coping mechanism, something I've done all my life. I was feeling sad and angry with the world. It took me a long time to be able to say: 'I'm angry. I'm angry with how the world treats me and other disabled people.' The documentary made me confront things about my disability that I'd perhaps kept in a drawer."

At the same time, Jones was finding it hard to live with her growing fame. "I was starting to be recognised whenever I went out, and it's [strange] because they don't actually know you. People who come up to me in public are often lovely but it was a lot to deal with. I feel grateful I could financially afford the therapy to practise self-care."

Jones's outlook is both interesting and admirable. Boisterous and positive, she's clearly enjoying herself and tells me repeatedly how much she "loves, loves" every opportunity she's been given. But she also admits she's more than the grin you see on a panel show. "I'm not this happy person all the time," she says. "I don't want other disabled people to look at me and think that I am, or that I don't find things difficult. I'm not proud of being disabled every day. Life would be easier if I didn't have cerebral palsy. I love this job but it's still hard."

Rosie Jones and Tom Rosenthal rap battling at The Underground club in Bradford in April 2022. Photograph: Joseph Scanlon

Get past the initial exuberance and she speaks like someone who is all too aware that – to some – her very existence as a disabled woman is at best confronting and, at worst, unnatural. “I know I’m always going to be dealing with more than comedians who aren’t disabled,” she says. “I’m out there being disabled, sexual, proud, rude, flawed … That’s scary for a lot of people – people who are used to thinking of disabled people as tragic or angelic. I don’t fall into their archaic stereotypes.”

I meet Jones a couple of weeks after the charity Scope has criticised media coverage framing disabled people as a strain on the taxpayer. Does she think the media plays a role in stoking ableist attitudes? “Oh definitely,” she nods. “I think they portray people with disabilities as victims and burdens. I am disappointed and angry: I thought we’d moved on and made progress, but clearly we haven’t.”

For someone who launched her career with the aim of making people laugh, it’s not without irony that Jones is now using her platform to discuss a topic that is, by any definition, pretty bleak. But this isn’t the first time Jones has found herself in the role of activist: she’s frequently spoken out about the lack of representation of disabled people in the arts as well as the impact of

government cuts. “Right now, the people with disabilities who truly have a platform to speak about these topics are few and far between,” she notes. “I want to use my platform for good.” That must be a lot of pressure, I say. “Yes, and I don’t think that my straight, white, non-disabled male comedian colleagues are expected to be so outspoken and political. But I try to make it clear that I don’t speak for all disabled people, I can only speak for myself and my own experience. On the flip side, the belief that I’m making a difference, changing things for the better, is incredible, so it’s worth it.”

It isn’t always plain sailing. Jones has also been criticised for playing comedy clubs that weren’t fully accessible to disabled people – largely due to the fact very few smaller venues are. She says she “fully understands” the upset. “I’m often part of a mixed-bill comedy night and if I were to turn the job down I’d be replaced by a comedian that would almost definitely be non-disabled. I believe I can make more of a difference by performing in those spaces and letting audiences see a proud disabled woman. I also have a frank conversation with the organisers who, after meeting me, make their venue a little bit more accessible, which is amazing. I’m responsible for making small theatres a tiny bit more disabled-friendly, one hand rail at a time!”

Now fronting her own tour, Jones is proud she finally has the control to make sure every venue she performs in is accessible. Her favourite part of touring, she says, is meeting the audience after the show. “I love that there’s non-disabled people there. I’m just a comedian like any other to them. And I also love to see all the disabled people in the crowd. They say, ‘Before you, I never saw anyone like me on stage.’” At the weekend, one fan gave her a bag of handmade badges adorned with disability pride slogans. “Disabled icon,” one reads. “Fuck ableism,” says another. It is a message that clearly keeps Jones going – and is a middle finger to the trolls.

Rosie Jones: Am I a R*tard airs on Channel 4 in mid-July. She is touring the UK with her show Triple Threat – tickets can be bought via rosiejonescomedy.com

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I was lost in the desert for nine and a half days – and sustained myself with raw bats and urine

‘Withered executives drooling over gratuitous nudity’ … Lily-Rose Depp in The Idol. Photograph: HBO

Television

Tedious, pointless, cringe-inducing: why The Idol was a failure from start to

finish

Even as it aired, Sam Levinson’s disastrous erotic thriller felt like a pulpy box-office flop rescued from the archives. It was so nothingy it’s hard to even tell what its point was – if anything

Shaad D'Souza
Tue 4 Jul 2023 00.00 EDTLast modified on Tue 4 Jul 2023 00.26 EDT

The Idol, the Weeknd and Sam Levinson’s embattled, controversial, woefully received erotic thriller, wrapped up after five weeks last night – not with a bang, nor a whimper, but a profound: *huh?* What was this show about, if anything? Nothing happened: the plot points covered in this show could make about two tight hours’ worth of television – or one probably-quite-watchable film – and instead were stretched to five, each episode padded out with extended musical numbers, montages of a sun-drenched Los Angeles, and some mightily cringe-inducing sex scenes.

In its final hour, the show was nothing if not consistent. By my count, about half the episode’s run-time was taken up with an extended showcase in which five characters – Moses Sumney’s Izaak; Troye Sivan’s Xander; Suzanna Son’s Chloe; Ramsey, playing herself; and, of course, Lily-Rose Depp’s Jocelyn – all performed entire solo musical numbers. (It was, at the

very least, funny to watch Sumney and Depp grind on a bunch of bewildered label reps in what I have to assume was one of the show's many improvised scenes.) The show's main mystery – who, exactly, is Tedros, the mysterious would-be svengali played by the Weeknd? – is wrapped up in a single scene, in which music execs played by Hank Azaria, Jane Adams and Eli Roth laugh cartoonishly as they recount his history as a pimp, a sordid past dredged up by Vanity Fair reporter Talia (Hari Nef) in, apparently, less than a week.

It doesn't need to be said that this is not the TV show we were promised. It's not – following HBO going in "a new creative direction" – a provocative thriller directed by brilliant indie film-maker Amy Seimetz that features Showgirls' Elizabeth Berkley and the final on-screen performance of the late Anne Heche. It's also not the merry-go-round of gratuitous torture porn that crew members alleged the Weeknd and Levinson turned it into in a January Rolling Stone report. Instead, The Idol was curiously normal: not high art; no more morally objectionable than many other self-consciously transgressive TV shows. Occasionally, it was great as a so-bad-it's-good watch, but more often it was just kind of boring.

No happy ending for Tedros (the Weeknd). Photograph: HBO

There were flashes of brilliance among the shots of Depp sullenly smoking by the pool. The scenes of music-industry satire, in which withered executives drooled over gratuitous nudity, mental illness and scandal, rang fundamentally true, if a little cartoonish. The gag built into this episode's musical showcase – which began with Roth's and Adams' characters about to write off Jocelyn and her band of weirdo stragglers, only for them to change their tune once they each received lapdances – was a little on-the-nose, but it was pretty funny, and, unfortunately, indicative of the way major label reps see dollar signs in their eyes the moment any performance becomes slutty and orgiastic.

Other industry-related plotlines didn't quite click in the same way. Jocelyn's backing dancer Dyanne, played by Blackpink's Jennie, was being groomed by a music executive to cut a song originally intended for Jocelyn, with Levinson clearly attempting to wring tension from the idea that the pair would eventually come to loggerheads. Dyanne's screen time was so minimal, though, that this never amounted to anything: Jocelyn won back the love of her label, and Dyanne was thrown into the industry meatgrinder. It's kind of a fun joke, but it would have had far more resonance had the show been more driven by plot or character interaction than by pure vibe.

As The Idol wound to a close, it became evident that this wasn't even the show that its cast and lead crew initially thought they were making. Dan Levy, originally part of the supporting cast and featured heavily in trailers, ended up appearing only in the first episode, making what amounted to a cameo. When I spoke to cast member Da'Vine Joy Randolph before it aired, she promised that the show's status quo would shift dramatically as the season progressed; it didn't really, unless you put a lot of stock in the final scenes, in which it's implied that Jocelyn was the one pulling the strings the whole time. I don't really buy that, simply because, for the bulk of the series, what you saw was what you got: some violent sex, some funny sex, a few immortal Rachel Sennott reaction shots, and very little in the way of genuine interiority for either Jocelyn or Tedros.

Had the show been longer, it might have been better able to sow its seeds, and the payoff would have been more satisfying. But it seems that Levinson might have struggled even more with a longer series, given the fact that the show was cut down from a planned six episodes to five. (I'm hoping that,

somewhere down the line, we get to see the Seimetz-directed version of the show, which was shot then canned. Even in an incomplete form, it could hardly be worse than what we ended up with.)

I have no doubt that The Idol will be ripe for cringe-viewing in future. Watching over the past few weeks, it already felt a little like some kind of pulpy box-office flop rescued from the archives. And I'm profoundly indebted to the show for one significant reason: it gave us World Class Sinner, a Jocelyn hit that's meant to be bad but which I – and many of my friends – just can't stop listening to. Unlike much of The Idol, World Class Sinner is camp, ridiculous fun – a send-up of dumb pop music that still has all the shiver-inducing thrills of the real thing. If only The Idol had been half as good.

The dampest squib of a finale … The Weeknd and Lily-Rose Depp in The Idol. Photograph: HBO/© 2022 Home Box Office, Inc. All rights reserved.

TV reviewTelevision

Review

The Idol finale review – one of the worst programmes ever made

We were promised the year’s most shocking show. Instead we get a painfully tedious TV non-event, featuring a performance from the Weeknd that should be tried at The Hague

Leila Latif
Mon 3 Jul 2023 17.15 EDTLast modified on Mon 3 Jul 2023 23.23 EDT

Getting rid of sex scenes is a debate that rears its ugly head among film and TV fans time and time again. The arguments against on-screen sex and nudity are a many-headed hydra of puritanism: they are unnecessary, they rarely serve the plot and making acting co-workers recreate intimacy is fundamentally icky. My position has always been that sex is part of life – and art should be able to depict all of life's foibles. Until, that is, I started watching The Idol, which makes it hard not to join the ranks of this new wave of prudes. After all, if sex on screen can facilitate a show this terrible, maybe it's worth embracing televisual celibacy.

It is not just that The Idol is one of the worst programmes ever made – it's also possibly the most squandered opportunity ever. Giant budget aside, post-Britney Spears, Kesha and Amy Winehouse, it's high time to satirise pop starlet tragedies – and with this production featuring Hank Azaria, Da'Vine Joy Randolph, Hari Nef and Rachel Sennott, it had more than enough talent to do so. Instead, we get the limp, glazed-over, chain-smoking nothingness of Lily-Rose Depp and a performance from Abel "The Weeknd" Tesfaye that should be tried at The Hague. After all the sex, nudity, swearing and scandal surrounding The Idol, we were braced to be shocked. We were

braced to be appalled. But nothing can prepare you to be so incredibly bored.

Five episodes in, we are left with the dampest squib of a finale. There are hints early on that something larger may be afoot. That Jocelyn (Depp) may be turning the tables on Tedros (Tesfaye), with Azaria's character, Chaim, seemingly warning Tedros of the potential consequences of his actions, via a speech that twists Little Red Riding Hood into a dark tale involving the little girl cutting open the wolf and stitching rocks into his belly. But by the end of the series, we are left with a pop star who is much as we found her, except with a boyfriend. She has made a decent comeback single and is doing the tour that was planned all along. When the first episode debuted, and we were promised the most shocking show of the year, it was inconceivable to think that this is where we would end up.

The giant twist? It is ambiguously hinted at that Jocelyn may have been more savvy than previously suspected. At one point, we are expected to believe that an international pop star's profile is scrapped by Vanity Fair because they get a scoop about a seedy nightclub owner being … seedy. To have so little happen in a concluding episode is utterly bizarre. Theories abounded – would Tedros kill Joss? Would Joss become a mass shooter on tour? Would she become some kind of vessel for a cult and absorb the talents of the many hangers-on that populate her mansion? Would something, anything, actually happen?

The answer is no. The only real seismic shift comes for minor player Rob, Jocelyn's ex-boyfriend who is falsely accused of rape and is digitally replaced in the film he has just acted in – which is cultural commentary of the most odious kind. The Idol is not content to just be boring, but feels the need to make the occasional point about how feminism and #MeToo get in the way of a good time. Much like the intimacy coordinator who hinders a great photoshoot in the first episode, The Idol reserves its only comprehensive moments to highlight how lame it is when women are listened to.

As the series concludes, we have spent five painful hours watching a tortured pop star be miserable and arrange a tour and a new single that seem

fine. People stripped off and moaned and delivered poorly written monologues, but it was all OK in the end because Joss got to be the horny singer of her dreams and Tedros ultimately proved to be a good influence. HBO – which was until recently regarded as the home of the best that TV had to offer – spent millions upon millions of dollars to deliver women gleefully writhing, being sexualised and finding peace in admitting how much they suck. No number of nipples and butt cheeks can distract from just how unattractive the show finds its subjects, and as it concludes, it's clear that this is intended to be only the beginning, that further cat and mouse games between Joss, Tedros, the music industry and feminism are intended. Mercifully, for us, this is the end. Hopefully the ickiness of The Idol will be cast to the annals of history. I would rather never see a nipple on screen again than have to watch a show this lousy.

The Idol aired on Sky Atlantic and is available on Now TV in the UK and Binge in Australia

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Eoghan Daltun with his dog on his farm, where native trees such as sessile oak, rowan and downy birch have self-seeded. Photograph: Rory Carroll/The Guardian

Rewilding

‘The result was amazing’: one man’s mission to reforest a barren Irish hillside

Eoghan Daltun has spent 14 years rewilding part of Beara peninsula into a showcase of diversity

Rory Carroll *Ireland correspondent*
@rorycarroll72
Tue 4 Jul 2023 00.00 EDT

Eoghan Daltun stood on a slope and pointed to a distant vista of verdant fields, craggy hills and conifer trees across the Beara peninsula in west Cork.

Sun glinted off the rocks and sheep grazed in meadows. It was serene – the sort of bucolic panorama that draws tourists and appears on Irish postcards to embody the Emerald Isle.

Daltun, however, had news for anyone tempted to marvel at nature's majesty. "It's ecological illiteracy. They can't read the landscape they're looking at. That is a completely barren landscape. It is biologically empty."

The scenery, he said, represented environmental degradation. The sheep had devoured wild flowers and seedlings, preventing native trees from growing, and the conifers were part of a monoculture plantation that devastated biodiversity. "We are in the midst of a serious ecological crisis."

Daltun is a pioneer in a rewilding movement that seeks to restore native forests that once blanketed 80% of Ireland and now cover just 1%, one of

the lowest rates in Europe.

Over the past 14 years the farmer-cum-activist, author and sculptor has turned 30 acres of rugged hillside in Beara, a windswept peninsula overlooking the Atlantic Ocean, into a showcase of biodiversity and climate action.

A meadow on Daltun's farm. Photograph: Rory Carroll/The Guardian

He fenced off the land to keep out feral goats, sika deer and other non-native animals, eradicated rhododendron and other invasive alien plants, and let nature do the rest. "The result was amazing," Daltun said during a tour of the land last week. "Almost from the start the whole place started to transform. You started to see drifts of wildflowers: dog violet, primrose, bluebell, bugle, wood-sorrel. And tree seedlings started to pop up."

He pointed at the ground. "Within 3 metres of where we are standing you have at least six species of wild native trees, all self-seeded – sessile oak, rowan, downy birch, hawthorn, hazel, holly." Daltun peered at a seedling. "Actually seven, there's a willow. They can keep on growing because there is nothing to eat them."

The site now has forest canopy and an abundance of insects and native mammals, such as pine martens, otters and lesser horseshoe bats. Wrens chirp from nests and ravens fly overhead. A recent drought dried up nearby streams but water still trickled through Daltun's property.

"A natural forest retains water like a giant sponge. The soils are more porous. The roots and mosses absorb the moisture and let it out slowly. The whole ecosystem has started to function again properly."

Daltun is part of a global effort to rewild gardens, estates and countryside to try to halt catastrophic biodiversity losses.

Eoghan Daltun: 'We either start protecting the natural habitats we have left or we lose them.' Photograph: Rory Carroll/The Guardian

Ireland is famously pastoral and in 2019 became the second country in the world after Britain to declare a climate emergency. But it is one of the EU's worst carbon emission offenders and has struggled to protect ancient bogs and contain rhododendron. It has increased forest cover to 11% – still low by European standards – but almost all is sitka spruce and other monoculture plantations, which critics say are ecological dead zones.

Rewilding initiatives have spread. Trinity College Dublin replaced manicured lawns in 2020 with turf that included 25 types of native Irish

wildflower, resulting in a riot of colour and foliage three years later. Randal Plunkett, who owns an estate in County Meath, replaced cattle, sheep and many crops with wilderness. Ireland's Health Service Executive said last week it may rewild the grounds of its headquarters.

Daltun, a sculpture restorer, has been an advocate since selling his home in Dublin in 2009 to buy a patch of the Beara peninsula. It had mature native trees but goats and deer had feasted on seedlings and wildflowers, and had stripped bark, paving the way for a rhododendron infestation that stifled other plants. "The forest was essentially dying," he said.

A lichen on Eoghan Daltun's farm. Photograph: Rory Carroll/The Guardian

The fencing and the rhododendron extirpation let indigenous nature flourish. Daltun, who keeps a small number of cattle on a separate parcel of land, also favours severe culling of feral goats and sika deer – a pleasant surprise to neighbouring farmers who were unsure what to expect from a Dublin environmentalist. "We either start protecting the little natural habitats we have left or we lose them," said Daltun.

Last year he published a book, An Irish Atlantic Rainforest: a Personal Journey into the Magic of Rewilding, that caught the public's imagination

and won international plaudits. “There has been a massive reaction. Awareness is increasing.”

Unlike Scotland, where a handful of wealthy estate owners can rewild vast tracts, rural Ireland is divided into smallholdings. Daltun said significant action would require subsidies, community consultation and popular support. “Rewilding can be seen as a rich person’s hobby. It’s really important that ecological and social justice go hand in hand.”

2023.07.04 - Opinion

- **Crisis, crisis, everywhere … why regulatory failure is at the heart of Britain's many problems**
- **Tories hear this: the public still believes in the NHS on its 75th birthday – and we know you don't**
- **Another deadly pandemic seems inevitable – but there is a way to avoid it**
- **Members' boorish heckling at Lord's shows MCC must change faster**

Outfall into the River Thames, at Thames Water's Crossness sewage treatment works in south-east London Photograph: Ben Stansall/AFP/Getty Images

OpinionRegulators

Crisis, crisis, everywhere … why regulatory failure is at the heart of Britain’s many problems

Nick Butler

Thames Water's woes are a clear sign that basic oversight of our critical industries simply isn't happening

Tue 4 Jul 2023 02.00 EDTLast modified on Wed 5 Jul 2023 13.06 EDT

The potential collapse of Thames Water, sinking under £14bn of debt, is just the latest evidence that the regulatory regimes that oversee large parts of the British economy are failing.

It comes on the heels of Ofgem, the gas and electricity regulator, failing to notice that companies supplying power to consumers were undercapitalised and vulnerable to global price volatility. The rail regulator, Office of Rail Regulation (ORR), has failed to protect the users of northern rail services or of commuter services around London from the incompetence of franchise operators. Ofcom, once the most respected regulator, has failed to prevent egregious telecom double-digit price increases – one of the worst recent examples of corporate exploitation which has helped to push up the cost of living.

Consumers or taxpayers or both will have to pay the cost of these failures. Ofwat's failure to control financial engineering has left a number of other

water companies in serious debt. Ofgem's inability to ensure that the companies it was regulating could cope with volatile prices will add billions to retail bills.

In the 1980s heyday of privatisation, regulators were presented as the key protectors of consumer interest in areas where private companies were taking on the ownership of natural monopolies. Over the past decade that role has been diminished. The ideological approach of successive governments has been that the private sector can be trusted to manage itself, and that undue regulatory interference would deter much-needed investment.

Many companies in the water, energy and other utility sectors are competent, are fully aware of their social and environmental responsibilities and do not exploit their consumers or use financial engineering to benefit their shareholders. But a minority do not operate in the public interest, and that is where strong and clear regulation is essential.

Energy and water supply businesses need investment, and unless they are all to be taken back into public ownership, private investors such as pension funds will need a return. But with a protected market position, returns should be set at an appropriate and limited level. For many institutional investors, relatively secure, if modest, returns are perfectly adequate. Utilities should not be in the business of short-term profit maximisation, and their pay and bonus structures should reward the delivery of promised service provision.

Ownership structures should not only benefit shareholders. There is much to be said for the development of utility businesses that follow the model of Welsh Water – Dŵr Cymru – a company limited by guarantee with no shareholders, and whose returns are therefore used to improve service provision for the benefits of its consumers.

Retail bills should be set to cover operating costs, including the costs of maintaining and upgrading infrastructure and protecting the environment. Long-term investment has been neglected under government pressure to keep bills down. This is a dangerously false economy leading to neglect and decay, and in the case of the water industry to the continued dumping of untreated sewage.

If we want good-quality water, reliable trains and secure energy supplies, we will have to pay for them. Good regulators have a responsibility to make the choices clear, and to ensure that all the companies engaged in the provision of basic services meet the standards expected.

The regulatory system is essential and it needs to be rebuilt. In each case, the remit of the regulator must be set and accompanied by sufficient powers to ensure compliance. The revolving door between the regulators and the companies they are employed to control must be closed.

A reformed model would allow regulators to be independent, and their remit would include a guarantee of independence from the day-to-day temptation for ministers to interfere in detailed decision making. In turn, they would give expert advice to government about how key objectives could be met and their leadership would be politically impartial.

The neglect of the past decade is coming back to haunt the regulators. With the prospect of a sustained period of high interest rates, more problems are likely in companies whose activities are so essential to daily life that they cannot be allowed to collapse. The problems at Thames Water came as a surprise to some observers, including it seems ministers, but to those who have followed the water sector closely, it was no surprise at all. Thames Water will not be the last victim of regulatory failure.

This article was amended on 5 July 2023 to give Dŵr Cymru as the correct name for Welsh Water, rather than “Glas Cymru” as an earlier version said.

Nick Butler is a visiting professor at King’s College London, a former group vice-president for strategy and policy development at BP, and a former adviser to Gordon Brown

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‘Tory governments that have overseen the NHS for two-thirds of its life have, with gritted teeth, had to swear undying allegiance.’ Rishi Sunak visits Addenbrooke’s hospital, Cambridge, 30 June 2023. Photograph: Dan Kitwood/PA

OpinionNHS

Tories, hear this: the public still believes in the NHS on its 75th birthday – and we know you don’t

Polly Toynbee

It has suffered years of cuts but the service will recover, because British people understand what it means for our way of life

Tue 4 Jul 2023 01.00 EDTLast modified on Tue 4 Jul 2023 07.36 EDT

Westminster Abbey on Wednesday morning will be filled with NHS staff in their uniforms as the “national religion” gives thanks for its 75th birthday. Hymns adapt quite easily: Abide With Me might be the dirge-like tone for those in peril on the wards.

Prayers from the pews, among junior doctors and consultants about to strike and nurses who could strike no longer, will be full of mixed emotions. Managers, faced with a record staff exodus, will be praying to get through next winter.

The wail goes up that the NHS as we know it may not be here for its 100th birthday. These are its darkest hours: waiting lists were never so long, results are falling behind those of similar countries, and crumbling buildings have ancient IT systems thanks to drained capital budgets. Private practice is rising, as people who can’t wait dip into their savings to pay. Is this the way

the NHS ends, not with a privatisation bang, but with the whimper of patients in pain reluctantly deserting it, causing a two-tier system?

I think not. The public remains passionately in support of the principles of the NHS, however glum about its current state. A Health Foundation poll shows three-quarters of voters believe a service free for everyone is "crucial", so the famous dictum attributed to Aneurin Bevan holds good: "The NHS will last as long as there are folk left with faith to fight for it." And there are.

Against all the odds, those founding principles survived the Thatcher revolution's individualism, privatisation, anti-tax and anti-state arsenic injected into the national bloodstream. Though the creation of the NHS was opposed furiously by Winston Churchill's Conservatives (and doctors), the Tory governments that have overseen the NHS for two-thirds of its life have, with gritted teeth, had to swear undying allegiance. Thatcher loathed it, but had to pledge that the NHS was "safe in our hands". Cameron's 2010 campaign sported vast posters promising, "I'll cut the deficit, not the NHS": under him, per capita spending fell further and for longer than ever before.

The question I ponder is why the universal egalitarian principle of the NHS, held in such high esteem by so many, rarely spills over into the other good things the state can provide for everyone. Why aren't we more Scandinavian in our willingness to pay the taxes that would give us a public realm with better education, arts, leisure centres, parks, preserved heritage, great transport, fine public housing, a decent social security net and Sure Start centres for all families?

Inside the NHS at 75: 'Used and abused, overworked and underpaid' – video

The mundane answer may be that everyone, of all ages and incomes, fears they might need an ambulance to A&E if they fall off a ladder or keel over with a heart attack, whereas only a certain number of people at any one time appreciate other public services. But Labour could tap into that Scandinavian sentiment, as it becomes ever clearer that the current plight of the NHS is due to profound social failures beyond its doors. The NHS is the last resort, the repository for the effects of neglect in everything else – from dirty air, to children in mould-ridden homes, to inadequate food. As research

by Michael Marmot, professor of epidemiology at University College London, shows, healing the NHS requires healing the worst inequalities.

One reason why the NHS will survive (even if it takes years to recover) is this perfect political exhibition of the consequences of 13 years under Labour followed by 13 years under Tory prime ministers. For many years, Labour's average annual spending increases from 1997 of about 6% gave the NHS its best ever results – and that led to the falling use of private healthcare. Look at it juxtaposed with the spending desert of the past 13 years, a Narnia of permanent winter where patients wait for care in hospital corridors. In years to come, that will stand as the example: you get what you pay for (except in the US). Labour has a history of leaving the NHS better, and the Tories of damaging it. NHS waiting lists now bake in economic failure, with too many people waiting, too sick to work. These historic facts are now so obvious that voters may take many years to trust the Tories again.

Wes Streeting, Labour's shadow health secretary, looks on as the Tories' workforce plan steals from his own much-trumpeted policy of doubling training places for doctors and nurses. He can now use elsewhere the £1.6bn a year he planned to raise from non-dom tax reliefs to spend on training. His reform priorities spelled out this week rightly shift resources out of acute care to community, GPs and prevention: it's been tried before, and was advocated again by the NHS Assembly's report last week. Has he the mettle to do as he says – and deny hospitals while beefing up GPs, social care and community health? How much Labour would spend on the NHS remains unknown for now, though Steve Barclay, the health secretary, gets away with promising £2.4bn over five years for his training plan, unable to say where it will come from. Rishi Sunak said ominously in his press conference, "By prioritising the NHS there will be other things that we can't afford." If rumoured benefit cuts are among those "other things", they will ricochet back into added NHS pressure: social cuts always do.

Meanwhile, Conservative outriders hammer on against the NHS – Andrew Neil was the latest to berate its failings in the Daily Mail. Demanding "reform", these opponents always leave that to the last paragraphs, never spelling out what they mean beyond vague but unspecified praise for European social insurance (which amounts to much the same as our national

insurance, with more costly administration). They plant the thought that we should pay top-ups and extras, with no details, driven by an ideological and illogical impulse that says any form of payment is good.

Resoundingly, overwhelmingly, the public rejects all that, as will those NHS staff in Westminster Abbey singing hallelujahs tomorrow. As a member of the NHS Assembly, I'll be hymning praises there too, like others thinking of births, deaths and family lives saved, all for free. Tory ministers will pretend to sing along, though they know that the terrible condition they have reduced the NHS to will be a prime killer of their electoral chances, possibly for years to come.

- Polly Toynbee is a Guardian columnist

‘Industrial farms are becoming disease factories, incubating pathogens like flu, enabling hyper-virulent pathogens to spread or cross to humans.’ Photograph: Ina Fassbender/AFP/Getty Images

OpinionInfectious diseases

Another deadly pandemic seems inevitable – but there is a way to avoid it

John Vidal

We are not helpless: we need to do big things quickly, though, to halt the disturbance of nature. And I fear that’s not happening

- John Vidal is a former Guardian environment editor

Tue 4 Jul 2023 03.00 EDTLast modified on Tue 4 Jul 2023 08.49 EDT

When he bought the pretty little striped field mouse on the internet for $8 to give to his daughter for her sixth birthday, the businessman from São Paulo was told it was free of infection and had been bred by a registered dealer. In

fact, it had been sourced from the vast sugar cane fields planted in Brazil to grow biofuels to reduce the use of fossil fuels – and which were swarming with rodents after yet another heatwave.

It nipped his daughter on the finger, but no one thought much of it – and six days later, he left on a trip to Europe. By the time he reached Amsterdam, she had started suffering fevers, muscle aches and breathing problems and had been rushed to hospital, and he too felt unwell. It was the start of one of the worst pandemics in human history, killing more people than Covid-19, Sars or the 1918 flu pandemic put together.

In one week 300 people had been infected, a month later 300,000 people around the world were gasping for breath. After 8 months, possibly 20 million people had died and 1 billion people were infected. It was Covid on steroids. Whereas Covid killed 1% of people infected, this novel hantavirus mutated as fast as the Omicron variant and killed one in three people it infected. It was Disease X, the name adopted in 2018 by World Health Organization disease experts to an as yet unknown, hyper-virulent disease for which no drug or vaccine was available, but which could kill hundreds of millions of people.

That much is fiction. Disease X is hypothetical. But the consensus is that something *like* it is coming. It may not be a hantavirus. It could well be a flu, a coronavirus like Covid-19, or a returning, souped-up ancient killer like typhoid, tuberculosis or plague. It may spill over to humans through a hamster, a bat, a chicken, or a tick. It could come out of a fur farm in Norway or a pig farm in Mexico. It could incubate in a disturbed forest, a US weapons lab or a farmers' market in the UK. It may not arrive for many decades but with climate change, new global ecological conditions, hyper-mobility and ever denser human and animal populations, another great pandemic is inevitable.

Pandemics kill far more people and cost economies more than war, but no government or global body at present plans to address the underlying cause of Covid-19 or the question of why outbreaks of major new infectious diseases like HIV/Aids, Ebola, Marburg, avian flu, Sars, Middle East

respiratory syndrome (Mers), mpox and Nipah have all emerged in the past 50 years. The priority of government and industry is to find better ways to treat symptoms with better vaccines and technology, rather than address the causes of disease.

But we are not helpless. We know enough to strongly expect the next great pandemic will be "zoonotic" (or linked to animals), be ecologically driven and connected to the way humanity manipulates, changes and degrades the global environment. Intensive deforestation, the draining of wetland, climate change, the degradation of soil, the collapse of biodiversity, and the growth of vast, impoverished cities have together helped create the perfect conditions for new viruses to evolve faster, emerge more easily and cross from one species to another.

Covid has taught us that we cannot stop the evolution of microbes or escape from them. There are at least six things we can do, however, to not only reduce the risk of pandemics emerging but also reduce their severity.

Rethink human relationships with animals. Animals have played a major part in nearly every major disease outbreak since 1970. In that short time, about 500 new zoonotic, or animal-born diseases have emerged, including Mers, avian influenza, Ebola, Marburg, Lassa, Nipah, Zika, Covid-19 and HIV/Aids. Humans have never been closer to the pathogens of other species.

Reform farming. We have never farmed so many animals so intensively: over 70 billion of them a year are slaughtered for meat. Global food production now relies on vast flocks and herds of genetically identical poultry, cattle and pigs being reared in high-intensity, overcrowded, confined, entirely unnatural conditions. The growing danger is that industrial farms are becoming disease factories, incubating and enhancing pathogens like flu, and enabling hyper-virulent pathogens to spread within flocks or cross to humans.

Restore ecosystems. The past 30 years have seen an astonishingly fast transformation of the world's forests, wetlands and soils to provide food; the greatest mining and extraction of fossil fuels for energy, power and minerals in human history; and the biggest increase ever known in trade and human travel. Logging, urbanisation and human population growth have all

fragmented ecosystems and helped create the condition for diseases to emerge and spread. We must minimise the disturbance of nature and reduce the interactions between ourselves and the pathogens of other species.

Control greenhouse emissions. Global heating increases the threat of diseases emerging – and changes where and when they emerge and spread. When temperatures rise, rains are heavier or droughts and heatwaves last longer, then the conditions for life change – and the insects, bats, ticks and other wildlife that mostly carry pathogens or diseases like malaria, Rift Valley fever, cholera and dengue are likely to geographically spread. The changing climate is already driving wildlife into new areas, destroying habitat and forcing it to survive in new ecological conditions in which previously isolated species may mix and exchange pathogens. Unless climate heating is brought under control, not only will humanity suffer, but there are likely to be many new diseases emerging, and in unexpected places.

Control lab experiments. There is no consensus on the origin of Covid-19, but the risk of a pandemic starting in a laboratory is real, and grows every year. Medical and military research uses the world's most dangerous bacteria, viruses and pathogens and is now conducted in thousands of state, corporate and academic laboratories around the world. New ways to find vaccines and control dangerous pathogens are now a multibillion-dollar global industry. The risk of future pandemics originating from controversial "gain-of-function" research that aims to increase a pathogen's virulence for possible military or medical use is high.

Improve disease surveillance. Infectious diseases will continue to break out, mutate and haunt us. But who they affect and where they strike now depends on us. Strong public health systems, especially in the world's great urban centres, are best placed to monitor new disease outbreaks, to identify what strains may be spreading and to test and stop them in their tracks. But that requires commitments by all countries to invest heavily in eradicating global poverty. This may be the global north's best insurance policy against future pandemics.

Eliminating the risk of infectious disease is as impossible now as it was 20 years ago, but if we only try to treat the symptoms of disease with vaccines

and technology, we are in danger of not preventing them occurring in the first place. The only way to ensure good long-term human and planetary health is to minimise the disturbance of nature – and avoid interactions between ourselves and the pathogens of other species.

- John Vidal is the Guardian's former environment editor and author of Fevered Planet: How Diseases Emerge When We Harm Nature (Bloomsbury, £20). To support The Guardian and Observer, order your copy at guardianbookshop.com. Delivery charges may apply.

Australian cricket team 'verbally abused' after controversial Bairstow dismissal – video report

Ashes 2023

Members' boorish heckling at Lord's shows MCC must change faster

Emma John

Ugly Long Room scenes looked, sounded and felt like unfunny Bullingdon Club callback – the age of entitled asses must pass

Tue 4 Jul 2023 03.05 EDTLast modified on Tue 4 Jul 2023 03.53 EDT

There are many things you can't do in the stands at Lord's. You can't wave flags, blow whistles, play with beach balls, you can't wear fancy dress "and/or oversized hats". There are even more banned activities in the Pavilion: you can't take drinks out of the bar; you can't save more than two seats at a time; you must *never* speak into your mobile phone, or even allow it to ring.

The above is not a comprehensive list, but it is an indicative one that demonstrates a common theme: decorum. The members of Marylebone Cricket Club – who include me – see their headquarters as a haven of calm, of old-school manners, of awed respect for its storied past. This is part of our unique sporting brand, along with stripy blazers that can trigger seizures, and the right to nap on a bench behind the bowler's arm.

Hence, it's considered classless to photograph the players as they walk through the Long Room and up the stairs to their dressing room. But you can, as evidenced on the final day of the second Ashes Test, form a mob that boos, heckles, and chants "Cheat!" at them. Only three members have been suspended for the incident but iPhone footage from members – who were prepared to break another club rule to record it – captured plenty of bad behaviour beside theirs.

Everyone agrees this was an unprecedented and isolated reaction, born of an unusually controversial dismissal. The scenes weren't repeated – MCC's chief executive personally addressed the Long Room before the players re-emerged after lunch to make sure of it. What hasn't been addressed is the eye-watering hypocrisy of these self-appointed guardians of the Spirit of Cricket™, who cannot stomach a piece of questionable practice from a wicketkeeper but are happy to indulge in boorishness on their own time.

So let's talk about the spirit of cricket, shall we? An infuriatingly nebulous concept – certainly in the case of the Jonny Bairstow decision – but much referenced in the club's own rules. In 2019, MCC formalised a code of conduct which came with the following preamble: "Respect is central to the Spirit of Cricket … Any conduct demonstrating a failure to show respect, including abusive, discriminatory or inappropriate behaviour or language, will be considered a breach of the Rules of the Club."

Voted in unanimously, the code was intended to end the offensive remarks and behaviour (mostly towards women) that have not yet been eradicated in the bars and on the benches. No one imagined it would be implemented to defend Australia from a hostile work environment. But then even the conditions of a general admission ticket state that "visitors must not engage in any conduct or behaviour which is abusive or threatening … or otherwise

behave in a threatening, abusive, riotous, indecent, insulting or anti-social manner". Those crowding the bottom of the stairwell or leaning over the banisters to "express themselves" racked up five of the last six. The stewards would have been within their rights to eject them then and there.

Their actions were as self-defeating as they were brainless. No member can be unaware of the current scrutiny of the club. The incendiary debate around the historic Eton v Harrow and Varsity fixtures – supposedly deferred for five years, while they continue to be played – was instantly reignited last week when the Independent Commission for Equity in Cricket report singled them out as a prime example of cricket's engrained classism and elitism. Resistance from large swathes of the membership to the leadership's attempts to make it more diverse and inclusive doesn't just look bad, it genuinely threatens the members' own interests. Icec recommends the removal of international matches and other privileges for clubs that fail to change.

And yet there these Spiritual Defenders of the game stood, using the theatrical backdrop and the powerfully echoing acoustics of their private cricketing palace to bray and honk like entitled asses. Others have noted that the behaviour of sporting crowds has declined in recent years, that the legacy of a post-Brexit, peak-Boris society has been a licence to behave badly. True or not, Sunday looked, sounded and felt like a rather unfunny Bullingdon Club callback.

after newsletter promotion

I can’t picture a more powerful demonstration that the club needs to change faster, not least because it’s impossible to imagine a membership made up of equal parts women indulging such a display of frustrated machismo. The club has chosen to concentrate on the three members who they could positively identify in altercation with the Australians but I’d have liked to have seen far more names taken, with swift expulsions all round. Not a bad way to tackle the ludicrous 27-year waiting list, after all.

Funny, too, how the last day at Lord’s has already wiped out the memory of the Just Stop Oil activists, invading the pitch with their harmless orange cornflour. That action was instantly condemned “in the strongest possible terms” by the club, while the members’ own disruptive and unpleasant protest was met with “emotions were running high”. Perhaps the dread of climate crisis and the fear of total planetary collapse just isn’t as upsetting as an Alex Carey run-out.

2023.07.04 - Around the world

- Georgia Health fears over jailed former president after video appearance
- US Capitol attack Man accused of attacking officer as January 6 arrests pile up
- Meta Instagram's Threads app to launch 6 July amid mass backlash against Elon Musk's Twitter
- 'It can be chilling' Julian Sands spoke of seeing human remains on climbs
- Fukushima China calls for suspension of Japanese plan to release radioactive water into sea

Mikheil Saakashvili appears on a screen during a court hearing in Tbilisi. Photograph: Irakli Gedenidze/Reuters

Georgia

Health fears over jailed former Georgia president after video appearance

Mikheil Saakashvili appears frail and emaciated on court video link, leading to concern about his treatment

Agence France-Presse in Tbilisi
Mon 3 Jul 2023 17.25 EDTFirst published on Mon 3 Jul 2023 16.33 EDT

Georgia's former president Mikheil Saakashvili has appeared on television for the first time in months, looking frail and emaciated, fuelling concerns over the detained politician's treatment.

The 55-year-old was almost unrecognisable and looked like a ghost of his former self when he appeared in a video link for a court hearing on Monday.

The images prompted war-torn Ukraine – of which Saakashvili is a citizen – to summon the Georgian ambassador, asking him to go to Tbilisi to help "save" Saakashvili.

The leader of the Caucasian country from 2004 to 2013, Saakashvili was jailed after returning from exile on charges that rights groups denounced as politically motivated.

Doctors have said Saakashvili risks dying from conditions he has developed while in custody, though Georgian authorities say he is being given adequate medical care.

Appearing via video link for a court hearing on the "abuse of office" charges, Saakashvili, 55, lifted his shirt to show his ribs protruding from his chest, a hollow abdomen, and skin clinging tightly to his bones.

"A totally innocent man is being kept in custody," he said in coverage carried live on several independent TV channels. "I did not commit any crime."

He is being held at a civilian hospital, where he was transferred last year after staging a 50-day hunger strike to protest against his detention.

"Putting me in jail will not break me," he said. "I am going to be actively involved in Georgian politics."

The Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, said the Georgian ambassador to Kyiv would be asked to "leave Ukraine within 48 hours to hold consultations with his capital" on Saakashvili's treatment.

Zelenskiy wants Saakashvili, who he made a Ukrainian citizen in 2019, to be transferred to a clinic in Ukraine or the west.

He called on Georgia to "hand over" Saakashvili to Ukraine and "save this man".

It was not immediately clear if the ambassador was being formally expelled.

The Ukrainian foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, said the ambassador would arrive at his offices on Tuesday.

“Tomorrow morning the Georgian ambassador will be at the foreign ministry. We will have a tough conversation with him, he will go to Georgia,” Kuleba said on social media.

Kyiv, which has been battling a Russian invasion for 16 months, has accused Tbilisi of increasingly cooperating with Moscow.

Zelenskiy accused Russia of “killing” Saakashvili “at the hands of the Georgian authorities”.

Two groups of doctors, one set up by Georgia’s rights ombudsman, another consisting of US-based medics, have said that Saakashvili’s health continued to decline well after he ended his hunger strike.

The group of US-based doctors, who examined Saakashvili in person, said his deteriorating health was the result of “torture” in custody, saying he needed an immediate transfer to a medical centre abroad.

The politician, who once weighed more than 100kg , has lost about 60kg while in prison, the doctors group said.

The EU and the US have urged Georgia to ensure that Saakashvili is provided medical treatment and that his rights are protected.

Amnesty International has described his treatment as “apparent political revenge”.

More than 1,000 people in total have been arrested, across almost all states, for January 6-related crimes. Photograph: Shannon Stapleton/Reuters

US Capitol attack

Man accused of attacking Capitol officer as January 6 arrests pile up

Jeremy Rodgers, 28, arrested in Florida a day after armed man wanted over riot detained near Barack Obama's Washington home

Guardian staff and agency
Tue 4 Jul 2023 05.00 EDTLast modified on Tue 4 Jul 2023 05.28 EDT

Americans continue to be arrested on suspicion of taking part in the Capitol attack, two and half years after the January 6 insurrection by supporters of Donald Trump.

Court documents on Monday showed that a Michigan man accused of attacking a police officer with a flagpole during the insurrection was arrested in Florida last Friday, a day after an armed man also wanted for the rioting

was arrested near Barack Obama's Washington home. Another man suspected of violence at the Capitol was arrested in Maryland last month.

Latest filings show that Jeremy Rodgers, 28, was arrested last Friday in Orlando and faces felony and misdemeanor charges, including assaulting a federal officer with a weapon.

Prosecutors say surveillance video shows Rodgers carrying a blue flag on his way to the Capitol and using it to strike a Capitol police officer on the helmet and then swinging the flagpole in the direction of officers, during the swarming of the seat of the US Congress.

He is accused of joining with thousands of other Trump supporters who invaded the Capitol in a deadly insurrection that sought, ultimately unsuccessfully, to halt the congressional certification of Joe Biden's presidential victory over Donald Trump in the 2020 election, at the urging of the defeated president.

Rodgers was among a crowd pushing through police lines outside the entrance to the chamber of the House of Representatives, investigators said. After another scuffle with police, Rodgers paraded through the Capitol rotunda waving his flag before leaving, officials said.

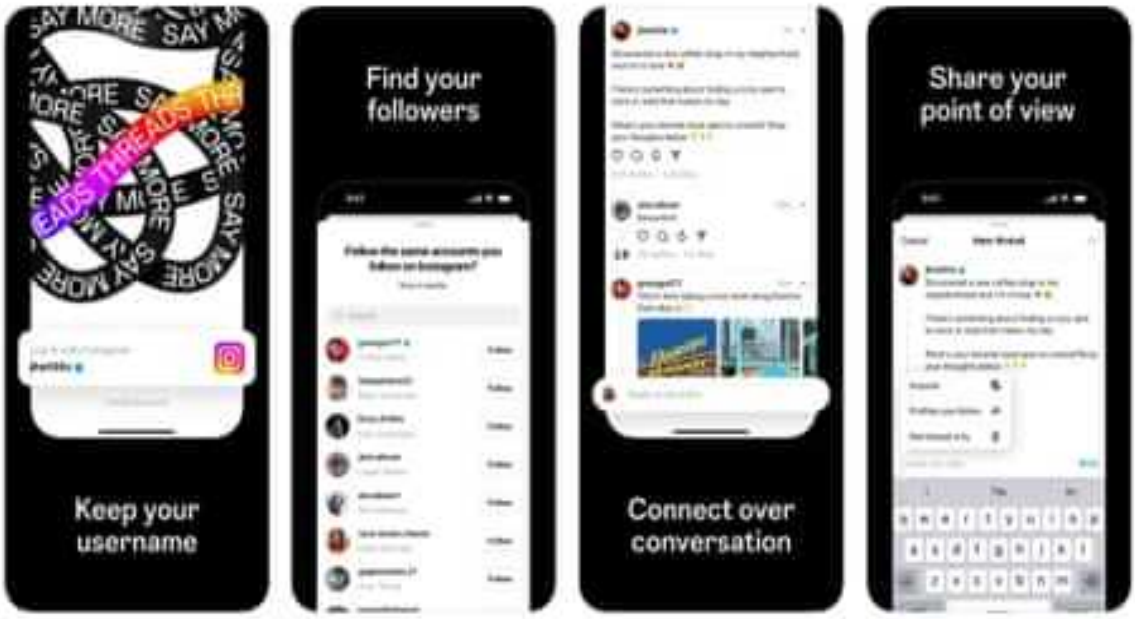
Last Thursday, a man armed with explosive materials and weapons, and also wanted for crimes related to the Capitol attack insurrection was arrested in the Washington neighborhood where Obama lives, law enforcement officials said.

Taylor Taranto, 37, was chased by Secret Service agents before being apprehended, and had an open warrant on charges related to the 2021 insurrection, two law enforcement officials said, and also had made social media threats against a public figure.

Meanwhile, on 13 June, Adam Obest, 42, of Thurmont, Maryland, was arrested and charged with crimes including assaulting an officer with a dangerous weapon on January 6, 2021, after reviews of police body camera

footage, federal prosecutors announced. He and his wife had attended Trump's rally shortly beforehand.

More than 1,000 people in total have been arrested, across almost all states, for January 6-related crimes.



Screenshots suggest people will be able to use their Instagram handle to log in to Threads, Meta's answer to Twitter, and follow their existing contacts. Photograph: New app Thread to rival Twitter

Meta

Instagram's Threads app to launch 6 July amid mass backlash against Elon Musk's Twitter

Interface of Meta's app appears similar to Twitter, whose tweet viewing restrictions have driven users to join rival platforms BlueSky and Mastodon

- **Threads v Twitter – is this the main bout between Musk and Zuckerberg?**

Josh Taylor
@joshgnosis
Tue 4 Jul 2023 00.57 EDTLast modified on Fri 7 Jul 2023 02.10 EDT

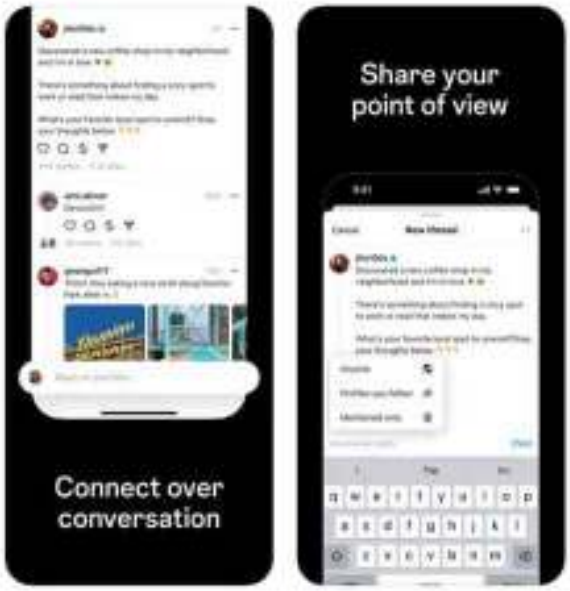
Meta's answer to Twitter, a new app called Threads, will launch on Thursday, just as users of the platform owned by Elon Musk seek out alternatives in droves.

The Threads app, which is linked to Instagram, appeared in the Apple app store on Tuesday ahead of Thursday's launch. Meta has launched a countdown website for the release.

A preview of the "text-based conversation" app says Threads will be a place "where communities come together to discuss everything from the topics you care about today to what'll be trending tomorrow".

"Whatever it is you're interested in, you can follow and connect directly with your favorite creators and others who love the same things – or build a loyal following of your own to share your ideas, opinions and creativity with the world," the promotional text says.

Screenshots suggest people will be able to use their Instagram handle to log in to Threads and follow their existing contacts. The app appears to share a similar user interface to Twitter, with similar features including reposting, liking and allowing users to limit who can reply to posts.



Meta will join a growing field of platforms, including BlueSky and Mastodon, competing to replace Twitter. Photograph: undefined/New app Thread to rival Twitter

Threads is aptly named for a Twitter rival, but it was originally the name of a 2019 app Meta launched to compete with the youth-focused messaging app Snapchat. The product was later abandoned but Meta retained the branding.

A spokesperson for Meta said the company had no comment on the planned launch.

Meta will join a growing field of platforms, including BlueSky and Mastodon, competing to replace Twitter since Musk took over late last year and the site became more difficult for its estimated 250 million users to access.

Last week, Twitter began requiring users to log in to view the site – previously, people without Twitter profiles could view tweets. It then imposed a limit on the vast majority of users who do not pay for the platform, restricting unverified accounts to viewing 600 tweets a day, later upped to 1,000.

On Tuesday, the company announced it would make its list-based Tweetdeck product – used mostly by businesses and news organisations – accessible only to users paying for Twitter Blue.

Musk's moderation decisions, including lifting bans on far-right accounts, and the site's increasing instability has been a turn-off for advertisers, who have paused or reduced spending in the past few months.

BlueSky had to momentarily pause new sign-ups – currently only available by invitation – to cope with demand after the rate limit change was implemented.

Meta's chief product officer, Chris Cox, said during a company-wide meeting there had been demand for a Twitter alternative "from creators and public figures who are interested in having a platform that is sanely run", according to The Verge.

One factor that may give users pause before signing up to Meta's Twitter replacement is privacy.

Jack Dorsey, Twitter's co-founder who is currently working on BlueSky, tweeted a screenshot of Threads' app privacy information, along with the caption "All your Threads are belong to us".

The Threads app can collect data related to your health, financial information, contact information, browsing history, location and purchases, among other things.

For comparison, BlueSky may link contact information, user content and identifiers. Twitter says it can track users via purchases, contact information, location, contacts and browsing history.

Twitter no longer has a press department. Questions sent to the former email address received a poop emoji as the auto-response.

Julian Sands in 2012. He died after setting off for a hike in the San Gabriel mountains of California. Photograph: Alexandre Meneghini/AP

Julian Sands

‘It can be chilling’: Julian Sands spoke of seeing human remains on climbs

Actor who died after going on solo hike said in last UK interview he had seen ‘spooky things’ on mountains

Harriet Sherwood
@harrietsherwood
Tue 4 Jul 2023 00.00 EDTLast modified on Tue 4 Jul 2023 02.35 EDT

Julian Sands spoke of feeling “chilled” by the discovery of human remains when pursuing his love of climbing, in his last UK interview before he died on a solo hike in California.

The 65-year-old actor was a committed climber and said he increasingly ventured out alone. “Pals I used to climb with have stopped going to the

mountains," partly because rock faces had become more unstable with climate change, and partly because of age, he told the Radio Times.

"If you don't really have the desire, the focus for climbing a route, if you're not absolutely committed, it becomes much more dangerous."

He added: "I've found spooky things on mountains, when you know you're in a place where many people have lost their lives, whether it be on the Eiger or in the Andes. You may be confronted with human remains and that can be chilling."

Best known for his roles in the Oscar-winning film A Room with a View and the TV dramas 24 and Smallville, Sands said he valued the landscape and wildlife of the California mountains more than gatherings of Los Angeles stars.

Climbing was about "solace" and "existentialist self negation", he said.

In an article about the actor for the Guardian last week, his closest collaborator, the director Mike Figgis, said he recalled conversations with Sands "about the kind of burials where they'd put your body on a mountain, animals would come and eat you and then you'd become part of that kind of cycle".

Sands disappeared on 13 January during bad weather in the Baldy Bowl area of the San Gabriel mountains. Air and ground searches were launched but were hampered by deadly storms, icy conditions and a threat of avalanches.

Julian Sands in Gothic. Photograph: Moviestore/Shutterstock

Human remains found by walkers nine days ago were formally identified as belonging to the actor. The cause of death is still being investigated.

Sands' family said: "We continue to hold Julian in our hearts with bright memories of him as a wonderful father, husband, explorer, lover of the natural world and the arts, and as an original and collaborative performer."

Sarah Jackson, Sands' agent, said: "He was a passionate climber, and we draw consolation from knowing that he passed in a place he loved, doing what he loved."

In a Q&A with the Guardian in 2020, Sands said he was happiest when he was "close to a mountain summit on a glorious cold morning".

He recalled a brush with death during a climb in the Andes in the early 1990s when he got caught in a storm above 20,000ft with three others. "We were all in a very bad way. Some guys close to us perished. We were lucky," he said.

Writing for the Guardian, Sands's friend, the actor Gabriel Byrne, shared an excerpt from Sands' most recent email. In it, Sands wrote:

Most mountaineers understand that the true summit is within. The high point on a peak is simply that, but the experience of the approach, the face or the ridge, up and down, is where true fulfilment is found.

A Tepco employee at Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. Japan plans to release 1.3m tonnes of radioactive water into the sea. Photograph: 中村靖治/AP

Japan

Fukushima plan to release water into ocean approved by UN watchdog

IAEA report says discharge would have ‘negligible radiological impact on people and the environment’

Justin McCurry in Tokyo
Tue 4 Jul 2023 06.23 EDTFirst published on Mon 3 Jul 2023 23.05 EDT

The UN’s nuclear watchdog has approved plans by Japan to release more than 1m tonnes of water from the wrecked Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant into the ocean, despite objections from local fishing communities and other countries in the region.

Rafael Grossi, the director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), said on Tuesday that the body's latest safety review of the planned discharge "makes the science of the treated water release clear for the international community and it answers the technical questions related to safety that have been raised".

The report said discharging the water would have "a negligible radiological impact on people and the environment".

"This is a very special night today," Grossi told the prime minister, Fumio Kishida, before handing him a blue folder containing the final report.

Kishida said Japan would "continue to provide explanations to the Japanese people and to the international community in a sincere manner based on scientific evidence and with high level of transparency".

Grossi later said the document was "neither a recommendation nor an endorsement" of the water release plans drawn up by Japan's government and the plant's operator, Tokyo Electric Power (Tepco).

In a tweet, he said the IAEA would "continue our impartial, independent and objective safety review during and after the discharge phase", adding that agency experts would "have a continuous on-site presence".

The end of the two-year safety review brings Japan closer to the start of the long operation to pump the treated water – a mixture of groundwater, rain that seeps into the area, and water used for cooling damaged nuclear fuel – into the Pacific Ocean.

It is not clear when that process will begin, although there is speculation that it could be this summer.

About 1.3m tonnes of water stored in huge tanks on the site has been filtered through Tepco's advanced liquid processing system (Alps) to remove most radioactive elements except for tritium, an isotope of hydrogen that is difficult to separate from water.

The “treated” water – Japanese officials object to the use of the word “contaminated” – will be diluted with seawater so that the concentration of tritium is well below internationally approved levels before being released into the ocean 1km from the shoreline via an undersea tunnel.

The water – enough to fill 500 Olympic-sized swimming pools - becomes contaminated when it is used to cool fuel rods that melted after the plant was hit by a powerful earthquake and tsunami in March 2011.

The disaster triggered a triple meltdown, in the world’s worst nuclear crisis since Chornobyl 25 years earlier.

Discharging the water is expected to take 30 to 40 years to complete, pending the IAEA’s review and official approval from Japan’s nuclear regulatory body, which could come as early as this week.

Attempts by Japanese government officials to win regional support for the plan have had limited success.

China, which denounced the plan as “extremely irresponsible” when it was announced in 2021, reiterated its opposition on Tuesday, calling for the discharge to be suspended.

Through its embassy in Japan, China said the IAEA’s report should not be interpreted as a “pass” for the water release.

Last week, a spokesperson for the country’s foreign ministry said Beijing urged Japan to “take seriously both international and domestic concerns, stop forcibly proceeding with its ocean discharge plan” and “subject itself to rigorous international oversight”.

Japan’s foreign ministry has said that it made multiple and repeated attempts to explain the science behind Tokyo’s stance to Beijing officials, but that its offers had been ignored.

Local Japanese fishing communities have also objected to the plan, saying it would destroy more than a decade of work rebuilding their industry, with shoppers likely to shun their catch and send prices plummeting.

Fukushima authorities have introduced some of the world's strictest radiation testing regimes, but many consumers are yet to be reassured that fish and other produce from the region are safe.

The government and Tepco claim the environmental and health impacts from the water release will be negligible because the treated water will be released gradually after it has been diluted by large amounts of seawater.

Tritium is considered to be relatively harmless because it does not emit enough energy to penetrate human skin. But when ingested – via seafood, for example – it can raise cancer risks, a Scientific American article said in 2014.

The IAEA says nuclear plants around the world use a similar process to dispose of wastewater containing low-level concentrations of tritium and other radionuclides.

After visiting Fukushima Daichi on Wednesday, Grossi will travel to South Korea, where some people have been panic-buying sea salt over fears of contamination after the discharge begins.

Grossi is also expected to visit New Zealand and the Cook Islands in an effort to ease concerns over the plan, according to media reports.

Reuters contributed to this report

Headlines monday 3 july 2023

- West Bank Israel attacks Jenin in biggest incursion in Palestinian territory in 20 years
- Live ‘Red wall’ Tories call for annual cap of 20,000 refugees admitted to UK
- Exclusive Seven in 10 people believe charges for NHS care on the way
- Doctors' pay Barclay willing to offer bigger wages in England

Israel launches major military operation in West Bank – video report

Palestinian territories

Israel attacks Jenin in biggest West Bank incursion in 20 years

At least eight Palestinians killed and dozens injured as major Israeli offensive targets city of Jenin

Bethan McKernan in Jenin and Peter Beaumont
Mon 3 Jul 2023 12.15 EDTFirst published on Mon 3 Jul 2023 00.44 EDT

Israel has launched a major aerial and ground offensive into the occupied West Bank city of Jenin, its biggest military operation in the Palestinian territory in years, in what it described as an "extensive counter-terrorism effort".

At least eight Palestinians were killed and 50 injured, 10 seriously, in the attack that began at about 1am on Monday, and the death toll is likely to rise, according to the Palestinian health ministry.

On Monday afternoon, Israeli sources suggested they would need at least another 24 hours to complete the operation.

Launching at least 10 drone strikes on buildings, a brigade of Israeli troops – suggesting between 1,000 and 2,000 soldiers – backed by armoured bulldozers and snipers on rooftops entered the city and its refugee camp, encountering fire from Palestinians, after Israel informed the White House of its plans.

The streets of Jenin were deserted on Monday except for crowds of people outside the nearest hospital, watching the gun battles at the main entrance to the camp at the end of the street. Black smoke from burning tyres and

teargas filled the air. Ambulances struggled to cross impromptu Israeli checkpoints.

As explosions echoed around the city, calls to support the fighters rang out from loudspeakers in mosques.

The White House said it defended Israel's right to security and was monitoring the situation on the West Bank closely. "We have seen the reports and are monitoring the situation closely," a White House spokesperson said. "We support Israel's security and right to defend its people against Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and other terrorist groups."

Britain's prime minster, Rishi Sunak, called on the Israeli military to exercise restraint.

"While we support Israel's right to self defence, the protection of civilians must be prioritised," a spokesperson said. "In any military operation, we would urge the Israel Defence Forces to demonstrate restraint in its operations and for all parties to avoid further escalation in the West Bank and Gaza."

A spokesperson for the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, called the operation "a new war crime against our defenceless people", while the Gaza-based militant group Hamas called on young men in the West Bank to join the fighting.

Palestinian militants on the streets of Jenin during the Israeli incursion on Monday. Photograph: Alaa Badarneh/EPA

Lynn Hastings, the UN's resident humanitarian coordinator, expressed alarm at the scale of Israeli forces operation in Jenin, adding on Twitter: "Airstrikes were used in the densely populated refugee camp. Several dead and critically wounded. Access to all injured must be ensured."

> Alarmed by scale of Israeli forces operation in #Jenin, occupied #WestBank. Airstrikes were used in the densely populated refugee camp. Several dead and critically wounded. Access to all injured must be ensured. @ochaopt is mobilising #humanitarian partners to provide assistance
>
> — Lynn Hastings (@LynnHastings) July 3, 2023

In a joint statement, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) and the domestic intelligence service, Shin Bet, said they had attacked a command centre in the Jenin refugee camp that was used by a local militant group.

Images from inside Jenin showed armed and masked Palestinian fighters on the streets as gun battles and explosions continued into Monday morning.

At a checkpoint on the outskirts of the city, the sound of increasingly heavy gun battles and aircraft overhead could be heard as the day wore on.

In an escalation of the violence, Israel carried out an airstrike near a mosque in the city that it said was being used by Palestinian gunmen to target Israeli forces. “Exchanges of fire are taking place with gunmen adjacent to a mosque in the Jenin refugee camp,” the IDF said. “An IDF aircraft struck to remove the threat.”

Map of West Bank

The joint aerial and ground incursion into the camp is the first since the 2002 battle of Jenin during the second intifada, when more than 50 Palestinians and 23 Israeli soldiers were killed in over a week of fighting, including 13 Israeli soldiers in a single incident.

Monday’s events bring the death toll of Palestinians killed this year in the West Bank to 133, part of more than a year-long rise in violence that has resulted in some of the worst bloodshed in that area in nearly two decades.

“There is bombing from the air and an invasion from the ground,” said Mahmoud al-Saadi, the director of the Palestine Red Crescent Society in Jenin. “Several houses and sites have been bombed … smoke is rising from everywhere.”

An Israeli army bulldozer drives through Jenin. Photograph: Jaafar Ashtiyeh/AFP/Getty Images

The incursion came at a time of growing pressure within Israel for a tough response to a series of attacks on settlers, including a shooting last week that killed four people.

Electricity was cut off in some parts of Jenin and military bulldozers were ploughing through narrow streets – another reminder of Israel's incursions during the last uprising. The Palestinian Authority and Jordan condemned the violence.

The operation led to protests overnight across the West Bank, including at a checkpoint near the city of Ramallah, in which a Palestinian man died after being shot in the head by the army, and a general strike across the territory on Monday. Israel's air defence systems were put on alert for potential retaliatory rocket fire from the blockaded Gaza Strip.

Map showing Jenin camp

An IDF spokesperson, R Adm Daniel Hagari, said the operation was a focused, brigade-sized raid that was expected to last between one and three days, and Israel did not intend to hold ground.

One Israeli official said the raid was intended to “break the safe-haven mindset of the camp, which has become a hornets’ nest”. It was unclear whether the operation would trigger a wider response from Palestinian factions, drawing in militant groups in the Gaza Strip, the coastal enclave controlled by Hamas.

A senior Hamas official called on young men in the West Bank to join the fighting. Saleh al-Arouri, the deputy head of the organisation’s political bureau, said: “To our heroes in the West Bank, from the south to the north: this is your day, young men. Fight with all the weapons, all your anger and with any means possible to defend our honour in Jenin.”

A statement from the Iranian-backed Islamic Jihad group in Gaza said: “The resistance will confront the enemy and defend the Palestinian people and all options are open to strike the enemy and respond to its aggression on Jenin.”

Tyres burn on a street in Jenin. Photograph: Raneen Sawafta/Reuters

As the operation continued on Monday, the Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, was briefed on progress and on the activity of the forces on the ground, discussing future operational plans.

The Israeli defence minister, Yoav Gallant, said his forces were “closely monitoring the conduct of our enemies. The defence establishment is ready

for all scenarios.”

The camp on the outskirts of the northern West Bank city was set up in the 1950s and the ghetto-like area, home to about 11,000 people, has long been viewed as a hotbed of what Palestinians consider armed resistance and Israelis see as terrorism.

Hundreds of armed fighters from militant groups including Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Fatah are based there, and the semi-autonomous Palestinian Authority has next to no presence.

The Jenin Brigades, a unit made up of armed men from different factions, has been blamed for several terror attacks against Israeli citizens as the security situation across Israel and the West Bank has deteriorated over the past 18 months.

Jenin and nearby Nablus have been the major targets of the now more than year-old Israeli Operation Breakwater, which has involved near-nightly raids and some of the fiercest fighting in the West Bank since the second intifada came to an end in 2005. Vigilante attacks by West Bank-based Israeli settlers against Palestinian villages are also growing in scale and scope.

Only days before a drone strike last month in Jenin, for the first time since the second intifada, the army used helicopter gunships to help extract troops and vehicles from a raid on the city, after fighters used explosives against a force sent in to arrest two suspects.

After the last major raid in Jenin, Palestinian gunmen killed four Israelis near a Jewish settlement in the West Bank in an attack that led to a rampage by settlers in Palestinian villages and towns.

Politics live with Andrew SparrowPolitics

Illegal migration bill mauled in Lords as peers vote to insert protections for children, LGBT people and pregnant women– as it happened

Nurses and NHS workers strike for pay and conditions in May. Photograph: Tayfun Salcı/EPA

NHS

Seven in 10 people believe charges for NHS care are on the way

Exclusive: Poll finds large majority in UK think key principle of health service will be dropped in next decade

Denis Campbell and *Rowena Mason*
Sun 2 Jul 2023 19.02 EDTFirst published on Sun 2 Jul 2023 15.00 EDT

Seven in 10 people in the UK believe charges for NHS care will creep in over the next decade, ending the health service's record of being free at the point of use, polling has found.

One of the NHS's key founding principles from 1948 is in peril, 71% of the public believe, according to the survey carried out for the Health Foundation ahead of the service's 75th birthday this week.

Despite almost three in four people saying the NHS in its current free form is “crucial”, 51% say they expect to pay for some services within the next decade, while 13% think most services will need to be paid for upfront and 7% anticipate charges for all services.

Tim Gardner, an assistant director of policy at the Health Foundation, said the thinktank interpreted the findings as an “expression of concern that what the public values the most about the NHS – affordable care provided free at point of use – may be under threat”.

He said: “The durability of the principle that the health service would provide care based on need not ability to pay has been regularly questioned throughout its history, especially at times when the service is under great pressure.”

There had been growing calls for radical changes, such as charging for GP appointments and A&E visits, added Gardner.

Politicians such as Rishi Sunak, the prime minister, Liz Truss, his predecessor in No 10, and the former chancellor and health secretary Sajid Javid have all backed one or both of those ideas as potential ways of raising more money for the NHS and reducing demand. Critics dismissed them as “zombie” ideas that were impractical and would not help.

The Health Foundation survey of 2,540 over-16s, conducted by Ipsos, was carried out at a time of huge pressure on the NHS owing to the backlog in waiting lists and staff shortages, and as junior doctor and consultant strikes loom this month.

On Sunday Amanda Pritchard, the chief executive of NHS England, urged the government and health unions to settle their dispute as soon as possible, saying patients would “pay the price” for the unprecedented scale of the action. She said strikes must not become “business as usual” for the NHS.

While there is currently a standoff, the British Medical Association (BMA) wrote to Sunak on Sunday asking the government to enter mediated talks to break the deadlock in the junior doctors’ strike and reach a settlement. Steve

Barclay, the health secretary, had on Sunday accused junior doctors of "suddenly" walking out of talks.

But Prof Philip Banfield, the new chair of the BMA council, will give a speech on Monday saying it is the government that is refusing to go to Acas or acknowledge that "devastation [on the NHS] has been wrought by successive UK governments".

Separate polling from Ipsos shows that most Britons support healthcare workers in their wave of strikes over pay and conditions this year despite the worsening disruption, with backing for junior doctors at about 56% in June.

With five days of junior doctors' strikes followed by two days of consultants' strikes scheduled for the middle of the month, data shows industrial action has already led to more than 648,000 cancelled appointments, procedures and operations, exacerbating backlogs.

Wes Streeting, the shadow health secretary, said there was "no doubt that having run down the NHS over 13 years, many Conservatives will now use their failure to argue that its founding principles must be abandoned" by making the case for charging. He said Labour would "never let this happen".

"The future of the NHS will be on the ballot at the next election," he said. "It was Labour who created the NHS and made sure it was there for us when we need it, delivering the shortest waiting times and highest patient satisfaction in history.

"It will fall to the next Labour government to rescue the NHS from the biggest crisis in its history, and breathe new life into the service so it is still there for us in the next 75 years."

Daisy Cooper, the deputy Liberal Democrat leader and party health spokesperson, said the Lib Dems would "set out our plans to ensure that we have an NHS fit for the 21st century that remains free at the point of use" before the next election.

"Waiting lists, staff sick days and social care demand are all soaring and only getting worse under this out-of-touch Conservative government," she

said.

The Tory peer James Bethell, who was a health minister at the height of the Covid pandemic, said the situation with waiting lists was already so bad that it constituted “rationing”, but he said he did not think charging for services was a good idea.

He said: “People might be thinking the pressures in the NHS makes charging inevitable but that doesn’t mean it’s either a good idea or that it’s popular. I haven’t seen any evidence that charging will improve outcomes.”

He argued for “a new contract between the government and the public that is not just a one-way promise for free access but is more of a partnership around healthy living”.

“That requires leadership from government to create an environment where ordinary people can make realistic healthy choices and are supported to fight disease,” he said.

“Instead too many of us are constantly battling against junk food, mouldy homes, dirty air, toxic workplaces and addictive algorithms that drive us to

porn, casinos and depression, and losing the battle with huge costs in health, care, benefits and productivity."

With the NHS struggling, the Health Foundation survey shows people appear to have little faith in politicians' promises to keep the NHS free, even though they would overwhelmingly like to see its current model continue.

According to the survey, the NHS ranks highest as people's first choice when asked what makes them most proud to be British – compared with democracy, culture and history – at 54% of those surveyed.

The data also revealed the public are pessimistic about the NHS's ability to meet key future challenges, with 77% believing the NHS is not ready for the increasing health demands of an ageing population.

It found some degree of split along political lines, with 66% of people intending to vote Conservative more likely to expect user charges for some services compared with 51% of Labour voters.

A senior Tory source said: "The NHS is our most treasured national institution and we are fully committed to its founding principle of healthcare for all, free at the point of delivery.

"As we celebrate its 75th anniversary this week, we have backed the NHS's long-term workforce plan with an extra £2.4bn of investment to cut waiting lists and put the service on a secure footing long into the future.

"For the NHS to carry on caring for us all for the next 75 years and beyond, we need a strong economy, and the biggest threat to that is Labour's plan for a £28bn annual spending splurge fuelled by uncontrolled borrowing."

About 80% of those surveyed think the NHS needs an increase in funding, compared with 17% who think it should operate within its current budget, with some degree of support for a dedicated NHS tax (31%), an increase in national insurance (22%) or an increase in income tax (21%).

The NHS in England is due to receive only a 1.2% increase to its budget this year – a third of its historical average of 3.6% – despite long waiting times,

growing patient dissatisfaction and increasing alarm that it is “broken” and unable to provide urgent care quickly.

Steve Barclay after appearing on Sunday with Laura Kuenssberg on 2 July. He says there needs to be ‘movement on both sides’ in the pay dispute. Photograph: Thomas Krych/Zuma Press Wire/Shutterstock

Doctors

Steve Barclay says he is willing to offer bigger pay rise to doctors in England

Health secretary made clear he was open to further uplift on salaries but not while NHS junior doctors are planning to strike

Tom Ambrose
Sun 2 Jul 2023 18.33 EDTLast modified on Thu 6 Jul 2023 09.28 EDT

Doctors in England could be offered a bigger pay rise after the health secretary admitted there needed to be “movement on both sides” in the long-running dispute, but refused to restart talks while strikes were planned.

Steve Barclay said that although he considered demands of a 35% salary increase to be unreasonable, a larger rise would be offered if negotiations

were to resume.

“I don’t think a 35% pay demand, which they refuse to move away from, is reasonable given the headwinds we face from inflation,” he told the Times, adding: “I think there needs to be movement on both sides.”

Junior doctors in England want a 35% pay rise to make up for what they estimate to be a 26% cut in their real-terms’ income since 2008-09, plus inflation.

They have staged three stoppages so far in pursuit of their goal of “full pay restoration”, forcing hospitals to postpone several hundred thousand outpatient appointments and operations.

But latest polling shows about two-thirds of the public support striking nurses, ambulance workers and junior doctors, despite growing numbers of appointments and operations having to be cancelled.

The figures have roughly held steady since the beginning of the year, though they dipped slightly in March after doctors, ambulance workers and nurses all held strikes.

Healthcare workers are striking in an effort to reverse the deep cuts to their salaries that have resulted from a decade of pay rises that have not kept up with inflation.

Doctors, nurses and some other healthcare professionals have voted against the government’s offer of 5% plus a non-consolidated payment.

Junior doctors, who can have up to eight years of post-foundation training experience as a hospital doctor or three years in general practice, voted this month to strike from 7am on 13 July until 7am on 18 July, the longest such strike in NHS history.

On Tuesday it was announced that senior doctors had voted to join them for the first time in this pay dispute, with the first two-day strike for consultants in more than 50 years scheduled from 20 July.

Meanwhile, the NHS England chief executive, Amanda Pritchard, told the BBC's Sunday with Laura Kuenssberg programme: "The hard truth is it is patients that are paying the price for the fact all sides have not managed to reach a resolution.

"There has been a significant amount of disruption and that is only going to get more significant as we hit the next round of strikes."

This article was amended on 6 July 2023. Junior doctors have staged three stoppages so far in the dispute, not two as an earlier version said. The text was also amended to clarify that the training timescales specified for junior doctors are in addition to foundation training, which lasts two years.

2023.07.03 - Spotlight

- **‘It makes more sense than a nine-to-five’ The rise of woodland off-gridders**
- **‘They found ways to do the impossible’ Hipgnosis, the designers who changed the record sleeve for ever**
- **‘In a death spiral’ The state of the NHS at 75**
- **‘Worth fighting for’ Health experts on the NHS today**
- **‘You can play it for five minutes or play it for five hours’ Guardian readers’ best games of 2023 so far**

George, Ursa and Heather, who live at Brithdir Mawr in Pembrokeshire, Wales. Photograph: Francesca Jones/The Guardian

Communities

The rise of woodland off-gridders: ‘It makes more sense than a nine-to-five’

Are self-sufficient rural communities an idea whose time has come? A few years ago, councils and neighbours tended to write them off as hippies. Now attitudes are changing

Sally Howard
Mon 3 Jul 2023 05.00 EDTLast modified on Mon 3 Jul 2023 10.05 EDT

In an idyllic corner of the south Somerset countryside, blackbirds chirrup, cart horses swish their tails and a restless wind susurrates through the boughs of a stand of Douglas firs as a cheery band of twenty-to-fiftysomethings pitch in to gather the hay. But for the reusable water bottles and walking boots, they might be characters in an English pastoral, bowed over their rural labours. “When I came here from Brighton I was surprised by how loud it was,” says Meg Willoughby, 28, a resident of Tinkers Bubble. “I had this idea of the peaceful woodland from fairytales, but farm animals are noisy, and when a hill wind blows through firs they make a crazy cracking sound. Nature is wild, isn’t it?”

Founded in 1994, Tinkers Bubble is England’s leading off-grid woodland community: an experiment in rural living that provides low-impact dwellings and a land-based livelihood to a changing roster of 16 residents. In April, it was granted permanent planning permission by South Somerset council, an achievement heralded as a landmark in off-grid communities’ long attempts to be accepted by mainstream Britain (and its planning department mandarins). They celebrated this success in May with song and home-brewed cider. “Though we’re not big drinkers,” Willoughby says, laughing. “We’re usually back in our cabins with a book by 8pm.”

The Brithdir Mawr community in Pembrokeshire, west Wales, which welcomes up to 100 volunteers a year. Photograph: Francesca Jones/The Guardian

Named after an ancient bubbling spring at the site's south-western edge, Tinkers Bubble occupies a 16-hectare (40-acre) parcel of land, eight hectares of which is evergreen forest. It is owned by a community benefit society, and the current residents, most of whom arrive as summer volunteers, are sustained by the income from a steam-powered sawmill, apple orchard and press (which produces a lively dry cider) and cottage food production, including heritage salad leaves. The community's 20 dwellings and outbuildings are dotted around a thatched communal roundhouse, all sitting amid the lofty firs. As part of their planning permission, the community is thinning the North American conifers, which were planted for timber in the 1950s, to encourage regeneration in the forest understorey – the ground-level layer of shrubs and plants. "It's lovely to see native yew saplings return," Willoughby says.

Moving a tree trunk at Tinkers Bubble. Photograph: Alex Toogood

Self-sufficient woodland communities are a fringe phenomenon in the pantheon of "intentional communities" (the umbrella term for social units in which members share a dwelling and lifestyle, encapsulating everything from traditional communes to co-housing projects), says Chris Coates, editor of Diggers and Dreamers: The Guide to Communal Living. "For a start," he says, "there isn't much woodland in Britain compared to places like Bulgaria and Romania [popular spots for founding intentional communities]. Plus, if you're talking about living self-sufficiently in and from a woodland, it's hard work, and best suits the young and fit."

He adds, however, that for those willing to take a risk with planning permission, the costs can be less than for bricks-and-mortar alternatives. Coates knows of a number of smaller communities and family groups who "fly beneath the radar", living in pockets of woodland away from local authority oversight.

Formal land-based communities with a woodland aspect include Landmatters, a rural permaculture co-operative in south Devon, set amid 17 hectares of pasture and semi-natural ancient woodland; Coed Talylan, a 28-hectare community on the edge of the Bannau Brycheiniog (Brecon Beacons), where people live in cabin-style dwellings and run a natural

building school and mushroom-growing business; and Brithdir Mawr in Pembrokeshire, a community of 10 adults and seven children on 34 hectares of land, including eight hectares of mature woodland and eight hectares of coppice.

Off-grid discussion groups, meanwhile, bristle with aspirant woodland smallholders looking for land and community members. They include Agatha B, 30, an accountant from Surrey who is buying a pocket of woodland in Wiltshire in the hope of setting up a residential medieval farm. "We want to make it a bit like [open-air experimental archaeology museum] Butser Ancient Farm," Agatha says. "But a real-life version that people live on." Woodland off-gridders often speak evocatively of Britain's heritage of woodland dwelling: from the Forest of Arden's "melancholy boughs" as the setting for love and intrigue, but also ‚shepherds' hard labour, in Shakespeare's play As You Like It; and Celtic traditions, in which blackthorn trees are infested by mischievous fairies, ash is nature's healer and oaks are the sacred old men of the British landscape (the term "druid", for the Celtic priestly class, translates as "oak man").

Meg and Alex at Tinkers Bubble. Photograph: Richard Toogood

Alex Toogood, 34, has lived at Tinkers Bubble since 2020 and was instrumental in its successful permanent planning bid. Toogood, who is non-

binary, was working as an engineer in London when the pandemic struck, and felt disposable. “I realised that if I left my job one day they would slot someone else into it the next,” Toogood says. “I was a cog.”

Toogood arrived at Tinkers Bubble in a lull between Covid lockdowns, via a stint in a Buddhist monastery in Scotland, and here, amid the daily work of tending the vegetable beds and orchards, maintaining the woodland and milking Daisy, the dairy cow, life made sense. “Today everything I choose to do has an impact on the people around me, and on the animals and the land,” Toogood says.

Tinkers Bubble residents coalesce naturally into teams depending on their practical aptitudes, Willoughby says, as we chat in the sunshine during her break from tending her flourishing crop of chervil, calendula and sweet grass. She has also been at Tinkers Bubble for two years, and comes from a family of leftist smallholders (her mum runs a community-supported farm agricultural business near Glastonbury). Willoughby spent several years in Brighton before returning, as she puts it, “to the mother trees”.

A horse team looks after the three horses that are essential to the smooth running of this fossil fuel-free – and therefore car-free – community. There’s also a cow team, who produce milk and cottage and hard cheese, and care for the new community calf, Bjorn. Carpenter Richard fashions the rakes we are using for today’s hay gathering, and vegetable-growers Toogood and Willoughby contribute to Tinkers Bubble’s food self-sufficiency and sell to local shops. “Every day I wake up to birdsong and walk through the woods to milk Daisy – and think how incredibly lucky I am,” Willoughby says. People often drift into Tinkers Bubble in need of nature’s TLC, particularly summer and day volunteers, she says: “They come broken down and, like me, are brought back to life by nature.”

Alex and Meg stack the carrot crop at Tinkers Bubble. Photograph: Tinkers Bubble

Toogood took over one of the community polytunnels in their first week and dug a pond immediately. “It’s hopping with frogs today, and that makes me proud,” they say.

Jenny Pickerill, an environmental geographer who studies land-based intentional communities at the University of Cardiff, says it’s a mistake to dismiss these projects as vestiges of hippy nostalgia. “It’s easy to project stereotypes on to low-impact rural communes – that they are isolationist, or living in the past,” she says. She believes the opposite is true: “These groups are testing radical ways of living that will have applications for all of our futures, whether that’s innovations such as straw-bale housing – a material that is abundant and perfect for this climate – or hyper-local food chains.”

Toogood believes that a broader shift around environmental issues is making a case for land-based communities. In the latest planning application, Tinkers Bubble “spoke our own language”, rather than attempting to couch their project in “planning department speak”, as they had in previous applications. (They were awarded temporary planning permission in 1998, 2004 and 2016.) The bid was accompanied by letters of support from the local community, who buy Tinkers Bubble juice, cider and salad, and attend

craft demonstrations and folk singalongs in the wood. Local relations have not always been as harmonious. In the 90s, when tensions ran high over the rights of travelling communities, rumours spread that Tinkers Bubble residents were drug-users and thieves. “And baby-stealers,” Willoughby says. “Totally bonkers, that one.”

George, Ursa and Heather in a grow house at Brithdir Mawr. Photograph: Francesca Jones/The Guardian

Heather Baker, 34, has lived at Brithdir Mawr since 2019 with her partner, George. Their daughter, Ursa, two, was born in the community, which occupies a mixture of stone and wooden dwellings in 32 hectares of ancient woodland, coppice and pasture in the Preseli mountains of Pembrokeshire, a landscape dotted with the bluestones found at Stonehenge. Brithdir Mawr was granted planning permission in 2008. In 2011, Wales launched its groundbreaking One Planet Development policy, which grants planning permission to low-impact, land-based projects such as Brithdir, which use a fair per capita share of the planet’s resources. Cornwall has been consulting on a similar policy.

> I wanted to bring up my own children as part of a tribe, with other adults and children to help to raise them

Unlike Tinkers Bubble, Brithdir Mawr members work outside the community, some as teachers and nurses, others in land-management areas such as seed production. Baker works 20 hours a week at Brithdir, and also part-time at a Steiner school. It was her first career in maternal mental health in Scotland that prompted Baker to seek out a radical new lifestyle. “I saw so much isolation in new mothers,” she says. “I wanted to bring up my own children as part of a tribe, with other adults and children to help to raise them.”

The best bit for Baker, however, has been working physically on the land. “Whether it’s cutting wood, plaiting onions or milking goats, it all seems to make more sense than my old nine-to-five life, stressed out and living in a small flat,” she says. Part of Brithdir Mawr’s mandate is outreach. The community hosts 80-100 volunteers a year, who arrive as harried city dwellers to camp, or pay to stay in the community’s trailers and wooden cottages, and pitch in with the land and woodland work. “You see the transformation immediately,” Baker says. “It’s ear-to-ear smiles, even if they are just lugging bags of manure.”

Whittling at Brithdir Mawr. Photograph: Francesca Jones/The Guardian

Simeon Warburton, 62, has lived at Landmatters since 2012. A musician, he arrived at the 14-strong permaculture community after leaving London to

raise his family on the road and in alternative communities. In 2005, Simeon and his wife, Miranda, 54, set off with their son Izzy, five, and daughter Kuki, two, for what they call their years of “road schooling”: “I couldn’t bear the idea of having to get up every day for the school run,” Warburton laughs. Occupied since 2005, Landmatters was awarded permanent planning permission for temporary housing structures in 2016. Life at the community is based on the ethos of permaculture (an approach to agriculture and settlement that seeks to be self-sufficient and environmentally sustainable) and consuming one’s fair share of the planet’s resources. “But everyone interprets that mandate in the way they think best,” Warburton adds.

Landmatters’ eight households live in handbuilt wooden cabins, and each have an annual allocation of two cubic metres of wood for personal and commercial use. Simeon and Miranda make wooden totems from their timber and run a solar-powered recording studio at the site. Izzy, 23, and Kuki, 20, live between Landmatters and city lives: Kuki is a tree surgeon and yoga teacher; Izzy is a blacksmith and record producer. “They had a fortunate upbringing in nature,” Warburton says. “It has turned them into happy and thoughtful young people.” It can be hard, he admits, to live in a land-based community, which demands energy, effort and a good deal of patience of its members, but the reward, he adds, is reconnection to nature’s rhythms and other people.

Simeon and Miranda Warburton at Landmatters in Devon. Photograph: Kuki Montez Airheart Warburton/@xkooksx

“My childhood was a life lived in the box of a suburban home,” he says. “Here, life is cyclical: we live among the beeches and oaks, the meadow flowers and insects. In spring and summer we’re busy growing and hosting visitors, and in winter we withdraw and make our crafts.” From his vantage point, Warburton concludes, urban capitalist lifestyles seem odd.

“I get it if you’re working 60 hours a week and winning at that lifestyle and making tons of money,” he says. “Though I would ask if you’re really happy if you’re working all hours at a job you hate and still not making ends meet.”

In Jenny Pickerill’s view, modern rural lifestyles are the strangest of the lot. “There’s this idea that you need a massive car and oil-fired central heating to live in the countryside,” she says. Low-impact communities such as Tinkers Bubble, she says, propose a socially just and nature-sympathetic model of rural living. “They show we can live within woodland and harvest bits of it sustainably. We don’t have to fence it off in the name of conservation.”

Hay slowly piles up in a wooden cart as Tinkers Bubble residents and volunteers break into song. I depart from this rural idyll, somewhat sheepishly, in a petrol-fuelled taxi driven by south Somerset-born Steve, who regards me quizzically when I say I’ve come from Tinkers Bubble. “We used to think they were dopeheads and dogs-on-a-string sort of people,” he says. He pauses. “But I see them these days with their bikes and horses, selling cider and apple juice in the village and – you know what? – I think they have got life about right.”

For more information about Tinkers Bubble, including details of its annual open day held in the autumn and volunteer afternoons throughout summer, click here. For more information on camping at Brithdir Mawr, click here

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Covered in glory … Peter Christopherson, Aubrey Powell and Storm Thorgerson at work. Photograph: Hipgnosis Ltd

‘They found ways to do the impossible’: Hipgnosis, the designers who changed the record sleeve for ever

Lee Campbell

Control director Anton Corbijn’s new film tells the chaotic, tragic story of the creative duo behind some of the most recognisable covers of all time

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Only at the end of our interview does it dawn on both of us that Anton Corbijn has been sitting in front of his huge vinyl record collection at his home in Amsterdam the whole time. It is fitting: not just because Corbijn, now 68, initially made his name by photographing Joy Division and went on to shoot and make music videos for the likes of Depeche Mode, U2, the Killers and REM, but also because he has just directed a documentary, Squaring the Circle (The Story of Hipgnosis), about the celebrated record sleeves of Aubrey “Po” Powell and the late Storm Thorgerson.

Hipgnosis was one of the trailblazers of album cover design during the golden age of the late 60s and 70s. It conceived the artwork for hundreds of bands and artists including juggernauts such as Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin, Peter Gabriel, 10cc and Paul McCartney, all of whom Corbijn has interviewed for this movie. Although they are often more identified with the pre-punk period, their dizzyingly inventive portfolio stretched into 1983, when the partnership ended.

Corbijn is relentless in his own creativity and deeply serious about his art. Along with his portrait photography and music videos, he is known for dramatic movies such as Control, about Joy Division’s Ian Curtis. This autumn, he’ll be shooting Switzerland – a drama about the author Patricia Highsmith, starring Helen Mirren – while also continuing to work closely with the resurgent Depeche Mode, designing the stage sets for their current Memento Mori world tour.

Houses of the Holy, 1973. Photograph: sjvinyl/Alamy

Variety is key to his longevity. “I’m so careful not to fall into a predictable direction,” he says. “After Control, I was offered countless biopics. I could have easily fallen into that trap and I am determined not to. I don’t like people calling my photographs rock photography. It’s the portraiture of musicians and many other disciplines. People like to pigeonhole because it’s easy. I like to be a multidisciplinary type of person.”

I ask about the inspiration behind the title of his latest movie. “Squaring the Circle means doing the impossible,” he says, “but it also represents the circular record going into a sleeve.” Doing the impossible is only a slight exaggeration. What Thorgerson and Powell pulled off in terms of design, long before the days of digitisation, was remarkable. Just take a look at Led Zeppelin’s Houses of the Holy cover created at the Giant’s Causeway on the coast of Northern Ireland, or Pink Floyd’s Wish You Were Here sleeve where a stuntman was set on fire to get that brilliant cover shot.

> They loved making things: one with great ideas and one with the technical skills to execute these ideas

Anton Corbijn

Corbijn unfortunately never met Thorgerson before his death in 2013, although was clearly intrigued by his reputation for having brilliant ideas and a very sharp tongue. “I would have liked so much to have had a conversation with him,” Corbijn says. “I think [Pink Floyd drummer] Nick Mason summed him up perfectly: ‘Storm Thorgerson was a man who wouldn’t take yes for an answer.’ He seemed at heart a sweet man, just fighting for his thing with a singular focus.”

The genesis of Squaring the Circle came about with an approach to Corbijn, not the reverse, which is how most of his commissions happen. In this case, Powell visited Corbijn in his native Netherlands in late 2020 to sell the project to him. Corbijn describes Powell as having “the gift of the gab”. Powell adopts the role of narrator throughout the film (Corbijn calls him a “natural”). All the interviews are conducted in signature Corbijn black and white, with the animated presentation of the album artwork in vibrant colour, giving the design the spotlight it deserves. The opening and closing scenes are beautifully shot with a steely Powell, walking purposefully through bleak countryside, his art portfolio strapped to his back. As Corbijn points out, it’s a fine line between being celebrated for your art and being endlessly defined by it: “Po is carrying the past with him. He’s very proud of it, but maybe it’s also like a stone around his neck.” The scene was inspired by the famous cover of Led Zeppelin IV, depicting a man in a rural setting with a pack on his shoulders. Corbijn wanted this image to “come alive” in the documentary.

Thorgerson and Powell were very different individuals, but that difference worked perfectly. Corbijn explains their dynamic: “They loved making things,” says Corbijn. “One with great ideas and one with the technical skills to execute these ideas.” He knows first-hand how demanding it is to deliver album design in its entirety: “I have done a lot of record sleeves in my life, but I’ve not designed that many. I may have taken the photo on the sleeve. Hipgnosis however, did everything. It’s amazing they came from nothing in a way. Neither of them were educated in the visual sense. They found ways to do the impossible.”

Pink Floyd’s Animals, 1977. Photograph: f8 archive/Alamy

Listening to the songs throughout the movie – Pink Floyd’s Wish You Were Here, Led Zeppelin’s No Quarter, Wings’ Band on the Run – you wonder how vast the music budget for Squaring the Circle must have been. However, it seems the love for Hipgnosis and what they had achieved for so many artists made licensing the soundtrack possible. “There was an enormous amount of goodwill towards Hipgnosis,” Corbijn says. “People just wanted to make it [the movie] work. They were generous. Everyone was proud of their albums and the work they had done with them.”

The documentary is packed with dry English humour, but also moments of poignancy. Powell recalls the profoundly sad sight of an overweight and almost unrecognisable Syd Barrett arriving at Abbey Road studios in 1975 during the recording of Pink Floyd’s Wish You Were Here, seven years after he had left the band, an event that clearly upsets the band’s surviving (if estranged) members to this day.

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> I am full of admiration for these sleeves. It showed me that it's very important to create a strong idea before you shoot

Anton Corbijn

There are interviews, too, with Peter Saville, best known for his sleek and minimalist design work with Joy Division and New Order, and something of a counterweight to Hipgnosis who, after all, mainly worked in a time of great musical excess. And Noel Gallagher provides useful insight as a dedicated consumer and lover of the Hipgnosis album sleeve.

It is Gallagher who, citing his daughter, argues that there is a lack of recognition of the album cover among younger generations, blaming factors including reduced budgets and the smaller picture formats used by streaming platforms. Corbijn is in complete agreement. "The importance of the record sleeve has diminished. In the 70s, for young kids there wasn't much else to spend money on. Yet you had to save up to buy something, so it was meaningful. Now nothing is meaningful because you can get it at the touch of a button."

The majority of sleeves discussed during the movie required an enormous amount of thinking outside the box by Hipgnosis. According to Corbijn, much of their success results from their ability to deliver under severe pressure, something he can relate to: "You have your back to the wall and you make it work," he says. "You become very inventive in these situations. Often, there is a better result than if the conditions had been perfect."

Even with close to 50 years' experience and a prime portfolio, Corbijn never wastes an opportunity to learn through his experiences. "I am full of admiration for the thoughts that go into making these album sleeves. It showed me that it's very important to create a strong idea before you shoot. I normally shoot before I have an idea. I need to think more about what is achievable."

Hipgnosis' influence is still being felt in the music industry. The Hipgnosis song fund – unrelated, but named in honour of the studio – has been at the forefront of a £1bn march to buy up the rights to classic artists' back catalogues. For all that Powell and Thorgerson's relationship resulted in some amazing pieces of work, things ultimately broke down between the pair – in one of the film's most moving moments Po breaks down in tears due to the fallout of his friendship with his late creative partner. "I didn't see it coming," Corbijn says. "It was a beautiful moment in the film. He clearly misses Storm terribly."

Squaring the Circle (The Story of Hipgnosis) premieres at the Sundance film festival on Friday, and is in cinemas and on-demand from 14 July.

Ambulances outside a hospital in London. Patients struggling to get urgent and emergency care is a key problem facing the NHS. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

NHS at 75

‘Locked in a death spiral’: the state of the NHS at 75

Doctors and senior hospital figures – as well as the official statistics – paint a bleak picture. But is there cause for hope?

Denis Campbell Health policy editor
Mon 3 Jul 2023 00.00 EDTLast modified on Tue 4 Jul 2023 07.27 EDT

Dr Nick Scriven can pinpoint the exact day he realised the NHS could no longer cope. “I first noticed it when I was on call on New Year’s Day 2012. We ran out of beds in our hospital. As a result medical patients had to occupy the beds in a surgical ward meant for people with broken bones waiting to have planned orthopaedic surgery.

“We’d always had ‘outliers’, the occasional medical patient who’d ended up in a surgical bed. But this was the first time cases like that had ended up taking over almost all the 30 beds on the orthopaedic ward. This went on for a month and was a massive stress for everyone as we’d never had to cope with this amount of patients being looked after elsewhere before.

“I hoped it was an anomaly but sadly the same thing happened every year after that,” says Scriven, who works at a hospital in Yorkshire.

However, in his experience it was not until 2015 that the NHS went from struggling with just its usual “winter pressures” – a temporary overload in the cold months – to an “eternal winter”: the same difficulties but close to year-round. “This was evident in the number of ‘extra capacity’ beds opened across the NHS to relieve ‘winter pressures’ that were still open at Easter. This picture has continued to cause ever increasing concern and put pressure on staff and patients”, says Scriven, a former president of the Society for Acute Medicine. In other words, being overwhelmed became routine – a regular, predictable event – and has remained that way since.

He was talking about England. But the trajectory of the health service in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland has followed the same pattern of dramatic, relentless decline.

Access to diagnostic tests such as CT or MRI scans is too slow, delaying the start of treatment, says the Health Foundation’s Anita Charlesworth. Photograph: David Tadevosian/Shutterstock

Scriven, a doctor for 32 years, says the NHS is in the worst state he has ever seen; it is in a “downward spiral”. “Care is in some respects dire. The target

used to be to treat 95% of A&E patients within four hours. Now it's just 76%. Patients face delays all year round that would have been unacceptable five to 10 years ago and until recently would have been reported to NHS England as an 'adverse incident'. Unfortunately we are in the position where dire circumstances, such as 'corridor care', with the complete lack of privacy and dignity that people suffer while sat on a trolley waiting [to get a bed], have in fact been normalised."

The chief executive of one acute hospital trust in England gives an even bleaker assessment as the NHS prepares to mark the 75th anniversary of its creation on Wednesday, which will include a service of thanksgiving for 2,200 staff and volunteers at Westminster Abbey. "It feels like we are locked into a death spiral. The challenges today are far greater than anything over the last 20 years," they say.

"Waiting lists are incredibly long, with no viable solutions to reduce them. Morale is low. And people – both patients and staff – are frustrated, annoyed and angry. Financial pressures are mounting and with patients waiting far longer for their care and struggling to access care, it is likely harm is increasing. It feels like the NHS, on its 75th birthday, is in an utter mess."

How did the country's most important public service end up in such a sorry state? Labour's Wes Streeting, the shadow health secretary, regularly points out that when his party was in government it "delivered the shortest waiting times and the highest patient satisfaction in history".

waiting list graph

While this is true, it would be wrong to suggest the NHS was in perfect shape under Labour. When it left office in May 2010 almost 2.6 million people were on the waiting list for hospital care and that total had been as high as 4.2 million. However, health experts point out that it took Labour time to get on top of the many problems in the NHS Tony Blair had inherited in May 1997, and that it needed years of sustained huge increases in the service's budget and staffing to do that.

It is instructive to compare the performance of the NHS's "referral to treatment" (RTT) programme – the longstanding aspiration to treat 92% of

everyone on the treatment waiting list within 18 weeks and a key metric of judging its overall ability to cope with the many pressures it is under – when Labour lost power in May 2010 and now, after 13 years of Tory-led administrations.

Inside the NHS at 75: ‘Used and abused, overworked and underpaid’ – video

When Gordon Brown left Downing Street the median wait for treatment under RTT was 5.5 weeks; today it is 14.1 weeks. While 2.6 million people were waiting then, today the figure is 7.33 million. Back then 92.1% of patients were seen within 18 weeks – the key 92% target was met – but NHS England’s last set of monthly performance statistics showed that now just 46% are seen within the target time.

Many international studies have found that the effective performance of any health system depends primarily on two things: the money it gets and the staff it has. Analysis by the Health Foundation think tank shows that the NHS got annual budget rises of 3% during Margaret Thatcher and John Major’s Tory governments between 1979 and 1997. Under Blair and Brown between 1997 and 2010, the average soared to 6.7%. But during the Tory-Liberal Democrat coalition in 2010-15 it plummeted to 1.1% as a result of the austerity imposed on the entire public sector. David Cameron and Theresa May’s subsequent administrations from 2015 to 2018 gave the NHS only a little more – 1.7%. Funding only recovered to the 4%-a-year average that health economists say is the minimum investment to maintain a high-performing system under Boris Johnson, Liz Truss and now Sunak.

Tony Blair at the laying of the foundation stone for the new Bishop Auckland general hospital in 2000. Photograph: Owen Humphreys/PA

The prime minister has made improving the NHS one of his five key priorities and surveys regularly remind him that it is an issue of acute concern to the public. But despite that, and despite the NHS having received an average annual increase to its income of 3.6% since its creation in 1948 and the service's many visible problems – such as people dying of a heart attack or stroke because an ambulance took too long to reach them – the Health Foundation has found the service will receive a budget boost of just 1.2% this year.

On staffing, the picture under the Tories is just as sobering. In March 2010 the NHS had 21,351 empty posts – a vacancy rate of 2.1%. At the end of March this year that had risen to 112,498 vacancies – 8% of the total workforce. In 2010 the service was short of 2,113 doctors and dentists and 8,153 nurses and midwives. Today it needs 8,549 medical staff and 40,096 nurses. In January the Care Quality Commission reported how when its inspectors visited Colchester hospital in Essex, it was so understaffed that there were too few people on duty to help some patients with their breakfasts, answer call bells promptly or clear dirty dressings from bedsides. Last Friday the government unveiled a 15-year NHS long-term workforce

plan, though the planned increases in numbers of doctors and nurses will take years to start producing new recruits.

Funding chart

Anita Charlesworth, the Health Foundation's head of research, says the NHS's sorry state is due to "a collision between rising demand over the long period, with the ageing population and people having more long-term health conditions, and medicine being able to do more, which is a positive thing, and constrained capacity, which was at least a decade in the making." Covid's arrival in early 2020 meant a system that was already "on the edge" of its ability to cope has since then in many ways fallen off a cliff, she says.

"What's striking about the current situation is that, while previously individual NHS services have struggled, now it's every area of the NHS which is struggling at the same time as the social care system is struggling and at the same time as a cost of living crisis. It's the combination of those factors that makes this so challenging."

She is particularly worried by several aspects of what she calls the NHS's "managed decline": the harm to patients who cannot get prompt care; that access to diagnostic tests such as a CT or MRI scan is too slow, delaying the start of treatment; and the fact that patients are struggling to get urgent and emergency care – to see a GP, start A&E treatment or get an ambulance after dialling 999 – not just to have planned surgery.

The evidence about patient harm caused by care delays is growing. The Royal College of Emergency Medicine, which represents A&E doctors, estimates that 23,000 people – 442 a week – died during 2022 as a direct result of having to wait too long in an emergency department. Similarly, Association of Ambulance Chief Executives data shows that last December 57,000 patients were put at risk because of delays in ambulance crews handing them over to A&E staff, of whom 6,000 were exposed to "severe harm" as a result.

Many patients face long waits at A&E units. Photograph: Rex/Shutterstock

Charlesworth denies that the NHS is slowly imploding. “I don’t think the NHS is failing. I think the NHS is being failed – failed by policy that is ineffective,” she says, referring to the neglect of the deepening workforce shortages, shortsighted approach to funding and failure to build hospitals and other new NHS buildings that have characterised all governments since 2010. The end result, she says, is that “we lack capacity. The gap between the pressures on the NHS and the resources available is as wide as it’s ever been.

“In human terms that means patients aren’t getting timely care and staff are suffering the moral injury of not being able to do what they’re trained to do. So by failing to invest in the capacity the NHS needs we’re failing patients, we’re failing staff and we’re failing the taxpayer, because a productive and efficient NHS is also really important for economic growth.”

In May Richard Taunt, a former deputy director at the Department of Health, published an essay setting out “the five reasons the NHS won’t live to see 100”. They included its highly centralised structures, a squeeze in the number of younger people available to become staff at a time when the ageing population is increasing demand, and the persistent mistake of treating illness but not preventing it.

Back at the NHS frontline, the trust chief executive is surprisingly positive about its future. They hope that the next government quietly dismantles the 42 new "integrated care systems" – regional groupings of NHS trusts, which work with local councils and voluntary organisations to improve care – which they see as "an expensive failure"; and that ministers can somehow end the very debilitating wave of NHS pay strikes.

"Whilst there are many reasons to feel anxious and the short-term future is almost certainly more challenging than the recent past, if we refocus on patient care and not just money, if we take difficult decisions and if we give people hope and belief, the NHS may survive to see its 100th birthday."

Despite laying bare the NHS's many problems, Charlesworth, too, is hopeful. "I'm profoundly optimistic about the NHS's future. First, public commitment to the NHS remains absolutely rock solid. Second, all the evidence is that tearing up our tax-funded free-at-the-point-of-use model of healthcare and moving wholesale to another [type of] system wouldn't deliver benefits to patients or the taxpayer. And third, we have the fundamental building blocks of an effective healthcare system: strong primary care, a good focus on public health and a great science base.

"But for the NHS to recover and survive and prosper, if we want a high-quality NHS, it has to be properly funded and have enough capacity. That is an enduring truth that no government should ignore."

Sufficiently funded, ‘the best days of the NHS lie ahead’: Matthew Taylor, chief executive of the NHS Confederation.

NHS at 75

‘A future worth fighting for’: five health experts on the state of the NHS at 75

Ideas for improving standards of care include robotics, more time for GP consultations and a tax on salt

Anna Bawden
Mon 3 Jul 2023 00.00 EDT

As the NHS turns 75, it is under unprecedented pressure: record waiting lists, demand for care and delays in discharging patients who are well enough to go home are putting all parts of the health service under immense strain. Sickness absence is at record levels, while nearly 170,000 NHS workers in England quit their jobs last year. Recent strikes by nurses, ambulance staff and junior doctors, coupled with the historic decision by consultants and radiographers to strike, too, show the depth of anger. Five experts spell out what's needed to make the health service thrive again.

Matthew Taylor, chief executive of the NHS Confederation

As we approach its 75th anniversary we also reach a crucial juncture in the history of the NHS. We now have a real opportunity to grasp head-on the changes needed, and to innovate and improve for patients and ensure it prospers for another 75 years and beyond.

What we need is a holistic health policy to improve access to services and standards of care. It is vital that everyone working in the NHS understands that prevention is always better than cure, ensuring that people are able to access the best possible tools to help them live healthier lifestyles as well as access the care they need before their health declines. This in turn will reduce pressure on the system.

We must seek to address the social conditions that make people sick and rob them of control, as well as building deeper trust and an enduring sense of shared responsibility between the health service and the people and communities it serves.

Despite all the challenges we face, the best days of the NHS lie ahead. Sufficiently funded, properly supported, devolved, preventative, empowering – our health service can and will be ready to grasp present and future opportunities. It is a future worth fighting for.

Pritesh Mistry, fellow in digital technologies at the King's Fund health thinktank

Pritesh Mistry.

Greater use of robotics would transform both the standards of care patients receive and hospital bed management. We are now on the cusp of a robotic revolution in healthcare. Robots are already used in pharmacies to dispense medications, but this barely scratches the surface of the great potential they have to change how health and social care is provided. Robotics could play a greater role in operations, and patients might find themselves under a knife held by a robot. This may be unsettling for some, but it can result in surgery that is less invasive for the patient and could mean quicker recovery times, freeing up beds and staff time. It can also save staff from experiencing radiation exposure during operations.

When it comes to diagnostics, robotics improve the quality of medical images, while AI can read scans more accurately, reducing the chance of human error in spotting health issues. Making the robotic revolution a reality will require a concerted effort on everything from funding, tech development, education and training for staff to changes to rooms and buildings. Simultaneously, there also needs to be focus on getting the basics right, as there is a real risk of creating a confused system, where AI robots can assess your X-ray, but doctors don't have access to wi-fi in the hospital.

Clare Gerada, president of the Royal College of GPs and co-chair of the NHS Assembly. She is writing in a personal capacity

Clare Gerada. Photograph: Justin Grainge

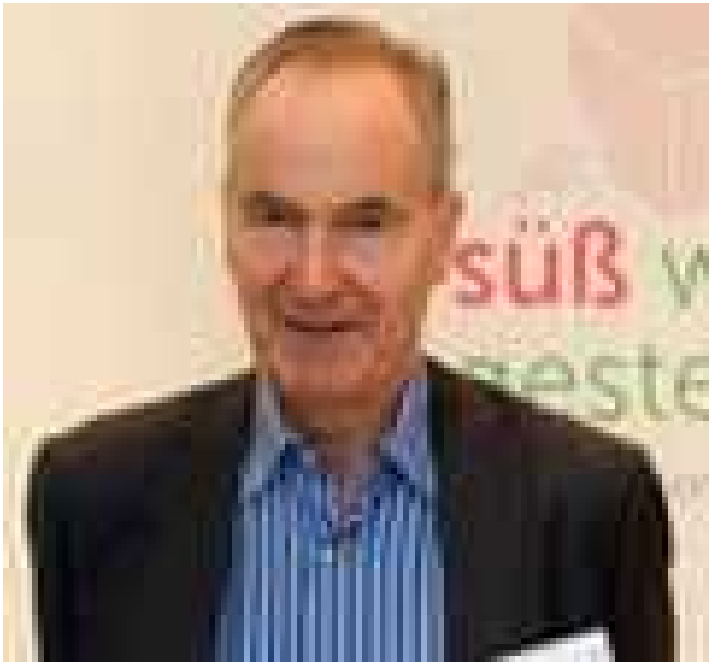
Today's GPs do more, to a greater degree of complexity, than our counterparts around the world, yet our share of NHS funding falls far short. As a result, patients experience longer waiting times, gaps in service provision, and are forced to seek alternative avenues for care.

Doubling of the number of GPs that the NHS workforce plan promises will help. To achieve this, only medical schools that have an explicit commitment to producing GPs should be allowed to expand their places.

Going forward, GPs need time to care for patients, but the workloads we face are unsustainable. We must insist on a cap on the number of patients we are expected to see per day; and more time for those patients who need it, not the current 10 minutes. And all doctors, irrespective of their final speciality, should spend six months training in general practice – after all, all GPs have spent at least three years training in hospitals.

As a society, we are growing older, fatter and sicker. More – and less burnt-out – GPs are vital if we are to keep patients healthier in their homes and ease the burden on hospitals and the rest of the NHS.

Prof Graham MacGregor, chair of Action on Sugar and Action on Salt



Prof Graham MacGregor.

Without doubt, the use of taxes is an effective lever to encourage food and drink manufacturers to reformulate their products to reduce sugar and calories – and it's working.

The soft drinks industry levy, or sugar tax, was introduced in 2015 to encourage manufacturers to reduce the amount of sugar in their soft drinks. The levy successfully removed a massive 46,000 tonnes of sugar from these drinks between 2015 and 2020 and raised £334m in 2021-22 alone, to be invested in children's health and wellbeing programmes.

However, the sugar tax only applies to soft drinks – there are many more food and drink products that are loaded with salt, sugar and calories. Long term, a high consumption of these ingredients can lead to weight gain, increasing the risk of type 2 diabetes, stroke, heart attacks and some cancers

Now the government must introduce similar levies to incentivise the food industry to reduce the sugar, salt, fat and calories in their junk food products.

What’s needed are mandatory targets in order to create a level playing field for food companies.

As a nation, just cutting one gram of salt from our average daily salt intake would prevent approximately 6,000 avoidable deaths from strokes and heart disease per year and associated life-changing disabilities.

Jennifer Dixon, chief executive of the Health Foundation

Jennifer Dixon.

The health service needs not only investment but also more systematic use of the latest technology if it is to improve access to treatment and ensure staff have more time to care.

Greater use of “virtual wards”, for example, could allow more patients to receive hospital-level care at home. This can be more convenient for patients and, crucially, frees up much-needed hospital beds, including by supporting people to be discharged from hospital earlier. The NHS also needs to go much further in enabling people with long-term conditions to monitor their health at home using mobile apps and wearable devices, helping avoid unnecessary hospital appointments.

But there's a lot more that can be done with technology, often behind the scenes, so that staff can spend less time on admin and more time with patients. Using software to automatically transcribe clinical notes can help GPs to focus more on what their patients are saying. AI can rapidly analyse patient feedback, freeing up staff to act on what patients are saying matters most to them.

With severe staff shortages and waiting lists at a record high, the NHS has no choice but to embrace the tech revolution.

‘Jaw-dropping’ … The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom. Photograph: Nintendo

Best culture of 2023 so farGames

‘You can play it for five minutes or play it for five hours’: Guardian readers’ best games of 2023 so far

From new iterations of Street Fighter, Diablo and Zelda to modern takes on 80s arcades and an evil pizza atop a pizza tower, readers share their picks

Guardian readers and *Alfie Packham*
Mon 3 Jul 2023 05.00 EDTLast modified on Wed 5 Jul 2023 07.03 EDT

Resident Evil 4

This is a 2023 remake of the game that got me into action games in 2005. Third-person over the shoulder shooters were new then and the action genre started appealing to me for the first time. It now has a modern polish and

atmosphere steeped in dread along with, at last, controls that don't make you feel like you're stuck in a tank. Leon is as goofy and dashing as ever and the blood and gore is dialled up to 11. It is smooth, slick, sick and just a fantastic experience. I haven't enjoyed a shooter this much since Resident Evil 4. **Leslie, 37, Manchester**

'An atmosphere steeped in dread' … Resident Evil 4. Photograph: Capcom

Akka Arrh

Akka Arrh is a modern take on a 1980s Atari arcade machine that was never released. Atari asked the legendary Jeff Minter (and Giles) of Llamasoft to reimagine the game and what they've come up with is pure arcade bliss. Trademark Llamasoft visuals: black background, blocky text, simple geometrics, coupled with modern psychedelic particle effects – with a trance soundtrack – produce a game that combines tower-defence strategy and arcade shooting. It can be as relaxing or complex as you want it to be. Minter, over his long career, has had a knack of creating games which are just fun – you can play it for five minutes and have a blast or play it for five hours and lose yourself. **Paul, Stuttgart, Germany**

The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom

It’s quite an achievement to improve on Breath of the Wild, but here it is. Importantly, for a game from a large publisher, it doesn’t push boundaries simply by having the latest cutting-edge graphics. Which is what 99.9% of AAA games dedicate all available resources to these days – and why so many of them are bland, boring, and redundant. Tears of the Kingdom is liberating as the player’s imagination and bravery is rewarded. Something you think won’t work … actually does! Scaling the heights for the first dungeon, up in the air above Rito, remains one of the most jaw-dropping moments I’ve ever experienced in over 35 years of gaming. This open-world approach makes titles like Witcher III look woeful in comparison. **Jareth, 38, Manchester**

Pizza Tower

Pizza Tower is like no other game I’ve played. It’s a fast, frantic 2D platformer where you play as a scared middle-aged Italian pizza chef and have to ascend a tower full of pizza-inspired levels full of pizza-inspired enemies and destroy its supports so that a giant pizza face called Pizzaface can’t destroy your pizzeria with a giant laser. You can’t die, but getting hurt reduces your score. Your aim is to get to the support pillar named John and destroy him, then run back through the same level you just did as it crumbles around you and a timer closes in at an uncomfortable rate. If you take too long, Pizzaface will arrive and kill you instantly if he touches you. Every level is brimming with personality and each plays out differently to the last. One minute, you’re exploring space, the next minute you’re playing golf with a sentient ball of cheese. It’s going to be hard to dethrone this one. **Aaron Durning, 24, Dundee, Scotland**

‘The right level of geekiness’ …Diablo IV. Photograph: Blizzard

Diablo IV

I’ve never played any of the previous versions of Diablo, but heard they were very good. Nowadays, as a very middle-aged gamer, I tend to play games for quite a while and then lose interest, which is fine. No game has grabbed me in the way that Diablo has since probably the GTA series back in the day. I love the battles; you can feel yourself improving your gameplay as well as levelling up, and it has just about the right level of geekiness for me to allow me to play around with my gear and build to gain that edge. My 10-year-old self (playing Golden Axe) would have been so jealous of this game ... Oh, and it is beautiful as well. **Dominic Foot, 47, Ringwood, Hampshire**

after newsletter promotion

Ghostland Yard

Ghostland Yard us an incredibly tight precision platformer, similar to Super Meat Boy. I appreciate games that respect my time and this one does that with its level design. It's quite tricky and addictive though, so I usually do spend some time playing it. I don't even find myself saying "just one more go"; the next level is just so instantaneous and I'm enjoying the challenge. It lends itself to people of a competitive nature with its global and local time rankings and finicky controls. It also has the options to unlock all levels and "infinite jumps", which are great ideas to help out players struggling at any point. I am not sure on the story yet … I know there is meant to be one, but have not yet learned enough about it. **Morgan, Melbourne, Australia**

Dead Space

So far this year there have been some amazing games, but for me, the Dead Space remake has topped my list (so far). I didn't play the original, mainly as I was too much of a scaredy cat. From the exploration to combat, I was at the edge of my seat throughout. After a few too many sleepless nights I did, however, make it through to the end credits. It confirmed I am still a scaredy cat but I had a "bloody" good time in the process. **Jonas, 39, London**

Cassette Beasts

Pokémon is my first gaming love, but its recent games have felt lacklustre, while other developers in the RPG genre have stepped up. Enter Cassette Beasts. From its primarily adult cast to the themes of the story, the game feels like if a Pokémon game was allowed to target an older audience. I'm playing on the Switch, where Cassette Beasts' drop-in/drop-out co-op play

makes it shine as a game to play with friends. Unfortunately, the Switch version has some performance issues, but patches are on the way, and I'm still completely addicted. **Nick, 32, Melbourne, Australia**

'Chess-like quality' … Street Fighter 6. Photograph: Capcom

Street Fighter 6

Street Fighter 6 has been a revelation. I've always been an average player so could never pull off some of the more extravagant combos, but the system they have employed here with modern controls and the drive gauge has added a chess-like quality to matches. The hub world for online brings back a sense of arcades of yesteryear. There is so much depth to the fighting system that I can see new and veteran players all enjoying it equally. **Nathan Hall, 44, Dublin**

2023.07.03 - Opinion

- My friend was out for pizza when the missile hit. Putin's targeting of civilians must be punished
- Sad snakes and geckos with bone disease – we vets see the dark side of the UK's exotic pet boom
- Beware the 'beige-fluencers', cheerleaders for a life of no surprises
- I spoke to teachers preparing to strike. Their trauma was palpable

‘It was very unlikely that senior commanders would have been there. It is not a military target.’ The destroyed restaurant in Kramatorsk, Ukraine after the missile strike. Photograph: Reuters

OpinionUkraine

My friend was out for pizza when the missile hit. Putin’s targeting of civilians must be punished

Nataliya Gumenyuk

Last weekend, Victoria Amelina and I discussed the Kremlin's violations in Ukraine. Days later, she became their victim

- Ukrainian writer Victoria Amelina dies after being wounded in Kramatorsk strike

Mon 3 Jul 2023 01.00 EDTLast modified on Mon 3 Jul 2023 03.57 EDT

'Please, not that place": that was our first reaction to the Russian missile strike on Kramatorsk's Ria pizza restaurant, which took 13 lives and wounded more than 60 people. Kramatorsk is the biggest, safest and most accessible town close to the Russian-Ukrainian frontline. Before the full-scale invasion, up to 200,000 people lived there; 80,000 now remain, including military personnel coming for a break, volunteers and journalists. Still, the services on offer are limited, so a central, well-run restaurant with quality wifi, space for meetings and quick meals will always be crowded. I remember Ria's young waiters always providing perfect service, knowing that everybody was in a rush. Some of them are now among the dead.

The second thought after this new attack was: who was there? One visitor, Victoria Amelina, a famous Ukrainian writer, was left in a critical condition.

We learned yesterday that she passed away after five days in hospital. Amelina was a war crimes researcher – last Sunday, a day before her Kramatorsk trip, she was at the Arsenal book festival in Kyiv moderating a panel on "What kind of crime is Russia committing?" at my invitation. Beforehand we prepared together, chatting about how hard it is for us to travel outside Ukraine, and how we drum up the strength and spirit to carry on. We felt defiant. The book festival was our celebration of Ukrainian resilience.

Victoria Amelina. Photograph: Daniel Mordzinski/Hay Festival

Reading that a friend is among the victims makes you feel numb, powerless. You can't stop thinking: what if they hadn't been there? The Ukrainian government has identified the Russian agent whom they suspect of reporting the exact location of the restaurant. Everybody knew that it was always full of civilians, media, military on leave. But it was very unlikely that senior commanders would have been there. It is not a military target.

Speaking on a major propaganda talkshow on the state-run Russia-1 Channel, the head of the Duma defence committee, Colonel-General Andrei Kartapolov, saluted the attack on Kramatorsk, saying: "I take my hat off to those who planned it, who carried it out. My old military heart rejoices when I see how many of these kids' bodies are being dug up, sometimes with

tattoos, sometimes with emblems." Among the bodies there are those of the 14-year-old twins Yulia and Anna Aksenchenko.

I visited the restaurant this April after the anniversary screening of our film about the attack on Kramatorsk train station on 8 April 2022, still one of the deadliest of the invasion: 3,000 people were at the station, 63 of whom died, and more than 100 were wounded. As part of the Reckoning Project, which documents war crimes, we echoed what human rights organisations and Ukrainian prosecutors had already said: that despite Kremlin claims that it was targeting military equipment at the station, this was a direct strike on civilians by Russia. The weapons used were Tochka-U missiles, banned by more than 100 nations, which are designed to cause severe injuries to humans, and would not have been chosen had the intention been to destroy weapons.

A woman lays flowers at a makeshift memorial for the victims of the Russian missile strike on the Ria pizza restaurant in Kramatorsk, Ukraine. Photograph: Reuters

At the time, the world was focused on the Russian atrocities in Bucha, and the residents of Kramatorsk were left alone with their wounds. Showing the film in a safe basement in Kramatorsk to witnesses – including the railway and rescue workers, the police, the mayor and the governor – it was clear

how hurt they were even a year on. This has been the most horrific day of their lives.

As we ate in the pizza restaurant afterwards, observing people chatting and eating, we enjoyed seeing the return of life and normalcy. After the liberation of Izium, in September 2022, the risk of occupation of Kramatorsk, 40 miles to the south, had shrunk away. The city was healing.

Exactly a year before the attack on the restaurant in Kramatorsk, Russia attacked a shopping mall in Kremenchuk – far from the frontline – killing 21 people, mainly employees. We've just published the investigation: the Ukrainian prosecutors identified that the types of missiles used here were used in subsequent civilian attacks, killing at least 21 people near Odesa and 46 sleeping at home in Dnipro. A picture is building of brutal, targeted civilian attacks.

For legal experts, a buildup of evidence like this leads to more action, a stronger case. It's the opposite for the media. The more often these attacks happen, the more attention wanes. Talking to international media while working on war crimes documentation, I mention how reporters and editors – intrigued by "a newer type of crime" – are getting bored as long as I mention victims of the missile attacks. "But isn't that just how war works?" they ask.

Russia has managed to normalise these civilian missile strikes, and even though it's possible to identify the type of weapon and prove that something was a civilian target, lawyers are hesitant to engage when public pressure is lacking.

Strikes against civilians are treated as inevitable tragedies of the war. But they are also crimes that must be investigated, whatever our political views and stance on the conflict.

Answering Amelina's questions at the panel about war crimes, colleagues focused on accountability for these crimes. As a Ukrainian who, like many others these days, feels powerless, numb and devastated because someone we know and love is injured, I am focused on prevention. We must demand

an investigation so that instead of a salute from a general Russian servicemen will receive an arrest warrant for these kinds of attacks. We can't save those who have already died, but at least this plague of impunity may be punished. And, just maybe, it will prevent another attack.

- Nataliya Gumenyuk is a Ukrainian journalist, and co-founder of the Reckoning Project

- ***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.***

Leopard gecko. ‘Exotic pets require complex, specific and often expensive care to ensure they are healthy and can live good, happy lives.’ Photograph: halimqomarudin/Getty Images/RooM RF

OpinionAnimal welfare

Sad snakes and geckos with bone disease – we vets see the dark side of the UK’s exotic pet boom

Justine Shotton

Thinking of purchasing a non-traditional pet? Don’t – unless you’re truly prepared to meet all its complex needs

Mon 3 Jul 2023 05.28 EDTLast modified on Tue 4 Jul 2023 07.15 EDT

The UK’s pet population is booming, driven largely by a significant rise in “pandemic puppies” and “Covid kittens”. But less traditional, or so-called “exotic”, pets are also increasing in popularity: the latest UK Pet Food survey estimates that in the UK alone, we own a staggering 1.3 million indoor birds, 900,000 tortoises and turtles, 800,000 lizards and 700,000 snakes. That’s 3.7 million animals, and the number is increasing rapidly, the research suggests the number of these pets may have jumped by 19% in the past 12 months alone.

These are fascinating animals with a huge range of unique adaptations, behaviours and personalities, so it’s understandable that many people are keen to keep them as pets. However, a word of caution: exotic pets require complex, specific and often expensive care to ensure they are healthy and can live good, happy lives, but these requirements are not always clear when they’re bought, and the onus is on the owners to do research before taking them home.

For example, ball pythons and other snakes can be popular pets but, with the capacity to grow to more than a metre in length, they need a lot of space to stretch out fully and a complex environment to adequately stimulate them, as well as specialist diets and feeding plans. Even small and seemingly “easy” pets can present financial challenges – for example, leopard geckos, which are commonly kept, will suffer from metabolic bone disease if they do not get the correct UV light and appropriate diet, but with electricity costs soaring and these reptiles living for 10-20 years in captivity, this requires significant investment by owners.

Ring-tailed lemur. Lemurs are among the primates most commonly kept as pets in the UK. Photograph: Anne-Christine Poujoulat/AFP/Getty Images

Having worked as a vet over the past 15 years, I’ve seen first-hand a huge variety of pets and their problems. I’ve met exotic pets with extremely dedicated and highly informed owners who provide for all of their pets’ requirements, but sadly, I’ve also seen some really devastating cases.

Many of these owners, despite their best intentions, just aren’t aware of the specific needs of their pets. I’ve seen “pathological” fractures in reptiles – due to bones so weak they easily break – because the wrong diets were fed, or they didn’t get the right UV light. I’ve seen thermal burns in snakes due to inappropriate or broken heating and lighting elements. I’ve seen chronic

and severe behavioural aberrations, including parrots feather-pecking themselves bald due to lack of appropriate social contact. These cases are heartbreaking and can result in such severe suffering that the only humane option for the animal is euthanasia.

A British Veterinary Association (BVA) survey reported that more than half of the exotic pets seen by vets have unmet welfare needs. Nine in 10 (92%) of these vets highlighted the lack of a suitable environment, and 85% flagged that appropriate diets were often not provided. Even more worryingly, 62% of these vets said that these animals are often not protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease – a significant increase from 46% in 2019.

So it's no surprise that the survey found that 81% of vets, myself included, are concerned that the complex welfare needs of these animals are not being met – suggesting that, as a society, we're falling short when it comes to ensuring the wellbeing of many millions of animals.

Choosing a new pet of any variety is a serious commitment and requires careful research and thought. Consideration should be given to which pet is right for you, whether you're able to afford their care throughout their whole lifetime – as some, such as parrots and tortoises, can live for many decades – and, critically, whether you are not only able to meet their welfare needs but can also give them a "good life".

Some exotic animals, such as primates, have such specific needs that it is extremely difficult – if not impossible – to meet these in a domestic setting. Many primates require specialist diets – for example, particular leaves, invertebrates or gum feeds – and all need complex environments to prevent behavioural problems. These animals are also highly social and must be kept in appropriate social groups, which requires lots of space and careful breeding management and expertise.

At the British Veterinary Association (BVA), we've been calling for a ban on owning primates as pets, so it's good news that just last week the government set out proposals to deliver a ban in England. It is essential that the devolved nations follow suit, as there is no circumstance in which these

intelligent, long-lived creatures can be properly cared for if they are kept as pets.

There are wider ethical considerations too – until the EU changed its regulations in 2007, birds were still harvested from the wild for the UK pet trade, and this remains the case for some pet fish. We recommend a move away from the wild-capture of fish, alongside the further development of high-welfare captive-breeding programmes for those species of fish whose needs can be met in the domestic environment, with improved regulation, traceability and independent auditing of the wild-caught fish trade.

The BVA, with the vets we represent, is encouraging everyone considering getting a pet, in particular an exotic one, to think carefully before they buy. We want all owners to be fully informed so they can give their pet – whether furred, feathered or scaled – a healthy and happy life, and to be honest enough with themselves to reconsider if this isn't possible.

- Dr Justine Shotton is senior vice president, BVA

‘Molly-Mae Hague owns a famously beige home and is known for her bland, fast-fashion wardrobe.’ Photograph: Scott Garfitt/PrettyLittleThing/REX/Shutterstock

Opinion Social media

Beware the ‘beige-fluencers’, cheerleaders for a life of no surprises

Sarah Manavis

Light a candle, wear matching pyjamas, go to bed early. Why has tedium become an aspiration for so many young people?

Mon 3 Jul 2023 03.00 EDTLast modified on Mon 3 Jul 2023 21.31 EDT

In sections of the internet populated by under-30s, one piece of advice has become common: romanticise your life. Take the good things you have and view them more positively – while also, at the same time, making changes to your living situation that will get you closer to the life of your dreams.

On Instagram, you will find millions of posts from (mostly) young women saying how all their problems were solved by following this guidance. On TikTok, videos on the subject have more than 1.4bn views. In these clips, though, you won't find advice on how to live a life that is exciting and fulfilling, or punctuated by surprise, newness and glamour. Instead, you will find millions of young people describing an ideal life that is overwhelmingly dull, fundamentally rooted in living each day the same, and following a narrow, regimented routine.

This mundane view of a perfect life elevates tedious activities to the status of aspirational living. Your best life will be accessed by taking "pretty pictures", wearing matching pyjama sets, cooking dinner at home, working out at 5am, buying flowers, lighting candles, stretching. By most measures, these activities are plainly boring, but videos of bedtime routines, trips to coffee shops (often Starbucks), or even just lists of "ways to romanticise your life" have become suffocatingly ubiquitous. Many have been viewed hundreds of thousands of times. Some influencers will even post multiple videos of the same routine in the space of a few weeks knowing it guarantees engagement (one particularly popular TikTok, which advises viewers to read in the morning and burn sage, currently has over 1m views).

This pervasive inclination towards dullness is also reflected in young people's taste in celebrities. The monochromatic, beige aesthetics of influencers such as Molly-Mae Hague and Matilda Djerf have earned them millions of young fans (Hague owns a famously beige home and is known for her bland, fast-fashion wardrobe; Djerf founded a multimillion-pound clothing brand selling luxury basics), but they are popular precisely because they embody a way of life that is not merely about aesthetics.

Hague, Djerf and similar celebrities promote a brand of balanced living that involves punishingly healthy routines featuring the occasional glass of white wine, renovating and decorating neutral-toned homes, committing to long-term monogamous relationships, buying expensive fluffy animals and opting for nights in over nights out. Many of these celebrities openly marvel at the fact that they have become so famous despite their lives being so boring.

There are obvious external factors that play into why some young people have become enamoured of these unremarkable routines. In these tightly structured lifestyles, they may glimpse a form of security that can otherwise feel absent in a period marked by economic and political turmoil. The noise of social media may also make quieter lives seem more appealing.

When a video went viral on Twitter earlier this month showing a 28-year-old man's typical workday – featuring a trip to the office, then the gym, then home to heat a ready meal and playtime with his dog, posted with the caption "This video was so depressing that I started tearing up watching it" – people were quick to criticise the poster's sentiment. A home, a steady 9-5 with a salary and flexibility, a gym membership and a pet: who wouldn't want these things, when so much of life is defined by chaos?

When the world feels tumultuous, people reach for what seems like control. But I'm not sure that the appeal of these insipid beige-fluencers can be entirely explained by a yearning for stability. There's a quiet conservatism in the valorisation of their routines and a sanctimonious tone adopted by those who follow them. This fits with a less reported narrative emerging about Gen-Z: despite their reputation for social liberalism, many young people champion a more puritanical approach to things such as sex, dating, and drinking.

Heteronormative, conventional lifestyles have long been regarded as more socially acceptable than straying from this path, but conventionality has now been granted a pious, aspirational element, as if this isn't how people have been encouraged to live for centuries. All of this feeds into pre-existing fear and caution around trying anything new: leading a boring, low-risk life is easier than going out in the world and trying to lead an exciting one; and it only becomes more appealing when that safe life is treated as morally superior.

It all feeds our increasingly limited monoculture, in which everything and everyone begins to look the same. Of course, these aesthetics and lifestyles are also incredibly profitable for the people and companies who peddle them (both Hague and Djerf have built lucrative careers from monetising the lives they portray on their Instagram feeds). Some influencers use this appeal to sell fake tan and linen trousers; others get their followers to spend thousands

on “romanticise your life” wellness retreats. We are told we’re being given the tools for empowerment by people who really just want to sell us cream-coloured office wear and sweatpants.

This banal, lobotomised vision of life contains a false promise: that if we subscribe to its version of monotony, this will somehow bring us deep satisfaction. But the idea of what our world could be should only be expanding – not being whittled down to fit the narrow messaging of mass culture. Even if it does feature morning workouts and early bedtimes, life shouldn’t be so rigid and boring. It should be diverse and fulfilling; it should be fun. We should be wary of those trying to convince us that anything less is the best the world has to offer.

- Sarah Manavis is a US writer covering technology, culture, and society

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Illustration: Matt Kenyon/The Guardian

Opinion Industrial action

I spoke to teachers preparing to strike. Their trauma was palpable

John Harris

Staff are burning out and classroom cupboards are bare, hitting students hard. We should feel shock – but also a sinking sense of deja vu

Sun 2 Jul 2023 09.00 EDTLast modified on Sun 2 Jul 2023 23.18 EDT

I love my mum," said last Saturday's headliner on Glastonbury's West Holts stage. But then, as the London-born hip-hop artist Loyle Carner prepared for his next song, he got on to the really crucial part. "My mum's a teacher; my girlfriend's a teacher," he said. "The only thing I feel like right now is, teachers are striking and I stand with them." A cheer began to go up, which then swelled as he reeled off a list of the educators who had helped him on his way, starting with his mother: "All my fucking teachers that lifted me up and saved me."

The following day, Glastonbury's Left Field – the big top that has a bill split between evenings of music and daytime debates and discussions – hosted an hour-long event centred on the current wave of strikes. I was in the chair, and the panel included Nusrat Sultana, a teacher and trade unionist from Birmingham who works at an autism-specialist school. She talked movingly about slashed budgets, disappearing staff, the end of school trips, and many of her colleagues' dire financial situations.

When I asked if there were any teachers in the crowd, around a dozen hands went up: whatever the festival's escapist attractions, people obviously wanted to come and tell people about the scale of a meltdown in state education that goes back to 2010 – if not even further – and is still not getting nearly enough attention.

This coming Wednesday and Friday, teachers in the National Education Union will once again be walking out of schools in England. They now look likely, when the new school year starts in the autumn, to be joined by headteachers. In real terms, insists the union, experienced teachers have endured a 20% pay cut since 2010. More than one in 10 new teachers now quit after just a year in the classroom, and one in three within six. Last week brought news that 700,000 children in England are being educated in buildings that need "major repairs", a story that was followed by specific details of what that now entails: as school premises are forced to shut because of safety concerns, kids are being taught in churches and village halls, or being sent home to take lessons remotely.

Here it all is: as that unrepentant austerity zealot George Osborne promotes his new podcast, with the promise of banter and laughs, and the former education secretary Michael Gove still sits in the cabinet, the schools system is in a state of collapse.

Special-needs provision is underfunded and dysfunctional. Thanks to a mixture of cuts and Conservative dogma, art, music and drama have been pushed to the margins. Teachers stop teaching not only thanks to their often impossible financial position, but also because of the cold system of "accountability" that involves endless data collection and testing, and constant anxiety about a visit from England's infamous schools inspectors. And who actually cares? The current education secretary is the sixth holder of the post since the autumn of 2021.

When I got back from Glastonbury, I spoke to a handful of schools insiders who fleshed all this out. Sarah, an art teacher from the north-east who left full-time teaching last year, told me about what has happened to the secondary school where she worked for 16 years. She left, she said, "because it was no longer the school I loved, and it was damaging my health".

From 2010 onwards, there had been a steady shedding of staff amid reduced budgets, until the school was transferred from her local council to an academy trust, and things became impossible. Sixty members of staff left in just 18 months, pushed out via a mixture of voluntary and compulsory redundancies and "settlement agreements" whereby other people were quietly sent on their way. The sixth form was closed, for reasons of "financial viability". Funding for music tuition from visiting specialists was ended, meaning that children could no longer learn to play an instrument. Art and technology teaching were also cut, and the modern languages on offer came down from four to two.

She was a union rep. "People would come and cry in my classroom," she said. "And you always felt at risk: am I next?" One of the most notable effects of all the cuts and turbulence, she said, was what happened to some of her students: "A lot of the behaviour became really, really shocking, and that was a direct result of removing the consistency of staff being there and all those personal relationships."

Rosie teaches in the nursery class of a council-run primary school in the London borough of Tower Hamlets, having also taught children in year 1 and reception. Over the past three years, financial pressures have led to the school's staffing being restructured twice: in the first set of changes, 14 teaching assistants were lost, "which had a huge effect, particularly on our most vulnerable and needy children". The nursery, where 54 children are taught, used to have 10 members of staff; now it has five. "But the needs of the children haven't gone down; if anything, they've increased." Nurture groups for children who need early intervention have been scaled back, and the same applies to speech and language therapy. As a result, teachers and support staff are "worked to the bone".

Her school now makes a point of recruiting early-career teachers – or ECTs – because "we can't afford to pay people who are experienced." Money for things beyond English, maths and science has shrunk, which means "no new paintbrushes if they're tired and raggedy, and not enough paint … we used to get in special paper for watercolours, but that's not there any more. The cupboards are bare."

She will be striking this week. “The main thing is, this is not just about our individual pay,” Rosie told me. “It’s about funding for schools.” This issue was vividly highlighted by the government’s recent offer to teaching unions of a largely unfunded 4.5% pay rise, which would only pile on more financial problems: “We won’t accept a pay increase at a cost that falls on the children in our schools,” she said.

For some people, all this may bring on a heartbreaking sense of deja vu. In the 1980s, the secondary school I went to – which sat next to a railway line – was full of mundane evidence of a school system that was buckling. As well as the teachers’ strikes, I vividly remember their context. Endless lessons in portable buildings that shook when the trains went past; the ancient desks, with empty holes where inkwells had been; the textbooks from 20 years before, and the all-pervading feeling that, whatever the valiant efforts of our teachers, no one in any position of power and influence really cared.

Things are superficially different now, but the sense of rot and shrinking horizons feels exactly the same. This week, in fact, feels like yet another grinding instalment of a story that seems to always involve the same basic elements: squeezed budgets, misplaced policy and what happens when state schools are too often commanded by privately educated politicians. To cap it all, England now feels to me like a country run by people who do not want to think about the future: the state of our schools, and what teachers are desperately fighting to overturn, could not provide a more vivid example of what that fear and neglect actually means in practice.

- John Harris is a Guardian columnist

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British troops in Helmand province in southern Afghanistan. Photograph: Manish Swarup/AP

Military

Eighty Afghan civilians may have been summarily killed by SAS, inquiry told

Lawyers for bereaved families allege British soldiers carried out policy of terminating all fighting-age men

Dan Sabbagh *Defence and security editor*
Sun 2 Jul 2023 13.41 EDTLast modified on Sun 2 Jul 2023 21.30 EDT

Eighty Afghans may have been victim of summary killings by three separate British SAS units operating in the country between 2010 and 2013, lawyers representing the bereaved families have told a public inquiry.

One of the elite soldiers is believed to have “personally killed” 35 Afghans on a single six-month tour of duty as part of an alleged policy to terminate

“all fighting-age males” in homes raided, “regardless of the threat they posed”.

Afghans were often killed after allegedly producing weapons when separated from their wider family by SAS soldiers, but there were five incidents where the number shot dead exceeded the number of weapons found.

The fresh claims are cited in a document submitted by the law firm Leigh Day, based on previous Ministry of Defence court disclosures, to a new public inquiry into allegations of war crimes committed by SAS soldiers in Afghanistan.

It highlights concerns made by senior army officers in emails from the time, including a warning that “there appears to be a casual disregard for life”. But an internal review that took place in 2011 did not bring about a change in the pattern of killing.

Between June 2011 and May 2013, 25 suspicious deaths were recorded by the lawyers, which included an allegation that in one SAS raid that “resulted in the deaths of 4/5 Afghans” only one grenade was found. The events of the operation were so violent that two Afghan children “had to be urgently evacuated for medical treatment”.

Elite British soldiers from the SAS routinely raided family compounds in search of Taliban fighters, often at night-time, in the latter stages of the UK’s long and bloody military deployment in Helmand province, which ended in 2014.

Leigh Day argues that there were “at least 30 suspicious incidents which resulted in the deaths of more than 80 individuals” between 2010 and 2013, but until now there has been no independent public investigation of what happened.

Last December, ministers announced the creation of a statutory inquiry, led by appeal court judge Lord Justice Haddon-Cave, following growing

pressure after a string of investigative reports and civil cases, which alleged that elite British troops repeatedly killed Afghans in cold blood.

It had been previously estimated that there were 54 Afghan victims from a single SAS unit, but the lawyers now argue the allegations cover more British troops and a longer period than previously suggested, and "reveal credible evidence of a widespread and systematic pattern of unlawful extrajudicial killings".

Military police launched Operation Northmoor in 2014, an investigation into allegations of more than 600 offences by British forces in Afghanistan, including the alleged killing of civilians by the SAS. It was wound down in 2017 by ministers and closed in 2019, and the MoD said no evidence of criminality was found.

The lawyers also argue that in the years that followed, there was "a wide-ranging, multilayered and years-long cover-up" involving senior officers, officials and a range of inquiries. At one point, military police ordered the leadership of the UK's special forces not to delete any material held on their server.

However, “in direct defiance of that order”, staff at the special forces headquarters “permanently deleted an unknown quantity of data” shortly before military police investigators arrived to examine it.

Full hearings are expected to start in the autumn, but on Wednesday and Thursday Haddon-Cave will decide on a request from the MoD to hold large parts of it secret, without members of the press or public present.

The MoD wants any pieces of evidence that “tend to confirm or deny the alleged involvement” of the SAS itself in Afghanistan to be heard in secret, although it has been the subject of several documentaries, reports and court hearings, and an order granting anonymity to all UK armed forces personnel.

That is being challenged by the Guardian and other media organisations, including the BBC, the Times and the Daily Mail. The lawyers for the bereaved families argue that the public inquiry should “limit the extent” of secret hearings “as far as is possible”, partly because of the seriousness of the allegations.

An MoD spokesperson said it would be up to the inquiry how it conducts its work: “It is not appropriate for the MoD to comment on cases which are within the scope of the statutory inquiry, and it is up to the statutory inquiry team, led by Lord Justice Haddon-Cave, to determine which allegations are investigated.”

Tesla delivered 10% more vehicles than in the first quarter. Photograph: Mike Blake/Reuters

Tesla

Tesla delivers record number of cars as price cuts lift sales

Carmaker co-founded by Elon Musk beats forecasts to deliver 466,000 vehicles in three months to end of June

Mark Sweney
@marksweney
Mon 3 Jul 2023 03.27 EDTFirst published on Mon 3 Jul 2023 03.04 EDT

Tesla delivered a record number of vehicles in the second quarter, as its strategy to cut prices drove a sharp increase in sales of its most popular electric vehicles.

The carmaker, which is run by the Twitter and Space X owner Elon Musk, delivered 466,000 vehicles in the three months to the end of June.

The company, which beat an average analyst forecast of 455,000 deliveries, delivered 10% more vehicles than in the first quarter and 83% more than the same period last year.

The world's most valuable carmaker, with a market value of $820bn, said it also produced 480,000 vehicles in the quarter.

"The price cuts [were] a smart poker move for Tesla and are paying major dividends in the field especially for the China market," said Dan Ives, an analyst at Wedbush Securities. "Tesla continues to play chess while other electric vehicle players are playing checkers and this was another trophy case quarter for Musk and co."

Tesla, which cut prices at the start of the year to boost demand, has set an ambitious target of increasing volumes by an average of 50% a year.

"A vast number of people want to buy a Tesla car but can't afford it," said Musk, speaking in January. "These price changes really make a difference for the average consumer."

The Tesla Model 3 saloon is priced from $32,740 after federal tax credits worth $7,500.

The company delivered 446,915 Model 3 compact cars and Model Y sport-utility vehicle – Tesla's mass-market models. It also made 19,225 deliveries of its Model S and Model X premium vehicles.

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Deliveries of its much-hyped Cybertruck, Tesla's rival in the pickup truck sector, are due to begin this quarter.

This year Tesla received a boost as General Motors, Ford, Volvo and Amazon-backed Rivian agreed to adopt its battery-charging standards.

Barbie, starring Margot Robbie (above) and Ryan Gosling, was slated to open in Vietnam on 21 July. Photograph: Landmark Media/Alamy

Barbie

Vietnam bans Barbie film over disputed map of China's South China Sea claims

Scene shows map of China's controversial 'nine-dash line' – repudiated in international ruling

Reuters
Mon 3 Jul 2023 05.51 EDTLast modified on Mon 3 Jul 2023 21.31 EDT

Vietnam has banned Warner Bros's Barbie film from domestic distribution over a scene featuring a map that shows China's unilaterally claimed territory in the South China Sea, state media have reported.

The U-shaped "nine-dash line" is used on Chinese maps to illustrate its claims over vast areas of the South China Sea, including swathes of what

Vietnam considers its continental shelf, where it has awarded oil concessions.

Barbie is the latest movie to be banned in Vietnam for depicting China's controversial nine-dash line, which was repudiated in an international arbitration ruling by a court in The Hague in 2016. China refuses to recognise the ruling.

In 2019, the Vietnamese government pulled DreamWorks's animated film Abominable and last year it banned Sony's action movie Uncharted for the same reason. Netflix also removed the Australian spy drama Pine Gap in 2021.

A photograph taken in August 2022 shows a fishing boat near Vietnam's Ly Son island, close to a disputed archipelago in the South China Sea region. Photograph: Nhac Nguyen/AFP/Getty Images

Barbie, starring Margot Robbie and Ryan Gosling, was originally slated to open in Vietnam on 21 July, the same date as in the US, according to the state-run Tuoi Tre newspaper.

"We do not grant licence for the American movie Barbie to release in Vietnam because it contains the offending image of the nine-dash line," the

paper reported, citing Vi Kien Thanh, the head of the department of cinema, a government body in charge of licensing and censoring foreign films.

Warner Bros did not respond immediately to a request for comment.

Vietnam and China have long had overlapping territorial claims to a potentially energy-rich stretch in the South China Sea. The south-east Asian country has repeatedly accused Chinese vessels of violating its sovereignty.

Vegetables planted under cover of darkness on a golf course in Gorraiz, near Pamplona. Photograph: Extinction Rebellion/AFP/Getty Images

Spain

Extinction Rebellion plugs holes on 10 Spanish golf courses in water protest

Activists denounce heavy use of water for ‘elitist leisure pursuit’ as drought continues in Spain

Sam Jones in Madrid
@swajones
Mon 3 Jul 2023 05.49 EDTLast modified on Mon 3 Jul 2023 21.31 EDT

Climate activists in Spain have filled in holes on 10 golf courses to draw attention to the huge amounts of water the “elitist leisure pursuit” uses as a nationwide drought continues in the first heatwave of the year.

Members of Extinction Rebellion (XR) revealed their latest direct action campaign in a video released on Sunday, saying they had targeted courses in

locations including Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, the Basque country, Navarra and Ibiza.

Footage showed activists plugging holes with soil and planting seedlings alongside signs reading: “Drought alert. Golf course closed for climate justice.”

In a statement, XR said it had carried out the action to “denounce the wasting of water by golf in the midst of one of the worst droughts in history”. It said golf courses in Spain used more water than the cities of Madrid and Barcelona combined, with each hole requiring more than 100,000 litres of water a day to maintain the greens.

“We cannot allow this kind of elitist leisure pursuit to continue,” the statement said. “Spain is drying up and the rural world is suffering losses running into millions because of the lack of water for crops – all because of an entertainment enjoyed by scarcely 0.6% of the population. Rich people and their leisure activities that gobble up essential resources are a luxury we cannot afford.”

While all of Spain has been in drought since January 2022, some parts of the country are more gravely affected by the lack of rain than others. Authorities in Catalonia, which has been in drought for more than three years, have introduced laws including a 40% reduction in water to be used for agriculture, a 15% reduction for industrial uses, and a cut in the average daily supply per inhabitant from 250 litres to 230 litres.

In May, the Spanish government approved a €2.2bn (£1.9bn) plan to help farmers and consumers cope with the drought, which has been exacerbated by the hottest and driest April on record.

“Spain is a country that is used to periods of drought but there’s no doubt that, as a consequence of the climate change we’re experiencing, we’re seeing far more frequent and intense events and phenomena,” said the environment minister, Teresa Ribera.

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“And we need to prepare for that by taking advantage of all the technical capacity that Spain has accrued and developed over many years. We need to deal with episodes such as the present one – and that requires planning, structural measures and also, obviously, short-term and immediate help plans.”

The Philippines has beautiful beaches and great diving spots but its tourism campaign video also included scenes from Brazil, Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates. Photograph: Eloisa Lopez/Reuters

Philippines

Agency behind ‘Love the Philippines’ tourism video sorry for using shots of other countries

Agency DDB Philippines apologises for using ‘highly inappropriate’ images that stock footage providers offer from Brazil and Indonesia

Agence France-Presse
Sun 2 Jul 2023 20.21 EDTLast modified on Mon 3 Jul 2023 21.31 EDT

A tourism campaign for the Philippines backfired after the creators of a video promoting the archipelago nation as a holiday destination said it had used stock shots from other countries.

Advertising agency DDB Philippines apologised on Sunday for the "highly inappropriate" images, which included rice terraces in Indonesia and sand dunes in Brazil.

The agency was behind the video for the government's $900,000 "Love the Philippines" tourism campaign, which launched on 27 June.

Philippines tourism campaign uses stock footage from other countries – video

The tourism ministry said the previous day it was investigating allegations that DDB's video included "non-original shots", and the video was later removed from its Facebook page.

Tourism is a key industry in the Philippines, which boasts pristine dive spots and white sand beaches, but arrivals lag those of its neighbours due to poor infrastructure and high costs.

There were 2.7 million inbound tourists to the Philippines last year, down 68% from pre-pandemic levels in 2019, according to data from the UN's World Tourism Organisation.

Questions emerged after popular Philippine blogger Sass Rogando Sasot posted on Facebook that several images in the campaign video were from other countries.

Analysis by Agence France-Presse's Fact Check team confirmed that the video showed places in Brazil, Indonesia, Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates.

DDB apologised on Sunday for using "foreign stock footage", describing it as an "unfortunate oversight on our agency's part".

"Proper screening and approval processes should have been strictly followed," DDB said in a statement. "The use of foreign stock footage in a campaign promoting the Philippines is highly inappropriate, and contradictory to the DOT's [Department of Tourism's] objectives."

The video was produced at its own expense, DDB said.

The tourism ministry said in its statement it had “repeatedly sought confirmation from DDB on the originality and ownership of all materials contained in the AVPs (audio-visual presentations) and key visuals presented to the department”.

“In all these occasions, DDB repeatedly assured the DOT that the originality and ownership of all materials are in order,” the ministry said.

Some of the images used in the promotional video can be found on the websites of stock footage providers.

For example, footage of rice terraces is on Pond5, which identified the location as Ubud on the Indonesian tourist island of Bali.

Videvo has the same aerial shot of sand dunes as the one used in the Philippine ad but says the location was Cumbuco in north-eastern Brazil.

Other footage shows a fisherman casting a net while wearing a hat that is not typically worn in the Philippines and a person driving a buggy over sand dunes in the United Arab Emirates.

A spokeswoman for the tourism ministry did not respond to requests for comment on Sunday.

The tourism minister, Christina Frasco, told local media last week the new branding campaign cost 49m pesos (nearly $900,000).

Frasco said the ministry conducted a global survey which found that, in the post-pandemic era, tourists wanted “authentic interactions with communities”.

The new slogan replaced “It’s more fun in the Philippines”.

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