

The Guardian

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Headlines monday 19 december 2022

- [Cop15 Historic deal struck to halt biodiversity loss by 2030](#)
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The age of extinctionCop15

Cop15: historic deal struck to halt biodiversity loss by 2030

Agreement on '30 by 30' target forced through by Chinese president, ignoring objections from African states

- [Cop15: key points of the nature deal at a glance](#)



The Cop15 agreement in Montreal is the culmination of more than four years of negotiations. Photograph: Julian Haber/Courtesy of Environment and Climate Change Canada

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[Patrick Greenfield](#) and [Phoebe Weston](#) in Montreal

Mon 19 Dec 2022 05.46 ESTFirst published on Mon 19 Dec 2022 04.37 EST

Governments appear to have signed a [once-in-a-decade deal](#) to halt the destruction of Earth's ecosystems, but the agreement seems to have been forced through by the Chinese president, ignoring the objections of some African states.

After more than four years of negotiations, repeated delays due to the Covid-19 pandemic and talks into the night on Sunday in Montreal, nearly 200 countries – [but not the US or the Vatican](#) – signed an agreement at the biodiversity Cop15, which was co-hosted by Canada and China, to put humanity on a path to living in harmony with nature by the middle of the century.

In an extraordinary plenary that began on Sunday evening and lasted for more than seven hours, countries wrangled over the final agreement. Finally, at about 3.30am local time on Monday, news broke that an agreement had been struck.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo's negotiator appeared to block the final deal presented by China, telling the plenary that he could not support the agreement in its current form because it did not create a new fund for biodiversity, separate to the existing UN fund, the global environment facility (GEF). China, Brazil, Indonesia, India and Mexico are the largest recipients of GEF funding, and some African states wanted more money for conservation as part of the final deal.

However, moments later, China's environment minister and the [Cop15](#) president, Huang Runqiu, signalled that the agreement was finished and agreed, and the plenary burst into applause.

Negotiators from Cameroon, Uganda and the DRC expressed incredulity that the agreement had been put through. The DRC said it had formally objected to the agreement, but a UN lawyer said it had not. The negotiator from Cameroon called it "a fraud", while Uganda said there had been a "coup d'état" against the Cop15.

Amid [plummeting insect numbers](#), acidifying oceans [filled with plastic waste](#), and the [rampant overconsumption of the planet's resources](#) as humanity's population grows wealthier and soars past [8 billion](#), the agreement, if implemented, could signal major changes to farming, business supply chains and the role of Indigenous communities in conservation.

The deal was negotiated over two weeks and includes targets to protect 30% of the planet for nature by the end of the decade, reform \$500bn (£410bn) of environmentally damaging subsidies, and restore 30% of the planet's degraded terrestrial, inland water, coastal and marine ecosystems.

Governments also agreed urgent actions to halt human-caused extinctions of species known to be under threat and to promote their recovery.

The deal follows scientific warnings that humans are causing the [start of Earth's sixth mass extinction](#) event, the largest loss of life since the time of the dinosaurs.

Canada's Steven Guilbeault, a former [environmental campaigner turned minister](#), said the Kunming-Montreal pact was a "bold step forward to protect nature".

"Just six months ago, we didn't know if we were going to even be able to have this conference and or even less to be able to adopt this historic document. And this was only possible through the collaboration of all countries present here tonight," he said.

Governments [have never met a target they have set for themselves on nature](#) in previous decades, and the Montreal-Kunming agreement has been the subject of a major push to change the years of failure, apathy and environmental destruction.

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In echoes of last month's [Cop27 climate summit in Egypt](#), divisions over money were the main sticking point in the final hours of negotiations. EU member states, the UK and other countries from the global north pushed for ambitious conservation targets in the final text, with co-hosts Canada saying that the success of the summit depended on the headline target to [protect 30% of Earth by the end of the decade for nature](#), known as 30 by 30.

Countries from the global south, including Brazil, Indonesia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo – [mega-diverse countries home to the world's three largest rainforests](#) – wanted governments to agree to the creation of a new biodiversity fund as part of the Montreal pact to pay for new conservation targets.

In the final agreement, countries decided to create a new fund within the UN's main existing biodiversity financing mechanism – the global environment facility – and commit to future talks about a separate fund. Rich countries agreed to provide \$30bn of aid for biodiversity by the end of the decade, believed to be a substantial increase on current levels.

Although the Montreal-Kunming agreement is not legally binding, governments will be tasked with showing their progress on meeting the targets with national biodiversity plans, akin to nationally determined contributions, which countries use to show progress on meeting the Paris climate agreement.

Observers expressed disappointment at the weaker-than-hoped-for language on consumption and pesticide use, both significant drivers of biodiversity loss. The term “nature positive”, which some scientists had said would be the biodiversity equivalent of “net zero”, did not appear in the agreement.

Alongside the nature targets, countries reached a historic agreement to develop a financial mechanism for sharing the benefits from drug discoveries, vaccines and food products that come from digital forms of biodiversity, known as digital sequence information or DSI, after rows about biopiracy in the lead-up to Cop15.

Find more age of extinction coverage here, and follow biodiversity reporters Phoebe Weston and Patrick Greenfield on Twitter for all the latest news and features

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Politics live with Andrew Sparrow**Politics**

Braverman says she wants to deliver Rwanda deportations at scale as soon as possible – as it happened

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Emergency services

Ambulance staff need firm promise on pay to call off strike, says union

Mere commitment to discuss pay, so far refused by health secretary, would now be insufficient

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



The ambulance strikes involve control room staff and other team members as well as paramedics. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Peter Walker Political correspondent
[@peterwalker99](#)

Mon 19 Dec 2022 04.20 EST Last modified on Mon 19 Dec 2022 04.34 EST

Ambulance staff would require a definite commitment from ministers on pay rather than just a promise of talks to call off their planned strike on

Wednesday, according to a union leader who said trust had largely broken down with the government.

Christina McAnea, the general secretary of [Unison](#), one of three unions involved in the strike by ambulance crews in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, said even a commitment to discuss pay, thus far refused by the health secretary, Steve Barclay, would now be insufficient.

“It has to be a very firm commitment,” McAnea told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme on Monday. “A change in attitude would definitely be welcome. But they would have to come up with something that was more than just ‘let’s talk about this’ for us to call off the strike on Wednesday.”

Barclay is [expected to contact unions](#) to urge fresh talks to avert further strikes, and the government’s Cobra emergency committee is due to meet again on Monday to coordinate the response to their impact.

On Sunday, Barclay called on ambulance trusts to ensure sufficient coverage to guarantee patient safety during Wednesday’s strike, which will come a day after another strike by nurses, also over pay. Barclay said unions needed to “meet their obligations” for emergency cover.

But McAnea said such was the poor level of service normally that efforts by hospitals to clear beds and ensure people could be removed from ambulances promptly meant the situation could be better than usual on Wednesday.

“When they come forward with what they see are their minimum staffing levels, in some cases they’re at the same, if not higher, than you would have on any day of the week,” she said.

“I’ve been going to visit our members and they’re telling me that they used to do maybe nine or 10 calls in a shift. Now they’re lucky if they do three. That’s not because they’re not working hard. That’s because they’re stuck in ambulances caring for patients outside A&E departments.”

Another union leader representing ambulance crews, Sharon Graham, of Unite, said Barclay would be responsible if patients suffered. “It’s Steve

Barclay who is holding the country to ransom,” she [told the Mirror](#). “He will have to carry the can if patients suffer because he thinks this is his Thatcher moment.”

She said Barclay was in for a “rude awakening” if he continued to refuse to negotiate on pay, saying: “The unions are not going to blink first.”

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The ambulance strikes, involving control room staff and other team members as well as paramedics, have been called by Unison, Unite and the GMB unions over a demand for a bigger pay increase than that decided earlier this year by the [NHS](#) pay review body.

Barclay and other ministers have insisted they are unwilling to go beyond the offer already made, which gives an average increase of 4.75% and a guaranteed minimum rise of £1,400 a year. The only possible movement could be through an offer of extra one-off payments.

While ambulance staff will respond to life-threatening situations, people with less critical injuries or ailments are likely to have to find another way to reach hospital.

McAnea said her members did not wish to be taking industrial action. She said: “I’ll say again, none of our members want to be on strike. This isn’t something they chosen to do. But the government has been completely intransigent. We’ve been calling on them for weeks and weeks to talk to us about this, to actually sit down and have a proper discussion about how we try and resolve this dispute. And they have adamantly refused to do that.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/dec/19/ambulance-staff-strike-pay-union>

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World Cup 2022

Argentina beat France on penalties to win World Cup after stunning final



Lionel Messi is lifted on the shoulders of Sergio Agüero as Argentina win the World Cup in dramatic fashion. Photograph: Tom Jenkins/The Guardian

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About this content

David Hytner at Lusail Stadium

@DaveHytner

Sun 18 Dec 2022 12.56 EST Last modified on Sun 18 Dec 2022 18.33 EST

It was a consecration, the spiritual overtones entirely appropriate. Lionel Messi not only emulated the deity of Argentinian football, Diego Maradona, by leading the nation to World Cup glory; he finally plugged the burning gap on his CV, winning the one title that has eluded him – at the fifth time of asking, surely the last time. In the process he gilded his claim to being recognised as the greatest player of them all.

Argentina had to win this final three times, France refusing to accept it was Messi's destiny to get his hands on the iconic gold trophy, that it was somehow preordained. It will go down as surely the finest World Cup final of all time, the most pulsating, one of the greatest games in history because of how Kylian Mbappé hauled France up off the canvas towards the end of normal time.

It had been billed as Messi v Mbappe, the Argentinian hero opening the scoring from the penalty spot and having a hand in Ángel Di María's goal for 2-0. But then came Mbappé, shattering the notion that Argentina would

close out the win with the minimum of fuss. This Argentina team do not really operate like that. They love to trade in late drama. Think of their wins over Australia and the Netherlands in the knockout rounds.

Quick Guide

Qatar: beyond the football

Show



It was a World Cup like no other. For the last 12 years the Guardian has been reporting on the issues surrounding Qatar 2022, from corruption and human rights abuses to the treatment of migrant workers and discriminatory laws. The best of our journalism is gathered on our dedicated [Qatar: Beyond the Football](#) home page for those who want to go deeper into the issues beyond the pitch.

Guardian reporting goes far beyond what happens on the pitch. Support our investigative journalism [today](#).

Photograph: Caspar Benson

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A part of the story was France's champion courage, the 2018 winners being revived by a clutch of Didier Deschamps substitutions. That and Mbappé, who was unplayable from the 80th minute. He scored twice in 97 seconds to force extra-time; the first a penalty, the second a sublime side-on volley and there was a point towards the end of regulation time when he appeared hell-bent on making sure that the additional period would not be needed.

Back came Argentina in extra-time, Messi scoring his second for 3-2. But back came France, Mbappé equalising with a second penalty on 118 minutes for his hat-trick and the Golden Boot. He finished the tournament with eight – one more than Messi. He joined Sir Geoff Hurst as a hat-trick scorer in the men's final.

At this point it is worth delving into the mayhem that gripped at the very end of extra-time.

Neither team were ready to accept that a penalty shootout was inevitable. Not a bit of it. Randal Kolo Muani, on as a substitute for the game of his life, could not stretch to head home a cross by Mbappé and will have nightmares about the one-on-one that he failed to convert, the Argentina goalkeeper, Emiliano Martínez, coming out on top.

At the other end the Argentina substitute Lautaro Martínez blew a gilt-edged header and then Mbappé beat two men on yet another explosive burst but not a third. Never has so much been crammed into an extra-time finale.

So to penalties and, after Mbappé and Messi had scored, it was over to Emiliano Martínez and some of his dark arts to make the difference. After he had saved from the substitute Kingsley Coman, Martínez threw the ball away before the next France kick, forcing the 22-year-old Aurélien Tchouaméni to go and fetch it, further heightening his anxiety. Tchouaméni dragged his kick past the post.



Emiliano Martínez saves from Kingsley Coman in the shootout. Photograph: Natacha Pisarenko/AP

Martínez had to be physically restrained by the referee, Szymon Marciniak, from confronting France's next taker, Kolo Muani. Martínez was booked; Kolo Muani lashed home. But the scene was set for the substitute Gonzalo Montiel to win it – to crown Messi and Argentina.

When Montiel scored, Messi sank to his knees in the centre circle, engulfed by teammates. Argentina's third [World Cup](#) will go down as Messi's World Cup, just as the second in 1986 had belonged to Maradona. Both men came to transcend their teams and the tournaments, with Messi collecting the Golden Ball here as the competition's star player. It has long felt as if he has had a celestial scriptwriter at work, guiding him to his destiny. The image of him and the trophy was what so many fans – and not just those from Argentina – had craved.

The start of the game came to feel like an awfully long time ago. It was when Messi located his passing rhythms straight away and Di María dazzled. Di María won the opening penalty, exploding away from Ousmane Dembélé before being caught and Messi did the rest.

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Emotional Argentina fans celebrate their nation's third World Cup victory – video

The first half was all Argentina, a scintillating period for them, Messi seemingly playing his own game. He fizzed or curled his passes, wowed with his changes of direction. He even threw himself into challenges.

Di María had lifted high early on and it said everything about France's struggles that Deschamps made a double substitution in the 41st minute. He moved Mbappé from the left into the centre and Olivier Giroud was the furious fall guy. Dembélé was also withdrawn. On came Kolo Muani and Marcus Thuram. By then it was 2-0. Messi fired a flowing move with a flick to Julián Álvarez, who immediately got Alexis Mac Allister running. Di María took off, too, on the other side and Mac Allister's low crossfield ball was made to measure. Di María was overcome after his emphatic finish.



The winning moment: Argentina celebrate Gonzalo Montiel's winning spot-kick. Photograph: Tom Jenkins/The Guardian

France had been a grisly second best in the first half of normal time and, although they dug out footholds in the second half, they struggled to create. Argentina – with Di María outstanding until his withdrawal – continued to look the more dangerous.

Then everything changed. Deschamps' substitutions were acts of alchemy. He introduced Coman for the disappointing Antoine Griezmann and went to 4-4-2, Kolo Muani moving up alongside Mbappé.

It was Kolo Muani who won France's first penalty from Nicolás Otamendi and suddenly Argentina were overtaken by nerves. The equaliser for 2-2 followed Coman robbing Messi and Mbappé finessing a give-and-go with Thuram before finishing spectacularly. The France substitutes streamed across the pitch towards Mbappé and France went close to a winner in regulation time, with Mbappé now rampant. At the other end, though, they needed Hugo Lloris to tip over a Messi blast to force extra-time.

Quick Guide

Hurst pays tribute as Mbappé joins him in hat-trick club

Show

It was a record that had stood 56 years and countless retellings – but Kylian Mbappé has finally ended Sir Geoff Hurst's reign as the only man to score a hat-trick in a World Cup final. The Paris Saint-Germain striker struck his first for France from the penalty spot on 79 minutes, swept in a chipped through-ball 97 seconds later, and scored another penalty in extra time to take the game to a shootout – where he converted his kick but still ended up on the losing side.

Two of Hurst's goals in England's 1966 win over West Germany came in added time, including his infamous second which ricocheted down off the bar and was ruled to have bounced down over the line. Ally McCoist, ITV's Scottish co-commentator at last night's final in Qatar, drily said Mbappé's display made him "the first person to score a hat trick in a World Cup final with all three over the line..."

Sir Geoff, meanwhile, took to Twitter moments after Mbappé dispatched his third, tweeting: "Many congratulations to Mbappé, whatever happens ... I've had a great run!" **David Hills**

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

Argentina shook their heads clear in extra-time. Lautaro Martínez made a difference. Twice he was denied by last-ditch Dayot Upamecano interventions and, when he unloaded for goal and Lloris could only parry, there was Messi to get the ball over the line.

There would be further twists, including Mbappé's second penalty for a Montiel handball before Messi and Argentina could celebrate.

What the papers sayNewspapers

‘The agony and the ecstasy’: what the UK papers say about the World Cup final

The newspaper front pages declare it Lionel Messi’s final, as they unite in celebrating Argentina’s win over France



UK newspaper front pages on the day that Argentina beat France to win the Fifa World Cup. Composite: Daily Mail / i / The Daily Telegraph / The Sun / Mirror / The Times / Daily Express

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[Jonathan Yerushalmey](#)

Sun 18 Dec 2022 19.52 EST Last modified on Sun 18 Dec 2022 19.54 EST

One man dominates the front – and back – pages of UK newspapers on Monday, after a “thrilling” World Cup final in Qatar.

Under the headline “Messi’s crowning glory”, the **Guardian’s** [Barney Ronay](#) calls it “the greatest Fifa World Cup final ever played”, and – more tellingly – a coronation for “the greatest footballer of the age”.

Guardian front page, Monday 19 December 2022: Workers who made jeans for Tesco ‘trapped in effective forced labour’
pic.twitter.com/bnm3TPUjMH

— The Guardian (@guardian) [December 18, 2022](#)

The **Mail** outlines “The agony... and the ecstasy”, as French star Kylian Mbappé is consoled by President Emmanuel Macron, and [Lionel Messi](#) celebrates Argentina’s win with his family.

Monday's Mail: Outrage At Neville's World Cup Rant Over UK Strikes
[#TomorrowsPapersToday](#) [#DailyMail](#) [#Mail](#)
pic.twitter.com/J0QAny7q7z

— Tomorrows Papers Today (@TmorrowsPapers) [December 18, 2022](#)

The **Sun** calls it the “greatest World Cup final ... since 1966”, with a full-page image of Lionel Messi lifting the trophy and the headline “In the hand of God”.

On tomorrow's front page: Lionel Messi finally got his hands on the World Cup as Argentina beat France after a thrilling final in Qatar
pic.twitter.com/xAHIafnhCX

— The Sun (@TheSun) [December 18, 2022](#)

The back page of the **Express** reports Messi as saying, “that his career is now complete after [Argentina](#) edged out France in a thrilling World Cup final penalty shoot-out.”

Above the banner, “Dream world”, the paper carries an image of the Argentinian star being carried on the shoulders of his teammates.

Monday's EXPRESS Sport: “Dream World” [#TomorrowsPapersToday](#)
pic.twitter.com/L7y0WPSkMe

— Allie Hodgkins-Brown (@AllieHBNews) [December 18, 2022](#)

The **Metro** calls it the “Crowning glory”, and despite writing that Qatar was almost certainly his “last tilt at World Cup glory”, the paper quotes Messi as saying “I'm not going to retire from the national team ... I want to keep playing.” Its front page image carries the headline: “Mess hysteria”.

Monday's METRO Sport: “Crowning Glory” [#TomorrowsPapersToday](#)
pic.twitter.com/MpyiGkLIjA

— Allie Hodgkins-Brown (@AllieHBNews) [December 18, 2022](#)

The **Mirror** says, “The GOAT... that’s Messi”. The paper writes that Messi “insisted he will not retire”, and quotes him as saying, “I knew that God was going to give me the World Cup. I was sure”.

Monday’s MIRROR Sport: “The Goat ...That’s Messi & The Final”
[#TomorrowsPapersToday](#) pic.twitter.com/leUITKcXTO

— Allie Hodgkins-Brown (@AllieHBNews) [December 18, 2022](#)

The **Telegraph**’s back page carries another full-page image of Messi, with the simple headline, “Miraculous. Magical. Messi.”

Monday’s TELEGRAPH Sport: “Miraculous. Magical. Messi.”
[#TomorrowsPapersToday](#) pic.twitter.com/b2w3RIjJog

— Allie Hodgkins-Brown (@AllieHBNews) [December 18, 2022](#)

The **i** calls Messi the “greatest of all time”. The paper says he has now joined the “ranks of Pelé and Maradona as he guides Argentina to World Cup glory in the most gripping final in history”.

Monday’s i Sport: “Greatest of all time” [#TomorrowsPapersToday](#)
pic.twitter.com/GAdMupTIzx

— Allie Hodgkins-Brown (@AllieHBNews) [December 18, 2022](#)

Finally, the **Times** carries a simple assessment of what is sure to be a historic night in footballing history: “The greatest”.

Monday’s TIMES Sport: “The greatest” [#TomorrowsPapersToday](#)
pic.twitter.com/ezAipWtsqj

— Allie Hodgkins-Brown (@AllieHBNews) [December 18, 2022](#)

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How Isy Suttie met Elis James: ‘It was the funniest time in the bedroom I’d ever had!’

Elis, 42, had seen fellow comedian Isy, 44, in *Peep Show* before they both performed at a gig in 2009. Engaged since 2016, they have two children and live in London



Isy and Elis ... ‘It’s nice to be with someone who appreciates those feelings of self-doubt.’

[Lizzie Cernik](#)

Mon 19 Dec 2022 01.00 EST Last modified on Mon 19 Dec 2022 03.53 EST

When comedians Isy and Elis met at a standup gig in Barnstaple in 2009, the first thing she noticed wasn’t his humorous charm, but his Ribena-soaked jacket. “I was excited to be booked alongside Isy because I’d seen her on *Peep Show*,” says Elis. But while driving from his home in Cardiff, disaster

had struck. “There was a carton of Ribena between my legs and I had to brake suddenly,” he laughs.

They had a brief chat before going on stage, and Elis thought she was “really funny and pretty” while Isy noticed he was “fun, if a bit haphazard”. After the gig, Elis accidentally left the jacket behind. Isy was “pleased to have an excuse to see him again” and found his details on their booking email so she could let him know. “Now I wonder if he did it on purpose!” she says.

They became Facebook friends and, although they both fancied each other, Elis’s profile said he was in a relationship, so Isy didn’t think anything would come of it. “I’d actually come out of a relationship 18 months earlier but hadn’t changed my status. It was back when Facebook would announce your breakup to the world with a broken heart. I didn’t want messages from people I went to school with telling me there’s plenty more fish in the sea.”

In December 2009, they were booked to do another gig together, this time in Cardiff, where Elis was living. They had a drink at the bar afterwards, and Elis managed to slip into conversation that he was single. “I don’t know how, but I already knew,” says Isy. “So I was really excited to see him again.” Elis stayed in her hotel room that night. “We had such a laugh. It was just the funniest time in the bedroom I’d ever had,” she says. For Elis, the evening was brilliant because he’d “held a candle for Isy for six months”.

They arranged to meet in London, where Isy lived, a few weeks later. “We went to a pub in Oval. It was the best date I’d ever been on,” he says. Even slipping on ice and bruising his coccyx couldn’t dampen the mood. “When I fell, I swore in Welsh, but I told her it meant ‘Jesus Christ’,” he says. “Afterwards, I think I knew we were going to be together for ever, and I never really even believed in that before.”



Isy and Elis at the Shard.

They quickly realised they wanted to be together, but the timing wasn't ideal. "Isy was going to Sydney for a few weeks to work, then I was going there to do standup for three months," says Elis. They had 12 days together in between the two trips, but being separated was difficult. "We were pining for each other so much," says Isy. While Elis admits the tour was a great opportunity, he never would have accepted the offer if he had met his partner first. "The time difference was really hard. I'm useless with tech so I spent a fortune on phone calls," he says.

Elis returned home in May 2010, and they spent as much time together as they could. "We often went to each other's gigs because it was a chance to see each other," says Isy. As well as understanding the physical pressures that accompanied life on the comedy circuit, from late nights to frequent travel, they had a shared appreciation of the psychological aspects of the job. "We both feel incredibly lucky to be still doing this 13 years later. But it's nice to be with someone who appreciates those feelings of self-doubt and criticism," says Isy.

The couple live together in London and have two children, born in 2014 and 2019. They became engaged in 2016 but haven't set a wedding date yet. "We will do it, but we moved after the pandemic and still have to unpack the

new house properly, which has been hard work,” says Isy. “Luckily we still find plenty of ways to make each other laugh.”

Jane Is Trying (W&N) by Isy Suttie is out now. Her tour show, Jackpot, is at Cardiff Glee on 8 January. See isysuttie.co.uk. Elis co-presents his Radio 5 Live show with John Robins every Friday from 2pm-4pm.

Want to share your story? Tell us a little about yourself, your partner and how you got together by filling in the form [here](#)

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The Have I Got News for You 2022 quiz of the year



Boris Johnson making his resignation speech outside No 10 Downing Street in September. Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA

It was another big year for bizarre news stories, but how good is your recall?
Test your knowledge, from Partygate to Ukraine

Mon 19 Dec 2022 02.00 EST

1. After spending a few years wandering along the south coast and angrily pointing at the sea, Nigel Farage returned from political limbo and suggested another referendum on what?

Abolishing the House of Lords

Net zero targets

Withdrawing from Nato

Rejoining the EU

2. Boris Johnson caused outrage at the Conservative party's spring conference when he compared the EU referendum to what?

The Normandy landings

Sophie's Choice

The war in Ukraine

The persecution of Jesus

3. In one of 2022's more peculiar Brexit headlines, it was alleged that new trade laws had "squashed" which UK industry?

Highlighter pens

Lip fillers

Edible insects

Vibrators

4. During a meeting with Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov, the then foreign secretary Liz Truss apparently said the UK would never recognise Russia's sovereignty over the Rostov and Voronezh regions. Why was this a problem?



She mispronounced both regions
Both are already part of Russia
They are islands in the Aegean Sea
They don't exist

5. How did former president Donald Trump suggest the US could attack Russia without anybody finding out?

Use high-altitude drones
Build a tunnel from Alaska to Russia
Cover planes in Chinese flags
Do it at night

6. After intense pressure, which global mega-corporation decided to suspend operations in Russia?

Pepsi
McDonald's
Coca-Cola
All of the above

7. After the many, many scandals that Boris Johnson survived during his premiership, the catalyst for his downfall was the appointment of which MP to the position of deputy chief whip?

Steve Baker

Chris Pincher

William Wragg

Crispin Blunt

8. When MP Andrea Jenkyns left Downing Street in the hours leading up to Boris Johnson's resignation, how did she react to the crowds gathered outside?



She raised her middle finger

She booed them

She shouted "shame!" 12 times

She turned her back on them

9. On 8 July, the Times featured a run-down of all the Tory MPs hoping to replace Boris Johnson, but why was the paper criticised over its choice of photo for Penny Mordaunt?

She was wearing a swimming costume

Her head had been cropped out

She was holding three glasses of wine

It wasn't Penny Mordaunt

10. As Boris Johnson faced increasing pressure over parties at No 10, which fellow golden-haired MP came rushing to his defence, arguing that the “circumstances” of working in Downing Street were different to those of other workplaces across Britain?

Michael Fabricant

Tom Tugendhat

Oliver Dowden

Grant Shapps

11. One of the parties investigated by Sue Gray took place on the day Dominic Cummings left No 10, and was said to be themed around which band?

The Beach Boys

Fleetwood Mac

AC/DC

Abba

12. During one reportedly boozy session on 16 April 2021, revellers were said to have broken what in the Downing Street garden?



A statue of Winston Churchill

A ceramic pot

A patio table

A swing

13. Who was suspended from the Labour party in 2022 after being branded a “serial bully” by the independent expert panel?

John Prescott

Melvyn Bragg

Peter Mandelson

John Bercow

14. A tweet by Labour’s Manchester mayor, Andy Burnham, went viral early in the year when he highlighted the price of what?

Food

Rail fares

Motorway toll roads

Fuel

15. Pressure continued to ramp up over Keir Starmer’s lockdown curry well into the summer, but can you remember which brand of beer he was drinking in the now-infamous photo?

Peroni

Newcastle Brown Ale

San Miguel

Hobgoblin

16. In May, 192 Republicans voted against a bill for \$28m to tackle a US shortage of what?

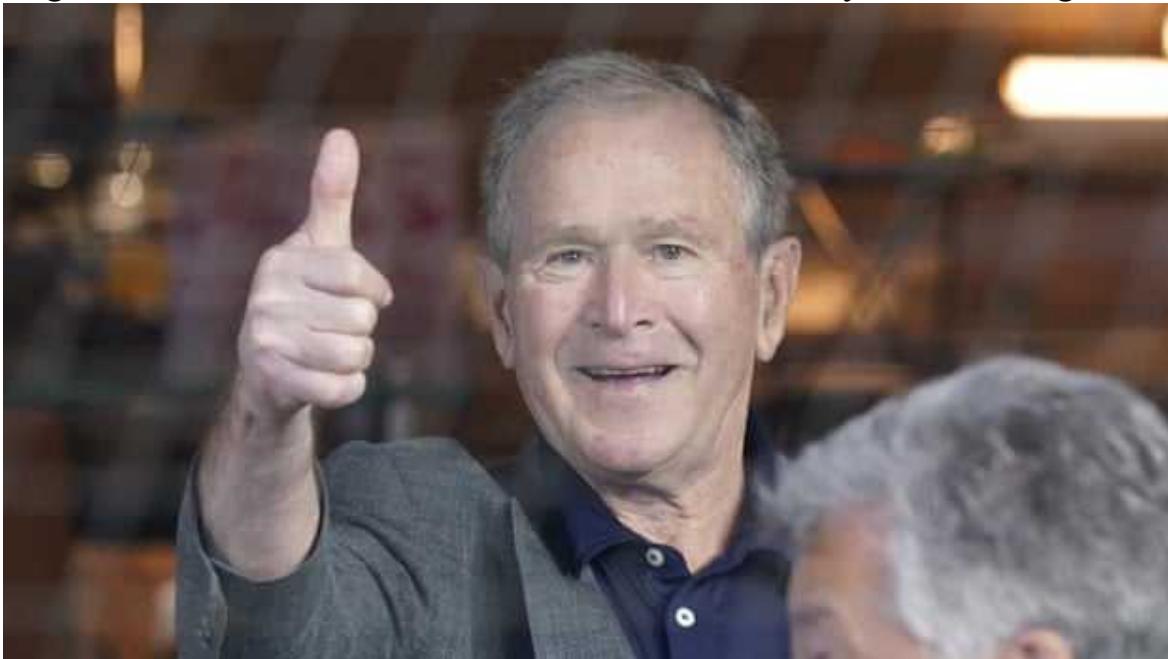
Insulin

Birth control pills

Formula milk

Wheat

17. During a speech in Texas, America's second most gaffe-prone president, George W Bush, was left red-faced after accidentally condemning what?



- The Republican party
- One of his dad's policies
- A local war veterans' charity
- The invasion of Iraq

18. By far one of the most inflammatory news stories of the year came when the US supreme court overturned 1973's landmark Roe vs Wade abortion ruling. Following the decision, what did Pope Francis compare terminations to?

- A terrorist attack
- Hiring a hitman
- Slapping God in the face
- Blowing up a hospital

19. One sad inevitability of the US coming out of lockdown was the return of preventable gun violence. After three mass shootings in four weeks, House minority leader Kevin McCarthy said that schools should use Covid funds to do what?

- Hold active shooter training
- Install alarms
- Fortify classrooms

Get rid of doors

20. On 12 April, Boris Johnson and Rishi Sunak received £50 fixed penalty notices after being found to have breached Covid rules. In stark contrast, a woman from Peterlee was fined £10,000 for organising what?

A balloon launch

A charity walk

A candlelight vigil

A karaoke competition

21. During an interview with Sophie Raworth on the BBC's Sunday Morning programme that inevitably kept returning to the issue of Partygate, former health secretary Jeremy Hunt twice declined to say that Boris Johnson was what?



Pressuring MPs to defend him

Someone he considered a friend

An honest man

The best person for the job

22. When the Met finally concluded its investigation, what was the total number of fixed penalty notices issued in relation to Downing Street “work events”?

56

96

126

156

23.A few days after the investigation ended, photos were obtained by ITV of Boris Johnson raising a glass during purported leaving drinks for which departing member of staff?

Lee Cain

Dominic Cummings

Munira Mirza

Dan Rosenfield

24.Upon clearing Keir Starmer and Angela Rayner of any wrongdoing, police described the curry and beer event as what?

Reasonably necessary for work

A well-earned meal

Justified sustenance

A business luncheon

- Extracted from *Have I Got News for You: The Quiz of 2022* (Little, Brown, £14.99). To support the *Guardian* and *Observer* order your copy at guardianbookshop.com. Delivery charges may apply
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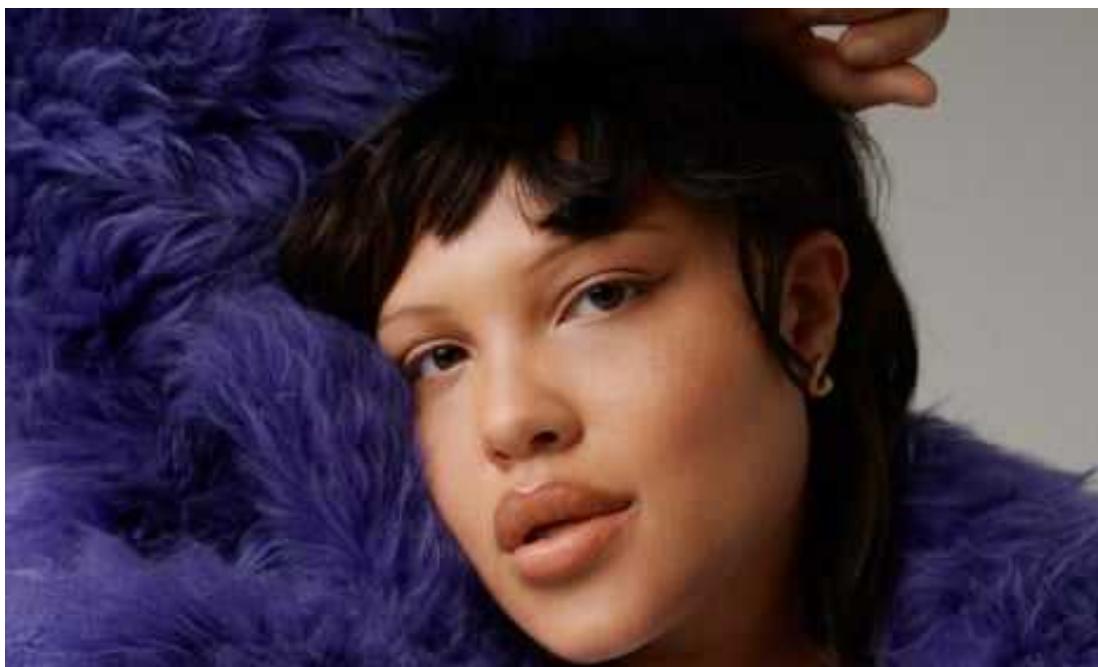
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Alva Claire: 'I don't do things by halves'

[Kate Finnigan](#)



‘I always had this belief’: Alva Claire wears top by operasport.net, jacket by blumarine.com, earrings by lovenesslee.com. Photograph: Danika Magdlena/The Observer

London-born, Brooklyn-based Alva Claire has established herself as one of fashion’s hottest models. But, she says, it’s been a long time coming

Mon 19 Dec 2022 04.29 EST Last modified on Mon 19 Dec 2022 13.02 EST

Even via a computer screen, Alva Claire is luminous. Her skin has the sheen and glow of someone with a diet rich in omegas and antioxidants, her smile is campaign-ready, her cleavage, cartoonishly framed by a tight, black peekaboo top, is magnificent and cheering on a dull autumn afternoon in my kitchen. I’m pretty confident Claire won’t mind me saying that. Not only is the London-born 30-year-old model in possession of a wicked sense of humour and a contagious cackle, she knows the power clothes have to attract and provoke. “We tell stories when we get dressed in the morning,” she says later. “Whether you like it or not, we’re all telling a story.”

It is mid-October and Claire is in her apartment in Brooklyn, where she lives when she’s not in London. She’s been in town for a week, the longest she’s been in one spot since the summer. Fashion month happened in September; Claire walked in 14 shows in New York, London, Milan and Paris. “I feel like I’ve been on tour,” she says, “but without the lovely singing voice.”

We tell stories when we get dressed in the morning. Whether you like it or not, we’re all telling a story

Alva Claire

Claire may not yet have reached Kate Moss and Naomi Campbell levels of household name recognition, but give her a minute. She laughs off the idea of being famous, but to those who follow fashion or models, Alva Claire McKenzie is a rock star. In the past few years she’s been the face of MAC cosmetics and of Rimmel London. She’s starred in a campaign for Beyoncé’s sportswear brand, Ivy Park. All after coming to global attention in 2020, when she walked the catwalk for Savage x Fenty, Rihanna’s underwear brand, wearing lacy lingerie and latex boots. Just days before she had been one of the first “plus-size” models to walk on a Versace catwalk,

alongside [Jill Kortleve](#) and Precious Lee. While some raised eyebrows at the fact it took the brand so long to employ plus-sized models, Claire has only positive things to say. “There’s a feeling when you put Versace on. That’s what I projected when I went out there, feeling super-strong, super-powerful.” She goes on, “As a model I see myself as embodying a character. I love shoots or shows when there’s a challenge to present a different kind of imagery. I suppose it’s seeing myself and my body in places I haven’t seen it before. Where I’ve not seen anyone like me do that before.”

In November, Claire took part in the fourth riotous Savage x Fenty fashion show. When [Rihanna](#) first launched these loud and proud catwalk shows – now streamed annually on Amazon Prime – with a cast of diverse models embracing a multitude of ethnicities and body shapes – it changed the conversation around women’s lingerie. Savage upturned the dominant years of the Victoria’s Secret annual catwalk shows, which defined the female body ideal as mostly white, thin, pneumatically breasted and as approved by the A-list men who always sat in the front row critically assessing the... outfits? In contrast, the women in Rihanna’s shows seem to enjoy and embrace their own idea of sexy, not someone else’s. It changed the experience of women who had previously felt alienated by fashion shows and by underwear.

“It makes me really happy whenever anyone tells me how the show made them feel, because it shows that fashion and art can really change things,” Claire says. “It’s amazing to see the power that gets instilled in people when they start to recognise themselves in different places in society. When I realised that it was like, ‘OK, this is pretty strong. I feel quite proud.’”

Growing up, Claire didn’t have that experience. An avid collector of fashion magazines (“*i-D*, *Dazed*, *Vogue*... I used to spend ages deciding which one I was going to buy because when you’re spending £4 on a magazine it’s not a joke, is it?”), she recently did a bit of a cull of her collection. “It was interesting when I went back through them how many of those magazines were just cover-to-cover white models. And it wasn’t even that long ago,” she says. “I thought how odd it was that I grew up with that.”

What was it then that she found so compelling in them? “Oh, the creativity, the photographers. Being able to go off in your imagination or romanticise or dream about something. That’s what a good fashion editorial does. It creates a world that you can enter. That’s what I was taking from it. It definitely wasn’t, ‘Oh wow, that looks like me!'” She laughs again. “It was not like that.”



‘People don’t see the journey behind what someone’s done’: Alva Claire wears dress by chloe.com, necklace and rings by alighieri.com, chain and earrings by completedworks.com, and shoes by blumarine.com. Photograph: Danika Magdelen/The Observer

Five foot eight and leggy, with full lips and a hooded gaze that can be fierce or dreamy or come-hither, Claire was told, for years, that she should try modelling. As a teenager she was approached by several scouts and was signed to an agency when she was 18. But while visual imagery was a major preoccupation in her family, it was creating it rather than being in it that took priority. “No one talked about appearance. It was more like: what’s going on in your head? What are you up to?” Her Jamaican father, Everal, is a graphic designer who had a hand in the titles for the BBC’s *Top of the Pops*. Her American mother, Susan, a book artist, taught at Camberwell College of Arts. “They had their work but they also had their own practice. There was this whole idea: go off and do your own thing, focus on multiple projects.

People were always creating art. I'm grateful for that, because it helps me approach things in an open way. I'm not really afraid of walking into a situation and being creative with people I don't know that well."

She's most recently employed that talent in a design collaboration for a new collection with the Danish womenswear brand [OpéraSPORT](#), launched in a catwalk show Claire modelled in at Copenhagen fashion week last year. Founders Stephanie Gundelach and Awa Malina Stelter liked her attitude and her personal style, which has always included a lot of vintage. "It's how I expressed myself when I was younger. I remember being actively annoyed when the girls at school all wore the same thing," she says. "I liked that I was wearing something no one else would find anywhere. I appreciate old things. I love trawling through charity shops. Anywhere I go I try and make time to do that."

She took that as her inspiration for her collection, which she calls "essentials with little quirks", and includes stretch ribbed dresses, logo T-shirts, a vegan leather coat and a retro-style tracksuit. A slick leather suit jacket is based on a find from a Vancouver thrift store. "I've worn the original so much it's literally falling apart now." She often wears menswear items, describing herself as "bopping around south London like a teenage boy in my hoodie" when she's back at home.

On paper Claire's story might sound entirely predictable – beautiful young woman, arty parents, model, oh, and now a designer, blah blah blah – but it's not really like that. It wasn't long ago (and let's not pretend the problem is fixed) that the fashion world outright rejected black and curvier women. That's why despite being scouted, despite being signed, Claire didn't make it at 18. She didn't even make a living from modelling during her early 20s, the years when a model is usually at her busiest. At that point she was mainly working in the background, in retail or as a styling assistant. "People don't see the journey behind what someone's done," she says. "We live in a culture now where it appears that success is almost instant, but there's always a story behind it."

I love seeing myself and my body in places I haven't seen it before

She doesn't label herself a plus-size model; she uses "curve", a word used by model agencies, only once in our conversation. I can understand why. When beauty is categorised, entire communities get other-ed. "I feel passionate about what I do," she says. "Like, I love my job, but in a way where I don't need to be screaming from the rooftops about all these different things. It's more about just me being myself and not fitting into a certain..." Perception? "Being a model is an art form and I'm so interested in that. It's kind of odd to constantly be asked if I think things need to change. I think I'm [demonstrating that] with my work, so just look at my work."

If there's anything that does partly define Claire, it's her persistence. She wanted to be a model, she believed she could be a great model, so she kept going despite the lack of enthusiasm she was experiencing in London. In 2018, when she saw that models such as Precious Lee and Paloma Elsesser – women who looked more like her – were getting major bookings for commercials in New York, she decided to make the most of her dual citizenship, quit her job at "a yummy mummy candle shop" in the UK and moved to NYC.

"It was weird. It was a bit bizarre at 25 to quit a full-time job and go to live in a model apartment with, like, a load of 18-year-olds in bunk beds," she says. "Because the apartment was so depressing I'd be out all the time walking. But it forced me to be more open. I was literally asking people, 'Do you want to hang out?' It forced me to be proactive." Even so, at first it didn't work out. The work didn't come like she'd hoped. "But I always had this belief," she says. "So even when I get a 'no', in the back of my mind I'm going, 'Yes!'. I'll hear a no but I don't absorb a no" Which sounds like an exceptionally useful life skill.



‘It makes me really happy whenever anyone tells me how a show made them feel’: Alva Claire in Rihanna’s Savage x Fenty show, California, November 2022. Photograph: Kevin Mazur/Getty Images/Prime Video

She was working on the second Savage x Fenty show as a styling assistant when she was cast. Finally, a breakthrough at 28, I say. “Well, I mean I suppose a breakthrough could be lots of different things – just personal things like I pushed through something or my confidence grew,” she says sensibly, “but yeah, that was my first New York fashion week show. And that was huge for me. It was at the [Barclays Center](#), it was going to be filmed. My family was like, you don’t do things by halves do you?”

What she loves about Rihanna’s brand is that there’s no song and dance about inclusivity. “Well,” she retracts, “there’s actually a lot of song and dance! But what I mean is, it shows that it’s not difficult to create a brand and an environment where everybody feels as if they have a place. And it’s interesting, because then you observe other brands making such a big deal of these decisions. It’s so hard for them to discuss. All these people trying to decide: is this right? It’s like, you know, it’s not that hard. Just stand behind your brand and your ethos and say this is what we do.”

Claire seems so at ease with herself at this point in her life that I wonder if she’s in any way relieved her success came to her later rather than as a

teenager. Once again she gently steers me away from a simplified take. “I think it’s important to see women of different ages doing things that we often associate with a certain age group. Models are often associated with being really young, so I’m happy it’s worked out this way,” she says. “But it’s interesting, I suppose I couldn’t have done it when I was younger because the industry didn’t exist like this then. I don’t know if it’s chicken or egg, but for whatever reason it’s all happening at this point in my life.” She beams beautifully. “So, I’ll just take care of my skin and it’s all good.”

Alva Claire x OpéraSPORT is available now on [operasport.net](https://www.operasport.net)

Styling by Bemi Shaw

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[Iran](#)

Escape from Iran: protesters regroup in Iraq after perilous journey

Daily shows of dissent against repressive 43-year clerical rule continue, with exiled demonstrators asking for help from the west



Protesters gather outside the UN headquarters in Erbil in later September to protest against the death of Mahsa Amini in neighbouring Iran. Photograph: Hawre Khalid/AP

[Martin Chulov](#) and [Nechirvan Mando](#) in Erbil

Mon 19 Dec 2022 00.00 EST Last modified on Tue 20 Dec 2022 00.10 EST

In late October, Paiman, an Iranian protester from the restive city of Mahabad, lay in a hospital ward, guarded by regime officials who had gunned him down during anti-government demonstrations.

Buckshot from a shotgun blast riddled his legs and torso, and blows to his head with wooden clubs had left him dazed and in agony.

Paiman needed treatment, which he was not about to get from a regime where mercy, let alone medicine, has been in short supply since the outset of an uprising that – three months since it began – continues to pose a profound and sustained threat to Iran's hardline leadership.

The 28-year-old veterinarian's fate seemed tied to that of other protesters who had died in the same hospital often two to three days after being admitted. But his brother and cousin had other ideas.

"We launched a rescue operation and took him from the bed, then we smuggled him here," said Paiman's brother, Aso, from a safe house in Erbil in neighbouring [Iraq](#). "It was a four-day journey across the mountains, much of it on horses. It was the toughest thing we have done."

Paiman and his relatives are among the few demonstrators to have made the precarious journey from Iran to the relative safety of Iraq, where some survivors of the violence are trying to regroup.



A grab from footage filmed in late October showing a fire burning at the office of the governor of Mahabad. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

Iraqi Kurdish officials estimate that dozens of protesters have crossed the border. Protesters themselves say the number is likely to be in the low hundreds.

Sitting on a floor, covered in a blanket, his skin pallid and his breathing shallow, he described the mounting violence that met the demonstrations in Mahabad, a predominantly Kurdish city in north-eastern Iran that has remained a focus of the clashes – the most serious threat to Iran's clerical leaders since the revolution that swept them to power 43 years ago.

“[Mahsa Amini](#) was a Kurd, it is true,” said Paiman, “but the revolution is a popular one, made up of Iranians from all parts of the country. There are Baluchis, Azeris, Persians and others. This is because we are all sick of them and their repression.

“Make no mistake, this was a revolution from its earliest days. It was not just protests. The revolutionary current that started this will see it to a finish. They are weak and they are scared of us,” he said of Iranian officials who continue to combat widespread daily shows of dissent with violence.

But fear cuts both ways; even in exile, the brothers, who have been joined by a cousin in their rented home in an Erbil suburb, still worry that Iranian officials could reach them.



A grab from footage showing protesters marching in Mahabad in October.
Photograph: ESN/AFP/Getty Images

“We think about this a lot,” said Paiman. “They have interrogated my father at home, but they won’t bother with my mother. She is old, and she doesn’t speak Persian anyway. They have so much to deal with, so we have to hope that they’re too busy to make us much of a problem.”

Paiman says he saw the regime official who shot him from less than five metres away. X-rays show his body was peppered with pellets, which are yet to be removed. Doctors in Erbil have little expertise in treating such wounds.

“They dragged me away by my legs to their car and I slipped into semi-consciousness,” he said. “I heard one of them say I was dead and to take me to the hospital. Next thing I woke up there.”

All three men keep in regular touch with relatives in Mahabad, who say the protests continue in many towns and cities at a similar tempo to the past three months – close to 600 people have been killed and nearly 10,000 injured by regime violence.

Two demonstrators have been sentenced to death, leading to demands that global leaders do more to support the uprising. “We call upon the west to recognise what this represents,” said Aso. “To the people of Britain, France and Europe; we share your values. Please help us.”

[Map](#)

Others have called for more robust backing, including the supply of weapons. “It is very possible that this could become armed,” said Paiman. “Each family member who has lost someone will do their best to avenge the death, and this may mean taking up arms. For 40 years, weapons were not allowed in Iran, though, and it’s very difficult to find them.”

Outside Erbil, the leader of a Kurdish-Iranian militant group, the PAK, suggested there was little regional or global appetite to support an anti-regime movement.

“We have previously called on the free and democratic states against terrorism and dictatorship to provide them with advanced weapons to fight against Iranian terrorist forces and terrorist groups under the command of

the Quds Force,” said General Hussein Yazdanpana. “However, we have not received any positive response so far, not any.

“In some cases, people have taken weapons from the Revolutionary Guards and intelligence officers who opened fire and killed demonstrators. However, because of our insistence on continuing peaceful demonstrations and refraining from fighting and taking up arms, these cases have not become the general characteristic of the uprising.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/dec/19/escape-from-iran-protesters-regroup-in-iraq-after-perilous-journey>.

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- Why the woes of Harry and Meghan tell us little about British racism
- I helped one man in this picture escape the horrors of Kharkiv. The other man? I may never know
- This World Cup should be remembered for its racism. But Qatar is not the victim
- This dire winter feels like wartime. But hope lies with communities helping themselves

[OpinionRace](#)

Why the woes of Harry and Meghan tell us little about British racism

[Nesrine Malik](#)



Minorities need better policing and healthcare. What they get is a discussion about the hurt feelings of the rich and famous



Illustration: Nathalie Lees/The Guardian

Mon 19 Dec 2022 01.00 ESTLast modified on Mon 19 Dec 2022 03.15 EST

You probably won't remember this, considering everything that followed, but when Harry and Meghan [got married](#), there was a popular view in the media that their union was a watershed moment for British race relations. The wedding, we were told, cast a spell on black, white and mixed-race people alike, enchanted by the nods to Meghan's Afro-American cultural heritage during the ceremony. "A new era dawns," a [New York Times](#) headline read. "Modern" was a word often used to describe the pair. A modern wedding, for a modern couple, in a modern Britain.

This new era did not dawn. But the prophecies of it are useful to revisit, because they should remind us that it didn't matter then, and it doesn't matter now. Because the country that Harry and Meghan married in was one that, just a few months before their wedding, declared Paulette Wilson, who had lived in Britain for 50 years, "removable to Jamaica" and detained her in Yarl's Wood. The Windrush scandal was also "modern" Britain.

The diversity and inclusion struggles of rich, famous people say little about the country as a whole outside the lives of those rich, famous people. But even though they are tiny in number, they are gigantic in influence. Their ability to amplify their grievances means that we plot the racial history of

this country via the journeys of its least relevant protagonists, such as princes and Hollywood actors. These figures inhabit such a different universe that not even their publicists are grounded enough to tell them that complaining in a [Netflix](#) documentary that the ceilings of their temporary palace cottage were too low is not something they should be attempting to solicit sympathy for.

To most people, there was as little at stake in their union as there was in their leaving the royal family. Harry and Meghan entered no promised land, and their departure does not add them to some rebel army. The couple's essential charge, that a status based on bloodline superiority was not distributed equally to them, cannot be credibly stretched to encompass any wider anti-racism – or antianything, really – politics.

If there's one thing that is apparent from their [recent documentary](#), it is that they are not renouncing their unearned right to royalty, but are angry that they could not claim it. Asking for tolerance is one thing, but asking for tolerance of feudalism built on institutionalising inequality, tax breaks and legal exemptions for sovereign billionaires? As far as the royal family are concerned, they don't want a coup: they want their cut.

They will be seen as informal ambassadors for race relations anyway. Harry and Meghan, in good times and bad, are burdened with these expectations because in Britain we like talking about racism when the stakes are low and the profile of the protagonists is high. People such as Meghan, and occasionally black [footballers](#) and [artists](#), have the privilege of being our "discussion starters", triggering discourse where we rinse and repeat arguments about whether Britain is racist or not.

The trouble with this is that it traps and smothers any meaningful conversation – because we end up talking about racism as the way people are treated, and not about the jeopardy racism leaves people in. These two forms of prejudice are both legitimate, but one is about the easily debated and trivialised inconveniences of being in a white space, and the other is about the right to survive in any place at all. One is about making assumptions about where you are from; the other is about sending you back there.

Policing travesties regularly visited on black men; black toddlers dying in mouldy apartments; disease, death and sexual assault in the illegally crowded asylum processing system: none of these issues are reflected in the grievances of those whose main experience of racism is how uncomfortable Britain's elite white institutions are.

The experience of Harry and Meghan, or any number of similar figures in public life, is limited. More importantly, it cannot flow downstream. It cannot ever become about the Home Office, or the black unemployment rate, or the black prison population. Their gripes with the press focus only on the treatment of them as royals, never extending the very short distance to understanding that celebrities are only part of a business model for some papers whose bread and butter is the constant hammering of, and misinformation about, migrants, Muslims and other minorities.

That we can treat Harry and Meghan's experience as something that other minorities can reap any dividends from shows just how far we are from any serious discussion of race in Britain, how we are constantly marshalled in the direction of reducing racism to skirmishes expressed in the language of hurt feelings and symbolic gestures. A country's minorities are crying out for better policing, housing and healthcare, but instead they are faced with a debate over which princess made the other one cry over a bridesmaid dress – and whether footballers should kneel before a game.

Inadvertently complicit in this is a cohort of ethnic minority Britons who do see a little of themselves in Meghan: in her loneliness as an outsider, and the disgusting treatment she receives by entitled boors such as Piers Morgan and Jeremy Clarkson, who last week said he'd like to see her paraded naked and pelted with excrement. Some people can relate to her pain and shock that her race really does matter after all despite achievement and application, and in her frustration that no matter how hard you try, you are constantly told you do not belong, in subtle, devious and often humiliating ways. Trust me, I get it. But these experiences, painful and scarring as they are, are restricted to a particular class, and can never make up the sum total of demands for equality. Everyone's experiences matter, of course, no matter how privileged; but societies that do not want to confront racism, that require heavy investment of resources in reforming institutions and processes that

fail people of colour, motivate ethnic minorities to stay away from the political and focus on the personal.

The unfortunate timing of the documentary – coming as it does during what is effectively a [national strike](#), a cost of living crisis and a winter that has started to bite – should alert us to the fact that, as when they got married, Harry and Meghan are not a reflection of the country's successes or a resolution of its crises. They have clearly gone through some real unpleasantness and what seem like genuinely traumatic experiences with extremely powerful parties in the royal family and the media. I believe them. I hope, as much as I can for two people I do not know, that they make peace with what happened to them, and do so on their own terms. Let's leave them to it, shall we?

- Nesrine Malik is a Guardian columnist
 - *Do you have an opinion on the issues raised in this article? If you would like to submit a response of up to 300 words by email to be considered for publication in our [letters](#) section, please [click here](#).*
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Snapshot of 2022Ukraine

**I helped one man in this picture escape
the horrors of Kharkiv. The other man?
I may never know**

[Nataliya Gumenyuk](#)



As a Ukrainian reporter, sometimes I can't bear to find out what has happened to people I spoke to in the early days of war

- Nataliya Gumenyuk is a Ukrainian journalist, and co-founder of the Reckoning Project
- What was the image on your phone that defined 2022?
[Writers give their perspectives](#)



Leonid Andriyovych, 72, in a Kharkiv basement, March 2022. Photograph: Nataliya Gumenyuk

Mon 19 Dec 2022 03.00 EST Last modified on Tue 20 Dec 2022 19.53 EST

It had only been three weeks since the invasion, but it felt as if the war had lasted a lifetime. We were exhausted and overwhelmed. By mid-March, the city of Kharkiv, situated 25 miles from the Russian border, looked unreachable from Kyiv, where I live. Ukrainians were adjusting to this new life. Under the constant shelling, hotels and shops were not able to offer any kind of normal service. We were not sure whether petrol stations were open. Yet the second-biggest city in [Ukraine](#), where around 2 million people were living, was too important to stay away from. I had close friends who could host me. So I went.

It was my friends who had [said](#), in the early hours of the morning of 24 February, that “Kharkiv is being bombed”, confirming our worst fears. I had visited them in January, before the war, reporting on the mood in the city, and visited their newly bought apartment on the top floor of an old house in the centre. Kharkiv was the first place in Ukraine to have its city centre shelled. It was heartbreakingly sad in March to see part of that street destroyed by rockets, though their house survived.

I travelled from Kyiv with [a photographer friend](#); we had worked together during the 2014 [Maidan revolution](#). He later got a job at a major lifestyle magazine, but after the Russian invasion he returned to frontline work. The third person in our crew was a Polish TV correspondent whom I had met while reporting the aftermath of the siege of Aleppo in Syria in 2016. I have covered foreign conflicts before, but the fact that this one was taking place in my home country still makes me uncomfortable.

On 13 March, we went to northern Saltivka – at that point, the Kharkiv suburb that had sustained the most damage. The Russians were less than a mile away; tall concrete high-rises were the last real frontier. It was around -18C, and explosions were constant, so at first we stayed in a basement with soldiers. They had come from the southern Mykolaiv region, where [I had been a few days before](#). They were not volunteers but members of the regular armed forces.

“What are you fighting for here,” I asked.

“My wife and kids,” the eldest said. “They have stayed in Ukraine,” he added. “Why should they flee? It’s our land.” Another guy, Dorin, had a wife and two sons in the south. His brother-in-law was also fighting.

“Why do you have two knives,” we asked.

“One for the lard, another for the onion,” Dorin said, without a hint of irony. (It’s a typical Ukrainian snack.) Together, with his squad, we laughed – we laughed louder than the sound of the shelling.

Volunteers had tried to evacuate as many people as possible from northern Saltivka, but there are always a few elderly people who say, “I’d prefer to die at home.” When we saw an elderly man standing near one of the doorways, I asked why he was staying.

“I wish to leave,” he answered, explaining he had spent 18 days without electricity. He just didn’t know how to. We immediately decided that we would help him evacuate. It was a pure accident that he came to us – he was on his way to boil some water in the only basement apartment that still had

electricity. He lived in a building nearby on the ninth floor, with windows facing the Russian troops. His name was Leonid Andriyovych, and he was 72.

It took some time for our crew to be ready to leave, so we stayed in a basement for a bit longer, and then I took the photo you see, of Leonid and a soldier. Compared with his comrades, many in their 30s, the guy was young: 21 years old. According to my notes his name was Roman, in normal times a professional sportsman. While others talked about their families all the time, he remained silent. We brought Leonid Andriyovych to the train station, which served as a humanitarian hub, where he boarded the train to Poltava – a regional capital west of Kharkiv – where his sister lived. By the evening he had already had a warm meal with her.

Three months later, I went back to the area. A few villages around Kharkiv had been liberated and the frontline had been pushed back, so northern Saltivka had become accessible for civilians once again. Some residents had come back to check their flats. The damage in the area was considerably worse. I tried to spot Leonid Andriyovych's flat – it looked completely burnt-out. I had seen many destroyed houses by then, but it really feels different to see a destroyed house that you yourself have once stepped into, even for a moment.

A few weeks after that second visit, my photographer friend was conscripted into the Ukrainian army, where he trained to become a paratrooper. He went through the toughest battles in the Donbas, was among those [liberating Izium](#), and lost close colleagues during the [fight for Lyman](#) and later extremely difficult fights in the Luhansk region. Northern Saltivka in March doesn't look dangerous at all compared to what he ended up going through.

Now the whole Kharkiv region is liberated. But its proximity to Russia means the residents remain on alert. The city has adjusted to a horrible rhythm of shelling and power cuts. "Ferroconcrete" is a nickname the city got: Kharkiv is known for its communist-era steel and concrete architecture – this term of endearment has come to symbolise the strength and resilience of its people. It's printed on T-shirts and other souvenirs. The more things are hit, the stronger we feel about them. Some of my Kharkiv friends moved to Kyiv, others stayed to defend the city and care for those in need.

Kyiv still remains a safer place, largely because the air defences in the capital are the strongest in the country. Since October we've also been getting used to the airstrikes on the capital, which have been targeting critical infrastructure, in particular power stations. At times this winter we may not have proper running water, electricity or heating. At the same time, I really understand why people want to stay in their homes unless it's absolutely unbearable.

I have been in touch with Leonid Andriyovych. He is still staying with his sister in Poltava. "We're having a romantic dinner with the candles," he joked. He hasn't returned to Kharkiv since we left, but his neighbours have informed him that his nine-storey block of flats has fully collapsed. He thanked me for not forgetting him. I said, "Not at all."

I am glad that I've been able to follow up with him. I regret that I cannot do the same with the soldiers we met during those early days of the war. I have just their names in my notes. I also admit that I often do not dare write down the phone numbers of the soldiers, as I would be afraid to later call them. Sometimes I prefer not to know what happened.

- 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](#).*

Rights and freedomWorld Cup 2022

This World Cup should be remembered for its racism. But Qatar is not the victim

[Pete Pattisson](#)

The misery of migrant workers involved in staging the tournament is plain to see. No amount of spin can cover up the structural racism involved



Amnesty International demonstrated outside the Qatari embassy in Brussels on International Migrants Day on Friday, calling on Fifa and Qatar to end human rights violations. Photograph: Laurie Dieffembacq/Belga/AFP/Getty Images

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When Nasser al-Khater, Qatar's World Cup chief, was asked two weeks ago about the recent death of a migrant worker, his [response](#) was both shocking and revealing. “We’re in the middle of a World Cup and we have a successful World Cup. And this is something you want to talk about right now? I mean death is a natural part of life,” he said, before going on to offer condolences to the family of the deceased.

First, a sense of outrage and indignation that anyone would challenge Qatar’s narrative about the [World Cup](#) and then a callous indifference for the workers who made it possible.

In recent weeks, that outrage, [stoked](#) by the Qatari authorities, has been seen in numerous articles calling western criticism of Qatar’s human rights record racist, hypocritical and orientalist.

Most chillingly, we have seen Qatar’s talking points repeated by Eva Kaili – at the time a vice-president of the European parliament – who was [charged](#) along with three others last week, in connection with allegations that Qatar used gifts and cash to influence decision-making. Kaili and Qatar deny any wrongdoing.

“The World Cup in [Qatar](#) is proof, actually, of how sports diplomacy can achieve a historic transformation of a country ... [the International Labour Organization] said that Qatar is a frontrunner in labour rights,” said Kaili in a debate on the country’s human rights record the day after the World Cup kicked off. “Still some here are calling to discriminate them, they bully them and they accuse everyone that talks to them or engages of corruption.”

And yet it is the second part of Khater’s response that explains much of the criticism. The casual dismissal of a worker’s death illustrates what I have seen time and again in almost a decade of reporting on the treatment of Qatar’s low-wage migrant workers – that for the most part, the Qatari authorities just don’t appear to care.

The real scandal of this World Cup is not that the criticism of Qatar is racially motivated, but that the men who built this tournament have been subjected to a labour system based largely on racial discrimination.

That was clear to the former UN special rapporteur on racism, Tendayi Achiume, who in 2020 released a [damning report](#) highlighting “serious concerns of structural racial discrimination against non-nationals”. Achiume said a “de facto caste system based on national origin” exists in Qatar, “according to which European, North American, Australian and Arab nationalities systematically enjoy greater human rights protections than south Asian and sub-Saharan African nationalities”.

[Migrant workers forced out of ‘family zones’ in Qatar](#) Guardian

This discrimination is embedded in “family housing only” [zoning regulations](#) that effectively prohibit most migrant workers from living in certain parts of the country and has played out for all to see when low-wage workers have been [barred](#) from entering some parks, shopping malls and public spaces.

It is evident in the different wages paid to different nationalities – Nepalis and Bangladeshis are often paid less than Indians or Filipinos for doing the same work, for example. A recent [report](#) by human rights group Equidem found that almost half the workers interviewed who were employed on World Cup stadiums reported nationality-based discrimination.

And it is most obvious simply in the way low-wage workers are treated. Twelve years after Qatar won the bid to host the World Cup, tens of thousands of workers remain housed in appalling accommodation and are still forced to pay extortionate recruitment fees for their jobs, often in return for a basic wage that equates to just £1 an hour.



Migrant workers watch France v Morocco at the West End Park cricket stadium in Doha. Photograph: Ibraheem Al Omari/Reuters

Wage theft appears rampant and arguably got worse in the months leading up to the World Cup, when thousands of workers were [sent home](#), many still in debt, as companies wrapped up construction projects.

The Qatari government has said it has taken wide-ranging actions to create safe conditions for its migrant workers and regulations have been put in place to limit labourers' exposure to the searing summer heat. But the authorities have [done little to investigate](#) the deaths of thousands of migrant workers, and countless families have been left without answers or [compensation](#) from their loved ones' employers. As Nirmala Pakrin, the widow of a [worker who died](#) while employed on a World Cup stadium, said to me recently: "They are making millions ... [so] why can't they even give us a little compensation?"

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Geoffrey Otieno, a Kenyan worker who was detained in Qatar for speaking out on workers' rights, recently [wrote](#) about how incensed he was by attempts to dismiss criticism of the treatment of migrant workers as racist, saying: "As a black African worker who made the 2022 World Cup possible, nothing – including the abuses to which I was subjected, and those that I witnessed – has been more infuriating ... In Qatar, migrant workers are an expendable commodity."

Qatar, and its supporters, argue that the country has introduced meaningful reforms, chiefly the dismantling of the abusive *kafala* system and the introduction of a minimum wage. But these only came into force 10 years after Qatar won the right to host the World Cup. And on the ground, little seems to have changed. The stories I heard from workers in Qatar last month are almost the same as those I heard when I began my reporting in 2013.

It would be oversimplistic to say exploitation in Qatar's labour system is based solely on race. Like everywhere, race, class and the profit motive combine to marginalise the most vulnerable. But Qatar's unique population – 95% of the workforce is from overseas – its vast wealth and the attention it sought by hosting the World Cup have exposed and amplified these divisions.

The Qatari authorities are not solely to blame. The day-to-day abuses endured by many low-wage workers are mostly meted out by other migrant workers, typically – according to many workers I have spoken to – managers

from India and Egypt. As one worker told me: “The Qatari people are very good, but they have left the country in the hands of people who don’t value human beings.”

Responsibility also lies with powerful Qatari business owners who appear to be untouchable. “It’s a hierarchical system here where no one lower would dare try to do something against someone higher than them,” a construction manager with years of experience in Qatar told me, by way of explaining how influential Qataris can act with impunity.

And then there is Fifa, and scores of foreign companies and individuals who seem to have turned a blind eye while pocketing enormous profits and salaries. A 2018 British government press release claimed British firms were likely to secure deals worth [£1.5bn](#) in the run-up to the tournament. Fifa earned a record [\\$7.5bn](#) in the four-year cycle leading up to this World Cup and yet has still failed to agree to a fund to compensate workers who have suffered and the families of those who have died.

Ultimately the responsibility to protect migrant workers lies with governments, and by that standard the Qatari authorities have largely failed. To call this out is not racist, it’s anti-racist.

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[**Opinion**](#)[**Voluntary sector**](#)

This dire winter feels like wartime. But hope lies with communities helping themselves

[John Harris](#)



From radical local energy projects to transport to volunteer libraries, incredible people are taking action into their own hands



‘The work has a sense of the kind of collective mobilisation and resourcefulness you might associate with wartime.’ Mark Pepper from Ambition Lawrence Weston. Photograph: Adrian Sherratt

Sun 18 Dec 2022 08.53 EST Last modified on Mon 19 Dec 2022 00.22 EST

I am standing on a muddy patch of land nudging the Severn Estuary, in the company of an inspirational community activist called Mark Pepper. We are here to look at building work on what will soon be not only the [tallest wind turbine in England](#), but a crucial source of help for people at the financial sharp end. Thanks to a deal with a renewable energy company, the electricity the turbine produces will be sold to the National Grid, generating funds that will be used to subsidise the bills of vulnerable people who live a five-minute drive away.

Pepper is one of the founders of [Ambition Lawrence Weston](#), a grassroots community group based seven miles from the middle of Bristol. A decade ago, spending cuts began to eat into the few amenities that local people had, and he and a handful of others decided they had to act.

“In 2012, they closed our college,” he says. “By that time, all the assets were getting stripped: the swimming pool, the leisure centre … loads of stuff was haemorrhaging, services especially. So a group of us got together and said:

‘No one’s going to help us. We need to get off our backsides and do it ourselves.’”



A community gardening project overseen by Ambition Lawrence Weston.
Photograph: Mark Pepper

The result has been a trailblazing experiment in community activism that now involves people in what Pepper calls “social infrastructure”: training, education, transport, youth work and more.

The ambitiousness of the community wind turbine is also reflected in plans for new local homes: in partnership with a housing association, Ambition Lawrence Weston is [working](#) on plans for 36 new houses, 26 of which will be offered for genuinely affordable rent, with the rest split between shared-ownership properties and selfbuild homes. “Developers come and talk to us, and they’re gobsmacked by the conversations they have,” he says.

For the past few weeks, I have been travelling around England and Wales filming a new instalment of the Anywhere But Westminster video series. The film ties in with this year’s [Guardian Christmas appeal](#) – a portion of the donations will be distributed to local groups by [Locality, which supports community organisations](#). As the Ambition Lawrence Weston story suggests, it explores a subject that still feels rather overlooked: the

multiplying number of community initiatives and organisations that have often been created as a last-ditch response to decline and neglect, but are now showing a glimpse into a potentially fascinating future.

Right now, of course, a lot of them are focused on ensuring that people survive this winter. That work has a sense of the kind of collective mobilisation and resourcefulness you might associate with wartime. Food is not only collected and distributed, but grown and cooked. Many organisations now ensure people have access to toiletries and clothing too, as well as advice about debt, housing and work.

A week after my trip to Bristol, I visited the [Selby Trust](#) in Tottenham, north London, which works out of a disused secondary school but will soon move to purpose-built premises. Its “food hub” – which is a portal into help with no end of issues – began in 2020, and initially helped about 13 households a week. Now, that number has increased a hundredfold. It takes both dedication and expertise to deal with a workload like that.

Beyond food, clothing and the kind of emergency help offered by “warm banks”, there lies a tangle of other provision that fills the gaps left by continuing austerity. When bus services are cancelled, grassroots groups often develop new community transport; if a library is threatened with closure, it may have to be run by volunteers.

I understand the anxiety that this stuff often triggers, about normalising the retreat of the state, and weakening the case for services being delivered by paid professionals. But what other option do people have? Besides, rather than smoothing over people’s grievances about austerity – the essence of David Cameron’s short-lived vision of the [“big society”](#) – most of the groups I have met have given the communities they serve an even louder voice: when they come together, people tend to get more politicised, not less.

Taking the long view, the best local organisations are modern successors to the miners’ welfare halls and working men’s institutes that preceded the welfare state, full of creativity and nous about how to operate in the most difficult circumstances.

An example: true to an age-old spirit of working-class self-help, a community initiative called [Arts Factory](#) serves communities at the top of the Rhondda valley in south Wales, and partly funds its work (which takes in food-growing, nursery groups, advice services and lots of activity focused on health and wellbeing) via an in-house graphic design business and a well-oiled operation that sells second-hand books on Amazon, using the talents of people with autism and learning disabilities.

If you hear a term such as “third sector” and picture cracked paintwork, rickety furniture and raffle tickets, this kind of social action points to something very different: it is networked, agile and enterprising, in the best sense.



Activities at the Selby Trust in north London, which works out of a disused secondary school. Photograph: Alex Brenner

Where might all this work be heading? Our endless crises mean that a lot of local innovation and energy is monopolised by the most urgent kinds of need. Inevitably, grassroots groups are faced with huge financial stresses, and the constant need to bid for funds and raise donations. But imagine if the people involved were able to concentrate a little less on hunger and poverty, and develop the kind of work they do in other fields, with dependable financial help from local and national government. They have an amazing

amount to teach us about how to approach big modern problems that the state tends to leave untouched: loneliness, mental health, long-term unemployment, the kind of care that happens outside institutions. Grassroots groups often work as incubators for new small businesses. And, as that turbine near the Severn proves, they can also extend their work into sustainability and climate action.

There is also a story here about the right way to treat people. The market is interested only in those who have the money to buy what it offers. But even in the best times, how does the state tend to deal with its citizens? All too often, it presents them with a maze of bureaucracy, endless instructions to “listen carefully to the following options”, and impossible demands, placed on people in the most vulnerable circumstances. By contrast, if you work at local level and try to blur the distinction between providers and users, you may just open the way to the kind of provision that allows people to feel as if they are helping themselves.

This year has been stained by the worst kind of leadership: lies, ego-trips, lurches from one approach to another, and reckless actions based on abstract ideology. The community activists I have met, by contrast, have stability, knowledge rooted firmly in the real world, and a fierce drive to make things better. Therein lies something that has felt vanishingly rare this year: a real glimmer of hope.

- John Harris is a Guardian columnist
- The 2022 Guardian and Observer charity appeal is in support of grassroots charities working with people struggling on the frontline of the cost of living crisis via our two appeal partner charities, Locality and Citizens Advice. Donations can be made online by credit card, debit card or PayPal, or by phone on 0151 284 1126. Sadly, we are unable to accept cheques.

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[Tesco](#)

Workers in Thailand who made F&F jeans for Tesco ‘trapped in effective forced labour’

Exclusive: Supermarket faces landmark lawsuit in the UK from 130 former workers alleging negligence

- [Workers tell of sweatshop conditions at Thai factory used by Tesco](#)



Workers inside VKG factory in Mae Sot, a city near the Myanmar border.

[Emily Dugan](#) in Mae Sot

[@emilydugan](#)

Sun 18 Dec 2022 14.00 EST Last modified on Mon 19 Dec 2022 12.43 EST

Burmese workers that produced F+F jeans for Tesco in [Thailand](#) report being trapped in effective forced labour, working 99-hour weeks for illegally

low pay in appalling conditions, a Guardian investigation has found.

Tesco faces a landmark lawsuit in the UK from 130 former workers at VK Garment Factory (VKG), who are suing them for alleged negligence and unjust enrichment. The workers made jeans, denim jackets and other F&F clothes for adults and children for the Thai branch of Tesco's business between 2017 and 2020.

Tesco said the garments were sold only on the Thai market, though the Guardian has seen images of labels written in English on clothes understood to be made there. Profits from sales in Thailand went back to the UK.

It is believed to be the first time a UK company has been threatened with litigation in the English courts over a foreign garment factory in its supply chain that it does not own.

The factory is in [Mae Sot, a city at the Myanmar border](#) that relies on Burmese migrant labour, and which has developed a reputation over the last decade as a “wild west” for workers’ rights. The lawsuit argues that Tesco should have known the area was notorious for exploitation.



People on mopeds ride past the VKG garment factory in Mae Sot, Thailand.
Photograph: Jack Taylor/The Guardian

The Guardian has investigated the allegations made by the former factory workers and interviewed 21 of them in Mae Sot. They described:

- Being paid as little as £3 a day to work from 8am to 11pm with just one day off a month.
- Detailed records kept by supervisors seen by the Guardian show the majority of workers on their lines were paid less than £4 a day and only according to how much they could make. The Thai minimum wage then was £7 for an 8-hour day.
- Having to work through the night for 24 hours at least once a month to fulfil large F&F orders, and becoming so exhausted they fell asleep at their sewing tables.
- Some reported serious injuries; one man described slicing open his arm carrying a dangerously heavy interlocker machine, requiring 13 stitches. Another said he lost the tip of his index finger after slicing it in a button machine while making F&F denim jackets.
- Many said they were shouted at and threatened by managers within the factory if they did not keep working overtime and meet targets.
- More than a dozen of the workers interviewed said the factory opened bank accounts for them and then confiscated the cards and passwords so they could make it appear they were paid minimum wage while paying much less in cash.
- Most workers relied on VKG for their immigration status and some said their immigration documents were held by the factory, leaving them in debt bondage.
- Factory accommodation within the compound consisted of overcrowded rooms with concrete floors to sleep on and dirty pond water in a bucket to wash. Workers say most rooms had no door, just a curtain.

Tesco said that protecting the rights of everyone in its supply chain was absolutely essential and that had it identified serious issues like these at the time it would have ended its relationship with VKG immediately.

Tesco started using the factory in 2017, despite its own initial inspection identifying areas of non-compliance that experts say should have been red flags.



Workers outside the factory. Photograph: Supplied

Tesco was not involved in the day-to-day running of the factory beyond setting and checking standards and placing orders. In a groundbreaking move, however, workers in Tesco's supply chain are seeking to hold Tesco to account for allegedly failing to protect them.

Tesco made £2.2bn profits in 2020, the last year that its Thai business used VKG.

Win Win Mya, 53, who said she was paid about £3 a day to sweep fabric offcuts from the factory floor, said: "They took that profit from us. They already have it but we don't have anything."

Labour experts say large clothing brands such as F&F deliberately outsource the production of clothes and the auditing of factories to avoid liability and

reputational damage while keeping prices cheap and protecting profits.

The case, which is being brought by Leigh Day, challenges the outsourcing structure. Oliver Holland, the workers' solicitor, said: "Tesco is one of the UK's most profitable companies and our clients allege that they're making vast profits through outsourcing the production, through workers being paid very low wages, working excessive hours, and under terrible conditions.

"It is argued that this is all solely for the profit of the companies in the UK, and so that consumers can buy very cheap clothing. Clothing that costs as little as F&F clothing is likely to be causing harm somewhere along the supply chain and that is what we have seen in this case."



Burmese migrant families let off fireworks outside their home as they celebrate Tazaungdaing festival in Mae Sot last month. Photograph: Jack Taylor/The Guardian

A claim has been issued in the high court and is expected to be served in the new year. Also facing legal action are Ek Chai, which had been the Thai branch of Tesco's business, until it was sold to Charoen Pokphand Group in December 2020.

The claim has also been brought against the auditors, Intertek. Lawyers believe this is the first time that a social auditor has been brought into this

kind of lawsuit.

Intertek Thailand inspected the factory regularly but did not identify serious issues until July 2020, when workers say they blew the whistle about their conditions. Workers said the factory was given notice of audits and that VKG managers coached them to lie.

The damning audit report found that nine out of 26 interviewed workers said they were not paid a day rate or the minimum wage, that they worked on Sundays and were scared to speak out.

It also said one worker reported having their ATM card taken from them and concluded that it could not verify whether the factory was compliant on hours, wages and benefits because of inconsistencies in VKG's records.



A protest by workers outside the factory. Photograph: Supplied

Tesco received the audit pack in August 2020, yet VKG remained a supplier until it sold Ek-Chai in December 2020. Tesco said it immediately undertook an investigation and decided to exit the supplier but did not manage to do this before the business was sold.

In August 2020, 136 workers at VKG were dismissed, which they said happened after they asked for better pay and conditions in the wake of the

audit. They tried to get compensation from the factory directly.

In October that year, the workers filed a case with the Thai department of labour protection and welfare. They claimed they were entitled to unpaid wages made up of two years' full wages; wages for working on traditional holidays; overtime pay; holiday pay and weekly rest day pay. But the department only ordered the payment of severance pay and notice pay.

The case then went to the Thai labour court, which reached the same conclusion. Nothing has been paid and an appeal is expected to be lodged shortly by the workers. Most are now pinning their hopes on the English case.

Thai labour experts and lawyers believe the Thai case failed in part because VKG relied on audit reports produced by Intertek that they consider to be deficient, as until 2020 it reported that VKG had complied with labour laws.



Burmese migrant workers play volleyball on their day off from work in Mae Sot. Photograph: Jack Taylor/The Guardian

David Welsh, the country director of the Solidarity Center Thailand, said the courts tended to side with employers and that Mae Sot was “very much the wild west of the global supply chain”.

Welsh said Mae Sot was characterised by weak rule of law, poor wages and working conditions, no union access and a migrant workforce “with little to no legal protections.”

Charit Meesit, a lawyer who represented the workers in the Thai courts, has been fighting labour cases in the courts for 42 years. He said: “The authorities know what’s going on but they turn a blind eye. The courts in Thailand need to step up and do more. What I have seen for a long, long time is that employers abuse the system.”

A Tesco spokesperson said: “Protecting the rights of everyone working in our supply chain is absolutely essential to how we do business. In order to uphold our stringent human rights standards, we have a robust auditing process in place across our supply chain and the communities where we operate.

“Any risk of human rights abuses is completely unacceptable, but on the very rare occasions where they are identified, we take great care to ensure they are dealt with appropriately, and that workers have their human rights and freedoms respected.

“The allegations highlighted in this report are incredibly serious, and had we identified issues like this at the time they took place, we would have ended our relationship with this supplier immediately.

“We understand the Thai labour court has awarded compensation to those involved, and we would continue to urge the supplier to reimburse employees for any wages they’re owed.”

Sirikul Tatiyawongpaibul, the managing director of VKG, called the allegations “hearsay” and said they should be presented in court and could not be commented on, given an ongoing case in the Thai labour courts.

She said: “The company’s rules and regulations are in line with Thailand’s labour law, with employment and working conditions in line with conditions laid out by the department of labour protection and welfare and customers ... the company has fought the case with facts and does not plan to shut

down operations. It is necessary for the company to demand justice under Thailand's judicial process."

A spokesperson for Intertek said: "As a responsible business, we take the matters raised in your correspondence very seriously.

"We also note these matters are currently the subject of Thai and English legal proceedings, and therefore we are not able to comment while these proceedings are ongoing."

This article was amended on 19 December 2022. An earlier version used an image that was miscaptioned as showing a protest outside the VKG factory. This image has been replaced.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/dec/18/workers-in-thailand-who-made-ff-jeans-for-tesco-trapped-in-effective-forced-labour>

Thailand

What do you mean, day off?

Workers tell of sweatshop conditions at Thai factory used by Tesco, as supermarket says it knew nothing of claims about VKG



Burmese migrant worker San San Aye says she earned as little as £2 a day at the VKG factory. Photograph: Jack Taylor/The Guardian



[Emily Dugan](#) in Mae Sot

[@emilydugan](#)

Sun 18 Dec 2022 16.00 ESTFirst published on Sun 18 Dec 2022 14.00 EST

In a factory at the Myanmar border in [Thailand](#), hundreds of Burmese workers made F&F jeans for Tesco. They describe sweatshop conditions, with 99-hour weeks, one day off a month and illegally low pay.

Now [Tesco](#) is facing a landmark British lawsuit for alleged negligence, having used the VK Garment (VKG) factory in Mae Sot as a supplier to its Thai business from 2017 until the supermarket sold its operations in Asia in December 2020. The case is being brought by 130 former garment workers at the factory.

Tesco said protecting the rights of everyone in its supply chain was absolutely essential and that had it known of the serious allegations it would have stopped using VKG immediately.

The Guardian spoke to 21 former workers from the factory at their homes in Mae Sot. Here are some of their stories.

The cleaner making £3 a day



Burmese migrant worker Win Win Mya says she lost her job in 2020 when she asked to be paid the minimum wage. Photograph: Jack Taylor/The Guardian

Win Win Mya, 53, says she was paid about £3 – less than half the Thai minimum wage – to sweep the factory floor all day. She asked for a pay rise in 2019 but says she was refused. “They said if you want more money you can find other work but we don’t have any other options.”

She was one of 136 workers who lost their jobs in August 2020 after asking to be paid the minimum wage. They say they were given an ultimatum by the factory: apply as new workers and accept things as they were, or leave. When they refused, they were dismissed.

She said being over 50 made it impossible to find another job and she has been unemployed and relying on her children since.

She was among the lowest paid in the factory. Commenting on Tesco’s £2.2bn profits made in the year she lost her job, she said: “They took that profit from us. They already have it but we don’t have anything.”

Fingertip ‘sliced off while making F&F jackets’



Win Soe outside his home in Mae Sot last month. Photograph: Jack Taylor/The Guardian

Win Soe, 48, is missing the tip of his index finger on his right hand. He says it got jammed in the button machine while making F&F denim jackets in about 2018.

“The machine I used was outdated,” he said. “Sometimes it jammed and I had to push with my leg to make it work.” He said the machine had no safety switch and gestures to show how he put his hand on the buttoning plate while reaching down to try to unjam it.

He said the work was hard and he felt humiliated by being shouted at by supervisors. “They did not respect us and they shouted at us most of the time. We were not happy but I didn’t have any option other than carrying on with my work. I have a family and I had to consider their wellbeing too.”

The worker who found his photo on a blacklist



Thant Sin Aung, 23, his wife, Aye Aye Thin, 27, and their baby, Fi Theint Aung, outside their home. Photograph: Jack Taylor/The Guardian

Thant Sin Aung, 23, says he was 15 when he started working for the factory under different ownership eight years ago. He said the factory arranged for a fake border passport with a fake name and his image and an older date of birth to get around child labour laws.

He says while making F&F clothes he often forgot to eat to try to meet targets and earn more, and became sick, once having to take most of a month off with illness and no pay.

After he and others were dismissed in August 2020, he says he approached a nearby factory, only to discover they had a sheet with his name and photograph. “They showed me the photo and said, ‘is this you?’ and I had to agree it was me.” He was out of work for more than seven months and was so hungry he ate wild watercress growing on a playground.

The mother who found herself in a cycle of debt



San San Aye looks out in front of her home in Mae Sot. Photograph: Jack Taylor/The Guardian

When San San Aye left her three sons with her sister in Yangon, she hoped to make enough money in Thailand to give them a better life.

She settled in the border town of Mae Sot and started working at VKG in 2017, marking and cutting out the denim to make F&F jeans. She said her pay was typically £4 a day, though could be as little as £2, a fraction of the £7 a day Thai minimum wage.

“I kept hoping that next month the money would be enough but it never was,” she said.

Her job meant starting at about 8am and finishing at 10 or 11 at night almost every day, she said, unless a big order came, then she worked until the next morning. “I wanted to sleep so much but if I didn’t finish, I couldn’t go home.”

She said she was paid according to what she could make and not paid overtime, leaving her with just enough to cover food and accommodation. Sending money home meant skipping meals.

Her middle son, Kaung Htet Kyaw, did well at school in Yangon and wanted to be a doctor. She hoped that funding his education could change the family's future. But just six months before he was due to take his final exams it became untenable. Tuition fees cost about £20 a month and then there were books, transport and food. His parents asked him to join them in Thailand.

He was 18 and found himself working at the factory with his mother, gathering up scraps of material as a sewing line helper for about £2 a day. Now 23, he works in another low wage factory, his ambition of becoming a doctor more remote than ever.

Like many families, they described being stuck in a cycle of debt. Kaung Htet Kyaw said: "Sometimes the debt collector came asking for money but we couldn't pay. I'm angry they didn't give wages on time."

His mother said: "Life here is more difficult than living in Myanmar. I came here with hopes but those dreams did not happen."

The female line leader who led the fightback



Burmese migrant worker Hla Hla Tay. Photograph: Jack Taylor/The Guardian

It was summer 2020 when Hla Hla Tey decided to do something about the factory where she had been working for more than two years. She was a quality control supervisor at VKG and said she worked overnight several days a week, leaving her to cycle home on the highway in the early morning, barely able to stay awake.

She said her pay declined over time and that when she asked a manager to be paid the minimum wage, he called her a dog, saying: “If you don’t want to work at the factory any more you can get out.”

When auditors came in July she said she was in a group who spoke to them. “I felt really angry and could not tolerate it any more,” she said. Many other workers “were also angry” she said, but most would “not dare to tell the truth because they were afraid to lose their jobs”.

She said the auditors asked how many days the factory was closed in a month and she was quick to set them straight. “I asked the counter-question: ‘What do you mean, day off or holiday?’” she said. “This factory never closes on festival holidays. We have one day off a month when they pay our wages.”

She said the auditor then asked whether she was paid the minimum wage and whether it was paid into her bank account. “I explained that even though they opened a bank account with my name, I can’t use it. In my bag I had a payslip, I said, ‘this is how I receive my wages’.” She said the payslip showed £74 for a month’s work, instead of the £280 suggested by the factory’s records.

She was one of more than a dozen workers who told the Guardian that the factory had taken control of their bank accounts, changed their passwords and paid them in cash, leaving a paper trail suggesting minimum wage pay.

She said despite the long days and low pay, bosses were quick to criticise. “If there was a quality problem they would shout at us and say ‘you must be blind, do you not have eyes?’.”

She said that despite having social security deductions from her wages she had to pay for her healthcare after having breast cancer.

At 54, Hla Hla Tay was the oldest to lose her job in 2020 and has struggled to find work since, saying factories rarely employ over-50s. Unemployed and unable to pay rent, she is living in a Buddhist monastery and relying on handouts from the relations in Myanmar she moved away to support.

She is worried about her future but also clear-eyed about her life at VKG. “That period was a time I was in hell,” she said.

Injured carrying heavy machinery



Aung Tun displays a scar on his wrist, which he says he sustained working in the VKG textile factory. Photograph: Jack Taylor/The Guardian

Aung Tun, 34, holds out his forearm to show a long deep scar. He worked for VKG from May 2019, first folding clothes and then logging items going in and out of the factory and loading up F&F orders on to trucks.

In January 2020, he said he was clearing the factory floor before an audit when the injury happened. He said he was hurrying to load a heavy interlocker sewing machine – a machine with a sharp knife that cuts fabric as it sews – on to a truck, when it fell and sliced into his arm.

“It was bleeding a lot. I had to concentrate not to pass out,” he said. “The machine was really heavy, it needed four or five people to carry it but only three of us did.”

Aung Tun said the wound needed 13 stitches, but that a manager at the factory told him to lie to the hospital. “The factory didn’t take any responsibility … they said when you go to the clinic, say it’s a bicycle accident, don’t talk about a workplace accident.”

Aung Tun said he was typically paid less than £5 a day and that the factory often delayed renewing his work permit “which made it difficult to leave” and also meant his records looked irregular when he tried to find work later.

“I felt extremely tired from overworking and the pay was very low,” he said. “We only took a rest at lunchtime, the rest of the time we were working, working, working.”

The blacklisted father looking after his daughter



Si Thu Aung, his daughter, Thoon Yati, five, and wife, Myat Su Mon, outside their home in Mae Sot. Photograph: Jack Taylor/The Guardian

Si Thu Aung, 32, kept meticulous records of pay and production of the more than 20 sewers he supervised. He said they produced 10-15,000 pairs of F&F jeans a month and were paid only according to what they could make.

Sitting outside the room he shares with his wife and daughter, he still has piles of paperwork that appear to document the meagre pay his sewers received but he said officials told him it was fake because it did not have factory branding.

Once workers told auditors that the factory had lied about their pay, Si Thu Aung said he and other line leaders were summoned to an urgent meeting. “A manager said, ‘you need to control your workers’ and we spoke back to them and said the factory needs to pay them [properly],” he said.

After standing up for the sewers on his line, he was told to apply as a new worker and when he refused, he was dismissed.

Later, when he tried to find a new job at nearby factories he kept being knocked back and believes he was blacklisted. Two factories told him they were not open when he heard they were. “I know it was because I had worked for VK,” he said. “They understood that we were people who made problems for our employer.”

For five months he was unemployed and has not been able to find a well-paid job since. Now he looks after his five-year-old daughter, Thoon Yati, while his wife works.

The man who claims the factory made him help its cover-up of his low pay



Ye Zaw Zo says his pay was cut as the speed of his work improved.
Photograph: Jack Taylor/The Guardian

Ye Zaw Zo, 31, was an ironing worker on the sewing line and said he typically made about £3 a day. He was paid according to how much he could iron but when he got faster he says they lowered his rate from 1p for every dozen garments ironed, to almost half that.

Like many of the workers, he said the factory had control of his bank card to make it appear he was paid the minimum wage.

One day he said the factory tried to withdraw money from his account but typed in his password incorrectly. He said they sent him to the bank to reset the password and withdraw £340 – a generous monthly wage above the Thai minimum.

“I said I would need the transport cost to go by motorbike,” he said. But when he returned to the factory with the cash, he said he was asked to hand it all over at the entrance and to sign a document saying he had been paid that amount.

Instead, he said he was only given back his actual monthly wage of £87. “I told them I needed to get back the cost of the transport,” he said, “but I had to use my own money.”

The line leader whose parents were lobbied to drop the case



Phyo Phyo Mar gave evidence in a Thai labour court about VKG last summer. Photograph: Jack Taylor/The Guardian

As a line leader in charge of more than 20 sewers, Phyo Phyo Mar's evidence about pay and conditions was crucial to a hearing in the Thai labour courts this summer.

She said a worker loyal to the factory went to speak to her parents in August, the day before she was due to give evidence in the Thai labour court, to try to persuade them to tell her to drop the case.

She has a carrier bag full of documents that look inconvenient for the factory, including pay sheets and garment sheets that appear to detail the dozen pay rate for each F&F item.

Her husband worked at the factory too and also lost his job in August 2020. In the last two years they have had to spend all the savings they managed to build through moving to Thailand, including some land in Myanmar.

Phyo Phyo Mar was pregnant with her second child when they lost their jobs and hasn't been able to work since. She applied at factories but they were not interested in hiring someone pregnant. Now she and her parents have health problems and they are having to borrow money for food. "I worry all the time about our finances. We can take on debt for food but we can't keep borrowing."

Sirikul Tatiyawongpaibul, the managing director of VKG, called the allegations "hearsay" and said they should be presented in court and could not be commented on, given an ongoing case in the Thai labour courts.

She said: "The company's rules and regulations are in line with Thailand's labour law, with employment and working conditions in line with conditions laid out by the department of labour protection and welfare and customers ... The company has fought the case with facts and does not plan to shut down operations. It is necessary for the company to demand justice under Thailand's judicial process."

A Tesco spokesperson said: "The allegations highlighted in this report are incredibly serious, and had we identified issues like this at the time they took place, we would have ended our relationship with this supplier immediately. We understand the Thai labour court has awarded compensation to those involved, and we would continue to urge the supplier to reimburse employees for any wages they're owed."

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/dec/18/workers-tell-of-sweatshop-conditions-at-thai-factory-used-by-tesco>

[China](#)

China's cities fall quiet amid warning of three Covid waves over winter

Chief epidemiologist says China is in the first of an expected three waves of Covid cases, despite official figures showing low numbers



A woman walks on a deserted street in Shanghai on Saturday. The country's chief epidemiologist has warned that China is in the first of an expected three waves of Covid cases this winter. Photograph: Alex Plavevski/EPA

[Helen Davidson](#) in Taipei

[@heldavidson](#)

Mon 19 Dec 2022 00.53 ESTFirst published on Sun 18 Dec 2022 22.47 EST

Chinese authorities have warned of successive waves of Covid infections over the coming months, as cases continue to surge after the lifting of restrictions earlier this month.

Across major cities people appear to be staying inside, either with the virus or in fear of contracting it, but authorities have pushed on with the reopening.

There are also mounting questions over the full impact of the current outbreak, with just three officially recorded Covid-19 deaths despite widespread reports of fatalities and busy funeral homes.

Speaking at a conference in Beijing on Saturday, Wu Zunyou, the chief epidemiologist at the Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, said the current outbreak would peak this winter and run in three waves for about three months, according to a state media report of his speech.

Wu said the first wave would run from now until mid-January. A second wave would likely follow soon after, triggered by the mass travel of hundreds of millions of people across the country for the Lunar New Year starting on 21 January.

He predicted a third wave from late February to mid-March after people returned to work from the holidays.

Residents in [China](#) are reporting countless cases of Covid around them, despite the official count being around just 2,000 a day. Last week the national health commission conceded it was “impossible” to keep track of asymptomatic infections, and it would no longer be counting them. The removal of mass testing and reduction in mandatory tests mean few people are getting tested.

City streets appeared quiet over the weekend in Beijing and Shanghai, despite further liberalisation of restrictions, including the cancellation of 126 travel and testing measures on key industries, according to state media.

Concerns about government data have also extended to the way deaths are recorded. On Sunday, authorities reported three people had died, the first Covid deaths since 7 December.

China has narrow parameters for attributing a death to Covid, as opposed to any underlying condition the Covid patient was also suffering. It also does not release data on excess deaths, which has assisted with measuring Covid deaths in other jurisdictions with similar narrow parameters or poor record keeping.

Sunday's report of fatalities in the single digits has jarred with some people's experience on the ground. "If it weren't for the fact that at noon yesterday, a family member of a friend had passed away due to infection with the coronavirus (non-elderly children), I would have believed it," said one Sichuan resident on Weibo.

"Is the data accurate? Last week, two people next to me died suddenly because of the coronavirus fever ... I couldn't get through to [emergency lines] 110 and 120 for half an hour, and I watched the people around me died," said another in Beijing.

Funeral homes and crematoriums across the capital city of 22 million are also struggling to keep up with demand amid staff shortages as workers and drivers call in sick, Reuters reported.

At Beijing's largest funeral parlour in Babaoshan, also known for handling the bodies of top Chinese officials and leaders, several hearses a minute could be seen entering on Sunday, while the parking area for private cars was also full.

"Right now it is difficult to book a hearse so many relatives transport the body with their own vehicles," an employee told Reuters on condition of anonymity.

It was not immediately clear to what extent a rise in Covid-related deaths was responsible. Calls by the Guardian to various funeral homes were unanswered, or the employees declined to speak.

A US-based research institute said this week that the country could see an explosion of cases and over a million people in China could die of Covid in 2023.

There also continues to be concerns over the availability of medicine, with some calls for the government to set purchase limits, and the still low rates of vaccinations among the elderly.

In his Sunday address, Wu said severe cases had declined compared with past years and vaccination had offered a certain degree of protection. The vulnerable should be protected, he said, while recommending booster vaccines for the general public.

While China rolled out its first Covid vaccines in 2021, vaccination rates among people aged 60 and above have remained little changed since the summer, according to official figures. Only 66.4% of people over the age of 80 have completed a full course of vaccination, official news agency Xinhua reported.

Authorities have not made vaccination mandatory in the wake of previous public backlashes. Last week China said it would start to offer a second booster – or fourth shot – for high-risk groups and people over 60.

Overseas-developed vaccines are unavailable in mainland China, which has relied on inactivated shots by Sinopharm, Sinovac's Coronavac and other domestically developed options. It has yet to introduce its own version of an mRNA vaccine, and questions remain over their efficacy compared with foreign-made mRNA counterparts, said Kelly Lei, a doctor in the southern Chinese city of Shenzhen.

“At least a half of doctors and educated people wanted to get the mRNA ones and refused to get the Chinese ones,” Lei said.

“After a while, people see no hope and also they are kind of forced to get the Chinese ones, so they had to accept it. Some doctors talked to me, and said it’s useless anyway, why waste the money.”

Lei said many of her friends are looking to visit the neighbouring Chinese territory of Macau, where mainlanders can receive mRNA vaccines.

Demand has surged in recent weeks, visitors to Macau say, with the online booking platform for vaccination showing no bookings available until 21

January.

On Monday Macau's government said that it would cancel its regulations on risk zones in mainland China starting from Tuesday. It also eased test requirements on all arrivals from the mainland, asking for a negative result from within the last 72 hours, rather than 48.

Macau, which has been essentially closed off throughout the pandemic, is heavily reliant on Chinese visitors. Tourists from mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, account for more than 90% of total visitation.

Reuters contributed to this report

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Taliban

Taliban prisoners in Pakistan overpower guards and take hostages

Counter-terrorism officer killed after militants seize compound in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province



Pakistani security officials secure a road leading to the Bannu facility where militants seized a counter-terrorism facility on Monday. Photograph: Noman Khan/EPA

Associated Press in Peshawar

Mon 19 Dec 2022 05.38 ESTFirst published on Mon 19 Dec 2022 03.59 EST

Taliban detainees overpowered their guards at a counter-terrorism centre in north-western [Pakistan](#) overnight, snatching police weapons, taking hostages and seizing control of the facility.

The incident quickly evolved into a standoff. Pakistani officials later confirmed that one counter-terrorism officer had been killed during the militants' takeover at the detention centre in Bannu, a district in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province and part of a former tribal region.

Police and the military scrambled to deploy troops and special forces to the area but by midday on Monday, about 12 hours later, the hostage crisis was ongoing. According to officials, at least 30 [Taliban](#) fighters were involved in the takeover and there were possibly as many as 10 hostages.

The brazen action reflected the government's inability to exercise control over the remote region along the border with [Afghanistan](#). The Pakistani Taliban are a separate group but also allied with the Afghan Taliban, who seized power in the neighbouring country last year as US and Nato troops were in the final stages of their pullout from Afghanistan.

Few other details have emerged about the incident, which started late on Sunday, apparently while police were interrogating the Taliban detainees, according to Mohammad Ali Saif, a spokesperson for the provincial government.

Saif said the place was surrounded and that officials were trying to negotiate with the hostage-takers. He said an operation was under way but did not elaborate.

Authorities enlisted the help of several relatives of the Taliban insurgents in the negotiations, several security officials told the Associated Press. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to talk to reporters.

The officials said some soldiers were also among the hostages. There were concerns that the military could storm the facility if negotiations fail. In a video message circulating on social media, the hostage-takers threatened to kill the officers if their safe passage was not quickly arranged by the government.

Mohammad Khurasani, a spokesperson for the Pakistani Taliban – also known as Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan or TTP – confirmed the incident. He said some of the hostage-takers were members of the Pakistani Taliban who had been detained for years in Bannu.

Khurasani said the TTP fighters were demanding safe passage to North or South Waziristan. Those areas were a Taliban stronghold until a wave of military offensives over the past years led to the region being declared clear of insurgents.

Since then, TTP's top leaders and fighters have been hiding in neighbouring Afghanistan, though the militants still have relatively free rein in patches of the province.

Initially, the hostage-takers demanded in a video message posted on social media that they be airlifted to Afghanistan but Khurasani said that demand had been made by mistake, since their fighters were not aware – due to their prolonged detention – that TTP now “enjoys control in some” parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, near the Afghan border.

The Pakistani Taliban have stepped up attacks on security forces since last month, when they unilaterally ended a month-long ceasefire with the Pakistani government. The violence has strained relations between Pakistan's and Afghanistan's Taliban rulers, who had brokered the ceasefire in May.

The TTP has waged an insurgency in Pakistan over the past 15 years, fighting for stricter enforcement of Islamic laws, the release of their members who are in government custody and a reduction of Pakistani military presence in the country's former tribal regions.

Also on Monday, a roadside bombing targeted a security convoy in restive North Waziristan, killing at least two passersby, police said. No group immediately claimed responsibility for the bombing.

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Headlines saturday 17 december 2022

- ['Very challenging period' English hospitals urged to free up beds before ambulance staff strike](#)
- [Rail strikes Passengers face fresh wave of weekend disruption](#)
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- [Russia How Putin's alleged 'business associate' made \\$400m from a major gas deal](#)

NHS

English hospitals urged to free up beds before ambulance staff strike

Hospitals are told strikes on 21 and 28 December – also taking place in Wales – will lead to ‘extensive disruption’



Hospitals have been told to put in place measures to ensure ambulance patient handovers are kept to no more than 15 minutes. Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

[Tom Ambrose](#)

Sat 17 Dec 2022 03.27 EST Last modified on Sat 17 Dec 2022 07.41 EST

As many hospital beds as possible in England should be freed up ahead of “extensive disruption” caused by ambulance staff strikes, [NHS](#) bosses have said.

Ambulance staff in England and Wales are [expected to walk out on 21 and 28 December](#) in a dispute over pay, prompting fears about bed capacity

across the service. Members of the Unison, Unite and GMB unions are expected to take part.

In a [letter](#) to staff on Friday, David Sloman, NHS England's chief operating officer, Stephen Powis, the national medical director, and Ruth May, the chief nursing officer, said it would be a "very challenging period".

They called for patients who have completed their emergency medical care to be moved out of emergency departments to create space for new patients.

The letter read: "Take steps to allow moving of patients who have completed their emergency medical care and are awaiting an inpatient bed out of the [emergency departments] to create space for new patients.

"This may involve the creation of observation areas and additional beds elsewhere in the hospital."

It said rescheduling urgent cancer treatment should only be considered if all other options have been exhausted and every effort should be made to maintain appointments.

It also said measures should be put in place to ensure ambulance patient handovers are kept to no more than 15 minutes.

However, the president of the Royal College of Emergency Medicine, Adrian Boyle, said discharging patients from hospitals where possible ahead of NHS strikes would be challenging.

"It's going to be really difficult to achieve," he told the BBC's Today programme. "We always want to be able to allow ambulances to return back to the frontline as quickly as possible. We've been struggling to do this for the past three years.

"To give you an idea of how big the problem is, in the last week, three-quarters of emergency departments are holding ambulances with handover delays every day. And this is because our emergency departments are full."

NHS data shows that one in six patients last week waited more than an hour to be passed to A&E teams after arriving in an ambulance. Just over one in three had to wait at least 30 minutes.

Oliver Dowden, the chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, said the ambulance workers' strike would cause "significant impacts and significant disruption".

He told the [Daily Telegraph](#): "Of course, the government is working hard to ensure that that is minimised. But you can't call a strike in this area and think that it's not going to have an impact. And it will have an impact."

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Asked if lives are at risk, he said: "I don't think it's helpful to engage in speculation," but added: "There is significant risk associated.

"But the government is not going to be able to mitigate away all of the impacts of these strikes. And particularly with something like the ambulance strike, we cannot remove those risks. Those are big risks that people face."

The ambulance workers strike comes amid warnings that [NHS nurses could strike for longer](#), at more places and will disrupt more NHS services from next month unless the government increases its pay offer.

Tens of thousands of outpatient appointments and non-urgent operations were cancelled on Thursday as nurses went on strike over pay. A second 12-hour stoppage is due next Tuesday. Rishi Sunak is refusing to bow to pressure from health leaders and senior Conservatives, including the former

health minister Dan Poulter and former cabinet ministers Jake Berry and Robert Buckland, to negotiate pay with nurses to prevent further action.

The general secretary of the RCN, Pat Cullen urged the prime minister to step in and get a grip before the situation “engulfs the NHS”.

“The resolve these nurses have is strong and in January it will be an escalation,” she said. “It will involve a longer period of time and significantly more organisations.”

Sunak insisted on Friday that the offer given to nurses was “appropriate and fair”.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/dec/17/english-hospitals-urged-to-free-up-beds-before-ambulance-staff-strike>

Rail strikes

Rail strikes: passengers face fresh wave of weekend disruption

People urged only to travel if absolutely necessary on last weekend before Christmas

- [Train strikes resume despite hopes of breakthrough](#)



A handful of passengers brave the rail strike at King's Cross station in London on Friday. Photograph: James Manning/PA

[Gwyn Topham](#) and [Christy Cooney](#)

Sat 17 Dec 2022 00.00 EST Last modified on Sat 17 Dec 2022 12.30 EST

Rail passengers face another day of reduced services on Saturday as thousands of Rail, Maritime and [Transport](#) workers' union (RMT) staff continue a 48-hour strike.

People have been urged to only attempt travel if absolutely necessary on the last full weekend before Christmas, with only a skeleton service running and all train journeys ending by early evening.

Rail firms advised passengers to plan ahead and check online for updates, with about 20% of normal services running between 7.30am and 6.30pm on Saturday, and no trains at all in some areas. Disruption is expected to continue into Sunday morning.

Thousands of RMT members at Network Rail and 14 train operators – joined by Transport Salaried Staffs Association (TSSA) members at six operators on Saturday – will take action in the dispute over pay and conditions.

It will be the last strike before Christmas Eve, giving some opportunity for people wishing to travel. However, an overtime ban starting for RMT train staff from Sunday will continue to affect services until January, with severe disruption on operators including Chiltern and South Western Railway.

A small number of National Highways controllers and traffic officers in the PCS union [will also continue strikes on Saturday](#), potentially inflating any disruption on the roads in the event of a traffic incident. The agency, which controls strategic roads and motorways, said no roads would be closed and remained confident of mitigation plans it had in place.

Faint hopes were raised that the rail dispute may reach a conclusion before further strikes in January.

‘We can’t afford not to’: a firefighter, paramedic, train driver and teacher on UK strikes – video

The union’s general secretary, Mick Lynch, said on Friday there were “no new proposals” but more meetings and “soundings-out” of possible solutions, after an apparently positive meeting between the RMT, the rail minister, Huw Merriman, and rail industry leaders on Thursday evening.

Lynch said they “had an exchange about what might be possible and some ways forward and ideas that all the parties shared … There are no actual negotiations; there are some soundings-out of what might be developed.”

However, he told Sky News he was “optimistic” that a deal could be reached with compromise, adding: “I know that there are some very simple steps that the employers and ourselves could take together to get a solution to this.”

The TSSA, whose members earlier this week voted to accept the improved Network Rail pay offer, also remains in dispute with train operators, with some industrial action across virtually all those in England contracted to the Department for Transport.

Transport for Wales, which has not been affected by strike action, confirmed on Friday it had reached agreement with all rail unions for a 4.5% pay increase.

The TSSA’s interim leader, Frank Ward, said it had reached agreement where there were “genuine negotiations”, adding: “It’s crystal clear that Rishi Sunak’s government is responsible for blocking negotiations with train companies and ruining Christmas for rail workers and passengers alike.”

The next RMT strike at Network Rail is due from 6pm on 24 December until 6am on 27 December. Although the union said it should not affect passengers, with virtually no trains over the Christmas bank holiday period, which is devoted to engineering works, Network Rail said it would bring trains on Christmas Eve to an early halt.

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One of the few firms hoping to operate, Eurostar, announced on Friday it would have to cancel Boxing Day services. While some cross-Channel services had run on previous strike days, it said it had been told that the UK's high-speed line to London would be closed.

Retailers and the hospitality and entertainment sectors have complained of mounting losses with high street footfall and people's travel plans affected.

Figures from location technology firm TomTom showed morning rush hour road congestion during the strikes was significantly higher in London, Liverpool and Glasgow compared with a week before, while high street footfall dropped up to 17% on strike days this week, according to Springboard.

Research by the RAC found young people in particular were seeing Christmas travel plans affected by the strikes, with two in five of 18- to 24-year-olds having to alter their trips. Of those, about half were now planning to travel by car instead, and a quarter did not yet know how to get to their intended destinations in time for Christmas.

The RAC spokesperson Rod Dennis said: "There's no question that the strikes are going to make this year's Christmas getaway on the roads busier than normal."

Meanwhile, British Airways and Virgin Atlantic have both halted the sale of new tickets for flights into Heathrow on the days affected by Border Force strikes over Christmas.

A spokesperson for the airport said the decision followed a request by Border Force, though they added that no flights had had to be cancelled as a result.

Border Force staff at Heathrow terminals 2, 3, 4, and 5 – as well as at Birmingham, Cardiff, Gatwick, Glasgow and Manchester airports and the Port of Newhaven – are planning strikes for 23-26 and 28-31 December.

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Transport

Explainer

When's best to travel by car or train in the UK this Christmas?

With industrial action expected to hit the railways and the roads, a guide to when might be a good time to travel



Passengers at Kings Cross station in London during strike action by members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) on Friday.
Photograph: James Manning/PA

[Joe Middleton](#)

Sat 17 Dec 2022 04.00 EST

It is that time of year when millions of people will travel to see friends and family, take a well-earned break, or make a last-minute dash to the shops to pick up a [Christmas](#) present.

The festive getaway could be trickier than usual this year as Britain has been hit by wide-ranging industrial action across the transport network.

Based on planned strike dates, here is an indication of when might be the best time to get away this Christmas.

When will roads be the busiest?

The AA is estimating 17m cars will travel on 23 December and Christmas Eve and that people can expect congestion and lengthy delays – so it is best to avoid these two days if possible.

The survey of more than 12,000 drivers by the motoring group reveals the two days when fewest cars will be on the road in the run-up to Christmas are likely to be Sunday 18 December and Monday 19 December.

These two days also do not coincide with any strike action that could impact roads or rail, so an early getaway would be best if possible.

Members of the RMT union at Network Rail have planned industrial action from late Christmas Eve until 27 December that will mainly affect engineering works.

However, Great Western Railway has warned travellers the train network “will shut early” on 24 December and there could be “significant disruption” because of the industrial action.

South Western Railway has urged customers to only travel if “absolutely necessary” on 24 and 27 December.

The AA has warned that the planned strike action on Christmas Eve “may add to the getaway mayhem” as more people take to the roads.

Members of the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) who work for National Highways as control room staff and traffic officers will strike in London and the south-east on 22, 23, 24 and 25 December.

The PCS said the action “risks bringing the road network to a standstill”. National Highways said no roads would be closed as a result of the industrial action and it has “well-rehearsed resilience plans in place”.

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Which roads will be the busiest?

The AA predicts these could be the most congested roads:

- M25
- M5 between Bristol and Weston-super-Mare
- M6 around Birmingham
- Stretches of the M1 smart motorway from Luton northwards
- M60 and M62 in north-west England
- M4 and M27 in Hampshire.

What should you do before you set off by car?

Edmund King, AA president, said “many breakdowns are preventable” and “checking your vehicle before you set off” is the most important thing to do.

He said: “Tyres (including the spare, if you have one), fuel, EV range, oil levels, coolant and screenwash checks should be made as a minimum. Likewise, keeping water, high-protein food or chocolate, warm clothes, coats and a hi-vis jacket will help keep you going should the worst happen.

“While the 23 December and Christmas Eve look set to be the busiest travelling days, planned industrial action by rail service staff may lead to increased levels of cars on our roads.”

What about rail?

As mentioned above, strike action could affect services in the run-up to Christmas. Despite that, Network Rail said 95% of the rail network would be open for travel during the festive period.

However, a number of important infrastructure upgrades are taking place over the festive period, so passengers should try to plan journeys in advance.

Andrew Haines, Network Rail chief executive, said: “We’ve worked closely with our train operators to ensure the vast majority of the network is open for business over the festive period so people can travel by rail to spend time with their families and friends.

“However, some of these key upgrade projects will have an impact on services, so we’re asking passengers to plan their journeys before travelling.”

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How Putin's alleged 'business associate' made \$400m from a major Russian gas deal

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[Art](#)

‘Almost as botched as Monkey Christ!’ Has the National Gallery ruined a Nativity masterpiece?



‘Like a pastiche of Renaissance art by a very bad app’ ... a detail from the restored Nativity by Piero Della Francesca, c 1485. Photograph: The National Gallery Photographic Department/Photo: The National Gallery, London

The restoration of this treasure took three years. So why do the shepherds look so gormless? Is the curly-haired one at a school disco – and is the other trying to remember where he parked the donkey?



[Jonathan Jones](#)

Sat 17 Dec 2022 04.00 EST Last modified on Sat 17 Dec 2022 15.44 EST

The National Gallery has ruined Christmas. Or, to be more precise, it has had a very good go at wrecking one of the world’s greatest Nativity paintings. The fact that Piero della Francesca’s Nativity is back on view for the festive season, after a three-year restoration [the London gallery vaunts as careful and revealing](#), should be glad tidings. But my joy turned to ash when I saw it. What in the name of God inspired the restorers to paint two completely new and distractingly moronic shepherd’s faces? Or a big white blob on the stable wall?

The Nativity, a mysterious and elusive work of haunting wonder, has been, oh so carefully and responsibly, rendered clumsy and plodding, if not

downright comical. Almost every colour has been altered, every line re-emphasised. It's like a garish digital reconstruction of what the painting may have looked like in 1475 when it was new – except, instead of offering this as a hypothetical, it has been physically repainted or, in the evasive language of restorers, "retouched".

This orange-faced man looks vacant, even constipated, his barely human eyes unfocused and lifeless

Piero painted this unique vision of Mary adoring her baby in front of a stable, accompanied by a choir of angels singing their hearts out, in his home town of Sansepolcro in Italy about 550 years ago. It has survived all that time, albeit with damage done long ago that erased the faces of two shepherds. None of that spoiled its mystery. Piero, a polymath who wrote books about maths and geometry, celebrated what he saw as the divine harmony of the physical universe in the choir of angels, with their mouths open in song. Influenced by the ancient Greek mathematical mystic Pythagoras, he connects the geometric, oval faces and tubular limbs of his people with the beauty of the angelic music he invites us to imagine. Try looking at it with Thomas Tallis in your ears.



Badly damaged ... the shepherds before they were retouched. Photograph: The National Gallery, London

Untune that string and what a chaos you make of this painting. Its pallor was part of its ethereal beauty. Now, the eye is drawn to a ruddy shepherd's face painted by the restorer that covers a long-obliterated part of the picture. It is so awful it makes me think of the notorious amateur repainting of Christ's features in a Spanish fresco that caused global hilarity a decade ago. The face of this red-hatted shepherd is, fortunately, done with more competence than "[Monkey Christ](#)" – and it's based on scientific study.

Yet expertise without artistic soul has produced an idiotic botch. This orange-faced man looks vacant and gormless, even constipated, his barely human eyes unfocused and lifeless. It's like he's trying to remember where he parked the donkey. The rest of the face, too, is clumsily done, with coarse shadows that attempt to define the nose and cheeks. It's like a pastiche of Renaissance art by a very cheap, very bad app. The adjacent curly haired shepherd, who points heavenwards, is barely any better. He looks like a very earnest teenager throwing shapes at a school disco.

The reason why it is such a scandal to fabricate faces in Piero's Nativity is that he painted expressions with a grave psychological truth. I don't believe for one second this restoration is true to the original. There simply isn't a more moving image of a company of singers, joined in their song. Or a more human Madonna. Compare their expressions with the inchoate ones added to the shepherd and you immediately see the problem.



Before the retouch ... ‘There simply isn’t a more moving image of a company of singers – or a more human Madonna.’ Photograph: The National Gallery, London

Paintings that are many centuries old need work over the years, and occasionally, where they are endangered, that has to be radical. But it is better to be cautious and minimal. The overriding priority is to preserve the artist’s own vision as purely as possible. Given that plenty had survived in this work to admire, the NG has shown astounding insensitivity to Piero’s magic.

The intervention seems to have been motivated by the National Gallery’s new interpretation of the picture. This, its researchers now believe, is an illustration of a vision that Saint Bridget of Sweden had on a pilgrimage to Bethlehem. “I saw a star,” she said, “but not the kind that shines in the sky; I saw a light, but not the kind that shines in this world.” To stress this idea of the star as a cosmic mystery, a patch of light on the stable wall, barely visible before, has now been crudely emphasised, turning it into a big white daub on grey stones. It is another lousy bit of painting. The dead-eyed, dancefloor shepherd, the [National Gallery](#) would have us believe, is pointing upwards to make sure we know this is holy light from heaven.

It's a rather leaden piece of theological decoding. But fine, file it away with all the other theories about paintings that come and go. With an artist as enigmatic as Piero, these experts should know theirs is unlikely to be the last word – yet, with that daub of white, they have physically painted what ought to be just one possible interpretation right into the picture. The effect of the restoration is to pull us away from the simple human drama of the Nativity towards a more abstract and inhuman symbolism.



'Polished up as if it was for sale at Frieze Masters' ... the painting after the restoration. Photograph: The National Gallery Photographic Department/Photo: The National Gallery, London

The NG says that, contrary to earlier theories that Piero never finished it, the Nativity is a fully completed work that happened to get badly damaged over the centuries. So they have made the entire painting more polished and complete, sharpening and deepening the blue of the Virgin's robes, the grey of the stone stable, the smoothness of its roof. The angels too look more solid, but in a dodgy way that, in the firmed-up garments and feet, verges on pre-Raphaelite tackiness.

Yet it still seems unfinished. The empty ruggedness of the foreground is as raw as a Van Gogh garden, which seems to me a deliberate effect by the

original artist – an early, daring instance of leaving art intentionally incomplete. In fact, it looks like someone has just rolled out a plain old rug. This touchingly ruinous Nativity, as broken down as the Bethlehem stable, has now been polished up as if it was for sale at Frieze Masters. The NG is not about to sell its Nativity but perhaps it believes, patronisingly, that visitors will respond better to a smooth and finished-looking work. I don't agree and this isn't what I want for Christmas.

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‘If Agatha Christie was writing now, there’d be a tech billionaire’: Daniel Craig and the stars of Knives Out on the new age of whodunnits

[Rebecca Nicholson](#)



From left: Kate Hudson, Madelyn Cline, Jessica Henwick, Daniel Craig, Janelle Monáe, Kathryn Hahn, Edward Norton, Leslie Odom Jr. Set design: Propped Up. Photograph: Jay Brooks/The Guardian

It was the slowburn hit of 2019 that revived murder mysteries for the big screen. Now Knives Out is back with another killer cast – who talk dressing up, their festive plans and the Mafia fiend among them



Sat 17 Dec 2022 02.00 EST Last modified on Tue 20 Dec 2022 05.56 EST

In the last couple of years, you didn't need to be sporting a monocle to notice that there were murder mysteries everywhere. On television, you could guess whodunnit on [The Afterparty](#) or [Only Murders in the Building](#). On the big screen, Kenneth Branagh worked his way through two starry Poirots with [Murder on the Orient Express](#) and [Death on the Nile](#). The Agatha Christie love continued with [See How They Run](#), a retro crime caper pegged to her play [The Mousetrap](#). And then there was [Knives Out](#).

Released in 2019 and directed by [Rian Johnson](#), the film juggled a rollercoaster plot with huge names and borderline slapstick, while giving viewers the vicarious pleasure of watching entitled, bratty rich people collapse into chaos. It starred Daniel Craig as Benoit Blanc, a southern gentleman detective with a "Kentucky-fried Foghorn Leghorn accent" and a Sherlock-esque mind. Blanc was there to crack the case of a dead crime author who died in his mansion, surrounded by his money-grubbing descendants. The film's cast was all-star, with Ana de Armas, Jamie Lee Curtis, Chris Evans and Toni Collette joining the melee, and its tone was fresh. It was thrilling, it was brainy, and it was surprisingly farcical and funny. Unsurprisingly, it was a huge hit. Netflix quickly commissioned two more Knives Out mysteries.

The first sequel, [Glass Onion](#), is the film everyone will be gathered around this Christmas. Daniel Craig returns as Blanc, but the rest of the cast is new, and even more starry. This time, it's set on a luxury Greek island, and instead of fusty country-house aristocrats, it takes aim at the dreaded "disruptors" – vacuous entrepreneurs and celebrities with far too much money, all operating around a tech-bro billionaire type who is not unlike a certain real-life Tesla boss.

I met the cast the day after the film's London premiere. Janelle Monáe brought Grace Jones with her; the two tore up the red carpet. Monáe had stayed up late dancing with Jones, while the rest of the cast had got an earlyish night. "I used to think I could stay out and then do [interviews]," a dry-witted Craig said. Did that lead to loose lips? He laughed. "Well, you've seen what I've said over the years! You make up your own mind about that."

Speaking to the cast, it's clear they have great enthusiasm – for the film, which was shot during Covid restrictions on a Greek island and then in Serbia; for each other (there is a very active group text thread); for Johnson; and for the whodunnit itself, which is proving so popular again.

Daniel Craig



Photograph: Jay Brooks/The Guardian

Rebecca Nicholson: We can't say too much about the plot of the film without risking spoilers ...

DC: It really is one of those things. I would hate for people not to have that surprise, because there are lovely surprises in the movie. To take away that deliciousness from people would be a shame. Obviously, the budget was much bigger this time ... [though] it wasn't that much bigger.

RN: But there are explosions!

DC: It's got explosions, for sure, and there was money spent on other things that weren't spent on the first one, but it wasn't like we tripled the budget. Except on Leslie Odom Jr's salary, of course. That actually made a big difference.

RN: If you had to choose: Benoit Blanc or Poirot?

DC: Oh, shush. That's not fair.

RN: Why is the whodunnit having a moment?

DC: Rian puts it more eloquently than I could. He says that Agatha Christie didn't write historical novels, she wrote what was happening at the time. If she was writing now, there would be a tech billionaire. Her books are social commentaries, and they're a good laugh. We all need a good laugh right now.

RN: You described the cast as a “drunken theatre troupe”.

DC: I've been in a lot of theatre groups, and they're mainly drunk. When we got to Greece, we were in lockdown, which curtailed going to restaurants and all the stuff you do to socialise. I thought it was incredibly important that we got together quickly to try and gel. I'd rented a nice place; I got some food, got some booze. I didn't know these people, but I realised very quickly that they quite like to party. Couldn't get rid of them.

RN: You ended up playing murder mystery games together in your downtime. Is that a team sport?

DC: No! It's throwing each other under the bus, as far as I can make out. We played a game called Mafia, which takes quite a lot of organisation, which I'm not very good at. There's something about going to sleep, and when you wake up someone's dead, and ... I have no idea. Janelle seemed to know that we were going to play these games, because she had a different costume every time. She would just turn up as Sherlock Holmes. Like, you had that in your suitcase? A moustache, pipe and deerstalker?

RN: Who was particularly deadly?

DC: Edward [Norton] was pretty good at it. It's a lot of lying, basically, and you have to kind of take it semi-seriously. And I can't take these things seriously.

RN: What makes Glass Onion a good festive film?

DC: It's a family film. Hopefully, as a family, you can sit down and have a laugh. That's all we're setting out to do at Christmas, or whatever holiday season it is for you.

RN: How will you be spending the big day?

DC: Together with family. We've got a young one now, so she's figured out what it is, so that's going to be pleasant and joyful and all of those things.

Kate Hudson



Photograph: Jay Brooks/The Guardian

RN: Your character, Birdie, is a former It-girl who once appeared on the cover of the Face.

KH: I feel like that was actually a real magazine cover of mine! All the pictures they used were from magazines I had done, so I feel like that might have been a cover.

RN: Did you research that late-90s party-girl era?

KH: I don't ever do that, because I don't want to mimic anybody. The whole purpose is to create something new.

RN: Did you guess whodunnit in the first [Knives Out](#)?

KH: If someone gives me a puzzle to figure out, I'm quick at it. But watching movies, I'm really present. I am like a little kid. I want the magic of being surprised.

RN: In both films, we're witnessing very privileged people collapse into a mess of their own making. Is that satisfying for audiences?

KH: They love it in real life! That's every headline you read. It's clickbait, come on. "Your favourite person is actually terrible." The world just goes right to that. Someone told me that, once upon a time, someone on a red carpet would slip on a banana peel, and they would turn their cameras away. Now, they're just throwing banana peels.

RN: Who's your favourite fictional detective?

KH: Murder, She Wrote and Angela Lansbury.

RN: What's the best Christmas gift you've given or received?

KH: Oh, the best gift I gave was last Christmas. I gave everybody in my family their year in astrology. And I gave them crystals; I gave them all a piece of jewellery they could wear that was very specific to them, and I had someone give them each an astrological reading.

RN: How do you spend the big day?

KH: Honestly, we're up until 4am putting stuff together. There's seven kids now and Christmases are so big. It's really fun. The day starts with the kids coming down early to my mom putting out the salmon and the bagels. Oh, yeah. And then we usually make pheasant that my dad has gone hunting for. This is how we do it at the Hawn/Russell house! It is pretty dreamy – until my mom starts cleaning while it's happening, and then nobody knows where anything is. Then we get drunk.

Leslie Odom Jr



Photograph: Jay Brooks/The Guardian

RN: Before Glass Onion, you starred in Murder on the Orient Express. Did you think: don't worry, everyone, I've got this?

LO: No! Murder on the Orient Express was my first real film experience, so I was just trying to figure out how to act on camera. It's a very different tone, and a very different company. So this felt different, in all the ways.

RN: Benoit Blanc or Poirot?

LO: Hmm. I'll get back to you.

RN: Daniel said that, as a cast, you like to party, which he discovered when he invited you for dinner ...

LO: Not only did Daniel set the tone with that first party, he set our pace for the work day. I remember the day that he had probably the most dialogue. I won't spoil anything, but there's one scene where he has a lot to say. And he took great care not to call us to set, not to waste a millisecond of our time. I thought it was so considerate, and that stuff matters.

RN: He also said that you are very good at Mafia.

LO: There's the one person who hosts, and I'm like, yeah, that's one of my [skills].

RN: Why is the whodunnit having a moment?

LO: Having been an audience member for the first Knives Out, it was just so richly layered. I could feel that this was a film-maker who really valued that cast. You could tell, because he tried to hold so many of them in a frame at any given moment. It's great fun for the audience to have that experience.

RN: How did you get involved in the sequel?

LO: Most things, I'm clawing and fighting for, but every now and again, there's like a match.com situation where there's a little setup. I knew Rian was out looking for this particular part, so our agents set up a meeting. He wanted me to know that he didn't feel he had [my character] all the way figured out.

RN: What was it like to go to the cinema with Grace Jones?

LO: I was two rows ahead of her. She really got a kick out of Janelle's performance and then the whole film. What a cool experience, to get to be in this movie with a rock star, and to have Janelle bring all that.

RN: How will you spend Christmas this year?

LO: We live a few blocks from both sets of our parents. Usually my parents come over in the morning as the kids open their presents, then we find our way to grandma's house, and the kids get a whole other Christmas there, so it's a long, wonderful day. A *looong* day.

Janelle Monáe



Photograph: Jay Brooks/The Guardian

RN: Your roles have been pretty serious until now. Were you prepared for how silly this was going to be?

JM: When I read the script, I knew that this was exactly what I needed to do. I've always wanted to work with Rian. I came in to his career on [Looper](#). I was blown away by that film; it was super innovative for the sci-fi genre. And this is a whodunnit, but what he's been able to do is modernise the characters and do something innovative in this genre as well. That's what was cool about it.

RN: Your character is very mysterious.

JM: She is super mysterious, right? And she has so many layers, so being able to sink my teeth into that as an actor was so fun. We talked a lot about hiding little Easter eggs for people to find. We hope you see something different each time.

RN: You smash a lot of stuff in the film. Was that cathartic?

JM: Absolutely. It was so fun. And big shout-out to the crew, because when you're smashing things, somebody has to pick it up so you can do another take. We didn't have a lot of takes, because we only had a set number of those items that could be broken. So you had to go for it.

RN: Daniel said that you packed costumes for the murder mystery games.

JM: Absolutely. I had a moustache in my suitcase. I had a pipe. I had a top hat, a cane, a cape.

RN: Just in case, or were they your usual clothes?

JM: [Gestures at her immaculate monochrome outfit] I *live* this life, you know? We got to be our most childlike selves. Outside of filming, we had even more fun. When we did the murder mystery games, we were in this bubble, because of Covid. So we had to entertain each other.

RN: Why does this work as a festive film?

JM: It crosses generations. Kids, grandparents, no matter what age, will be able to go on this ride two, three, four times. It's that sort of movie where I don't think people will leave feeling, oh, I just watched everything that is wrong about the world. I think art is best when it's escapism, when you can just watch something and enjoy those 90 or however many minutes without feeling heavier. You should be lighter. You should be laughing.

RN: What do you want for Christmas this year?

JM: I am usually the Grinch at Christmas. But I love a good holiday party. I love an ugly sweater party. Any experience where it feels like people are going into character and having good time. I love all that.

RN: Do you know about Wagatha Christie?

JM: Who? Now I'm going to go Google it. Wow.

Madelyn Cline



Photograph: Jay Brooks/The Guardian

RN: Your character, Whiskey, is a YouTuber. How much do you know about that world?

MC: I can't say I'm a YouTuber. I don't smash that "like" button. I don't even have an account. I just go and find the videos I like, or people send them to me. But I use Instagram, and it's the same thing. It's social media. I did do some research. And my search history was a little mortifying on YouTube.

RN: If you were to smash that like button, what would it be for?

MC: It's very specific, but I really enjoy some ASMR [autonomous sensory meridian response]. Also the videos that I would subscribe to are on shelf organisation. It makes sense, because I'm horrible at organisation.

RN: Who was best at the murder mystery games?

MC: Kate was really good at moderating and leading the charge. Leslie and Kathryn [Hahn] were the funniest moderators. Kathryn would get killed in the game, and she would stand up and co-moderate with Leslie. Honestly, at that point, I would try to get killed just so I could just watch them. They are so funny.

RN: Daniel said that Janelle brought costumes with her.

MC: She was the one who spearheaded the costumes, and the dressing-up of the games. I miss those Mafia nights. It was so much fun.

RN: Who is your favourite fictional detective?

MC: I think Benoit is amazing. In a similar vein, I also love [Clue \[the 1985 murder mystery based on Cluedo\]](#).

RN: Are you any good at Cluedo?

MC: I love it. I haven't played in a long time, though.

RN: Why is this a good festive film?

MC: I saw this on Twitter, so I don't take credit, but it made me laugh: what better time to release a movie about a murder mystery than during the holidays when everybody wants to kill their family? You gather around the table. Knives are out.

RN: What's the best gift you've given or received?

MC: I like really little thoughtful things. Someone got me a rock from somewhere. And then we painted it.

RN: You're going to get sent so many rocks.

MC: That's bad. Never mind! Flowers? Money? One time, my nana gave me some money. When I moved to LA, she sent me \$20, because she thought I was starving. That was a sweet gift. Sometimes receiving gifts is like receiving compliments. I have a hard time knowing what to say, because I am so grateful, but also, I'm a little overwhelmed. I love giving gifts. I love the thought that goes into, like, what can I do? What inside jokes are there? How can I give someone something that's meaningful?

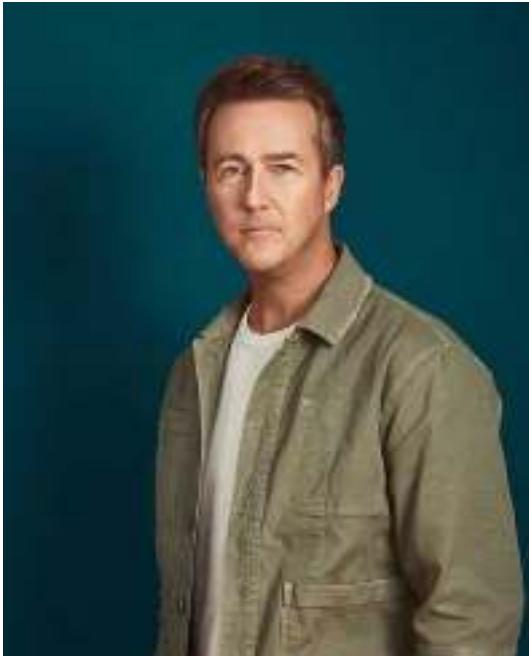
RN: Agatha Christie or Wagatha Christie?

MC: Agatha and Wagatha would be [clasps hands].

RN: Are there any unsolved mysteries that haunt you?

MC: [long pause] Where is Amelia Earhart?

Edward Norton



Photograph: Jay Brooks/The Guardian

RN: You got involved in Glass Onion pretty early on.

EN: I had coffee in New York with Rian right after [Brick](#) came out [in 2005], because I'm a big noir detective film fan. We bonded over that. I was talking about doing his film [The Brothers Bloom](#) with him, but I was doing another film and I broke my back doing a stunt. So I fell out of doing that. Finally, he rang me up. He said: "It's the next of the Benoit Blanc series." I said: "We've been talking about this for 20 years. Let's do it."

RN: What gruesome facts did you unearth when you were researching tech bros?

EN: There's a great deal of stuff that's pulled specifically from interviews you can watch, and documentaries. There are malapropisms, or people purporting to be intellectually brilliant, who can't even grammatically construct a sentence. We had so many. Too many.

RN: Your character is particularly daft.

EN: There's a bit where I'm running around, afraid of certain things, and I had this impulse, when I'm hiding behind Daniel, to spin and grab him by the belly. It's just a funny thing. It's Daniel, it's James Bond, and you sort of go, how's he going to react if I just do this? I was like, oh, fuck it. I did it. Sometimes you have to gently test the limits of how high it could go.

RN: After Fight Club, you know a thing or two about movie twists. How good is Rian at a twist?

EN: Rian's twists are great. To be honest, he likes to play with the baggage people bring in. In my case, he knows the things I've done in the past are going to set people into a mental analysis of, "Should I expect this?" But then that would be too obvious. He's really canny in that way, and funny.

RN: Why do you think this works as a festive film?

EN: It is medicine for an anxious world. Sometimes, it's very, very nice to look at scenery and funny costumes and have a proper laugh. It's nice to put that out.

RN: What do you want for Christmas this year?

EN: Even when you say that, it rattles me. I get flummoxed and start thinking, That can't be coming up already. I've got so many things I need to do before the end of the year. I usually want more time before Christmas, that is what I want for Christmas. All the way through making this film, Janelle and I had been talking about our love of Bowie, and we rallied a bunch of friends to see the David Bowie documentary at the Imax. She got us the Imax screen at its headquarters. So I think we should do a Christmas party screening of it at [Monáe's HQ] Wondaland. That would be fun.

Kathryn Hahn



Photograph: Jay Brooks/The Guardian

RN: You worked with [Kate Hudson](#) in How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days ...

KH: The fact that we were able to reunite! We hadn't really seen each other since, and it was mindblowing that this was happening, and that she was playing this part. I can't tell you how excited I am for Kate. Every time she opens her mouth in this movie, I'm like, ahhhhh. It's so delicious.

RN: What makes this a good film for the holidays?

KH: It's thrilling. It also does feel like you're on a vacation. It's beautiful, fun, fabulous costumes. I mean, why not?

RN: You have previous experience of festive films. How did this compare with Bad Moms 2?

KH: Bad Moms 2 was a blast and so fun, but this – I mean, I'm not comparing anything in any way, but because of the nature of filming this, no one went back to their trailers, we were together all day, every day. When we got to Serbia, we were in a green room together, all day long, and then on Saturday nights we would just see each other, socially, to hang out. Then we would have a little vacation together. It was the best. And there was really no movie-star crap. It felt like everybody was in the same sweaty theatre ensemble together.

RN: Who inspired the beige-wearing politician you play?

KH: It's all there in the script, so I didn't need to go outside of what Rian had written. I mean, there are so many humans right now one can draw from, so I had all that ... *bleurgh*. It was all there. I didn't need to go far.

RN: Did you guess the twist in the first Knives Out?

KH: I definitely did not.

RN: What's your favourite movie twist?

KH: The Sixth Sense. Fight Club, Primal Fear. Edward has been in a lot of them.

RN: How will you spend Christmas this year?

KH: Well, we always have to have a family staircase photograph, before we go down and see the tree. My husband is Jewish so we do both Hanukah and Christmas, if they line up at the same time, which they usually don't. We do stockings first, and there's always clementines in the stockings.

Jessica Henwick



Photograph: Jay Brooks/The Guardian

RN: Why is Glass Onion a good festive film?

JH: It's a group of people who are forced to be together, once a year. It's Christmas taken to the extreme, isn't it?

RN: Peg is the straight woman in a film of clowns ...

JH: I think you always have to have someone playing it straight. She works as a touchstone for the audience. This is how the normal person reacts to this situation. This is how a normal person of normal wealth would behave on this crazy island full of billionaires.

RN: Who was the stone-cold killer at Mafia?

JH: I don't want to say. I refuse this question.

RN: I heard that Janelle had costumes.

JH: She did, but she wasn't very good at the game. Everyone is ignoring this. She would always guess wrong. She would always kill the wrong people.

RN: Did you figure out whodunnit in the first Knives Out?

JH: Yeah. I figured it out probably 20 minutes before it was revealed. It was not because I'd figured out the plot, but because I'd got the vibe. I realised, oh, [Rian's] doing this to make me feel this way about this character, which must mean that's the killer. But Rian knows that, so he's playing a different game this time. Audiences are getting smarter and smarter.

RN: Who's your favourite fictional detective?

JH: Jessica Fletcher, from Murder, She Wrote.

RN: Why is the whodunnit having a moment?

JH: Everything's cyclical. Everything that is out of fashion comes back into fashion. Look at how many escape rooms there are in London alone. People love to solve things. Murder-mystery is probably the most immersive genre there is. It encourages you to listen and take notes, because if you go to the bathroom and miss two minutes, it is going to fall apart. You have to be an active participant. It's not backseat viewing. Some things are made for doing the laundry. And this is not one of those films.

RN: Are there any unsolved mysteries that haunt you?

JH: If I had a fantasy dinner party, I would invite Agatha Christie. I would ask her what happened in those 11 days that she disappeared.

RN: What's the best gift you have given or received?

JH: My brother got me a Harry Potter wand. It was beautiful; it was in this glass case and it was amazing.

RN: Do you know about Wagatha Christie?

JH: Yes. Fucking love it. So funny. I love this. It's such a British question.

RN: So – Wagatha Christie or Agatha Christie?

JH: I think Agatha. would support Wagatha.

Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mystery is out on Netflix on 23 December.

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‘I’m getting a wee bit choked up’: Martin Compston and Tony Curran on their hugely moving new drama

[Ryan Gilbey](#)



Tears and teacakes ... Curran and Compston in Mayflies. Photograph: Jamie Simpson/BBC/Synchronicity Films Limited

Would you help your best pal to die? That's the question posed by Andrea Gibb's devastating new series *Mayflies*. The real-life friends discuss couch-surfing, working together – and AC-12 mania

Sat 17 Dec 2022 03.00 ESTLast modified on Sat 17 Dec 2022 08.05 EST

Martin Compston – AKA strait-laced DI Steve Arnott in *Line of Duty* – was a long way from AC-12 when he received the script for *Mayflies*, based on [Andrew O'Hagan's novel](#) about lifelong friends plunged into a crisis in adulthood. “I was in a field in Budapest after an Arctic Monkeys gig when I got the email,” says the actor, from his home in Las Vegas. “I saw Tony was in it and thought, ‘Is this for real?’” That’s Tony Curran, with whom he has been pals since they played menacing Glaswegian miscreants in the haunting 2006 thriller *Red Road*. “The big man really took me under his wing,” he says.

Like the chipmunk-cheery Compston, the dry, droll Curran is a Scot abroad: he joins our call from Los Angeles, where he has lived for nearly 20 years. Compston even kipped on his kitchen floor once when he was in LA for pilot season. “I gave you a couch at least, didn’t I?” says Curran. “Not at

first, cos there was someone else on it,” says Compston. “Aye, it’s a lot like the YMCA, my pad,” Curran concedes.

In *Mayflies*, Curran plays Tully, the former ringleader of a group of rambunctious but sensitive teenage boys whose friendship offers a respite from their bleak lives in 1980s small-town Scotland. Tully is described as the group’s “life force”. Now he is facing a terminal cancer diagnosis; in his despair, he calls Jimmy (Compston), who has become a successful novelist, and asks for his friend’s help in ending his life.

Curran’s research involved speaking to staff at Glasgow’s [Maggie Centre](#), a charity which provides free cancer support across the UK. “It was a turning point for me,” he says. “Afterwards I went out into the back garden where people go to contemplate what they’ve just been told, and I perched on a little wooden stump to take a moment. As I sat there, it started to rain.” He pauses, giving a little “heh-heh” to cover the emotion rising in his throat. “I thought about the compassion and empathy they show there. And I thought: I believe I could possibly pull this off, and immerse myself, and leave nothing behind.”

Talking about his friend’s performance, it’s Compston’s turn to bring himself to the brink of tears. “The biggest takeaway for me is pride in Tony. I said this to my wife recently. I’m getting a wee bit choked up thinking about it now. He knocks it out the park. It’s the most emotionally present I’ve ever been on a job. As an actor, you use different tools to reach certain places, and a lot of times you’re off in your head thinking about things from the past, but you didn’t need any of that here. Doing it with one of your best pals made it all feel very real.”

Curran agrees. “There’s a moment at the beginning where I tell him I’m not doing chemotherapy, and there was so much going on in Martin’s face that it moved me greatly. He’s got those big brown lamps, you know? Those eyes!” Still, there’s no getting round the fact that Compston, who is 38, and Curran, a youthful-looking 53, could only have been at school together if it was as pupil and teacher. “Tony’s an LA 53, not an east of Scotland 53,” says Compston. “It was more a case of me ageing up than him ageing down.”

Mayflies has special rawness and relevance for the screenwriter Andrea Gibb, who adapted the novel. Her partner – the Guardian journalist and Twitter friend-to-all Simon Ricketts – [died of cancer at the end of 2018](#). “He was very ill for the whole year before,” she tells me. “After he died, I threw myself into work. I don’t think I took his death on board until lockdown. Then I was forced to come to terms with what had happened. I process things through what I write, so when Mayflies came along, I knew it would be hard but cathartic.”



A flashback to the young friends in Mayflies. Photograph: Jamie Simpson/BBC/Synchronicity Films Limited

It helped that she saw similarities between Tully and Ricketts. “Simon made you laugh all the time, and if someone does that, you cling to them like a life-raft. That is very Tully, which is one reason I was drawn to this. I could channel Simon through him.” In Tully’s wife, played by Ashley Jensen, Gibb also found a place to express “a lot of the anger and grief I felt. I put all that into the writing, and it’s been good for me. I do feel something has shifted.”

Whereas the novel is split in two – the first half confined to the 80s, the second leaping forward to the present day – the screen version invokes the past only in brief interludes which haunt the modern-day scenes. It is the

euthanasia question which now propels the drama. “The past is there to reinforce why these friends are bonded, what they owe each other,” she says. “Tully can only ask Jimmy to help him because of who they were at 18.”

At that age, Compston had already turned his back on a football career and given a blistering performance as a teenager struggling to make a better life for his family in Ken Loach’s 2002 film Sweet Sixteen. Does he see anything of himself in O’Hagan’s characters, who are described in the novel as “soft as Tunnock’s Teacakes”? “Well, they woulnae survive in Greenock!” he splutters. “Growing up around there and in football dressing rooms, you needed to be able to hold your own. They’re cutthroat places. You have to fight for your space verbally. That’s something I carry with me. I have a bit of a chip on my shoulder. I’m quite a happy-go-lucky guy, but on set I feel I’ve got something to prove.” Curran smiles at this. “I’ve always said Martin’s very well balanced. He’s got a chip on *both* shoulders!”

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Tracy Ifeachor and Ashley Jensen with Curran and Compston in *Mayflies*.
Photograph: Jamie Simpson/BBC/Synchronicity Films Limited

Curran, a fixture of US television shows such as *24*, *Ray Donovan* and *The Flash*, also started acting at a young age. And like Compston with *Line of Duty*, he knows what it's like to be part of a TV phenomenon: in 1997, he played Lenny, the affable gay plumber in the influential BBC drama [*This Life*](#). "That was a groundbreaking show in lots of ways," he says. "Lenny was a regular guy who happened to be gay. There was a real poignancy to it at the time. People were gripped."

But as a British cult hit in the pre-streaming era, its popularity was nothing compared to the hysteria that greeted [*Line of Duty*](#). "Streaming changed everything," says Compston. "By series five and six it was this huge machine. It got quite difficult at times. We used to film my clandestine phone calls outside AC-12 HQ with just me and a camera, but in later series there'd be 30 or 40 people all filming it. That can take you out of a scene."

He admits he is "still trying to get back" to the purity and immediacy he felt on *Sweet Sixteen*. And while no one will mistake *Mayflies* for a Ken Loach drama, it does have an intimacy and intelligence that can be traced to O'Hagan's novel, where young men learn to express themselves through

their love of music, films and literature. Art reveals to them a world beyond the limits of their inherited, inhibited masculinity.

“It’s an amazingly important book for men and boys,” says Gibb. “When we put young men on the screen, particularly in Scotland, they’re usually disaffected or they’re drug addicts. They’re lost in space. You think, ‘Is there more to the working-class boy than this?’ What Andrew has written are boys from housing estates who are political and cultural, articulate and funny. The working-class are shown to have depth and profundity. We need more of that.”

Mayflies is on BBC One on 28 December at 9pm.

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King Charles III

Two PMs, a race row and Harry & Meghan: Charles's first 100 days as king

Amid a steady stream of controversy, keeping calm and presenting a united front remains the monarchy's mantra



Charles, 74, has regularly been out in the community since he became king in September. Photograph: Ian Vogler/AFP/Getty Images



[Caroline Davies](#)

Sat 17 Dec 2022 03.00 EST Last modified on Sat 17 Dec 2022 03.43 EST

The king could have been forgiven if he allowed himself a small, rueful smile as the Prince of Wales gave a reading on the spirit of togetherness at the royal family's Westminster Abbey carol service hosted by the Princess of Wales this week.

Hours earlier, a recalcitrant Duke of Sussex had [torpedoed any sense of that spirit within the family fold](#). Now Prince William – the embodiment of the institution according to brother Harry – found himself reciting their late grandmother's 2012 Christmas message on that very theme.

As Charles listened he may have reflected on just how the early days of his reign, which reaches the milestone of 100 days on Saturday, has been hijacked by such public airing of the family laundry.

“But I think he would have been resigned to the fact it was going to happen. Knowing that the Netflix series was coming out, there was a certain inevitability about all this,” said Joe Little, the managing editor of [Majesty magazine](#).

Charles has been busy, despite Harry and Meghan sucking up most of the oxygen of late. As the Sussexes gave vent from California, he and the queen consort were at The Kind Cafe, a community kitchen in Harrow, north-west London, quietly unveiling a plaque against the backdrop of a poster helpfully reading: “Keep Calm and eat cupcakes”.

Over on Netflix, Meghan’s own visit to a community kitchen, run by female survivors of Grenfell, and highlighted as one of her major achievements as a working royal, was being watched by millions on both sides of the Atlantic.

But keeping calm was the palace mantra of the day. Royals in their numbers turned out for Kate’s Together At Christmas carols. The princess was at her self-deprecating best, offering a deep curtsey to the king and Camilla, and joking with guests she was not sure her children “think I’ve got a particularly good singing voice”. No limelight stealers here; just the future monarchy in a reassuring tableau – William, Kate, with their children George and Charlotte dressed in mini-me outfits matching their parents. “Kate, we love you”; “Prince William, we love you,” shouted members of a supportive public outside the abbey.



Senior members of the royal family presented a united front at the Together at Christmas carol service amid the the criticisms levelled by Harry and Meghan. Photograph: Yui Mok/AFP/Getty Images

It seems a long time since Charles held his first weekly audience with then prime minister Liz Truss, greeting her with the words: “[So you've come back again? Dear, oh dear. Anyway](#)”; a reference not to Truss's precarious position, as speculated by sketch writers, but the fact it was her second visit that day.

Since then the new king has appointed another prime minister, Rishi Sunak, led his first service of remembrance as monarch and daily tended his official red boxes, the same used by his mother and grandfather, George VI, though restored by a luxury leather goods company.

He has been regularly out and about in the community, large crowds have turned out for him and the Queen consort. He has dodged egg throwers in [York](#) and [Luton](#), seen the [new 50p coins](#) minted bearing his portrait, attended the Houses of Parliament to [unveil a plaque](#) marking the spot of his mother's lying-in-state, and appeared [on the BBC's Repair Shop](#) (viewing figures albeit undoubtedly a fraction of Netflix's).

He has hosted [his first state banquet](#) welcoming the South African president, Cyril Ramaphosa, and held several palace receptions, including one ahead of Cop27.



Charles and Camilla with Harry and Meghan at the funeral of Queen Elizabeth II in September. Charles has endured harsh criticism from his younger son over the past two years, most lately in the Netflix docuseries. Photograph: Martin Meissner/AP

Alas, it was at another reception, hosted by Camilla, that another controversy would emerge. The late queen's lady-in-waiting, Lady Susan Hussey [resigned and apologised](#) after a black guest at the reception was left feeling traumatised when repeatedly quizzed by Hussey where she was from, despite saying she was British. The comments were swiftly described by Buckingham Palace as "unacceptable and deeply regrettable".

Other bumps along the way include a [Metropolitan police inquiry into allegations of "cash for honours"](#) at Charles's Prince's Foundation, and calls from one Welsh council for the title of Prince of Wales, which Charles has passed on to William, to be banned because it is seen as [a symbol of English oppression](#). Meanwhile, Quebec's legislature is examining a bill that could end officials having to [swear an oath to the British monarch](#).

Charles has endured harsh criticism from his younger son over the past two years in the Sussexes's many interviews, most lately in the Netflix docuseries. "Criticism of Harry's brother and father is rather unsavoury," said Little. "You would imagine the late queen would be appalled that people would be aware the Sandringham summit was anything other than calm and organised."

The king will now be putting the finishing touches to his first Christmas broadcast to the nation and Commonwealth. It will be an important one, and there are bound to be comparisons to those of the late [Queen Elizabeth II](#). He will be aware of this, and will have laboured over it.

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He will, undoubtedly, hope it will bring the focus back to monarchy and its place, as supporters of the royal family see it, in UK life.



Charles and Camilla at a community cafe in Harrow, north-west London.
Photograph: WPA/Getty Images

Charles' first 100 days as king

Highs:

The Cop27 UN climate summit was one invitation Charles [did not accept](#), though he probably would have had he not been king. Abiding by advice from No 10, he declined the invitation. Referring to Charles' previous assurances he would not pursue his causes in the same way as when Prince of Wales, Joe Little, managing editor of Majesty magazine, said: "That would certainly indicate that what he said many moons ago he would do, he is now doing, which is an encouraging start to the reign."

Presenting a united front at the Together at Christmas carol service. Attended by all the senior royals, it will be televised on ITV on Christmas Eve. Though organised many months before Netflix announced its airing of the Harry & Meghan docuseries, it was inevitably interpreted as a show of calm and united strength by the royal family in response to the criticism levelled at the institution, and family members, by Harry and Meghan.

Lows:

The fifth season of The Crown. Unfortunate timing sees the fictional drama revive the War of the Waleses, between Charles and the late Diana, Princess of Wales, and including the personal horror of the leaking of a highly intimate conversation between Charles and the then married Camilla Parker Bowles dubbed Tampongate by tabloids, and described by the [actor Dominic West, who plays Charles, as “two middle-aged lovers being sweet to each other.”](#)

Charles's first royal runner was beaten. Educator finished second as the first runner for the king in the famous royal silks at Salisbury. While the king has previously had runners in the colours he shared with the queen consort when they were the Prince of Wales and Duchess of Cornwall, it is the first time the famous purple, red and gold silks took to the track in his name.

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2022.12.17 - Opinion

- In Ukraine, I saw the greatest threat to the Russian world isn't the west – it's Putin
- Qatar 2022: this World Cup has taken place in a crime scene
- Harry and Meghan are still giving Britons what they really want from royalty: cruel spectacle
- I'm a former Tory minister and a doctor – and I say give striking nurses a better pay deal

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In Ukraine, I saw the greatest threat to the Russian world isn't the west – it's Putin

[Timothy Garton Ash](#)



The Kremlin's imperial war has made its own culture and language a common enemy for people across its former empire



‘Revulsion against Putin’s recolonisation wars has extended to the whole broader notion of a Russian-speaking world.’ Bakhmut, 15 December 2022.
Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Sat 17 Dec 2022 04.00 EST Last modified on Sat 17 Dec 2022 05.44 EST

The time has come to ask whether, objectively speaking, [Vladimir Putin](#) is an agent of American imperialism. For no American has ever done half as much damage to what Putin calls the “Russian world” as the Russian leader himself has.

This thought came to me recently when I was in the Ukrainian city of Lviv, talking to Ukrainians made refugees in their own country by Putin’s war. “I was a Russian speaker until 24 February,” said Adeline, an art student from the now Russian-occupied town of [Nova Kakhovka](#), referencing the date of Russia’s full-scale invasion earlier this year. Russia has failed to take over Ukrainian culture, she said, so now it has set out to kill it. Several other Ukrainian students told me they find “the spirit of freedom” in Ukrainian literature, but of subservience to power in Russian literature.

Tetiana, a refugee from the ruthlessly bombed and destroyed city of Mariupol, had suffered without heat, light or water in a cellar under constant bombardment, seen her best friend killed by a Russian missile, and then had

a traumatic odyssey of escape. Tetiana not merely speaks much better Russian than Ukrainian; her mother is actually from [Russia](#), as are her parents-in-law. The Russian president would consider her a Russian. So I asked her for her message to Putin. She replied that she would like to kill him.

Wherever I turned, in every conversation, there was a total rejection not just of the Russian dictator, not merely of the Russian Federation as a state, but of everything and almost everyone Russian. Polling by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology shows that some 80% of Ukrainians had a positive attitude to Russia in 2013; by May 2022, the figure was [just 2%](#). A university lecturer told me that his students now write “russia” with a small initial letter. “I don’t correct them.”

This may be unsurprising in [Ukraine](#), a country suffering from a Russian war that is now primarily directed against the civilian population. But the same thing is happening across much of the territory of the former Russian (and subsequently Soviet) empire – which, since the early 2000s, Moscow has tried to reimagine as the *russkiy mir*, or Russian world.

In Georgia, a strong resentment of neoimperial Russia is more than understandable, since [Russia has occupied](#) roughly – a fifth of the country’s sovereign territory (in Abkhazia and South Ossetia) since 2008. But following the invasion of Ukraine, that hostility has enveloped almost all Russians. Ironically enough, this impacts the many tens of thousands of Russians who have fled to Georgia precisely to avoid being conscripted into fighting in Putin’s war against Ukraine. Georgians ask: why don’t you protest back home? Or as one banner put it, “Putin is killing people in Ukraine while Russians eat khachapuri in Georgia.” (Khachapuri is the distinctive Georgian cheese bread.)



Ukrainian artist Gamlet Zinkovsky (top) sets up two paintings by Polish artist Maciej Vogel on the wall of a building in Kharkiv. The paintings depict two women knitting a scarf in the colours of the Ukrainian and Polish national flags. Photograph: Sergey Kozlov/EPA

The revulsion is also found in central Asian states that still have very close ties to Moscow. On YouTube, you can watch a [magnificent excoriation](#) of the bullying Russian ambassador to Kazakhstan, Alexey Borodavkin, delivered in fluent Russian by the Kazakh journalist Arman Shuraev. “Russophobia is all that you have achieved with your stupid actions,” he says. If Russia invades Kazakhstan as it has Ukraine, “the entire Kazakh steppe will be strewn with the corpses of your conscripts … You are idiots. You are cannibals who eat themselves.”

“Borodavkin,” he concludes, directly addressing the ambassador, “if you want to see Nazis and fascists in Kazakhstan, look in the mirror and you will see the main Nazi and fascist. Glory to Ukraine! Forward Kazakhstan!”

When Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February, the Ukrainian journalist Olha Vorozhbyt tried to explain to an Indian public what was going on. “Could you imagine a Britain that claims India is in its empire?” she wrote in the Indian Express. “That is what Russia is doing now.” One can extend the analogy. Imagine that a revanchist, militarist

British dictatorship instrumentalised the cultural notion of an “English-speaking world” to justify its reinvasion of India. That’s exactly what Putin has done.

The [notion of *russkiy mir*](#) was revived and repackaged in the late 1990s as a kind of Russian soft-power initiative (*mir* means peace as well as world). In 2007, a Russkiy Mir Foundation was created by presidential decree. This was presented as a Russian counterpart to the British Council or Germany’s Goethe-Institut, but the concept was then weaponised by Putin to justify his war of recolonisation in Ukraine. He explicitly [mentioned the term](#) in a speech justifying the annexation of Crimea in 2014.

The entirely predictable result: revulsion against his recolonisation wars has extended to the whole broader notion of a Russian-speaking world. Obviously, a comparison with the English-speaking world points up big differences as well. Britain’s empire was overseas, Russia’s a contiguous land empire. The ideology of a Russian world was always closely associated with the Russian imperial project, the [Russian Orthodox Church](#) (now headed by the ecclesiastical warmonger Patriarch Kirill) and autocracy. But if Britain had reinvaded India, the British Council wouldn’t be very popular either. Those who justify their wars in terms of culture will find their culture treated as an enemy.

Russian culture is thus a collateral victim of Putin’s self-devouring cannibalism. There was an alternative future in which Russian-speaking culture, like today’s English-speaking culture, may have become multiculturally enriched by authors and artists from all its former colonies. What would contemporary English-language literature be without authors from India, Africa and Oceania? And, after all, fine contemporary Ukrainian writers such as [Andrey Kurkov](#) write – or should I say wrote? – in Russian.

But we must keep our eyes on the main tragedy. Putin is trying to recover parts of the Russian empire by brute force and terror. He [recently boasted](#) that the Azov Sea has become an internal Russian sea, adding that even Peter the Great “had still to fight to gain access to [it]”. About 14 million Ukrainians, a staggering one-third of the country’s population, have been made homeless. Europe has seen nothing like this since 1945.

Even in Lviv, in the far west of Ukraine, I encountered frequent multi-hour power cuts, because Russia has destroyed about 50% of the country's energy infrastructure. (You can donate to help Ukrainians get through the winter [here](#).) What does Ukraine need most? Every single person I spoke to gave the same answer: weapons, weapons, weapons. Give us the tools, they say, and we will finish the job. And so we should.

In the end, Vladimir Putin will go down in history not merely as the man who failed to restore the Russian empire, but as the destroyer of the Russian world.

- Timothy Garton Ash is a Guardian columnist
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[Sportblog](#)[World Cup 2022](#)

Qatar 2022: this World Cup has taken place in a crime scene

[Marina Hyde](#)



There has not been a single conviction and yet nothing changes with metaphorical bedsheets dutifully shielding the suspects



'I have stayed in the odd fancy hotel over the years. If, however, I was arrested in one of them, I can't get my head around the process that would lead to me still being treated as a valued customer even as I was led out to the police van.' Illustration: Gary Neill

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Fri 16 Dec 2022 10.47 EST Last modified on Sat 17 Dec 2022 00.24 EST

Two days out from the [World Cup](#) final, Qatar finishes hosting its tournament having very recently been declared “a frontrunner in labour rights”. “Today,” the declaration in question continued, “the World Cup in Qatar is proof of how sports diplomacy can achieve a historic transformation of a country.”

It feels only mildly unfortunate that the member of the European parliament who uttered these words three weeks ago is currently detained by Belgian police, [after the discovery of almost €1m](#) in banknotes in her marital home and a hotel room used by her father. After all, this has been a successful World Cup. Qatar has catapulted itself on to the world stage and won many plaudits. This timing is merely a freak coincidence.

In his closing speech, I hope Fifa’s president Gianni Infantino returns to [a familiar rhetorical furrow](#), and riffs: “Today, I feel in police custody in Brussels. Today, I feel like an MEP with a suitcase of cash in her home. Today, I feel I am that MEP who denies any involvement in an alleged bribery and corruption scheme which also features the Moroccan intelligence services. Today, I feel I am the MEP’s husband who is reported to have confessed his role working for Qatar’s government.”

Before we go on, I should of course say there has never been any incontrovertible evidence uncovered that links Qatar to corruption in the manner it secured its World Cup. The arrests in Brussels last week are alleged to relate to Qatar’s attempts to bag an aviation deal and visa-free travel to the bloc. There is no smoking gun on Qatar’s successful bid, and Fifa’s no-doubt crack ethics committee found nothing in its investigations. The desert state would prefer you focus solely on its jubilation in that 2010 footage of Sepp Blatter opening the envelope revealing the word “Qatar”, while the cameras picked up representatives of England’s failed 2018 bid, including David Beckham, looking sad and shrugging. Beckham himself has since found a [reported £150m from Qatar](#) to cheer him up. So, you know – every cloud.

Quick Guide

Qatar: beyond the football

Show



It was a World Cup like no other. For the last 12 years the Guardian has been reporting on the issues surrounding Qatar 2022, from corruption and human rights abuses to the treatment of migrant workers and discriminatory laws. The best of our journalism is gathered on our dedicated [Qatar: Beyond the Football](#) home page for those who want to go deeper into the issues beyond the pitch.

Guardian reporting goes far beyond what happens on the pitch. Support our investigative journalism [today](#).

Photograph: Caspar Benson

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Thank you for your feedback.

It seems odd now to think back to [the Fifa arrests of 2015](#). At the time, it was the biggest story out there – so big that you could hardly believe what you were seeing. It ran and ran – until the massive political shocks of 2016 eclipsed it entirely, and it suddenly seemed like some quaint old cops-and-robbers tale from a different time.

But back then we were gripped. Time and again I go back to that image of staff at Zurich's five-star Baur au Lac hotel, where [Fifa](#) executives were staying on the eve of its annual congress, dutifully holding up bed sheets to shield the suspects after they'd been arrested in the dawn raid by the Swiss authorities at the behest of the FBI. It's not so much that the Fifa executives were literally being led out under their own dirty linen – though there's definitely that. It's the continuing level of respect.



There will always be people like David Beckham willing to hold up the metaphorical bedsheets for Qatar. Photograph: Franck Fife/AFP/Getty Images

I have stayed in the odd fancy hotel over the years. If, however, I was arrested in one of them, I simply can't get my head around the process that would lead to me still being treated as a valued customer even as I was led out to the police van. I mean, what do you do to get that service? Ring down to the concierge and say: "Good morning. Couple of things. One, the hollandaise on my eggs benedict was a bit tepid this morning. Not happy. And two, I've just been arrested on behalf of the FBI. Can you send up someone in a tailcoat to hold some linen around me while I'm hauled off?" You would think, guest-services-speaking, that you were on your own at that point. And yet, bedsheets borne by footmen were forthcoming. It feels a

testament to the fact there really was no better customer than Fifa. And there still isn't.

As for last week's arrests, they allege Qatar's continuing attempts to curry global influence. Some of these are in plain sight. A number of British MPs [have accepted travel gifts and hospitality](#) from the Doha regime, with £260,000 showered on 36 MPs in the past year alone. Faced with renewed interest on these unfortunate declarations of interest after the Belgian raids, some beneficiaries are sticking to their guns. The Conservative backbencher Jackie Doyle-Price, who took £7,374 in travel and hospitality, insists: "It is precisely to challenge them on their human rights record that we go on these trips."

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I sort of love this idea – that an autocratic regime which has repeatedly demonstrated its total disregard for human rights would lay on lavish all-expenses-paid trips for no-mark foreign politicians and then, when some irrelevant member for West Bollockshire raises the issue of migrant worker deaths in between bites of the Arabian oryx steak it paid for, decide that it should change its ways. As Labour's regretful Chris Bryant, who himself accepted hospitality, put it: "They didn't want to listen and it felt all wrong." Well, yes.

So if it feels ridiculously on the nose that this Brussels raid should take place in the closing stages of Qatar's World Cup, that's just the game. You expect sensational upsets, but winning eyes remain on the prize. After the Belgian arrests, a member of the Strasbourg parliament intoned: "[We are standing in](#)

the middle of a crime scene”. Big deal. For the past month, we’ve been watching the biggest sports event in the world take place in the middle of one.

There has not been a single conviction despite, reportedly, thousands of labourer deaths. Nothing has changed, because the system works. There will always be people like Beckham willing to hold up the metaphorical bedsheets and the caravan will always move on. Whoever wins out of Argentina and France, the ultimate winner has been Qatar. It got away with it.

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[OpinionMonarchy](#)

Harry and Meghan are still giving Britons what they really want from royalty: cruel spectacle

[Jonathan Freedland](#)



You don't have to be a fan of the couple to see that monarchy exacts too high a price – and abolition would do the Windsors a favour



A photograph of Prince Harry and Meghan, the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, featured in their Netflix documentary. Photograph: Courtesy of Prince Harry and Meghan/Netflix

Fri 16 Dec 2022 11.42 EST Last modified on Fri 16 Dec 2022 12.48 EST

They're more royal than the royals. Detached they might be, but even in exile they are fulfilling their duties to the letter. For all their insistence that they had to break away from the system of monarchy, Harry and Meghan remain two of its most devoted servants. Because, for all the red-top fury aimed their way, they are doing the job from which they claimed to have "stepped back" exactly as it has been prescribed for generations. Indeed, they continue to provide the service Britons have been demanding from the Windsors for a century or more.

And what is that service? At its simplest, it is entertainment – or, perhaps more accurately, diversion. At a time when the news is full of bleak tidings – nurses paid so poorly they are compelled to strike, migrants and refugees risking death to cross an icy Channel, Russian missiles raining down on Ukraine – H&M, as the couple call each other, have served up a welcome excuse to look the other way.

Even those splashing the Duke and Duchess's woes across the front pages, and those reading them, know this story is not as important as some (or any) of the other things going on in the world. It's not despite that fact, but because of it, that people are snuggling under the duvet for a couple (or six) hours of [Sussex-watching on Netflix](#). That's how escapism works.

Naturally, some have taken to the phone-in shows to complain about the volume of media attention lavished on this trivia, decrying such warped priorities when food banks are joined by [warm banks](#), bedding banks and [nappy banks](#), and when homeless people shiver on the streets. But I rather liked James O'Brien's response to an LBC caller who chided him for covering the Netflix show instead of graver matters. "But you didn't call me about those things, did you? You called me about *this*."

Admittedly, the platform is a departure from royal tradition. Harry's parents conducted their war against each other via interviews on ITV and the BBC; now the outlet is a global streaming service. Which means "the institution", as the Sussexes refer to it, has to worry about reputational damage not only in its home market, where it can usually shape the media narrative, but internationally, where it can't.

The location is new, too: Windsor giving way to Montecito, ribbon-cutting at municipal leisure centres in England replaced by guided meditation sessions in the California hills. But that's no big deal for successful entertainment franchises: [The White Lotus](#) relocated from Hawaii to Italy for its second season. Perhaps the best way to think of the Sussexes is as a spinoff from the main show. Production has been outsourced and privatised, but it remains very much the same brand.

'They were lying to protect my brother,' says Harry in latest Netflix trailer – video

For what is the story that Harry and Meghan are telling? It is of a royal clan riven into factions, a tale so old Shakespeare was [speaking of](#) "the bond crack'd twixt son and father" nearly half a millennium ago. But at its centre is a young royal who believes himself misunderstood and mistreated, even cast out, by a cold, heartless institution.

That story, too – turning on romance, either thwarted or doomed – is wholly in keeping with Windsor tradition. I can remember my parents recalling their sympathy for Princess Margaret, denied her love of Group Captain Peter Townsend – he was always given his full rank, even around our kitchen table – while my grandmother would chip in with memories of the fateful romance of Edward and Mrs Simpson. For my generation, it was Princess Diana who ran into the chilly strictures of the Firm. For my sons, it will be the fable of Harry and Meghan. People take sides, the young usually rooting for the ones who dare defy convention (though, in the decades that followed, there were few eager to confess they'd cheered for the Hitler-curios Edward and Wallis). Round and round it goes, generating monarchy's most valuable quality: continuity. Off the Firm's books they may be, but Harry and Meghan are still in the royal business.

Indeed, they are doing the deeper part of the job too: holding up a mirror – albeit a wonky one – to the nation royalty serves. The [Netflix](#) series' strongest and saddest theme is that when a historically closed, white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant institution such as the British monarchy had a chance to open up by including a Black woman, thereby winning new admirers across the globe, it blew it – chiefly by surrendering to the racist double standard applied by a corner of the press (and presumably its readers) that could not look at Meghan without reaching for the lexicon of “gangsters”, “Straight Outta Compton” and all the dispiriting rest.

In the process, and over six glossy if long hours, H&M remind us of the price we exact from the Windsor family, and those who join it, as that single dynasty provides us with this odd service: part-soap, part-reflecting surface, part-diplomatic corps. “We pay, they pose”, runs the unwritten contract between public and royals, according to a Times headline that briefly appears in the latest batch of programmes.

The consequences of that bargain – struck ever since we stopped the royals from ruling us but kept them in place anyway – are laid bare in this series, just as they were in the show from which Harry & Meghan blurrily picks up and which it echoes, namely [The Crown](#). Put simply, this is an arrangement that requires one family to live dysfunctionally, for ever watched. The dystopian movie classic [The Truman Show](#) – imagining a child who, from birth, is permanently on camera for the amusement of a global TV audience

— appals us, and yet that is not so far from how we demand the Windsors live.

You don't have to like Harry and Meghan, or enjoy six hours of one-sided, uninterrupted PR-cum-hagiography, or even be able to stomach the California vocabulary of "triggering", "spaces" and feeling "seen", to concede that the whole set-up does very strange, often poisonous, things to those fated to live within it. Harry may be far too sensitive to — and consume too much of — the media, but that's easy for me to say: he believes it was obsessive press interest in his mother that drove her to her death, and he has good grounds to believe that.

Which is why I've long considered myself a pro-Windsor republican. There are sound, democratic reasons for a grownup country to choose its own head of state, but a further, compelling argument for abolition of the monarchy is the damage it does to the family saddled with the inherited burden of performing it. The process is cruelly warping, the proof documented generation after generation. I think we should do things differently for our sake. But if that's not persuasive, take one look at the state of the Windsors — and do it for them.

- Jonathan Freedland is a Guardian columnist
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OpinionNHS

I'm a former Tory minister and a doctor – and I say give striking nurses a better pay deal

[Dan Poulter](#)

NHS workers in Scotland have been offered close to 8%. Surely their colleagues in England deserve as much



Striking nurses outside St Thomas' hospital, London. 'Strike action on this scale is unprecedented in the history of our National Health Service.' Photograph: Martin Godwin/The Guardian

Fri 16 Dec 2022 10.15 EST Last modified on Fri 16 Dec 2022 13.15 EST

For the first time in its history, the Royal College of Nursing has [taken strike action](#) over pay. Next week, nurses in England will be joined on the picket line by ambulance workers and other members of the NHS workforce, and

junior doctors may soon join them. We should be clear that strike action on this scale is unprecedented in the history of our National Health Service.

As a doctor myself, I would never strike, because I worry about the impact on my patients. But it is important to recognise that many [NHS](#) workers are experiencing real financial hardship owing to the ever-rising cost of living, and the failure of the government to make a sensible pay offer is not helping. So how has the government got into this mess, and what can be done about it?

In February every year, the independent NHS pay review bodies meet to consider evidence, including the likely rate of inflation, in order to make recommendations about annual uplifts in pay for NHS workers. Government assertions that it is simply [following the advice](#) of the independent pay review bodies should be treated with some scepticism.

In the recent past, the government has chosen to ignore independent pay review body advice and offer lower than recommended pay settlements to NHS staff. So it is rather disingenuous for the government to now accept the recommendations because it is financially expedient for it to do so.

The pay review bodies made their recommendations for this year before the war in Ukraine, which has had a significant impact on inflation and the cost of living. In other words, the recommendations were made without reference to the single most significant factor affecting take-home pay.

The government is certainly right about one thing: inflation makes everyone poorer, and [a pay offer](#) of between 4% and 5% makes nurses and other NHS workers considerably poorer. Inflation alone justifies revisiting the recommendations of the pay review bodies to ensure nurses get a better deal.

The government also needs to properly consider the healthcare economics of the dispute. There are already a large number of nursing and other staff vacancies in the NHS, as a result of which about [£6bn a year](#) is being spent on temporary staffing costs, a bill that has [doubled from around £3bn in 2015](#).

The cost and reliance on temporary staffing is bad for patients but, despite being unacceptable and financially unsustainable, it appears to lack ministerial attention.

The government's decision to squeeze nursing pay will push more nurses to vote with their feet, to leave the NHS and earn more money by either working for temporary NHS staffing agencies or to work for private healthcare providers. This could even result in the perverse situation where reductions in real-terms pay mean that the same nurse could leave their NHS job and return to work for the NHS, perhaps even in the same hospital department, as an agency nurse. The NHS will foot the bill for the agency costs and the increased salary paid to the nurse.

This is poor healthcare economics. Pay needs to be set at a level that helps to recruit and retain the NHS workforce and the time has come for some joined-up thinking from government. Investing in better pay for nurses and other NHS staff would help improve staff retention and reduce the ever-growing temporary staff bill.

Nursing union demands for a close to [20% pay rise](#) are unreasonable, but it is equally unreasonable for the government to fail to acknowledge that the current independent pay recommendations were made without consideration of runaway inflation caused by the war in Ukraine.

The Scottish government has recognised this and made an [improved pay offer](#) to NHS staff of close to 8%, financed by adding an [additional penny](#) to the higher rate of income tax. The UK government should consider a similarly improved pay settlement for NHS staff in England. This would cost around £2bn and could be found without the need for tax rises if the government looked to NHS efficiencies, such as improving procurement practices, and recognised that investing in improved staff recruitment and retention would in itself deliver significant savings.

This is the very worst time for industrial action in the NHS. There is the ever-growing backlog of care resulting from the Covid pandemic – with 7 million people on waiting lists and growing – and winter pressures. Unless the government and NHS workers can come to terms quickly, patients will be the real losers in this dispute.

- Dr Dan Poulter is the MP for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich, a former health minister and a practising NHS hospital doctor

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

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[**Donald Trump**](#)

Exclusive: January 6 panel considering Trump referral to justice department for obstruction of Congress

Subcommittee recommended Trump could also be referred for conspiracy to defraud the United States, sources say



Donald Trump could be referred for obstruction of an official proceeding, the subcommittee is said to have concluded. Photograph: Andrew Harnik/AP

*[Hugo Lowell](#) in Washington
[@hugolowell](#)*

Fri 16 Dec 2022 14.51 EST Last modified on Fri 16 Dec 2022 15.34 EST

The House January 6 select committee is considering a criminal referral to the justice department against [**Donald Trump**](#) for obstruction of an official proceeding of Congress and conspiracy to defraud the United States on the

recommendation of a special subcommittee, according to sources familiar with the matter.

The recommendations on the former president – made by [the subcommittee examining referrals](#) – were based on renewed examinations of the evidence that indicated Trump’s attempts to impede the certification of the 2020 election results amounted to potential crimes.

The select committee could pursue additional criminal referrals for Trump and others, given the subcommittee raised the obstruction of an official proceeding and conspiracy to defraud statutes among a range of options, including insurrection, and discussions about referrals continued on Thursday, said the sources.

The referrals could also largely be symbolic since Congress has no ability to compel prosecutions by the justice department, which has increasingly ramped up its own investigations into Trump’s efforts to overturn the 2020 election and subpoenaed top aides to appear before federal grand juries.

The recommendations presage a moment of high political drama next Monday, when the full panel will vote publicly to adopt its final report and formally decide on making referrals, and increase pressure on the attorney general, Merrick Garland, to seek charges over January 6.

Trump could be referred for obstruction of an official proceeding, the subcommittee is said to have concluded, because he attempted to impede the certification and did so with a “consciousness of wrongdoing” – as the panel has previously interpreted the intent threshold.

The former president was seen to have met the elements of the offense since he relentlessly pressured Mike Pence to refuse to count electoral college votes for Joe Biden, despite knowing he had lost the election and had been told the plan was illegal.

Trump could also be referred for conspiracy to defraud the United States, the subcommittee suggested, arguing the former president violated the statute

that prohibits entering into an agreement to obstruct a lawful function of government by dishonest means.

The conspiracy charge was seen to be broadly applicable because Trump's agreement with key lawyers – and potentially even the rioters – did not need to be overt, while the plan to have Pence reject Biden slates of electors with Trump slates that did not exist was deceitful.

The discussions about referring Trump for obstruction of an official proceeding and conspiracy to defraud appeared to build upon the major win for the panel in May, when a federal judge found that Trump and the lawyer John Eastman likely engaged in felonies in trying to subvert the 2020 election.

In the ruling, US district court judge David Carter in California ruled that Trump and Eastman had concocted a “coup in search of a legal theory” and ordered Eastman to turn over his most sensitive emails to the investigation, citing the crime-fraud exception to attorney-client privilege.

The emails later showed that Eastman had admitted that he knew that having Pence interrupt the January 6 certification was illegal – and yet urged Pence's counsel Greg Jacob that the then-vice president should move ahead with the plot anyway.

The panel may not adopt all of the options presented by the subcommittee – it also suggested civil referrals to the House ethics committee for GOP congressmen and the disbarment of some Trump lawyers, among a number of options, though a witness tampering referral for Trump is no longer under consideration.

But members on the select committee have resolved to suggest criminal and civil charges to some degree, and any referral letters would be accompanied by supporting evidence not dissimilar to prosecution memorandums that are routinely drawn up by the justice department, one of the sources said.

A spokesman for the select committee declined to comment.

Regardless of how the panel proceeds against Trump, the intention to make

criminal referrals against the former president has been practically an open secret for months as its members have used the issue of potential criminality to reinforce the seriousness of Trump's conduct.

The recommendations from the subcommittee – led by congressman Jamie Raskin and comprised of vice-chair Liz Cheney, Adam Schiff and Zoe Lofgren, all members with a legal background – follow internal discussions for nearly a year that Trump committed crimes in seeking to nullify his defeat.

Even before the select committee filed its civil suit to Carter, Cheney read aloud parts of the the obstruction statute at a public business meeting last December. And then throughout public hearings in the summer, the panel detailed their findings like prosecutors, treating the public like a jury at trial.

If the members decide to move forward with criminal referrals against Trump in particular – essentially a letter informing the justice department they uncovered evidence of crimes – they would be creating a roadmap for a prosecution put together by the select committee's top lawyers.

The select committee's investigation has been principally driven by color-coded teams of investigative lawyers, many of whom have previously worked as federal prosecutors, conducting more than 1,000 witness interviews and reviewing documents and communications from Trump's confidantes.

Still, the justice department has no obligation to take up any criminal referrals and, at this stage, could have a better perspective about the strength of criminal charges as it escalates its own January 6 inquiries with an investigative arsenal far more potent than possessed by Congress.

In recent months, an increasing number of top Trump advisors and election officials in states where Trump tried to nullify his defeat have been subpoenaed to testify before an increasing number of federal grand juries in Washington hearing evidence about events connected to the Capitol attack.

The recent subpoenas to election officials have demanded any and all communications involving Trump and the Trump campaign from June 2020

to January 2021, as part of the investigations into Trump's so-called fake electors scheme, according to two subpoenas reviewed by the Guardian.

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[**Malaysia**](#)

Malaysia landslide kills at least 21 campers as recovery efforts continue

Two of the dead found locked in an embrace, officials say, with 12 still missing after the disaster north of the capital Kuala Lumpur

Aerial footage shows aftermath of deadly Malaysian landslide – video

Associated Press

Fri 16 Dec 2022 21.05 ESTLast modified on Sat 17 Dec 2022 04.41 EST

A thunderous crush of soil and debris killed 21 people at a campground in [**Malaysia**](#) and rescuers dug through the mud in the night for another 12 who were feared buried in the landslide.

More than 90 people were sleeping on an organic farm when the dirt tumbled from a road about 30 meters (100 feet) above the site and covered about 1 hectare (3 acres) on Friday. Two of the dead were found locked in an embrace, according to the state fire department chief.

Authorities told local media that the landowners did not have a licence to run a campground.

At least seven people were hospitalised and dozens more were rescued unharmed, said district police chief Suffian Abdullah.

Leong Jim Meng told the New Straits Times English-language daily that he and his family were awakened by a loud bang and felt the earth move at the campsite in Batang Kali, about 50 kilometers (30 miles) north of the capital of Kuala Lumpur.

“My family and I were trapped as soil covered our tent. We managed to escape to a carpark area and heard a second landslide happening,” the 57-

year-old was quoted as saying. He said it was surprising because there was no heavy rain in recent days, only light drizzles.



Rescuers work following a landslide at a campsite in Batang Kali, on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur. Photograph: Korporat Jbpm/AP

It is currently the season for monsoon rains in Malaysia, and the country's government development minister, Nga Kor Ming, said all campsites nationwide that are near rivers, waterfalls and hillsides would be closed for a week to assess their safety.

The Selangor state fire department posted photos of rescuers digging through soil and rubble with an excavator and shovels. Officials said the rubble is believed to be 8 meters (26 feet) deep. More than 400 rescuers as well as tracking dogs are set to work through the night to find the dozen people still missing.

Selangor state fire chief Norazam Khamis was cited by the Free Malaysia Today news portal as saying that two of the bodies found were "hugging each other" and believed to be mother and daughter. The fire department said five children were among those who perished.

An estimated 450,000 cubic meters (nearly 16 million cubic feet) of debris — enough to fill 180 Olympic-sized swimming pools — hit the campsite,

Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad, the natural resources, environment and climate change minister, told local media.

Suffian, the district police chief, said the victims entered the area, a popular recreational site for locals to pitch or rent tents from the farm, on Wednesday. The campsite is not far from the Genting Highlands hill resort, a popular tourist destination with theme parks and Malaysia's only casino.

After visiting the site late Friday, prime minister Anwar Ibrahim announced a special payment to the families of those killed as well as survivors.

Nga told local media that the campsite has been operating illegally for the past two years. The operator has government approval to run an organic farm but has no licence for camping activities, he said. If found guilty, Nga warned, the camp operator could face up to three years in prison and a fine.

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[Tunisia](#)

Tunisians go to polls in election set to cement rule of strongman president

Opposition groups are boycotting vote that one prominent party leader describes as ‘a still-born farce’



A woman and a girl in the capital, Tunis, walk past electoral posters for candidates. Photograph: Fethi Belaid/AFP/Getty Images

[Martin Chulov](#) Middle East correspondent

Sat 17 Dec 2022 10.44 ESTFirst published on Fri 16 Dec 2022 22.00 EST

Tunisians have gone to the polls to elect a new parliament, 11 years to the day since [a vendor's self-immolation](#) sparked [the fall of their ruling tyrant](#) and triggered a wave of popular revolts across north Africa and the Middle East.

In the troubled decade since, other regional states that once cracked under the strain of popular revolts have been increasingly smothered by

counterrevolutions that clawed back civic gains and political freedoms championed by their citizens.

Although [Tunisia](#) was the only nation to emerge from the Arab spring protests with a democratic government, there are fears that Saturday's election will cap its dalliance with democracy and cement the return of strongman rule.

The current president, Kais Saied, who in July last year [ousted Tunisia's ruling government](#) and has since [revamped the constitution to give himself largely unfettered powers](#), is expected to preside over a new legislature with little aegis, and weakened political parties.

Polling stations opened at 8am local time (7am GMT) on Saturday and were scheduled to close at 6pm.

Voter turnout appeared lower during the morning hours, although Associated Press reporters saw people queueing outside several voting stations in the capital, Tunis.

Saied and his wife, Ichraf, cast their ballots in Ennasr, a northern suburb of Tunis, on Saturday morning.

Saied called on people to vote "with your hearts and your conscience to reclaim your legitimate rights to justice and freedom". He also warned against supporting those he claimed had abused power and "depleted the country of valuable resources after bribing people to elect them under the old electoral law".

That the elections fall on the anniversary of Mohamed Bouazizi setting himself alight to protest against his treatment at the hands of the authorities is highly symbolic, and brings down the curtain on an era that came to be known as the Arab spring – in the place where it all began.



Tunisia's president, Kais Saied, has revamped the constitution. Photograph: Johanna Geron/AP

Opposition groups and the main political parties have said they will boycott the vote, calling it undemocratic and a fig leaf of legitimacy for a power grab that would shred hard-won freedoms.

Nejib Chebbi, head of an anti-Saied coalition including the Islamist Ennahda party, said the election, which is taking place during an economic crisis that is fuelling poverty, amounted to a “a still-born farce”.

Saied, however, says a referendum held on constitutional reform in July provided a mandate to push through the changes and claims that Tunisians are seeking political certainty after a decade of stumbling and often crumbling democracy.

“Tunisia is the last domino to fall in the region,” said Hamish Kinneear, [Middle East and north Africa](#) analyst at the risk intelligence company Verisk Maplecroft. “Looking forward, however, nothing is inevitable. Saied may be dominant now – but could face heavy domestic opposition to his plans to introduce structural economic reforms.”

For the time being, however, those who support Tunisia's new strongman appear to gravitate to the certainty that he offers.

“What made Saied popular, and fortified his presidential powers, is that Tunisians had lost patience with their elected leaders as they watched nine successive governments in 10 years issue big promises and consistently falter, particularly on the economic front,” said Prof Safwan Masri, dean of Georgetown University in Qatar and author of *Tunisia: An Arab Anomaly*. “But the economic situation has not improved under Saied, and his popularity, always shallow, has been waning.”



Tunisian demonstrators take part in a rally in the capital last week against the president. Photograph: Fethi Belaid/AFP/Getty Images

In nearby Egypt – whose leadership supported Saied’s grab for power – a revolution ignited by the ousting of Tunisia’s Zine Abidine Ben Ali in 2011 has long since reverted to the type of oppressive state rule that characterised the era of its long-ruling tyrant, Hosni Mubarak. Although Egypt’s revolutionaries were among the loudest and largest in the region, their quest to forge a political ecosystem in which citizens shaped their destinies was largely swamped by a resurgent police state that seized on the failings of the short-lived government of Mohamed Morsi, who [was forced from office](#) and jailed in 2013.

“Forging democracy from the rubble of authoritarian states is a herculean task,” cautioned Kinnear. “Hosni Mubarak may have been swept aside in a

popular revolution and replaced with an elected leader, but other parts of the old regime – such as the military – remained intact and later helped to restore authoritarian rule. Democracy remains fragile even once it is established.”

Masri said the jury remained out on whether Tunisia could still succeed in its democratic experiment. “The social bedrock of democratic Tunisia – its strong civil society and labour movement, along with its commitment to women’s rights and the visible role women play in public life – cannot be overlooked. As tempting as it is to look at all countries in the region through the same prism, that can be quite misleading. The situation is quite different than it is, say, in Egypt, where the army and labour movement have inverse strengths compared to Tunisia.”

HA Hellyer, a non-resident scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, said the election would not necessarily mark the end of an era. “The post-2011 era has seen revolution and counterrevolution, but not a final chapter by any means. What we’re seeing are cycles that keep on unfolding, where populations insist on pushing, and then retreating, and status quo systems try to manage. Kais Saied is another note in the story in that regard, but I don’t think he’s crystallised anything yet.”

The Associated Press contributed to this report

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UFOs

‘Several hundred’ UFO reports received by Pentagon’s new tracking office

All-domain Anomaly Resolution Office was set up to track unidentified objects in the sky, underwater or in space



Video grab image taken on 28 April 2020 showing ‘unidentified aerial phenomena’. Photograph: DoD/AFP/Getty Images

Associated Press in Washington

Fri 16 Dec 2022 16.23 ESTFirst published on Fri 16 Dec 2022 16.06 EST

A new Pentagon office set up to track reports of [unidentified flying objects](#) has received “several hundred” new reports, but no evidence so far of alien life, the agency’s leadership has told reporters.

The All-domain Anomaly Resolution Office (AARO) was [set up in July](#) and is responsible for not only tracking unidentified objects in the sky, but also

underwater or in space – or potentially an object that has the ability to move from one domain to the next.

The office was established following more than a year of attention on unidentified flying objects that military pilots have observed but have sometimes been reluctant to report due to fear of stigma.

In June 2021 the Office of the Director of National Intelligence reported that between 2004 and 2021, there were 144 such encounters, 80 of which were captured on multiple sensors.

Since then, “we’ve had lots more reporting”, said anomaly office director Sean Kirkpatrick. When asked to quantify the amount, Kirkpatrick said “several hundreds”.

An updated report from the director of National Intelligence that will provide specific figures on new reports received since 2021 is expected by the end of the year, the officials said.

The office was set up not only to examine the question of whether there is extraterrestrial life, but also the security risk posed by so many encounters with unknown flying objects by military installations or military aircraft.

This May, [Congress held its first hearing in more than half a century on the topic](#), with members expressing concern that – whether or not the objects are alien or potentially new technology being flown by China, Russia or another potential adversary – the unknown creates a security risk.

So far, “we have not seen anything, and we’re still very early on, that would lead us to believe that any of the objects that we have seen are of alien origin”, said Ronald Moultrie, under secretary of defense for intelligence and security. “Any unauthorized system in our airspace we deem as a threat to safety.”

The office is also working on ways to improve its ability to identify unknown objects, such as by recalibrating sensors that may be focused just on known adversary aircraft or drone signatures, Moultrie said.

One reason for the hundreds of additional reports coming in may be the outreach the department has done to destigmatize reporting potential encounters. Each service has also established its own reporting processes, Kirkpatrick said.

Beyond unidentifiable objects, new technology – such as future stealth bombers and stealth fighters, drones and hypersonic missiles being fielded by both the US and China – could be mistaken for a UFO. Kirkpatrick said the new office has been coordinating with the Pentagon and the US intelligence community to get the signatures of US technology in order to rule out those aircraft or drones.

“We are setting up very clear mechanisms with our blue programs, both our DOD and IC programs, to deconflict any observations that come in with blue activities, and ensure that we weed those out and identify those fairly early on,” Kirkpatrick said, referring to the “blue” US aircraft programs in operation by the Pentagon or intelligence agencies.

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Peru

Peru ministers resign after deadly protests as pressure on government rises

Education and culture ministers resign following ongoing unrest that has seen at least 17 people killed



Security forces intervene at a protest in Lima, Peru, on Wednesday.
Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Reuters

Fri 16 Dec 2022 23.37 EST Last modified on Fri 16 Dec 2022 23.42 EST

Pressure rose on Peru's fledgling government as two cabinet members resigned following deadly protests that have rocked the country since former president Pedro Castillo's removal from office and arrest last week.

Education minister Patricia Correa and culture minister Jair Perez announced their resignations on Twitter on Friday, citing the deaths of individuals during the unrest.

“This morning I presented my letter of resignation from the position of education minister. The death of compatriots has no justification. State violence cannot be disproportionate and cause death,” Correa said on her Twitter account.

Castillo’s ouster has sparked angry protests, with demonstrators calling for early elections, the closure of congress, a constituent assembly, and the resignation of new president Dina Boluarte.

The protests continued Friday, with key roads blockaded and airports forced to close. At least 17 people have been killed in the protests so far, authorities have said, and at least five more have died of indirect consequences.

The United Nations on Friday expressed “deep concern” over reports of deaths and detentions of minors involved in the demonstrations.

Peru’s government said foreign minister Ana Cecilia Gervasi would meet with the UN High Commission Tuesday to discuss the situation.

On Thursday, eight people were killed in clashes between security forces and protesters in Ayacucho, according to local authorities, after a supreme court panel [ordered an 18-month pretrial detention for Castillo](#) while he is investigated over charges of “rebellion and conspiracy”.

Castillo has denied wrongdoing and says he remains the country’s lawful president.

Peru has been through years of political turmoil, with multiple leaders accused of corruption, frequent impeachment attempts, and presidential terms cut short.

The cabinet departures raise questions about the longevity of the government of Boluarte, the former vice president, who was sworn in on 7 December after Castillo was removed from office by a congressional vote hours after he attempted to dissolve congress.

Peru’s congress on Friday rejected a proposed constitutional reform that would have brought presidential elections forward to December 2023, one of

the key demands of the protesters.

After the deaths in Ayacucho, the country's ombudsman's office said a criminal complaint had been filed to determine the responsibility, without giving further details.

Boluarte's government [announced a state of emergency](#) on Wednesday, granting police special powers and limiting freedoms, including the right to assembly, but it appears to have had little effect in stemming the protests.

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- [Live Politics: union leader warns of ‘huge escalation’ of public sector strikes if pay offers don’t improve](#)
- [Industrial action Border Force staff join strikes as postal workers take action again](#)
- [Border Force Strike could last six months, says union leader](#)

Business liveBusiness

Travellers warned of delays as airport Border Force staff strike; next week's ambulance strike called off – as it happened

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Industrial action

Border Force staff join strikes as postal workers take action again

Passengers arriving in UK can expect longer queues while mail may not arrive in time for Christmas

- [UK strike calendar – service stoppages in December and January](#)



A group of striking postal workers keep warm as they picket outside a Royal Mail sorting office in London last week. Photograph: Leon Neal/Getty Images

Gwyn Topham Transport correspondent
[@GwynTopham](#)

Fri 23 Dec 2022 00.00 EST Last modified on Fri 23 Dec 2022 04.29 EST

Border Force officials will on Friday join the wave of [industrial action](#) across Britain, starting the first of a series of strikes at airports, while Royal

Mail workers strike again for two days before Christmas.

Passengers travelling into the UK have been warned to be prepared for longer queues at immigration in airports, while many letters and parcels will now go undelivered before Christmas, as staff take action over pay trailing behind inflation.

Heathrow, the biggest of the six airports where Border Force staff are to strike, said it expected the vast majority of journeys to be unaffected, with no flights cancelled before the industrial action.

About 1,000 members of the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union will continue to strike over the remaining days of 2022, apart from 27 December.

The Home Office, which is responsible for Border Force, has drafted in officials from other departments as well as hundreds of members of the armed forces as a contingency workforce to try to mitigate the effects of the strikes.

The chief operating officer of Border Force, Steve Dann, has not ruled out airport closures in a worst-case scenario, and he said the travelling public [should expect disruption](#).

Just under 9,000 flights are now scheduled to land at the six affected airports – Birmingham, Cardiff, Glasgow, Gatwick, Heathrow and Manchester – during the strikes, carrying up to 1.8 million passengers, according to data from the aviation analytics firm Cirium. Officials will also strike at one seaport, Newhaven in East Sussex.

The airports are confident that the contingency staff and e-gates, which will be unaffected, will process most passengers effectively during the strikes. The volume of passengers travelling through airports is still only about 85% of pre-pandemic levels.

Heathrow expects departing flights will see little or no impact, with all terminals open as normal, but warned that incoming travellers should be

prepared for longer waits in the immigration hall, particularly if they do not have passports that can be used at the automatic gates.

Meanwhile, Royal Mail said it would do all it could to ensure delivery of last-minute Christmas cards and parcels, as tens of thousands of postal workers strike again in an [increasingly bitter dispute](#) with its staff in the Communications Workers Union.

Royal Mail said the industrial action, which will have covered 18 days this year by Christmas, had now cost it £100m.

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A spokesperson said: “Over the next 48 hours we will be doing all we can to deliver Christmas for our customers. Thousands of employees from across the business have swapped their regular day jobs to help sort and deliver the festive mailbag. We are grateful to them and the more than 12,000 posties who returned to work on the last strike day.”

A CWU spokesperson dismissed the claim and said the industrial action was strongly supported.

The Royal Mail spokesperson added: “We urge the CWU to seriously consider our pay offer of up to 9%, and to work with us to bring the company back to profitability … [Its] future and all our employees’ jobs depend on Royal Mail modernising so that we can better serve customers’ changing demands.”

The CWU has accused Royal Mail of refusing an offer to suspend the strikes. Its general secretary, Dave Ward, said the company was trying “to destroy the jobs of postal workers and remove their union from the workplace”.

The two sets of strikes follow action earlier this week by nurses and ambulance workers. Industrial action including an overtime ban at train operating companies has continued to disrupt some rail services severely, while more rail strikes at Network Rail follow from Christmas Eve.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/dec/23/border-force-staff-join-strikes-as-postal-workers-walk-out-again>

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Industrial action

Border Force strike could last six months, says union leader

Mark Serwotka, head of the PCS union, warns of ‘huge escalation’ of action in January across all sectors

[UK strike calendar – service stoppages in December and January](#)



People are being urged to use electronic gates where possible on arrival at UK airports. Photograph: Oli Scarff/Getty Images

[Kiran Stacey](#) Political correspondent

Fri 23 Dec 2022 03.52 EST Last modified on Fri 23 Dec 2022 04.14 EST

A union leader has warned of six months of strike disruption by Border Force staff, as they and postal workers become the latest groups to walk out.

Mark Serwotka, the head of the Public and Commercial Services Union, which represents Border Force staff, said on Friday he expected rolling

strikes to take their toll for months to come, with what he called a “huge escalation” in January.

His comments echo [warnings by health unions](#) that the government’s refusal to offer more pay this financial year would lead to industrial action lasting well into the new year.

Serwotka told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme: “We have a strike fund that means we can sustain this action after Christmas. The strike mandate lasts right up until May – we will be supporting this action until May and we would reballot again if we have to.”

He added: “Not only going to be six months, I think in January what you’ll see is huge escalation of this action, in the civil service and across the rest of our economy, unless the government get around the negotiating table.”

Passengers arriving into British airports on Friday were [being warned](#) to expect longer queues for immigration as a result of the Border Force strikes, although Heathrow said it was not cancelling any flights. About 1,000 workers are planning to walk out for the next week, affecting six of the country’s busiest airports: Heathrow, Gatwick, Birmingham, Manchester, Glasgow and Cardiff.

The government has drafted military personnel and civil servants to staff entry gates, and travellers are being urged to use electronic gates. Children under 12 cannot use these, however, putting families at highest risk of long delays.

Meanwhile, members of the Communication Workers Union have begun a two-day strike, which could disrupt the delivery of last-minute Christmas cards and presents.

On Friday morning the Royal College of Nursing was due to announce two more days of strikes next year as they try to push the government to improve its pay offer of £1,400 for NHS staff except dentists and doctors.

Ministers, however, insist they will not budge in their refusal to boost pay for 2022/2023, although officials have suggested accelerating the pay award

process for the next financial year.

Senior Treasury officials said they believed any change in this position would undermine the reputation for fiscal credibility that the prime minister, Rishi Sunak, has prioritised in the wake of Liz Truss's botched mini-budget.

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Serwotka rebutted the government's argument that higher public sector pay could fuel inflation, accusing ministers of driving people into inwork poverty.

"Forty thousand of our members are using food banks," he said. "Forty-five thousand of them are claiming inwork benefits, they are inwork poor.

"We presented the government with a dossier where their own staff spoke to the government and told them that they were skipping meals; they didn't put the lights on at home; they were terrified about what Christmas would bring."

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2022.12.23 - Spotlight

- 'The grief expressed is mine' Charlotte Wells on Aftersun, The Guardian's best film of the year
- Best films 2022 No 1 – Aftersun
- Celebrity how we met Julian Lloyd Webber and Jiaxin Cheng: 'I said: Would you consider trying life in England?'
- 'Ghost stories are essentially optimistic' Mark Gatiss leads a spooky on-air Christmas

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Charlotte Wells on *Aftersun*, The Guardian's best film of the year: 'The grief expressed is mine'

[Catherine Shoard](#)



'People want the connection between artist and art to be so strong. I do wish it could be completely anonymous' ... Charlotte Wells. Photograph: Chris Pizzello/Invision/AP

The Scottish director discusses the impact and autobiography of her debut film, about a father (Paul Mescal) and daughter (Frankie Corio) on holiday in the late 1990s

[Peter Bradshaw on why *Aftersun* is the best film of the year](#)



[@catherineshoard](#)

Fri 23 Dec 2022 01.00 EST Last modified on Fri 23 Dec 2022 02.59 EST

Why do you think the film has had such an impact on people?

I don't know. Cannes [where the film premiered] was such a shock. The response was wholly unexpected, both for what it was and because I had never considered what it might be. Which is a naivete I will only have this once and feel so grateful for. We had just been rushing to get to the finish line. We'd spoken a lot in the edit room about the film's legibility and how it might connect with audiences, but without any thought to what that meant. We never considered what the critical response would be. I don't think we ever thought very many people would see the film, which was a reasonable expectation.

Does it speak to an audience hunger for films that aren't too prescriptive?

That would be nice if that were true. One thing that struck me was the second we finished screening in Cannes, this young man came up to me and shared his own and his mother's experience with depression. And it was so striking.



Frankie Corio and Paul Mescal in *Aftersun*. Photograph: Sarah Makharine

The film is certainly open, and I have seen people bring many different kinds of experiences to it, but that was certainly an unintended expression – yet it was so immediately legible to this young man. It meant so much that it connected that personally and so specifically. There is an openness and language around mental health in younger people that didn't exist when I was a teenager.

After another screening, somebody who probably doesn't watch films like this very often said: "Where I'm from, there's a saying: 'Why do young men die? Because they want to.'" The film connected with him in a way that felt like it reached way beyond like an arthouse film legibility to something far more raw. Those are always the most meaningful responses, where they elicit some kind of recognition in people that is nothing to do with film.

Yet for all the universality out of specificity, there are very fundamental themes that a lot of people can connect with, and a core parental relationship that I don't think is unique. Even if the one portrayed on screen [between a young father, Calum, and his daughter, Sophie] is one less often portrayed on screen.

I read too much about the film; it's not good. People try to box it in, in terms of distributor or the support that I received. But I wasn't necessarily thinking about the form conforming to anything other than pursuing which films interested me. So its accessibility has been a really nice surprise.

I always want to make films that way. I think you have to chase what interests you. I don't think about making films for other people. Which isn't to say you don't consider the audience, but consciously trying to cater to other people while using it as a medium of self-expression seems a dangerous path to walk.

Do you think the ubiquity of video today changes how people will remember their parents?

Yes. I don't have any video of my dad at all. I have a torso on an hour's worth of digital video playing chess. All of our heads are framed out of screen because the chess board is more interesting. I think that's kind of perfect in its own horribly sad way. My generation has more than the generation before, and this current generation record more than ever. And yet sometimes I still forget to point the camera at things that you might wish you had later on. I don't think that feeling necessarily would ever change, of always reaching for something you don't quite have. The feeling of chasing somebody lost.



Wells, second right, with her *Aftersun* cast and crew at the British Independent Film Awards. Photograph: Dave J Hogan/Getty Images

It was interesting watching Frankie [Corio, 11, who plays Sophie] interact with the camcorder physically, because it had the same curiosity for her that it had for me at that age, but just coming from a completely different point of view. It was so limiting in a way for her, whereas for me, it felt of infinite possibility.

And I think people who had memorable experiences at the point when the film takes place and who have records on that same type of media and a relationship to seeing that kind of footage may have the strongest connection to the film.

How have you navigated the sudden interest in your own life story?

I'm enjoying this conversation, which like makes me vulnerable to being too honest. It's been difficult to navigate and I start to question what autobiography even means. I suppose I like to put *Aftersun* in a "personal film-making" bucket.

I enjoyed figuring out the film as a story and making choices that served a film. And I enjoyed figuring out who these characters were, that were

unquestionably based on myself and my dad, and our character traits were the basis of Callum and Sophie's character traits. But at the same time, I like film-making and in this script it was always about serving this film.

It's funny hearing people describe it as my memory because that it truly is not. The events that were in the script that were closely based on a conversation or an interaction – many of them aren't in the final film. I think that's because I am keen to serve the film and not my own past and whatever I'm exorcising with my own past is still the core of the film. The emotion of the film and the grief expressed is mine. And that's a really easy thing to admit because, as I said, this to me was a form of expression and that is what I was ultimately expressing.

But in terms of: did this happen, or was I on this holiday? The answer is no. I've started to push more against autobiography, the more I see people inclined to draw a one-to-one relationship between me and the film. It's difficult. I have that impulse too. When you watch something, you immediately look up: is this the creator? But I have a very different take on that impulse now. A lot of work went into this as a film, and that work is often discounted by saying: this is just what happened.

You've said that film can express feelings in a way words and still images cannot. There's an amazing moment in the film in which a Polaroid develops; have you looked into the psychology and chemistry of what moving images do to the brain?

No. But I'm interested in how different forms of art best communicate different things. I think there's like an immense power in a photograph and in a song and in a painted portrait or prose. Which is why I keep reading unadaptable books, like The Comforters by Muriel Spark. I can't help think about adaptation, but only want to be reading things that probably shouldn't be adapted.



Aftersun. Photograph: Sarah Makharine

Sometimes I feel frustrated by how much emotion can be communicated in a still photograph or a three-and-a-half minute song, when you have to work so hard to get to that amount of feeling in film over 90 minutes. But I do think it allows for something else. Combining music, sound and picture allows you to do a lot of contradictory things at the same time. And I'm interested in contradictory things: people and emotions. I think there's something in film that allows you to just use all of these layers and tools at your disposal to express something a bit more messy.

Which films have moved you in the way people have been moved by yours?

There were a few documentaries that we were watching leading up to production: [Silence Is a Falling Body](#), which mostly uses DV footage a woman found of her father after he died. That's phenomenal. [Terence Davies's trilogy](#). Chantal Akerman I adore, especially [News from Home](#). Edward Yang.

[Murmur of the Hearts](#) by Sylvia Chang was the last film that I sobbed at in the way that people describe sobbing at this film. It has a dream ghost-type

sequence for a departed parent. I saw that in the midst of writing this and was inconsolable.

In terms of sucker punch, when I saw [Carol](#), Todd Haynes's film, I knew nothing about it going in and hadn't read the book. There was something in that film that I had never seen before. I was really, really unexpectedly moved. It was like seeing something of myself on screen that I hadn't expressed.

Do you find people who have lost a parent are more moved by Aftersun?

I think so. I see so many readings on the film and I'm very reluctant to invalidate them because the core expression is kind of similar, regardless of your take. But I think there is one line through the film that is closer to mine, and I think that's the one.

Does the power of film ever frighten you?

Lots about this frightens me at the moment, quite frankly. I made Aftersun in a vacuum with my friends and then it reaches people and makes them feel strongly. It's very weird being a physical player in that. People want the connection between artist and art to be so strong. I do wish it could be completely anonymous in some ways. It's very hard to imagine making another film right now.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2022/dec/23/charlotte-wells-on-aftersun-the-guardians-best-film-of-the-year-the-grief-expressed-is-mine>

Best films 2022Movies

Best films of 2022 in the UK: No 1 – Aftersun

This extraordinary debut by director Charlotte Wells tells the poignant story of a father-daughter relationship. Understated, deceptively simple, it shimmers with mystery and tragedy

- [Charlotte Wells on the impact and autobiography of Aftersun](#)
- [50 best films of 2022 in the UK](#)



‘Childhood memories worn to a sheen’ ... Paul Mescal and Frankie Corio in Aftersun. Photograph: Sarah Makharine



[Peter Bradshaw](#)

[@PeterBradshaw1](#)

Fri 23 Dec 2022 01.00 EST Last modified on Fri 23 Dec 2022 02.41 EST

With a surname like that, maybe a lot was going to be expected of this extraordinary first-time feature director. Charlotte Wells' delectable debut movie has floored audiences all over the world, beginning with its premiere this May in the Critics' Week at Cannes, which is where I first saw it. It is film about the overwhelming power of the past and its terrible, tragic inaccessibility; a film about a father-daughter relationship achieving a poignant new intimacy at the very moment it has to be relinquished. The title elegantly gestures at something understood only when it has receded into the past, when its heat has cooled, and when some balm is needed.

Aftersun features [Paul Mescal](#) and nine-year-old newcomer Frankie Corio as Calum and Sophie: a Scottish guy who, some time in the 90s, has come on a package holiday trip with his kid, from whose mum he is now separated. It's a summer trip in a budget resort, a sunshine break that is also a kind of farewell – although Sophie does not exactly grasp that. Maybe Calum doesn't either. Father and daughter amiably get along with no perceivable tension or drama. Calum good-naturedly goofs around with Sophie, who eye-rollingly tolerates his embarrassing dad-dancing at the disco. But one

night Calum goes off on his own, stricken by a guilt and an overwhelming love that he can't properly show her.

Everything is low key and the film is allowed to unspool naturally, like a deceptively simple short story. It is structured in terms of a series of flashbacks experienced by the adult Sophie, and *Aftersun* is about childhood memories being worn to a sheen and elevated to mystery by being constantly replayed in your mind (like the digital video that Calum is shooting on his state-of-the-art Sony Handycam). New meanings appear that were not there at first, revealed or created by the remembering mind and endowed with a new poignancy.

Conversations about what *Aftersun* means have been intriguing: for some in the United States, the fact that Calum has three alcoholic drinks over supper with Sophie appears to hint at something irresponsible. Anglo-Saxon audiences might not see anything particularly bad in it. There is also the question of whether or not Calum is now supposed to be dead, a shocking implication (for a character who is so young in the movie) which makes the whole thing even more tragic.

Either way, the loss – and the love – together make up the one big thing overarching the film's many little moments that traffic uneventfully across the screen. Nothing very dramatic happens, and when something important does occur, it is coolly unemphasised and unsignposted. The artistry is implicit and unostentatious. The details accumulate; the images reverberate and the importance of the central relationship deepens. This film shimmers like a swimming pool of mystery, gaining new converts and followers everywhere it is shown. Nothing deserves the “film of the year” tag more than this.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2022/dec/23/best-films-of-2022-in-the-uk-no-1-aftersun>

Celebrity how we metLife and style

How Julian Lloyd Webber met Jixin Cheng: ‘I said: Would you consider trying life in England?’

Cellists Lloyd Webber, 71, and Cheng, 48, met while he was on tour in New Zealand. She eventually moved to the UK, where the couple now live. They married in 2009



‘The only times we argue is about work’ Jixin and Julian.



[Emine Saner](#)

[@eminesaner](#)

Fri 23 Dec 2022 01.00 EST

It wasn't until the third time [Julian Lloyd Webber](#) and Jiaxin Cheng met that the idea of a romantic relationship seemed a possibility. The first time, in 2000, Julian, the celebrated cellist, was on tour in New Zealand, and Jiaxin was one of a number of music students invited to hear him rehearse. Born in China, Jiaxin had graduated from the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, and was doing a master's degree at Auckland University. "Our teacher took us backstage to say hello," she says.

Julian got her email address, and contacted her two years later when he was on tour in the country again to ask if she was still in New Zealand, adding that he might need her technical help with a concert that was going to be broadcast. By then, Jiaxin had graduated and was playing in the Auckland Philharmonia and the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra. "At rehearsal, the sound wasn't good and I asked Jiaxin if she could come and listen," says Julian. "Being a cellist herself, she was very helpful, and I was able to get a good recording."

The next time they met, in 2006, on Julian's last tour of New Zealand, was "when something really started to click," he says. It had been, he says, "a very difficult time for me" (his third marriage was breaking up). Again, Jiaxin met him after his rehearsal, and he invited her to the concert. He had given her his new CD, *Unexpected Songs*, which she had been listening to in the car on the way. "There was a track I thought was really lovely and I looked down at the CD cover to see what it was. Unfortunately, the car in front braked suddenly and I ran straight into the back of it." She arrived late, and met Julian as he was leaving the stage door. He invited her to his concert the next day instead, in a city more than an hour away, and she offered to drive them there in a hire car. "We had time for some long conversations that day and everything felt really comfortable," recalls Jiaxin.

When Julian went back to the UK, they kept in touch by phone and email, although the time difference made it difficult. "I said: 'Would you consider coming over to see what you think of life in England?'" he remembers. It was a big leap for Jiaxin, who had an established career as a musician in New Zealand. "And my parents were there," she adds. She barely knew Julian and had never been to Europe before, but she decided she would go, thinking that if it didn't work out, she could just return to New Zealand within a few weeks. "She really took a chance, so I'm very grateful for that," says Julian.



‘Those are the only times we argue – about the interpretation of work and working together.’ Photograph: Simon Fowler

When Jiaxin arrived, Julian’s life was mostly taken up with touring. “Immediately, I started travelling with him all over the country, helping out with lighting and sound decisions, and that was fun because I saw a lot of different cities,” she says. Julian says: “When you are on the road together, it is actually a real test.” It was the first time he had been in a relationship with another musician, let alone another cellist. “I think one of the reasons it worked was because you know what it’s like going out on that stage.”

Most of Jiaxin’s ex-boyfriends had been cellists, she says with a laugh. “Julian is a brilliant cellist, but I look at him more as a person, I like to listen to his stories, he’s got that sense of humour I really like.” They married in 2009 and didn’t play together much at first, even at home, but in 2011, the year their daughter was born, they started playing and recording music. Their first full album together, *A Tale of Two Cellos*, came out in 2013. “We worked very hard together,” says Julian. “I suppose you could say, lightheartedly, that those are the only times we argue – about the interpretation of work and working together. Because you’re married, probably you’re ruder to each other than you would be if it was another colleague.”

The testing time came in 2014, when a neck injury forced Julian to stop playing. “It was horrible for me, but I felt even worse for Jiaxin because she had given up a lot of opportunities in New Zealand, and we were working together a lot and everything was going really well. Suddenly all that had to stop.”

However, Jiaxin had started to make a name for herself. “When I came here, at almost 30, it was very difficult to restart your career in another country,” she says. Julian always encouraged her to keep practising, she says. “Gradually, people started to know me and book me for concerts.” Now it’s her husband who takes on the technical side, while Jiaxin plays. “It’s gone full circle,” says Julian. “It’s great for me because I’m back out on the road. I enjoy listening to her play.”

Julian Lloyd Webber is the founder of the 30 Under 30 Rising Stars Project, in collaboration with Classic FM. Bach Revealed – Julian and Jiaxin Lloyd Webber’s exploration of Bach’s cello suites – tours festivals across the UK next summer.

Want to share your story? Tell us a little about yourself, your partner and how you got together by filling in the form [here](#)

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Mark Gatiss

‘Ghost stories are essentially optimistic’: Mark Gatiss leads a spooky on-air Christmas

League of Gentlemen star’s two programmes are part of a rich seam of shows about the supernatural this year



Mark Gatiss and Rev Richard Coles making Hunting Ghosts for Radio 4 in Coles’s old parish in Northamptonshire. Photograph: Simon Barnard

Tara Conlan

Fri 23 Dec 2022 01.00 EST

This year’s [Christmas TV and radio schedules](#) feature more spooky and supernatural content than before the pandemic, reflecting a hunger for answers during uncertain times or grief for loved ones.

That's according to Sherlock and League of Gentlemen writer and actor [Mark Gatiss](#), who will be appearing in two ghostly programmes over the Christmas period.

In 2019 Christmas content was mostly straightforward light entertainment shows such as Michael McIntyre's Big Christmas on BBC One, with a nod to ghosts on the main channels mostly via versions of the [Charles Dickens](#) classic A Christmas Carol.



BBC One's Ghosts Christmas special. Photograph: Guido Mandozzi/BBC

But this December on BBC One, for the first time the festive special of hit comedy [Ghosts](#) will be shown on Christmas Day, while over on ITV1 Ant and Dec are going ghostbusting in Ant & Dec's Saturday Night Takeaway Presents: Polter Guys.

Meanwhile, Netflix will be premiering the prequel to its popular supernatural series The Witcher and BBC Four is showing Gatiss's [Christmas](#) Carol: A Ghost Story.

In addition, on Christmas Eve BBC [Radio 4](#) is airing Hunting Ghosts with Gatiss and the Rev Richard Coles and this week has broadcast a Christmas special of Danny Robins' popular ghost podcast Uncanny.

Other shows include Jason Watkins in A Ghost Story For Christmas: Count Magnus on BBC Two, and this month Netflix is airing the new animation Scrooge: A Christmas Carol, starring Luke Evans and [Olivia Colman](#), while the BBC World Service is running an adaptation of Susan Cooper's Christmas novel about primeval forces, The Dark Is Rising.

Despite this being a bleak midwinter due to strikes, the cost of living crisis and people still processing the pandemic, ghost stories were often popular, Gatiss said, as "they are essentially optimistic, because it means there's more to life ... there's more to it than dreamt of in our philosophy".

In Hunting Ghosts he and Coles visit Coles's old haunted parish of Finedon in Northamptonshire and discuss the paranormal, life and grief.

Gatiss said Christmas was often harder for people who had experienced loss, as it represented a milestone and harked back to the past and happier times: "There's a reason that doesn't happen in the summer holidays, even though we probably have very strong childhood memories of that.

"Christmas is such a bright spot for all of us who are lucky enough to have a fairly happy childhood; it was literally a light in the darkness of winter ... so inevitably that's when you remember those you've lost, what they used to represent and all that tradition."

That sense of loss is reflected in the Christmas episode of Ghosts: amid the usual spectral comedy antics the episode features one of the characters looking back at past Christmases with their family.

The paranormal expert Prof Chris French, the head of the anomalistic psychology research unit at Goldsmiths, University of London and author of the forthcoming book The Science of Weird Shit, said there had been a tradition going back centuries of telling ghost stories at Christmas, as the nights were longer and "pre-electricity there wasn't a lot else to do".

"This time of year, interest in the paranormal tends to increase, particularly during times of uncertainty. Covid is still going on and ... many people lost

someone or knew someone who came close to dying. Also at Christmas we do tend to look back ... and we look to traditions.”

He said it had been “a good year for ghosts, mostly due to Danny Robins [who has had success with the podcast The Battersea Poltergeist and stage play 2:22 A Ghost Story] and a lot of successful TV, radio and theatre”, so the subject was on commissioners’ minds.

French added: “There will be lots of people who’ve lost loved ones, and when it’s the first Christmas or first birthday your thoughts do turn to people you’ve lost and one part of that is the notion of what happens when we die.

“We tend to have ghost stories that are associated with Christmas [such as A Christmas Carol] and which are quite scary, but when it comes to grief and loss ... in some vague sense people find that comforting, rather than scary.”

- *Hunting Ghosts with Gatiss and Coles is on BBC [Radio 4](#) on Christmas Eve, repeated on Christmas Day then on BBC Sounds*
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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2022/dec/23/ghost-stories-are-essentially-optimistic-mark-gatiss-leads-a-spooky-on-air-christmas>

2022.12.23 - Opinion

- Christmas comes with good cheer. The tragedy is the religious baggage
- The media damns striking nurses and ambulance staff as the enemy, just as they did the miners
- Sure, moaning about ‘nepo babies’ is fun – but we’re missing the bigger problem
- Despite the political pantomime, it’s been a good year for the FTSE 100

[Opinion](#)[Christmas](#)

Christmas comes with good cheer. The tragedy is the religious baggage

[Polly Toynbee](#)



As a cultural Christian, I share the goodwill. As a humanist I am glad to see archaic beliefs and damaging traditions losing their grip



Workers for the Crisis homeless charity take a selfie as a choir sings Christmas songs in Cardiff on 20 December, 2022. Photograph: Huw Fairclough/Getty Images

Fri 23 Dec 2022 01.00 EST Last modified on Fri 23 Dec 2022 09.38 EST

This is the first Christmas since time immemorial that most people in this country are not Christians. The [latest census](#) found those identifying as Christian fell from [59% to 46% in a decade](#), with 8 million people shifting to “no religion”, which is now the second-largest English group, and the largest in Wales. The number of atheists is probably higher, as some tick the Christian box as their cultural identity, without having any religious belief. In that sense, I feel culturally Christian, so deeply imbued with its myths, paintings, hymns and parables.

But as a vice-president of [Humanists UK](#), I celebrate any decline in superstition, any rise in those who look life and death in the eye with no expectation of anything beyond this earth.

Here comes Christmas. It touches most rationalists as much as believers, reaching deep into the recesses of heart, childhood, memory and family bonds. I will watch A Christmas Carol every year and, whatever production, Muppets or Alastair Sim, I will always shed a tear for the prospect of human

redemption. I will watch [It's a Wonderful Life](#) for its belief in collective good at Christmas overcoming the ogres of Pottersville capitalism – never mind Clarence the angel.

In all Christmas messages, the poor inherit the earth, the stable stands for the homeless and refugees, yet the mystery is why so little of this goodwill gets beyond the tinsel into politics. This yuletide's proposal to send asylum seekers to Rwanda is [popular](#). Sentimental gathering at the crib doesn't extend to enough outrage at so many children going to school hungry.

Every culture needs a mid-winter festival of light in the darkness, a rebirth in the shortest days. Much as I dislike most Christian belief, the iconography of star, stable, manger, kings and shepherds to greet a new baby is a universal emblem of humanity. In that spirit I relish singing the old carols when I get the chance: I was invited to wonderful [John Rutter's Christmas Celebration](#) with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra at the Albert Hall this year. The dense theology of carols inculcating bizarre concepts skates past most singers – “veiled in flesh the godhead see, hail the incarnate deity” and the sheer impudence of “lo he abhors not the virgin’s womb”. But they arouse ancient emotions more primitive than Christianity. My atheist great-grandfather, Gilbert Murray, a classical scholar and also president of the humanists, called Christmas “Mithras’ birthday”, because Jesus usurped this winter festival from him.

But the rest of it, I find loathsome. Why wear the symbol of a barbaric torture? Martyrdom is a repugnant virtue, so too the imposition of perpetual guilt. The nuns taught my mother as a child that Jesus felt every act of naughtiness as another thorn in his crown. And how impossible it is to worship an all-good yet all-powerful God the father, God the king, who inflicts random horrors on his people while demanding praise, thanks and glorification. Give me the badly behaved quarrelsome gods of Valhalla, the Greeks and Romans.

The greatest myth of Christianity is that it was a force for civilisation that drove out pagan brutality. I've been reading Catherine Nixey's [The Darkening Age](#), which recounts the destruction wreaked by fanatical early Christians, who permitted no heresy, hacked down temples and burned ancient classical texts. Far from noble monks preserving classical writings,

most were gleefully destroyed by Christians. Palmyra, in Syria, the scene of an atrocity by Islamic State in 2015, when it blew up great temples and murdered the [82-year-old head of antiquities](#), was only a repetition of what black-hooded Christian madmen did there in the fourth century, smashing and decapitating a vast statue of Athena, gouging out statues' eyes and chiselling in crosses. Nixey says monotheistic religions are most prone to causing extreme religious terror. History written by the victors obliterated how hard the classical forces of reason, learning, mathematics and philosophy resisted insurgent Christian unreason.

That's all long ago, remote from the fading remnants of our Church of England, which can these days be progressive on some matters – not on sex, but on social injustice, arousing ministerial wrath for defending the weak. The Tory MP [Jonathan Gullis](#) rightly faced mockery for telling bishops “to stop preaching from the pulpit” over the wicked plan for Rwanda deportations.

Yet despite the apparent waning of religion, the church retains a political grip quite disproportionate to its shrinking numbers. At the coronation, King Charles will be anointed as defender of *the* faith, though he will say he [serves all faiths](#) (not atheists). Innocuous? Not at all. This established church, with 26 bishops in the Lords, is already [resisting Labour's plan](#) for its abolition. Why are a third of state schools still religious, mainly Church of England and Catholic; many highly selective? In Northern Ireland, [only 7%](#) attend integrated schools. Far from abandoning a compulsory Christian “collective act of worship”, Nick Gibb, the schools minister, threatens to “[investigate](#)” any schools that don't ensure one takes place every day.

Most alarming, [6,000 children](#) attend unregistered, illegal schools, where many study religious texts, often misogynist, homophobic and abusive, with virtually no schools prosecuted. An act to close loopholes has just been dropped.

But the greatest damage wreaked by the enduring grip of religion affects every single one of us sooner or later. Organised opposition has time and again blocked [our right to die](#) with dignity at a time of our own choosing. A greatly disproportionate number in both Houses are religious and they fight

every time: only their God, they say, can decide the time of our passing. Meanwhile, every day people suffer needlessly.

So [Christmas](#) comes with good cheer, enjoy it. But know that it comes with religious baggage we should shed.

- Polly Toynbee is a Guardian columnist
 - *Do you have an opinion on the issues raised in this article? If you would like to submit a response of up to 300 words by email to be considered for publication in our [letters](#) section, please [click here](#).*
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Opinion

The media damns striking nurses and ambulance staff as the enemy, just as they did the miners

[Ken Capstick](#)

Those who fought to save their jobs, homes and families in the 1980s look at the rightwing attacks and recognise this playbook



Striking miners in Pontypridd, Wales in August 1984. Photograph: Ken Saunders/The Guardian

Fri 23 Dec 2022 03.00 EST Last modified on Fri 23 Dec 2022 14.28 EST

When mineworkers took strike action in 1984 to save their industry from a government policy aimed at its total destruction, Margaret Thatcher was quick to refer to them and their families as the “enemy within”. As [strikes take place](#) across Britain, the government’s response echoes the past.

Whether it be rail workers, train drivers, Royal Mail workers, barristers, postal workers, refuse workers, London Underground workers, air transport workers or our wonderful NHS nurses, the government finds itself determined to force through cuts in wages. These cuts in working-class living standards follow continued cuts since the financial crash of 2008, a crash not brought about by those who suffered most, but for which they continue to pay the price.

During the pandemic, we saw Boris Johnson and Rishi Sunak standing on the steps of Downing Street applauding our courageous NHS workers and urging the rest of the nation to do the same, while staff inside No 10 enjoyed beer- and wine-swilling parties. How long will it be before our NHS workers are called the enemy within?

Many of those [taking action](#) today are fighting not only for increased wages, but to save their industries, just as the miners did in 1984 and 1985. The constant cuts to our NHS and the privatisation by stealth of our health services represents a threat to its existence and to the nation's health. Aneurin Bevan's dream of a health service that was free to everyone who needed it is being whittled away, little by little, by people who never liked it in the first place, in the hope that no one notices until it is gone.

Many workers are being offered pay increases way below inflation. The [latest offer to rail workers](#) is 8%, spread over two years. That's only 4% in each of the two years. The retail prices index (RPI) [stands at 14%](#), so this offer amounts to a real-terms pay cut of 10%. Even if the consumer prices index (CPI) is used as the measure of inflation, [now running at 10.7%](#), the offer is still a considerable wage cut of 6.7%. Most workers across the UK are being expected to take massive real-terms wage cuts, even while the cost of living is soaring. Heating a typical three-bedroom home [will cost £2,100](#) over the 12 months from October 2022 due to increased energy bills, regardless of the government's cost of living support package.

We usually hear two mantras from government when it makes wage increase offers, or in this case wage decrease offers. First, that the wage cut is "generous" and second that it is all that [can be afforded](#). An [MP's salary](#) as at April 2022 was £84,144 a year plus allowances. In contrast, NHS

workers, including nurses, have to pay parking charges in hospital car parks while they are at work.

This month, Kelvin MacKenzie, the former editor of the Sun, accused ambulance staff of “organised hatred” for going on strike. Ambulance workers save lives every day. They are dedicated people. Such derision is a naked attempt to draw striking workers into a fruitless low-level exchange that only the tabloids, with their power, can win. If the tabloids and the government are resorting to smearing ordinary people striking against pay cuts as the “enemy within”, it means they’ve already lost the argument.



A protest at Downing Street during the second day of strike action by nurses on 20 December. Photograph: Leon Neal/Getty Images

During the miners’ strike we were subjected to daily misleading articles, downright lies and abuse from the gutter press. Yes, sometimes it hurt, but it was always best to ignore it and try not to stoop to that level. It was far better to use all the means we had to try to present what we believed to be a compelling case every time we had the opportunity. I think the unions have done very well in their dealings with the media; union figureheads such as Mick Lynch have made a calm and compelling case for why strikes are a rational response to this unprecedented squeeze on workers’ living conditions.

Of course, you still try to counter a false narrative. Criticism that is born out of misunderstanding of the issues must be challenged. It was important during the miners' strike to take every opportunity to present what we believed to be a compelling case.

It would be a dereliction of intelligent thought not to mention Russia's war in Ukraine, which is at the very root of the spiralling inflation we are seeing across Europe. Energy and food prices are important drivers of inflation along with soaring petrol costs, all of which can be attributed to this unnecessary war, from which there will be no winners. Runaway inflation is causing real hunger, and supporting Ukraine has already cost the [UK £2.3bn](#). The war is a disaster, a sickening loss of life and a complete failure of diplomacy. The search for peace must begin now, or every lost life will be laid at the door of incompetent and obstinate leaders.

The strikes by those working in essential services across Europe are justified in the face of rising living costs and out of control inflation brought about by incompetent governments. But the press can't see this – so it sticks to its old, easy, divisive solutions: attacking working people, attacking unions and failing to see how warped and biased coverage perpetuates injustice and heaps hardship on to communities. Those who fought to save their jobs and homes and families in the 1980s look at the rightwing media today and recognise this playbook. I hope that this time the public understands what the unions are fighting for, and see this strategy of sabotage for what it really is.

- Ken Capstick is the former Yorkshire vice-president of the National Union of Mineworkers and currently a trustee of the Mineworkers' Pension Scheme (MPS). He is writing here in a personal capacity

OpinionCelebrity

Sure, moaning about ‘nepo babies’ is fun – but we’re missing the bigger problem

[Rebecca Shaw](#)

So much of the media we consume comes from people who have no idea what it’s like to be working class. We’re missing out



There are so many talented people that we will never hear from because they are too busy *surviving* Photograph: Cemile Bingol/Getty Images

Thu 22 Dec 2022 17.50 EST Last modified on Fri 23 Dec 2022 03.26 EST

If you’ve been on Twitter lately (and huge congrats if you haven’t), you would have seen a lot of discussion about “nepo babies”. No, a nepo baby is not the strange cousin of a Cabbage Patch Doll nor a cool slang name for “nephews”. Rather it’s a term used to describe the children of celebrities

who follow in their famous parents' footsteps. Classic nepotism, you've heard of it.

The nepo baby spectrum also covers those who get a leg-up from family industry connections, or the children of the very rich, all of whom have doors opened for them from the time they arrive through their very first door (the vagina). There have always been nepo babies and there will always be nepo babies but that doesn't mean it's not frustrating. For example, while watching the new season of Amy Schumer's sketch show last week, I noticed that one of the writers is Jerry Seinfeld's 21-year-old daughter. As a sketch writer myself, I found this a bit annoying! But all the focus on nepo babies and famous people is obfuscating a more important and insidious problem.

Last week [research](#) from the UK found that there has been a huge decline in the number of actors, musicians and writers who come from a working-class background. About 16% of arts workers born in the 1950s had a working-class background (already low) but that has fallen to just 7.9%. The study found that people who grew up in professional families were four times more likely to be in creative work. I don't have the stats for Australia but am confident the findings would be similar. This has been something I've been aware of as I've moved throughout the arts industry, noting how hesitant a lot of people are to discuss their backgrounds, talk about which school they went to or speak about class as a diversity issue.

I'm the daughter of a butcher and a cleaner. My grandad was a meatworker and my grandmother a cleaner. I was also a cleaner for a few years, so I guess you could call us the Barrymore family of menial labour. I was the first in my family to graduate high school and the first to go to university, and have had the good luck and privilege to be able to spend the best part of a decade trying (TRYING) to build [a stable career as a writer](#). This is the moment where it becomes difficult for me to complain about the trials and tribulations of my chosen career (typing on a computer) when I know my parents have broken bodies from their decades of toiling in terribly paid, genuinely difficult jobs ... but I'm going to persist anyway.

Do we only want to see TV shows and movies and ideas generated by the rich?

The thing that gets talked about most when it comes to nepo babies is their access to opportunities, the connections they have and the doors that are opened. These are valid points – but we shouldn't forget that this is not restricted to the very rich or famous. To become a successful professional musician or artist or writer or actor you have to have time to spend making your art and hustling to make industry connections. This is extremely difficult if you don't come from a stable background. I can only imagine that the process of discovering your creativity, of deciding to follow your dreams and talent, of knowing it's even a *possibility*, is made much easier if you have the awareness, even unconsciously, that you will ultimately be OK if it doesn't work out. That sort of freedom allows you to try things, to take big swings and to have extra brain space and time dedicated to getting good at the thing you love.

That's not to say that people don't deserve their spot when they arrive, although there are obviously exceptions (not you, if you're reading this). It doesn't mean they're less talented or funny or hard working – it just means they had an easier path. Just as I had an easier path than many others (eg, I am a white person). I still have a lot of guilt that instead of using the opportunity my parents afforded me through their hard work to embark on a stable career, I chose an uncertain and difficult world, feeling the pressure of letting everyone down. The differences in access and opportunity for people at this level often goes unacknowledged while we all pile on a famous model's daughter for becoming a model too. By the way, I'm not sure what else we expect these genetically gifted people to be doing – manager at a local Starbucks? Solving crimes at night? Of course they go into show business.

We don't like to acknowledge that so much of the media we consume in this country, the books and TV and movies and even journalism, comes from people who have no real idea what it's like to be working class, and whose frame of reference is narrow. Even if you don't care about the plight of whining comedy writers like me (totally fair), is this the limited media landscape we really want? Do we only want to see TV shows and movies

and ideas generated by the rich, or the privileged, or the people who have always felt relatively safe?

When I've considered quitting – many, many times – this has, in part, compelled me to keep going. It feels important that there continues to be voices like mine in the room. There are so many talented people with wonderful creative brains and ideas that we will never hear from because they are too busy *surviving*. There are also so many people who tried and burned out, or were forced to give up their passion to concentrate on making enough money to live. These are the people we should be talking about, not the beautiful celebrity children of beautiful celebrities.

Obsessing over nepo babies while not addressing the structural and generational inequalities that produce poverty and privilege is just a good-looking (and fun!) distraction from the real problem: that working in the arts is becoming less and less viable for a large proportion of society. If the books we read, the TV shows we watch and the movies we see are only the domain of the rich, we will all be the poorer for it.

- Rebecca Shaw is a writer based in Sydney
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Nils Pratley on financeFTSE

Despite the political pantomime, it's been a good year for the FTSE 100

Nils Pratley



A weak pound, even after a rally once Liz Truss and Kwasi Kwarteng had been bundled off stage, helped



Distrust around the UK ‘as an investment thesis’ still lingers after the mini-budget fiasco. Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA

Thu 22 Dec 2022 13.09 EST Last modified on Thu 22 Dec 2022 16.17 EST

In a year of three prime ministers, war in Europe, recession, rising mortgage costs, double-digit inflation, enormous energy bills, strikes, higher taxes, a dramatic plunge in the pound in October and a debacle with pension funds that the Bank of England said threatened to create “a material risk to financial stability”, you may not necessarily have bet on the [FTSE](#) 100 index to end 2022 higher than it started.

There are still a few trading days to go, so an “up” year is not guaranteed. But, at 7,469, the index was in positive territory for 2022 by a margin of 1.1% at Thursday’s close. Include dividends paid by the 100 constituents and the total return is closer to 5%. You won’t get rich quickly at that rate but you should sleep at night. Over in the US, the broadly based S&P 500 index has slumped by a fifth this year.

A few explanations and disclaimers are required, naturally. First, a weak pound – down 11% versus the dollar, even after a rally once Liz Truss and Kwasi Kwarteng had been bundled off stage – tends to be helpful for an index overpopulated with oil companies, miners and pharmaceutical firms

that make the greater part of their revenues in dollars but have sterling share prices. Expressed in dollar terms, the Footsie's performance wouldn't look as pretty.

Second, after several lacklustre years, one could sniffily say the FTSE 100's outperformance is a case of every dog having his day. Or, since London was labelled as "the Jurassic Park of stock exchanges" by the hedge fund manager Sir Paul Marshall, perhaps every dinosaur. The UK has too many fund managers clipping dividend coupons rather than investing in growth and innovation, Marshall argued. He may be right, but dividends came back in fashion in 2022 as the US tech brigade was clobbered in a climate of rising interest rates. Ocado (down 60%) is virtually the Footsie's only tech champion, aside from the investment trust Scottish Mortgage (off 45%).

Third, Russia's invasion of Ukraine clearly changed everything. Defensive assets (and the Footsie's top performer this year is a defence company, BAE Systems) are usually safe places for investors to hide in times of geopolitical uncertainty. Soaring energy prices obviously propelled the index heavyweights BP and Shell higher (both up 47%).

Fourth, the relative buoyancy says nothing positive about the investment world's view of the UK. A stock market index is merely the sum of its constituents, and the collection of the 100 largest companies by capitalisation on the London market is international and eclectic. It runs from a Chilean copper miner (Antofagasta) to a hedge fund run by a US billionaire (Pershing Square).

If you're looking for pure domestic companies, you'll find a group towards the lower end of the performance table. The bottom five include the housebuilders Persimmon and Barratt Developments, which are operating in a weakening market where prices probably have further to fall in 2023, plus Segro, an owner of UK warehouses. The sense of distrust around the UK "as an investment thesis", as the Lloyds Banking Group chief executive, Charlie Nunn, put it recently, still lingers after the mini-budget and the year's political pantomime.

One can, then, regard the modest spring in the Footsie's step in 2022 as nothing more than a statistical oddity driven in large part by horribly high

energy prices and a panicky preference for the so-called “value” stocks in which the London market is unfashionably overweight. It would be a reasonable view.

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But another is possible. When investment trends turn, they can stay turned for a while. The triumphant era for exciting “growth” stocks lasted from the end of banking crisis in 2009 until 2021, which was an exceptionally long cycle. It is surely plausible that a shift back towards “value” and dividends could be more than a passing fad. Don’t expect them to sprint, but the FTSE 100’s dinosaurs don’t look extinct yet.

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2022.12.23 - Around the world

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[Libya](#)

Revealed: Libya aborted plan to hand Gaddafi spy chief to US at last minute

Extradition of Abdullah al-Senussi over Lockerbie bombing would have closely followed that of Mohammed Abouagela Masud



Abdullah al-Senussi in 2011. He is a suspect in the 1988 bombing of a flight over Lockerbie, as is Mohammed Abouagela Masud who has already been taken to the US for questioning. Photograph: Paul Hackett/Reuters

[Jason Burke](#) Africa correspondent

Fri 23 Dec 2022 00.00 EST Last modified on Fri 23 Dec 2022 15.46 EST

The extradition to the US of Muammar Gaddafi's most trusted and notorious aide was abruptly halted by Libya at the 11th hour this week for fear of public anger after the handover of another ex-senior Libyan intelligence operative, officials in Tripoli have told the Guardian.

Abdullah al-Senussi, a [former intelligence chief](#) and brother-in-law of Gaddafi, is blamed for a series of lethal bombings directed at western aviation as well as other targets.

The US want the 72-year-old, currently held in prison in Tripoli, to answer questions connected to the attack which brought down a US-bound aircraft over [Lockerbie](#) in Scotland in 1988. Senussi has long been suspected of masterminding the operation, which killed 270 people.

Earlier this month the US announced that another Libyan suspect in the Lockerbie bombing, [Mohammed Abouagela Masud](#), was in its custody. Masud was taken from his Tripoli home by armed men on 17 November, held for two weeks by a militia and then handed over to US government agents in the port city of Misrata.

His family [said he had been unlawfully abducted](#). In a statement on Tuesday, the US embassy in Libya said the process had been “lawful and conducted in cooperation with Libyan authorities”.

The handover of Masud has provoked outrage in [Libya](#), putting the government of interim prime minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh under severe pressure and leading to the shelving of plans to transfer Senussi to US custody.

“The idea was to have Masud sent to the US first and then give them Senussi. There have been discussions for months about this. But then officials got worried,” said one Libyan official source with knowledge of the case. A second said Senussi was meant to be handed over at the weekend.

Known as “the butcher”, Senussi is being held in the Rawawa prison in Tripoli and is thought to be in ill health. He was sentenced to death in a mass trial that concluded in 2015.

Senussi was considered Gaddafi’s most trusted aide. [He has had a reputation for brutality](#) since the mid-1970s and his name appeared as number two on an opposition list of wanted “war criminals”.

Bringing him before a US court would mark a significant, if controversial, achievement for the Biden administration and may signal a new determination to pursue decades-old cases involving the deaths of US citizens.

The effort to secure the transfer of Masud and Senussi was launched under Donald Trump's administration but has been revived over the last nine months through discussions between US officials and the Libyan government, the sources said.

In August an agreement about the transfer of Senussi and Masud was reached with Dbeibeh. Dbeibeh's mandate expired last December and he has a clear incentive to win favour with the US, analysts say.

As Senussi is currently behind bars, a transfer by Libya to the US would have been administratively more straightforward than that of Masud, who was detained without a warrant by militia loyal to a commander accused of systematic human rights abuses.

"This is a completely different case," said one Libyan official.

Senussi is also a widely reviled figure in Libya, and cannot be portrayed as a pawn simply following orders, as Masud has been by his supporters.

In the early 1980s, while Senussi ran Gaddafi's internal security services, many opponents of the regime were killed in Libya and overseas. Libyans hold him responsible for the 1996 massacre of about 1,200 inmates at the Abu Salim prison while a court in France convicted him in absentia in 1999 for his role in the 1989 bombing of a passenger plane over Niger that killed 170 people.

Senussi, then head of Libya's external security organisation, has long been accused of recruiting and managing Abdel-Baset al-Megrahi, the man convicted of the 1988 Lockerbie bombing.

Senussi was also said to have been behind an alleged Libyan intelligence plot to assassinate Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia in late 2003.

The international criminal court [issued an arrest warrant for Senussi in 2011](#) for his role in violence against opposition protesters in the eastern city of Benghazi at the start of the Libyan uprising.

Successive Libyan governments insisted on prosecuting Senussi on home soil. The ICC decided in 2013 that as Libya had put Senussi on trial it would halt its own proceedings against him. The former intelligence chief was eventually condemned to death in July 2015 in a process that was severely criticised by human rights campaigners.

It is unclear if the transfer of Senussi to the US has been shelved indefinitely, or merely postponed.

Alia Brahami, an expert on Libya with the Atlantic Council, said the case demonstrated a tension between the demands of the law and the demands of justice.

“Senussi is suspected of a great many crimes and the possibility that he might answer for one of them, an act of mass murder no less, is extraordinary,” Brahami said. “Any transfer would generate enormous controversy, whatever the circumstances, as did that of Masud, and rightly so. But the lasting story will be about the long arm of American justice, and it will be heard around the world.

“Successive transitional governments [in Libya] have struggled to hold members of the old regime accountable in a transparent and ordered way, because of the chaos which has prevailed since the revolution but also because of the continuing power of regime interest groups.”

The family of Senussi and tribes still loyal to him have threatened unrest if he is transferred to the US.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/dec/23/libya-aborted-plan-to-hand-gaddafi-spy-chief-to-us-abdullah-al-senussi>

[Taliban](#)

Taliban minister defends closing universities to women as global backlash grows

Neda Mohammad Nadeem says ban was necessary to prevent mixing of genders as rare protests break out

Afghan women protesting Taliban university ban report being arrested and beaten – video

Guardian staff and agencies

Thu 22 Dec 2022 19.52 ESTLast modified on Thu 22 Dec 2022 21.50 EST

The minister of higher education in Afghanistan's Taliban government has defended his decision to ban women from universities – a decree that [triggered a global backlash](#) and protests inside the country.

Afghanistan's Taliban-run administration announced earlier this week it had [closed universities to women](#) partly due to female students not adhering to its interpretation of the Islamic dress code and interaction between students of different genders.

Female university students were turned away from campuses on Wednesday and the higher education ministry said their access would be suspended “until further notice”. Dozens of women gathered outside Kabul University on Thursday to protest in the first major public demonstration in the capital since the decision.

In the capital, about two dozen women marched in the streets, chanting for freedom and equality. “All or none. Don’t be afraid. We are together,” they chanted.

In video obtained by The Associated Press, one woman said [Taliban](#) security forces used violence to disperse the group.

“The girls were beaten and whipped,” she said. “They also brought military women with them, whipping the girls. We ran away, some girls were arrested. I don’t know what will happen.”

US secretary of state Antony Blinken said the Taliban were trying to sentence Afghanistan’s women “to a dark future without opportunity” by barring them from attending universities.

“Afghan women deserve better. Afghanistan deserves better,” he later [tweeted](#). “The Taliban have just definitively set back their objective of being accepted by the international community.”

Acting higher education minister Neda Mohammad Nadeem, in his first comments on the matter, told Afghan state broadcaster RTA that several issues had prompted the decision.

“We told girls to have proper hijab but they didn’t and they wore dresses like they are going to a wedding ceremony,” he said.

“Girls were studying agriculture and engineering, but this didn’t match Afghan culture. Girls should learn, but not in areas that go against Islam and Afghan honour.”

The higher education minister said that the Taliban “asked the world not to interfere in our affairs” as he said discussions over female education were ongoing.

Blinken called on the Taliban to reverse the ban.

“We are engaged with other countries on this right now. There are going to be costs if this is not reversed,” the US secretary of state told a news conference, declining to provide specifics. “We will pursue them with allies and partners.”

US-led forces [withdrew from Afghanistan](#) in August 2021 after 20 years of war as the western-backed former government collapsed and the militants, who enforce a strict interpretation of Islam, seized Kabul.

Since the Taliban took over, students and professors say university classes have been separated by gender and female students have adjusted their attire to meet instructions such as covering their face and wearing dark colours.

The Taliban-led administration had already drawn criticism including from foreign governments for not opening girls' high schools at the start of the school year in March, [making a U-turn on signals it would do](#).

In a sign of stricter enforcement of restrictions on teenage girls' education, a letter from the education ministry on Thursday instructed all educational institutions not to allow girls above grade 6 to access their facilities.

Though high schools in most provinces have been closed, some have remained open and many tutoring centres and language classes have been open to girls. Nadeem said religious education remained open to female students.

In the capital, about 50 mainly female protesters assembled outside Kabul University while holding banners and chanted: "Education is our right, universities should be opened."

The previous day students in Nangahar University in eastern Afghanistan also protested and male medical students walked out of exams in protest at their female classmates being excluded. Several cricket players have also publicly opposed the ban.

Large-scale protesting has become rare in Afghanistan since the Taliban took over the country, as they are often shut down forcefully by security agencies. The scattered protests that have occurred are a sign of the discontent the Taliban's policy has generated, advocates say.

The Associated Press and Reuters contributed to this report

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[Taiwan](#)

Taiwan may restrict Panadol sales to thwart bulk-buying for China

Covid-19 situation across the strait, and concern at home sparked by Taiwan's reopening for travel, have put strain on medicine supplies



People buy Covid test kits in Taipei, May 2022. Photograph: Ann Wang/Reuters

Timmy Shen in Taipei
Fri 23 Dec 2022 01.52 EST

Taiwan may restrict the bulk buying of pain relief medications as people stock up, with some planning to ship their purchases to China, where the worsened Covid-19 situation has put a strain on supplies.

Hsueh Jui-yuan, Taiwan's minister of health and welfare, told lawmakers at a [legislative committee hearing](#) on Thursday that the health agency would

first instruct pharmacies to advise customers not to snap up Panadol and related drugs.

The health authorities would discuss if they needed to impose restrictions but there was no concrete plan in place yet, Hsueh told reporters on Thursday, the official news agency Focus Taiwan reported.

Taiwan has experienced shortages of paracetamol and Covid-related medicine since May this year when local cases surged, several pharmacies in Taipei told the Guardian. One pharmacy said that over the past few weeks, customers had come in to stock up, fearing a surge in cases after Taiwan [opened its borders](#) to tourists in October.

“We ran out of stock for Panadol fairly quickly and we don’t expect restocking any time soon until probably after the lunar new year, which falls in late January next year,” said one employee at a pharmacy in Da’an district in downtown Taipei.

Some drug buyers in Taiwan are looking to ship or bring the painkiller to the Chinese mainland, where Covid-19 cases and deaths have risen after [China](#) relaxed its zero-Covid restrictions.

“I plan to purchase a variety of drugs that can help fight Covid when I return to work in Shenzhen,” said Lee, a Taiwanese entrepreneur who only gave his last name and runs a cross-border e-commerce business in the Chinese south-eastern city. “I even plan to resell some of the drugs to my friends.”

Chang, a Taiwanese product designer who works in Beijing and is currently on vacation in Taipei, said he planned to buy fever drugs and rapid antigen test kits before returning to work early next year. “I feel there’s a high chance for me to get infected after I return to Beijing, so I figure I’d prepare some drugs to avoid all the hectic I may experience trying to get a hold of drugs.”

China is scrambling to ensure stable drug supplies after ending its nationwide zero-Covid policy. Authorities have introduced measures to

properly allocate medical resources, including requisitioning the production of medical supplies.

To address nationwide shortages, more than a dozen Chinese pharmaceutical firms have been tapped by officials to help “secure supplies” of key drugs – a euphemism for requisitioning. At least 11 of 42 test kit makers whose products are licensed by China’s medical regulators have had part of their production seized by the government or received orders from the state, according to Agence France-Presse and local media reports.

AFP contributed to this report.

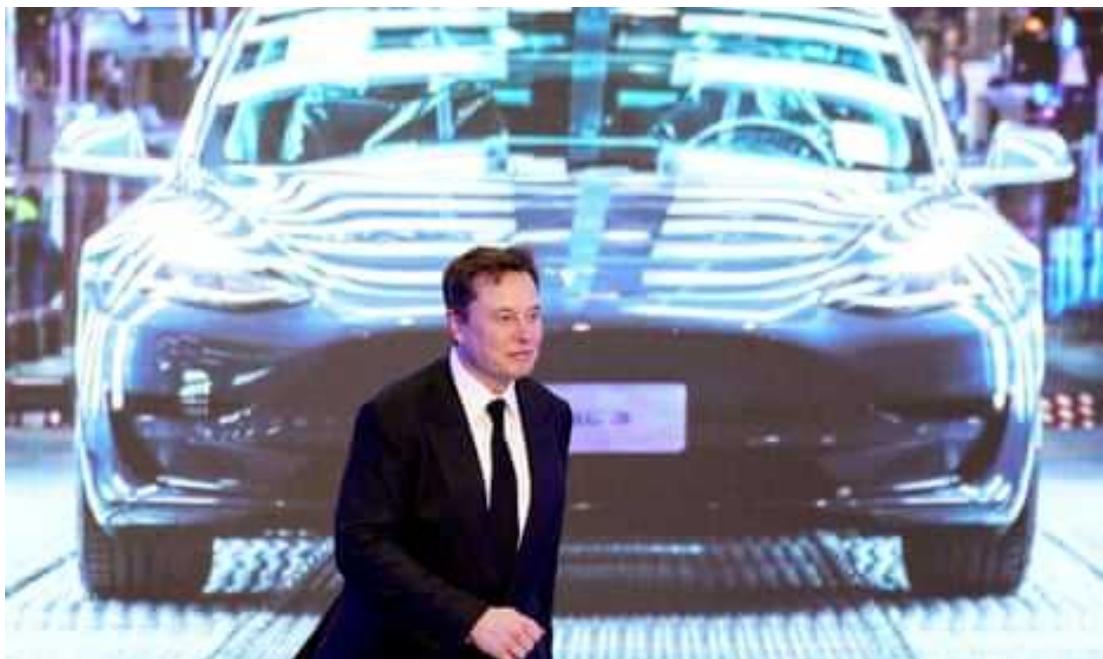
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[Tesla](#)

Elon Musk says he will not sell more Tesla stock for about two years

Chief executive's comments come amid concerns over softening demand for electric cars



Elon Musk says Tesla's board is open to a share buyback but it will depend on the scale of a recession. Photograph: Aly Song/Reuters

Reuters

Fri 23 Dec 2022 04.19 EST Last modified on Fri 23 Dec 2022 04.42 EST

The Tesla chief executive, [Elon Musk](#), has said he will not sell any more of the electric car company's stock for about two years.

While speaking in a [Twitter](#) Spaces audio chat on Thursday, Musk said he foresaw the economy would be in a "serious recession" in 2023 and demand for big-ticket items would be lower.

His comments came after a [Tesla](#) stock sell-off deepened on Thursday over worries about softening demand for electric cars and Musk's distraction with Twitter and his stock sales.

"I won't sell stock until, I don't know, probably two years from now. Definitely not next year under any circumstances and probably not the year thereafter," Musk said.

Shares of Tesla rose 3% to \$129.23 (£107.22) in after-hours trading on Thursday after an 8.9% drop in regular trading hours.

Musk has previously made promises about not selling Tesla stock before subsequently selling it. Last week, Musk disclosed [another \\$3.6bn in stock sales](#), taking his total near \$40bn since late last year and frustrating investors as the company's shares wallow at more than two-year lows.

"I needed to sell some stock to make sure, like, there's powder dry ... to account for a worst-case scenario," the billionaire said.

He said Tesla's board was open to a share buyback but that will depend on the scale of a recession.

On Thursday, Tesla stocks plunged 9%, after Tesla started to offer deep, \$7,500 discounts to US consumers, fuelling investor concerns about softening demand as the economy slows.

"I think there is going to be some macro drama that's higher than people currently think," he said, adding that homes and cars will get "disproportionately impacted" by economic conditions.

Asked whether he would bring in someone such as the venture capitalist David Sacks to run Twitter to allow him to focus on Tesla, Musk dodged the question and said Twitter was a relatively simple business.

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“[Twitter] is maybe 10% of the complexity of Tesla,” Musk said.

Musk said earlier this week that he would step down as chief executive of Twitter once he found “someone foolish enough to take the job”.

In response to concerns that his political views and controversial comments were alienating some people, he said: “I am not going to like sort of suppress my views just to boost the stock price.”

Musk has increasingly used Twitter’s live audio platform to weigh in on his product and strategic decisions at the social media company he took private in October in a \$44bn deal.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2022/dec/23/elon-musk-says-he-will-not-sell-more-tesla-stock-for-about-two-years>

[Fiji](#)

Fiji's king-maker party votes to support opposition coalition and oust Frank Bainimarama

'We believe we have agreed on a way forward that benefits this country,' party leader Viliame Gavoka told reporters after an internal party vote



People's Alliance party leader Sitiveni Rabuka, right, joins hands with coalition partner Anare Jalu, chair of the Social Democratic Liberal Party, after an agreement to form a new government in Fiji. Photograph: Saeed Khan/AFP/Getty Images

Reuters

Fri 23 Dec 2022 01.34 EST Last modified on Fri 23 Dec 2022 01.43 EST

Fiji's Social Democratic Liberal party (Sodelpa) said on Friday that it would form a coalition with two other parties, a move that will dislodge the current

prime minister, Frank Bainimarama, signalling an end to the former military leader's 16 years in power.

"We believe we have agreed on a way forward that benefits this country," party leader Viliame Gavoka said in a news conference after an internal party vote.

Fiji, which has a history of military coups, was dominated by sometimes tense race relations between its indigenous majority and a big ethnic Indian group, before constitutional reform in 2013 to remove a race-based voting system that favoured indigenous Fijians.

Bainimarama, who has yet to concede defeat, said on Thursday the military had been called in to [assist police maintain law and order](#) because of attacks on the Indian ethnic minority in the wake of a national election last week that showed no party received a clear majority.

A coalition of three parties including Sodelpa said on Tuesday it had a combined majority and had agreed on the leader of the People's Alliance, Sitiveni Rabuka, as prime minister. Bainimarama and Rabuka are both former coup leaders.

There was a heavy police presence outside the Southern Cross Hotel in the capital of Suva as the Sodelpa board met on Friday to vote on the matter for a second time in a week.

Addressing media after the meeting ended, Gavoka said Sodelpa's board had voted 13-12 in favour of forming a coalition with People's Alliance and the National Federation party.

"We believe we have agreed on a way forward that benefits this country," he said. "Democracy has won."

A Sodelpa official told reporters a new coalition agreement would be ready to sign on Wednesday.

Rabuka and Bainimarama had earlier led delegations to the hotel to make presentations to Sodelpa, which has emerged as a power-broker after

winning three seats in the hung parliament.

The party supports policies favouring indigenous Fijians, while Rabuka's coalition partner, the National Federation party, has drawn support from the Indian community.

Board members entering the hotel's gated compound on Friday had their names checked against a list. Military vehicles patrolled the hotel vicinity, although army commander Maj Gen Jone Kalouniwai said the police were still in control and the military would "respect whatever the outcome is", media outlet Fiji Village reported.

Fiji has been pivotal to the strategically located region's response to increasing competition for influence between China and the United States, and struck an agreement with Australia in October to work more closely with its military.

"We stand ready to work with whoever forms government in Fiji," Australia's prime minister Anthony Albanese, said on Friday. "Fiji will remain an important partner of Australia."

Overnight, some Fijians had posted images of calm scenes and Christmas shopping to social media in protest against the decision to call in the military to assist policing.

Fiji's police commissioner, Sitiveni Qiliho, said in a statement on Friday morning that the police chief operations officer, Abdul Khan, who had been tasked with leading the joint military and police security operation a day earlier, had resigned for "personal reasons".

Fiji's president needs to recall parliament by 2 January so legislators can vote for a new prime minister, according to a letter sent by the president to the coalition partners cited by Fiji Village.

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Headlines tuesday 20 december 2022

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- [Nursing Strike to go ahead in England, Wales and Northern Ireland](#)
- [Ambulances People with chest pain should call 999 despite strike, says minister](#)
- [Analysis Ambulance strikes are a risk but the system is broken](#)

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

Ambulance strike set to go ahead as pay talks between government and unions end without agreement – as it happened

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/live/2022/dec/20/rishi-sunak-health-nhs-strikes-nurses-ambulance-pay-offers-live>

Nursing

Nurses in England, Wales and Northern Ireland strike for second day

Tuesday's strike goes ahead as Royal College of Nursing highlights low pay

'We do this for you': nurse on Birmingham picket line explains why sector is on strike – video

[Harry Taylor](#)

[@harrytaylr](#)

Tue 20 Dec 2022 07.00 ESTFirst published on Tue 20 Dec 2022 01.00 EST

Nurses in England, Wales and [Northern Ireland](#) went on strike on Tuesday in an ongoing dispute with the government about pay and concerns about patient safety.

Up to 100,000 members of the Royal College of [Nursing](#) (RCN) took part after it balloted its members in October. It has said that low pay is the cause of chronic understaffing that is putting patients at risk and leaving NHS staff overworked.

It is the second day of strikes in December, after an initial strike on 15 December, the biggest in the RCN's history. It meant the [cancellation of thousands](#) of outpatient appointments and non-urgent operations.

Further strikes [have been threatened for January](#) unless talks between union negotiators and the government take place before Thursday.

The RCN's general secretary and chief executive, Pat Cullen, said: "For many of us, this is our first time striking and our emotions are really mixed. The [NHS](#) is in crisis, the nursing profession can't take any more, our loved ones are already suffering.

“It is not unreasonable to demand better. This is not something that can wait. We are committed to our patients and always will be.”

Nurses in Scotland were due to strike, but they were called off after a pay offer from Holyrood. The proposal was [put to members in Scotland](#) in November, and a result is expected this week after the ballot closed on Monday.

The Welsh first minister, Mark Drakeford, said ministers in Cardiff [had decided against](#) offering nurses more than the 4% and 5.5% they had already been offered.

'It's for the NHS': nurses strike across England, Wales and Northern Ireland in pay dispute – video

Steve Barclay, the health secretary, is understood to have written to unions to request fresh talks in [England](#), but will not discuss increasing pay. A one-off payment to staff had been put forward, but rejected by Downing Street.

“The health secretary is determined to do what it takes to keep patients and the wider public safe in the face of industrial disputes,” one Department of Health and Social Care source [told the Observer](#).

Union leaders have said future strikes inside hospitals could be more severe, with nurses providing “less generous” support.

NHS staff return to work to find same patients waiting in ambulance for A&E, MPs are told – video

Some services will be [protected during December's strikes](#), including chemotherapy, dialysis, intensive care and high dependency units and neonatal and paediatric intensive care.

Ruth May, England’s chief nursing officer, a senior figure at NHS England, visited picket lines last week. She said she wanted the government to work with unions to get a deal over pay.

The latest developments come in a month that has been peppered with strike action across the UK, including by NHS staff including ambulance workers, as well as rail staff and Royal Mail employees.

Ambulance workers in England and [Wales](#) will stage another strike on Wednesday, involving up to 10,000 staff. Union officials have suggested that paramedics, call-handlers and emergency care assistants would come off picket lines for the most serious cases.

Those who are members of GMB will strike again on 28 December.

Ambulance service staff in Scotland called off a planned strike after Unite and Unison members agreed to a new offer, with a new minimum hourly rate.

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Industrial action

NHS ambulance strikes: don't get drunk and avoid 'risky activity', people told

No 10 says public should use 'common sense' during England and Wales dispute as minister prepares to meet unions

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



Military personnel take part in a training session as they prepare to provide cover for striking ambulance workers. Photograph: Victoria Jones/PA

[Denis Campbell](#), [Jessica Elgot](#) and [Mark Brown](#)

Tue 20 Dec 2022 10.35 ESTFirst published on Tue 20 Dec 2022 04.11 EST

Members of the public have been urged to avoid getting drunk or taking part in "risky activities" on Wednesday because strike-hit [NHS](#) ambulance services may not be able to treat them.

Thousands of paramedics and other personnel in NHS ambulance services across England and Wales will strike for between 12 and 24 hours on Wednesday, leaving the NHS unable to respond to many of the 999 calls it usually receives.

On Tuesday, NHS bosses and a government health minister advised people to behave in a “sensible” way during the strike in order to avoid ending up needing to go to A&E so that ambulance services can concentrate on helping those in greatest medical need.

Prof Sir Stephen Powis, NHS England’s national medical director, asked the public to ring 999 only if it involved a life-threatening emergency and instead to call the 111 telephone advice service.

“But people can also help by taking sensible steps to keep themselves and others safe during this period and not ending up in A&E, whether that is drinking responsibly or checking up on a family member or neighbour who may be particularly vulnerable to make sure they are OK,” said Powis.

Will Quince, a health minister, urged people to play their part in reducing the pressure on overstretched NHS services by not engaging in “risky activities”, in case they got injured.

“Where people are planning any risky activity, I would strongly encourage them not to do so because there will be disruption on the day,” he told BBC Breakfast.

Downing Street declined to specify what pursuits Quince meant. But the minister clarified to BBC Radio 5 Live that “if there is activity that people are undertaking tomorrow, whether it’s, for example, contact sport, they may want to review that.”

Asked if people should still go running, he replied that that was not a “hugely risky” activity. But, he added: “Would I go running tomorrow if it was still icy? No I wouldn’t, because that would encompass additional risk.”

Powis and Quince spoke out after the campaign group [GP Survival on Monday criticised](#) NHS England for not preparing the public for the huge disruption Wednesday's strike will entail. It should have advised them to refrain from pursuits that involve danger and set out how to move and transport injured and acutely unwell people to hospital who cannot get an ambulance to take them.

Talks were continuing on Tuesday between the health secretary, Steve Barclay, and Unison, Unite and the GMB, the three unions whose members in ambulance services will be on strike.

Unions and NHS bosses have already agreed that ambulance crews will respond to all "life or limb" category one calls, which involve patients who are at immediate risk of dying, for example because they are in cardiac arrest or have stopped breathing.

However, Tuesday's talks were about whether ambulance personnel would also attend category two calls, which involve situations such as suspected heart attacks and strokes, in which patients must receive treatment fast to give them the best chance of survival.

The unions' joint action is the first shot in a campaign for a bigger pay settlement from the government than the £1,400-a-head it has offered. Thousands of nurses also staged strikes on Tuesday across England, Wales and Northern Ireland for the same reason.

The warning came as Rishi Sunak's cabinet ignored the strike action on Tuesday morning and focused instead on the prime minister's meetings in Estonia and Latvia as well as plans for the coronation of King Charles III next year. Steve Barclay, the health secretary, will however meet ambulance unions for talks later on Tuesday.

Speaking earlier, Quince said that people should not take unnecessary risks during the strikes. "Where people are planning any risky activity, I would strongly encourage them not to do so because there will be disruption on the day," he said.

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Downing Street later declined to set out what “risky” activities might include, with the prime minister’s official spokesperson telling reporters: “The public, as we saw through Covid, can be trusted to use their common sense.”

Women planning home births should get advice via their antenatal care, the spokesperson said, stopping short of advising expectant mothers in labour to go to hospital.

Quince stressed that those with chest pain should call 999 despite the ambulance strike in England and Wales on Wednesday but admitted that people experiencing such pain were waiting an average of 47 minutes.

People with chest pains or who have had a bad fall – category 2 cases – were waiting more than an hour in some areas, Quince said. But he insisted that life-threatening emergencies would be covered on Wednesday and that the most critical category 1 calls were being answered in under 10 minutes.

“If you have chest pains, call 999 and the expectation is, and I’ve been really clear with you, I don’t think that there is any paramedic, ambulance technician, anyone working in our NHS, whether they’re on a picket line or not, that would not respond to a 999 call where somebody has chest pains and there is a threat of a heart attack,” he told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme on Tuesday.

The ambulance workers’ strike on Wednesday will involve up to 10,000 staff. Union officials have suggested that paramedics, call handlers and emergency care assistants would come off picket lines for the most serious

cases. Those who are members of the GMB will then strike again on 28 December.

Meanwhile, at least three ambulance services declared critical incidents as NHS services face “unprecedented” pressure. North East ambulance service, South East Coast ambulance service and the East of England ambulance service have all moved to the status as staff work to respond to calls.

The former operates across Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, County Durham, Darlington and Teesside; South East Coast ambulance service covers Brighton and Hove, East Sussex, West Sussex, Kent, Surrey and north-east Hampshire; while the latter works in Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Essex, Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire.

Declaring a critical incident allows an ambulance service to instigate several additional measures to protect patient safety, which include seeking mutual aid, cancelling all training to allow for the redeployment of all clinical staff, not taking bookings for urgent non-emergency transportation and increasing third-party provider provision.

In other industrial action affecting the health service, [nurses were striking](#) for a second day on Tuesday. The head of the Royal College of Nursing, Pat Cullen, said there was no route to negotiations with the government to end the dispute because ministers would not discuss pay.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/dec/20/people-in-pain-should-call-999-despite-ambulance-strike-says-minister>

NHS

[Analysis](#)

NHS ambulance strikes will put patients at risk – but delays already at record high

[Andrew Gregory](#) Health editor

Alarming data underlines why workers in England and Wales are taking exceptional step that may have lethal consequences



A queue of ambulances outside the Royal London hospital emergency department last month. Photograph: Leon Neal/Getty Images

Mon 19 Dec 2022 12.39 EST Last modified on Tue 20 Dec 2022 00.11 EST

At any other moment in the 74-year history of the [NHS](#), thousands of nurses staging their first ever strike would represent the single biggest threat to patient care.

Last Thursday's stoppage by nurses resulted in the cancellation of 16,000 appointments, procedures and surgeries in England, with more set to be postponed this Tuesday.

These are unprecedented times, however, and this week striking nurses will not pose the biggest problem. Nine ambulance trusts in England and Wales are expected to be affected by industrial action on Wednesday, coordinated by the GMB, Unison and Unite unions.

The ambulance strikes will involve paramedics as well as control-room staff and support workers. The threat to patient safety on Wednesday will be exceptional.

Under trade union laws, life-preserving care must be provided during the strikes. But there remains a lack of clarity about what will be offered. Even at this late stage, NHS leaders say negotiations are continuing between unions and ambulance services to agree which incidents will be exempt from strike action.

All category 1 calls – the most life-threatening cases – will be responded to, while some ambulance trusts have agreed exemptions with unions for specific incidents within category 2 calls.

However, in some cases, elderly people who fall during the strikes may not be sent help until they have spent several hours on the floor. Heart attack and stroke patients may get an ambulance only if treatment is deemed “time critical”.

There is no doubt that many of those patients making 999 calls on Wednesday will not get the care they need. Some will probably die as a result.

The government says anyone in an emergency should still call 999, with military personnel due to be drafted in to cover, but such is the complex nature of urgent and emergency care that there will be no substitute for the ambulance workers.

NHS leaders believe Wednesday's strike will present a completely different magnitude of risk. Quite simply, patients not getting emergency treatment quickly enough can mean the difference between life and death.

Some hospitals are braced for many more patients to turn up at emergency departments in taxis, which will add to the chaos. Even if ambulances cannot quickly drop off patients, they can liaise with hospital staff before arriving so emergency departments know what is coming.

But a surge in seriously ill patients arriving in taxis or private vehicles will leave hospital staff with less time to prepare or make plans to triage patients.

Hospitals have been ordered to put measures in place for Wednesday to ensure ambulance patient handovers are kept to no more than 15 minutes, in order to maximise capacity across urgent and emergency care.

However, NHS data from last Thursday showed ambulance handover delays at hospitals in England already at a new high, a week before the ambulance strike, with one in six patients waiting more than an hour to be passed to emergency department teams. One in three waited at least 30 minutes.

Ambulance crews could not respond to almost one in four 999 calls in October – the most ever – because so many were tied up outside A&Es waiting to hand patients over.

An estimated 5,000 patients in England – also the highest number on record – potentially suffered “severe harm” by waiting so long either to be admitted to A&E or just to get an ambulance to turn up to help them.

The alarming data underlines what many in the NHS have been saying for months. Strike action will probably be lethal this week, and beyond, but parts of the system have been broken for some time.

Paramedics are striking because they are being asked to do more and more, to extreme and unsafe levels, and for less and less. Patient safety is already being put at risk, they add, because of the government’s failure to retain and recruit staff over many years.

Immediate action is needed from ministers to fix the health service, and first on the agenda must be a workforce plan that ensures more staff are retained and recruited. Without action, more staff will quit, fewer will be left on the frontline, strikes will continue – and patient harm will become a daily reality.

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Terry Hall

Terry Hall was the self-assured eye of the Specials storm

[Alexis Petridis](#)



As the pioneering 2 Tone band's lead singer, Hall's impassive style made him a star – and helped him weather the vicissitudes of fame, the changing charts and British decline

[Terry Hall: lead singer of the Specials dies aged 63](#)

[Terry Hall: a life in a pictures](#)



‘A cheerless, unaffected British voice’ ... Terry Hall in 2018. Photograph: Josh Cheuse

Mon 19 Dec 2022 17.42 EST Last modified on Tue 20 Dec 2022 16.29 EST

As the credits roll on [Dance Craze](#), the impossibly exciting 1981 concert film shot at the height of the 2 Tone movement, the Specials perform Nite Klub. It’s a noticeably different version of the song to the one that appears on their eponymous 1979 debut album. The intro is long and slow, reflecting songwriter Jerry Dammers’ increasing interest in jazz and easy listening, which would controversially infect the Specials’ second album More Specials. Then the song erupts into frantic ska and the band’s members suddenly spring into life, leaping up and down, rushing backwards and forwards across the stage. Except for Terry Hall, who continues to stand more or less stock still, his face impassive, an occasional nod his solitary concession to what’s happening around him. As the song progresses, audience members start to climb on stage and dance, swamping the band. Dammers gleefully dives into their midst, but Hall has retreated to the rear of the stage, by the drums. He keeps singing about the awfulness of provincial nightlife – “Is this the place to be? What am I doing here?” – while staring balefully at the mayhem before him. The song ends and the screen goes black as Hall emits a mirthless laugh.

It was a very Terry Hall moment. Everyone remembers the Specials in their prime as a thrilling mass of cartoonish kinetic energy – when the comedy show Not the Nine O’Clock News hamfistedly attempted to parody them, it was with a song called I Like Bouncing – but Hall was invariably the eye of the storm: he might occasionally move in time to the music (and at one point in Dance Craze he climbs down from the stage and sings directly into the rowdy front row) but in comparison with his bandmates, he was a statue, fixing the crowd or the viewer at home with an unblinking, mournful stare.



The Specials in New York, 1979 ... (L-R) Roddy Radiation, Sir Horace Gentleman, Terry Hall, Neville Staples, Lynval Golding, John Bradbury and Jerry Dammers. Photograph: Images Press/Getty Images

There was something unblinking and mournful about his voice, too. Hall never tried to imitate the old Jamaican ska vocalists, even when he was essaying their material. Instead, he sang in a cheerless, unaffected British voice – you could occasionally catch a hint of the Midlands about his vowels – that could rise to a wail if needed. It was perfect for the Specials’ lyrics, which conjured up a spectacularly grim vision of late 70s Britain on their debut album – violence lurks around every corner, different youth cults battle it out and the National Front is on the march – and grew bleaker still on More Specials, where air crashes, ageing, drink-driving and nuclear paranoia (on the Hall co-written Man at C&A) found their way into the mix.

More than the speed and ferocity with which the Specials played, more than Roddy Radiation's stinging rock'n'roll-influenced guitar style, it was Hall who linked them to punk, or at least to Johnny Rotten. "It was just the way he stood on stage and gazed for half an hour ... His stance was like an expression of standing still," Hall enthused of the Sex Pistols' frontman. The anguished, undulating cry he unleashes in lieu of a chorus on the 1981 single Ghost Town, meanwhile, wouldn't have sounded out of place on Public Image Ltd's contemporaneous album The Flowers of Romance.

Hall's mordant public image proved so pervasive that a wild rumour circulated playgrounds in the early 80s: he suffered from a medical condition affecting the muscles in his face that left him *physically unable to smile*. Occasionally, you got the feeling he rather enjoyed playing up to it: he fell to his knees like an overwrought crooner while singing Do Nothing on Top of the Pops, but did so while wearing an expression of utter boredom; "Hello, hi, I'm Terry and I'm going to enjoy myself first," he deadpanned on More Specials' cover of Enjoy Yourself, a jaunty song that dated back to 1949.

The Specials: Enjoy Yourself (live) – video

Equally, one of the few things the band's seven members agreed on in retrospect was that there frequently wasn't much to smile about in the Specials. The sheer intensity of their success – within months of the release of their debut single Gangsters, they had spawned both their own genre and an entire youth movement – and a crippling workload didn't do much to help relations within the band. Their live shows had a tendency to attract trouble. Their anti-racist stance made both their shows and the band themselves a target for National Front thugs – guitarist Lynval Golding was seriously injured in a racist attack in south London – but audiences could get out of control without far-right interference. On their 1980 tour, audience violence marred gigs in Newcastle, Leeds and Cambridge. At the latter show, Hall and Dammers intervened in an attempt to stop the crowd fighting with bouncers: both were arrested, charged with incitement to riot and fined £400. None of the band's members seemed to have emerged untraumatised from the experience of their 18 months of fame, but the pressure took a particular toll on Hall, who struggled with his mental health (he was eventually diagnosed with bipolar disorder after a suicide attempt in 2004). "Everything was a drama," [he told the Guardian in 2009](#). "You couldn't get

any space, not even for an hour or two, because wherever you went there were these lads who'd travelled 9,000 miles to see you live and didn't have anywhere to stay, so you had to put them up in your room and then you had to sit up all night with them, talking about the fucking Specials."

Terry Hall: his most memorable songs – video obituary

He announced his departure from the band backstage at Top of the Pops, where they were due to perform Ghost Town, an eerie and eerily prescient depiction of urban decay that reached No 1 the day after cities across Britain erupted in rioting. He formed Fun Boy Three with fellow ex-Specials Golding and Neville Staple: their debut single, The Lunatics Have Taken Over the Asylum made the Top 20, which told you more about the residual level of affection for the Specials than it did about the song's commerciality: bleak in a way that made Ghost Town sound positively upbeat, it set the tone for their eponymous debut album, a dense, claustrophobic, impressively experimental mass of African-inspired percussion and ominous vocals that powered into the Top 10 on the back of an atypically upbeat cover of the 30s jazz standard It Ain't What You Do It's the Way That You Do It recorded with Bananarama. On one level, 1983's Waiting was lighter than their debut – produced by Talking Heads' David Byrne, it featured the fantastic, poppy hit single Our Lips Are Sealed (on the US version), which Hall had written with Jane Wiedlin of the Go Gos about their clandestine relationship – but it also contained Well Fancy That!, a disturbing account of the abuse Hall had suffered as a child, after being abducted by a paedophile ring during a school trip to France. If you wanted evidence of Hall's catholic music taste – not always apparent in the Specials – Waiting opened with a jaunty cover of the theme music from the 1960s film adaptations of Agatha Christie's Miss Marple mysteries.



Fun Boy Three in 1983. Photograph: Steve Rapport/Getty Images

Said catholicism became more apparent still after Fun Boy Three broke up, not long after Waiting's release. Hall later said that he spent the remainder of the 80s "distancing myself from [the Specials] as much as I could", and there was certainly a sense of repudiating his past about the next band he formed, the Colourfield, whose debut album *Virgins and Philistines* dealt almost exclusively in music that would have been verboten under punk and post-punk's scorched-earth rules, such as gentle acoustic folk-rock and Latin-infused easy listening. They performed their hit single [Thinking of You](#) on BBC1's cosy daytime chat show *Pebble Mill at One*, an unthinkable environment for the Specials to have appeared in. Its glossier follow-up, *Deception*, featured covers of both the Monkees' *She* and Sly and the Family Stone's *Running Away* as well as a selection of originals that illustrated Hall's blossoming power as a songwriter, not least the beautiful *Miss Texas 1967*. Next, he formed the trio Terry, Blair & Anouchka, who delved even deeper into 60s and 70s-inspired pop on their solitary album *Ultra Modern Nursery Rhymes*, a genuine lost classic. Improbable as it seemed, Hall had a genuine facility for sunshine pop; as if to underline where they were coming from, it concluded with a cover of Captain & Tennille's corny-but-fantastic 1975 hit *Love Will Keep Us Together*. Just as the global influence of the Specials became readily apparent, thanks to a

wave of American ska-punk bands, Hall had never seemed further from the music they were inspired by.

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But Ultra Modern Nursery Rhymes failed to make the charts. Similarly, there were few takers for Vegas, the electronic duo he formed with Dave Stewart of Eurythmics, or indeed for Hall's 90s solo albums Home and Laugh, despite the strength of their songs – listen to Hall's version of the Lightning Seeds' Sense, which he co-wrote with Ian Broudie, or the glorious chiming guitars of Sonny and His Sister. Better still was 2003's The Hour of Two Lights, which found Hall collaborating with Mushtaq Uddin of Fun-Da-Mental: a remarkably ambitious album of musical fusions that involved Algerian rappers, Polish Gypsy band Romany Rad, a 12-year-old Lebanese vocalist and jazz pianist Zoe Rahman. It could have been a worthy mess, but instead it worked, conjuring up a sense of global menace. If anyone conversant with the Specials' oeuvre could spot Hall's vocals a mile off, it was still like nothing else he'd released, testament to his musical restlessness.

Eventually, though, he bowed to the inevitable: inspired by seeing the reformed Pixies live, he agreed to a Specials reunion. From the start, it was dogged by the same fractiousness that plagued their initial incarnation – depending on which version of events you believe, Jerry Dammers was either fired or left after a couple of rehearsals – but it was a huge commercial success: the first set of gigs sold 45,000 tickets in an hour. The gigs were triumphant and celebratory, although relations in the band continued to prove combustible. Roddy Radiation left, so did Neville Staple:

coupled with the [2015 death of drummer John Bradbury](#), it reduced the band to a core of Hall, Golding and bass player Horace Panter. And yet the three of them kept going, eventually releasing two new albums. If no one was going to rank 2019's [Encore](#) or 2021's [Protest Songs](#) over Specials and More Specials, they were far better than a naysayer might have suggested a Specials album would be without the input of Dammers, who after all had been the band's architect, chief songwriter and de facto leader in their heyday. Both albums were admirably uninterested in simply warming over the old Specials sound: you got the feeling that the same restless spirit that had powered Hall's solo career was behind their diversions into everything from funk to Frank Zappa covers.

Terry Hall and Mushtaq: Ten Eleven – video

Perhaps they kept going in order to prove that, contrary to popular wisdom, the Specials had been more than a one-man show, or to underline that the Specials' left-wing, anti-racist message was as relevant in the 21st century as it had been in the late 70s and early 80s: Encore featured both a song called BLM and an appearance by Saffiyah Khan, a young woman who'd been photographed facing down EDL protestors while wearing a Specials T-shirt. Or perhaps they were simply enjoying themselves in a way that they seldom had in the band's original incarnation. Certainly Hall cut an unexpectedly sunny figure in interviews, delighted by everything from an increase in the number of women turning up to their gigs to qualifying for an over-60s bus pass. "I bloody love being 60," [he told one interviewer](#). "I've always thought I'd make my best music between the years 60 and 70."

It wasn't to be, but Terry Hall's career is hardly one of unfulfilled potential. He was a defining member of one of the most beloved and influential bands of their era, but moreover, he declined to be hemmed in by their vast legacy: as you might have guessed from the figure captured at the end of Dance Craze, standing still while bedlam erupts around him, [Terry Hall](#) was very much his own man.

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Terry Hall

Obituary

Terry Hall obituary

Singer with the Specials whose chart-topping Ghost Town evoked the sense of social collapse gripping Britain at the turn of the 80s



Terry Hall, third from left, with the Specials, c1980: from left, John Bradbury, Lynval Golding, Neville Staple, Roddy Radiation and Horace Panter, and, at the front, Jerry Dammers. Photograph: Sunshine International/Rex/Shutterstock

[Adam Sweeting](#)

Tue 20 Dec 2022 02.00 EST Last modified on Wed 21 Dec 2022 08.40 EST

Famously deadpan, dour and slightly menacing, Terry Hall, who has died aged 63 after a short illness, shot to fame at the end of the 1970s with Coventry's groundbreaking multi-racial band the Specials. They emerged in the aftermath of punk, with a fizzing, politically charged mix of ska and new wave, and enjoyed instant success with their debut album, [The Specials](#), which reached No 4 on the UK chart. For a time, the Specials' 2 Tone Records operation became the UK's most successful record label, with

releases from Madness, the Beat and the Selecter alongside the Specials' own.

Terry Hall: his most memorable songs – video obituary

Their second album, *More Specials*, featured a broader and jazzier musical palette and scorched to No 5. The band scored Top 10 singles with [Gangsters](#), [A Message to You Rudy](#), [Rat Race](#), [Stereotype](#) and [Do Nothing](#), peaking with their chart-topping classic [Ghost Town](#) in 1981.

Hall commented that “I don’t believe music can change anything” because “all you can do is put your point across”, but the Specials caught the fraught and dangerous atmosphere of the turn of the 1980s with an eerie intensity. [Ghost Town](#) in particular chillingly evoked the sense of social collapse and economic decline gripping a riot-torn Britain.

The Specials found themselves in the eye of the storm, with neo-Nazis frequently targeting their gigs. Hall and the band’s keyboards player, Jerry Dammers, were both arrested when they waded in to try to break up fighting between fans and security guards at a gig in Cambridge. They were found guilty of “incitement to riot” and fined £400 each.



Terry Hall, right, and Neville Staple performing with the Specials in London, 1980. Photograph: David Corio/Redferns

However, when recording Ghost Town for an appearance on [Top of the Pops](#), Hall and his bandmates Neville Staple and Lynval Golding announced they were leaving the band, as the result of internal personality clashes. They went off to form Fun Boy Three.

Building on the ska legacy of their former band, Fun Boy Three hit the UK Top 10 with their eponymous debut album (1982), and scored a Top 5 hit single with the infectiously catchy [It Ain't What You Do \(It's the Way That You Do it\)](#), its chart-friendliness much enhanced by the addition of the female trio Bananarama. Hall had brought them on board after seeing them featured in the Face magazine.

The same combined team enjoyed a further Top 5 hit with [Really Saying Something](#), which also reached the Top 20 of the American club chart. After a second album, Waiting, and Top 10 hits with [The Tunnel of Love](#) and [Our Lips Are Sealed](#), Fun Boy Three split up following an American tour.



Terry Hall, third from left, with members of Bananarama and Fun Boy Three in 1982; the two trios had a series of hits together. Photograph: LJ Van Houten/Shutterstock

Hall was born in Coventry, where his father worked at the Rolls Royce aeronautics factory and his mother at a Chrysler car plant; he had two elder

sisters. Though he showed academic potential, passing his 11-plus exam with ease, and was skilled enough at football to be invited for a trial at West Bromwich Albion, he was given little encouragement in either direction by his parents.

His childhood was scarred by his experience of horrific sexual abuse. When he was 12, he was abducted by one of his schoolteachers and delivered into the clutches of a paedophile ring in France. He wrote about the episode in the song Well Fancy That, a track he recorded with Fun Boy Three in 1983. It included the lyrics: “On school trips to France / Well fancy that / You had a good time / Turned sex into crime”. Hall commented that “the only way I could deal with the experience was to write about it, in a song. It was very difficult for me to write, but I wanted to communicate my feelings.”

The traumatic events resulted in Hall being put on valium at the age of 13, and the effects of these experiences would continue to haunt him. During the 1990s he used drinking as a crutch and slipped into alcoholism. In 2004 he tried to kill himself and he was subsequently diagnosed with bipolar disorder, which had to be controlled with anti-psychotic medication.

He left school at 14 and undertook a string of temporary jobs, including as a bricklayer and a trainee hairdresser, before joining the punk band Squad as lead singer. Hall described the band dismissively: “It was just like 1-2-3-4 then make a noise for two minutes, and then stop and say 1-2-3-4 again.” When Squad supported an early incarnation of the Specials, then known as the Automatics, Dammers was impressed and invited Hall to join them. Hall liked the Automatics’ songs enough to accept, though it would take some honing and refining before the distinctive Specials sound emerged.



Terry Hall on stage at the Glastonbury festival in 2009. Photograph: Jim Dyson/Getty Images

Hall's post-Fun Boy Three career found him hopping between a bewildering variety of projects. In 1984 he formed the Colourfield with Toby Lyons and Karl Shale, which produced the Top 20 album *Virgins and Philistines* (1985) and a string of singles, of which only [Thinking of You](#) made much impression on the charts. Hall also undertook songwriting collaborations with Ian Broudie of the Lightning Seeds, before forming Terry, Blair and Anouchka in 1989, alongside Anouchka Grove and the American actress Blair Booth.

The trio were united by their fondness for cheesy 60s pop, and they [covered](#) the Captain & Tennille's hit *Love Will Keep Us Together*, but their solitary album *Ultra Modern Nursery Rhymes* failed to chart, and a couple of singles did little better. "A lot of the stuff I've done is pretty much a wind-up," Hall admitted. "Terry, Blair and Anouchka was completely taking the piss out of us and everyone else."

Another project was Vegas, a collaboration between Hall and the Eurythmics' Dave Stewart. Their solitary album fared poorly, though [their version](#) of [Charles Aznavour](#)'s *She* reached the Top 50. He undertook further

collaborations with Tricky, Lily Allen, Shakespears Sister, Nouvelle Vague and Damon Albarn's Gorillaz, and with Mushtaq (from Fun-Da-Mental).

He was also part of the Specials' various reunions post 2008, one of only three original remaining members. The band's comeback album [Encore](#) (2019) [topped](#) the UK chart. In 2021 they released [Protest Songs 1924-2012](#), a collection of cover versions of famous sociopolitical songs down the decades, which reached No 2.

Hall is survived by his second wife, Lindy Heymann, and their son, Orson, and by two sons, Theo and Felix, from his previous marriage, to Jeannette, which ended in divorce.

Terence Edward Hall, singer and songwriter, born 19 March 1959; died 18 December 2022

This article was amended on 21 December 2022. An earlier version misnamed Hall's son Theo as Leo.

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I'm dreaming of a bestseller: what makes Christmas songs stick?



Mariah Carey, Ed Sheeran, Frank Sinatra, Phil Spector and George Michael are among the most popular artists for the Yuletide season. Composite:

Guardian design/CBS/Getty Images/Invision/AP/Paramount Pictures/Allstar/Redferns/NBCU Photo Bank/Alamy

We analyse the most popular festive songs to find that all we want for Christmas is mid-century nostalgia

[Comment: Do they know it's Christmas?! Why today's meek festive pop lacks the crucial chaos element](#)

[Carmen Aguilar García, Michael Goodier, Lucy Swan and Pamela Duncan](#)
Tue 20 Dec 2022 04.00 EST Last modified on Tue 20 Dec 2022 18.19 EST

When composer Irving Berlin finished writing White [Christmas](#) in 1940, he reportedly told his musical secretary: “Not only is it the best song I ever wrote, it’s the best song anybody ever wrote.”

If musical greatness can be measured by record sales, he was correct. Recorded by Bing Crosby and released in 1942 on his compilation album Merry Christmas, White Christmas would go on to become the [bestselling single](#) of all time. The song is still one of our most-listened on the 24 and 25 December, more than 80 years later.

The longevity of White Christmas is not a one-off. The Guardian took every Christmas song that had charted in the UK Top 100 since 1952, and selected the 100 most popular of those on [Spotify](#). Two-thirds were released at least 30 years ago.

[Timeline showing release date of Christmas songs.](#)

But why are we still listening to the same old songs? According to Prof Joe Bennett, forensic musicologist at Berklee College of Music, the answer is nostalgia. Christmas “is a time for returning to where we came from” and that has an impact on the music, he says.

Bennett categorised our list of 100 Christmas songs using the same method he used in his [2017 paper](#), looking at the lyrical and musical themes.

The most recurrent lyrical categories were homely themes – related to family, open fires, gifts under the tree and coming home for Christmas – or party-related, such as dancing, mistletoe or being with friends. Common festive musical tropes included sleigh bells (found in 46% of songs) and tubular bells (found in 21%).

A throwback to the mid-20th century

The genres of Christmas songs are also rooted in nostalgia. More than half of our songs are in genres popular during the mid-20th century, with around a quarter in a style of pop influenced by the American record producer Phil Spector's 1963 album "A Christmas Gift for You" (Spector was later convicted for murder in 2000s).

Even later artists and songs reference the mid-20th century. Mariah Carey's All I Want for Christmas is You, released in 1994, "is partly a throwback to the Phil Spector sound of the early 60s," says Bennett. "It's not really doing mid-90s pop. It's doing 60s pop with mid-90s recording quality."

Ed Sheeran and Elton John's Merry Christmas, released last year, also alludes to Spector's sound, while Michael Bublé, the king of the modern Christmas song, uses contemporary production techniques to hark back to the 1950s big-band sound.

Graphic showing the most popular genres of Christmas songs

The domination of older genres means more popular modern ones are left out.

"One of the fascinating things about Christmas music is the almost complete absence of hip-hop. It hardly appears in holiday playlists, despite being the world's most popular musical form by most measures," says Bennett.

There have been attempts to create hip-hop Christmas classics – perhaps most notably Run DMC's Christmas in Hollis, released in 1987 and included

in our list. But these are rarely successful.

One successful example of a fresh take on a Christmas classic is the Jackson 5's version of *Santa Claus is Coming To Town*. "That is pure pop disco," says Bennett. "It updates an old song with a modern arrangement. It's the opposite to the Mariah Carey approach, of applying a retro arrangement to a new song."

Same songs, different artists

Another sign of the lasting influence of nostalgia over Christmas music is the fact many of the same songs are covered over and over again by different musicians – White Christmas has more than 20,000 versions listed on Spotify.

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Some covers are more innovative than others, however. Using Spotify's music classification algorithms, we found popular versions of Silent Night are more similar than versions of Santa Claus Is Coming To Town or Mary's Boy Child.

[Musical qualities chart](#)

There's a musical explanation for this. Silent Night is a waltz – with a 3/4 time signature – and it is more difficult to increase the tempo or add energy to a waltz, says Bennett. Waltzes are generally rare in pop music, but are less

rare among Christmas songs (they made up 6% of our list, with a further 8% of songs in 12/8 time).

Rise of the festive female artist

Although Christmas songs are a reminder of the past, the data also shows some changes through the decades.

Modern songs are increasingly likely to be sung by female artists. This is partly down to a rise in solo artists across the music industry in recent decades – and a decline in male-dominated band music.

“Record labels these days are much more comfortable investing in solo artists, as opposed to bands. This is probably ascribable to the decline of rock (and albums) and the rise of streaming (and singles), meaning that it’s economically lower risk to invest in a solo artist – and a lot of the solo artists are women,” says Bennett.

Chart showing the artists behind Christmas songs, by gender

Spotify data also shows an increase in “danceability” over the years, with songs interpreted by female singers higher up in the score. Spotify classifies danceability based on “a combination of musical elements including tempo, rhythm stability, beat strength, and overall regularity”.

There has also been an increase in “energy” but a decrease in “acousticness”. This isn’t so remarkable – recording techniques and a rise in digital music means that these changes reflect the broad arc of modern music.

But what is remarkable, says Bennett, is that “we are still listening to songs from the 40s, 50s and 60s at Christmas time, which we don’t really do during the rest of the year. So the data does tell us something”.

He added: “It reminds us that these older songs are still culturally valued, whoever is singing them.”

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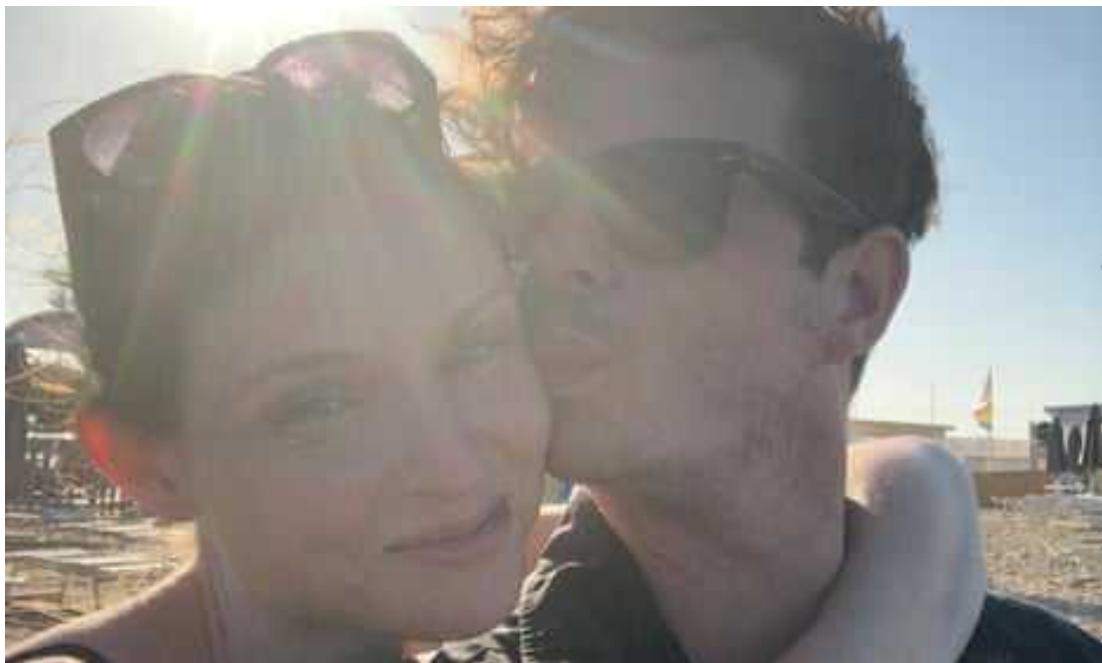
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How Sophie Ellis-Bextor met Richard Jones: ‘It’s embarrassing. I told him he had a nice amp!’



‘That kiss was like a switch that went on’: Sophie and Richard, who were friends before getting together

Musicians Ellis-Bextor and Jones, both 43, met when he was auditioning to join her band. They married in 2005, have five sons and live in London



[Emine Saner](#)

[@eminesaner](#)

Tue 20 Dec 2022 01.00 EST

The first words Sophie Ellis-Bextor said to her future husband, Richard Jones, have been immortalised in neon, and are proudly on display in his studio. “It’s embarrassing,” she says with a laugh. “I said: ‘Nice amp.’” It was 2002, they were both in their early 20s, and Jones, a bass guitarist – who would go on to [form the band the Feeling](#) – was auditioning for Sophie’s new tour band.

They met in a rehearsal studio in north London, Richard remembers. “I was like, wow, look at this ethereal, beautiful woman that is way more beautiful in real life than I expected.” (Sophie was, of course, already a super-successful pop star.)

“I was 22, and it’s quite intimidating where everybody’s auditioning to be in your band, and you’re feeling quite young and not that experienced yourself,” she says. “I remember thinking, I don’t want this to feel awkward or weird, because all the musicians were my peers.” That’s when she chose, inexplicably, to compliment Richard on his equipment. “I think I was just trying to be quite chatty, and normalise everything,” she says.

Both were already in relationships, and neither was looking to meet anybody else. “First impression was like, wow,” says Richard. “But, you know, you meet beautiful people.” It didn’t really mean anything.

Sophie chose Richard and his friend, the drummer Paul Stewart, for her tour. Richard found an old camcorder recently, on which they had filmed behind-the-scenes footage. “Loads of it is the two of us just laughing at stuff. At the time, we weren’t even aware of anything other than we had a really good time together. We were all having fun, but there was definitely a real sort of ...” “Connection?” suggests Sophie. “I suppose I’m trying not to say Love Island words,” says Richard. Sophie adds: “We had a good friendship, basically.” They spent a lot of time together, but usually with other people around. When they did the European tour, they became, says Sophie, “closer in a different way”.

On the tour bus, he remembers there being a “sort of electricity, something in the air”. Had there been flirtations before? “Nothing,” says Sophie. Richard says: “It was weird. It was like: ‘Oh’ – and you’re both on the same page.”

There were a couple of weeks left of the tour, and each tried to work out how they felt, knowing they had to end their relationships with their respective partners. They met up a month after they got back to the UK, both newly single, and Richard drove Sophie up to Alexandra Palace, overlooking London, “like in an American movie. We wondered if we would feel the same and it was exactly the same.”



Sophie and Richard on their wedding day.

They attempted to keep their relationship private. “This was in the days of paparazzi and, as it turns out, phone hacking,” says Sophie. Then, after six weeks, she found out she was pregnant.

Sophie gave birth to their first child, Sonny, two months early, which was stressful but also quite intense in a new relationship. “When we became parents, we’d only been a couple for eight months,” she says. “It was quite full on, but my memory of it is very positive and warm. At the heart of it all, we always felt excited about Sonny.”

“Sophie’s mum gave us the best advice,” says Richard, “which was: ‘It might not be the right time, it might not be the right man, but it’s the right baby.’ I thought they were such wise words because we didn’t know if we’d end up together. How could we? We wanted to be together, but we were also in the honeymoon period.”

They started living together only two weeks before Sonny was born, and got married when he was 14 months old; they now have four more sons. At about the time they became a couple, Richard and his bandmates formed the Feeling. “I definitely felt a massive drive to up my game,” he says. He also felt it wouldn’t work if Sophie was still essentially his boss, but now they

work together quite often – he regularly plays bass for her, they DJ together, and they have produced a family cookbook, born out of their lockdown [Kitchen Disco live Instagram shows](#).

Twenty years after they first met, Sophie says she is wary of giving advice about long-lasting relationships, “but I would say that being friends first is a big part of it, because we’ve always got a lot of respect for each other. I really like Richard as well as loving and fancying him, and I think liking each other is an underrated element of relationships.” Richard says: “We have moments where we annoy each other, don’t get on, all the normal stuff, but I think we’re both very mindful to just be kind to each other.”

Sophie Ellis-Bextor tours her Christmas Kitchen Disco from next November. [Tickets are on sale now](#)

Want to share your story? Tell us a little about yourself, your partner and how you got together by filling in the form [here](#)

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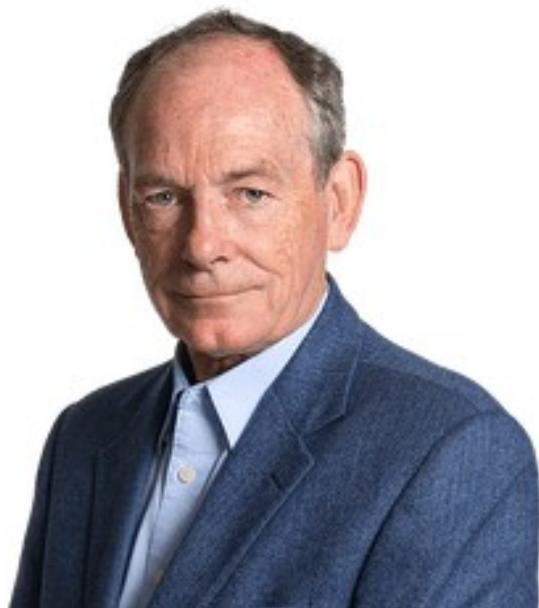
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Even England's police want to decriminalise hard drugs. Why won't our posturing politicians listen

[Simon Jenkins](#)



Police chiefs' plan to recommend addiction services would be far more effective than this futile 'war on drugs'



‘The home secretary, Suella Braverman, told the Tory conference she intended to take a hardline approach to drug offences.’ Photograph: Tolga Akmen/EPA

Tue 20 Dec 2022 01.00 EST Last modified on Tue 20 Dec 2022 08.35 EST

The best social reform starts on the frontline. The news that the National Police Chiefs’ Council has decided to [effectively decriminalise](#) cannabis and cocaine in England is, for drugs reformers, sensational. It intends to extend nationwide the warning and treatment schemes that have already been piloted in Durham and Thames Valley. Instead of prosecuting users of hard drugs such as heroin, cocaine and ecstasy, officers will recommend addiction services (dealers, and those who refuse to cooperate, will still be prosecuted). So far, these schemes have been hugely effective in stopping reoffending and saving police time. This move flatly challenges the home secretary, Suella Braverman, who told the recent Tory conference she intended to take a [hardline approach](#) to drug offences. The government wants a “three strikes and you’re out” policy that would see drug users banned from driving and losing their passports. This is pure politics, not harm reduction.

In every sense, the “war on drugs” [initiated by Edward Heath’s government](#) in the early 1970s has failed. British cannabis consumption is at its highest point since 2007, with one in 12 adults admitting to using the drug. Scotland

has the highest rate of deaths from drug use in Europe. Meanwhile, the prosecution of arrested drug offenders is falling due to sheer overstretch. This is legalisation by stealth.

County lines drug distribution now displays Ocado-like efficiency. It is so extensive that the Home Office last spring [could boast](#) it had “closed down” 2,500 such lines and arrested 10,000 young people since 2019. Yet [by October](#) it had found another 172 lines supposedly in need of “closing down”. The cost of these headline-grabbing operations runs to hundreds of millions of pounds and clearly does little to impede the drug gangs infesting Britain’s inner cities.



‘Yes, in California legalisation has meant drugs on every street, but they are on every British street, too.’ Magnolia cannabis lounge in Oakland, California. Photograph: Elijah Nouvelage/Reuters

The police chiefs declare they will treat drug use as a public health problem. Users will not be tainted with a criminal record if they seek treatment or abstain. The chiefs are backed by the overwhelming weight of those grappling with drug abuse on the frontline. Some 500 health organisations, including the British Medical Association and the Association of Directors of Public Health, wrote last week to Braverman to protest against her

intention to “criminalise the young and vulnerable” by “doubling down on a failed model”.

There is much to debate over drug regulation, witness regimes as variable as the Netherlands, [Portugal](#) and California and Oregon in the U. All have lessons to teach Britain. All will attest that drug use and abuse will not go away, any more than will alcohol. Most suggest that legalising use while still criminalising supply has problems, as in [Oregon's ostensibly libertarian system](#).

What is beyond argument is that pretending that a modern state, however authoritarian, can stamp out any or all forms of narcotic consumption is futile. It has failed. It is a dead policy. Law enforcers and public health professionals are shouting from the rooftops. A half-baked [Home Office](#) can merely intone, as it has for half a century, that “drugs ruin lives and devastate communities”.

Rishi Sunak should turn the much-predicted brevity of his term of office to advantage. Localism is showing the way. Sunak has nothing to lose by following the police’s lead, by appointing a commission to move Britain from the dark ages to the mainstream of the drugs debate. Yes, in California this can lead to drugs on every street, but they are on every British street, too. The difference is that in the US they are [policed and taxed](#) – and their victims are aided, not imprisoned. Sooner or later that must be the way forward. Why not now?

- Simon Jenkins is a Guardian columnist
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Snapshot of 2022Migration

**Here's a tortoise I found crossing the
Albanian border. It should be that easy
for all of us**

[Lea Ypi](#)



Meandering across an artificial line that divides humanity, the tortoise had a lot to teach my children – and me

- What was the image on your phone that defined 2022? [Writers give their perspectives](#)



‘During Albania’s 45 years of communist rule, any citizen caught imitating the actions of this tortoise would have been shot.’ Photograph: Lea Ypi

Tue 20 Dec 2022 02.00 EST Last modified on Tue 20 Dec 2022 11.15 EST

This undocumented tortoise was spotted crossing the land border between [Albania](#) and Greece one early morning in August, shortly after we had emerged from a long queue to have our passports stamped.

“Here,” I had been telling my children, “where you see the red flag with the eagle, is Albania. And over there,” I added, pointing at the other flag, blue with white stripes, a few hundred metres in the distance, “is [Greece](#).”

“But where are we now?”, the six-year-old asked. The tortoise was slowly trailing behind us, through what is sometimes referred to as *terra nullius*, a portion of territory that does not belong to any state and that usually demarcates two bordering jurisdictions.

During Albania’s 45 years of communist rule, any citizen caught imitating the actions of this tortoise would have been shot. The stretch of dividing land was guarded by soldiers on both sides, while vehicles crossing the border were few and far between. Now, the landscape offers a strange mix of wildlife and civilisation, a synthesis of nature and artifice. The chirping

sound of crickets is interrupted by cars braking suddenly at the respective checkpoints. Outside the marked paths, the land is barren and the vegetation unattended. We were surrounded by mountains, the same ones having different names on the different sides of the border.

In modern political thought, the concept of *terra nullius*, ie a piece of land that does not have a legal owner, was crucial to the defence of colonialism. Territorial sovereignty was justified by invoking the need for the efficient use of land to which it was presumed that nobody had previously laid a claim. “If within a territory of a people there is any deserted or unproductive soil,” Hugo Grotius, the 17th-century Dutch founding father of international law, wrote, “it is a right of foreigners to take possession of such land.” Reflecting on the origins of private property, the Genevan philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote that the first person who enclosed a plot of land and said “this is mine” – and found people “simple” enough to believe this account – was the true founder of civil society. Something similar could be said for state territory.

“But where is the tortoise from?,” my six-year-old asked. “Where is she going? Is she Greek or Albanian?”

“Tortoises don’t have countries,” I replied. “They live in the state of nature.”

The justification for political authority, including the right of states to police their borders, lies in its presumed superiority over the animal kingdom. In the state of nature, Thomas Hobbes explained, competition for scarce resources, and the war of all against all, makes even the strongest fear for their life. The state, and only the state, is capable of guaranteeing true rights-based freedom, as opposed to the anarchy of nature.

I used to find this argument plausible but have become increasingly sceptical of it. A few weeks after this photo was taken, [92 migrants](#) were rescued on the northern border between Greece and Turkey. They were all naked and many bore bodily injuries. It is not clear how they lost their clothes, but Greece blamed the Turkish authorities. The UN called for a “full investigation” and decried “such cruel and degrading treatment”. Suddenly,

the rules made up by states seemed even crueler than the so-called laws of nature.

Around the same time, undocumented Albanians travelling to Britain were the subject of a vicious verbal attack by the home secretary, [Suella Braverman](#). They were labelled as invaders, even though what they had done was ultimately no different from the tortoise: crossing a border. But we have been taught to consider the mere act of movement over an artificial boundary some kind of crime because we have accepted as natural deeply unnatural political conventions.

And so I have kept returning to this photo, of a tortoise who seemed so at home in a world without passports.

- Lea Ypi is a professor in political theory at the London School of Economics, and the author of [Free: Coming of Age at the End of History](#), published by Allen Lane
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OpinionUkraine

Providing US Patriot missiles could transform Ukraine's defences. But it's a move with risks

[Jack Watling](#)



By providing key systems to defend against Russia, the west risks weakening its deterrence posture towards China



The aftermath of a Russian missile strike in Kryvyi Rih, 16 December.
Photograph: Mykola Synelnykov/Reuters

Tue 20 Dec 2022 03.00 EST Last modified on Tue 20 Dec 2022 18.15 EST

The Biden administration has crossed a new line in its support for [Ukraine](#), by indicating its willingness to send Patriot air and missile defence systems to aid in the war against Russia. The system – which includes powerful missile interceptors and radar – is likely to prove highly effective for Ukraine, and marks a significant step forward in the scope and complexity of the US's support. But the gift of such prestige systems will present longer-term challenges for Nato.

Joe Biden previously ruled out sending Patriot systems to Ukraine. The shift in policy appears to have arisen from Russia's extensive targeting of Ukraine's civilian critical national infrastructure, which has left much of the country [without power](#). Russia is now seeking to obtain [Iranian ballistic missiles](#) to bolster its own depleted stocks, and this, combined with ongoing domestic missile production, means these attacks may persist for a long time. Defending Ukraine from missile attacks is now a humanitarian priority.

The Patriot is one of the world's most capable air and missile defence systems. Over the past five years Saudi Arabia has shot down hundreds of

Iranian-designed missiles [fired by the Houthis](#) using the system. Beyond protecting Ukraine's cities, the provision of such medium-range air defences may also free up some capacity for Ukraine's S-300 missile systems, expanding the available air cover over the frontlines.

It is important to note that the system will not provide immediate protection, and so Russian strikes on Ukraine's energy infrastructure are likely to continue in the short term. Patriot is a complex system to both operate and maintain. Previously provided equipment – without requisite training on how to maintain and repair it in combat conditions – has suffered from maintenance issues. Ensuring that the Ukrainians can operate the system sustainably will take time.

As Ukraine's stocks of air defence missiles have fallen, the country has become increasingly dependent on international support, just as it now relies on its partners for the majority of its artillery ammunition and armoured vehicles. That reliance comes with some risks, especially for systems for which Ukraine's partners have limited stocks.

Some fear that giving certain military support to Ukraine risks wider escalation, but this was not the basis for US reluctance to send Patriot systems. The US has significantly fewer of them than its own operational analysis suggests are necessary to defend its forces in the Indo-Pacific. Moreover, there is continuing demand for missiles from existing users, from Sweden to Saudi Arabia: the latter expends a significant number of missiles each month in defence of its critical national infrastructure. Missile manufacturing levels, meanwhile, are low.

In some respects this problem of supply reflects the wider challenge in munitions supplies to Ukraine. Ukrainian armed forces' consumption of ammunition significantly exceeds the available supply, and their artillery is wearing out barrels faster than they can be replaced. The hollowing out of Nato's defence industries has left the alliance in poor shape to support sustained high-intensity operations. In the case of systems such as Patriot, the challenge is greater because it takes much longer to manufacture precision weapons such as air defence missiles than it does to make unguided artillery rounds.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine should prompt the regeneration of Nato's industrial base – investing in munitions factories and critical machine tooling – but this will take time. In the interval before increased supply is available, and with the current pressure on demand, there is also a risk that by providing key systems to Ukraine, the west does so at the expense of its deterrence posture towards China over its threats to Taiwan's independence.

Facing such competing pressures, the US and other Ukrainian partners have had to carefully balance the support they provide Ukraine between those systems its military can be trained to operate, that which Nato's defence industry can sustain, and the donors' own security needs. In this context, while Patriot offers a good option for defeating cruise and ballistic missiles targeting Ukrainian cities, it is important that local air defence officers understand that they cannot expend an endless supply of these munitions and that they prioritise them accordingly.

Patriot is certainly capable of downing Iranian-made Shahed-136s, munitions that have also been used to hit energy infrastructure. But if it is used in this role Kyiv will run out of missiles fast. This has already happened with GMLRS, the long-range rocket provided to Ukraine. Although its forces were initially careful to use GMRLS against high-priority targets it has increasingly been employed more widely, contributing to operational success in the liberation of Kherson, but significantly exceeding the rate of consumption of these missiles supportable by Ukraine's partners.

The provision of Patriot – like other systems before it – is not a magic bullet. It offers Ukraine defence against a specific threat. But fielding at scale an affordable and sustainable means of defeating the other threats to Ukraine's energy security will require some innovative thinking and investment by Ukraine's partners. It is also vital for global stability that the provision of these systems is matched by an ability to industrially replenish Nato stocks – and to convince China that production can be sustained in the event of a larger conflict.

- Jack Watling is a senior research fellow for land warfare at the Royal United Services Institute

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Opinion[Elon Musk](#)

Twitter users voted Elon Musk out. But CEO or not, he'll still call the shots

[Sarah Manavis](#)

Even if the multi-billionaire owner accepts his user poll and stands down, his machinations seem likely to ruin the company



‘What has made it all the more surreal is that, throughout this never-ending car crash, Elon Musk has consistently tweeted every few hours.’

Photograph: Dado Ruvic/Reuters

Tue 20 Dec 2022 04.12 EST Last modified on Tue 20 Dec 2022 08.52 EST

Since its launch, few people have embodied the worst of Twitter like [Elon Musk](#). The site is a magnet for the self-involved, the kind of people who think a few likes and retweets confirm that they are always right; the types who walk through life with blinkers on and a mirror fixed directly in front of them.

Through relentless efforts to be seen as funny, tweeting [stale memes](#) and [tired jokes](#), and his transparent desperation to be liked, [tanking his own stock price](#) to delight his followers, Musk's Twitter persona was infamous. But it was also a common type on the site: someone eager to be seen as in on the joke, a lovable troll, but, crucially, someone who is also actually bad at using Twitter on a basic level. The adulation of his diehard fans sometimes masked the fact that most people don't like these kinds of characters online.

If this wasn't glaringly obvious before Musk bought Twitter, it is now. There has been little respite from the chaos of Musk's Twitter since he took over just under two months ago. He is the constant centre of attention. He has fired employees and [tinkered with core features](#) as if on a whim. Accounts mocking Musk have been suspended, and [hate speech has soared](#) in this short space of time. As a result, advertisers have [fled the platform](#), leading to "massive" drops in revenue.

What has made it all the more surreal is that, throughout this never-ending car crash, Musk has consistently tweeted every few hours, seemingly incorporating advice he receives from random users into the platform with almost immediate effect, and pondering major business decisions out loud to an audience of millions.

But this tumultuous few months reached a frenzied climax this weekend – which may mark the end of Musk's time as Twitter's chief executive. On Thursday and Friday, several of the most prominent journalists covering Musk [were suspended](#) from Twitter after Musk claimed they had "doxed" him by sharing posts from a longstanding Twitter account that tracked where Musk's private jet had flown (this type of flight record is legally public and not in violation of privacy laws, but the private jet account was also suspended).

Shortly thereafter, users began to notice [Twitter](#) was marking posts linking to a competitor site, Mastodon, as "unsafe", removing tweets containing these links and preventing users from posting new ones with links to the site. The weekend ended with a poll posted by Musk himself late on Sunday night asking: "Should I step down as head of Twitter?", saying he would "abide by

the results". The option "yes" won with 57.5% of the more than 17m votes. Whether Musk is sticking to his word is yet to be confirmed - though he has been active on the platform, replying "interesting" to several users who suggested bots voted in the poll, and tweeting that only paid subscribers would be able to vote in future.



'Musk is not alone: mass job losses at Meta, after a year spent tinkering with Instagram and the metaverse, had many asking if Mark Zuckerberg had lost his touch.' Photograph: Josh Edelson/AFP/Getty Images

Though many predicted that Musk's Twitter deal would be a disaster, few could have guessed it would have been quite as disastrous as this. But Musk is not alone: 2022 has seen some of Silicon Valley's most famous tech CEOs lose what sheen of "genius" they still clung to. Mass [job losses at Meta](#), after a year spent tinkering with Instagram and the metaverse, had many asking if Mark Zuckerberg had lost his touch. [Redundancies at Amazon](#), after Jeff Bezos repeatedly blasted himself alongside various celebrities into space, have had a similar effect.

In the case of Musk, the embarrassment he is experiencing may feel like a satisfying bit of schadenfreude. However, although Twitter is small compared with the likes of TikTok or even Facebook, it is – as Musk is keen

to emphasise – the internet’s town square. And it has now been decimated as a result of his ego.

Though it seems unlikely that he expected it to go so badly, Musk stepping down as chief executive may have always been part of the plan. During [his testimony](#) at a trial surrounding his remuneration package at Tesla on 16 November, Musk said he didn’t want to be CEO of any company – not just Twitter – and that his role within the platform was temporary, with plans to eventually appoint someone else to the role. He has done this before: Musk ran a Twitter poll last year asking users if he should sell some of his Tesla stock, only for it to be revealed he had [already agreed to sell a portion](#) several days before posting the tweet.

The past six weeks has solidified Musk as Twitter’s worst character, unmasking the desperation behind the trolling persona he has long projected. It feels fitting that the end of his tenure would come with a giant poll of his own making asking people to say whether they liked him or not. But even if he isn’t in the CEO role, Musk will remain Twitter’s owner after he steps down, with a new chief executive of his choosing. The only difference may be a Twitter now being destroyed behind closed doors, rather than one whose destruction is live-tweeted, out in the open.

- Sarah Manavis is an American writer covering technology, culture, and society
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[China](#)

China rushes to boost intensive care beds, doctors and stocks of medicine as Covid surges

State media reports on increased efforts to boost health infrastructure, staffing and supplies



A doctor prescribes medicine for a patient at a makeshift fever clinic in Beijing. Photograph: Wu Hao/EPA

*Helen Davidson in Taipei
@heldavidson*

Tue 20 Dec 2022 02.21 ESTFirst published on Tue 20 Dec 2022 00.37 EST

Chinese authorities are rushing to boost the number of intensive care beds and health workers and increase medication supplies as Covid-19 surges through the country.

Since the abrupt dismantling of the stringent zero-Covid regime, [cases have skyrocketed in China](#). A full picture of the impact is difficult to gauge. Authorities have conceded it is “impossible” for the testing system to keep track, and the narrow parameters for attributing deaths to the virus mean the official count – fewer than 10 this week – is at odds with widespread anecdotal reports of fatalities and high traffic at funeral homes.

At least one major funeral home in Beijing was heavily guarded by security and police on Tuesday, after recent media reports of long lines of hearses.

Numerous state media reports on Tuesday reported on the increased efforts to boost health infrastructure and supplies.

According to the Global Times, several major city hospitals were sourcing more ventilators and other emergency equipment. Citing experts, the report said there were also major concerns about staffing levels, particularly intensive care nurses. Last week it was reported [doctors and nurses were being made to work](#) even after testing positive.

The report said hospitals were “urgently” borrowing staff from other facilities to retrain them. Henan province was aiming to more than double the number of intensive care units, and increase the number of ICU doctors and nurses almost 10-fold.

Guangzhou, a city of 15 million, has increased the number of fever clinics to allow for as many as 110,000 patients a day, up from 40,000. It is also working to increase the number of ICU beds from 455 to 1,385 by the end of today, the People’s Daily reported.

Meanwhile, Nanjing city has introduced purchase limits on ibuprofen and other drugs, as it and other regions scramble to increase supply of the over-the-counter medications.

On Saturday the National Health Commission (NHC) also revised guidelines to allow people to give blood seven days after last testing positive for Covid, after the outbreak was linked to shortages.

In Beijing, Reuters reported a designated Covid-19 crematorium, where it had seen a long line of hearses and workers in hazmat suits carrying the dead inside on the weekend, was heavily guarded on Tuesday. Reuters could not immediately establish if the dead being taken there were Covid fatalities.



Beds are seen in a fever clinic that was set up in a sports area as Covid-19 outbreaks continue in Beijing.

Photograph: Thomas Peter/Reuters

The current wave is expected to peak in major cities this month, before second and third waves are expected to hit after lunar new year travels and the subsequent return to work.

Despite this, the government has pushed ahead with the reopening. China's economy has been damaged by a property sector collapse and the zero-Covid induced disruptions to production and supply chains.

On Tuesday the World Bank slashed its forecast for China's 2022 growth, from the 4.3% predicted in June, to 2.7%.

An editorial in the People's Daily had earlier that morning said "signs of recovery have begun to emerge" in China's economy, "whether those longstanding doomsayers like it or not".

However there are widespread reports of staffing issues across China, as employees fall ill. The provinces of Zhejiang and Anhui and the city of Chongqing are among the places authorities have reportedly said people can return to work if they have mild or asymptomatic Covid, “under the conditions of good protections”.

A news account on Weibo, named China Business News, said the ruling would probably lessen the overwhelming demand for rapid antigen tests, previously required to be allowed back to workplaces.

The announcement was a top trending topic on Weibo, with more than 150m views.

“Isn’t this encouraging the infection of all employees to increase the peak number of infections?” said one commenter.

“You should come to work even if you are sick, that’s a real capitalist,” said another.

“Colleagues who are positive are forced to sit on duty, but none of the leaders come to work in the company,” said one complaint.

China’s social media is highly regulated and with strict censorship, but the sudden reopening and subsequent rising case numbers and deaths have been widely discussed online, with some incredulity. On Monday, thousands of comments under a post which had reported the weekend’s official death toll as just three, were made unviewable.

In the official state media outlet, Xinhua, an editorial on Tuesday praised online discussion, casting the numerous posts about infections and symptoms, and attempts to source sold-out medication, as “the heartwarming power of encouragement and helping each other”.

This article was amended on 20 December 2022. Zhejiang and Anhui are Chinese provinces, not cities, as an earlier version said.

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Holocaust

Former Nazi camp secretary found guilty of complicity in 10,500 murders

Irmgard Furchner, 97, who worked at Stutthof concentration camp during the second world war, is given a two-year suspended sentence



Irmgard Furchner at the trial in Itzehoe in October. Photograph: Reuters

[Kate Connolly](#) in Berlin

Tue 20 Dec 2022 08.02 ESTFirst published on Tue 20 Dec 2022 04.40 EST

A 97-year-old former secretary at a Nazi concentration camp has been found guilty of complicity in the murder of more than 10,500 people imprisoned there, and handed a two-year suspended sentence.

Irmgard Furchner, who has been on trial in the northern German town of Itzehoe for more than a year, spoke to the court on one occasion earlier this month to say she was sorry for what had happened, but stopped short of admitting her guilt.

The start of her trial was [delayed in September 2021](#) when [she briefly went on the run](#). Having failed to turn up at court, she was found by police hours later on the outskirts of Hamburg, after which she was held in custody for five days and fitted with an electronic wrist tag.

Furchner had worked at the Stutthof camp between 1943 and 1945 as a secretary to the camp commandant, Paul-Werner Hoppe, when she was 18 and 19. She was tried in a juvenile court owing to her age at the time the crimes were committed.

She is the first civilian woman in [Germany](#) to have been held responsible for crimes committed in a Nazi concentration camp.

The judge, Dominik Gross, said the trial would be “one of the worldwide last criminal trials related to crimes of the Nazi era” and took the unusual step of allowing the proceedings to be recorded for “historical purposes”.

The trial, which took place over 40 days of sessions of about two hours’ duration due to the accused’s advanced age, heard from 30 survivors and relatives of prisoners of Stutthof from the US, France, Austria and the Baltic states.

It also heard from historical experts who gave details of the daily life at Stutthof and the role Furchner played in assisting the bureaucratic processing of prisoners, as well as information about the treatment of prisoners, including torture methods and the procedures involved in the systematic murder of thousands of them, to which they said she had been privy.

Many prisoners were left to starve and freeze in the open air. An estimated 63,000 to 65,000 people, about 28,000 of whom were Jewish, were murdered at Stutthof, mostly in gas chambers, some by a shot to the back of the neck, for which the prison had a specially built facility.

One of the most memorable testimonies was that of 84-year-old Josef Salomonovic, who survived Stutthof and gave evidence in December 2021 after travelling to the court from his home in the Czech Republic. His father, Erich, had been executed in Stutthof.

Salomonovic held up a photograph of his father and addressed Furchner directly. Outside the courtroom, he said he had wanted to confront her with the image of his father. “She is indirectly guilty, even if she was only sitting in the office,” he said.



Josef Salomonovic in the witness stand in the courtroom at the trial of Irmgard Furchner (pictured in the background) in Itzehoe, Germany. Photograph: Getty Images

During the trial, court officials including the judge visited the preserved site of Stutthof, near Gdansk, [Poland](#), in what was then territory that had been annexed by Germany. There they saw for themselves the proximity of Furchner’s desk – in the office she shared with other secretaries – to the workings of the camp’s death machinery, including gas chambers, a crematorium and a gallows.

They concluded that the view she had from her window, her walk to and from the office, along with the orders she was instructed to process on her typewriter and via telephone, were enough for her to have had sufficient insight into and have therefore actively participated in what was going on in the camp.

During the trial, Furchner conversed regularly with the judge through her lawyer, but said little. She typically was brought to court in an ambulance flanked by doctors, wearing sunglasses and a face mask and in a wheelchair.

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Her lawyer, Wolfgang Molkentin, said his client did not deny the crimes that had taken place in Stutthof, but denied having been guilty of them herself.

Reacting to the verdict, Manfred Goldberg, 92, who was deported to Stutthof in August 1944 and spent more than eight months there as a slave worker before being sent on a death march just days before the war ended, and finally being liberated in Germany in May 1945, said he could not believe that Furchner did not know what was happening where she worked.

“It is my belief that it would have been impossible for Furchner not to have known what was going on there, as she claims. Everything was documented and progress reports, including how much human hair had been harvested, sent to her office,” he said.

Goldberg, who later settled in the UK where he married and had children, said the importance of the trial was in letting the world know “that there is no limitation of time for crimes of such cruelty or magnitude”, but he was disappointed at the two-year suspended sentence.

“This appears to me to be a mistake. No one in their right mind would send a 97-year-old to prison, but the sentence should reflect the severity of the crimes. If a shoplifter is sentenced to two years, how can it be that someone convicted for complicity in 10,000 murders is given the same sentence?”

Karen Pollock, the chief executive of the [Holocaust](#) Educational Trust, said the trial had shown that the passage of time was “no barrier to justice when it comes to those involved in perpetrating the worst crimes mankind has ever seen.

“Stutthof was infamous for its cruelty and suffering … the testimony shared by survivors during this trial has been harrowing and their bravery in reliving such horrific memories must be commended.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/dec/20/nazi-camp-secretary-irmgard-furchner-stutthof-germany>.

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[Spain](#)

Spanish PM vows to end ‘unjustifiable’ block on court changes

Conservative judges froze passage of measures meant to overhaul appointments to their court



The constitutional court in Madrid, where conservative judges currently hold a majority. Photograph: EPA

[Sam Jones](#) in Madrid

[@swajones](#)

Tue 20 Dec 2022 11.03 ESTFirst published on Tue 20 Dec 2022 04.48 EST

Spain’s prime minister, [Pedro Sánchez](#), has vowed to use “whatever measures are needed” to end to a long-running judicial deadlock after conservative judges at the country’s constitutional court took the unprecedented step of suspending the passage of legislation that would overhaul the way appointments to their court are made.

Last week, Sánchez's Socialist-led coalition government managed to get its changes to the penal code through congress, the lower house of Spain's parliament.

Its key proposal was changing the way the judiciary's governing body, the General Council of the Judiciary, works in order to break a long-running political standoff over new appointments to the constitutional court, where conservative judges currently hold a majority. The mandates of a third of the court's judges – three conservatives and one progressive – have expired and political squabbling over their replacements has dragged on for the past four years.

Other measures in the draft legislation – which has been [criticised by opposition parties](#) as another sop to the moderate wing of the Catalan independence movement on which Sánchez depends for parliamentary support – include abolishing the offence of sedition and lowering the penalties for those who misuse public funds but do not do so for personal gain. Both offences were used to prosecute and jail nine of the [Catalan independence leaders](#) behind the failed 2017 push to secede from Spain.

The changes could mean lower penalties for those Catalan politicians who fled abroad after the unilateral independence referendum, and a sooner-than-anticipated return to frontline politics for those who were barred from holding office after being convicted.

The conservative People's party (PP), which argues that the judicial changes are unconstitutional, filed a challenge at the constitutional court last week asking judges to freeze the passage of the legislation before it went before the senate this Thursday.

After a long meeting on Monday, the court accepted the PP's challenge and ordered the suspension of the legislation. The move was approved after the court's six conservative judges outvoted its five progressive ones.

Sánchez described the decision as “unprecedented” in the 44 years since Spain returned to democracy after the death of Gen Franco, and he said the

PP wanted to “maintain the old makeup of the court, which is more favourable to its politics”.

The prime minister said the ruling would be abided by but promised a calm but firm response.

“Our democratic system has the mechanisms needed to overcome a situation like this,” he said in a televised address on Tuesday morning. “While we don’t approve of the decision, we will obey the resolution adopted yesterday by the current conservative majority of the constitutional court.

“But, in accordance with both the law and the constitution, the government will adopt whatever measures are needed to put an end to the unjustifiable blockage of the General Council of the Judiciary and the constitutional court so as to ensure that the constitution and the will of the people … are respected.”

Ione Belarra, the leader of Podemos, one of the junior coalition parties, said the Spanish right had crossed a line. “The political, media and judicial right is waging an unprecedented coup against democracy,” she said. “It’s now up to us to show that there are more of us democrats.”

Ander Gil, the senate’s Socialist speaker, confirmed that the upper house would respect the court’s decision, but said ways of “preserving parliamentary autonomy” would be examined once the scope of the ruling had been established.

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The PP said it had merely been defending the constitutional order against the government's hasty and cynical plan. The party's leader, Alberto Núñez Feijóo, called on the coalition to abandon its "unprecedented verbal escalation" and to shelve what he said were its judicial efforts to placate the Catalan independence movement.

"[Sánchez] has said he'll do everything possible to achieve the aim he can no longer conceal: doing whatever's necessary to satisfy those who want [Catalan] independence and using the government to control the judiciary," he said.

"But I say very clearly to all Spaniards that I'll do everything possible to achieve the opposite: always defending the Spanish state, always defending Spanish democracy and guaranteeing the independence of the judiciary."

If the government did not drop the changes, Feijóo added, a general election should be held to give Spaniards a say in the matter.

Spain is due to hold an election by the end of next year. Polls suggest that at present the PP would win the most seats but would have to rely on the support of the far-right Vox party to form a government.

Sánchez argues that the controversial measures on sedition and misuse of public funds are needed to help bring "coexistence" back to Catalonia after years of festering tensions, while Feijóo maintains that the proposals are intended solely to keep the Socialists in power.

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[Fiji](#)

Sitiveni Rabuka to be Fiji's new PM as Frank Bainimarama's 16-year reign ends

The People's Alliance leader will take over after he secured the backing of the Social Liberal Democratic party to oust longstanding rival



People's Alliance leader, Sitiveni Rabuka, greets party workers after securing a coalition to take power. Photograph: Saeed Khan/AFP/Getty Images

Australian Associated Press

Tue 20 Dec 2022 13.05 ESTFirst published on Tue 20 Dec 2022 03.38 EST

Frank Bainimarama's reign as leader of [Fiji](#) has ended almost 16 years after he instigated a coup in 2006 and installed himself as prime minister the next year.

Cheering, singing and car horns filled the streets on Tuesday outside the office of the man who will be crowned Fiji's new prime minister.

Sitiveni Rabuka will head the Pacific nation after his People's Alliance party secured the backing of the Social Liberal Democratic party (Sodelpa) whose three members held the balance of power after the election delivered a hung parliament.

Rabuka will head a tripartite coalition between People's Alliance, who billed themselves as an alternative to the nationalist FijiFirst government, the Indigenous-focused Sodelpa and the more liberal-democratic National Federation party.

At a livestreamed news conference, Rabuka thanked the people of Fiji. "I'd like to thank them very much for giving us the honour of forming the next government of Fiji — a government we hope will bring the change that people have been calling out for over the last few years.

"It's going to be an onerous task, it will not be easy as it was never easy to try and dislodge an incumbent government."

The heads of Sodelpa narrowly decided to dethrone Bainimarama with 16 votes for People's Alliance and 14 for FijiFirst.

Bainimarama led FijiFirst to two democratic victories in 2014 and 2018 but failed to secure a majority at last week's election.

FijiFirst will command 26 seats in the expanded 55-member parliament, while People's Alliance will have 21, the National Federation five, and Sodelpa three.

FijiFirst secured 42.5% of the vote, while People's Alliance took 36%, the National Federation party 9% and Sodelpa more than 5%.

Sodelpa campaigned on free tertiary education, \$159m (\$A106m) a year for Indigenous affairs and extra protections for Indigenous land rights, saying the issues were non-negotiable during talks.

The party's religiously conservative leader, Viliame Gavoka, had also demanded an embassy in Jerusalem during negotiations, arguing Fiji needs to lean into its Christian principles.

Sodelpa's vice president, Anare Jale, said making one of the party's three members – likely Gavoka – the deputy prime minister despite being the smallest in the coalition was also discussed with People's Alliance. But details of the final agreement remain scarce.

Prasad said the three parties were up to working together and understood the enormity of the task despite concerns of a precarious relationship owing to the People's Alliance being a Sodelpa breakaway.

Gavoka ousted Rabuka as opposition leader and the party fractured in half when nine of the remaining Liberal Democrat parliamentarians jumped ship to People's Alliance after its creation in 2021.

Former Sodelpa leader Ro Teimumu Kepa warned the larger coalition partners not to try and strongarm the smaller party.

"I hope you will look after us and not try to bully us because we can be bullies too," she said.

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Global development

Africa's biggest photography library opens in Ghana

Ghanaian photographer's crowdfunded project won support of Humans of New York author and boasts more than 30,000 books



Paul Ninson at Dikan Center in Accra, Ghana. Photograph: Ernest Ankomah/The Guardian

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[About this content](#)

Ekow Barnes

Tue 20 Dec 2022 02.30 EST Last modified on Tue 20 Dec 2022 16.29 EST

The largest photography library in [Africa](#) has opened in Ghana's capital, Accra, showcasing the work of the continent and diaspora's forgotten, established and emerging talent.

Founded by Ghanaian photographer and film-maker Paul Ninson, the [Dikan Center](#) houses more than 30,000 books he has collected. The first of its kind in Ghana, a photo studio and classrooms provide space for workshops while a fellowship programme is aimed at African documentarians and visual artists. An exhibition space will host regular shows, the first of which is [Ahennie](#), a series by the late Ghanaian documentary photographer Emmanuel Bobbie (also known as Bob Pixel), who died in 2021.

The bond-trader-turned-photographer Brandon Stanton, author of the book [Humans of New York](#), who kickstarted the crowdfunding campaign that helped to establish the Dikan, attended the opening with Ninson, whom he met while the latter was living in New York.



Visitors at the opening of the Dikan Center in Accra in December.
Photograph: Ernest Ankomah/The Guardian

As well as books of work by pioneering black photographers, such as Gordon Parks, who was the first African American photographer to have a staff position at Life magazine, and publications including National Geographic, there are rare books including one signed by Stephen Hill, who was governor of Gold Coast as [Ghana](#) was known before independence, dated 1852.

[Ninson was studying](#) at the School of the International Center of Photography in New York when he began collecting photography books.

“I started buying African photo books, with the idea of sharing them with young photographers back home, but as my collection grew, it dawned on me that I could create a library dedicated to photography and visual education, so I started reaching out to booksellers for donations. I also received donations from private galleries and collectors,” says Ninson.



Visitors look at photo books in the collection during the opening.
Photograph: Ernest Ankomah/The Guardian

West Africa has a long history of photography, which was introduced by explorers and governors in the early 1840s. It was soon picked up by African entrepreneurs, who often worked as itinerant photographers, such as George Lutterodt, who ran pop-up studios and opened a business in Accra in 1876. In the 20th century, pioneering photographers – including renowned Malian portraitists [Seydou Keïta](#), and [Malick Sidibé](#), and Ghanaian photojournalist [James Barnor](#), who established Ghana's first colour processing lab – captured social, cultural and political changes through their work in the fashion and music worlds.

Ninson's vision for Dikan, which means “take the lead” in Asante, is to celebrate this rich visual history and the accomplishments of African artists, as well as offering inspiration and resources to emerging photographers.

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A visitor at the Ahennie exhibition of work by Emmanuel Bobbie.
Photograph: Ernest Ankomah/The Guardian

[Rita Mawuena Benissan](#), a Ghanaian-American artist and founder of Si Hene, a non-profit foundation that collects archives telling stories about Ghana's royal history, welcomed the opening of the centre. "In a state where there are no archives for people to refer back to their history, it becomes very problematic. When you are able to have a point of reference, it's much easier. I'm excited and I can't wait to visit Dikan."

Self-taught Ghanaian photographer and film-maker [David Nana Opoku Ansah](#) said the centre would "change everything" for emerging photographers. "[Until now] I have sourced most research materials on the internet. This centre will be a treasure trove for image-makers like myself because it gives us the opportunity to dig deeper and create more meaningful work that stands the test of time."

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Headlines friday 16 december 2022

- [Live Russia-Ukraine war: Russia launches mass missile strike on Ukraine, causing power outages](#)
- [Power Russia begins mass air strike in apparent move to destroy Ukraine's power grid](#)
- [London Four people in critical condition after suspected crush at Asake gig in Brixton](#)
- [Live Business: rail and road passengers facing disruption as strikes get underway](#)
- [Rail strikes Industrial action resumes despite hopes of breakthrough](#)

[Ukraine war liveUkraine](#)

Kharkiv left without power, heating and water after new wave of Russian missile strikes across country – as it happened

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Ukraine

Russia carries out more mass strikes on Ukraine's energy infrastructure

Power outages reported after barrage of rockets fired at several regions in second such attack in days

- [Russia-Ukraine war: latest updates](#)

Barrage of missiles fired at Ukraine by Russia – video

Isobel Koshyw in Kyiv

Fri 16 Dec 2022 13.01 ESTFirst published on Fri 16 Dec 2022 03.36 EST

A second wave of mass strikes in days has been launched by Russia across [Ukraine](#), with 76 rockets fired at several regions on Friday morning in what appeared to be a continuation of the Kremlin's attempt to destroy Ukraine's energy infrastructure.

Ukraine's state energy company Ukrrenergo said energy consumption had fallen by 50% as a result of the attacks and that it would take longer to restore the electricity supply than after previous attacks. [Russia](#) had hit thermal power plants, hydroelectric plants and substations of main networks, Ukrrenergo said.

Air defence forces appeared to have caught most of the incoming rockets in places, and claimed 60 out of 76 rockets launched were downed. "I thank everyone for their work," said Mykola Oleschuk, the head of Ukraine's air defence forces, said on Telegram.

Ukraine's defence minister, Oleksii Reznikov, told the Guardian in [an interview](#) earlier this week that Ukraine was winning the air war thanks to the increased efficiency of its air defence forces.

Nevertheless, energy infrastructure was hit across the country, resulting in complete outages in at least two regions as well as outages and emergency power cuts to stabilise the grid in others, including in Kyiv. Thousands of people sought shelter in subway stations deep underground during the bombardment.

The aim of these regular mass attacks, Ukraine's authorities say, is to destroy the country's power grid in the hope that damaging Ukraine away from the frontline will enable Russia to make gains on the battlefield.

Power outages were reported in the eastern and central regions of Kharkiv and Poltava. The mayor of Kharkiv, Ihor Terekhov, described the damage in the city as "colossal" and asked for residents to be patient while water, electricity and heating were out.

In response to Friday's attack, the US national security council spokesperson, John Kirby, said Russia was trying to "put fear into the hearts of the Ukrainian people and to make it that much harder on them as winter is now upon them". Kirby also said there would be another defence package for Ukraine, which will include air defence systems, but he declined to go into details. On Thursday, the US Senate passed a defence budget for 2023 that included \$800m of aid for Ukraine.

On Tuesday, CNN reported that US officials had agreed to give Ukraine the powerful Patriot air defence systems that experts say would make a significant difference to Ukraine's ability to down incoming missiles. Though Ukraine has shown increasing efficiency in stopping Russian missiles en route to targets, one successful hit on a power plant can cause damage that takes months, if not years, to rectify.

Authorities said three people had died and 13 were injured, including two children, when one of the rockets on Friday hit a residential building in the city of Kryvyi Rih in the Dnipro region.



A residential building damaged by a Russian missile in Kryvyi Rih, Ukraine.
Photograph: State emergency service of Ukraine/Reuters

Three explosions were heard in Kyiv on both sides of the city divided by the Dnipro River. One energy infrastructure facility was hit in the capital and nine houses in different areas were damaged, according to the head of the Kyiv region, Oleksiy Kuleba. In total, three people in Kyiv were injured, he added.

Kyiv is still suffering from water disruptions in every district, according to the city's mayor, Vitali Klitschko, and local people reported immediate power outages and loss of mobile internet. Klitschko told Ukraine's public broadcaster Suspilne that the water and electricity supplies should be back by Saturday morning.

The Ukrainian energy company DTEK said emergency power outages would be introduced in the city as result of the attack.

The Kyiv city administration said Ukraine's capital had withstood "one of the biggest rocket attacks" launched by Russian forces since they invaded Ukraine nearly 10 months ago. The administration said Ukrainian air defence forces shot down 37 of "about 40" that entered the city's airspace.

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People shelter inside a metro station during the Russian missile attacks in Kyiv. Photograph: Viacheslav Ratynskyi/Reuters

The spokesperson for Ukraine's air forces, Yuriy Ignat, said different types of missiles had been used: "They used everything they had, except for drones."

In comments to the Guardian, Reznikov said Ukraine's air defence forces had honed their skills and what equipment they had over the past nine months. He said that the efficiency of those forces had gone from 50% to 80% since the war began.

On Friday, one rocket was shot down by a member of Kyiv region's territorial defences, Ukraine's home army of volunteers, using a machine

gun, according to Ukraine's Obozrevatel TV news.

On Wednesday, Ukraine's air defence forces said they shot down all 13 of the Iranian-supplied drones that Russia launched at Kyiv city and Kyiv region. No casualties were reported, though a few buildings were damaged by the debris of downed drones.

Russia's foreign ministry warned this week that if the US delivered Patriot air defence systems to Ukraine, such systems and any crews that accompany them would be a legitimate target for the Russian military. Washington rejected the threat.

Kirby also said the first tranche, worth \$53m, of equipment for repairing Ukraine's energy infrastructure had arrived in the country on Friday.

Ukraine's foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, urged western partners to continue to deliver weapons to Ukraine as a response to Russia's actions. "For each Russian missile or drone aimed at Ukraine and Ukrainians there must be a howitzer delivered to Ukraine, a tank for Ukraine, an armoured vehicle for Ukraine," he wrote on Twitter. "This would effectively end Russian terror against Ukraine".

In an interview with Agence France-Presse on Friday, the Nato secretary general, Jens Stoltenberg, said Russia was readying for a protracted war and that Kyiv's Nato backers must keep sending weapons until Vladimir Putin realises he "cannot win on the battlefield".

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London

Three people still in critical condition after suspected crush at Asake gig in Brixton

Met police begin investigation into ‘extremely distressing’ incident after large crowd gathered outside O2 Academy

Asake gig in Brixton abandoned after suspected crowd crush – video report

[Matthew Weaver](#)

Fri 16 Dec 2022 19.24 ESTFirst published on Fri 16 Dec 2022 02.30 EST

Three people were still in a critical condition on Friday night after an apparent crowd crush at a concert at the O2 Academy Brixton in London on Thursday.

The Metropolitan police launched an investigation into what they said was an “extremely distressing” incident at a performance by the Nigerian Afrobeats singer and songwriter Asake.

The artist, whose London concert dates sold out within minutes when tickets went on sale in September, said he was praying for those injured amid claims hundreds of people entered without tickets.

Police were called to the venue in south London at about 9.35pm on Thursday after reports that a large number of people were attempting to force entry. They found a number of people with “injuries believed to have been caused by crushing”.

Of the eight people taken to hospital, three were still in a critical condition on Friday evening. Two more people were treated for minor injuries at the scene.

Writing on Instagram, Asake said: “My heart is with those who were injured last night and caused any form of discomfort. I pray you get well soonest.

“I am also in the process of reaching out to individuals. I still do not have the full brief from the venue management themselves as to what led to the disruption at the entrance of the Brixton Academy, but we are thankful that all was peaceful at the end.

“For my people who enjoyed the beginning of my performance, I am sorry that it was cut short. Thank you for your unbelievable love London. I love you too much! I’m looking forward to seeing you again in a bit!”

Earlier this week, [Asake had urged fans not to come](#) to the 4,921-capacity venue without tickets for another concert on Sunday.

One woman, who was taken to hospital with suspected internal bleeding, told the BBC: “I couldn’t breathe and I completely passed out. I thought I was dead. I took my last breath and I could not get any more oxygen. I was so scared.”

Another of those who witnessed the apparent crush to enter the venue said people were fainting in the queue. “Asake had been locked off, people fainting in the queue, people fighting and banging on doors,” [she wrote on Twitter](#).

Asake concert Brixton 15th... can you imagine my first concert and it turns out like this pic.twitter.com/4wWKgvZ5Zm

— ghostingdoll (@elsie_leimu) [December 15, 2022](#)

Concern has been expressed about alleged heavy-handed tactics used by the police in response to the incident. The Met said its directorate of professional standards would review how the police acted on the ground.

The Met has referred itself to the police watchdog, the Independent Office for Police Conduct, which it said was “standard national practice following

all incidents where police have been in attendance and members of the public have been seriously injured”.

The force moved to calm any tensions and rumours. It said: “We are aware of footage on social media showing an officer pushing a woman from the steps. This matter has been assessed by the Directorate of Professional Standards and there is no evidence of misconduct.”

The Labour MP Florence Eshalomi, whose Vauxhall constituency includes Brixton, said the review should examine video footage to identify any possible wrongdoing by the police.

Speaking to BBC Radio 4’s World at One programme, she said: “This is a really deeply concerning incident. What is clear is that something has gone wrong with the ticketing and security procedures. It’s vital that we don’t speculate or jump to any conclusions or attribute any blame until we know the facts.”

Another video from outside the venue showed hundreds of people wanting to get in.

They need to close down o2 Brixton. What a myth lol [#asake](#)
pic.twitter.com/5yjNzwi4pn

— say no more (@DammySNM) [December 15, 2022](#)

The concert was cancelled 10 minutes after Asake appeared on stage. Video on TikTok showed him going on stage to say: “They said outside is fucked up already. So we have to end the show. I don’t know why. It’s not me.”

pic.twitter.com/KBpbTqEgzw

— Milez (@MilezGrey) [December 16, 2022](#)

Another man then came on to the stage to explain. “We have stopped the show because they breached the door. You have got 3,000 people [who] have

broken the door outside and because of security, police have asked us to close the show. We apologise to you. This is nothing to do with us,” he said.

The disappointed crowd was told to leave the building immediately.

While no arrests have taken place, detectives from specialist crime have launched an urgent investigation and cordons remain in place at the O2 Academy.



A screengrab from video shows the crowd outside Brixton O2 Academy on Thursday evening. Photograph: @rofiatcc/PA Media

A woman who attended [described the concert as a “disaster”](#) as she shared video of what appeared to be scuffles at the crowded entrance to the venue. Cynie La Gazelle said she was shaken by what she saw. “I should have just listened to my gut instincts and stayed at home,” she tweeted.

[Another Twitter user, Niaa](#), wrote: “Left my house to enjoy Asake, ended up having a panic attack in queue because of the stampede and people not acting accordingly. I was in literal tears, scared for my life. Worst experience of my life.”

The Met police gold commander, Ade Adelekan, described the incident as “extremely distressing” and urged any witnesses who were yet to speak with

police to get in contact.

Adelekan added: “I am aware of video being shared on social media. I would ask people to be sensible about what they share, and not to post material that will be upsetting to those affected by this incident.

“Where force has been used by police officers, those officers know they have to be accountable for their actions. The Met’s directorate of professional standards will view all material, including body-worn video footage from the officers at the scene.

“In relation to a clip being widely shared, I can confirm that no police dogs were deployed to the location.”

The mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, tweeted that [he was “heartbroken”](#).

Any witnesses who are yet to speak with police are asked to call 101. Anyone with mobile phone footage that may assist police is asked to contact MetCC on Twitter.

The O2 Academy has been approached for comment.

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Business liveBusiness

RMT boss says no new offers but deal achievable as rail and road passengers face strike disruption – live

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Rail strikes

Train strikes resume despite hopes of breakthrough

Second strike of week begins after TSSA union accepts pay deal with Network Rail

- [UK strike days calendar: public service stoppages in December](#)



Train operators said 20% of normal services would be running between 7.30am and 6.30pm on both Friday and Saturday. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

*Gwyn Topham Transport correspondent
@GwynTopham*

Fri 16 Dec 2022 00.00 EST Last modified on Fri 16 Dec 2022 02.17 EST

Train services around Britain will be severely disrupted once more as national strikes resume on Friday, despite another union accepting Network

Rail's pay deal.

Passengers have been advised to only attempt to travel by train if necessary as this week's second 48-hour strike by members of the [RMT](#) union begins, with three more weeks of disruption to follow.

Train operators said passengers should plan ahead and check with operators for the latest information, with about 20% of normal services running between 7.30am and 6.30pm on both Friday and Saturday.

Motorists in parts of England could also potentially face worsened disruption, with the first of 12 days of rolling regional strikes by members of the PCS union at National Highways also starting on Friday.

Although no roads will be closed, any major incident could [result in longer delays](#) with fewer control room staff or traffic officers available.

Strikes planned by baggage handlers at Heathrow for Friday [were called off, however, on Thursday afternoon](#) after last-ditch talks between Unite and Menzies Aviation. The union will now put the deal, which is believed to be in the region of a 10.5% increase, to a ballot, with further strikes due after Christmas should it be rejected.

RMT members who are security staff at Eurostar had been due to strike on Friday and Sunday, but the action was called off on Wednesday for a vote on the latest pay offer from the employer Mitie. If it is rejected, strikes on 22 and 23 December will still go ahead.

Hopes of a breakthrough in the long-running rail dispute were raised after members of the Transport Salaried Staffs Association (TSSA) union [voted to accept Network Rail's improved pay deal in a referendum](#).

The union, which is much smaller than the RMT, said 85% of its members voted in favour of the offer, which includes a minimum 9% pay rise by January, job security to 2025 and guarantees on terms and conditions.

A Department for [Transport](#) (DfT) spokesperson said the news showed the tide was turning, adding: “It is clear to everyone that this offer is fair and reasonable, giving better pay to workers but delivering vital reforms to our railways.”

The Network Rail chief executive, Andrew Haines, said: “We know there is a sizeable number of RMT members who want this deal and we can see that strike action is beginning to break down.”

The [RMT rejected](#) the same offer, a two-year deal covering the missed January 2022 pay rise and 2023, last week.

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The RMT’s general secretary, Mick Lynch, again met the rail minister, Huw Merriman, and industry leaders on Thursday afternoon, after the government said it wanted to facilitate a resolution, although it insists pay and conditions are a matter for railway employers.

Lynch said afterwards the parties had all agreed to further all-industry talks with the minister. “These meetings will be arranged, but in the meantime all industrial action remains in place,” he said.

Unions say they are even further away from a deal with train operating companies, with RMT strikes at the 14 English operators contracted to the DfT on Friday, and the TSSA also continuing limited industrial action.

The RMT’s overtime ban at train operators also remains due to start on Sunday and runs until the next week of strikes in early January.

South Western Railway, one of the UK's biggest commuter networks, has now [followed Chiltern](#) in saying that it will be operating a severely reduced service because of the overtime ban, with trains only running between the hours of 7am-10pm until January.

Strikes were partly blamed for slumping shopper numbers this week, although cold winter weather played a part. Figures from Springboard showed overall retail footfall decline by 8.6% from Monday to Wednesday compared with last week, and by 17% on strike days on high streets.

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'It's got to be an experience, first and foremost': James Cameron, Sigourney Weaver and Kate Winslet on the return of Avatar

[Steve Rose](#)

The director and actors discuss his typically gruelling film-making process, including learning to free dive, the tech v nature message of the new films – and why there's still room for 'big boy toys'



James Cameron with (left) Jack Champion on the set of *Avatar: The Way of Water*. Photograph: Everett Collection Inc/Alamy



[@steverose7](#)

Fri 16 Dec 2022 01.00 EST Last modified on Tue 20 Dec 2022 05.56 EST

Sigourney Weaver recalls flying back from New Zealand with James Cameron last year, after they had finished filming the new Avatar movie. “I put on Superbad, I got a glass of wine, I had my seat back, slept for 14 hours,” she says. Meanwhile, for the duration of the flight, “Jim is sitting up reading a book that was called something like Is God Dead? I realised that I was not the same kind of human as he is. I mean, the guy is just ...” She trails off, grasping for words. “He’s such a *marine*.”

People often complain that the age of Hollywood legends is over, but everything about James Cameron always seems to be mythologically huge. Where other movie titans owned fleets of luxury cars, Cameron had not just cars but helicopters and even submarines – which he designed himself and took to the bottom of the ocean. Alongside the militaristic hardware, a myth has formed of Cameron as a fearsome, tough-talking army general of a director, subduing and marshalling his crew on set to the extent they once made T-shirts that read: “You can’t scare me, I work for James Cameron.”

The scale of Cameron’s movies is equally legendary. Each one seems to be the most expensive gamble in history, and is predicted to be a disaster, but

ends up breaking box-office records. At least that was the story with the last two: [Titanic](#) and [Avatar](#). Now comes [The Way of Water](#), the first of four planned Avatar sequels, jointly estimated to be costing more than \$1bn to make. It is also three and a quarter hours long, so epically proportioned business as usual, you might say.

The Way of Water comes 13 years after the first [Avatar](#), and much has changed in the interim. Streaming has decimated cinema; Disney has bought up everything (including 20th Century Fox, Cameron's favoured studio); and an entire cycle of superhero movies has captured the blockbuster territory Cameron once occupied. For some, this has highlighted Avatar's relative lack of cultural impact: everyone knows Captain America and Iron Man; far fewer will recall the names of Avatar's heroes, or even its actors (Jake Sully, played by Sam Worthington, and Neytiri, played by Zoe Saldana; Saldana has made four Marvel movies since she last played Neytiri).

Cameron recently took a swipe at superhero movies, complaining “they all act like they’re in college”; today, he’s more measured. “God bless ‘em. Let them do their thing. I love Marvel,” he says when we meet in London. The 68-year-old is leaner of build and whiter of hair these days, and seems relaxed and attentive, even after a marathon bout of promotional interviews.

Was he looking at Marvel’s cultural impact and thinking that one Avatar movie was not enough?

“I don’t think the Marvel Universe had anything to do with that,” he says. “I think it was more looking at what [Peter Jackson](#) had done with the Lord of the Rings films, taking that trilogy of books and turning it into something that people are happy to return to every couple of years. And I thought, ‘Well, let’s do that.’ Let’s create a world that’s that intricate, that has that fractal level of detail. Tolkien spent 12 years putting all that detail into the books.”



Shooting scenes underwater. Photograph: Mark Fellman

Typically, Cameron has almost gone one better. On top of inventing a new world populated by giant blue-skinned aliens (called Na’vi) and other fantastical fauna and flora, Cameron’s team have invented new film-making technology with which to render it, which partly explains the 13-year delay (although the producer Jon Landau points out that’s a fraction of the time it took them to make a sequel to *Top Gun*).

Moving on from *Avatar*’s forest setting, *The Way of Water* unveils a whole new aquatic ecosystem, populated by bespoke sea animals and a Pacific Islander-like tribe of Na’vi. As well as pioneering new techniques of underwater motion capture, they put actors through a kind of Na’vi boot camp: language and dialect classes, Na’vi movement lessons, underwater sign language, parkour, scuba diving, not to mention free diving – the cast could not use aqualungs when performing underwater, so had to learn to act while holding their breath.

“We did training for like a year with a guy who teaches the Navy Seals,” Weaver explains. “We were certified for scuba, then we went on dives with Jim, who’s a great diver, off the coast of Hawaii, with huge manta rays swimming over us. And then doing some of the work riding on creatures and

stuff like that. And then the free diving. By the time we had to shoot those scenes, I'd done a breath hold of six-and-a-half minutes."



Sigourney Weaver with her computer-rendered character. Photograph: 20th Century Studios

Weaver's return is something of a surprise considering her character, a human scientist, died in the first Avatar. Somehow she's back playing a 14-year-old Na'vi girl (she can't really explain it either). "I had to unearth my own, somewhat ambivalent 14-year-old self," she says. The magic of technology does the rest – despite appearing as a blue-skinned teenage alien, she is still unmistakably Sigourney Weaver.

Even more of a surprise is the participation of Kate Winslet. After Titanic, Winslet said of Cameron: "He has a temper like you wouldn't believe ... You'd have to pay me a lot of money to work with Jim again." Whether it was the money or the time – Winslet was 21 back then; now she is 47 – the scars of Titanic seem to have healed. In fact, she and Cameron remained friends, she says, explaining how, at an event in 2014, he said to her, "at some point, we have to get you big and blue".

Cameron gave Winslet the option of doing as much or as little of the water stuff as she wanted this time, she says. "And I said: 'Oh no, I'm definitely,

definitely doing it.' And I just loved it so much, my gosh." She held her breath for a record-breaking seven minutes 20 seconds. "I got quite good at it in the end," she says proudly.

There were some similarities with making *Titanic*, she acknowledges, "in the sense that there were so many actors, and we really had to stick together because it was so hard for all of us. And obviously, the shoot was incredibly long and there was an enormous amount of pressure on everybody." But the infamous Cameron temper seems to have gone. "He's definitely mellowed," she says. "I think he said that about himself, too. He's just a more chilled-out guy these days."



Cameron with Kate Winslet and Leonardo DiCaprio on the set of *Titanic*.
Photograph: 20th Century Fox/Allstar

Weaver agrees. "He's more playful now," she says, thinking back to when she first worked with Cameron on *Aliens*, in 1985. At that time he had a lot to prove. "People didn't know who this Canadian kid was, stepping into Ridley Scott's shoes. So he was pretty serious." It was only later, when they were showing *Aliens* at the Venice film festival, that Weaver saw a lighter side to him. "I was having dinner with him. And I turned to him and said: 'You're so funny. Where was *that* the whole time?' He's incredibly funny

and witty, and a great friend and companion. We've become his actor family.”

Family has a lot to do with it. Since 2000, Cameron has been married to the actor Suzy Amis (they met while filming *Titanic*, in which she has a small role). The couple have three children together plus one each from previous relationships, aged between 15 and 32. In *The Way of Water*, which is set a decade on from the first *Avatar*, Jake and Neytiri have four children. “Artistically speaking, I’m writing what I know,” says Cameron.

Unlike those carefree Marvel heroes, *Avatar*’s characters have acquired adult responsibilities. “He could have quite easily told the story of Jake and Neytiri going on battling the wars,” says Worthington (who, like Saldana, has three children of his own), “but when you add in the kids and having to keep them safe, or not wanting them to emulate you because it can get them killed, they’re operatic themes.”

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Winslet's character, Ronal. Photograph: 20th Century Studios/AP

It must be said, though, that these Na'vi are pretty disciplinarian parents. Jake, the ex-marine, preaches about a father's role protecting his family, but often treats his own children like military subordinates. They even call him "sir". "Yeah, he's a tough guy," Cameron admits. "And I've been accused of that as well by my children. We've come to an accommodation around that. My wife founded a school called the [Muse school](#), and it has a kind of radical approach to curriculum. And one of the things is that the students get to critique the teacher, and the teacher has to listen and do what the students think they should do. Well, we also do that in my family as well."

Basically, Cameron's children told him he was always off making films, and therefore had no right to lay down the rules when he was at home. And how did Cameron respond? "I gotta listen to them. That's the rule," he says, smiling. "I'm much more easygoing now. I let them do what they feel they need to do." He could be talking about his actors as much as his children.

Where once Cameron collected vehicles and weaponry, now he's more likely to be found farming organic vegetables in New Zealand (not entirely successfully, it must be said). He has been a vegan since 2012 and, alongside his wife, is a committed advocate of climate-friendly eating. When I ask

what he has been doing since the first Avatar, he replies: “I was building a factory in Canada for pea-protein extraction.”

For all their heavy metal action, Cameron’s films have always been ambivalent about technology. Time and again in his movies, the military-industrial complex turns out not to be our friend, from the destructive man-machines of [Terminator](#) to the venal extraction industry in [The Abyss](#) to the hubristic catastrophe of *Titanic*. In *Avatar* the theme is writ even more starkly: human technology versus defenders of the natural order. Or, as Cameron once put it, “helicopters versus pterodactyls”.



‘There’s a lot of cool stuff in this movie in terms of big boy toys.’
Photograph: Everett Collection Inc/Alamy

“Yeah, it’s a change of priority. There’s less violence and fetishisation of guns and so on,” says Cameron. “But I still like my tech. I get very involved in the design of the helicopters and the boats. And there’s a lot of cool stuff in this movie in terms of big boy toys. But the way the first film worked, and the way that I think this film can work, is that it rekindles in us an awareness of our innate connection to nature, and to each other, which is primordial. It’s very true in Indigenous culture; we’ve lost it quite a bit in our urban, industrial culture. I think, internally, we feel a longing for it. And when we see it on the screen, it awakens something in us.”

Just as the industrial and the organic collide in Avatar, so do the nostalgic and futuristic. Avatar's world might represent some tree-hugging, pre-industrial Eden, but the movies also play with sci-fi ideas of post-human identity. Jake, Weaver's 14-year-old girl and the principal antagonist Quaritch, played by Stephen Lang, are all, in different ways, a mix of human and alien, struggling to reconcile their identities. There's an intriguing scene in The Way of Water where Quaritch, presumed dead at the end of Avatar but now inhabiting a Na'vi body, encounters his own human remains in the forest. He picks up his own skull and crushes it in his blue hand. "Is he truly reincarnated? Or is he, in fact, a new being who's just strongly influenced by the imprint of the previous version of himself?" asks Cameron.



Still from Avatar: The Way of Water. Photograph: 20th Century Studios

"I guess what I'm struggling to do is to have the best of both worlds, right? We have to forge a path forward where we listen to the Indigenous wisdom-keepers and rebalance ourselves with nature, and not go fully down the rabbit hole of advanced technology, but at the same time not lose what we've created, not lose this zenith of science and understanding of the natural world that we've managed to extract. So what does a balanced human future look like? I have ideas around that, of course, but I don't know what that looks like."

Given the scale, ambition and scarcity of his output, Cameron is as much a prophet as a film-maker these days, or at least that rare breed of cultural heavyweight whose every new work carries great significance. “I think we shouldn’t overestimate the impact of a single film,” he says. “But I do think that we in the arts, especially if you’ve got more reach, have a responsibility. I think a lot of movies are just escapism. The Avatar films do have a conscience, but I don’t let that get in the way of the big adventure. It’s got to be an experience, first and foremost, or you’re wasting your time trying to say anything thematically.”

So there’s still room for the big boy toys?

“Oh, I want one of everything that’s in the movie for real,” he says.

[Avatar: The Way of Water](#) is in cinemas now

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Seascape: the state of our oceansCop15

Watered down: why negotiators at Cop15 are barely mentioning the ocean

With only two instances of the word ‘ocean’ in the latest 5,000-word working agreement, delegates fear marine biodiversity is being sacrificed



The elephant (of the sea) in the room ... participants in front of a whale picture during Cop15 in Montreal, Canada. Photograph: Andrej Ivanov/AFP/Getty Images

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[About this content](#)

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Fri 16 Dec 2022 02.45 EST Last modified on Sat 24 Dec 2022 14.28 EST

The ocean may cover 70% of the Earth's surface and contain much of its animal life, but you might not get that impression from the UN discussions in Montreal to save global biodiversity, with some delegates fearing marine protections could be severely watered down or dropped entirely.

Although overfishing, global heating and acidification are considered an existential risk to what has been called "[the lungs of the planet](#)", so far there are only two mentions of the word "ocean" in the latest 10-page, 5,000-word working agreement at Cop15 –let alone specific demands to [curtail fishing](#), protect [coral reefs](#) or stop [deep-sea mining](#).

In public the ocean, which represents [95% of the planet's biosphere](#), isn't being entirely ignored: delegates have approved a [general draft](#) on marine and coastal biodiversity, and there remains hope that the 30x30 pledge [to protect 30% of Earth by 2030](#) will also include the ocean. In private, participants in the working groups – the closed-door sessions where the details are hashed out – say several countries are acting obstructively, with

China, Russia, Indonesia and Argentina among those accused of being hesitant to commit to specific restrictions.

“We’re worried these countries will try and water this down to, say, 10%,” says Simon Cripps, executive director of marine conservation at the [Wildlife](#) Conservation Society and a Cop15 participant. “We’re already sitting at 7% protection, of which 3.5% is in any way effectively managed, and look – sharks are going to pieces, fisheries are massively overfished, you’ve got coral reefs on the verge. So clearly a 10% goal isn’t working.”

We can choose 30% of the open ocean, away from every consumer. But it doesn’t help any coral. It doesn’t help any mangroves. It doesn’t help seagrass

Steve Widdicombe, Plymouth Marine Laboratory

Because the negotiations work on a consensus basis, individual countries and coalitions can effectively veto things they don’t like.

One of the perceived obstacles is fishing. China maintains [the largest distant fishing fleet in the world](#), operating 17,000 industrial trawlers that fan the globe and cluster along the borders of other countries’ jurisdictions, sucking up vast amounts of fish and squid, for example near the Galápagos. So, when the word “fisheries” was dropped from the latest working document in the section about ending perverse environmental subsidies, it came as little surprise to many: Cripps explains that losing the specific word was a way to keep countries from vetoing the entire section, and making at least incremental progress.

Another stumbling block is money. Developing countries are wary of restrictions if no more money is promised to help pay for them. On Tuesday night, Brazil led a group of developing countries that [walked out of a finance meeting](#), protesting that donor countries were refusing to create a new fund for biodiversity. Those wealthier countries argue that Brazil – as well as China, India and other large countries whose economies have ballooned – should start pitching in to pay for biodiversity, too.

One hugely important marine issue is simply not on the table at all, namely whether the 30% target will be local or global: will individual countries be asked to protect 30% of their own coastal areas – or is it a vaguer aim to protect 30% of the ocean, somewhere else? “From the start, they’ve been saying it’s a global target,” says Cripps.

This means that, even if 30x30 were agreed, it might not help marine biodiversity at all because of yet another unsolved problem: the high seas. Most of the ocean lies outside national jurisdiction, and is effectively lawless. Countries only have sovereign authority up to 200 nautical miles from their coast; everything beyond is considered the high seas, ruled by nobody. A separate set of UN negotiations has been under way for years to agree a high seas treaty, but [the last round of talks ended in failure](#). They are reconvening in March 2023 to try again.

Without that treaty, any agreements made in Montreal to protect ocean on the high seas are legally meaningless, as there would be nobody to enforce the rules. There are regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs), which set quotas to prevent species, such as tuna, from being overfished on the high seas, but their enforcement powers are limited in scope and they are [heavily influenced](#) by commercial fisheries. Countries could also use the parallel negotiations as an excuse not to act, arguing that protecting the ocean isn’t a matter for Cop15 at all.

A few nations have been forging ahead closer to home, with Costa Rica, France and the UK proposing ambitious limits off their own coastlines – though almost all the UK’s marine protected areas [still allow bottom-trawling](#).

“Designation is not protection,” says Steve Widdicombe, director of science at the Plymouth Marine Laboratory and an ambassador for [Back to Blue](#) looking at ocean acidification. “You can allocate a particular label or piece of ocean and say, ‘Oh, it’s a marine protected area, it’s a site of special scientific interest, it’s a nature reserve’ or what have you. Well, you’ve still got bottom trawling going on in there, you’re still pumping sewage into it.

“Not every piece of sea is the same as every other piece of sea,” he adds. “We can choose 30% of the open ocean, away from every consumer – that’s absolutely fine, accessible, easy stuff to do. But it doesn’t help any coral. It doesn’t help any mangroves. It doesn’t help seagrass.”

Cripps raises the possibility that even if the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) fails to reach an agreement, the ocean might already soon be 30% protected in some form. “You’ve gotta ask – if CBD doesn’t get consensus, are we gonna get 30x30 anyway?” he says.

But he points out that it means business as usual – with nothing changing in terms of overfishing, deep-sea mining, acidification, microplastics or any of the other threats facing the embattled ocean.

“It should be much easier [to protect 30% of the ocean] than the land – that is the conundrum and the paradox here,” National Geographic explorer-in-residence Enric Sala told the conference. “Thirty percent is not the goal: it’s a milestone. Studies show we need something closer to half of the ocean if we are to prevent the collapse of our life support system during our lifetimes. But it is the unprotected 70% where our use of resources really has to be done more responsibly, to let that 30% help to regenerate the rest of the ocean.”

Conservationist Sol Kaho’ohalahala, a seventh-generation Hawaiian, agreed. “In a native Hawaiian perspective it is almost saying as though only 30% of our ancestors are important and that the other 70%, we might just have to put them aside.”

This story was amended on 18 December 2022 to remove the mention of Iceland as being obstructionist, which was added in error during the editing process

Henry Cavill

Henry Cavill won't return to The Witcher despite losing Superman role

Netflix confirms role of Geralt of Rivia will still be recast and played by Australian actor Liam Hemsworth, after Cavill was dropped by DC Studios



‘It’s sad news ...’ Henry Cavill as Geralt of Rivia in The Witcher.
Photograph: Katalin Vermes/AP

Sian Cain

@siancain

Thu 15 Dec 2022 20.01 EST Last modified on Thu 15 Dec 2022 20.04 EST

Henry Cavill will not be returning to his role as Geralt of Rivia in Netflix series The Witcher, despite being dropped as Superman after a shake-up at Warner Bros.

Cavill played Geralt for three seasons but confirmed he would be leaving the Netflix series in October, with the Australian actor Liam Hemsworth

stepping into the lead role.

Shortly after, Cavill announced he would return as Superman in Warner Bros' DC Universe. It was widely speculated he had left The Witcher in order to commit to a training regime to play the hero, a role he has held since the 2013 film Man of Steel.

[But on Wednesday](#), just weeks after announcing his return, it was revealed that Cavill had been dropped from the role. Director and writer James Gunn, who joined DC Studios as co-chair with Peter Safran, announced he was writing a new Superman movie focussing on a younger version of the hero that would not include Cavill.

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“It’s sad news, everyone. I will, after all, not be returning as Superman,” Cavill wrote on Instagram after the announcement. “After being told by the studio to announce my return back in October, prior to their hire, this news isn’t the easiest, but that’s life.”

On Thursday, Netflix confirmed that season four of The Witcher is continuing with Hemsworth as Geralt. The third season, the last to star Cavill, will air in the middle of next year.

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Fans were outspoken when the recasting was announced, with many voicing their displeasure at the change. Cavill was widely praised for his performance as Geralt, and is an avid fan of Andrzej Sapkowski's books and the games on which the show is based.

"Henry is an extraordinary Geralt and I think Liam will continue and also be an extraordinary Geralt," Netflix's head of US and Canada scripted series Peter Friedlander [said in an interview earlier this month](#). "There has been a legacy of amazing, iconic characters where the actors have changed and we're hugely optimistic about this."

Hemsworth said he was "[over the moon](#)" to take over the role.

Gunn's new Superman film will reportedly follow a younger version of the hero posing as journalist Clark Kent.

Gunn, a director and writer who took over as co-chair and co-CEO at DC Studios in November, said he had had "a great meeting with Henry and we're big fans and we talked about a number of exciting possibilities to work together in the future."

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2022.12.16 - Opinion

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These strikes are telling us something: Britain's era of low wages may be over

[Andy Beckett](#)



Higher salaries would boost the UK economy and bring us in line with many other rich countries



Illustration: Thomas Pullin/The Guardian

Fri 16 Dec 2022 01.00 ESTLast modified on Fri 16 Dec 2022 09.21 EST

For almost half a century, in other words within the limits of political memory, Britain has been a country where the priority of most governments has been to keep a few key economic numbers low. Income tax, interest rates, inflation and most people's wages: all were deliberately suppressed by Downing Street and its collaborators in business and the Bank of England. By doing so a space was created – in theory at least – for certain interest groups to flourish: employers, entrepreneurs, shareholders, top earners, homeowners and consumers. Together, they were supposed to boost our previously sluggish rate of economic growth.

It hasn't quite worked out like that. Britain is on the brink of recession yet again. Interest rates, taxes and inflation are all high. Only average wages are still low. And even that dubious achievement of British government and capitalism since the 1980s now feels fragile, with strikes solidifying and spreading across both private and state sectors, determinedly driven by workers who have finally had enough of years of falling pay. As Mick Lynch of the RMT union put it with characteristic pithiness on the Today programme last week: "The price of labour isn't at the right price in this country."

What might life be like in Britain if most people's wages were more generous? One answer is more like life in many other rich countries. According to the [United Nations](#), the share of our gross domestic product that goes to employees is lower than in France, Germany, Italy, Australia, South Korea, Canada, the US and half a dozen other, often more successful, capitalist nations. This "labour share" has fallen in Britain in most years since the late 1970s, when the great counterattack began against unions and decent pay for the many. The absence of this broad-brush but telling indicator from everyday debate in Britain is a sign of how much our politics is shaped by essentially rightwing assumptions.

But now the national conversation about pay seems to be changing. Lynch says the strikes – which despite months of disruption still have [substantial public support](#) – are ultimately about "the rebalancing of our society". That's a very ambitious goal for a union movement much smaller than in its 1970s heyday; which receives at best qualified support from Labour; and which faces a cornered Tory government that sees a [successful confrontation with the unions](#) as one of the few ways it might stay in power. Yet the cost of living crisis, and crippling staff shortages from the NHS to the railways, mean that the old Westminster and media orthodoxy that holding down pay is Britain's only realistic option is losing its force.

Were salaries generally higher, it would almost certainly be easier to recruit and retain staff. Some of the large number of adults who have [chosen to leave the national workforce](#) in recent years would probably return. Workers might be more motivated and efficient, lessening Britain's productivity crisis. Some employees would be able to work fewer hours, and families might benefit as a result.

With higher disposable incomes, people would probably spend more, boosting the British economy. Meanwhile the state would need to spend less on benefits that effectively subsidise low wages. According to the [Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#), two thirds of working-age adults in poverty are in a household where someone works. Higher wages could make having a job a real – rather than often rhetorical – route out of poverty.

Realigning the economy with the needs of the majority would also have costs. Taxes or state borrowing would have to rise to fund better public sector wages – at least in the short term, until the in-work benefits bill fell, and rising incomes increased growth. Goods and services might also become more expensive. We have got used to a world where almost anything can be delivered cheaply to our door – and almost anything can be done to us at work. In a higher-wage world, we might lose some of our power as consumers, while gaining power as workers. At first, we might feel the loss of familiar pleasures more than we use this new agency.

But inflation has already begun to end the golden age of consumption for most of us, anyway. And higher wages may also bring more welcome disruptions. The [gap between ordinary and elite earners](#), which has opened even further in Britain than most wealthy countries, might narrow – especially if taxes are raised to increase public sector pay. Such a narrowing could have psychological as well as material consequences. The extreme separateness and sense of entitlement of the modern rich, and the queasy mix of fascination and loathing rich people arouse in us, evident in hit TV shows such as *Succession* and [The White Lotus](#), might diminish a little if economic security was not so unfairly distributed.

Now, some or all of these potential shifts may sound far-fetched. But an economy where most people's wages grew rather than shrank has existed before in Britain. For much of the first three decades of the 20th century, and again from the late 1940s until the mid-1970s, the “labour share” increased. In fact, its trajectory over the past 150 years forms a [wave pattern](#), with slumps regularly followed by recoveries. Another upswing is overdue.

It may be harder to achieve this time. During previous pay upswings, the economy and trade union memberships were often growing strongly, unlike now. Today's workers will have to be canny and relentless to get more, when the rewards provided by capitalism may be shrinking overall for some time.

But the survival, instead, of the low-wage status quo feels increasingly uncertain. In 1962, one of the most influential modern economists wrote that “in a market society” the way that pay is distributed “is unlikely to be tolerated unless it is also regarded as yielding distributive justice”. Without a

broad public acceptance of such economic arrangements, he went on, “no society can be stable”.

The economist was Milton Friedman, one of the gurus of the global right. With Britain in such a state now that even he and Mick Lynch might agree on a few things, were Friedman still alive, the end of our low-wage era may be coming.

- Andy Beckett is a Guardian columnist
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[Opinion](#)[Prince Harry](#)

If Harry and Meghan were hoping to change the royal family, they'll be disappointed

[Stephen Bates](#)



Monarchists already know of their woes while republicans will merely have their views confirmed. And the soap opera will go on



‘Was it worth it for Harry and Meghan? That depends what they were hoping for.’ Photograph: Kirsty O’Connor/AP

Thu 15 Dec 2022 12.01 ESTLast modified on Thu 15 Dec 2022 15.51 EST

So this is what snowbound, strike-hit Britain needed on a Thursday morning: a rich and entitled couple living in agreeable circumstances in California bemoaning their treatment by the media, the royal family, courtiers, a woman in the crowd in Liverpool, Meghan’s father and even the Queen by implication. Assailed by “them” and “they”.

Yes, it’s the Harry’n’Meghan show on Netflix again, another two and a half hours in which the Duke and Duchess of Sussex back resentfully into the limelight to reveal once more their truth, complete with home movies of their son Archie and copious intimate photographs showing them intruding on their own privacy.

So, what’s new? Well, on this telling, they have been bullied and harassed out of The Firm they worked so hard for: five engagements in five days during their last week in Britain. And the cottage the Queen gave them in the grounds of Kensington Palace was really rather pokey. They made so many sacrifices for this country.

There are details about the negotiations with the Queen, Charles and William in early 2020, with his big brother shouting at him. They were denied the chance to be part-time royals bowing into and out of their duties. Perhaps that's true; perhaps The Firm is behind the times on employment law.

They said William's communications team briefed against them. That may be the case and it wouldn't be the first time: old-timers remember Charles v Diana: the [War of the Waleses](#) and the dark arts of Charles's communications chief, [Mark Bolland](#), 20 years ago.

But they assign blame a bit too liberally. Some, though far from all, of the coverage of Harry and Meghan in some of the tabloids, particularly their bete noir, the Daily Mail, was pretty hateful – but it should be noted that many of the headlines flashing across the screen in the documentaries are not from the British media, but scandal sheets such as the National Enquirer in the US. The retaliation by Meghan's friends – “the truth about Meghan” – was also planted, in [People magazine](#).

As a former royal correspondent, albeit from some years ago, I find some elements of what they say jarring. I don't recognise the “constant briefings” of royal reporters, and stories endlessly planted. I remember it being quite hard to get any information out of the palace and briefings about royal tours. The media picks things up: it quickly discerned that not all was well between the royal brothers, or with Meghan. Should they not have reported that?

So, as the final episode plays out, was it worth it? Will the series alter things for the royals? My feeling is not: monarchists here and around the world already know much of this stuff, and either discount it or tut and move on. Republicans, meanwhile, will merely be confirmed in their view of an outdated, antiquated and out-of-touch institution.

Was it worth it for Harry and Meghan? That depends what they were hoping for. In Britain, Harry's approval ratings have sunk since he left the country, but it may give them the profile to mine lucrative celebrity elsewhere. He may, if he's feeling uniquely hard done by, be comforted to see what the

British public thought of his great-great-uncle Edward VIII when he abdicated for the woman he loved. The letters written to the palace in 1936, preserved in the National Archives at Kew, are quite as abusive as anything Harry and Meghan endured on social media.

So was it all worth it for Netflix? The streaming giants must be happy that last week's instalments became its highest viewed documentary premiere and Britain's most popular TV series of 2022. Presumably there's a return to be made on that, for them and for the co-producers, the Sussex's media company, Archewell.

But will there be more happy returns in the future? Have Harry and Meghan got more to say that will drive sales and damage the institution, or have they shot their bolt? That's the cliffhanger now. The royal soap opera will continue; for all the uncertainties, that's inevitable. The challenge for the US cast members will be finding ways to stay in it.

- Stephen Bates is the Guardian's former royal correspondent. His latest book is The Shortest History of The Crown (the institution rather than the series)
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[Opinion](#)[Boris Johnson](#)

Will Boris Johnson stage a comeback? Sunak may only have five months to find out

[Katy Balls](#)



If the prime minister can't close the gap on Labour, many Tory MPs predict the 'wild' return of his rival in the spring



‘Many of those backing the new leader had hoped that the last leader but one would walk off into the sunset of the well-paid lecture circuit.’ Boris Johnson in the Houses of Parliament. Photograph: Toby Melville/Reuters

Fri 16 Dec 2022 02.00 EST Last modified on Fri 16 Dec 2022 08.53 EST

Three years ago this week, Boris Johnson was looking ahead to a long premiership – eight years at least. As the result broke of a majority of 80 in the 2019 election the prime minister pitched himself as a Blair-like figure – heading to Sedgefield, where his party had turned the former prime minister’s seat blue, [for his victory rally](#). The implication was clear: Johnson was a leader who would be as influential and long-lasting in British politics as Tony Blair.

Fast forward to today and things look rather different. Johnson is on the backbenches – having been forced to resign in the face of successive scandals. After Liz Truss’s short stint in the job, he launched one aborted attempt to return. His former chancellor and political rival Rishi Sunak is now in charge. The polls suggest the Conservatives are on course for a heavy defeat at the next election, which could even include [Johnson’s own seat](#) of Uxbridge and South Ruislip.

Yet the news this month that Johnson [will stand again](#) as an MP in 2024 is a source of intrigue in Westminster. Many of those backing the new leader had hoped that the last leader but one would walk off into the sunset of the well-paid lecture circuit. He is certainly finding it lucrative – parliamentary records suggests he has made [more than £1m](#) since leaving No 10. “There is a chance he gets sick of declaring all his extra earnings and heads for the exit,” said one former minister wistfully at the time. Instead, to the delight of his supporters and horror of his critics, Johnson plans to stick around for the foreseeable.

With Truss, Johnson’s direct successor, also choosing to stand again, it means that Sunak faces the prospect of having two very recent former prime ministers with unfinished business in the Commons. Neither have shown any sign that they will make life easy for the new prime minister – both [put their names to an amendment](#) by the former cabinet minister Simon Clarke designed to allow onshore windfarms to be built. It is unheard of for former prime ministers to start signing amendments so quickly after leaving office.

Another MP adds that Johnson isn’t exactly being demure. “His closest allies have made it very clear he is still around,” they explain. “Theresa May was very discreet when she returned to the Commons after stepping down, but he will always have a crowd around him when in parliament.” Just this week, Sunak, Truss and Johnson gathered in the same room for the Conservative Friends of Israel’s annual business lunch. “Everyone stood up to give Rishi a standing ovation,” recalls one attender at the bash. “It was pretty awkward for Boris, who had to join in.”

Meanwhile, prominent Johnson backers Priti Patel and the Tory donor Lord Cruddas have given their support to the new [Conservative Democratic Organisation](#) – a group described by one member of the 2019 intake as “clearly anti-Rishi” – which seeks to “restore democracy” within the Tory party. It claims that party members ought to be empowered with more of a say on the direction, policy and leadership of the party after MPs were allowed to topple two prime ministers in the space of a few months. When Johnson flirted with the idea of a comeback after Truss resigned, he and his supporters repeatedly suggested that had it been down to the members – rather than MPs – he would have won out over Sunak.



Prime minister Rishi Sunak speaks during PMQs at the House of Commons on 14 December, 2022. Photograph: Jessica Taylor/Reuters

Former party chairman Jake Berry has gone further – [declaring in an interview](#): “I think Boris will come back. I wouldn’t say when. I think he will come back. He’s a bit like the Conservative party’s mistress – something he knows about. The tempting other woman. The king over the sea.” Berry’s point is that if MPs get desperate, that’s when the call will come – and if the Tories keep trailing behind Labour by 20 points, MPs are already bracing themselves for an attempt by Johnson supporters to pitch the former prime minister as the solution.

“It’s very clear that they are creating the infrastructure in parliament and outside to mount a comeback,” argues one senior Tory. “While it’s not obvious now, May 2023 would be the opening if we suffer big losses in parts of the country.” The view in the Johnson camp is effectively that Truss blew her premiership up too soon for Johnson to return. Had she managed to hang on for a bit longer until local elections and until Johnson was past the [privileges committee](#) inquiry into whether he misled the Commons – which could in theory lead to a suspension and spark a byelection in his seat – then they believe he would have been the clear favourite to take over. Instead, Johnson had the privileges committee hanging over him – and a leadership election that was all about the bond markets.

Sunak could find himself facing a restive party and an old-time political rival in six months' time if he can't show progress. But for now, more MPs than not view a Johnson comeback in the spring as implausible. "They are deluding themselves if they think Boris is coming back before the next election," says a former government aide. "MPs have not forgotten." But one MP in the middle of the party points out that Johnson did technically – as [verified by Sir Graham Brady](#) – receive 100 nominations the last time round: "If he could do that at his most discredited, it suggests he has the base," the member of the 2015 intake says. "There is not an appetite now, but 2019 is uniquely Boris's coalition – if [local] election results are poor, it could focus minds. It would be totally wild, but we have had wild times for years."

Should Johnson 2.0 fail to take off, there could still be a vacancy to fill in two years' time. With a number of Tory MPs already taking the view that the next election is lost, it's not uncommon to hear Conservative MPs discussing who, in the event of an election loss, would be the leader of the opposition. In such circumstances, the party would probably move to the right and go back to core values, including low taxes.

While a lot of MPs and aides predict that Tory rising star Kemi Badenoch would be the most likely candidate, others think a more experienced figure could step in. "You may laugh, but it's not impossible it's Boris or Liz," argues a former government adviser. Such moves would, of course, face a backlash – but the thinking among some who backed Johnson and then Truss is that the party would need someone radical and experienced – which could be missing in the younger intakes.

Since entering No 10, Sunak and his team have been on a mission to take the "sugar rush" out of politics after a high-octane year of Tory psychodrama. They have had some success. But if Sunak is to succeed in the long run, his 2023 challenge isn't just to show progress on the economy and public services – it's also to keep his own critics and rivals at bay.

- Katy Balls is the Spectator's deputy political editor
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[Opinion](#)[Social care](#)

Health expert Jeremy Hunt knew how to fix social care. Why is chancellor Jeremy Hunt not doing so?

[Polly Toynbee](#)



As chair of the health select committee he wrote a bold and sensible report. He now seems to have forgotten what was in it



‘Only two months ago, Jeremy Hunt was a rebellious chair of the Commons health and social care select committee.’ Photograph: Reuters

Thu 15 Dec 2022 12.21 ESTLast modified on Thu 15 Dec 2022 17.40 EST

Strikes add to the crisis the NHS faces. It’s been the nurses today, ambulance staff next week. Of course they can be resolved, as can all public pay claims, in this case for the [cost of some £13bn](#) to match the full 11.1% peak inflation, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies’ (IFS) Ben Zaranko (though unions don’t really expect this amount). That sum could be raised by equalising tax on earned and unearned income, which might yield as [much as £14bn](#), according to the Tax Justice Network.

But leave that aside for now: one mystery is why the government is failing to do what it can to ease [NHS](#) pressures immediately. Ineptitude? Stupidity? Or, as conspiracy theorists would have it, a positive desire to prove the NHS doesn’t work?

It’s especially puzzling when for once, in Jeremy Hunt, there is a chancellor who knows the health service well, having been the longest-serving health secretary. Only two months ago, he was a rebellious chair of the Commons health and social care select committee, producing thorn-in-the-side reports and even a book spelling out what was needed. He can’t hide behind know-

nothing rightwing tropes calling for unspecified, but threatening, “reform”: he’s seen never-ending turbulent “reform” with two new acts in the Tory years. Nor can he believe their constant “too many managers” nonsense: [the NHS has a disproportionately low number of managers](#) compared with other industries, [and similar health systems](#). Nor can he agree that NHS staff – with GPs under particular attack – are idlers: fewer GPs are seeing more patients.

He knows that a prime blockage is the failure of social care, due to government funds to local authorities being cut, cut and cut again. That results in [13,000 NHS beds blocked](#) by medically fit patients who don’t have social care beds or homecare packages to make it safe to leave hospital. Patients are unable to be admitted to wards from A&E, while ambulances stack up outside, unable to offload patients into overwhelmed emergency departments.

Most serious problems in the NHS will take years to resolve, such as training new doctors and nurses and repairing dilapidations, but this one could be eased quickly – and at a relatively modest cost. The reason that the social care system can’t cope is the vast numbers fleeing this very low-paid and overworked job for which it is impossible to recruit. Address the miserable pay, and social care would quickly get back on its feet: recruiting would be easy if pay matched the demanding nature of the job, but staff are paid [at or near the “national living wage”](#), with even more experienced workers only earning an extra 7p an hour, less than supermarket pay. On Thursday, care workers from Citizens UK were protesting about their low pay outside the London HQ of Barchester Healthcare where the CEO, Pete Calveley, is paid [130 times their social care rate](#) – £2.27m per year.

So says Sally Warren, the King’s Fund’s director of policy, who was until recently director for social care at the Department of [Health](#) and Social Care. So she knows the facts and the costings in considerable depth. How much would it cost to pay enough to raise wages to attract the necessary staff? “£2bn would do it, for each of the next two years,” she tells me. “Not tens of billions.” Compare that, she says, to costs in the NHS and to the vast waste of money of fully staffed ambulances queueing for hours, or surgeons twiddling their thumbs in irritation at the lack of beds to take their patients.

“£1.5bn a year is wasted in hospital beds occupied by patients who don’t need them.”

The Treasury snubs all spend-now-to-save-later calculations from every department. Those blocked beds, it usually says, would only be filled by other patients who would be put through faster, each one having an expensive procedure: blocked beds are cheaper. Not so, says Warren, as the surgeons have to be paid anyway, even when prevented from operating.

Jeremy Hunt himself, as chair of the committee, [demanded £7bn](#) for social care, which is what it would take in the long run to upgrade the entire sector, to train staff well, to give them a career path on the same [Agenda for Change](#) scale of NHS staff. That’s Labour’s plan. Social care gets erratic bungs to see it through winter crises – [£500m this year](#) – but Warren says it’s always unpredictable and offered at the last minute, so providers dare not raise pay rates, unsure if they can sustain it the following year, so they use it to buy extra shifts.

That £2bn would open up spare beds closed for lack of staff in the 17,000 care providers, [more than 80% of which](#) are small outfits, rather than the big private-equity-owned sharks. . It’s not just beds: many sitting in hospitals needlessly await care packages at home, but domiciliary care services are collapsing. Many wait for NHS services in the community, but the number of district nurses [halved in the last decade](#). The IFS this week [produced an alarming report](#) on declining productivity in the NHS. One key reason, it said, was the failure to “discharge patients into the community or social care, which further clogs up the system and acts as a drain on staff resources”. Far from integration, there’s a tug of war, or tug of blame, between the NHS and councils. The [Association of Directors of Adult Social Services](#) points to discharged patients needing far higher levels of care than before. And 82% of directors are seeing an increase in the need for care due to people being discharged from hospital more quickly, while 46% say they are now having to care for those waiting for NHS treatment.

The 245,821 people [waiting for an assessment](#) of their need for care in August has risen by 20% since last November. All in all, that’s the circularity of treatments in NHS and social care: councils see the NHS has at least had a little growth, while they have had a decade of cuts. Whatever the

success or failure of attempts to blend them and their budgets, an immediate promise from Jeremy Hunt of £2bn a year for social care from now on would be money very well spent for both sides. But this poacher-turned-gamekeeper now seems to deny what he used to know just two months ago.

- Polly Toynbee is a Guardian columnist
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Lockerbie plane bombing

Libyan PM admits government role in sending Lockerbie bomb suspect to US

Hamid Dbeibah, who governs only part of the divided country, says extradition of Mohammed Abouagela Masud was with his support



Mohammed Abouajela Masud was charged in a federal court on Monday with an act of international terrorism. Photograph: Ismail Zetouni/Reuters

AP in Tripoli

Thu 15 Dec 2022 17.31 EST Last modified on Thu 15 Dec 2022 17.48 EST

One of [Libya](#)'s rival prime ministers has admitted that his government was involved in the extradition to the US of a former Libyan intelligence officer accused of making the bomb that downed Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988, killing all onboard.

US authorities [announced on Sunday they had arrested former intelligence officer Mohammed Abouagela Masud](#). The next day, Mas'ud appeared at

federal court in Washington and was charged with an act of international terrorism. US officials did not explain how he was taken into their custody.

In a televised broadcast on Thursday evening, Libya's prime minister, Hamid Dbeibah, said Masud's extradition was lawful and his government was simply cooperating with an "international judicial framework to extradite accused citizens". It was his first comment on the extradition.

In 20-minute speech, Dbeibah named Masud as the bombmaker for the Lockerbie attack that killed 270 people and said that Libya "had to wipe the mark of terrorism from the Libyan people's forehead". He provided no hard evidence for any of his allegations and did not elaborate on his government's role in Masud's handover.

The US and Libya have no formal extradition agreement.

A day before, Libya's chief public prosecutor, Saddiq Al-Sour, had announced there would be an investigation into Masud's extradition following a complaint from the suspect's family. The Tripoli-based prosecutor provided no details about the investigation.

Masud was "kidnapped" from his family home in Tripoli by armed men in November, according to a statement issued by his family shortly after the alleged incident. It was unclear if any of the family witnessed Masud's alleged abduction.

In that statement, the family condemned Libyan authorities for their silence over the incident and for any extradition process that could later take place.

Engulfed by over a decade of civil conflict, Libya is divided between the government of Dbeibah in Tripoli and a rival government based in eastern Libya headed by prime minister Fathi Bashagha. In western Libya, militia groups have accumulated vast wealth and power from kidnappings and their control over the country's lucrative human trafficking trade.

On Tuesday, Bashagha called Masud's extradition illegal and urged his immediate release.

Masud's extradition has added to discontent among Libyans, long frustrated by years of chaos and division. In Facebook videos posted Thursday, people in Tripoli were seen carrying posters that blamed Dbeibah and his allied militia forces for Masud's extradition. In statements broadcast Thursday, two of Libya's influential tribal groups also condemned the move.

The New York-bound Pan Am flight exploded over the Scottish town of Lockerbie after taking off from London on 21 December 1988, killing 259 people onboard and 11 on the ground. Among the dead were 190 American citizens.

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[Malaysia](#)

Malaysia landslide: at least 12 killed and 22 missing at campsite near Kuala Lumpur

Fifty-nine people have been rescued after a landslide hit about 3am north of the capital

Aerial footage shows aftermath of deadly Malaysian landslide – video

Guardian staff and agencies

Fri 16 Dec 2022 01.02 ESTFirst published on Thu 15 Dec 2022 19.59 EST

A landslide killed at least 12 people while they slept at a Malaysian campsite near Kuala Lumpur early on Friday, officials said, as search teams scoured thick mud and downed trees for more than 20 people still missing.

A child and a woman were found among the dead, authorities said, while one of the eight people taken to hospital was pregnant. Others had injuries ranging from minor cuts to a suspected spinal injury.

More than 90 people were caught in the landslide, which occurred about 3am and tore down a hillside into a farm with camping facilities, engulfing the campsite about 50km north of Kuala Lumpur, the capital, the state fire and rescue department said. Fifty-nine had been found safe and 22 were still missing.

Three people were injured while rescuers were searching for the missing, the department said.

Teh Lynn Xuan, 22, said she was camping with 40 others when the landslide struck. One of her brothers died, while another was in the hospital, she said.

“I heard a loud sound like thunder, but it was the rocks falling,” she told Malay-language daily Berita Haria. “We felt the tents becoming unstable and soil was falling around us. Luckily, I was able to leave the tent and go to someplace safer.

“My mother and I managed to crawl out and save ourselves.”



Survivors walk out after the landslide hit the campsite in Batang Kali.
Photograph: AP/Fire and rescue department of Malaysia

District police chief Suffian Abdullah said the dead were all Malaysians and included a child aged about five.

Almost 400 people from several agencies had been deployed, with search-and-rescue efforts ongoing, he said.

The landslide in Selangor state fell from an estimated height of 30 metres (98ft) and covered an area of about 0.4 hectares, the fire and rescue department said. It posted pictures of rescuers with flashlights digging through soil and rubble in the early hours of the morning.

Footage from local television showed the aftermath of a large landslide through a steep, forested area beside a road, while other images on social

media showed rescue workers clambering over thick mud, large trees and other debris.

"I pray that the missing victims can be found safely soon," Malaysia's minister of natural resources, environment and climate change, Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad, tweeted on Friday morning, one of several ministers who were heading to the scene. "The rescue team has been working since early."



The scene after the landslide. Photograph: Astro Awani/Reuters

The disaster struck in Batang Kali town, just outside the popular hilltop area of Genting Highlands, a tourist destination known for its natural beauty, resorts and Malaysia's only casino.

News agency Bernama tweeted that all campsites and water recreation areas around Batang Kali had been ordered to close immediately until further notice, citing the minister of home affairs.

Pictures posted on the Father's Organic Farm Facebook page show a farmhouse in a small valley, with a large area where tents can be set up.

Selangor is Malaysia's most affluent state and has suffered landslides before, often attributed to forest and land clearance. The region is in its rainy season but no heavy rain or earthquakes were recorded overnight.

With Reuters and Associated Press

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Colombia

Colombia revokes amnesty it granted to alleged IRA bomb-making trio

Men were pardoned in April 2020, but after reviewing evidence the court concluded they had not come clean about their trip



Niall Connolly (left), Martin McCauley (centre) and James Monaghan in Bogotá, Colombia, after their arrest in 2001. Photograph: AP

[Luke Taylor in Bogotá](#)

Fri 16 Dec 2022 03.00 EST Last modified on Mon 19 Dec 2022 08.15 EST

Colombia's peace tribunal has revoked a controversial amnesty it granted to three alleged IRA members accused of training Colombia's largest guerrilla group in bomb-making.

Colombia's Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) had [pardoned the trio in April 2020](#) providing they fully divulge the truth about a trip they made to Colombia in 2001 at the height of the country's six decades of conflict.

But after more than two years reviewing evidence submitted by the defendants' lawyers, the court – which was formed out of the country's 2016 peace accord –concluded that the Irishmen had not come clean about their trip to South America.

“Martin John McCauley, Niall Terrence Connolly and Séamus O’ Muinecháin failed ‘in a serious manner’ to comply with their obligation to contribute to the full truth,” the JEP said in a statement.

Martin McCauley, Niall Connolly, and James Monaghan were [captured in Bogotá’s international airport on their way back to Europe in 2001](#) following a five-week trip to San Vicente del Caguán, a rebel-held town in Colombia’s vast southern jungles.

San Vincente was the main settlement in a vast swath of territory from which government forces had withdrawn, as a condition for peace talks with the now-defunct Revolutionary Armed Forces (Farc) .

“The Colombia Three” have always denied wrongdoing, maintaining that they were observing Colombia’s peace negotiations, not training Farc guerrillas, but they were eventually sentenced to 17 years in prison for [allegedly showing the rebels how to make rudimentary but lethal explosives](#).

The Irishmen appeared to have been let off the hook when a Bogotá judge concluded that they had travelled on false passports but threw out the terrorism allegations on procedural grounds, despite traces of explosives being found on their clothing.

The decision was reversed in the supreme court in 2004 – by which time they had fled to Ireland while on bail.

Ireland has no extradition treaty with Colombia so they have remained there ever since.

The JEP says the Irishmen have appealed the decision to deny their amnesty, which if upheld, will pass the case onto a special unit of the country’s general attorney for investigation.

The drawn-out legal saga has strained peace processes on both sides of the Atlantic.

The trial added to suspicions that the IRA had not signed 1998's Good Friday Agreement in good faith and would continue engaging in terrorism.

And the peace process the trio had allegedly been observing eventually broke down amid accusations that the Farc were merely using the ceasefire to regroup and step up their insurgency.

Colombia's conflict formally ended in 2016 when the Farc signed a peace agreement with the government. An estimated 450,000 people were killed and 8 million displaced in the civil conflict, making it one of the deadliest in modern history.

The 2016 accord was initially rejected in a popular vote, with the JEP a major sticking point.

Critics like Ximena Ochoa, co-founder of the Colombian Federation of Farc Victims, say the court allows war criminals like "The Colombia Three" off the hook too easily, but welcomed the tribunal's latest decision.

"It has been incredibly difficult to see murderers go free but we victims accept it because it what was agreed and it has legal and judicial support," Ochoa says. "But it should also be clear for those who participated in these grave and atrocious crimes, that they must comply with the court's requirements or face the consequences. We are very grateful that the JEP is demanding compliance with these agreements and defending the rights of victims. We hope it extends to other cases."

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/dec/16/colombia-amnesty-alleged-ira-bomb-making-trio>

[John F Kennedy](#)

US National Archives releases more than 12,000 documents on JFK assassination

Documents disclosed after Joe Biden issued an executive order authorizing them to be made available to the public



President John F Kennedy signs the Limited Test Ban Treaty in the White House. Photograph: AP

Reuters

Thu 15 Dec 2022 19.46 EST Last modified on Thu 15 Dec 2022 20.14 EST

The US National Archives on Thursday [released](#) thousands of documents related to the 1963 assassination of then President John F Kennedy shortly after Joe Biden issued an executive order authorizing the release that also kept hundreds of other sensitive records secret.

The release of 12,879 documents was not expected to include any new bombshells or change the conclusion reached by the commission led by chief justice Earl Warren that Lee Harvey Oswald, a former Marine and communist activist who had lived in the Soviet Union, acted alone. However, the latest cache will be useful for historians focusing on the events around the assassination.

Kennedy was shot and killed while riding in his motorcade through Dallas on 22 November 1963, at the age of 46.

Thousands of books, articles, TV shows and films have explored the idea that Kennedy's assassination was the result of an elaborate conspiracy. None have produced conclusive proof that Oswald – who was fatally shot by nightclub owner Jack Ruby two days after killing Kennedy – worked with anyone else, although they retain a powerful cultural currency.

There were initial concerns that Ruby might have had some connection to Oswald. But a newly released September 1964 memo to the presidential commission investigating the assassination said “the Central Intelligence Agency has no indication that Ruby and Lee Harvey Oswald ever knew each other, were associated, or might have been connected in any manner”.

Congress in 1992 had ordered that all remaining sealed files pertaining to the investigation into Kennedy's death should be fully opened to the public through the National Archives in 25 years, by 26 October 2017, except for those the president authorized for further withholding.

In 2017, then President Donald Trump released a cache of records, but decided to release the remaining documents on a rolling basis.

All of the remaining JFK files were originally supposed to have been released in October 2021. Biden postponed that planned release, citing delays caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, and announced they would be instead disclosed in two batches: one on 15 December 2021, and another by 15 December 2022, after undergoing an intensive one-year review.

With Thursday's release, 95% of the documents in the CIA's JFK assassination records collection will have been released in their entirety, a

CIA spokesperson said in a statement, and no documents will remain redacted or withheld in full after an “intensive one-year review” of all previously unreleased information.

In a memorandum on Thursday, Biden said that until 1 May 2023, the National Archives and relevant agencies “shall jointly review the remaining redactions in the records that had not been publicly disclosed”. After that review, “any information withheld from public disclosure that agencies do not recommend for continued postponement” will be released by 30 June 2023.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/dec/15/us-national-archives-releases-documents-jfk-assassination>

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[Iran](#)

European MPs seek to publicise plight of jailed Iranian protesters

Politicians particularly in Germany taking responsibility for lobbying for the safety of individual prisoners



A 'Women, Life, Freedom' placard during a rally in support of protesters in Iran, in front of the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin. Photograph: John MacDougall/AFP/Getty Images

[Patrick Wintour](#) Diplomatic editor and [Maryam Foumani](#)

Fri 16 Dec 2022 00.00 EST Last modified on Fri 16 Dec 2022 11.01 EST

Politicians from [Europe](#) have begun sponsoring jailed Iranian protesters in the hope that by highlighting individual cases of injustice, the authorities will be forced to step back from handing down lengthy jail sentences or carrying out executions.

The [executions of two demonstrators](#) and threats to kill others suggest Tehran is set on the use of repression and fear to quell the protests.

However, there have been widespread demonstrations in [Iran](#) against the executions, including in the capital, Tehran, and the cities of Mashhad, Sanandaj, Karaj, Kermanshah, Babolsar and Tabriz. Students at Tabriz University of Medical Sciences held up placards reading: “You don’t object to these executions until your parents [are] executed?”

In a video published on social media on the evening of 12 December, a woman in Mashhad placed a rope around her neck and stood in the middle of the street in protest.

Eighteen female political prisoners, including the well-known women’s movement activist Narges Mohammadi, also published a letter calling for an end to the use of the death penalty. More than 230 Iranian civil activists have in a joint statement called for its abolition.

The recent release of a 15-year-old boy from detention two days after his mother gave a heart-rending interview in local media indicates that the regime may be nervous of bad publicity. The reformist Etemaad newspaper interviewed Elham Najaf, the mother of Amir Hossein Rahimi, who said she could not afford the bail for her son, who was accused of possessing a molotov cocktail.

Sonia Sharifi, a 17-year-old woman facing serious charges, was also released on Thursday night in Abdanan and greeted by cheering crowds as she stood on top of a car to salute them. She had been sponsored by Katja Leikert, a Christian Democrat member of the German parliament, who welcomed her temporary release. There is no evidence whether external pressure led to her release on bail.

Sponsoring MPs take responsibility for lobbying for the safety of individual prisoners, demanding information on their whereabouts and publicising their plight. As many as 30 Iranians in jail now have a European sponsor. The MPs also hope to highlight how Iran is not following its written penal code

in administering justice, and is arresting lawyers, or denying the accused legal representation of their choice.

Martin Diedenhofen, an MP with Germany's Social Democrat party (SDP), has adopted the case of 19-year-old Mohammad Broghni, vowing in a letter to the Iranian ambassador on Thursday to keep fighting for the man's life. Broghni faces the imminent threat of execution in Rajaei Shahr prison in Karaj, where [Mohsen Shekari](#) was executed last week.

Ye-One Rhee, another SDP legislator, is sponsoring the imprisoned dissident rapper Toomaj Salehi, also by sending protest letters to the Iranian ambassador. Carmen Wegge, also of the SDP, [has declared herself the sponsor](#) of Armita Abbasi, 20, who was taken to a hospital in Karaj on 18 October by security forces with multiple injuries, including internal bleeding and evidence of repeated rape.

Mostafa Nili, a lawyer who has represented many political prisoners in the past, is being sponsored by the CDU foreign affairs specialist Norbert Röttgen. Nili was arrested on 7 November by Iran's Revolutionary Guards.

In the [Netherlands](#), Sjoerd Wiemer Sjoerdsma, a liberal MP, said he was sponsoring Hamid Qara Hasanlu, an Iranian radiologist sentenced to death. The MP said he was writing letters to the Iranian ambassador, the EU special representative for human rights and the high commissioner for human rights.

In [France](#), the leftist MP Elsa Faucillon said she was accepting sponsorship of Reza Aria, saying his execution was possible at any moment. The French Green MP Sophie Taillé-Polian said she was calling for the release of two brothers, Farhad and Farzad Tahzedeh.

In Austria, the Social Democrat human rights spokesperson Harald Troch has sponsored Mohammad Hosseini, who has been accused of killing a member of the Basiji security forces.

Although there is a debate about the value of prisoner sponsorship in practical terms, a willingness to lobby on behalf of a specific Iranian prisoner places some pressure on a country where at least some of the political elite are worried about its growing international isolation.

Outside Iran, the Iranian diaspora, acting on advice from human rights groups such as Amnesty International and the Norway-based Hengaw group, have issued warnings on social media that specific prisoners are in imminent danger of execution. Amnesty sent out an alert about the possible execution of Broghni.

Journalists conducting interviews from inside Iran are taking risks. Reporters Without Borders says 47 Iranian journalists have been imprisoned in 2022, 34 of them since the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini that sparked the nationwide protests.

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Headlines thursday 15 december 2022

- [Live Tens of thousands of UK nurses go on strike in first such industrial action in NHS history](#)
- ['Tragic first' Tens of thousands of nurses prepare to strike](#)
- [Explained Why are nurses striking and how will it affect hospital care?](#)
- [Rail strikes Showdown talks planned as country comes to a standstill](#)

NHS

Labour MPs join nurses on picket lines – nurses strike, as it happened

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/live/2022/dec/15/uk-nurses-strike-today-nhs-history-live-latest-updates>

NHS

Tens of thousands of nurses prepare to strike in ‘tragic first’ for NHS

RCN chief says members are acting across England, Wales and Northern Ireland with a ‘very heavy heart’



NHS staff march in London in July to demand fair pay. Photograph: Guy Smallman/Getty Images

[Denis Campbell](#) Health policy editor

Wed 14 Dec 2022 18.00 ESTLast modified on Thu 15 Dec 2022 11.53 EST

Tens of thousands of nurses will strike across England, Wales and Northern Ireland on Thursday, sparking major disruption to services in the first such action in [NHS](#) history.

Nurses will refuse to work at hospitals and other places of care across the three countries [from 8am until 8pm, in the first of two days of scheduled walkouts over their pay claim](#).

Their action has led to large numbers of outpatient appointments and operations being cancelled. Urgent and life-saving services will be fully staffed, but many non-urgent services will operate with only the much smaller numbers of nurses usually on duty on Christmas Day or overnight.

Less unwell patients attending A&E have been told to expect to wait even longer than usual.

Members of the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) are staging the strikes in an effort to win a pay rise for this year of 5% above inflation, and in protest at the government's decision to award them an increase of at least £1,400, which is the equivalent of about a 4% uplift.

The RCN's general secretary, Pat Cullen, has stressed that nurses do not want to strike but feel obliged to do so because, with soaring inflation, the government's pay offer amounts to a real-terms cut in their salaries after a decade in which the value of experienced nurses' pay has already fallen by 20%.

"Nurses are not relishing this," she said. "We are acting with a very heavy heart. It has been a difficult decision taken by hundreds of thousands who begin to remove their labour from tomorrow in a bid to be heard, recognised and valued.

"It is a tragic first for nursing, the RCN and the NHS. Nursing staff on picket lines is a sign of failure on the part of governments."

Cullen has been engaged in a heated war of words with the health secretary, Steve Barclay, over his refusal to engage in discussions with the RCN over pay, despite the union's willingness to compromise on what ministers have called an "unreasonable and unaffordable" demand.

The RCN undertook action short of a strike and three days of walkouts in Northern Ireland in late 2019, in a dispute over pay and safe staffing levels. This is the first time, however, that they have taken coordinated action across the NHS. They will strike again on 20 December.

Nurses will not withdraw their labour in Scotland. RCN members there are voting until next Monday on whether to accept a “best and final” offer from Nicola Sturgeon’s government, which is worth £2,205 or a rise of about 7.5%.

The RCN has bowed to pressure from NHS leaders in recent days and agreed to protect patient safety by exempting extra areas of care in England, Wales and Northern Ireland from the strikes, including children’s A&E units, emergency cancer services and some forms of mental health care.

NHS nurses on strike: 'Morale has hit the floor' – video

“The RCN has agreed that all emergency departments and urgent care units affected by industrial action should be staffed to at least Christmas Day levels,” said Matthew Taylor, the chief executive of the NHS Confederation, which represents NHS bodies in England and Wales.

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“But with such high demand from patients, people arriving at A&E with more minor ailments should unfortunately expect to have to wait longer.

“The NHS will make every effort for this not to happen but patient safety and maintaining safe staffing levels in the most critical services has to be the number one priority.”

The Welsh government said NHS care would be “significantly impacted” and that services were likely to resemble those usually provided on public holidays. Non-urgent or routine appointments are likely to be postponed, it

said, though health boards hope to offer patients new dates as soon as they can.

Voicing his support for striking nurses, the Welsh health minister, Eluned Morgan, stressed the Labour government's belief that "all public sector workers should be fairly rewarded for the important work they do".

She said: "The strikes which begin today will inevitably have a significant impact on NHS services. But we recognise the strength of feeling among staff, which the difficult decision to vote for industrial action reflects."

Barclay said: "Our nurses are incredibly dedicated to their job and it is deeply regrettable some union members are going ahead with strike action."

Keeping patients safe was his top priority and arrangements had been made to ensure that, he said, but "I do remain concerned about the risk that strikes pose to patients."

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/dec/14/tens-of-thousands-of-nurses-prepare-to-strike-in-tragic-first-for-nhs>

Nursing

Explainer

Why are nurses striking and how will it affect hospital care?

Key questions answered as nurses in England, Wales and Northern Ireland stage first national strikes

- [Nurses' strike – live news and reaction](#)

'It's a tragic day for nurses': RCN chief criticises health secretary over strikes – video

PA Media

Thu 15 Dec 2022 03.44 EST Last modified on Thu 15 Dec 2022 12.23 EST

Nurses across England, Wales and Northern Ireland are [staging their first national strikes](#) on Thursday.

Why are nurses striking?

The Royal College of [Nursing](#) (RCN) balloted its members over industrial action in a dispute over pay. It has argued that low pay is driving “chronic understaffing” that puts patients at risk and leaves nursing staff overworked, underpaid and undervalued.

Is there really a crisis in the workforce?

The number of nurses and midwives registered to work in the UK has grown to a record level – 771,445 were on the Nursing and Midwifery Council register in September. But separate figures from NHS Digital show there were a record 47,496 full-time equivalent nursing vacancies in [England](#) at the end of September, representing a vacancy rate of 11.9%.

How many nurses will be on strike?

Tens of thousands of nurses are to take part – originally it was anticipated that up to 100,000 would strike but this figure changed due to the various “derogations” that have occurred in recent weeks where nurses have agreed to provide certain services during strike days.

When will the strikes take place?

The strikes are scheduled for Thursday 15 December and Tuesday 20 December, although not all organisations are taking part on both days.

What happens if I'm sick?

People who need emergency or urgent care will still get help. The strikes will affect other elements of care but people will have been contacted in advance to be told of changes to planned care and encouraged to attend appointments unless they have been instructed otherwise. GP surgeries and pharmacies will be running as normal.

What has the Royal College of Nursing asked for?

The RCN asked for a 12.5% increase in pay in 2020. Somewhere during the dispute it was claimed that nurses wanted a “5% above inflation rise” – presumably when inflation was 7.5% or thereabouts.

So what has been offered?

An independent pay review body recommended that the majority of NHS staff on so-called Agenda for Change contracts are to be given a £1,400 rise in pay. The Nuffield Trust has estimated that this is the equivalent to an average of 4.3% rise for qualified nurses. The RCN has previously said that despite this year's pay award, experienced nurses are worse off by 20% in real terms due to successive below inflation awards since 2010.

What has the government said?

The government accepted the recommendation by the pay review body and it has said that union demands are “not affordable” in the current economic climate, saying each additional 1% pay rise for all Agenda for Change staff would cost about £700m a year. But the pay review body estimates that each 1% increase in pay adds about £500m to the Agenda for Change pay bill in England, £29.5m in [Northern Ireland](#) and £37.5m in Wales.

The Department of [Health](#) and Social Care said that, using October’s RPI inflation data, a 5% above inflation rise would equate to a pay rise of 19.2%. It said that increasing pay for all staff on Agenda for Change contracts – which also includes staff such as midwives, ambulance workers, porters and cleaners – by 19.2%, instead of the existing pay award, would cost “around an additional £10bn”.

Officials have said that this would hamper the NHS’s efforts in tackling the record backlog of care. But the RCN has not specifically asked for a 19.2% pay increase.

A separate [pay offer has been made in Scotland](#).

What has the NHS said?

Officials in England have said they would like to see a resolution to the dispute as soon as possible “but pay is a matter for the government and the trade unions”.

Where will the strikes take place?

Not every hospital will be affected by strike action. Here is the official list of trusts and NHS organisations taking part, released by the RCN:

England

East Midlands

Kettering general hospital NHS foundation trust

NHS Nottingham and Nottinghamshire ICB

Northamptonshire healthcare NHS foundation trust

Nottingham University hospitals NHS trust

Nottinghamshire healthcare NHS foundation trust

Eastern

Cambridge University hospital NHS foundation trust

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough NHS foundation trust

Cambridgeshire Community Services NHS trust

Hertfordshire Community NHS trust

NHS Hertfordshire and West Essex ICB

Royal Papworth hospital NHS foundation trust

London

Great Ormond Street hospital for Children NHS foundation trust

Guys and St Thomas NHS foundation trust

Imperial College healthcare NHS trust

NHS North Central London ICB

Royal Marsden NHS foundation trust

North West

Alder Hey Children's NHS foundation trust

Liverpool heart and chest hospital NHS foundation trust

Liverpool University Hospitals NHS foundation trust

Liverpool Women's NHS foundation trust

Mersey Care NHS foundation trust

The Clatterbridge Cancer Centre NHS foundation trust

The Walton Centre NHS foundation trust

Northern

Gateshead Health NHS foundation trust

Northumbria healthcare NHS foundation trust

The Newcastle Upon Tyne hospitals NHS foundation trust

South East

Oxford Health NHS foundation trust

Oxford University hospitals NHS foundation trust

Royal Berkshire NHS foundation trust

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South West

Devon Partnership NHS trust

Gloucestershire Health and Care NHS foundation trust

Gloucestershire hospitals NHS foundation trust

Great Western hospitals NHS foundation trust

NHS Bath, North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire ICB (BSW Together)

NHS Devon ICB (One Devon)

NHS Gloucestershire ICB (One Gloucestershire)

North Bristol NHS trust

Royal Devon University healthcare NHS foundation trust

Royal United hospitals Bath NHS foundation trust

Torbay and South Devon NHS foundation trust

University hospitals Bristol and Weston NHS oundation trust

University hospitals Plymouth NHS trust

West Midlands

Birmingham Women's and Children's NHS foundation trust

Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health and Care NHS trust

NHS Birmingham and Solihull ICB (BSol ICB)

The Royal Orthopaedic hospital NHS foundation trust

University hospitals Birmingham NHS foundation trust

Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS trust

Yorkshire & Humber

Bradford teaching hospitals NHS foundation trust

Leeds community healthcare NHS trust

The Leeds teaching hospitals NHS trust

National employers

Health Education England

NHS England

Northern Ireland

Belfast health and social care trust

Northern health and social care trust

Western health and social care trust

Southern health and social care trust

South Eastern health and social care trust

Northern Ireland Practice and Education Council

Business Services Organisation

Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority

Northern Ireland Blood Transfusion Service

Public Health Agency

Northern Ireland ambulance service

Wales

Cardiff and Vale University health board

Powys Teaching local health board

Welsh ambulance services NHS trust headquarters

Hywel Dda University health board

Swansea Bay University health board

Cwm Taf Morgannwg University health board

Betsi Cadwaladr University local health board

Velindre NHS trust

Public Health Wales

Health Education and Improvement Wales Health Authority

NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership

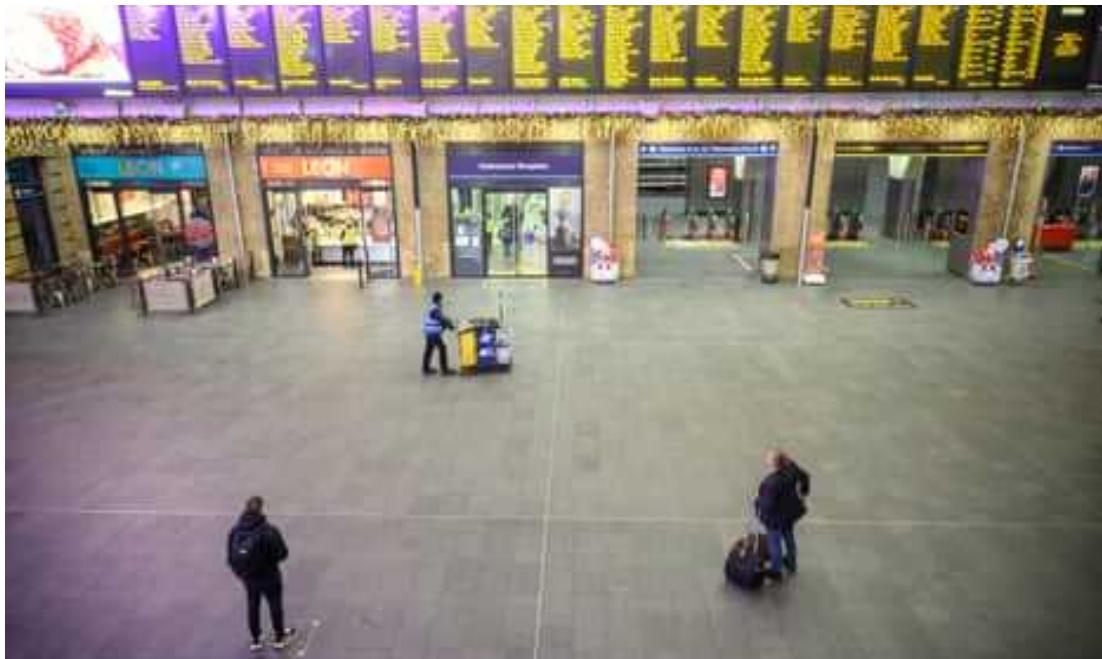
Digital Health and Care Wales

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Industrial action

Rail strikes: showdown talks planned as country comes to a standstill

Unions, ministers and industry bosses to meet amid wide-scale disruption caused by only 20% of rail services running



A handful of commuters await information during the morning rush hour at Kings Cross train station in London on 14 December. Photograph: Leon Neal/Getty Images

[Joe Middleton](#) and [Joanna Partridge](#)

Wed 14 Dec 2022 13.07 EST Last modified on Thu 15 Dec 2022 09.37 EST

Union leaders, the rail minister and industry chiefs are scheduled for showdown talks on Thursday after industrial action on the rail network brought the UK to a standstill for the second day in a row.

Only 20% of services were running as about 40,000 RMT members working for [Network Rail](#) and 14 train operators went on strike for a second day. A

further 48-hour strike is scheduled for Friday.

Rail passengers have been warned that trains will start much later than usual on Thursday, despite it being a non-strike day, with the first trains much busier than usual because of strike disruption.

The industrial action, combined with the snow and freezing temperatures, contributed to a [dramatic decline in footfall in cities across the UK](#) as firms recovering from the pandemic desperately try to claw back business over Christmas.

It comes as the high court on Wednesday granted permission for a legal challenge against the government's decision to allow agency workers to fill in for striking workers. The TUC is coordinating the case brought by 11 trade unions who represent millions of workers, with a hearing set to be held from late March next year.

The TUC said the judicial review against "anti-worker" regulations was a "major blow" against the government's attempts to undermine workers' right to strike for better pay and conditions.

About 115,000 members of the Communication Workers Union (CWU) who work for [Royal Mail](#) also took part in further industrial action on Wednesday and will also strike on 15, 23, and 24 December, with pictures today showing enormous stacks of letters and packages piled high outside depots.



The postal backlog at the Bristol Filton office of Royal Mail. Photograph: Ben Birchall/PA

[Up to 100,000 nurses who are members of the Royal College of Nursing \(RCN\)](#) will also take part in their first ever industrial action on Thursday.

The RMT confirmed that it will hold fresh talks with the rail minister, Huw Merriman, on Thursday , along with the train operating companies and Network Rail.

The union's general secretary, Mick Lynch, said: "I congratulate RMT members who have shown enormous dignity and rock-solid fortitude throughout this 48-hour strike. They have shown how important their work is to the functioning of the economy and wider society.

"All they want is a negotiated settlement on job security, a decent pay rise and good working conditions."

Figures from retail analysts Springboard [showed the impact of freezing temperatures and strikes on the high street](#), with footfall on Tuesday – the first day of the rail strikes – 37% lower than on the same day in 2019.

Across the UK it was down by 26%, while footfall at shopping centres was 28% lower and 9% down in retail parks.

The latest data from TomTom indicated that strike action was also affecting the number of people getting in their car as congestion in the larger cities increased across the board. [London](#) recorded an increase of 10%-15%.

Despite the fresh talks between the RMT, rail bosses and the government, hopes are slim that another two-day strike on 16-17 December can be averted.

An overtime ban at the train operator will also cause various degrees of disruption until more strikes on 3-4 and 6-7 January. Another strike will mainly affect engineering works from late Christmas Eve until 7am on 27 December, while ongoing repair works will also affect remaining travel over the festive period.

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‘We can’t afford not to’: a firefighter, paramedic, train driver and teacher on UK strikes – video

Further disruption is expected on the railway after Christmas as the smaller TSSA union said 700 members working for West Midlands Trains (WMT) and Great Western Railway (GWR) would strike on Wednesday 28 December in a dispute over pay, jobs and conditions.

Elizabeth line workers, who are employees of Rail for London Infrastructure (RfLI), have also voted overwhelmingly for strike action. Members of the

Prospect union rejected a 4% pay offer for 2022 and said the offer was “well below the current inflation rate”.

There were signs of progress in other industrial disputes as the RMT members who work as security guards on [Eurostar](#) services called off strikes planned later this week. The workers, employed by contractor Mitie, were due to take industrial action on Friday and Sunday in a dispute over pay.

RMT said it suspended the strikes this week so that security staff could vote in a referendum on the latest offer from Mitie. However, further strike action on 22 and 23 December will take place if the dispute is not resolved, the union said.

Mitie said that pay negotiations with RMT were ongoing and that contingency measures were in place so that Eurostar services would not be affected.

Members of the Unite union who work for Network Rail in electrical control rooms also called off planned industrial action and accepted an improved pay offer.

Andrew Haines, chief executive of Network Rail, said: “The RMT leadership needs to think long and hard about what to do next. Further strike action will cause further misery for the rail industry and for their members, who will lose pay.

“This news is especially frustrating, given that we learned today that colleagues represented by Unite union have accepted the very same offer put to RMT members. The RMT are the outliers here – they need to stop playing politics and work with us to bring this dispute to an end.”

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2022.12.15 - Spotlight

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- [Dismantling Sellafield The epic task of shutting down a nuclear site](#)
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From Lidl's gold-dusted salmon to Iceland's toffee crowns: we taste-test the best budget Christmas food



Felicity Cloake gets stuck into the salmon. Photograph: Issy Croker/The Guardian

Low-cost supermarkets have gone upmarket, selling fancy scallop gratins and passionfruit panna cottas at tempting prices. But are they any good?



[Felicity Cloake](#)

Thu 15 Dec 2022 01.00 EST Last modified on Thu 15 Dec 2022 09.42 EST

We live in a world where the main message of [Christmas](#) is “spend, spend, spend”, and where festivity has become synonymous with luxury – but you shouldn’t have to bankrupt yourself to have a good time. Helpfully, the more budget-conscious retailers have pushed the boat out this year, hoping to lure customers away from their upmarket competitors with golden fish and gargantuan toffee crowns. With food prices rising at record rates, they’re likely to be an attractive option for many of us. But what’s worth spending your hard-earned cash on ... and what’s best left on the shelf?

Morrisons The Best Triple Smoked Scottish Salmon With Orange



£4.50 for 130g

Given the questionable desirability of smoking something as delicate as fish three times over, this is surprisingly mild – in fact, the fish could have done with a bit more flavour to stand up to the aggressively citrussy chunks of peel on top, which sadly look better than they taste. With the fish thin-cut and greasy, you'd be better off grating some orange zest over plain smoked salmon if this combination appeals (or pairing it with marmalade if you're feeling particularly daring). **4/10**

Asda Extra Special Blackthorn Dry-Cured Smoked Salmon



£6 for 120g

Cheap smoked salmon is often cut wafer-thin to help sustain the illusion of plenty, so it's refreshing to see some more generous slicing on display here. The blackthorn refers not to any sloe berry flavouring, but to a brand of Scottish sea salt that seems to have been similarly generously deployed, and paired with a fairly strident smoke. This would be best served with plenty of brown bread and butter or cream cheese to balance the salt. **7/10**

Lidl Deluxe Royal Smoked Scottish Salmon Fillet with Gold Dusting



£9.99 for 200g

If you want to really wow your guests – as in, stun them into goggling silence with the sheer strength of your canapé game – then this gold-dusted hunk of fishy bling is for you. The salmon itself has a good texture and a fairly mellow smoke, but let's be honest, all anyone's interested in is the gold. Cut into chunky gold-topped slices and party like King Croesus himself – definitely one to bear in mind for New Year's Eve, too. **9/10**

Morrisons The Best King Prawn Cocktail

£5 for 400g

My first reaction when I finally found some prawns at the bottom of the pot was to wonder what the legal definition of a king prawn is, because I'd expected something bigger than these little fellas – and given that, with seafood at least, smaller is usually better, less disappointingly bland as well. Fortunately the sauce packs enough of a boozy sweet and sour punch that if you stick them on top of some shredded iceberg, and top with cucumber cubes and cayenne pepper, no one is going to complain. That said, I suspect it would still be cheaper to make your own with frozen prawns, but for the time- or energy-pressed, these will be a godsend. **7/10**

Aldi Specially Selected Perfectly Seasoned Garlic & Herb Argentinian Red Prawn Skewers



£3.99 for 126g

Another one that has me googling prawns – Argentinian red prawns are a new one on me, but they do feature on [Seafood Watch's sustainability red list](#) of species to avoid. I'm unable to find out much more information about these ones, but frankly, they don't have a lot of character anyway – despite the name, even the marinade is a bit muted. Again, you'd be better off buying frozen Marine Conservation Society-certified prawns from closer to home and marinating them yourself, bearing in mind that the smaller the prawn, the sweeter the flavour. **5/10**

Aldi Specially Selected Rich & Creamy 2 Scallop & Champagne Gratins



£3.29 for 200g

A scallop shell gratin is always a joy to behold (so deliciously retro!), yet it must be noted that, despite the plump example on the box, the one I try has been chopped into tiny pieces texturally reminiscent of the rubber on top of a pencil. The sauce is creamy bland, with the lingering bitterness of the morning after one too many glasses of bad fizz – why anyone would cook with the world's most expensive sparkling wine is beyond me. If you want seafood, there are far better value options out there. **2/10**

[Aldi Specially Selected Lemon Infused Cranberry & Orange Salmon](#)



£6.99 for 534g

Though I'm not personally taken with the marriage of cranberry and fish, if you are tempted by this hunk of protein, I'd strongly advise you to carefully consider the instructions to bake it for more than an hour. Not only will you utterly spoil it, but with energy prices as they are, you'll also end up spending any money you might have saved on the salmon. If I were you, I'd check it after 20 minutes. It's fine. **7/10**

What appears to be a collapsed sandcastle is accompanied by a thimbleful of something troublingly gelatinous

Lidl Deluxe Stuffed Venison Joint with a Pork, Apple and Rosemary Stuffing with Smoked Streaky Bacon

£12.99 for 800g

I'm going to level with you: this one isn't a looker. God knows how they managed to get the pack shot, which is straight out of one of Henry VIII's banquets, but the reality is, according to the photographer, "a little plate of sadness" – the soggy stuffing spilling out like the filling from an abandoned

sofa under a smoking carapace of burnt bacon. Venison is a naturally lean, dry meat, so you'll need all your teeth here, but (plot twist) close your eyes and it tastes pretty good. **7/10**

Lidl Deluxe 2 Sage, Onion & Hazelnut Vegan Nut Roasts with Gravy

£3.99 for 350g

“Something has gone terribly wrong with the gravy,” the food stylist says apologetically as she presents me with what appears to be a collapsed sandcastle accompanied by a thimbleful of something troublingly gelatinous. Leaving the gravy aside, this has very old-school vegan vibes: lots of different textures, including peanuts, grated carrot, lentil and cranberries, held together by some damp stodge. The predominant flavour is onion, and nostalgia. It’s not terrible, but it’s 2022: vegans deserve better. **5/10**

Lidl Deluxe Brussels Sprouts & Bacon Gratin



£2.49 for 450g

I love sprouts. I love them raw, I love them al dente, and I love them slow-cooked into sweet, nutty submission accompanied by generous amounts of

butter. But this sad gratin, which has to go into the oven for 40 whole minutes, is like something you'd be served in an institutional setting, and the inmates would have just cause for complaint. Mushy, gloopy and thoroughly unpleasant – vegetables for people who want an excuse not to finish them. **1/10**



‘Guaranteed to knock you out after lunch ...’ Photograph: Issy Croker/The Guardian

Iceland Luxury The Perfect Sticky Toffee Crown

£10 for 2,070g

This bears an undeniable resemblance to a similar offering from M&S last Christmas ... but clocks in at almost twice the size. As dense and datey as any respectable sticky toffee pudding, but in a more regal format, with frankly obscene amounts of sticky treacly sauce, and another sweet creamy one that saves you making custard (though I wouldn't say no). This ably fulfils plum pudding's traditional role of knocking you out after lunch. Great value, especially as it can be microwaved in minutes. **9/10**

Morrisons The Best Passionfruit Panna Cotta Star



£7 for 65g

This is so solid I initially think it's made from white chocolate – no sexy wobble here – but though it's apparently a bit fiddly to turn out without damage to its marble perfection, the texture proves surprisingly soft and creamy. The flavour is good too: milky sweet, rather than over-sugared, and paired with a pleasingly sharp coulis. I'd be delighted to be presented with this after a Christmas feast. **9/10**

Lidl Deluxe Dark Chocolate & Salted Caramel Cottage



£8.99 for 800g

The idea of pouring molten liquid down the chimney of a cottage feels a bit Bad Santa. But, though this chunky chocolate dwelling filled with white chocolate mousse, salted caramel and hefty chocolate biscuit foundations is far too sweet for my taste, I suspect kids would absolutely love smashing it to pieces and demolishing the ruins – which is surely the true spirit of Christmas. Good fun (but make sure you schedule a nice energy-burning walk afterwards or they might start on your house next). **8/10**

Aldi Specially Selected Hand Finished Black Forest Snow Globe



£7.99 for 550g

A word of warning: don't whack this chocolate bauble theatrically with a spoon, hoping for a piñata effect. It's filled with a nondescript mousse (infused with "exhausted vanilla seeds" I feel a pang of empathy for), and not quite enough cake or amarena cherries to back up the Black Forest claim on the box, plus a weirdly grainy chocolate and hazelnut base that makes it hard to slice. Outrageously, it's a booze-free zone too. Unsurprisingly, I couldn't see it in Aldi Germany's Christmas selection online. Go for the cottage instead. **5/10**

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Dismantling Sellafield: the epic task of shutting down a nuclear site

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Donald Trump

Build the Wall blocks and Infowars whiskey: what the far right are gifting this Christmas

What to buy for the Maga person in your life – whether it's a Trumpy Lego knockoff or conspiracy-themed whiskey



You name it, some enterprising Maga entrepreneur has slapped 'Let's Go Brandon' on it. Photograph: Freedom Speaks Up



[Arwa Mahdawi](#)

Thu 15 Dec 2022 01.00 EST Last modified on Thu 15 Dec 2022 01.03 EST

'Tis the season of the gift guide. They're everywhere you look: 10 holiday presents for the dog enthusiast in your life! Fifteen great holiday ideas for the grumpy atheist in your life! Twelve cigar-themed knick-knacks you can buy your cigar-loving partner! And, of course, there are all the usual Him and Her gift guides. As one viral tweet [put it](#): "There's no funnier caricature of masculinity than the Him from 'holiday gifts for him'. he doesn't drink any liquid but whiskey. he's got 20 watches on each wrist. if he saw a single texture other than leather he would throw one of his pocket knives at it."

Now, I don't normally do gift guides because I am a Serious Journalist who writes hard-hitting stories about pepper-spraying myself and cloning my dog. However, I'll make an exception this year because, truly, we are spoiled for choice when it comes to completely bonkers conservative merchandise.

Donald Trump's ascent in 2016 kicked off a boom in the [extremism economy](#). The internet is littered with retailers like the [Maga Mall](#) and the Patriot Depot, selling everything from T-shirts with slogans like "Fully vaccinated by the blood of Jesus" to festive gun holsters. If you're trying to

find a holiday present for the far-right extremist in your life, the options are endless, so I've curated a helpful list.

‘Let’s Go Brandon’ wrapping paper

A couple of years ago, [Brandon Brown](#) was a mid-tier Nascar driver nobody except racing buffs had heard of. Due to a strange confluence of events, however (people yelling “fuck Joe Biden” at a race and a sports reporter trying to pretend the crowd was saying “let’s go Brandon”), he became a catchphrase in the culture wars. You can find Let’s Go Brandon bumper stickers, mugs, hats, cookies, condoms … you name it, some enterprising Maga entrepreneur has slapped “Let’s Go Brandon” on it. You can even wrap your Brandon bounty in “Let’s Go Brandon” wrapping paper. A Georgia company called Freedom Speaks Up claims it sold over 500,000 sq ft of the novelty wrapping paper last year and expects to double that number this year. “We’re having tons of fun with this, there’s no way to spend 20 bucks and get more smiles on Christmas morning,” the CEO [said in a statement](#). Heartwarming stuff. This is what Christmas is all about, eh?



Photograph: Patriot Depot

A Trump Maga Build the Wall construction set

The Maga crowd still seem to think it's 2016 and can't drop their Trumpy catchphrases. If you'd like a little throwback toy, how about a Build the Wall construction set for just \$19.95? Sold by [the Patriot Depot](#), it's described as "the best-selling conservative toy of all time". I'm not sure what data this is based on, but we'll just go with it, shall we? The marketing blurb also claims that "the Left needed psychiatric help after seeing the Build the Wall set for the first time. They are furious that it's back." Yep, I'm triggered over here. Going to need to find a safe space stat.

I think it's interesting that the Patriot Depot's tagline is "supplies for the conservative revolution". Apparently everyone's going to be playing with knock-off Lego in the conservative revolution. Which, you know, doesn't sound too bad.

A butt plug from Target

During a recent speech at the New York Young Republicans Club Gala, Marjorie Taylor Greene, the woman who once ranted about the "[gazpacho police](#)", shared some unsolicited thoughts about sex toys. "By the way, you can pick up a butt plug or a dildo at Target and CVS nowadays," the far-right [Georgia congresswoman said](#). "I don't even know how we got here ... This is the state that we're living in right now." I'm not sure this was supposed to be a gift idea for Young Republicans, but some people interpreted it as such. "Sounds like someone's giving her Secret Santa a hint!" Jimmy Kimmel joked.

Alex Jones's conspiracy-theory-themed whiskey

Every celebrity in the world has a booze brand these days. George Clooney has a tequila company, Ryan Reynolds launched a gin brand, Matthew McConaughey collaborated on a bourbon. I could go on – at this rate it would be quicker to make a list of celebrities who *haven't* plastered their names on a bottle of alcohol. Even D-list conspiracy theorists in trouble with the law are getting on the boozy bandwagon. [Rumour has it](#) that Alex Jones – the guy who was recently ordered to pay [nearly \\$1.5bn](#) in damages to the families of victims of the 2012 Sandy Hook elementary school mass shooting, after years of [spreading lies about the tragedy](#) on his Infowars

show – will soon be releasing a whiskey. What’s it called? Conspiracy, of course.



Photograph: YouTube/OfficialAsSeenOnTV1

A cute little Trumpy Bear

Trumpy Bear, a 22in-long stuffed toy with a Trump-style toupee, first appeared on the scene in 2017 with a [completely absurd commercial](#). “When America is great, business is great,” says one man in the advert. “When business is great, I’m great. I love you, Trumpy Bear.” Because this was all completely deranged, everyone assumed the bear was fake. It was not. It was a real product that retailed for about \$60 and flew off the shelves during the holidays. “They’re very popular gift items both for people who like and dislike the president,” an executive from the Trumpy Bear company [told the Cut](#). If you missed out on getting your hands on one while Trump was in office, you’ll be glad to know the bear is still available. Presidents may come and go, but Trumpy Bear is for ever.

A subscription to the Guardian

Go on, trigger them. I dare you.

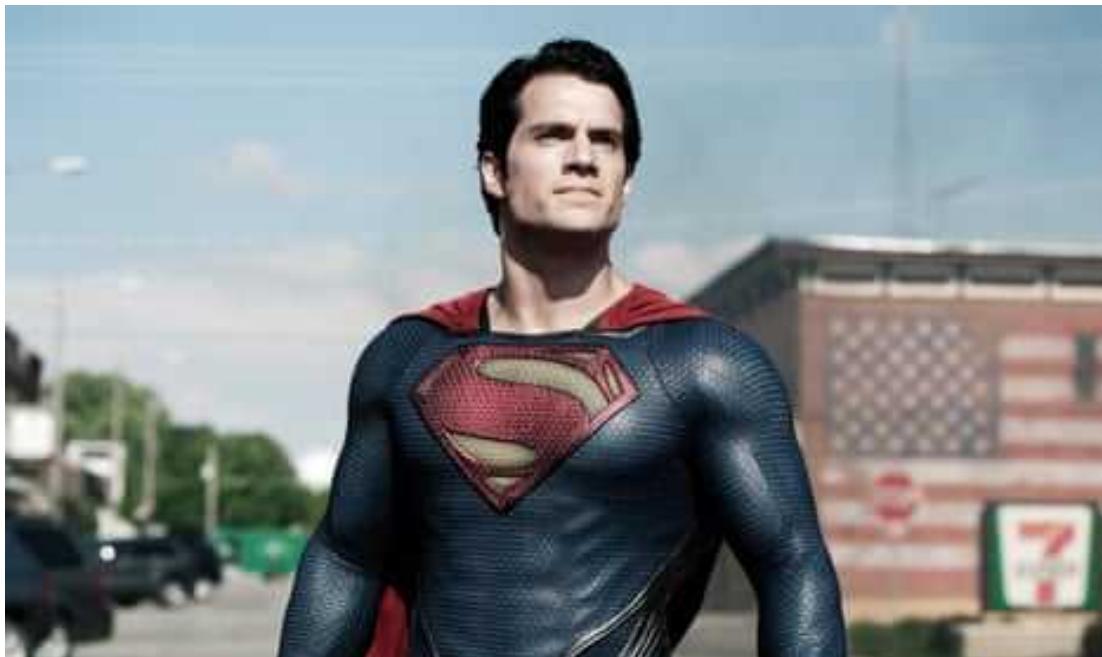
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[Warner Bros](#)

Henry Cavill dropped as Superman weeks after announcing return to role

Actor says ‘this news isn’t the easiest’ as DC Studio’s new co-chairman James Gunn builds new universe



Henry Cavill as Superman in *Man of Steel*. Cavill has been told he won’t reprise the role in *Guardians of the Galaxy* director James Gunn’s film.
Photograph: Clay Enos

[Sian Cain](#)

[@siancain](#)

Wed 14 Dec 2022 22.32 EST Last modified on Thu 15 Dec 2022 15.51 EST

Guardians of the Galaxy director and DC Studios’ new co-chairman, James Gunn, is writing a Superman movie that won’t involve the actor [Henry Cavill](#), who said it was “not the easiest news” after he only recently announced that he would be returning to the role.

The new [Superman](#) film penned by Gunn will take the character in a different direction and focus on the superhero's younger years. The announcement comes amid momentous change at DC Studios and parent company Warner Brothers, which has been slashing scores of projects to cut costs after merging with Discovery, Inc.

Cavill has played Superman since the 2013 film Man of Steel and last appeared in the role in a cameo in Black Adam earlier this year. In October, after resigning from the lead role in Netflix show The Witcher, he announced he would be returning to play Superman again.

On Wednesday, [Cavill wrote on Instagram](#) that Gunn and his co-chair, Peter Safran, had met with him to deliver the news.

"I will, after all, not be returning as Superman," Cavill wrote. "After being told by the studio to announce my return back in October, prior to their hire, this news isn't the easiest, but that's life. The changing of the guard is something that happens. I respect that. James and Peter have a universe to build. I wish them and all involved with the new universe the best of luck, and the happiest of fortunes."

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Fans might want to "mourn for a bit", he wrote, but "Superman is still around".

"My turn to wear the cape has passed, but what Superman stands for never will. It's been a fun ride with you all, onwards and upwards."

Gunn's film will reportedly focus on the younger years of the hero, during his years posing as Daily Planet reporter Clark Kent, with insiders telling the Hollywood Reporter that Gunn could potentially direct the film as well as writing it.

“Peter & I have a DC slate ready to go, which we couldn’t be more over-the-moon about; we’ll be able to share some exciting information about our first projects at the beginning of the new year,” Gunn [wrote on Twitter](#) on Wednesday. “Among those on the slate is Superman. In the initial stages, our story will be focusing on an earlier part of Superman’s life, so the character will not be played by Henry Cavill. But we just had a great meeting with Henry and we’re big fans and we talked about a number of exciting possibilities to work together in the future.”

Cavill’s announcement that he would return as Superman was reportedly signed off by Warner Bros, before Gunn and Safran assumed their roles at DC Studios on 1 November. Just six days before that, Cavill [had said in an interview](#) that he was looking forward to playing an “enormously joyful” Superman and that he was “very excited” about Gunn being hired.

On Tuesday it was revealed that DC Studios’ Wonder Woman director Patty Jenkins would no longer be working on a [third film in the franchise](#). In response to reports, she denied quitting, writing in a lengthy open letter: “I never walked away. I was open to considering anything asked of me. It was my understanding there was nothing I could do to move anything forward at this time.”

The Hollywood Reporter claims that Gunn and Safran have also met with Batman actor Ben Affleck to float the idea of him directing for them in the future.

A Black Superman film written by author Ta-Nehisi Coates and produced by JJ Abrams is reportedly still going ahead, and will not be impacted by Gunn’s film.

Gunn has long been in the running to make a Superman film: in 2018, when Gunn left Marvel Studios for DC when [he was temporarily fired from Guardians of the Galaxy Vol 3](#), then-Warners boss Toby Emmerich [pushed for Gunn to take on Superman](#). Gunn wrote and directed The Suicide Squad instead.

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2022.12.15 - Opinion

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It's time to give unions a seat at the table in talks about how Britain is run

[Martin Kettle](#)



This winter's wave of strikes isn't just a protest at poor pay, but at a broken economic and political system



Fire Brigades Union rally regarding possible strike action, near statue of Winston Churchill, London, 6 December 2022. Photograph: Peter Nicholls/Reuters

Thu 15 Dec 2022 01.00 EST Last modified on Thu 15 Dec 2022 05.45 EST

A strike can be caused by many different things, but all strikes are the result of societal or economic failure. The failure can be at the micro level – a lack of agreement between management and workforce about what can be afforded, for instance. But the failure can also be at the macro level – government policy that pushes businesses and workers to the limit, inadequacy of the dominant ideas of political economy to cope with changing times and new concerns, or even a failure of the collective imagination of an era or culture.

So, when the UK is hit, as this December, by strikes involving nurses, teachers and lawyers, along with postal, rail and energy workers, there is plenty of micro failure in individual industries to go round. But since the UK is also recording its highest number of [days lost through strikes](#) for more than a decade, with those figures certain to rise again over the next quarter, the failure is simultaneously macro – and on a substantial, even historic, scale. The current disputes differ in various ways but they share something larger. They are part of a national failure of industrial policy that demands different, national solutions.

We should not be romantic about strikes. They may sometimes be unavoidable, though not always, as anyone old enough to have worked in the print industry in the 1970s will recall. They may sometimes be judged successful, though there have also been catastrophic strikes, such as the 1980s miners' dispute and others that, even if successful in the narrow sense, have left legacies of bitterness. Strikes can be heroic, unquestionably so in famous cases, but a politics that is too often rooted in heroic defeatsought to stimulate us to look for different ideas that might work better in the businesses, industries and services on which we rely.

'We can't afford not to': a firefighter, paramedic, train driver and teacher on UK strikes – video

Britain's winter of strikes has been triggered by inflation and by the continuing low level of real wages, especially in the public sector. But the immediate disputes rest on other, older failures, especially of recurrent attempts to cut public spending too far, including on wages and staffing, without increasing taxes and growing the real economy.

The strikes also send a larger message. They signal the failure of an industrial policy that involves far too few challenges to business, and which has assumed that unions are irrelevant, can be legislated out of the picture (as in [strike ban plans](#)) and are to be largely ignored. This has been a recurrent problem in British history. It shouldn't take a strike to raise it up the political agenda. In practice, however, it often does. It is doing so now.

It's almost a century since the [General Strike](#) of 1926. That strike suffered as heroic a defeat as any in British history. But it showed that the unions could not be destroyed, and that they were around to stay. It led to one of those intermittent periods in which the country glimpsed a different approach to industrial relations. And it is full of echoes for today, when new approaches are again needed.

The year after the strike, a group of industrial employers headed by Sir Alfred Mond, the head of the newly formed Imperial Chemical Industries (ICI), wrote to the TUC general council proposing discussions on greater cooperation in British industry. "We realise," Mond wrote, "that industrial reconstruction can only be undertaken with the cooperation of those

empowered to speak for organised labour. We believe that the common interests which bind us are more powerful than the apparently divergent interests that separate.”



Striking NHS domestic cleaners, London, 1 December 2022. Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

The so-called [Mond-Turner talks](#) with the TUC followed, during which [Ernest Bevin](#), a founder of the Transport and General Workers’ Union, with his formidable strategic sense of what might be gained from them, ensured that everything about industry – including finance, markets and management – should be on the table, alongside more bread-and-butter trade union issues. In 1929, a national industrial council was formed, whose purpose was to consolidate a shared approach to industrial change and unemployment. It was all swept away by the slump of the early 1930s, but Britain’s first experiment with codetermination in industry is full of lessons for the post-industrial landscape of the 21st century, if we are smart enough to learn them.

If that is to happen, however, British government and business – and also the unions – are going to have to learn new habits to replace the failed approaches that have led to the current winter of disputes. The political scientist Andrew Hindmoor gives a [revealing illustration](#) of what is wrong.

In the coalition government of 2010-15, he calculated, business representatives attended [45% of all meetings](#) with ministers. In the Treasury and business departments, the figure was 60%. By comparison, trade unions attended 5%.

That sharp disparity of access will not have changed during the seven years of Conservative government since then. If anything, as the [PPE scandals](#) suggest, it has probably widened. But the disparity needs to narrow. That can be achieved either by voluntary initiatives, as happened in the Mond-Turner period, or it must be led by government. But the words written by Mond in 1927 remain potent and true today.

The current disputes all reflect the slow shift in the economy from wages to profits. If Britain wants to prevent strikes like these from recurring – and we should – the state doesn't simply need to pay its workers better, though that is certainly the most immediate part of it. It also needs to reinvent an industrial policy for the 21st century based on codetermination and industrial democracy. The phrase may have fallen into disuse nearly 50 years ago, but what this country needs is a pay policy.

- Martin Kettle is a Guardian columnist
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OpinionMarriage

Why are so many women living in separate homes from their partners and kids? Because it's a win-win situation

[Emma Brockes](#)



For many women, the pandemic deepened the gendered division of labour and they simply had enough. For those who could afford it, they found a room of their own



Director Tim Burton and actor Helena Bonham Carter were the poster couple for living in separate houses – until they divorced. Photograph: Suzanne Plunkett/Reuters

Thu 15 Dec 2022 03.00 EST Last modified on Thu 15 Dec 2022 07.07 EST

The model coupling – the dream, if you will – was always Helena Bonham Carter and Tim Burton, or [Annie Leibovitz and Susan Sontag](#): maintaining a marriage, de facto or real, across two separate households, so that you got all the benefits with none of the gross bits. You could keep the magic alive, extend the honeymoon period indefinitely and, by protecting your space and rationing your time together, create a scenario in which you were actually happy to see each other. Trends originating with celebrities tend to be fake, meaningless or massaged, but the appeal of this model has lingered on. Overlooking the small matter of money, what, exactly, is there not to like?

Or rather, what is there not to like for the women in any given couple? In the New York Times this week – sound the klaxon – a [new trends piece](#) drops on the growing numbers of women in the US who, post-pandemic, are opting to sustain the separate household model of marriage, established during lockdown by some families to reduce Covid transmissions, and proving so preferable to the norm, apparently, that they're in no hurry to reunite with their husbands.

It's well known that among straight couples, women initiate most divorces – by some reckonings 70% – and pushing for separate households is, I would imagine, a staging post towards this end for many of the numbers in this new trend. But for others, perhaps it really is a viable solution to the problem of loving your spouse but not wanting them underfoot all the sodding time.

I confess, I'm biased in this area. I live with my kids, but I've never cohabited full time with a romantic partner. The luxury of deciding when people come and go in your house is a hard one to relinquish and once you get used to not living inside someone else's emotional weather – the idea of it makes me simultaneously panicked and livid – it's very hard to give it up.

In the US and the UK marriage numbers have been declining for the last decade, and for some time in both countries, single adult women have outnumbered their married counterparts. What's new is the surge in those who still identify as married but live apart from their spouse; in the US, married couples maintaining separate households rose by a quarter between 2000 and 2019, and in 2021, that number sharply climbed again, according to the New York Times. It is estimated by the Census Bureau that 3.89 million Americans, or 2.95% of married couples, live apart. They even have a little acronym: Lat, or “living apart together”.

The trend appears a likely result both of everyone being home for the past two-plus years and driving each other insane, and the fact that after lockdown ended, studies showed that men swiftly dropped the childcare and domestic work some had adopted during that period. Judging by case studies in the article, for some women, quarantining in a quiet, separate residence while their husbands shouldered the caretaking at home, struck them at the level of a revelation. For others, the fact that even a global pandemic did little to undermine – or in some cases, actively deepened – the division of labour at home along traditional gender lines had a straw-that-broke-it effect.

I mean, obviously there are downsides to this whole thing, mainly financial, particularly if you have kids. The overheads on two households are eye-bleeding. I remember being shaken when, straight out of college, a few friends hastily moved in with their partners and just as hastily married, primarily, it seemed to me, to reduce costs. This seemed mad at the time, but

on reflection, perhaps, was no madder a rationale than any other. And on closer inspection, of course, neither of those totemic celebrity relationships advertised anything beyond separation (Bonham Carter/Burton) or dysfunction (Leibovitz/Sontag).

The Lat model can also be a dodge, I see that. If I wasn't too cheap and lazy to go to therapy I would address the fact that my own behaviour is often avoidance masquerading as something more noble and decisive, a laundering process in which I am expert. Still, if the close-proximity model – stay in my general area, pop around all the time, but if you don't mind awfully, don't leave stuff in my fridge and if you're in a mood (or I am) bugger off when I say so – is becoming increasingly popular, I can say with some confidence it works for me.

- Emma Brockes is a Guardian columnist
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Snapshot of 2022Queen Elizabeth II

I thought mourning the Queen would be a personal choice. Then I saw the billboards

[Billy Bragg](#)



As I drove away from Winchester service station, I realised a long-planned campaign was being put into action

- What was the image on your phone that defined 2022? [Writers give their perspectives](#)



‘The two dark sentinels standing guard at Winchester on that September night seemed to silently insist that, before entering, we bow our heads in respect of a version of our national story’ Photograph: Billy Bragg/The Guardian

Thu 15 Dec 2022 02.00 EST Last modified on Thu 15 Dec 2022 15.51 EST

I learned the Queen was gravely ill while travelling on a train in Germany. It was several hours before the official announcement of [her death](#); at this point, doctors were “concerned” for her health. But the image of a BBC newsreader in black tie and jacket gave the game away. This was the moment that the national broadcaster had been nervously rehearsing for decades. Strict protocols were in place to ensure no embarrassments. If the BBC had gone to black tie, I thought, Her Majesty must have already passed.

By the time I reached my gig that evening, the announcement had been made. I sat up late into the night, watching reactions to the news on TV. Flying home the next day, I wasn’t sure what to expect. Would people be sombre or shocked? Flags flew at half-mast, but Heathrow was as bustling as ever and, driving home to Dorset, things looked pretty much as they always did.

Stopping for coffee at Winchester services on the M3, I got my first taste of

the mood that would come to dominate the following days. Either side of the entrance to the food hall, the video billboards that usually advertised the delights available within now showed a portrait of the Queen, alternating with her royal cypher and her dates, 1926-2022. I took a photo and sent it to my brother-in-law. I found it hard not to see it as a crass attempt by advertising companies to jump on the bandwagon of national grieving. As I drove on into the night, a long-planned campaign was being put into action, its aim to ensure that we all participated in mourning the loss of the Queen.

What to make of patriotism? To paraphrase Martin Luther King, the arc of history is long, but it bends towards inclusivity. It's why corporations believe they can reach a younger demographic by commissioning ads that celebrate diversity, why the National Trust seeks to highlight the connection between slavery and stately homes, and why there is a plus sign at the end of LGBTQ.

Patriotism chafes against this trend. Resistant to change, reliant on conformity, it takes pride in immutable symbols and institutions, such as the flag and the armed forces, and prizes assimilation over diversity. While inclusivity presents as an invitation, patriotism is at best an expectation and at worst a demand. Are you with us or against us?

I found it hard to disentangle the period of official solemnity from the politics of this country over the past decade. This was a time when those who seemed determined to offend were elevated to the highest offices in the land, using dog-whistles to stir up division. Attempts to have a deeper understanding of our colonial past were met with outrage and reaction. Millions were put through privation and economic hardship. The flag was waved by our politicians more and more, making it mean less and less. Britain became ever more inhospitable to those who choose to make their homes here.

The two dark sentinels standing guard at Winchester on that September night seemed to silently insist that, before entering, we bow our heads in respect of a version of our national story – but who decides on that story? And where is it going?

For those on the outside looking in, it will take more than the coronation of a

new king to bring the country together. In order to feel that they belong, people need to see themselves as part of the national narrative and feel that their experiences are being treated with respect. That is simply not achievable at a time when politics rewards those bent on exclusion.

- Billy Bragg is a singer-songwriter and activist

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

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Thanks to you, my glasses no longer slip down my nose. If only it didn't hurt too much to wear them

[Adrian Chiles](#)



You solve one problem, only for a worse one to pop up. Shall I tell you all about my flesh-coloured papule?



Turns out there are worse things than insecurely attached spectacles.
Photograph: Posed by model. DjelicS/Getty Images

Thu 15 Dec 2022 02.00 EST Last modified on Thu 15 Dec 2022 05.46 EST

Unaccountably, I woke up early the other morning with the song China in Your Hand by T’Pau ringing in my ears. Odd that. Not heard or thought about it for years. I put it on.

“Don’t push too far, your dreams are china in your hand,” Carol Decker advises, adding, “Don’t wish too hard because they may come true.” She sings the truth.

Only last month, you Guardian readers made a dream of mine come true. Very decent of you, but I wish you hadn’t. I’d written [a moving, heartfelt, anguished piece](#) about my lifelong struggle to stop my spectacles continually slipping down my nose. This elicited a variety of responses, some of which weren’t ungenerous. Advice, if not sympathy, came my way. One suggestion was to buy these little thingies you attach to the end of the arms of the glasses to keep them in solid position behind your ears.

I walked to the shops and my specs stayed in place. Oh joy

They worked. Oh joy. I walked to the shops and the specs stayed in place. On the way home I broke into a run. They didn't move. Even a quick pogo around didn't shift them. My life had changed. But within a week a sharp pain developed around the bridge of my nose. Before long a dramatic kind of sore had developed. Oh no – I knew it was all going too well.

This, it turned out, was an acanthoma fissuratum. According to DermNet, this is “an uncommon condition that occurs in people who wear glasses”, presenting as “a firm flesh-coloured papule, nodule or plaque that has a central furrow dividing the lesion in half”. Luckily, there is a cure: not wearing your specs for a while. At least I don't need a prescription for that. When I go back to glasses, it will have to be without the little thingies. It's a shame – we were good together.

- Adrian Chiles is a writer, broadcaster and a Guardian columnist
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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/dec/15/thanks-to-you-my-glasses-no-longer-slip-down-my-nose-if-only-it-didnt-hurt-too-much-to-wear-them>

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[China](#)

Chinese doctors and nurses reportedly told to work while infected as Covid surges

Some Beijing hospitals have as many as 80% of staff infected, according to one doctor, leading to serious staff shortages



One doctor in China reported that as many as 80% of staff were infected in some Beijing hospitals. Photograph: Thomas Peter/Reuters

*Helen Davidson in Taipei
@heldavidson*

Thu 15 Dec 2022 01.19 EST Last modified on Thu 15 Dec 2022 15.51 EST

Chinese doctors and nurses are being told to keep working even when infected with Covid-19, staff and residents reported, as the virus rips through the population in the wake of eased restrictions.

Some hospitals in Beijing have up to 80% of their staff infected, but many of them are still required to work due to staff shortages, a doctor in a large public hospital in Beijing told Reuters, adding he had spoken to his peers at other big hospitals in the capital.

All operations and surgeries had been cancelled at his hospital unless the patient was “dying tomorrow”, he said, declining to be named due to the sensitivity of the subject.

A senior World Health Organization official said on Wednesday that China’s flare-up started “long before” restrictions were lifted, but since the sudden shift in policy major cities in Beijing appear to have experienced a huge surge in cases of Covid-19. Authorities have said it is “impossible” to measure, since most people are not being tested.

“The explosion of cases in China had started long before any easing of the zero-Covid policy,” WHO emergencies chief Michael Ryan said on Wednesday. “There’s a narrative that, in some way, China lifted the restrictions and all of a sudden, the disease is out of control,” he added at the UN health agency’s headquarters in Geneva.

“The disease was spreading intensively because the control measures in themselves were not stopping the disease.”

In Sichuan, a doctor surnamed Li told Reuters that their tertiary hospital was “overwhelmed with patients”.

“There are 700, 800 people with fever coming every day,” Li said. “We are running out of medicine stocks for fever and cold. A few nurses at the fever clinic were tested positive, there aren’t any special protective measures for hospital staff and I believe many of us will soon get infected.”

Claims of rampant infections among hospital staff are also spreading across social media. One Chongqing resident said primary care in their city had “imploded”.

“80% of the newly admitted patients in our small third-level respiratory department in a remote city are positive,” they wrote on Weibo.

“From December 8, when the first positive patient was allowed to be admitted, to today, December 13, at least half of the medical staff in our department were infected. At the beginning the infected were allowed to go home to rest, but now as long as it is not very serious symptoms, they are not allowed to go home.”

The Guardian was unable to reach management staff at several hospitals, and health authorities did not immediately respond to queries.



Beijing residents line up to enter the fever clinic of a hospital. Photograph: Andy Wong/AP

The outbreak is not limited to Beijing, and the sudden pivot in official policy and messaging about the dangers of the virus [brought alarm and fear](#) to some. Residents across other major cities told the Guardian it felt like “positive cases are everywhere”.

A Chongqing resident said all the teachers at their child’s school were positive and classes had moved online. In Zhengzhou, one person said many businesses had switched to working from home.

A Guangzhou resident said the streets were quiet, with many people at home, but businesses and restaurants were still open. “I tried to call the hospital hotline for fever but no one answered the phone,” she said.

The White House national security spokesperson, John Kirby, said the US government was ready to assist China with the outbreak if Beijing requested. Kirby told reporters that China has not requested help at this stage.

“We have made that point that we are prepared to help in any way they might find acceptable. That was true back when the pandemic was raging, and that is true today,” he said.

The WHO also raised concerns that China’s population of 1.4bn was not adequately vaccinated.

China has said about 90% of its population is vaccinated and its National [Health](#) Commission (NHC) on Wednesday announced it would roll out the second booster shots for high-risk groups and elderly people over 60 years old.

Data from the NHC show vaccinations have been ramping up in recent days. The latest official data shows it administered 1.43 million shots on Tuesday, well above the November rate of 100,000-200,000 doses a day.

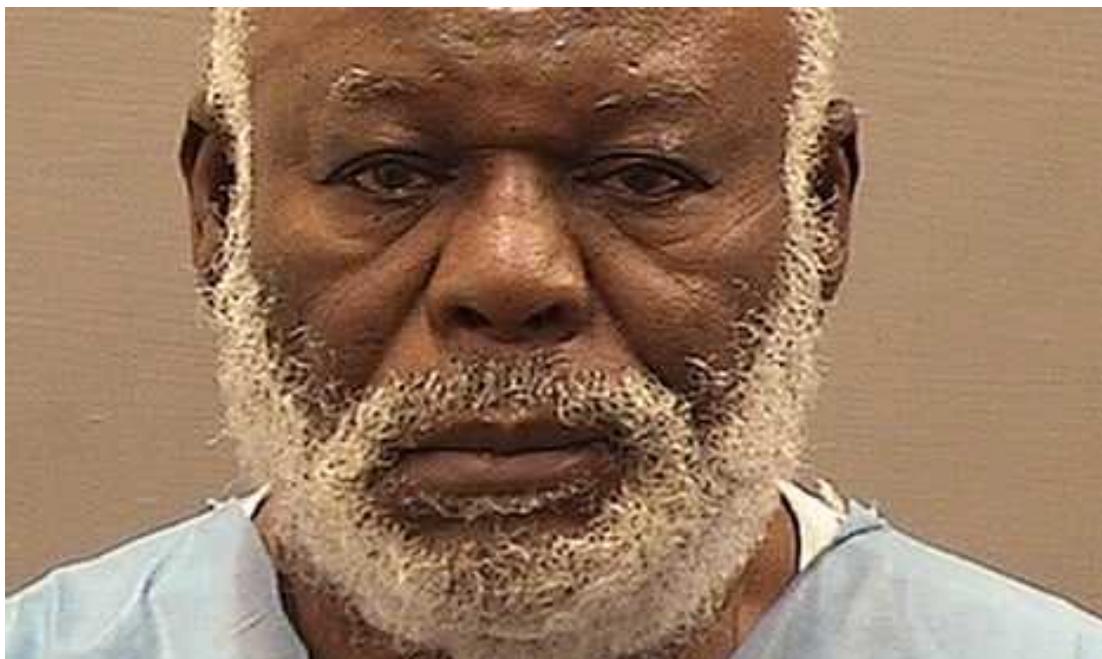
Reuters contributed to this report

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Lockerbie plane bombing

Libya opens inquiry into alleged abduction of Lockerbie bomb suspect

Investigation launched after complaint from Mohammed Abouagela Masud's family that his extradition was not lawful



A police photograph of Lockerbie bombing suspect Mohammed Abouagela Masud. He is accused of making the bomb that blew up Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie in Scotland in 1988. Photograph: Alexandria Sheriff'S Office/Reuters

AP in Benghazi

Wed 14 Dec 2022 16.52 ESTLast modified on Wed 14 Dec 2022 17.14 EST

Libya's chief prosecutor has opened an investigation into the extradition of a Libyan national accused of making the bomb that downed Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988, to the United States.

US authorities announced on Sunday that they had arrested former intelligence officer Mohammed Abouagela Masud. The following day he appeared in federal court in Washington DC. and was charged with an act of international terrorism.

Speaking to reporters in Tripoli, prosecutor Al-Siddiq Al-Sour said the investigation has been opened after a complaint from Masud's family that his extradition was not lawful. Al-Sour later confirmed the investigation with the Associated Press, but did not provide further details.

Libya and the US have no formal extradition agreement.

Masud was kidnapped from his family home in Tripoli by armed men in November, according to a statement issued by his family shortly after the incident. The family blames authorities in Libya's capital Tripoli for the alleged kidnapping and extradition, it added. Masud's family have released no official comment since that statement and did not respond to the AP's request for comment.

Torn by civil war since 2011, Libya is divided between the government of the prime minister, Hamid Dbeibah, in Tripoli and a rival government based in eastern Libya headed by PM Fathi Bashagha.

In western Libya, militia groups have amassed great wealth and power from kidnappings and their involvement in the country's lucrative human trafficking trade.

The official spokesperson for Libya's Tripoli government did not respond to a request for comment about the investigation.

According to Jalel Harchaoui, a north Africa-focused analyst, a proper investigation into how Masud was taken, detained, and transferred would probably uncover illegal steps. "The investigation is unlikely to take place unless Deibah and his support base grow significantly weaker," he said.

On Tuesday, Bashagha labelled Masud's extradition illegal and called for the former intelligence officer's immediate release.

The New York-bound Pan Am flight exploded over Lockerbie less than an hour after takeoff from London on 21 December, 1988, killing 259 people onboard and 11 others on the ground when it crashed. About 190 American citizens were on the flight, which was destined for New York.

A breakthrough in the decades-long investigation came in 2017 when the US Justice Department received a copy of an interview that Masud, a former explosives expert with Libya's intelligence services, had given to the north African country's law enforcement in 2012, while in custody following the collapse of Col Muammar Gaddafi's decades-long rule.

In the interview, US officials said, Masud admitted building the bomb in the Pan Am attack. He also said the operation was ordered by Gaddafi's intelligence services, according to an FBI affidavit.

American authorities in December 2020 announced charges against Masud. At that time, he was in Libyan custody.

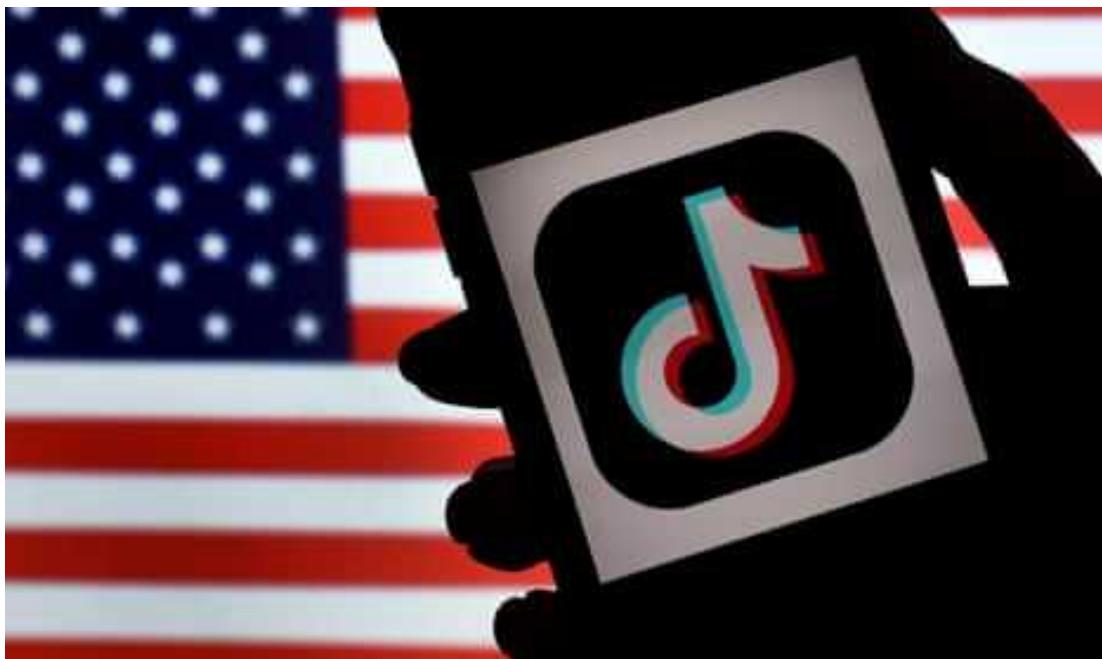
Masud is the third Libyan intelligence official charged in the US in connection with the Lockerbie attack, but the first to appear in an American courtroom. US officials have not explained how he was taken into their custody.

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US Senate

Senate votes to ban TikTok on US government-owned devices

Bill comes after several states barred employees from downloading the app on state-owned gadgets over data concerns



The bill must still be approved by the House and signed by President Biden to take effect. Photograph: Olivier Douliery/AFP/Getty Images

Reuters

Wed 14 Dec 2022 21.37 EST Last modified on Thu 15 Dec 2022 08.47 EST

The [US Senate](#) late on Wednesday passed by voice-vote a bill to bar federal employees from using Chinese-owned TikTok on government-owned devices.

The bill must still be approved by the US [House of Representatives](#) before going to Joe Biden for approval. The House of Representatives would need

to pass the Senate bill before the current congressional session ends, which is expected next week.

The vote is the latest action on the part of US lawmakers to crackdown on Chinese companies amid national security fears that Beijing could use them to spy on Americans.

The Senate action comes after North Dakota and Iowa this week joined a growing number of states in banning [TikTok](#), owned by ByteDance, from state-owned devices amid concerns that data could be passed on to the Chinese government.

During the last Congress, the Senate in August 2020 unanimously approved legislation to bar TikTok from government devices. The bill's sponsor, Republican Senator Josh Hawley, reintroduced in legislation in 2021.

Many federal agencies including the defense, Homeland Security and state departments already ban TikTok from government-owned devices. "TikTok is a major security risk to the United States, and it has no place on government devices," Hawley said previously.

North Dakota Governor Doug Burgum and Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds issued directives prohibiting executive branch agencies from downloading the app on any government-issued equipment. Around a dozen US states have taken similar actions, including Alabama and Utah this week.

TikTok has said the concerns are largely fueled by misinformation and are happy to meet with policymakers to discuss the company's practices.

"We're disappointed that so many states are jumping on the political bandwagon to enact policies based on unfounded falsehoods about TikTok that will do nothing to advance the national security of the United States," the company said Wednesday.

Other states taking similar actions include [Texas](#), Maryland and [South Dakota](#).

Republican Senator Marco Rubio on Tuesday unveiled bipartisan legislation to ban TikTok altogether in the United States, ratcheting up pressure on ByteDance due to US fears the app could be used to spy on Americans and censure content. Rubio also is a sponsor of Hawley's TikTok government-device ban bill.

The legislation would block all transactions from any social media company in or under the influence of China and Russia, Rubio's office said.

At a hearing last month, FBI Director Chris Wray said TikTok's US operations raise national security concerns.

In 2020, then President Donald Trump attempted to block new users from downloading TikTok and ban other transactions that would have effectively blocked the apps' use in the United States but lost a series of court battles over the measure.

The government's committee on foreign investment in the United States, a powerful national security body, in 2020 ordered ByteDance to divest TikTok because of the fears that US user data could be passed to the Chinese government, though ByteDance has not done so.

CFIUS and TikTok have been in talks for months to reach a national security agreement to protect the data of TikTok's more than 100 million users but it does not appear any deal will be reached before the end of the year.

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Biodiversity

Landscape restoration projects across Europe boosted by \$26m awards

The efforts, including restoring grassland in the Georgian steppe, will work in cooperation with local communities to repair biodiversity hotspots



One project aims to restore habitats within the Rhodope mountains on the border between Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey. Photograph: Evgeni Dinev Photography/Getty Images

*[Patrick Barkham](#)
[@patrick_barkham](#)*

Thu 15 Dec 2022 02.00 EST Last modified on Thu 15 Dec 2022 02.03 EST

From the wilderness of the Finnish boreal forest to the busy Solent estuary, seven landscape restoration projects across Europe have been boosted by more than \$26m (£21m) from the [Endangered Landscapes Programme](#) (ELP).

The projects cover an area 18 times the size of Greater London and include returning nature to the Iberian Highlands, restoring grassland in the Georgian steppe, and replacing coniferous plantations with natural riverine and deciduous forests in the Rhodope mountains in south-east Bulgaria.

The restoration efforts aim to repair biodiversity hotspots, reintroduce species and work with local communities at a scale large enough to enable ecosystems and natural processes to re-establish themselves. According to the ELP, which is managed by the [Cambridge Conservation Initiative](#) and backed by Arcadia, a charitable fund established by billionaire philanthropists Peter Baldwin and Lisbet Rausing, such ambitious landscape restoration will ultimately prove a cost-effective way to address the extinction and climate crises.

In Finland, [a \\$1.5m award](#) will fund attempts to save from extinction a unique, land-locked population of Atlantic salmon by revitalising the fish's spawning grounds and improving river water quality by restoring 1,000 hectares (2,500 acres) of carbon-sequestering boreal peatlands.

There are just 30 to 50 mother salmon returning to spawn each year in the Koitajoki watershed. Two hydroelectric dams block the migration routes of the landlocked salmon, which are a population that naturally never journey into the sea but migrate to lakes within Finland. The fish survive only because conservationists physically move them over land to assist their migration.

“It’s a knife-edge moment,” said Tero Mustonen of the Koitajoki watershed project. “This \$1.5m project will do massively important work to support the last remaining spawning habitat and juvenile fish habitat that exists and also improve water quality. It is addressing, finally, degradation across Koitajoki in scale. I have a vision of uniquely landlocked Atlantic salmon and precious whitefish swimming in restored rivers and streams. Above this, golden eagle and bar-tailed godwits fly as they once did, perhaps smiling to themselves, seeing their homes saved, restored – in short, alive again.”

According to Mustonen, vast funds will be required to create side-streams around the 1960s-era dams for the migratory fish or even dismantle the dams, but he hopes the ELP funds are the “first step” and will open dialogue with the electricity companies that manage the dams about increasing water flows downstream to enable the juvenile fish to flourish.

In Cumbria, 33,000 hectares of land is receiving \$5m in funds over five years for an RSPB-led project that seeks to expand nature corridors and wildlife-friendly farming beyond the wildlife hotspots of the [Haweswater reserve](#) and the [Lowther estate](#).

Funds will be available for local hill farmers to create new wetlands and hedges, but the project will also support farmers to explore new, nature-friendly business models, helping them access not just the government’s new [Environmental Land Management scheme \(Elms\)](#) funds, but also new private-sector payments for sequestering carbon and boosting biodiversity.

Bill Kenmir, Cumbria ELP project manager, said: “We’re not looking to force farmers into anything, but there is a big change coming and we all need to think about how we will adapt to it. Brexit, leaving the common agricultural policy and all the uncertainty around the government’s new farm funding schemes is making people think about how livestock farming can survive. There’s an understanding that we’re at a point of change and need to be thinking differently, not just farmers, but us conservationists and landowners too.”

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Keyhaven Lymington marshes on the Solent estuary. Photograph: Frank Blackburn/Alamy

While debates over the future of Cumbrian landscapes and communities have been dogged by a perceived [clash between rewilders and sheep farmers](#), Kenmir said there was much more dialogue now and the ELP funds would foster further cooperation between conservationists and farmers in the region. “There’s a real opening-up of conversations, and [the Cumbrian farmer and author] [James Rebanks](#) has been at the forefront of bringing regenerative farming forward, opening up collaboration for sectors that historically have worked in isolation.”

The other British project to receive support is the five-year Solent seascapes project, which will receive \$5m for the restoration of seagrass meadows, oyster reefs, salt marsh and seabird nesting habitat across a complex network of harbours and estuaries under great pressure from industrialisation and urbanisation but which still provide refuge for threatened species including the thresher shark and critically endangered European eel.

In eastern Europe, projects being supported include restoration work on nature-rich habitats within the Rhodope mountains on the border between Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey, a biodiversity hotspot that is home to 81

species on the International Union for Conservation of Nature red list, and a breeding stronghold for the eastern imperial eagle.

There is also a grant award to support work in the Georgian steppe between the Iori and Alazani rivers, which hosts a unique mixture of Palearctic, Indomalayan and Afrotropical fauna, including jackals, wolves and vultures. The project will scale up grassland restoration and continue working with the pastoralist community to recover and to reconnect wildlife corridors from Kakheti to Vashlovani national park.

Dr David Thomas, director of the Endangered Landscapes Programme, said: “We are delighted to announce our new cohort of landscape restoration projects, which will showcase how restoration can improve our environment, creating landscapes where people and nature flourish for generations to come.”

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[Texas](#)

Texas attorney general sought data on gender changes to state IDs

Ken Paxton requested the public safety department for the numbers, but it was never given due to accuracy problems



Demonstrators at the Texas capitol protesting transgender-related legislation on 20 May 2021. Photograph: Eric Gay/AP

Associated Press

Wed 14 Dec 2022 20.31 EST

The office of Republican [Texas](#) attorney general Ken Paxton this summer sought data on how many people had changed the gender information on their driver's licenses, according to a newspaper report published on Wednesday that civil rights attorneys described as worrying.

The Washington Post reported that public records obtained by the newspaper do not indicate why Paxton's office made the request to the Texas department of public safety (DPS). The head of the driver's license division told colleagues in June to compile the "total number of changes from male to female and female to male for the last 24 months".

A DPS spokesperson told the Post that no data was ultimately handed over because it could not be accurately produced.

Paxton's office did not return a message seeking comment on Wednesday from the Associated Press.

Texas Republicans for years have been at the forefront of efforts to restrict transgender rights. The request came months after Republican Texas governor Greg Abbott ordered child welfare officials to investigate gender-affirming care as child abuse, a move that Paxton's office backed in a legal opinion.

The DPS found over 16,000 gender changes over the past two years, but officials said a manual search would have been required to determine the reason for each one.

According to records obtained by the Post, DPS staff members repeatedly referred to the request as coming from the attorney general's office as they discussed attempting to narrow the data to include only licenses that had been altered to reflect a court-ordered change in someone's gender.

"A verbal request was received," DPS spokesman Travis Considine told the Post. "Ultimately, our team advised the [attorney general's] office the data requested neither exists nor could be accurately produced. Thus, no data of any kind was provided."

Brian Klosterboer, an attorney at the ACLU of Texas, said this request of information was "highly unusual" and a violation of privacy.

"We suspect that this kind of data inquiry is an attempt to create information to further restrict and curtail the rights of transgender people living in Texas," Klosterboer told the Associated Press.

Abbott has followed other Republican governors in signing legislation that bans transgender youth from participating on public school sports teams that do not align with their sex assigned at birth.

Texas Republicans have also filed legislation to prohibit a change of sex on birth certificates for minors, following in the steps of states that include neighboring Oklahoma, where Republican governor Kevin Stitt this year signed a law prohibiting the use of non-binary gender markers on state birth certificates.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/dec/14/texas-attorney-general-sought-data-on-gender-changes-to-state-ids>

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Headlines saturday 24 december 2022

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- [Train strikes Christmas Eve travel warning to rail passengers as strikes hit services](#)
- [Explainer How could UK transport strikes affect travel over Christmas?](#)
- [Strike calendar Who is striking when?](#)

Private schools

London private school investigated over ‘blanket’ A or A* grades in 2021 A-levels

North London Collegiate school has faced multiple malpractice allegations over way grades awarded



All A-level entries at North London Collegiate school achieved an A* or A in the 2021 when formal exams were replaced by teacher-assessed grades
Photograph: Heritage Image Partnership Ltd/Alamy

[Richard Adams](#) Education editor

Sat 24 Dec 2022 03.00 EST Last modified on Sat 24 Dec 2022 08.28 EST

A prestigious private school in London has faced multiple investigations into the way it awarded exam grades in 2021, when all its A-level entries received A* or A, the Guardian has learned.

Senior leaders and teachers at the North London Collegiate school (NLCS) have been placed under investigation for alleged malpractice in setting teacher-assessed grades, which replaced formal exams cancelled by the government because of the Covid pandemic.

Sources at the £22,000-a-year girls' school said more than 20 cases involving NLCS had been passed to malpractice committees convened by A-level examination boards, which held a series of confidential hearings this month.

While some of the malpractice allegations have been dismissed, others have been upheld by the committees. Findings from the hearings are not publicly available and the committee's deliberations are confidential.

A spokesperson for [Pearson](#), the exam board involved in the investigations, said: "We take allegations of malpractice very seriously and investigate all those put to us. Where malpractice is found we have systems in place to ensure, as far as possible, that appropriate sanctions are taken according to the evidence. We cannot comment on individual cases."

The school declined to state how many malpractice investigations or hearings involving NLCS had taken place.

A spokesperson for NLCS said: "The process and findings of any such investigations are confidential between the exam board and the parties. However, we can confirm that there has been no finding of centre [school] malpractice by NLCS."

The NLCS spokesperson later added: "We can confirm that the investigation has concluded."

The revelations will reignite the controversy over the record-breaking number of top grades given by independent schools in 2021, with the proportion of A*'s up nearly 150% on 2019, when formal exams were last held.

NLCS's extraordinary results were put in the spotlight in February after the [Sunday Times reported](#) the school gave A* grades to more than 90% of its A-level entries in 2021, the highest in the country and a 56-percentage-point increase on the 34% who achieved the grade in 2019.

The cancellation of formal A-level and GCSE exams in 2021 led to grades instead being awarded by teacher assessment using internal processes. This gave schools wide latitude over the grades awarded to their pupils.

Evidence passed to the Guardian from teachers and parents at NLCS suggested the school was prepared to award the highest possible grades to its pupils. One internal message from a senior leader advised staff to “work to ensure the students have a good day, in the way we frame the assessments”, adding: “That way, every student has the potential to get the grade they could get, rather than the ones they would get.”

Teachers were warned that talk of grade inflation was “really unhelpful” and told instead that “assessing in an alternative way” was going to “advantage our students”. Staff were also told: “[There is] clear direction that our grades this year don’t need to match previous years’ grades.”

A staff meeting in March 2021 was told: “These grades will probably be the best grades the school has ever achieved … We will be working within the system to create the advantage for them [the students].”

A letter sent to parents the same month outlined how the school planned to alternate lessons with short assessments of the subjects they had just studied. “We remain confident that this strategy of preparation, followed by assessment, will afford our students the best opportunity to maximise their grades,” the letter said.

Staff who complained about the procedures said they were assured that rival schools were going to issue inflated grades, meaning NLCS students would be disadvantaged and could lose out on university places.

Bridget Phillipson, the shadow education secretary, called for a full investigation by the Department for Education. “These findings will do

nothing to dampen suspicions that certain private schools were gaming the system during the suspension of exams due to Covid,” Phillipson said.

“It is time for the education secretary to launch her own investigation into the assessment of grades during Covid to establish just how widespread this exploitation was.

“Labour would end private schools’ tax breaks and use the money to invest in a brilliant state education for everyone.”

The hearings involving NLCS are the first confirmation of the investigations revealed by Dr Jo Saxton, the chief regulator of [Ofqual](#), who told MPs in October that exam boards were “investigating individual cases of malpractice” at private schools in England over the 2021 results.

A spokesperson for Ofqual said: “Ofqual takes allegations of malpractice extremely seriously and we require exam boards to investigate such allegations and address any proven cases of qualifications-related malpractice in a school or college. It is not appropriate for us to comment on specific cases.”

A letter sent to Ofqual from a whistleblower, seen by the Guardian, alleged that NLCS leaders were willing to exploit loopholes in the assessment guidance issued to schools by the exam boards.

“After the government’s announcement that 2021’s [A-levels](#) and GCSEs [exams] would be cancelled, senior management at NLCS were openly excited at the possibility of obtaining ‘our best grades yet’ and the allure of this idea propelled them to make decisions that had little integrity, even though they appeared to be within the rules,” the whistleblower alleged.

In April this year the school announced NLCS’s headteacher, Sarah Clark, had resigned with immediate effect, after four years in the post.

Asked whether her departure was connected to the 2021 assessments, a spokesperson for the school said: “Having led the school through the numerous challenges posed by the Covid pandemic, in April 2022 Sarah

decided that it was the right time for her to step back and spend some time with her family before she takes on her next challenge.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2022/dec/24/north-london-collegiate-school-investigated-a-level-grades-2021-malpractice-allegations>

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[US news](#)

Gigantic US winter storm leaves millions without power and cancels holiday plans

Power outages leave more than 1.4 million homes and businesses in the dark, while thousands of US flights were canceled

Freezing temperatures engulf US causing widespread travel disruption – video report

[Jon Henley](#), [Edward Helmore](#) and [Maya Yang](#)

Fri 23 Dec 2022 17.03 ESTFirst published on Fri 23 Dec 2022 06.37 EST

The winter storm that forecasters dubbed Elliott intensified into a bomb cyclone near the Great Lakes on Friday, bringing high winds and blizzard conditions from the Northern Plains to western and upstate New York, along with life-threatening flooding, flash-freezing and travel chaos as it went.

Airline cancellations topped 5,700 flights, with tens of thousands of holiday travellers grounded in airports with limited expectations of making further progress. Travel on the roads was disrupted due snowy weather or crashes and authorities in parts of Indiana, Michigan, New York and Ohio urged motorists to avoid nonessential travel.

Transportation secretary Pete Buttigieg told CNN the US aviation system “is operating under enormous strain”. About 10% of US flights were canceled on Thursday, Buttigieg said.

The storm, estimated to be 2,000 miles wide, has produced driving snow and plummeting temperatures, knocking out power from Texas to Maine. Officials ordered cars off the roads as US forecasters warned of “potentially crippling impacts across central and eastern” parts of the country.

The arrival of the arctic blast produced widespread disruption to utilities, with more than 1.5m households estimated to be without power. At the White House, after Joe Biden was briefed on Elliot, the president said: “This is not like a snow day when you were a kid. This is serious stuff.”

About 200 million people in the 48 contiguous states were under extreme weather alerts, said forecaster Bob Oravec of the National Weather Service (NWS). An advisory warned that the powerful cold front would engulf the eastern US tonight “with widespread dangerous cold expected to continue across much of the eastern two-thirds of the US into the holiday weekend”.

“Rapid temperature drops, sometimes 50 or more degrees colder than the previous day,” Oravec told the Associated Press. “It’s a pretty powerful system.”

The precipitous drop in temperatures was accompanied by high winds. A 79-mph gust was recorded in downtown Buffalo, New York, where snow fall produced a [rare “zero visibility” observation](#) at the airport.

“There are some people in Buffalo saying this is one of the worst storms they’ve ever seen,” said the city’s mayor, Byron W Brown. “Buffalo is used to dealing with normal snowfall. We are dealing with it fine, but certainly it is a very challenging storm”.

In Ohio, what was described as a “mass casualty incident” was declared on Interstate 75 after more than 100 vehicles piled up in the conditions. The police department in Memphis, Tennessee, said a man found on Union Avenue on Friday had died from exposure to the frosty weather.

Forecasters had said the scale of the weather pattern was nearly unprecedented in its scope, exposing than 200 million people – [about 60% of the US population](#) – to some sort of winter advisory or warning. The weather service’s map “depicts one of the greatest extents of winter weather warnings and advisories ever,” forecasters said.

Tens of thousands of homes have been left without power, and governors in at least 13 states have drawn up emergency response plans, including

National Guard deployments, for the holiday weekend, with heavy snow and ice creating treacherous road conditions and some drivers stranded.

Temperatures in Colorado on Thursday dipped to a record-breaking low of -9F (-22.7C) from 42F (5.5C), while Cheyenne, Wyoming, recorded its greatest one-hour temperature drop, plunging from 43F to 3F in the space of 30 minutes.

The NWS said temperatures of -50F to -70F were possible over the weekend in some parts of the US, warning that even in big metropolitan areas such as Des Moines, Iowa, frostbite could become a significant danger.

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Ahead of one of the busiest travel periods of the year, the American Automobile Association (AAA) said more than 112 million people planned to travel 50 miles (80 km) or more from home between 23 December and 2 January.

Even though fleets of snow plows and salt trucks have been deployed across the US, driving was extremely dangerous and even deadly. Kansas City police spokesperson Donna Drake said a minivan driver died Thursday after losing control on icy streets and overturning into a creek.

In Kentucky three people died on the roads, Governor Andy Beshear announced on Friday morning. Beshear added that the state's National Guard was delivering blankets to the Kentucky state police to distribute to stranded drivers on Interstate 71 and escorting some to shelters.

New York's governor, Kathy Hochul , declared an emergency, saying the threat of flooding and ice jams blocking rivers would “wreak a lot of havoc in our community”. The Ohio governor, Mike DeWine, called it “a unique and dangerous situation”.

In Georgia, where temperatures in the north were forecast to hit -12C, with subzero wind chills, the governor Brian Kemp said the state was “expecting weather we haven't seen in a decade or more”.

More than half of the so-called lower 48 states, from Washington state to Florida, are under winter weather alerts, including wind chill advisories affecting about 135 million people, said Ashton Robinson Cook of the weather service's prediction centre.

The NWS has described the storm as “once in a generation” weather event, saying more than 100 daily cold temperature records could be equalled or broken over the coming days. Florida is projected to experience its coldest Christmas in 30 years.

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Rail strikes

Delays hit rail passengers rushing to beat Christmas Eve strike

Sympathy and irritation from public as thousands of RMT union members at Network Rail prepare to strike



Rail passengers at King's Cross railway station in London. Photograph: Bloomberg/Getty Images

[Gwyn Topham](#) Transport correspondent

[@GwynTopham](#)

Sat 24 Dec 2022 10.03 ESTFirst published on Sat 24 Dec 2022 01.00 EST

Rail passengers were facing delays as they rushed to get the last trains before Christmas Eve services came to a halt, while Britain's roads were braced for extra traffic as a result of the strikes on the railways.

People embarking on festive getaways or heading home for the holidays gathered on the concourses of major stations including London Euston and

Birmingham New Street.

Thousands of members of the RMT union at [Network Rail](#) will strike from 6pm on Christmas Eve until 6am on 27 December.

The last intercity trains on some long-distance routes departed as early as 8am. Some main routes were not due to operate at all, partly due to ongoing industrial action that includes an overtime ban at train operating companies.

Services from Euston to Crewe, Manchester Piccadilly, Glasgow Central and Birmingham International were all delayed, with a limited staff presence as travellers waited anxiously with their luggage.

Some told of their frustration at short-notice cancellations but others voiced support for workers on strike.

Kartik Aggarwal, a 24-year-old student, faced missing a Christmas party in Birmingham. Speaking at Euston alongside some relatives, he told PA Media: “It’s been really bad. We were planning for a long time only to have two trains get cancelled with no notification. We came running but still nothing. I feel very irritated, like we’re wasting our time.”

The PhD student Amy Saunders, 31, said the disruption to her journey to see family for Christmas was stressful, but she expressed her sympathy with those on strike.

She said: “I support the strikes and I’m sure it’s equally stressful for everyone working here trying to get everyone home for Christmas, and they wouldn’t need to strike if their working conditions weren’t intolerable.

“Everyone’s really struggling and there needs to be more support.”

The [RMT](#) had argued it was not targeting Christmas travel when it called the latest strike in the long-running dispute over pay and jobs.

Network Rail, however, said the timing of the action meant all passenger trains would need to be in depots before the action started.

Contingency staff are being drafted in to allow Network Rail to press ahead with most of the £120m of engineering works planned over the Christmas bank holidays. No passenger trains were ever scheduled to run on Christmas Day. The few planned Boxing Day services on Eurostar, Merseyrail and Stansted Express have now been cancelled.

With large stations quiet during much of Friday, rail sources suggested that many passengers had decided to travel earlier – while surveys for motoring organisations indicated a third had opted to drive this year rather than take the train they would normally choose.

The last Christmas Eve trains from Edinburgh to London had been scheduled to leave at 8am. Last trains for Newcastle and Scotland were at 11am, and either way between Manchester and Liverpool at about 2pm.

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No direct trains were running between London and Nottingham or Sheffield on East Midlands Railway, which had urged passengers not to travel on its services on Saturday.

Further disruption will continue after Christmas, with services starting later on 27 December due to the strike, and continuing problems on South Western, Chiltern, East Midlands and elsewhere due to the RMT overtime ban.

The TSSA union will strike for 24 hours on separate days at Cross Country, GWR and West Midland trains. Ongoing engineering work will also impact

services, including on the West Coast line from London Euston, and into London Liverpool Street.

There has been no sign of a resolution to the dispute. The RMT has accused ministers of “going missing” since meeting union and industry leaders nine days ago. The general secretary, Mick Lynch, said: “Until the government gives the rail industry a mandate to come to a negotiated settlement on job security, pay and conditions of work, our industrial campaign will continue.”

A Department for Transport spokesperson said ministers had “worked hard to facilitate a fair and reasonable offer”, adding that the public “deserve better than to have their festive celebrations impacted by strikes”.

PA Media contributed to this report

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Transport

Explainer

How could UK transport strikes affect travel over Christmas?

Industrial action by rail workers will not only hit train journeys but add to congestion on the roads; disruption at airports too



Rail passengers at Kings Cross station in London on Friday. Trains will stop running at about 3pm on Christmas Eve, says Network Rail. Photograph: Bloomberg/Getty Images

[Joe Middleton](#) and agencies

Sat 24 Dec 2022 01.00 EST

The great Christmas getaway continues on Saturday as millions of people travel across the UK to be with friends and family for the festive season.

But strikes mean journeys home could be severely hampered by industrial action on the roads, railways and at airports, as Britain's transport network reaches breaking point.

What is the situation on the railways?

Rail passengers have been urged to travel only if “absolutely necessary” as thousands of members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union at Network Rail will walk out from 6pm on Christmas Eve until 6am on 27 December.

The union said the industrial action would mostly affect planned engineering works, but Network Rail has confirmed trains will stop running at about 3pm on Christmas Eve.

A number of train operators have warned passengers to travel only if “absolutely necessary”, as some routes will not operate at all, and others will have a limited service.

An overtime ban – industrial action short of a strike – could further disrupt services when they are in high demand on Saturday afternoon. It has already wreaked havoc with timetables on some lines on non-strike days, with about 4,000 trains cancelled daily.

The limited train services will almost certainly have a knock-on impact on the number of drivers. An RAC survey indicated that nearly half of people affected by rail strikes this month planned to drive themselves or get a lift from someone else.

On Friday, the RMT accused the government of “going missing”, with no further talks planned since last week’s meeting with the rail minister Huw Merriman and industry leaders.

The Network Rail chief executive, Andrew Haines, said the union was causing “needless misery to its own members, to the railway and to the country’s economy”.

What about the roads?

The AA predicts that 16.5 million people will travel by road on Christmas Eve and have warned of [lengthy delays and traffic jams](#) on key motorways and A-roads.

The AA has identified the traffic hotspots as: the M25; the M5 between Bristol and Weston-super-Mare; the M6 around Birmingham; stretches of the M1 “smart” motorway from Luton northwards; the M62 and M60 in the north-west and the M4 and the M27.

The motoring group warned that the rail strikes mentioned above could “add to the getaway mayhem” by hampering confidence in public transport use.

The AA’s head of roads policy, Jack Cousens, said: “We are advising those heading out in their cars to be prepared for some congestion, especially on popular routes heading out of London.

“The rail strikes have convinced more people to travel by car this year, and while hundreds of miles of roadworks have been removed to ease the pain, it might not be enough to keep the queues away.”

The transport analytics company Inrix said it expected journey times by road to be about 14% longer compared with the same period last year.

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Pressure on the roads ahead on Christmas could be further exacerbated by industrial action from National Highways employees.

Members of the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) who work as control room staff and traffic officers will continue their four-day strike on 24 and 25 December.

The PCS said the action “risks bringing the road network to a standstill” and road safety campaigners said they were “very concerned” about potential delays in setting warning signs on roads.

National Highways said no roads would be closed as a result of the industrial action, that it had “well-rehearsed resilience plans in place” and that strikes involved a small number of frontline staff.

What is happening at airports?

Border Force officials joined the wave of industrial action hitting the country on Friday and will strike every day for the rest of the year, except 27 December.

Travellers have been warned to expect delays amid fears long queues at passport control could lead to people being held on planes, disrupting subsequent departures.

Around 1,000 members of the PPCS union employed by the Home Office to operate passport booths are on strike at Heathrow, Birmingham, Cardiff, Gatwick, Glasgow and Manchester airports, as well as the port of Newhaven in East Sussex.

The Home Office has drafted in military personnel trained to check passports. Heathrow and Gatwick, the country’s two largest airports, said their immigration halls were operating as normal on Friday.

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Industrial action

Explainer

UK strike calendar – service stoppages planned for December and January

All the dates for strikes and stoppages across health, transport and postal networks



Ambulance workers at a picket line in Bishop Auckland in County Durham.
Photograph: Richard Saker/The Guardian

[Joe Middleton](#), [Anna Leach](#), [Garry Blight](#) and [Casper Hughes](#)

Fri 23 Dec 2022 08.03 ESTFirst published on Mon 12 Dec 2022 01.00 EST

The wave of strikes sweeping the country reaches a peak this week, threatening to bring Britain to a standstill as workers across the transport network, NHS, [Royal Mail](#) and civil service take industrial action in rows over pay and conditions.

Further unrest could beset the government in the new year as strike ballots for firefighters and teachers close in January, while junior doctors are scheduled to vote next month, and London Underground workers have approved a mandate for another six months of industrial action.

With wide-ranging protests in the public and private sectors, Rishi Sunak threatened this month [to bring in “new tough laws” to limit strike action](#).

No details have been released by No 10 on the plans, but Sharon Graham, the general secretary of Unite, said the union would not be “intimidated by anti-trade union attacks” and was “ready industrially and financially” to challenge any new measures.

Here are the main public service strikes planned for December and January:

Monday 12 December

A strike by Unison members working for the NHS will take place in Northern Ireland.

Tuesday 13 December

Members of the RMT working for Network Rail and 14 train operating companies are scheduled to stage the first of days of strikes.

National Rail has warned there will be a “very limited service” on strike days and there will be “no trains at all on some routes”.

TSSA members who work for Avanti West Coast stage a 48-hour stoppage.

Members of the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union will take action spread over the month that will affect numerous government agencies and departments.

The first day includes staff at the government’s Rural Payments Agency (RPA), who disburse funds for the agricultural sector.

Staff at the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) will strike starting on this date in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Wednesday 14 December

Members of the Communication Workers Union (CWU) continue strike action in an increasingly bitter dispute with Royal Mail over pay and conditions.

More than 115,000 postal staff are expected to take part in industrial action that will continue in the run-up to Christmas and is expected to disrupt the delivery of letters and packages.

Other strikes include RMT members working for Network Rail and the 14 train operating companies, TSSA members who work for Avanti West Coast, staff at the RPA and staff at the DVSA in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Thursday 15 December

Up to 100,000 nurses with the Royal College of [Nursing](#) (RCN) are expected to take part in the first of a series of strikes across 53 NHS organisations in England. Nurses will also take industrial action in Wales and Northern Ireland.

Members of the CWU will strike for a second consecutive day and staff at the RPA and DVSA in Scotland and Northern Ireland continue industrial action.

Friday 16 December

PCS members working for National Highways will take part in the first of 12 days of strike action over the festive period.

The strike is taking place on a regional basis, with the first action covering the north-west, Yorkshire and Humber and the north-east.

Strikes are also expected by RMT members at Network Rail and 14 train operating companies; TSSA members with Avanti West Coast; Abellio bus workers in the south and west of London; staff at the RPA and DVSA staff in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Saturday 17 December

Further strike action by RMT members working for Network Rail and 14 train operating companies; TSSA members who work for Avanti West Coast, c2c, and East Midlands Railway; Abellio bus workers in the south and west of London; members of PCS working for National Highways.

Sunday 18 December

The DVSA strike continues for staff in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Monday 19 December

Members of Unite who work at the Highlands and Islands airports in Scotland are striking. The 11 airports affected are Barra, Benbecula, Campbeltown, Dundee, Inverness, Islay, Kirkwall, Stornoway, Sumburgh, Tiree and Wick.

DVSA driving examiners to strike in the north-west, Yorkshire and Humber, and north Wales and RPA staff resume their walkout.

Tuesday 20 December

Strike action by nurses from the RCN in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The DVSA strike continues in the north-west, Yorkshire and Humber, and in north Wales. RPA staff continue their strike.

Wednesday 21 December

Ambulance workers and other NHS staff will stage a strike coordinated by GMB, Unison and Unite in England and Wales.

The DVSA strike continues in the north-west, Yorkshire and Humber and north Wales. RPA staff continue their action.

Thursday 22 December

Cleaners with the RMT will begin the first of a number of strike days at rail firms including Avanti, although services are unlikely to halt.

Members of Unite who work at the Highlands and Islands airports in Scotland strike again.

National Highways workers in London and the south-east commence strike action.

The DVSA strike continues in the north-west, Yorkshire and Humber and north Wales. RPA staff continue their action.

Friday 23 December

RMT cleaners for a number of rail companies and the DVSA staff in the north-west, Yorkshire and Humber, and north Wales are all due to take action.

CWU members restart nationwide strike action against their employer Royal Mail.

PCS members at Border Force start a wave of strikes at Heathrow, Gatwick, Manchester, Birmingham, Cardiff and Glasgow airports. National Highway workers in London and the south of England continue their strike.

Saturday 24 December

CWU members continue their strike into a second consecutive day.

Members of RMT working for Network Rail will strike, although this will mostly affect engineering works.

PCS members at Border Force continue strike action at airports.

The DVSA strike continues in the north-west, Yorkshire and Humber and north Wales, as will the National Highways strike in London and the south-east.

Sunday 25 December

The RMT strike will continue, although no services run on Christmas day.

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PCS members at Border Force continue strike action at airports, alongside PCS members who work for National Highways in London and the south-east.

Monday 26 December

The RMT rail strike will continue.

PCS members at Border Force continue strike action at airports.

Tuesday 27 December

The RMT strike continues until 6am.

Wednesday 28 December

The DVSA driving examiners' strikes will start in the east of England, east Midlands, West Midlands and parts of London.

PCS members at Border Force continue strike action at airports.

Thursday 29 December

The DVSA strike continues in the East of England, east Midlands, West Midlands and parts of London.

PCS members at Border Force continue strike action at airports.

Friday 30 December

Strikes by National Highways employees will kick off in the West Midlands and the south-west.

The DVSA strike continues in the east of England, east Midlands, West Midlands and parts of London.

PCS members at Border Force continue strike action at airports.

Saturday 31 December

RMT members working as cleaners for a number of rail companies are due to take action.

Action by National Highways employees will continue in the West Midlands and south-west.

PCS members at Border Force continue strike action at airports.

The DVSA strike continues in the east of England, east Midlands, West Midlands and parts of London.

Tuesday 3 January

RMT members working for National Rail restart strike action.

National Highways traffic officers to begin nationwide strike.

The DVSA strike continues in the east of England, east Midlands, West Midlands and parts of London, while staff at the RPA resume their action.

Wednesday 4 January

The RMT rail strike continues.

Second day of nationwide strike by National Highways traffic officers.

The DVSA driving examiners' strikes will start in London, south-east England, south-west England and Wales. RPA staff continue their action.

Thursday 5 January

Train drivers represented by Aslef launch a national day of strike action.

The DVSA strike continues in London, south-east England, south-west England and Wales. RPA staff continue their action.

Friday 6 January

The RMT rail strike continues.

The DVSA strike continues in London, south-east England, south-west England and Wales. RPA staff continue their action.

National Highways workers in the east Midlands and eastern regions will begin strike action.

Saturday 7 January

The RMT rail strike continues.

The DVSA strike continues in London, south-east England, south-west England and Wales, while the National Highways workers in the east Midlands and eastern regions take strike action for the second consecutive day.

Sunday 8 January

The DVSA strike continues in London, south-east England, south-west England and Wales.

Monday 9 January

The DVSA strike continues in London, south-east England, south-west England and Wales. RPA staff resume their action.

Tuesday 10 January

The DVSA strike continues in London, south-east England, south-west England and Wales. RPA staff continue their action.

Wednesday 18 January

Nurses represented by the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) begin a second round of strike action in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Thursday 19 January

The nurses continue strike action into a second day.

This explainer, first published on 12 December 2022, is being updated to reflect the latest information. Please click on the timestamp to see when it was last modified. Any significant corrections made to this or previous versions of the article will continue to be footnoted in line with Guardian editorial policy.

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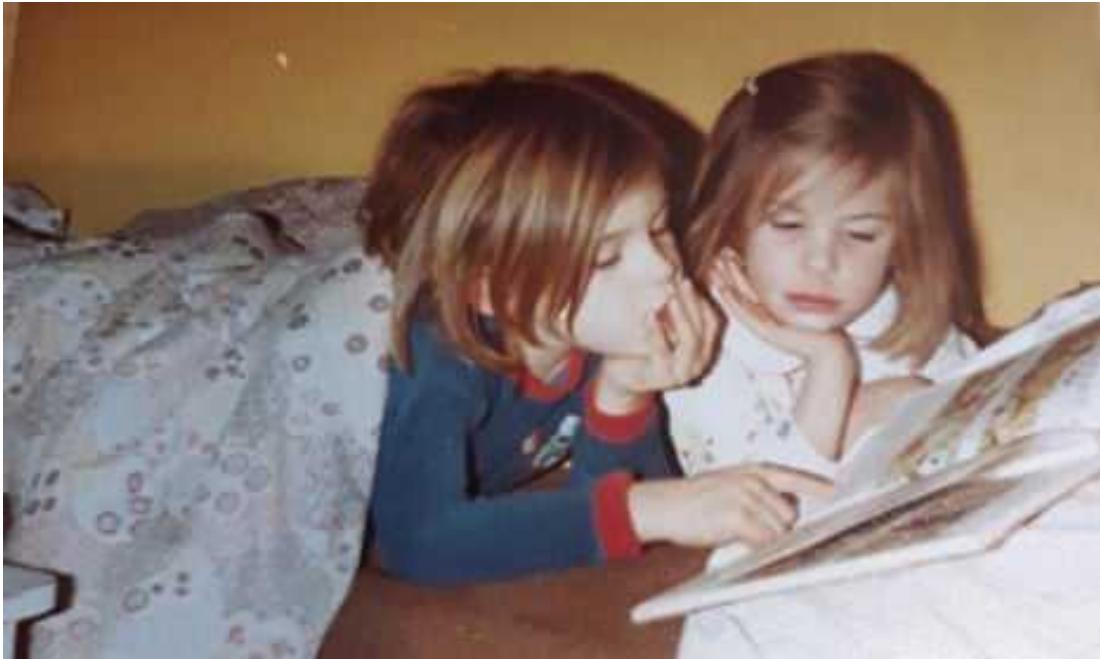
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[The Christmas present I'll never forget](#)[Christmas](#)

**I curled up with my sister and we
opened our stockings together one last
time – the Christmas present I'll never
forget**



The sisters in 1979 ... Bibi van der Zee, aged seven (left), and Ninka, aged six

Ninka had been diagnosed with leukaemia when she was 16 but for one final festive celebration, she was out of hospital and back home with us

[Bibi van der Zee](#)

[@bibivanderzee](#)

Sat 24 Dec 2022 03.00 EST

We didn't know until the very last minute whether my sister would be let out of hospital for [Christmas](#).

It was 1991 and we were camping in a house in London that a friend had lent my parents, waiting to find out. Home, in theory, was Rome for my parents, Edinburgh for me – but in practice, a year and a bit into my sister's leukaemia, home was wherever Ninka was being treated. There had been a brief, sunny period in the summer where she had been in remission. When the cancer came back, Mum just put her into the car and drove her from Italy to the Royal Free Hospital in London.

Now, after other treatments had failed, the hospital was preparing her for a bone-marrow transplant. That meant blasting her with chemo and keeping her in isolation. That's what I remember, anyway. In my memories, which are not perfectly intact, she was in a kind of tank, like in a science-fiction film. We could still go in to visit her, wearing aprons and gloves, but she was not supposed to leave the tank. We didn't know it then, but the transplant would only work for a few months before the cancer would come back again, more aggressive than ever, and would take her away from us for good. But we didn't need to be told this could be her last Christmas. Everyone who has been through this knows the way in which, from the moment you hear the news, you are constantly braced.

We were not the most functional of families most of the time, but before and after her diagnosis at the age of 16, my sister was the thoughtful, kind person who held the rest of us together (although she could also be a proper pain in the arse). I had combined the worst of my parents – bad-tempered, impatient, my mum's pear shape – while Ninka had inherited Mum's sweetness and my father's occasional, wonderful silliness. She had inherited my dad's height and long legs, too, overtaking me a couple of years earlier. My father openly said she was his favourite, and that seemed fair enough because I preferred her to everyone else too.



Bibi van der Zee's sister Ninka in hospital

I don't remember much about the wait to find out whether she'd be let out but I remember the bolt of joy when the doctors, at the absolute last minute, confirmed we could take her home. On Christmas Eve we bundled her up in blankets and wheeled her off the ward. She was all long, skinny arms and legs, tiny duckling tufts of hair left clinging to her skull, pale with nausea – the chemo made her wretchedly sick – but still full of stupid Ninka jokes, still failing to take me anything like as seriously as I was pretty sure I deserved, given that, at 19, I was a year and a half older than her.

She and I had an unbreakable ritual on Christmas mornings, after sharing a bedroom for the first 12 years of our childhood, and this year was no different. We would leave our Christmas stockings at the ends of our beds to be filled, and then get into bed together in the morning and go through them, taking it in turns and opening one gift at a time. Mum (or Santa Claus) wrapped each little thing up in red and green tissue paper – a tiny finger puppet, a packet of Smarties, a pouch of nice felt-tips ... always, always a tangerine. Anything big and serious went under the tree for later, but this was just the two of us, snuggled up, toasty warm under our duvet, messing around with bits of tissue and chocolate coins.

And that was my best present ever. I wish I could remember every detail of that Christmas but the memories are vague. We had immutable traditions for every part of the day: buck's fizz for breakfast, my father pretending not to want to open the presents, and then, finally, the presents and a beautifully decorated table for lunch. We were not in our own home, but Papa was a genius at making a room *gezellig* – Dutch and candle-lit and cosy. There would probably have been one of our obscure family games or Trivial Pursuit in the afternoon. Christmas was one of the times when we all tried hard to make it work, and that particular year we found our best selves for her.

We only talked once about death – not then, but a few months later. God, Ninka was so magnificent. Thirty years later, I'm awed all over again at her courage: she never complained, never sulked. But when we knew the bone marrow transplant had failed, and her body began to fall apart like a clown car, she tried to joke about it and told me I had to marry someone she liked, someone who ate McDonald's and wine gums or she'd come back and haunt

me. She only let herself have one moment of self-pity, telling me: “I’m too young to die.” That was it.

But clear and golden and absolutely real in my mind is Christmas morning and my sister, tucked up in bed, with the tufts of hair on her head, her long fragile fingers, our great, great love for each other, the warmth of the duvet, the smell of tangerine, the rustle of the paper. The amazing thing is that that memory never ever dims.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2022/dec/24/i-curled-up-with-my-sister-and-we-opened-our-stockings-together-one-last-time-the-christmas-present-ill-never-forget>

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Blind date: ‘I was too busy thinking about the six kids he said we’d have to notice his table manners’



Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

Aaron, 25, meets Sid, 28. Both are support workers for children

Sat 24 Dec 2022 01.00 EST

Aaron on Sid



What were you hoping for?

A fun evening with drinks flowing, good company and good food.

First impressions?

Very cute and pretty. Sid appeared a little shy at first, but we quickly got comfortable with each other.

What did you talk about?

She told me about the time she got chucked off a plane, a story I found both interesting and absolutely hilarious.

Most awkward moment?

The waiter explaining the menu had a very strong accent and spoke very

fast. Sid and I did not know what to make of it at first. But we ended up making friends with her.

Good table manners?

Absolutely: she fed me and I fed her.

Best thing about Sid?

Very talkative. I could also tell that she has a really bright personality.

Would you introduce Sid to your friends?

Yes, as long as she wouldn't get them chucked off a flight to Venice.

Describe Sid in three words.

Fun, interesting and confident.

What do you think Sid made of you?

I think she liked that I was very flirtatious and fun to be around.

Did you go on somewhere?

It was a school night, and since we both work with young people, we thought it was best to go home and meet up another time.

Q&A

Want to be in Blind date?

Show

Blind date is Saturday's dating column: every week, two strangers are paired up for dinner and drinks, and then spill the beans to us, answering a set of questions. This runs, with a photograph we take of each dater before the date, in Saturday magazine (in the UK) and online at theguardian.com every Saturday. It's been running since 2009 – you can [read all about how we put it together here](#).

What questions will I be asked?

We ask about age, location, occupation, hobbies, interests and the type of person you are looking to meet. If you do not think these questions cover everything you would like to know, tell us what's on your mind.

Can I choose who I match with?

No, it's a blind date! But we do ask you a bit about your interests, preferences, etc – the more you tell us, the better the match is likely to be.

Can I pick the photograph?

No, but don't worry: we'll choose the nicest ones.

What personal details will appear?

Your first name, job and age.

How should I answer?

Honestly but respectfully. Be mindful of how it will read to your date, and that Blind date reaches a large audience, in print and online.

Will I see the other person's answers?

No. We may edit yours and theirs for a range of reasons, including length, and we may ask you for more details.

Will you find me The One?

We'll try! Marriage! Babies!

Can I do it in my home town?

Only if it's in the UK. Many of our applicants live in London, but we would love to hear from people living elsewhere.

How to apply

Email blind.date@theguardian.com

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

And ... did you kiss?

Yes. I think it is always important to kiss on the first date, to really show your attraction to the other person.

If you could change one thing about the evening what would it be?

I would have done the date on a weekend, then we could have hung out more.

Marks out of 10?

8.

Would you meet again?

I'd be more than happy to.

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Sid and Aaron on their date

Sid on Aaron

**What were you hoping for?**

To meet my husband.

First impressions?

Gorgeous – he was wearing these glasses that gave off old-school Usher vibes.

What did you talk about?

A bit of everything really – he was really easy to talk to – but mainly our mutual love of EastEnders.

Most awkward moment?

Probably ordering two bottles of cava, because we weren't paying – then learning that Aaron wasn't much of a drinker.

Good table manners?

I was too busy thinking about the six kids he said we'd have to notice his table manners.

Best thing about Aaron?

His smile.

Would you introduce Aaron to your friends?

We actually FaceTimed my friend Eve during dinner.

Describe Aaron in three words.

Fun, confident and sexy.

What do you think Aaron made of you?

I'm not sure. I think he liked me.

Did you go on somewhere?

No, it was a school night.

And ... did you kiss?

Ask Aaron.

If you can change one thing about the date what would it be?

I would have had the sea bream.

Marks out of 10

8. Feels weird to rate him, but it was a good date.

Would you meet again?

I hope so ...

Aaron and Sid ate at [Barrafina Borough Yards](#), London SE1. Fancy a blind date? Email blind.date@theguardian.com

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2022/dec/24/blind-date-aaron-sid>

Christmas puzzles specialBooks

Can you outwit Margaret Atwood? The bumper books quiz of 2022

Which author was this year elected to the US Senate? In what horror story does a vampire appear as a cat? Test your wits with questions set by authors including Atwood, Bernardine Evaristo, Ian Rankin and more



Illustration: Ana Hard/The Guardian

[Nicholas Wroe](#)

Sat 24 Dec 2022 04.00 ESTLast modified on Sat 24 Dec 2022 06.23 EST

Authors' questions

- 1.MARGARET ATWOOD ASKS: “They live too near the rocks to quarrel with their neighbours.” This quote appears in:
All Quiet on the Western Front
The Hobbit

The Tale of Mr Tod
Middlemarch

2.Which pioneering nature writer had a father who presented them with the doctor's bill for their birth on their 21st birthday?

Rachel Carson

John Livingston

Barry Lopez

Ernest Thompson Seton

3.In what horror story does a vampire appear in the shape of a large cat?

The Vampyre

Carmilla

Interview with the Vampire

Salem's Lot

4.IAN RANKIN ASKS: Which artist's 1988 Moscow exhibition was the subject of a book published this year?

David Hockney

Maggi Hambling

Francis Bacon

Lucian Freud

5.Which author, better known for their film career, had a 1966 novel (The Glass Pearls) reissued this year?

David Lean

Angela Lansbury

Donald Cammell

Emeric Pressburger

6.Whose latest novel, set in 1926 Soho, revolves around nightclub owner Nellie Coker?

Kate Atkinson

Jenni Fagan

John Lanchester

Denise Mina

7.WILLIAM BOYD ASKS: Which one of these cities did James Joyce not live in?



Zurich

Trieste

Rome

Venice

8.What was TS Eliot's first wife's Christian name?

Virginia

Vivien

Valerie

Violet

9.Which one of these 19th-century explorers first reached the source of the Nile?

Henry Morton Stanley

Cashel Greville Ross

John Hanning Speke

Richard Francis Burton

10.BERNARDINE EVARISTO ASKS: Which writer has published two crime fiction novels featuring a detective called Digger as protagonist?

Jason Allen-Paisant

Jacob Polley

Jacob Ross

Jacob Sam-La Rose

11. Name the title of the wildly satirical book by a Sierra Leonean barrister first published in London in 1909.

Britons, Blacks and Bargains

Savage Britons and Sensible Africans

The Invisible Spirit of the Britons

Britons through Negro Spectacles

12. Which debut novel features a Nigerian mother and her family living in north west London?

On Black Sisters' Street by Chika Unigwe

26a by Diana Evans

The Mother by Yvette Edwards

The Opposite House by Helen Oyeyemi

13. ANNE ENRIGHT ASKS: When the heroine of Louise Kennedy's novel Trespasses is invited to a bohemian supper in mid-70s Belfast, the hostess serves a classic dish of the time. It is:



Angels on horseback

Moussaka

Pineapple upside-down cake

Fondue

14. The narrator of Mike McCormack's Solar Bones, Marcus Conway, has a daughter to whom he has given the name of Agnes. His wife is called:

Mairead

Marcella

Agatha

Annie

15. Another Mayo writer, Colin Barrett, gives a character in Homesickness a home on a fictional estate near Ballina. It is called:

Mary Robinson Heights

Benwee Manor

Belleek Woods

Granuaile Court

16. VAL McDERMID ASKS: Which British crime writer's pseudonyms include JB Dancer, Thorn Ryder, Terry Lennox and JD Sandon?

Ian Rankin

Lee Child

John Harvey

John Creasey

17. Which of these does not belong in the list of Sue Grafton's Kinsey Millhone alphabet series?

R Is for Ricochet

V Is for Violence

D Is for Deadbeat

P Is for Peril

18. John Gielgud's career as a West End leading man was kickstarted in a play written by a golden age crime writer. But which one?



Ngaio Marsh

Josephine Tey

Agatha Christie

Gladys Mitchell

19. WERE YOU PAYING ATTENTION? Which key element of the classic animated film of The Snowman does not feature in the original book by Raymond Briggs, who died this year?

Christmas

The Brighton Pavilion

Flying

A little boy

20. Which musician's 2022 book was dedicated to "all the crew at Dunkin' Donuts"?

Bob Dylan

Dave Grohl

Nick Cave

Patti Smith

21. Shehan Karunatilaka's debut novel was called Chinaman. Was it set in the world of ... ?



- Finance
- Cricket
- Porcelain production
- Gambling

22. Which novelist was placed on Russia's sanction list for their stance on the war in Ukraine?

- Salman Rushdie
- Orhan Pamuk
- Margaret Atwood
- JK Rowling

23. Nick Hornby's 2022 study of genius found unexpected parallels between which two creative titans?

- Jane Austen and Beyoncé
- Charles Dickens and Prince
- Anthony Trollope and Morrissey
- George Eliot and Adele

24.2022 Nobel prize winner Annie Ernaux's autobiographical book A Girl's Story recalls the time she came to London in 1960 aged 20 to work as:



A French tutor

A singer

A pastry chef

An au pair

25.Which of these octogenarian writers was the odd one out this year?

Cormac McCarthy

Anne Tyler

John Irving

Penelope Lively

26.The 2022 Goldsmiths prize for work that “breaks the mould or extends the possibilities of the novel form” was awarded to:

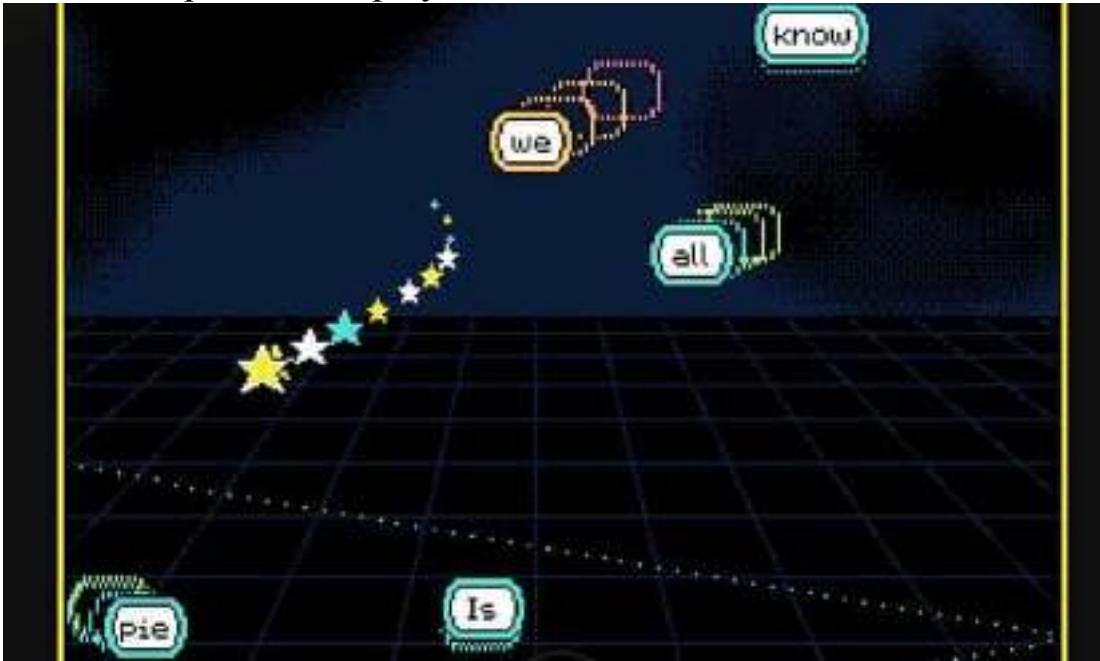
A novel by two authors

A novel in two languages

A novel in two volumes

A novel with two endings

27. The 80s-style shooter video game EmilyBlaster was inspired by a 2022 novel. It requires the player to fire at the words of which writer?



- Emily Brontë
- Emily Dickinson
- Emily Ratajkowski
- Emily St John Mandel

28. Which bestselling author was this year elected to the US Senate?

- Jane Smiley
- JD Vance
- Al Franken
- Michael Moore

29. Which newly appointed public figure also published a novel this year?

- The chief executive of the NHS
- The chair of the Football Association
- The commissioner of the Metropolitan police
- The president of the CBI

30.Which of these writers did not use the late queen in their fiction?



Hilary Mantel

Alan Bennett

Sue Townsend

John Banville

31.RIGHT AND HONOURABLE? Which politician provided publicity for a then unpublished biography of Liz Truss by raising it at prime minister's question time?

Liz Truss

Keir Starmer

Boris Johnson

Nadine Dorries

32.Which politician is described in Marina Hyde's What Just Happened?! as a "living testament to the ancient Conservative principle that they've always got a worse idea up their sleeve"?

Gavin Williamson

Suella Braverman

Steve Baker

Priti Patel

33. It was reported in a new book that on Boris Johnson's last day in No 10 Dominic Raab had to leave crisis talks by a side entrance out of view of photographers because he was wearing:



- Jeans
- Judo kit
- Swimming trunks
- Full white tie evening dress

34. Which political figure appears in Jonathan Coe's 2022 novel Bournville, although "whether he's a fictional character or not remains hard to determine with any certainty"?

- Jacob Rees-Mogg
- Boris Johnson
- Matt Hancock
- Dominic Cummings

35. Which of this year's four chancellors of the exchequer is the subject of a biography entitled Going for Broke?

- Kwasi Kwarteng
- Nadhim Zahawi
- Rishi Sunak
- Jeremy Hunt

36.SAY WHAT? Who said “It never occurred to me that I was writing a cosy book: it’s wrapped in cosy wrapping paper and there’s a cosy bow on the top, but I don’t think the gift itself is cosy.”

Dolly Parton

Richard Osman

Rev Richard Coles

Bob Mortimer

37. Which writer said of their homeland: “I mean, we produce a lot of Viagra. And Guinness. And Kerrygold. But when you think about Ireland, what else is there, except poets?”



Colm Tóibín

Paul Muldoon

Sally Rooney

Claire Keegan

38.The biography of which writer included letters to their publisher complaining about a book tour event where “the books were unpleasantly cold to sign”?

John le Carré

Barbara Cartland

Terry Pratchett

Jan Morris

39.Which actor's diaries revealed the lesson they took from winning a major award: "This will be a healthy reminder to me that subtlety isn't everything"?

Paul Newman

Matthew Perry

Richard E Grant

Alan Rickman

40.Which musician's memoir recalled falling asleep in a French chapel as "part reverie and part revelry, part rosary and part rosé"?

Pete Doherty

Bez

Bono

Jarvis Cocker

41.1922 AND ALL THAT After copies of James Joyce's Ulysses were seized by customs officials in Folkestone for obscenity they were then:

Sent to the Bodleian Library

Placed in the vault of the Bank of England

Burned

Stolen and sold on the black market

42.The first fiction to be read on the BBC was in a programme for children on its second day of broadcasting. It was a story by which writer?

Beatrix Potter

E Nesbit

Rudyard Kipling

Oscar Wilde

43.The writer and Irish nationalist Erskine Childers was executed in 1922. His bestselling novel The Riddle of the Sands is often described as the first:

Spy novel

Horror novel

Meta novel

Beach read

44.Which author, born in 1922, claimed that "you can't create humour out of happiness"?

Kingsley Amis

Kurt Vonnegut

Grace Paley

Charles M Schulz

45. Which newspaper concluded its review of TS Eliot's The Waste Land by judging the poem was "so much waste paper"?



The Daily Mail

The Guardian

The Daily Telegraph

The Times

46.COVER STARS: Without their titles or authors, can you spot some of this year's literary highlights? Which book is this?



A Previous Life by Edmund White

Teen Couple Have Fun Outdoors by Aravind Jayan

Young Mungo by Douglas Stuart

The Men by Sandra Newman



47.Which book is this?

People Person by Candice Carty-Williams

Love Marriage by Monica Ali
Either/Or by Elif Batuman
The Marriage Portrait by Maggie O'Farrell



48. Which book is this?
The Exhibitionist by Charlotte Mendelson
Companion Piece by Ali Smith
Lessons by Ian McEwan
Bournville by Jonathan Coe



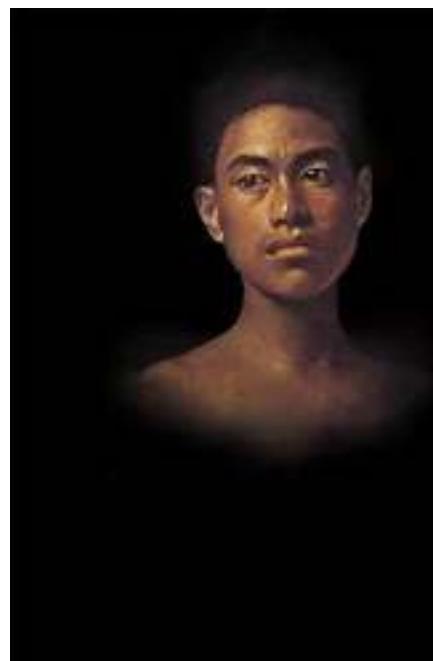
49. Which book is this?

Vagabonds! by Eloghosa Osunde

The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida by Shehan Karunatilaka

Liberation Day by George Saunders

Glory by NoViolet Bulawayo



50. Which book is this?

To Paradise by Hanya Yanagihara

Paradais by Fernanda Melchor

Lapvona by Ottessa Moshfegh

Homesickness by Colin Barrett

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Can you beat this fiendish Christmas quiz?



Illustrations: Jason Ford/The Guardian

Wizard of wordplay Frank Paul shares some of his trickiest brainteasers

Frank Paul

Sat 24 Dec 2022 02.00 EST

Film poem

The names of 16 films from Rolling Stone's Top 100 Films of the 1990s are concealed in this poem. They may be written forwards or backwards, separated by spaces, punctuation or line breaks (for instance, "No, it celebrates ..." would conceal "Election").

My parents forge, from a wasp's wing, ersatz pearls.
My aunt and uncle have got my head in a whorl
And oafish Dexter, their son, is acidic with sarcasm.
I'll teach them (like a samurai) long, amusing lessons, throw them in a chasm.
Cousin Brooke clones tarantulas, Rod stole my toothbrush.
Moreover, Megan draws taboo graffiti of a song thrush.
I told Rebecca, "I'll kill you with punches and ricin!"
"A titch like you? Ha!" She put flesh-eating mice in
My ears, she put ants in my pants!
I can't believe she reduced the bout to ants!
Even a snake deep in a dank fjord, it
Wouldn't stoop to this, no one would applaud it.
I only wish they hadn't drowned out with the national anthem
A Trixie Mattel concert we went to in Grantham.

Mystery carol



- 1** What first name is shared by a Coronation Street character from the 1960s who reappeared in 2008 and an obsessed fan of Alan Partridge, whom Partridge calls a “mentalist”? It is the nickname of the writer of the TV series Cardiac Arrest, which was inspired by the writer’s experiences as a junior doctor.
- 2** Which word is found in a two-word phrase meaning either “widely distributed missive” or “O”, as well as in phrases denoting the A406 and A205?
- 3** Which two initials may refer to a man known for calling for “clear blue water”, who was surprisingly defeated by Stephen Twigg, as well as being initials by which he could no longer describe himself in the wake of his defeat by Stephen Twigg?
- 4** Which four-letter preposition becomes a word meaning the same thing if two letters are added to the end of it, and becomes a polyhedron if three letters are added to the beginning of it?
- 5** Which word may refer to, for instance, a South Korean Netflix series featuring zombies, a British TV series centred on a solicitor, or, for instance, Fungi?

6 Mountains, pretentious, beautiful and elaborate may all be considered opposites of which word?

7 Which word, the surname of a singer-songwriter, may refer to the location of prisoners in an allegory by Plato, and is spelt identically to a Latin word which begins a two-word message found at the House of the Tragic Poet in Pompeii?

8 By taking words which may follow each of these answers to make new words, names or phrases, you can make the title of which Christmas carol?

Missing links



What do these have in common?

1 The primary antagonist of the film Die Hard; a slogan popularised in the wake of shootings in Paris in January 2015; an illustrated poetry collection subtitled Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul; and an England defender who tweeted in response to Priti Patel following the final of Euro 2020, “You don’t get to stoke the fire at the beginning of the tournament by labelling our anti-racism message as ‘Gesture Politics’ &

then pretend to be disgusted when the very thing we're campaigning against, happens."

2 New Year's; Dirty; Another; and Beautiful.

3 A forename shared by women who married George HW Bush, Ringo Starr and the Family Guy character Carter Pewterschmidt; Brooklyn, Romeo and Harper's brother; the name that fills the blank space in the Friends episodes titled The One With _____'s Thunder, The One With _____'s Boots and The One With the Fake _____; and the forename of a performer who starred with Daniel Craig in both Knives Out and No Time to Die. (Be specific.)

4 Being hit with a heated iron, shot with a BB gun, covered in feathers, burned after grabbing a heated doorknob and knocked unconscious with a snow shovel.

5 Partridge cartridge; scrounge lounge; porpoise corpus; and crackpot jackpot.

6 The author of the classic Christmas story The Gift of the Magi; a villain played by Raúl Juliá in the film Street Fighter; the frontman of the band Dinosaur Jr; and the author of The Railway Children.

7 Anne Boleyn; Harry Bailey; Ira Gershwin; and Peppa Pig.

8 The films Home Alone 2; The Little Rascals; The Associate; Zoolander; and Two Weeks Notice.

Non-vegan, vegan



Each question has two answers, spelt identically, except the first must have a “non-vegan” string of letters removed to make the second (spaces may also be added and removed). For example, a pair of answers could be “screaming: sing”.

- 1** Doused with alcohol and set alight: supply.
- 2** Made known: a slender-leaved plant or its stalk.
- 3** Having a varus deformity: dismissed in a particular way.
- 4** A radio drama first broadcast in 1954: the surname shared by Tony and Rory, the first brothers to play rugby union for England together since 1937.
- 5** The two missing words in this definition from Jean Gallier and Jocelyn Quaintance’s Linear Algebra and Optimization with Applications to Machine Learning – “A pair (R, S) such that $A = RS$ with R orthogonal and S symmetric positive semidefinite is called a _____ of A ”: Annabel Lee or The Fall of the House of Usher.
- 6** Someone who interviews people who have completed an assignment and reports on their answers: postpone.

7 Type of bed: inauthentic.

8 A statement concerning the difference between two numbers: the four missing words in this Manchester Evening News headline from September 2020 – “Should you call police if you _____ people in your neighbour’s garden?”

Hidden furniture, fictional lions and missing witches



There are seven items of furniture hidden in this message. Each may be found forwards or backwards, separated by spaces, line breaks or punctuation! Each has at least five letters, and no letter overlaps between more than one item of furniture. Five well-known fictional lions are hidden in the message, too. They’re formed from alternate letters, the way that “Alex” would be formed from **All-New X-Men!** Each one’s got at least six letters and no letter overlaps between more than one. As if that wasn’t hard enough ... there are also six hidden witches here: they’re all anagrams of consecutive words.

Ringo has been fraternising with twits (we checked, of course). How indiscreet, testifying to his tendency to speak rashly. Eeyore-like, illumined

by a moonbeam, he wasn't laid on normal furniture but was squatting down, avidly listening to a gay Abba tribute band, Face Melt in Bottom – and this is when out of the corner where I'd hidden to watch and listen I backflipped and arrested him! No one will escape justice, not even if they are the child of aristo, oligarch, the offspring of mangy earl, noble dynasty's scion! What rude "loyal" bicorns there are, refusing to disclose the truth to the Silver Sorceress. Such creatures engorge her arm in might, so she could lift any dumbbell! I herd them to be boiled in a saucepan, accused in a lawcourt (lads clump, await lily ice cream, watch and jeer), hanged from the infamous flagstaff, then turned to stone!

Jamaica?



Some Christmas crackers here, a joke in every one. Have you heard, “My wife’s gone to the West Indies.” “Jamaica?” “No, she wanted to go”? These jokes are like that – but you supply the place name.

1 My husband’s gone to west London.

?

No, it’s constructed largely from bricks and other building materials.

2 My wife's going to the Republic of China to give a blood transfusion.

?

No, O-negative.

3 My husband's going to India to see a concert by the singer who released Love Me Like You Do.

?

No, I expect her to be fully clothed.

4 I'm going to take the presenter of That's Life to Hampshire.

?

No, I'll transport her in a car.

5 I'm going to Germany to address the former lead singer of the Birthday Party in a cat-like voice.

?

Yes, that's exactly what I plan to do.

6 Tipper Gore's gone to a city in North Africa.

?

No, his relationship to her is friendly rather than mocking.

The answers

Film poem

Swingers (wasp's wing, ersatz)

Orlando (whorl/And oafish)

Casino (son, is acidic)

Crash (with sarcasm) [This refers to David Cronenberg's *Crash* rather than its Paul Haggis-directed, best picture-winning namesake.]

Magnolia ([samurai] long, amusing)

Singles (amusing lessons)

Lone Star (clones tarantulas)

Rushmore (toothbrush/Moreover)

Fargo (taboo graffiti)

Titanic (ricin!" / "A titch)

Heat (flesh-eating)

Seven (ants!/Even)
Naked (snake deep)
JFK (dank fjord)
Audition (applaud it/I only)
The Matrix (anthem/A Trixie)

Mystery carol

Jed [Stone; Maxwell; Gerald “Jed” Mercurio]
Circular [Circular letter; North Circular and South Circular Roads]
MP [Michael Portillo]
Amid [Amidst; Pyramid]
Kingdom
Plain
Cave [Nick Cave; *Cave canem* (“Beware of the dog”)]
I Saw Three Ships Come Sailing In

Missing links

- 1 Contain names of Chinese dynasties with an *s* added at the end (Hans [Gruber]; (Je) Suis (Charlie); Songs 9of *Innocence and Experience*); (Tyrone) Mings
- 2 Can precede “Day” to make U2 songs
- 3 Follow “Santa” to make cities in California: Barbara; Cruz; Monica; Ana (de Armas)
- 4 Injuries suffered by the Wet Bandits in Home Alone
- 5 “Closed” pairs of rhyming words (that is, pairs of words that no other English word rhymes with)
- 6 Known by a single initial followed by a surname: O Henry; M Bison; J Mascis; E Nesbit
- 7 Have brothers named George (George Bailey being the protagonist of It’s a Wonderful Life)
- 8 Feature cameos by Donald Trump

Non-vegan, vegan

- 1 Flambéed: Feed
- 2 Revealed: Reed
- 3 Bowlegged: Bowled
- 4 Under Milk Wood: Underwood
- 5 Polar decomposition: Poe composition

6 Debriefefer: Defer

7 Hammock: Mock

8 Seven is one more than six: See more than six

Furniture

Settee (indiscreet, testifying)

Divan (down, avidly)

Ottoman (bottom – and)

Cabinet (listen I backflipped)

Stool (aristo, oligarch)

Closet (disclose the)

Canape (saucepans, accused)

Lions

Parsley (speak rashly. Eeyore-like)

Nemean Lion (moonbeam, he wasn't laid on normal)

Cowardly Lion (scion! What rude “loyal” bicorns)

World Cup Willie (lawcourt (lads clump, await lily ice)

Mufasa (infamous flagstaff)

Witches

Wicked Witch of the West (with twits (we checked, of)

Baba Yaga (a gay Abba)

Maleficent (Face Melt in)

Morgan le Fay (of mangy earl)

Hermione Granger (engorge her arm in)

Mildred Hubble (dumbbell! I herd)

Jamaica?

1 Maida Vale (Made of ale)

2 Taipei (Type A)

3 New Delhi (Nude Ellie [Goulding])

4 Winchester (Winch Esther [Rantzen])

5 Munich (Mew, “Nick!” [Cave])

6 Algiers (Al jeers)

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Tim Dowling: my wife clicks on a button that ruins five people's Christmas



Composite: Getty/Linda Nylind/Guardian

We're escaping the festive season by going to Morocco. Or at least, we were

...



[Tim Dowling](#)

[@IAmTimDowling](#)

Sat 24 Dec 2022 01.00 EST Last modified on Sat 24 Dec 2022 11.51 EST

It was my wife's idea: to escape [Christmas](#) by going someplace they don't have it. She found cheap flights and whipped up sufficient enthusiasm among our three sons to persuade them to pay for their flights. We'd all spend Christmas together, in Morocco.

The only thing guaranteed to make me feel more anxious than Christmas itself is travelling at Christmas, but everything has been organised by my wife well in advance. I begin to relax by thinking of all the yuletide stuff I would not have to deal with.

Then one evening, around the time we would normally be arguing about whether it was too early to buy a tree, my wife comes downstairs wearing a hard-to-read expression.

"So last week I got this email saying our outgoing flight time had been changed," she says.

“By how much?” I say.

“A couple of hours,” she says. “But what I didn’t notice was that the date had also changed.” She holds out her phone so I can read the email.

“Three days?” I say.

“Three days later,” she says.

“What’s the point of that?” I say. “We won’t even miss Christmas. By the time we’ve unpacked, it’ll be time to come home.”

“The thing is,” she says, “I clicked Accept.”

I go and find my laptop. The middle one, who is sprawled on the sofa, pulls out his phone. The three of us begin a largely overlapping investigation of flight times, alternative routes and terms and conditions.

“There just isn’t another flight,” my wife says. “Apart from two days before, which is double the price.”

We discuss the idea of going on half a Christmas break – the half that doesn’t include Christmas

“What’s the next-closest airport?” I say. “We can drive the rest of the way.”

An atmosphere of panic descends, and eventually subsides. It turns out there are a number of options – giving up among them – but they all depend on what the airline will agree to.

“It should be fine,” I say. “But we can’t do anything now.”

“What do you mean ‘we’?” my wife says.

“You didn’t know what you were accepting,” I say. “How can clicking on a button be legally binding?”

“Feel free to make these arguments yourself,” she says.

“It’s not even a real button,” I say.

Late the next morning my wife comes down to my office. She looks pale, and her arms are tightly folded.

“Well that didn’t go well,” she says.

“What did they agree to?” I say.

“They wouldn’t agree to anything,” she says. “He just kept saying, ‘You clicked Accept’.”

“Not even flying to a different airport?” I say.

“He was also the rudest person I’ve ever spoken to,” she says. “I’m still shaking.”

My wife recounts some of the highlights of the conversation for me. She said: but this will ruin Christmas for five people. He said: it is you who have ruined Christmas.

“So I told him I was a journalist and was going to write about this,” she says.

“But you’re not a journalist,” I say.

“I know, but you are,” she says.

“Yes, but I’m not going to …”

“And then, I’m afraid, I shouted fuck you and put the phone down.”

“I see.”

“I expect they’ll have a recording of that,” she says. “For training purposes.”

“They may do,” I say. “I’d pay to hear it.”

“Anyway I can’t call them back, in case I get the same person. So I’ll have to think about what to do next.”

We have a brief, tricky conversation about sunk costs, unforeseen expenses and the galling possibility of going on half a Christmas break - the half that doesn't include Christmas.

"Don't forget to factor in the cost of the tree and the turkey we'll probably have to get now," I say.

"Ugh, turkey," she says.

When I next see my wife she is at her own desk. Several windows are open on her computer screen, all of them different airline websites.

"There are other flights," she says, quietly, clicking one of the windows.

"Whoa," I say. "Is that one-way?"

"I can't ask the boys to pay for new tickets," she says. "I'm the one who clicked Accept."

"Yeah, but even if you hadn't clicked on it, there still wasn't a good ..."

"Leave me," she says. "I'm not going to decide until I'm in less of a rage."

I back out of the room, thinking: I should probably get a tree, just in case.

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Trump, Bankman-Fried and Musk are the monsters of American capitalism

[Robert Reich](#)



For them, and for everyone who still regards them as heroes, there is no morality in business or economics. The winnings go to the most ruthless



Elon Musk and Donald Trump on 30 May 2020 in Cape Canaveral, Florida.
Photograph: Alex Brandon/AP

Sat 24 Dec 2022 01.00 ESTLast modified on Sat 24 Dec 2022 11.44 EST

If this past week presents any single lesson, it's the social costs of greed. Capitalism is premised on greed but also on guardrails – laws and norms – that prevent greed from becoming so excessive that it threatens the system as a whole.

Yet the guardrails can't hold when avarice becomes the defining trait of an era, as it is now. Laws and norms are no match for the possibility of raking in billions if you're sufficiently ruthless and unprincipled.

Donald Trump's tax returns, just made public, reveal that he took bogus deductions to reduce his tax liability all the way to zero in 2020. All told, he reported \$60m in losses during his presidency while continuing to pull in big money.

Every other president since Nixon has released his tax returns. Trump told America he couldn't because he was in the middle of an IRS audit. But we now learn that the IRS never got around to auditing Trump during his first two years in office, despite being [required to do so by a law](#) dating back to

Watergate, stating that “individual tax returns for the president and the vice-president are subject to mandatory review”.

Of course, Trump is already synonymous with greed and the aggressive violation of laws and norms in pursuit of money and power. Worse yet, when a president of the United States exemplifies – even celebrates – these traits, they leach out into society like underground poison.

Meanwhile, this past week the SEC accused [Sam Bankman-Fried](#) of illicitly using customer money from FTX *from the beginning* to fund his crypto empire.

“From the start, contrary to what [FTX](#) investors and trading customers were told, Bankman-Fried, actively supported by Defendants, continually diverted FTX customer funds ... and then used those funds to continue to grow his empire, using billions of dollars to make undisclosed private venture investments, political contributions, and real estate purchases.”

If the charge sticks, it represents one of the largest frauds in American history. Until recently, Bankman-Fried was considered a capitalist hero whose philanthropy was a model for aspiring billionaires (he and his business partner also donated generously to politicians).

But like the IRS and Trump, the SEC can’t possibly remedy the social costs that Bankman-Fried has unleashed – not just losses to customers and investors but a deepening distrust and cynicism about the system as a whole, the implicit assumption that this is just what billionaires *do*, that the way to make a fortune is to blatantly disregard norms and laws, and that only chumps are mindful of the common good.

Which brings us to [Elon Musk](#), whose slash-and-burn maneuvers at Twitter might cause even the most rabid capitalist to wince. They also raise questions about Musk’s other endeavor, Tesla. Shares in the electric vehicle maker dropped by almost 9% on Thursday as analysts grew increasingly concerned about its fate. Not only is Musk neglecting the carmaker but he’s appropriating executive talent from Tesla to help him at Twitter. (Tesla stock is down over 64% year-to-date.)

Musk has never been overly concerned about laws and norms (you'll recall that he kept Tesla's factory in Fremont, California, going during the pandemic even when public health authorities refused him permission to do so, resulting in a surge of Covid infections among workers). For him, it's all about imposing his gargantuan will on others.

Trump, Bankman-Fried and Musk are the monsters of American capitalism – as much products of this public-be-damned era as they are contributors to it. For them, and for everyone who still regards them as heroes, there is no morality in business or economics. The winnings go to the most ruthless. Principles are for sissies.

But absent any moral code, greed is a public danger. Its poison cannot be contained by laws or accepted norms. Everyone is forced to guard against the next con (or else pull an even bigger con). Laws are broken whenever the gains from breaking them exceed the penalties (multiplied by the odds of getting caught). Social trust erodes.

Adam Smith, the so-called father of modern capitalism, never called himself an economist. He called himself a “moral philosopher,” engaged in discovering the characteristics of a good society. He thought his best book was not *The Wealth of Nations*, the bible of modern capitalist apologists, but the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, where he argued that the ethical basis of society lies in compassion for other human beings.

Presumably Adam Smith would have bemoaned the growing inequalities, corruption, and cynicism spawned by modern capitalism and three of its prime exemplars – Trump, Bankman-Fried, and Musk.

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[Republic of ParenthoodChristmas](#)

I've always felt a tug of sadness at Christmas – until this year

[Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett](#)



I can never experience the festive season as a child again, but seeing it through my baby's eyes is the next best thing



A baby looking at a Christmas tree in a shopping mall in Shanghai, China, 25 December 2020. Photograph: Alex Plavevski/EPA

Sat 24 Dec 2022 02.00 EST Last modified on Sat 24 Dec 2022 16.29 EST

I've been well and truly ambushed by [Christmas](#) this year: the tree is only just decorated, and as for the homemade wreath I normally lovingly create with greenery foraged from the neighbourhood – forget it. I'm late on everything, from sending my tax information to my accountant to this column. I've missed all the Christmas delivery windows, and have spent this week rushing around town like the harassed mother I now am. Owing to illness and the baby forgetting how to sleep without the breast, I have missed every single festive gathering, both personal and professional, including the *Guardian Opinion* do, a huge family weekend in a Welsh haunted house, and various literary events, the schmoozing element of which could well have helped the chances of my new book – reference to which I have shoehorned in here in the hope that it might drum up some preorders. I have drunk precisely one (one!) martini, my first in 18 months, and while I enjoyed it, I would rather have had three, despite everyone knowing that two is the tipping point.

Yet I couldn't be happier. Despite the opening paragraph, if you've come here for a protracted whinge, you will go away disappointed. This mad, chaotic singular year, I have felt the meaning of Christmas more than

perhaps any other. I am the very essence of joy to the world, peace on earth, good tidings etc, etc. I haven't even touched my misanthropic Merry Fucking Christmas [Spotify playlist](#), because I don't wish I had a river I could skate away on. I'm happy right here, with my husband and my baby, and though I may roll my eyes during lullaby time when I get to lines such as "holy infant so tender and mild" and "the little Lord Jesus no crying he makes" it is only momentary. This year, I have had a great gift bestowed upon me, the gift of a child, and it has changed everything.

It's not as though I hated Christmas before. I was no Scrooge; I got into the spirit, but I was always acutely aware of the melancholic side to the season, a festival of feasting and light in a darkness that is never entirely absent despite our best efforts, as we think of loved ones we have lost and Christmases past and feel, or [I do anyway](#), a tug of sadness at the fact that we will never live those innocent childhood memories again. Divorce, bereavement, illness, poverty, pain – all families face challenges, and Christmas can have a tendency to cast them in high relief.

In my case, being a child of divorce with a brother in a care home, it was the scattered nature of my family, so different in its patterns and traditions from the wholesome, conventional groupings we see in adverts, and the stress of travelling from pillar to post to be with everyone I loved in a short window of time, that sometimes made me feel less than jolly. Perhaps this is why my favourite carol is In the Bleak Midwinter and my favourite yuletide song is Christmas Card from a Hooker in Minneapolis. I took a morose joy in the defiant and the non-traditional, the saturnine and the grinchy, the ghostly and the uncomfortable. The darkness at the edge of the toy town.

While it is true that I will never experience a childhood Christmas again, will never fully live the excitement of my first real tree in its red bucket, with its hot, multicoloured twinkle lights enclosed in little plastic petals, or the anticipation of leaving a wee dram for Santa on the fireplace before heading to bed, I feel that I have been gifted something greater. Because I get to see it through the eyes of my baby son, and I get to devote my time to giving him his first Christmas. From taking him to get the tree, to describing the decorations as he watches me decorate it, singing carols to him, and seeing his face as he watches the lovely [Mr Bear's Christmas](#) on CBeebies

(narrated by Stephen Fry, it's an 11-minute DIY animation by the self-published author Lorna Gibson, crafted from felt, wool and foam and shot on an iPhone using a £5 stop-motion app), it's all been magical so far. I've loved dressing him in a Christmas jumper, charity shopping for toys, and choosing the books that will become his favourites.

Most special of all, however, was our trip to see the lights at Kenwood House earlier this month. We went last year, when I was pregnant with him, my stomach swelling, my walk on its way to becoming a waddle, my fears about Covid and the prospect of giving birth in an understaffed maternity unit frightening me more than I let on as I posed next to the tree. To return with him bursting with excitement at the lights as snowflakes kissed his red, cold cheeks and he kicked his legs as his dad carried him in the sling was one of the best moments of my motherhood so far. Seeing a dad chase his toddler, who had illegally broken into a light installation and was running around, gave me a glimpse of what my life will look like next year. The next morning, I watched my son shake the snow that had fallen overnight from the branches in the garden.

This time of year can be tough for lots of reasons. I'm not suggesting that having a baby can melt it all away, but it does feel as if I've undergone a personal shift. Instead of being haunted by the ghost of Christmas past, I'm embracing the ghost of Christmas future. It's all for him now. All of it.

What's working

I'm lucky enough to live near [the Toy Project](#), a charity that recycles unwanted toys and sends them to children who need them, whether in refuges, hospitals, children's homes or abroad. The range available to customers is brilliant, too, and if you're in the London area it's well worth the trip.

What's not

My husband has been teaching the baby to sleep again, and is making great progress, but the sleep debt I've accumulated means I'm still catching up. After a disrupted night, I usually repair to the spare room with an eye mask and earplugs for a totally sensorily deprived snooze. Unfortunately, the cat

has worked out how to open doors, and has decided that mornings are prime time for playing on my head.

- Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett is a Guardian columnist and author of [The Year of the Cat](#), which will be published in January 2023
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OpinionPolitics

Who can doubt the futuristic brilliance of Sunak and co? They've given us driverless government

[Marina Hyde](#)



On site visits, the PM and ministers like to dress up as workers, but their only actual power is to make everything worse



Rishi Sunak with welder Brian Walsh at the Harland & Wolff shipyard factory, Belfast, 16 December 2022. Photograph: Charles McQuillan/Getty Images

Fri 23 Dec 2022 07.59 EST Last modified on Fri 23 Dec 2022 13.40 EST

Christmas week brings an exciting labour market win for Rishi Sunak, as the prime minister finally manages to [appoint an ethics adviser](#). For the past few months, this empty role has begun to look like one of the jobs that British people no longer seem minded to do, like fruit picking or being Nigel Farage's wife. As part of Sunak's commitment to being the change he wants to see, his ethics guy is Sir Laurie Magnus, a former investment banker who won't have the power to launch his own investigations. Maybe this is Sunak's version of a terrible cracker joke.

A full 18 hours into his job, Magnus has yet to stage a wildcat strike, which feels like a rare industrial relations success for the prime minister. For those struggling to keep track of who else is on strike, a useful rule of thumb is that if a secretary of state has dressed up as one on a visit this year, they are now taking industrial action.

Senior politicians have cosplayed as train drivers, ambulance workers, Border Force officials – the list goes on. We've yet to see health secretary

Steve Barclay in a nurse's uniform, though do assume that the reason politicians tuck their tie into their shirt when they visit hospitals is to prevent someone grabbing them by it and asking them what on earth they actually meant when they ostentatiously clapped for carers. It says a lot that you can be booked for sarcastic applause in football, but in politics it can see you promoted.

As for how it's all going down with the public, the Chinese this week unveiled an [ultra-deepwater drillship](#) that will be able to plumb twice the depth at which the Titanic rests, though that still leaves the Conservative poll rating just beneath its reach. With the country settling into a kind of perma-rage that nothing much works any more, there is something mesmeric about the government's attempts to insist its dignity hasn't been compromised, and that it has taken back control of the taking back control. The party's chaos machine has spewed out just the three prime ministers this year, yet Sunak's appearance before the liaison committee this week appeared to downplay this farce to the equivalent of a few substitutions in your shopping order. Sorry, Downing Street contains the following substitutions: 1xLizTruss for 1xBorisJohnson, 1xRishiSunak for 1xLizTruss, 1xEvenWorseEconomicProspects for 1xBadEconomic Prospects.

Yet for all the dysfunction and breakdown taking place out there in the place we call reality, Sunak comes across as a sort of prime ministerial chat tool, a state-of-the-art robot whose learned responses are uncannily human-adjacent, but divorced from any sense he meaningfully gets any of it. "I'm really, really robust," he told the liaison committee, which feels like the sort of thing Alexa's software throws up after a slight pause when your kids ask it a rude question.

'We want to save lives': ambulance staff strike across England and Wales – video report

Then again, perhaps this is where he wishes to take the role. Sunak has long been one of those Silicon Valley-frotters who has swallowed all the bullshit about the possibility of a frictionless world, where tech companies act in concert to provide superior services to the muddle of the state, and politicians like him are willingly reduced to a kind of genial front-of-house role. They are not so much problem-solvers and pathfinders as polished

maître-d' figures, selected only because people still like to see a human in a ceremonial front-facing role, even though they know the country is essentially driverless.

It does feel like we're half the way there. The country certainly appears driverless – but mainly in the sense that Brian Harvey's car was when the East 17 singer contrived [to run himself over](#) with it.

Of course, the reality of all the tech bros' driverless utopias is that beneath the supposedly unruffled surface are the countless exhausted workers it takes to keep the appearance of seamlessness on the road. A significant number of these are joining the strikes, somehow unpersuaded that their reclassification as "key workers" during the pandemic came from the heart. An early readout of Covid was that middle-class people stayed at home while working-class people brought them stuff. Or saved their lives, or whatever. The current attempt to rebrand key workers as uppity workers is certainly bold. Unfortunately, it's proving quite difficult to shift the perception that all emissaries of the government actively make everything worse. A plan to include ministers among volunteers manning Border Force positions during the walkout has failed to persuade even No 10. A senior government official conceded to Friday's Times: "Having a minister and their entourage is probably the last thing that people need to minimise the disruption."

And that perception feels public-sector-wide. As the UK's post-pandemic recovery is revealed to have been even weaker than previously thought, it's almost as if ministers dressing up in the clothes of people who do essential jobs has reached its limits as a pageantry strategy. The UK is the [only G7 country](#) not to have regained the ground lost during the lockdown, with seemingly no politician willing to face up to an answer or range of answers as to why that may be. The government comes across as something events happen to, rather than because of, except in a negative way. Still, nurses have this morning announced further strikes next month, so perhaps some of them could dress up as politicians for a day and go on a site visit to Westminster to man the frontline themselves. It's increasingly difficult to see how they could do any worse.

- Marina Hyde is a Guardian columnist

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Martin Rowson on the government's pay offers to striking workers – cartoon

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2022.12.24 - Around the world

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China

Chinese city seeing half a million Covid cases a day – local health chief

The figures reported by Qingdao's municipal health chief were in stark contrast to official statistics from the central government



Chinese hospitals have reportedly been overwhelmed since the dismantling of the country's zero-Covid measures. Photograph: Noel Celis/AFP/Getty Images

Agence France-Presse
Sat 24 Dec 2022 00.08 EST

Half a million people a day are being infected with Covid-19 in a single Chinese city, a senior health official has said, in a rare and quickly censored acknowledgment that the country's wave of infections is not being reflected in official statistics.

A news outlet operated by the ruling Communist party in Qingdao reported the municipal health chief as saying that the eastern city was seeing “between 490,000 and 530,000” new Covid cases a day.

The coastal city of about 10 million people was “in a period of rapid transmission ahead of an approaching peak”, Bo Tao reportedly said on Friday, adding that the infection rate would accelerate by another 10% over the weekend.

The report was shared by several other news outlets but appeared to have been edited by Saturday morning to remove the case figures.

China’s National Health Commission said that just 4,103 new infections were recorded across the entire country on Friday, with no new deaths. In Shandong, the province where Qingdao is located, authorities officially logged just 31 new domestic cases.

China this month rapidly dismantled key pillars of its zero-Covid strategy, doing away with snap lockdowns, lengthy quarantines and travel curbs in a quick reversal of its hallmark containment strategy.

Cities across the country have struggled to cope as surging infections have emptied pharmacy shelves, filled hospital wards and appeared to cause backlogs at crematoriums and funeral homes.

But the end of strict testing mandates has made caseloads virtually impossible to track, while authorities have narrowed the medical definition of a Covid death in a move experts have said would suppress the number of fatalities attributable to the virus.

China’s government has tight control over the country’s media, with legions of online censors on hand to scrub out content deemed politically sensitive.

Most government-run publications have downplayed the severity of the country’s exit wave, instead depicting the policy reversal as logical and controlled.

But some outlets have hinted at shortages of medicine and hospitals under strain, though estimates of actual case numbers remain rare.

The government of eastern Jiangxi province said on Friday that 80% of its population – equivalent to about 36 million people – would be infected by March.

More than 18,000 Covid patients had been admitted to major medical institutions in the province in the two weeks up to Thursday, including nearly 500 severe cases but no deaths, the statement said.

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January 6 report review: 845 pages, countless crimes, one simple truth – Trump did it



Storm clouds above the US Capitol in Washington. Photograph: Jim Lo Scalzo/EPA

The House committee has done its work. The result is a riveting read, utterly damning of the former president and his followers

Lloyd Green

Sat 24 Dec 2022 01.00 ESTLast modified on Sat 24 Dec 2022 06.34 EST

Whether fomenting insurrection, [standing accused of rape](#) or [stiffing the IRS](#), Donald Trump remains in the news. On Monday, the House select committee voted to issue [its final report](#). Three days later, after releasing witness transcripts, the committee delivered the full monty. Bennie Thompson, Liz Cheney and the rest of [committee](#) name names and flash receipts. At 845 pages, the report is damning – and monumental.

Trumpworld is a [crime scene](#), a tableau lifted from Goodfellas. Joshua Green of Bloomberg nailed that in [The Devil's Bargain](#), his 2017 take on Trump's winning campaign. The gang was always transgressive, fear and violence part of its repertoire.

Brian Sicknick, the Capitol police officer who died after the riot. E Jean Carroll, who alleges sexual assault. Shaye Moss, the Georgia elections worker targeted by Rudy Giuliani and other minions. Each bears witness.

The January 6 report laments that “thuggish behavior from President Trump’s team, including efforts to intimidate described elsewhere ... gave rise to many concerns about [Cassidy] Hutchinson’s security, both in advance of and since her public testimony”.

Hutchinson is the former aide to Trump and his final chief of staff, Mark Meadows, whose testimony may have been the most dramatic and impactful.

In the same vein, the committee chronicles Trump’s demand that Brad Raffensperger, the Republican secretary of state in Georgia, “find 11,780 votes”. Trump reminded Raffensperger of the possible consequences if his directive went unheeded: “That’s a criminal, that’s a criminal offense. That’s a big risk to you and to Ryan, your lawyer ... I’m notifying you that you’re letting it happen.”

Now, a Fulton county grand jury weighs Trump’s fate. Jack Smith, a federal prosecutor newly appointed special counsel, may prove Trump’s match too.

Transcripts released by the committee show Stefan Passantino, Hutchinson’s initial lawyer, engaging in conduct that markedly resembles witness tampering.

“Stefan said, ‘No, no, no, no, no. We don’t want to talk about that.’” According to Hutchinson, Passantino was talking about Trump’s fabled post-rally meltdown on January 6, when told he couldn’t go to the Capitol too.

Hutchinson understood that disloyalty would mean repercussions. It took immense courage and conscience to speak as she did. Trump’s supporting cast was retribution-ready. She knew she would be “fucking nuked”.

In a woeful prebuttal, Passantino claimed to have behaved “honorably” and “ethically”. He blamed Hutchinson. His advice, he said, was “fully consistent” with the “sole interests” of his client. He is now on leave from his law firm.

To quote the final report, “certain witnesses from the Trump White House displayed a lack of full recollection of certain issues”. Meadows, for one, is shown to have an allergy to the truth. The committee singles out The Chief’s Chief, his memoir, as an exercise in fabulism. Trump gave Meadows a blurb for his cover: “We will have a big future together”. In so many ways, Donald. In so many ways.

The book “made the categorical claim that the president never intended to travel to the Capitol” on 6 January, the committee now says, adding that the “evidence demonstrates that Meadows’s claim is categorically false”.

He had needlessly cast a spotlight on himself and others. The report: “Because the Meadows book conflicted sharply with information that was being received by the select committee, the committee became increasingly wary that other witnesses might intentionally conceal what happened.”

Then again, no one ever accused Meadows, a former congressman, of being the sharpest knife in the drawer. Reptilian calculation is not prudence or prescience. Last year, Trump trashed Meadows as “ fucking stupid”. He may have a point. After all, Meadows confessed to Trump of possibly putting Joe Biden’s life in jeopardy at the September 2020 debate, after positive and negative Covid tests that were covered up.

Trump himself derided the Chief’s Chief as “fake news”. The committee referred Meadows to the justice department.

“It’s easy to imagine Meadows has flipped and is cooperating with the justice department,” said Ryan Goodman, a New York University law professor and former Pentagon special counsel. The vicious cycle rolls on.



Donald Trump and Mark Meadows exit the Oval Office on 4 January 2021, on their way to Georgia. Photograph: Drew Angerer/Getty Images

The committee also gives Kayleigh McEnany, Trump's final press secretary, her own moment in the sun. She too attempted to cover the tracks of her boss.

"A segment of McEnany's testimony seemed evasive," the committee concludes. "In multiple instances, McEnany's testimony did not seem nearly as forthright as that of her press office staff, who testified about what McEnany said."

We saw this movie before – when McEnany stood at the West Wing lectern.

"McEnany disputed suggestions that President Trump was resistant to condemning the violence and urging the crowd at the Capitol to act peacefully when they crafted his tweet at 2.38pm on January 6," the report says. "Yet one of her deputies, Sarah Matthews, told the select committee that McEnany informed her otherwise."

Last year, McEnany delivered a book of her own, namely *For Such a Time as This*. The title riffs off the Book of Esther. McEnany repeatedly thanks the deity, touts her academic credentials and vouches for her honesty. She claims she never lied to reporters. After all, her education at "Oxford,

Harvard and Georgetown” meant she always relied on “truthful, well-sourced, well-researched information”.

She lauds Trump for standing for “faith, conservatism and freedom” and delivers a bouquet to Meadows. “You were a constant reminder of faith. Thank you for being an inspiring leader for the entire West Wing.”

Whether Trump [retains the loyalty of evangelicals](#) in 2024 remains to be seen.

The January 6 report often [kills with understatement](#). For example, it repeatedly mocks Giuliani and his posse. The committee notes: “On 7 November, Rudy Giuliani headlined a Philadelphia press conference in front of a landscaping business called Four Seasons Total Landscaping, near a crematorium and down the street from a sex shop.”

Like Giuliani’s three ex-wives, the members of the committee loathe him.

“Standing in front of former New York police commissioner and recently pardoned convicted felon Bernard Kerik, Giuliani gave opening remarks and handed the podium over to his first supposed eyewitness to election fraud, who turned out to be a convicted sex offender.”

If the debacle surrounding [George Santos](#), the newly-elected New York congressman, [teaches us anything](#), it is that you can never do enough background-checking.

Giuliani’s law license is suspended, on account of “false claims” in post-election hearings. [A panel of the DC bar](#) has recommended disbarment.

Nick Fuentes, Trump’s infamous neo-Nazi dinner guest, also appears in the January 6 report, regarding his part in the insurrection. He is quoted: “Capitol siege was fucking awesome.” Recently, [Fuentes reaffirmed his admiration for Hitler](#). Trump still refuses to disavow him.

Trumpworld is a tangled web. Ultimately, though, the January 6 report is chillingly clear about the spider at its center.

“The central cause of January 6 was one man, former President [Donald Trump](#). None of the events of January 6 would have happened without him.”

True.

- *The Final Report of the Select Committee to Investigate the January 6 Attack on the United States Capitol is available [here](#).*
-

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Megan Thee Stallion

Tory Lanez found guilty in Megan Thee Stallion shooting

Felonies facing rapper Tory Lanez include assault with a semiautomatic weapon and could lead to up to 22 years in prison



Megan Thee Stallion arrives at the Billboard Music Awards in May.
Photograph: Jordan Strauss/Invision/AP

Associated Press
Fri 23 Dec 2022 19.02 EST

A Los Angeles jury on Friday found rapper Tory Lanez guilty of three felonies in the 2020 shooting of hip-hop star [Megan Thee Stallion](#) that left her wounded with bullet fragments in her feet.

The jury deliberated for one day before convicting the 30-year-old Canadian rapper, whose legal name is Daystar Peterson, of assault with a

semiautomatic firearm, having a loaded, unregistered firearm in a vehicle and discharging a firearm with gross negligence. The counts could lead to up to 22 years in prison.

Lanez showed no visible reaction as the verdict was read. He was handcuffed while in the courtroom.

After the jury left the courtroom, Lanez's father, Sonstar Peterson, leapt up and began shouting: "This wicked system stands judged before God almighty!" He then pointed to the two prosecutors in the case and yelled "You two are evil, wicked people. You know exactly what you did."

Deputies removed him from the courtroom, where he continued to shout in the hallway.

Megan Thee Stallion, whose legal name is Megan Pete, testified during the trial that Lanez fired a handgun at the back of her feet and shouted for her to dance as she walked away from car they had been in.

She needed surgery to remove bullet fragments from her feet.

The shooting set off a [national conversation that peaked during the trial](#), focusing on the reluctance of Black victims to speak to police, the protection of Black women, gender politics in hip-hop, and online toxicity.

In closing arguments, prosecutors emphasised the courage it took for Megan to come forward and the vitriol the 27-year-old has faced for it. They said she had no incentive to tell anything but the truth.



Tory Lanez enters the Clara Shortridge Foltz Criminal Justice Center in Los Angeles. Photograph: Damian Dovarganes/AP

“Why would she lie?” Deputy District Attorney Alexander Bott said. “She’s been subjected to a stream of hate. For what? For coming forward as a victim of domestic violence?”

Lanez’s lawyer alleged in his closing argument that the shots were actually fired by Megan’s friend Kelsey Harris in a jealous fight over Lanez, who tried to stop the shooting. The attorney, George Mgdesyan, argued Megan created a more sympathetic narrative by pinning the shooting on Lanez.

“Megan Pete is a liar. She lied about everything in this case from the beginning,” Mgdesyan said. “She lied under oath here.”

Harris denied being the shooter and identified Lanez as the one holding the gun. Her attorney, in an email, declined to comment on her involvement.

Lanez began releasing mixtapes in 2009 and saw a steady rise in popularity, moving on to major-label albums. His last two reached the Top 10 on Billboard’s charts.

Megan Thee Stallion was already a major rising star at the time of the shooting, and her prominence has surged since. She won a Grammy for best

new artist in 2021, and had No 1 singles on the Billboard Hot 100 with her own song “Savage,” featuring Beyoncé, and as a guest on Cardi B’s “WAP.”

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Palestinian territories

No room in Bethlehem's inns as tourists return for Christmas season

West Bank city gears up for festive season after two years of pandemic restrictions



People take pictures of the Christmas tree and nativity scene in Manger Square, outside the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, West Bank.
Photograph: Mahmoud Illean/AP



[Bethan McKernan](#) in Bethlehem

Sat 24 Dec 2022 00.00 ESTLast modified on Sat 24 Dec 2022 03.13 EST

There's once again no room at the inn in Bethlehem as the Palestinian city gears up for its first [Christmas](#) season after two years of pandemic restrictions.

During the week of Christmas this year, 120,000 tourists and pilgrims from all over the world are expected to visit the occupied West Bank town, home to the Byzantine Church of the Nativity, which stands on the spot where it is believed Jesus was born. The predicted numbers for 2022 are almost on a par with 2019, when Bethlehem saw an all-time high of 150,000 visitors in the same time period, and 3 million visitors overall.

On a mild, sunny afternoon in mid-December, hundreds of local and international tourists stopped to look at a nativity scene and posed for selfies in front of the huge Christmas tree in Manger Square, adjacent to the church. As the daylight began to fade, festive lights glowed all over the city centre, and a band started up at a nearby restaurant.

Historically one of the most important centres of Christianity, today the majority of Bethlehem's population is Muslim but the town is still home to a thriving Christian community and many Christian orders.

“I’m Muslim but I love Christmas. I’ve been coming to Bethlehem every year since I was a kid,” said street seller Majed Hamdan, 21, who was hawking Santa hats and face masks in the square.

“People are definitely back this year. The atmosphere is very different.”

Tourism is a vital sector of the Palestinian economy, accounting for about 15% of the Palestinian Authority’s gross domestic product. Since the territories do not have an airport, most international visitors enter through Israel, crossing checkpoints in Israel’s West Bank wall that keeps the two holy cities of Jerusalem and Bethlehem separate from one another despite the fact they’re only 6 miles (10km) apart.

Covid-19 decimated Bethlehem’s tourism industry: the hotels, restaurants, olive woodworking and souvenir shops lost \$200m (£164m) during two years’ worth of closures, the local municipality has estimated. Unlike other governments, the weak Palestinian Authority did not offer financial help for Palestinian business owners or the city’s 8,000 workers, making the pandemic a gruelling challenge.

Map

But this year, Bethlehem’s 5,000 hotel rooms are once again fully booked. Some visitors to Israel and the [Palestinian territories](#) choose to stay in the West Bank city for the duration of their trip, as it is much cheaper than Jerusalem.

“Covid was very tough. We are a family business, we have been here for 90 years. Business goes up and down with the political situation but we never had anything like the pandemic,” said Nabil Giacaman, a third-generation woodworker and owner of the Il Bambino arts and sculpture shop.

“I am still worried because there’s inflation and money problems everywhere so even if tourists are coming they don’t have as much to spend. Still ... now is much better than before.”

While the pandemic may have eased, 2022 has still been difficult here: this year has been the bloodiest in the decades-old Israeli-Palestinian conflict in

Jerusalem and the West Bank in 17 years, with about 150 Palestinians and 30 Israelis killed. Fighting has largely been contained to the north of the occupied territory, but the Israeli army killed a teenager in a refugee camp on the outskirts of Bethlehem earlier this month, leading to a daylong strike across the city in protest.

But amid the golden mosaics, candles and incense in Emperor Justinian's 1,500-year-old Church of the Nativity, no visitors seemed worried about the possibility of violence. Tour guides working in several different languages patiently shepherded hundreds of foreigners through the church's tiny entrance, explaining the many layers of religion and history inside.

"I've always wanted to come pray under the star where Jesus was born and now I finally have the chance to," said Dorothy Wise, a 70-year-old from the US on a tour with her church group. "We actually planned this a while back so it's great to finally be here."

Fabio Vecchio, 36, was wandering around Bethlehem with a small group of friends from Milan. "I'm not really religious but we are enjoying our visit. It feels special to be here during the Christmas season," he said.

Bethlehem locals, too, are determined that this year's celebrations should go ahead: the busy December programme includes hosting international delegations and performances from artists and singers before the festivities culminate with midnight mass on Christmas Eve.

"This city is nothing without pilgrims and of course Christmas is the best time of the year here," said William Ghattas, 54, a friar at the church drinking coffee outside in the sunshine. "It is wonderful to welcome people back again."

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/dec/24/no-room-in-bethlehems-inns-as-tourists-return-for-christmas-season>

[Paris](#)

Clashes in Paris after three people killed in shooting at Kurdish centre

French media say a 69-year-old opened fire on group of people, and government says incident seemed to have been racially motivated

Clashes erupt with French police outside scene of deadly shooting in Paris – video

[Jon Henley](#) in Paris

[@jonhenley](#)

Fri 23 Dec 2022 15.15 ESTFirst published on Fri 23 Dec 2022 07.01 EST

Clashes have erupted in Paris after three people were killed in a shooting at a Kurdish cultural centre that the French government said appeared to have been racially motivated.

French media reported that a 69-year-old man opened fire on a group of people at the Ahmet-Kaya centre on Rue d'Enghien in the 10th arrondissement on Friday morning. Shots were also fired at a hairdresser's and a restaurant in the street. Three people have been wounded, one critically.

Prosecutors said police detained the alleged gunman, who had previous convictions for assault and possession of an illegal weapon, and seized a weapon within minutes of the shooting. He was wounded in the face and taken to hospital.

Laure Beccuau, the Paris prosecutor, said in a statement that one woman and two men had died in the attack, and three men had been wounded. "There is no evidence at this stage to link [the suspect] to any extremist ideological movement," she said.

Emmanuel Macron said in a tweet that “the Kurds of France” had been “the target of a vile attack in the heart of Paris”. The French president said his thoughts were with the victims, the wounded and their families, and thanked the police.

[Le Monde](#) said the victims were all members of the Kurdish community and had died inside and in front of the cultural centre. A centre spokesperson, Agit Polat, accused French authorities of “once more failing to protect us … For us, this is a terrorist attack.”

[Graphic](#)

Several hundred Kurds gathered outside the centre and in the streets nearby on Friday afternoon in protest at the shootings, clashing at times violently with security forces, throwing rocks and setting fire to rubbish bins. Police responded with teargas and 11 officers were wounded, police said.

A further demonstration by Kurdish organisations in France is planned, at the capital’s Place de la République on Saturday.

In January 2013, three Kurdish female activists, including Sakine Cansız, a co-founder of the Kurdistan Workers’ party (PKK), [were shot dead at a Kurdish information](#) centre near the cultural centre. Their suspected killer, Ömer Güney, a Turkish national, [died of a brain tumour](#) in a Paris hospital in 2016 before his trial.

The French interior minister, Gérald Darmanin, said at the scene of Friday’s shooting that it was “not certain … the gunman was specifically targeting the Kurdish community”, but more likely “foreigners in general”. More should be known about his motives after he had been questioned by police, Darmanin said.



There were protests and some clashes at the scene of the shooting.
Photograph: Blondet Eliot/Abaca/Shutterstock

Beccau said the man, reportedly a retired train conductor, had been released from jail on 12 December on strict conditions after serving a year's pre-trial detention, the maximum allowed by the law. French media said he was awaiting trial for a sword attack on migrants.

Two Sudanese men needed hospital treatment for their wounds after that December 2021 attack, on a camp in the 12th arrondissement, according to reports. The man slashed six tents with a sword before being overpowered, the NGO Utopia56 said.

The Paris prosecutor also said the man had been convicted twice previously: in 2016, for attempted manslaughter, and in 2017 for illegal possession of a weapon. Le Parisien cited an unnamed police source as saying he told officers during his arrest on Friday he "did not like Kurds".

An investigation had been opened for murder, voluntary manslaughter and aggravated violence, Beccau said, adding that a possible racist motive would "obviously be part of the investigation".

The Paris mayor, Anne Hidalgo, said psychological assistance would be made available to people affected by the incident.

One witness, a shopkeeper in the street, told Agence France-Presse that seven or eight shots had been fired. “It was just complete panic – everyone locked themselves in,” the woman said.

The owner of a restaurant in the street said they had seen “an old white man enter the cultural centre and open fire. Then he went into the hairdressing salon next door.”

A Kurdish activist, Murat Roni, said the cultural centre was “like a Kurdish embassy in Paris … a meeting place for cultural events, political discussions, help with immigration procedures – a building where all Kurds could meet”.

France experienced a string of deadly attacks by Islamic extremists in 2015 and 2016, and remains on alert for terrorism-related violence.

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Headlines monday 12 december 2022

- [Live UK cold weather: National Grid puts contingency coal units on standby as travel is disrupted by snow](#)
- [UK weather Britain has coldest night of the year as temperature hits -15C in Scotland](#)
- [Energy National Grid fires up two coal-fired plants amid UK icy weather](#)
- [Solihull Four children in hospital after being pulled from lake](#)

UK weather

Police say no suggestion more are missing in Solihull lake where three children died after falling through ice – as it happened

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/live/2022/dec/12/uk-cold-weather-snow-travel-disruption-trains-flights-cancelled-latest-updates-live>

UK weather

UK weather: ice warning remains as temperature hits -15C in Scotland

Travel disrupted as Britain hit by ice, fog and snow, with airports forced to close and rail and roads affected

Travel disruption as heavy snow blankets parts of UK – video

Gwyn Topham and agency

Mon 12 Dec 2022 13.16 ESTFirst published on Mon 12 Dec 2022 03.03 EST

An ice warning covering much of the south-east will remain in place until 11am on Tuesday after snow, ice and fog brought widespread travel disruption to parts of the country.

While [Scotland](#) experienced the lowest temperatures, with the mercury dropping below -15C, transport problems were greatest in the south-east. The first inches of snow to fall this winter left motorists negotiating treacherous roads and some rail services out of action, as airports cancelled flights after ice and fog closed runways.

The Met Office said cold weather would persist through the week, and issued a yellow snow and ice warning for northern Scotland and north-east England from midnight on Tuesday until noon on Thursday.

The Met Office said there would be heavy snow in parts of the north and Scotland on Tuesday, with as much as 8 inches (20cm) accumulating over high ground, and the potential for temperatures in northern Scotland to fall even further than the -15.7C recorded in Braemar, Aberdeenshire, overnight on Sunday.

Milder conditions were expected by the weekend, although a Met Office spokesperson said the outlook remained uncertain.

Drivers and rail passengers in the south-east in particular were left struggling on Monday as the wintry conditions closed major roads and rail routes in the early morning.

National Highways said it had reopened all motorways in the south-east before lunchtime after many routes, including the M25, had been blocked in places by snow and accidents.

The UK's busiest motorway, orbiting London, was snow-covered in parts and closed entirely for several hours between junctions 23 and 25 in Hertfordshire because of jackknifed lorries. Gritters, snow ploughs and emergency services were deployed to reopen all roads in the region.

National Highways said it had up to 25 gritters treating the M25 as snow and ice hit overnight, spreading 960 tonnes of salt and more than 18,000 litres of anti-freeze. The agency urged motorists to continue driving with care because of icy conditions.

The AA president, Edmund King, said the number of breakdown callouts was about 25% higher than normal.

On the railways, the wintry conditions mainly affected services in the south-east, after several inches fell around London, Anglia and Kent. Southeastern trains issued a “do not travel” warning on Monday morning and there was also significant disruption on services run by Greater Anglia, South Western Railway and Southern, ahead of strike action due to begin on Tuesday.

Network Rail said it was deploying de-icing trains to treat tracks, especially in the south-east where the electrified services rely on the third rail. It said the first early morning trains were likely to be most affected by freezing weather.

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Early train services were disrupted around Edinburgh when icicles in a tunnel caused signalling failure. All East Midlands Railway trains were delayed due to a freight train having derailed at low speed and blocking the line.

Tube trains in London were delayed and disrupted, particularly the outer network as ice and snow caused equipment failures on several lines.

Network Rail said most services around Britain outside the south-east were otherwise running normally, on the first day of a [new weekday timetable](#), after the official changeover of schedules on Sunday.

More than 300 flights due to serve UK airports were cancelled across Sunday and Monday, with Heathrow, Manchester, Luton and Bristol among those affected. Gatwick and Stansted airports temporarily closed their runways on Sunday to clear snow. Gatwick was the worst affected, according to data from Cirium, cancelling 91 flights at the weekend and dozens more on Monday morning.

Police warned people to continue to avoid open water after [three children died](#) after being pulled from a lake in Solihull in the West Midlands on Sunday afternoon after falling through ice.

Richard Stanton, the area commander for West Midlands fire and rescue service, said: “We know the weather forecast for the next few days is expected to be bitterly cold. Please, adults and children alike, stay away from open water. Under no circumstances venture on to ice regardless how thick or safe you think this ice may be.”

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Energy industry

National Grid stands down coal plants on standby in icy weather

Great Britain's electricity system operator says it has no concerns over blackouts despite snow and ice

- [UK cold weather disruption – live updates](#)



The coal-fired plants that were preparing to operate on Monday are owned by the energy company Drax. Photograph: Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

[Jasper Jolly](#) and [Alex Lawson](#)

Mon 12 Dec 2022 06.44 ESTFirst published on Mon 12 Dec 2022 03.09 EST

Great Britain's electricity system operator has stood down two coal-fired power stations that were put on emergency standby to keep the lights on

amid a spell of cold weather.

Earlier on Monday, National Grid's electricity system operator (ESO) said the two "winter contingency coal units" would be available if required as temperatures dip below zero and demand soars. It said the public should continue to use energy as normal.

But the units will not now be needed, with Great Britain's energy needs met by other sources, including an anticipated pickup in wind power.

The government this summer asked the owners of coal-fired power stations to slow closure plans as ministers looked to shore up energy supplies after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Russia was previously a big supplier of natural gas to Europe, so the invasion roiled global energy markets and prompted a scramble for alternatives.

The coal plants in North Yorkshire that were preparing to operate on Monday are owned by the energy company Drax. They would only operate if instructed to do so by National Grid, and Drax would not have been able to sell the electricity on the open market.

A Drax spokesperson said: "National Grid ESO instructed the units to be warmed earlier today so that they were ready to generate power should the country require it. That instruction has since been stood down."

It comes as [snowfall and ice caused travel disruption](#) and forced school closures across the UK.

The drop in temperatures prompted [UK power prices to hit a record high](#) on Sunday.

Great Britain's electricity generation system has rapidly moved away from coal in recent years: its [first coal-free day was achieved in 2017](#), while in 2020 the island ran without coal-powered electricity for a [month during a sunny May](#).

The use of zero-carbon renewables has increased rapidly to replace it, but the UK has also increased its reliance on natural gas, a fossil fuel. That reliance has proved problematic during 2022 after Russia invaded Ukraine.

Great Britain was heavily dependent on burning gas for electricity generation over the weekend, with low winds and cloudy skies. On Saturday, gas generated 62% of electricity in Great Britain, according to National Grid data. Nuclear power stations generated 14%, while wind and solar accounted for 8% and 1% respectively. [Coal](#) accounted for 4%. (Northern Ireland's energy system operates separately.)

We've issued a notification to warm two winter contingency coal units. This measure should give the public confidence in Monday's energy supply.

(1/3)

— National Grid ESO (@NationalGridESO) [December 12, 2022](#)

National Grid ESO sought to emphasise that asking the coal-fired power stations to heat up did not mean it had any concern over blackouts on Monday.

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“This measure should give the public confidence in Monday's energy supply,” National Grid ESO said. “The ESO as a prudent system operator has these tools for additional contingency to operate the network as normal and the public should continue to use energy as normal.”

EDF, the French energy giant, said the nuclear fleet in the UK was running at full available capacity for the first time this winter after the return of Hartlepool Unit 1 from a planned refuelling outage. EDF operates the fleet, in which the British Gas owner, Centrica, is a minority investor.

National Grid [warned in October](#) that severe conditions could trigger planned power cuts this winter. Fintan Slye, the executive director of the ESO, said that was still a possibility.

But he told BBC Radio 4's Today programme: "We remain cautiously optimistic through the winter that we will be able to manage it. We have enough supplies secured through the rest of the day that we can manage that and ensure there's no disruption to customers' supplies."

National Grid will run a test of its "[demand flexibility scheme](#)", which encourages households to reduce their energy use during peak times, on Monday evening.

Octopus [Energy](#) said its customers had been paid £1m for reducing their energy usage during the company's first four "saving sessions" as part of the scheme. Customers saved on average more than £4 across the four sessions, with the top 5% of savers bringing in almost £20.

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[UK news](#)

Four children in hospital after being pulled from Solihull lake

West Midlands fire service said reports indicated the children were playing on the ice before falling through

Four children in critical condition after falling through ice on Solihull lake – video

[Nadeem Badshah](#)

Sun 11 Dec 2022 15.47 ESTFirst published on Sun 11 Dec 2022 12.21 EST

Four children have been taken to hospital in cardiac arrest after falling through the ice on a lake in Solihull, emergency services have said.

West Midlands police said specialist teams are continuing an operation overnight at Babbs Mill Park in Kingshurst in the town on Sunday amid reports that two further children may be missing.

At a press conference in Birmingham, West Midlands fire service area commander, Richard Stanton, said reports from the scene and social media indicated that “a number of children had been playing on the ice on a lake and had fallen through the ice”.

Cameron McVittie, a tactical commander with West Midlands ambulance service, said the four children were in cardiac arrest and are all receiving specialist care. Two are being treated at Birmingham children’s hospital and two at Heartlands hospital, also in the city.

McVittie said: “On being rescued, the four children were taken under blue lights to hospital with an advanced care team.

“Unfortunately, the children in the water were in cardiac arrest and were receiving advanced life support en route to hospital.

He added: “There are no updates. They are all in critical condition when they arrived in hospital.”

[Map](#)

Supt Richard Harris, from West Midlands police, said officers went into the lake as well as first responders to rescue the children and look for anyone else. He added that one officer has mild hypothermia and is making a “full recovery” in hospital.

Harris said: “On behalf of West Midlands police we understand how distressing this is for families and the wider community and we are doing everything we can to support all those involved.”

Stanton added they were “made aware there were up to six people in the water” when firefighters arrived.

He said: “So after rescuing the four children, we have continued the search and rescue operation to confirm whether there were any more in the water.

“The specialist medical advice we have been given on the scene, given the temperature of the water, given the age of those who entered the water and the amount of time they have been in there – this would no longer be a search and rescue operation.”

Ellie Harvey, 29, who works in a nearby primary school as a lunchtime assistant, told the Daily Mail: “I understand they are all year five and year six primary schoolchildren.

“I think they were a group of friends. The lake was ice and it is very enticing for children.

“I have a boy the same sort of age but luckily he doesn’t like playing out in the cold. There was ice on the lake but it wasn’t thick.”

Eyewitnesses reported seeing at least 10 fire engines and 10 police cars parked on Collets Grove, the nearest street to the lake.

Stanley Busumani, 30, who lives nearby, told the newspaper: “Around 2.30pm there were suddenly a load of ambulances, police and fire engines arriving all at once.

“I have heard it is five kids. I have seen people sobbing down their phones and a lot of very upset people.

“I have a five-year-old. This is a terrible thing to happen.”

In an earlier statement, the fire service said: “At 2.36pm on Sunday 11 December, West Midlands fire service, along with West Midlands ambulance service and West Midlands police, were called to Babbs Mill Park in Solihull.

“Reports from the scene and videos on social media indicate that people had been playing on the ice on a pond and had fallen through. Our specialist water rescue teams arrived and acted assertively to take control of the scene and carry out rescues using specialist equipment and entering the water.

“Casualties have received medical support at the scene from both firefighters and ambulance personnel prior to being taken to nearby hospitals.



Police at the scene in Babbs Mill Park. Photograph: Jacob King/PA

“We would ask people to allow emergency services at the scene to go about their work in a safe and effective way.”

West Midlands police tweeted earlier: “We are currently at the scene of a serious incident at Babbs Mill Park, Fordbridge Road, Kingshurst, Solihull.

“A number of people have been pulled from a lake and are being transported to hospital. They are believed to be in a critical condition.

“We are working with @WestMidsFire and @OFFICIALWMAS at the scene and will provide further updates in due course.”

Babbs Mill Park is a local nature reserve with a lake, river, wildflower grasslands and woodlands.

The Midlands, areas of Scotland, south-western England north-western England and Wales were affected by snow and ice over the weekend.

A Met Office yellow warning for snow and ice was in place for much of Scotland, as well as parts of Wales and south-western England until noon on Sunday.

Two more snow and ice warnings are in place for the north of Scotland for 24 hours from noon and another for most of London and some of south-east England covering 6pm on Sunday to 9am on Monday.

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2022.12.12 - Spotlight

- ['I want my monkey!' Ruth Wilson on villainy, intimacy and returning to His Dark Materials](#)
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‘I want my monkey!’ Ruth Wilson on villainy, intimacy and returning to His Dark Materials

[Zoe Williams](#)



'I believe in connections' ... Ruth Wilson. Photograph: Pip/Camera Press

The actor made her mark in Jane Eyre after leaving college and hasn't stopped working since. She talks about her role in Philip Pullman's dark fantasy, her love for the stage – and her fear of commitment



[@zoesqwilliams](#)

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On the set of His Dark Materials, the BBC's arresting adaptation of Philip Pullman's novels, the word is that [Ruth Wilson](#), as Mrs Coulter, was genuinely frightening – when she dropped out of character to start chatting, the relief was palpable. Pullman's villain starts this third season in a characteristically dark place: she has found a way to keep her daughter close, but only by drugging her.

"The relationship is so damaged," Wilson says. "That is her only possibility of being able to act as a mother. And there's some desire to keep Lyra young and innocent. Mrs Coulter's desire, really throughout the whole series, is to prevent people from becoming adults."

[His Dark Materials](#) is a fantasy franchise that, theoretically at least, was written for children, although as Wilson says: "Philip's books are so adult in their themes. And the journey those kids take is into adulthood."

Watch the official trailer for [His Dark Materials](#)

She talks about her character with a marked serious-mindedness and complete lack of judgment that make me think she would make an excellent psychoanalyst – but that would be the screen's loss, because she's an incredible bad guy, among other things.

"It's so much more than just villainy," she says about Mrs Coulter. "It's so much deeper than that. It's not just a psychopath. There's narcissism, there's stuff about parenting, about the mother instinct. It's about the idea of sexuality and sin. It's about freedom of voice, freedom of creativity, freedom of imagination. So, yeah, I played two quite iconic psychopath villains" – the other was Alice Morgan, in [Luther](#), opposite [Idris Elba](#) – "but they're not one note, you know?"

Wilson is speaking by Zoom from Belfast, where she's filming a six-parter about the [Magdalene laundries](#), where so-called "fallen women" were confined and enslaved. As she paces about her neutrally furnished rental accommodation, looking for better wifi, it's like being given a virtual tour by an estate agent – though the only thing that's conventional about her is the symmetry of her features. When she speaks, she has this charismatic, restless

energy; she always has an original take, and puts it in an unusual way. I bet her own flat – she lives in Bermondsey, in south-east London – has no trace of beige in it. I bet it's full of peacock feathers and artefacts made of bone. Or maybe I've just been watching too much *His Dark Materials*.



‘The perfect team’ ... Ruth Wilson as Mrs Coulter with her dæmon.
Photograph: Ray Burmiston/BBC/Bad Wolf

If you haven't read the books, well, you should. But if you're not going to, a primer: everyone has a spirit animal, a “dæmon”, that travels alongside them. This creature does a lot of heavy lifting, in metaphorical terms, indicating self-acceptance, maturation, alienation, loss, all sorts. Coulter's dæmon, a golden monkey, never speaks, and is animated in post-production, but there is a puppeteer in the role, Brian Fisher, even if you never hear or see him.

“We had our little rules,” Wilson says, “so in public we were the perfect team, but at home we can't even bear to be in the same room together. Yet she deflates when she's apart from him – it was almost like depression. None of this was explained and it wasn't in the writing, it was just how we chose to perform in those moments, and then we'd pass that on to Russell [Dodgson, in charge of visual effects] so he could draw it. It's a joyous way

of working. Now I want a collaborator wherever I go. I want my monkey with me.”

Ruth Wilson, 40, grew up in Shepperton, in Surrey, with her father, an investment banker, and her mother, a parole officer – “politically really divided”, she says approvingly. “My mum’s a lefty; my dad always voted Tory. Which was great, because you have two sides of the story.” It was a “very privileged, easy upbringing”, with three older brothers, which is why she didn’t especially love her all-girl’s private school, and moved to a regular sixth-form college. “I missed the company of boys. I wanted to have more experiences and be among more mixed people.”

She went on to study history at the University of Nottingham, and then to Lamda, the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art. Going into the arts was no foregone conclusion – her parents were supportive but quite surprised. Her grandfather was a writer, spy and polygamist, immortalised in the 2018 historical drama [Mrs Wilson](#), in which Ruth plays her own grandmother, who only discovered Alexander Wilson’s other lives after his death, and even then not all of them. We pause for a second to laugh about the time a journalist suggested that maybe her own resistance to marriage was rooted in her polygamous antecedent. “Yeah, it’s genetics. You know, my grandfather died before I was even born, and my parents have a great marriage. It must have skipped a generation.”



Mother love ... Ruth Wilson, right, as Mrs Coulter with Dafne Keen as Lyra in *His Dark Materials*. Photograph: Simon Ridgway/Bad Wolf/BBC/HBO

It's not that she doesn't believe in relationships, she says. "I believe in connections; I've got a very strong relationship, and have had for a number of years. [She's seeing an American writer, but never names him.] I believe the value of having someone in your life who understands you and sees you is enormous. And I'm so glad I have it. But I don't believe in institutions. I feel slightly restricted by having to conform to someone else's idea of what a relationship is, or where you should be at this time in your life. It feels dogmatic to me."

Straight out of *Lamda* (pretty much), Wilson landed the title role in [Jane Eyre](#), the 2006 BBC reboot. That adaptation was critically acclaimed for its subtlety and intelligence. She took a character who is such a landmark in the canon – jittery, a bit needy, trampled – and turned *Jane Eyre* into someone much more substantial and self-possessed. She was nominated for a Bafta and a Golden Globe.

Some of her most celebrated roles during the 00s were on stage – Stella in *A Streetcar Named Desire* at the Donmar, Tanya in Gorky's *Philistines* at the National – and theatre remains her preference, albeit only just. "It's your responsibility to tell that story every night, you have that immediate

relationship with the audience – there's nothing like it. For me it's more exhilarating and collaborative and realistic than a film or TV experience.”



Critically acclaimed ... Wilson in *Jayne Eyre*. Photograph: Album/Alamy

Allied to that interest in collaboration, Wilson likes to see things through from start to finish. “As an actor, you don’t often get that opportunity. You’re just coming in and doing your bit and then going again.” This has spurred her towards production – she was an executive producer on *Mrs Wilson*, and has a production company, Lady Lazarus – and she’s definitely a finisher/completer, as the management books put it. More than a decade ago, she was in *Anna Christie* (also at the Donmar) with [Jude Law](#) (they went out for a bit afterwards). Law gave her the novel *True Things About Me*, by Deborah Kay Davies, to see if she thought it would make an interesting screenplay. They optioned it jointly (his company is called Riff Raff), and it hit the screens this year as [True Things](#), starring Wilson.

People, especially actors, often say: “This story doesn’t get told,” but I have genuinely never seen this story in a film – a romance through the most unromantic lens conceivable, that of: “What if these overwhelming feelings aren’t real? What if I’m projecting? What if there’s nothing underneath it all?”

Wilson plays Kate, who works in a benefits office in the Kent town of Ramsgate and falls for a guy she calls Blond. “Both Harry [Wootliff, the director] and I were really interested in those early infatuation moments. You fall for people who clearly aren’t right for you. It’s intoxicating, it feels like a drug. You obsess over it, you project so much on to someone you barely know.”

I loved this film, despite what they do to Ramsgate, which is the most charming place, making it look like a dump. “Other films would shoot me wandering down the beach, listlessly looking out at the sea. But she’s so encased in her own need, so locked in her own head, that she can’t even see out.” The perspective is so subtle: Blond can’t be what she wants, not because he’s a commitment-phobe, or using her, but because she’s in that weird state, Wilson says, “where you want it so badly that you’re willing to adjust and change yourself for them. You’re offering yourself, you’re giving them what you think they want of you, constantly shape-shifting, so as not to disappoint them. But they’re in your imagination. He’s called Blond; she doesn’t even care about his name. He’s so far from what she’s trying to put him in to.”



Intoxicating ... Wilson as Kate in *True Things*. Photograph: Everett Collection Inc/Alamy

It feels like a radical statement, from a deceptively quiet film: not everything that goes wrong is because of some bad man. “A lot of people talk about it as a gaslighting toxic relationship. It wasn’t really – she’s the driving force. She’s the one that essentially chooses, decides to pursue him. She’s gonna get what she wants. And when she does get it, she’s, like: ‘Nah, I don’t want it.’ It’s not romantic at all,” Wilson concedes, “but it felt quite honest.”

Nor is it full of nude scenes, maybe contrary to the expectations set up by the fact that it had the same intimacy co-ordinator – Ita O’Brien – as [Normal People](#). Wilson recalls that the director said: “I don’t really care about nudity. To me, that’s not where intimacy is. Yes, nudity is beautiful and wonderful and can be really ugly, and can be all the things you want it to be, but we’re exploring the dynamic between two people – they don’t have to be naked.”

The whole culture around sex scenes has changed a lot, even in the past couple of years. It was as recently as 2018 that Wilson left [The Affair](#) – the show, also starring [Dominic West](#), for which she won a Golden Globe – and she’s reticent about it (citing, in the past, a non-disclosure agreement), but there were some allegations at the time of inappropriate behaviour.

Wilson says intimacy coaches have completely changed the game, too, though. “We have proper discussions: what the director is hoping to achieve, what the actors feel comfortable doing and not doing, and how do we really get that anyway? What is the scene actually trying to make happen between the two people in that moment? Because it should be as conversational as any other scene. Sex is so interesting, and so detailed, and so specific to the relationship you’re having with that person and yourself at the time within your life. It really should be as nuanced as that.”



The Affair ... Dominic West and Ruth Wilson. Photograph: Everett Collection Inc/Alamy

It makes total sense, and yet, at the same time, no sense at all, what this process used to be like: "Before we had #MeToo, and before we had intimacy coaches on set, there was no real conversation around sexual scenes. There wasn't a discussion, and people felt very uncomfortable having conversations. Directors, actors, everyone, felt uncomfortable, so just inevitably we ended up with uncomfortable scenarios. It felt bizarre to me. I would be trying to have the conversations and yet there would be no answers or no comment. I found it bizarre. I felt I was talking into a void." It must be a bit bracing, this new world, for directors who didn't really have a narrative purpose with the sex, just wanted to see it. "It has unmasked something – there was a tendency just to put things in for titillation. That's when it doesn't feel genuine, it feels exploitative."

Wilson never passes over a project without mentioning the people she felt created the atmosphere, made it work – whether that's Jane Tranter, the executive producer on *His Dark Materials* ("She was the driving force of the whole thing") or Wootliff, who, after Covid messed with the schedule, ended up shooting *True Things* with a six-week-old baby. "Her baby was there, suckling on set. It was quite special, actually. I'd love there to be a creche system for women." She sees what it will take before women in creative

industries can have it all as more than a pragmatic question, though. “I think about having children, and I don’t know how I could do the career I do with a child. I do question how that’s possible. The travel. The amount of mind time it takes me. I’m not sure how I could do it. I think it’s a myth that you can do it all and do it all easily. It’s just not the case – and shouldn’t be, probably. It’s a mad world, a wonderful world, and I love it. But it makes those other choices in life difficult.

“I’m a commitment-phobe generally,” Wilson says, explaining why she originally turned down the part in Luther. “Most actors are, probably.” The truth is that she’s incredibly committed, just to large, unusual things: smashing the patriarchy; remaking theatre “to make it more experiential, appeal to a younger audience”; surviving the omnicrisis through art. “It’s going to be an interesting few years, I think. Quite a tough few years. We’ll have to really reinvent theatre to get people back.”

- *His Dark Materials* is on BBC One from 18 December, with all three seasons available to stream on BBC iPlayer.
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Industrial action

Analysis

Factcheck: are UK strikers greedy, unrealistic and putting others in danger?

[Archie Bland](#)

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Thousands of postal workers stage a rally in Parliament Square. Photograph: Vuk Valcic/Alamy Live News/Alamy Live News.

Mon 12 Dec 2022 03.11 EST Last modified on Mon 12 Dec 2022 06.42 EST

After ministers [rebuffed an offer](#) by nursing unions to suspend strikes in return for new pay negotiations, and with Cobra meetings due on Monday to work through [controversial contingency plans](#) involving the military, there is little reason to expect a reprieve from planned strikes.

Industrial action already under way in December among bus, rail and postal workers will intensify and broaden this week to others in the public sector including ambulance drivers, baggage handlers, and driving examiners. The result will be some of the most significant disruption to the British economy in recent memory.

The strikes are a response to limited pay rises set against a backdrop of sharply rising inflation that [the TUC says](#) has left key public sector workers £180 a month worse off than a year ago. They have been met with a barrage of criticism that casts strikers as irresponsible, selfish and unrealistic. So how do the following claims compare with reality?

‘This is effectively a general strike’



Thousands of striking workers and their supporters attend a rally at King's Cross station called by the UCU on 30 November 2022 in London, England.
Photograph: Guy Smallman/Getty Images

“This is looking increasingly like a general strike” – Stephen Glover, Daily Mail, [7 December](#)

“It’s almost like a de facto general strike taking place by the amount of disputes” – Dave Ward, CWU general secretary, [3 December](#)

Everyone agrees that industrial action in the weeks running up to Christmas will have a significant impact. But claims from both sides that the whole economy will grind to a halt in a “general strike” exaggerate the parallels with the past.

As [this explainer](#) from Philip Inman sets out, it used to be possible for the TUC to coordinate a general strike without ballots in each area. But [now the law bans strikes](#) without a successful ballot in an individual workplace.

It might still be possible for a “de facto general strike” to happen if enough industries succeeded in bringing industrial action at the same time. But union representation in the UK since the winter of discontent in 1978 and 1979 [has fallen significantly](#), from about 50% in 1979 to about 23% in 2021, although it is still about 50% in the public sector. The reality of the 1979 comparison is made clear [in Richard Partington’s piece from 8 December](#), which points out that while the number of working days lost this year could reach 1.74m, in September 1979 alone, 12m days were lost.

‘Striking workers are being greedy and their demands are unaffordable’

“Where is [Rishi Sunak’s] big effort to mobilise the country against these greedy union extremists?” – Douglas Murray, the Sun, [8 December](#)

“Inflation-matching or inflation-busting pay rises are unaffordable ... There simply isn’t the money.” Transport secretary, Mark Harper, Sky News, [27 November](#)

Critics of striking workers often present their pay demands as excessive in a time of economic difficulty. But in [this analysis from July](#), Ashley Kirk sets out Office for National Statistics data that shows real public sector pay has fallen by 4.3% since the 2009 financial crisis. Meanwhile, the IFS says, real private sector pay [has risen by 4.3% since 2010](#). New analysis published by

the TUC today says that [2022 has been the worst year for real pay growth for almost 50 years.](#)

Pay demands should also be set against the impact of inflation, which is quickly eroding the value of even generous-sounding settlements. For example, an offer to rail workers described as “8%” [in a Daily Telegraph headline](#) on 4 December is spread over two years, making it [4% in reality](#), against the [most recent inflation figure](#) of 11.1%.

One way to get at the question of affordability is to examine the government’s claims of the cost to taxpayers. Rishi Sunak claims that it would cost about £1,000 extra per household to give pay rises offsetting 10% inflation this year. But Ben Zaranko, of the Institute for Fiscal Studies, points out in [this BBC Reality Check piece](#) that once you factor in the 3% average pay rises for public sector workers already budgeted for 2022-23, the real “extra” cost is about £640 per household, about a third of which would be returned in tax.

The question of whether a bit over £400 per household is affordable – with the greatest burden falling on the richest – is ultimately a political judgment. We can also ask whether it is true, as is often claimed, that pay rises will stoke inflation. [This piece by Richard Partington yesterday](#) argues that fears a “wage-price spiral” is under way are overplayed. The Bank of England estimates holding overall wage growth to 2.5% could reduce inflation by 1.5 percentage points – “a drop in the ocean” compared with the impact of soaring energy prices.

‘NHS strikes are putting people in danger’



More than 10,000 NHS ambulance staff from nine NHS hospital trusts in England and Wales will strike on 21 December in a dispute over pay.
Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

“[Ambulance staff] joined the service to save lives, not put them at risk” – Conservative MP Mike Penning, Daily Mail, [6 December](#)

“It will cause pain and discomfort for people and put lives at risk” – Whitehall source, Daily Express, [6 December](#)

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One common theme of coverage of planned strikes by nurses and other NHS workers is a possible risk to patient safety – and there will clearly be some

discomfort or delay as a result of the action. But it is another step to suggest that lives will be put at risk.

The “life-preserving care model” [that guides Royal College of Nursing industrial action](#) excludes emergency interventions to save lives or prevent disability from strikes as well as other situations where lives could be put at risk. Matthew Taylor, the chief executive of the NHS Confederation, [has urged urgent clarification](#) on exemptions but told the BBC strike days would “[feel like a weekend or bank holiday](#)”.

The evidence from previous strikes suggests that it is possible to take industrial action without jeopardising safety. An [article in the Independent, published in August](#), pointed to a 2018 BMJ study which found no measurable impact on mortality during junior doctors’ strikes in 2016, although it added that there were fewer A&E admissions and attendances. A strike in Northern Ireland in 2019 ended with “no adverse incidents” for patients, the RCN says.

‘Negotiating is out of the government’s control’

“My role is to facilitate and support – not negotiate.” – Mark Harper, letter to RMT general secretary, Mick Lynch, [29 November](#)

“The essential discussions have to occur between the rail operating companies, Network Rail and the unions.” – work and pensions secretary Mel Stride, [TalkTV, 23 November](#)

Government ministers say that they stay out of negotiations, and that their hands are tied by independent pay bodies – with the government yesterday [refusing the nursing union’s request](#) to negotiate for that reason. But there are reasons to be sceptical about that account.

On Thursday, [the FT reported](#) that employers had planned to offer the RMT a 10% pay rise over two years, only for the government to intervene. The eventual offer was 8% over two years, tied to the introduction of driver-only trains. That was not denied by the Department for Transport, while the FT quotes an “industry figure” as calling the intervention a “clumsy mis-step” that exacerbated the situation.

‘The public opposes strikes’

“The put-upon public are turning against militant unions set on ruining Christmas.” – report in the Sun, [6 December](#)

“Civil servants shouldn’t expect sympathy for their strikes from the working taxpayers who pay their wages.” – John O’Connell, chief executive of the TaxPayers’ Alliance, [10 November](#)

Opponents of strikes naturally wish to present themselves as the voices of ordinary working people. But the reality of the polling is more complicated.

Last week, for example, [a YouGov poll](#) found that only 37% of people supported striking rail workers, against 51% opposed. But [an Observer poll](#) found 40% blaming the government and rail companies, with 37% holding unions responsible – and also showed big majorities supporting nurses.

If that picture is mixed, that is probably worse news for the government than unions, who certainly want public backing but ultimately answer only to their membership. The battleground now is whether the reality of strikes in the run-up to Christmas turn voters against the unions – or reinforces the sense that industrial action is part of a wider picture of government incompetence.

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2022.12.12 - Opinion

- English is picking up brilliant new words from around the world – and that's a gift
- Multiple infections could make us much sicker – strep A, RSV and flu are a dangerous mix
- Flatmates are disgusting. What would it take to fall in love with one?
- In Kyiv, I saw Dante under sandbags – a modern image of the hell of war

OpinionLanguage

English is picking up brilliant new words from around the world – and that's a gift

[Danica Salazar](#)



From ‘lepak’ to ‘deurmekaar’, terms borrowed from its 1.75 billion global speakers are enriching the language we share



A protester in Hong Kong with a sign saying ‘add oil!’ – a local expression of support. Photograph: Philip Fong/AFP/Getty Images

Mon 12 Dec 2022 01.00 EST Last modified on Tue 13 Dec 2022 00.21 EST

Who owns the English language? The answer to this question is no longer as straightforward as “the English”. According to the latest figures from the British Council, [English is “spoken at a useful level” by about 1.75 billion people](#). Counted among this vast anglophone population are not only the hundreds of millions who speak English as a first [language](#), but also the hundreds of millions more who speak it as a second or foreign language in different parts of the world.

English spread across the globe largely as a result of imperialism, as the language was imposed on colonies in Asia, Africa, Australia and the Americas. When these former colonies achieved independence, many chose to retain the use of English, usually to function as a primary working language and neutral medium of communication for their diverse populations. As countries such as India, Nigeria, South Africa, Jamaica and Singapore adopted English as a language, they also adapted it – making significant changes to its pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary, and giving rise to new varieties now collectively known as World Englishes.

Today, the predominance of English as a language of science, technology, business, diplomacy and entertainment has given many people around the world a strong incentive to acquire the language. From Brazil to South Korea, Spain to Indonesia, millions of people are learning English, and they too are making their own mark on its development.

The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) has documented many of the words that these new communities of English speakers have added to the vocabulary. Many of these words are borrowings from other languages with which English is in constant contact, such as *lepak* (to loiter aimlessly) from Malay, *deurmekaar* (confused, muddled) from Afrikaans, *kaveera* (a plastic bag) from Luganda, and *whāngai* (an adopted child and the adoption itself) from Māori, which may be unfamiliar to British English speakers but are words characteristic of Malaysian English, South African English, Ugandan English and New Zealand English respectively.

Speakers of world varieties of English are remaking its vocabulary to better express their identities, cultures and everyday realities. In Hong Kong, people exclaim *add oil* as a show of encouragement or support, an expression literally translated from the Cantonese *gā yáu*, with reference to petrol being injected into an engine. In the Philippines, many houses have a *dirty kitchen*, which is not actually a kitchen that is dirty in the sense you think, but a kitchen outside the house where most of the real cooking is done – a necessary convenience in a tropical country where it is best to avoid trapping heat and smells indoors. In Nigeria, a *mama put* is a street-food stall, and its name comes from the way that its customers usually order food: they say “Mama, put ...” to the woman running the stall, and point to the dish they want so it can be put on their plate.

Meanwhile, the Japanese have invented, and South Koreans have popularised, the word *skinship*, a blend of the words *skin* and *kinship* that refers to the close physical contact between parent and child or between lovers or friends.

In Oxford University Press’s Gift of Words campaign this year, we have asked people who speak more than one language to “gift” a word from their first to their second language, and vice versa. The responses we have so far received highlight even more words that multilingual English speakers felt

they had to borrow from their other languages for lack of a direct equivalent in English: words such as *saudade* (nostalgic longing) from Portuguese, *gezellig* (a sense of cosiness and togetherness) from Dutch, *nomakanjani* (come what may) from isiZulu, and *apapacho* (affection, comfort) from Nahuatl by way of Spanish.

Calling these borrowed words “gifts” is an important reframing, as many value language purity over diversity and consider external influences a threat to the integrity of a language. But this is in contradiction to how language works, as the borrowing of words is part of the natural evolution of all living languages. English is particularly notable for its ability to absorb elements from other languages, and the previously mentioned loan words join a host of others that English borrowed from Old Norse, Norman French, Latin and Ancient Greek much earlier in its history, including core words such as *egg*, *fashion*, *universe* and *economy*.

Contrary to popular belief, it is multilingualism rather than monolingualism that is the norm, with various reports estimating that between 60% and 75% of the global population can speak more than one language. And in such a multilingual, digitally interconnected world, where more and more people are brought together by shared interests and goals rather than just geographic proximity, the interchange of words between languages and cultures has accelerated.

Changing our attitudes towards multilingualism and language variation is vital to fight the linguistic prejudice that causes people to be discriminated against for not using the “right” words or for speaking in the “wrong” accent. Despite all that they have contributed to the enrichment of English, many speakers of varieties other than standard British or American English still find themselves being mocked or losing out on educational or professional opportunities as they are effectively denied the right to use their own language in the way that they want.

It is only when we share ownership of English, and embrace the language in all its diversity, that it can truly be a gift that everyone can benefit from.

- Danica Salazar is a lexicographer at Oxford Languages, where she leads editorial projects on world varieties of English
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Opinion**Strep A**

Multiple infections could make us much sicker – strep A, RSV and flu are a dangerous mix

[Daniela Ferreira](#)



The pandemic has changed the seasonal pattern of infectious diseases, and risky, little-understood blends are the result



‘There have been a number of strep A deaths in the UK, 16 of them children.’ Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

Mon 12 Dec 2022 04.00 EST Last modified on Wed 14 Dec 2022 07.27 EST

Around this time last year, my young daughter caught chickenpox. I thought it was a standard case of a normal childhood illness – we’d manage it by trying to ease the itching and everything would be fine.

Instead, my daughter got worse. She developed a sore throat, then a body rash, and struggled to drink liquids. Again, I thought this was a normal progression of her infection and she would eventually get better. It was only after I started talking to my colleagues that I learned that group A strep cases had been reported among schools in the vicinity. I also found out that chickenpox could lead to increased vulnerability against strep A, particularly among children.

My daughter was taken to the GP, diagnosed with group A strep, and prescribed antibiotics. She made a full recovery, as most people do. However, as we witness a resurgence of this disease, we know that in rare cases strep A can cause pneumonia and an invasive bacterial infection that can be fatal. There have been a [number of deaths](#) in the UK, [16 of them children](#).

The strep A situation does highlight what is not yet enough studied in scientific research – the relationship between infectious diseases, such as between chickenpox and strep A. We still don't understand why contracting one disease can make us more vulnerable to get a second one, a not uncommon scenario. Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and influenza can have similar links to pneumococcal bacteria, which cause pneumonia. Having a cold caused by one of these viruses makes one more susceptible to pneumonia and generally much sicker. Even less is known about the potential impact of Covid-19 when it inevitably enters the mix, as we go into winter.

One thing is certain, though. Getting infected with bugs such as strep A, RSV, influenza and Covid-19 can weaken the immune system to the point that pneumonia can develop, either caused by these or other bugs. For example, studies have shown that the decline in pneumococcal pneumonia during the pandemic was not due to the disappearance of the pneumococcus that had continued to circulate in the communities, but to a complete decline in certain respiratory viruses. Pneumococcus was still present, without symptoms, in children's noses – but without a co-infection it couldn't progress to full-blown pneumonia.

There is an opportunity for scientific research to explore the relationship between respiratory viruses and pneumococcal bacteria, so we are not forced to treat them independently of each other and perhaps could better use the arsenal of vaccines already available, as well as the new ones coming soon. This would help policymakers plan the best defences against such infections and should be an integral part of efforts to build global resilience against future pandemics. Research of this kind is already being carried out at the University of Oxford and other institutions around the world.

Unpicking this relationship between different infections is vital, especially as, post-pandemic, we are seeing shifts in the seasonality of several diseases. The rising numbers of strep A cases is unusual for this time of the year because they typically occur in late spring or early summer, often after chickenpox infections. This is most likely the result of a large infection-naïve population – people who have never encountered the infection before – that has developed as a result of us staying mostly indoors during the pandemic.

A shift in seasonality of certain diseases following the pandemic and a sharp increase in other respiratory viruses at this time of the year can also increase vulnerability to strep A. We saw something similar happen in the US and in the UK with RSV, when there was a surge in cases over the spring and autumn last year following the easing of social contact rules. We should typically expect RSV to start peaking over the winter instead.

Another effective way we can mitigate the impact of respiratory diseases is through vaccination. There are already vaccines available for pneumonia, influenza and Covid-19 for instance. Although there aren't any for RSV or strep A, they are in development and could be an important weapon against such infections in the future. However, it is also possible to build up defences indirectly. A chickenpox vaccine obviously helps recipients develop immunity against the disease, but could also potentially help to stop such infections from progressing into something more serious, such as strep A. The same principle can be applied to influenza, pneumococcus and Covid-19 vaccines.

An already stretched NHS is doing all it can to combat strep A and other respiratory illnesses. Pharmacists are also reporting [shortages in antibiotics](#) needed to treat strep A. We should do what we can to help our health system be more resilient through these cold months while also calling for measures to help it weather such pressures in the future, including more backing for scientific research and investment in pandemic preparedness.

This article was amended on 12 December 2022. An earlier version said incorrectly that all the recent strep A deaths in the UK have been of children.

- Daniela Ferreira is professor of mucosal infection and vaccinology at the University of Oxford and the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine
 - *Do you have an opinion on the issues raised in this article? If you would like to submit a response of up to 300 words by email to be considered for publication in our [letters](#) section, please [click here](#).*
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Flatmates are disgusting. What would it take to fall in love with one?

[Emma Beddington](#)



You'd have to ignore the hair-clogged plughole for a start. But I guess that's where pheromones come in



A fondue-gooey viewing experience ... Anthony Welsh in *The Flatshare*.
Photograph: 42 TV/Paramount +

Mon 12 Dec 2022 02.00 ESTLast modified on Mon 12 Dec 2022 03.36 EST

Home alone last week, I did what I only do in private: flipped open my laptop and surreptitiously signed up to another unnecessarily complex streaming service to watch the romcom series *The Flatshare*. It's not that I think enjoying romance is shameful; I just live with someone whose comfort viewing skews to stuff exploding and Kevin McCloud raising an eyebrow at architraves.

I adore a good romcom, [but the reviews were adamant](#): *The Flatshare* is not that. I switched off my limited critical faculties and surrendered to a fondue-gooey viewing experience. It has a sketchy plot, damp-squib sexual chemistry and supporting characters limited to one personality trait, as if rationed. Then there's the loopy premise: the leads share a flat and a bed (one gets it during the day, the other at night) without meeting. Fine by me.

There was one insuperable stumbling block to my enjoyment, though: I don't believe you would fall in love with someone while living with their detritus and sordid habits, getting to know them only through Post-it notes, the most pass-agg form of communication imaginable. With an effort of

imagination, I can just about understand falling in love in a real flatshare; pheromones could absolutely trump a hair-clogged plughole. But if your only contact with the other person is finding their toenail parings in a crumpled tissue, juggling their draining-board Jenga and scrubbing at their bath tidemarks, you are only getting the worst of them. How could that awaken emotions other than disgust and blind rage?

I'm sensitised to this at the moment because my sons are experiencing their first flatshares, reminding me how grim living with other people can be. I've received pictures of a recycling pile big enough to get Kevin McCloud excited about its radical use of negative space, an overflowing bin that should be destroyed with a flamethrower and a shower that needed a content warning. I'd still be single if I'd got to know my spouse only through his abandoned bean tins; he'd have been repulsed by my floordrobe. Flatshares – other people – are disgusting. My next romcom comfort watch will need distant, Regency-style longing as a palate cleanser.

Emma Beddington is a Guardian columnist

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/dec/12/flatmates-are-disgusting-what-would-it-take-to-fall-in-love-with-one>

Snapshot of 2022Ukraine

In Kyiv, I saw Dante under sandbags – a modern image of the hell of war

[Clive Myrie](#)



I've reported on conflicts for 20 years, and I'm not afraid to be blunt about Russia's disgusting war of aggression on Ukraine

- What was the image on your phone that defined 2022? [Writers give their perspectives](#)



A sculpture of Dante under sandbags in Kyiv, Ukraine. Photograph: Courtesy of Clive Myrie

Mon 12 Dec 2022 02.00 EST Last modified on Tue 13 Dec 2022 11.51 EST

I took quite a lot of photos on my phone when I was in [Ukraine](#) this year, but this one jumped out at me as I was scrolling through them. Here we have Dante – the Italian poet, philosopher, writer – with his marble head poking up out of the sandbags. It's in a park on Volodymyr Hill in the centre of Kyiv.

It's not just an arresting image. Dante is a harbinger of the Renaissance; he's a symbol of culture and learning. And that is the opposite of war, which is a regression to dark times. This is what Ukraine and Kyiv are having to labour under – and so Dante finds himself stifled by sandbags. Of course, one also thinks of the Divine Comedy and the seventh circle of hell, which is violence. That's what the people of Ukraine have been enduring: a modern circle of hell.

The fact that Dante had to be covered with sandbags tells you everything – the Russians are attacking things that are nothing to do with a military campaign. That is a particular hell, when civilians are seen as legitimate

targets for an advancing army. And as soon as I see this image, all of this floods into my mind.

I took the photograph when I was interviewing members of [the Ukraine Freedom Orchestra](#). Some are refugees who lost their homes; some are serving soldiers who'd been given special dispensation by Volodymyr Zelenskiy to spread Ukrainian culture and art. They went off on tour in the summer and played the Proms in London.

I'd never been to Ukraine before 2022 and I look back on my time reporting there with a lot of sadness. I'd always heard that places like Kyiv and Odesa and Lviv were beautiful cities, and it is indeed a beautiful country with beautiful people. But the first time I went had to be under these circumstances. I recall the people I met who are now refugees, who have lost their homes, their livelihoods. I hope to go back in time for the anniversary of the war in 2023. To think it's still being fought almost a year on is appalling.

And that's not just from Ukrainians' point of view but, frankly, from Vladimir Putin's: he thought this would be over in days. Now Ukraine and Russia are locked into this long war of attrition, it seems, particularly in the east, with the Russians sending in [Iranian kamikaze drones](#) every now and again. The American writer Francis Fukuyama said that he understood that some Russian soldiers in the first wave of the invasion had their dress suits with them for the military parades that would take place in a week, after they'd conquered Kyiv. There are so many young conscripts, mainly from the outlying areas in Russia where life is tough; this is also a tragedy for many of them and their mothers and fathers. So many lives have been broken by the vanity of one man.

I've been covering wars and conflicts for 20-odd years, from East Timor to the Middle East to west Africa. But I wasn't expecting anything like this. This is two sophisticated countries with modern weaponry and modern armies fighting each other on European soil. Two national armies going toe-to-toe. That is unprecedented in [Europe](#) since the second world war, even taking into account the awful conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, which I covered.

We always think of history moving forward in a direction that takes us to a better place; we like to think that we move from the dark to the light. Yet we've gone backwards.

Has this war affected my sense of what I do as a journalist and broadcaster? I'm not afraid to be blunt about it. I'm not going to be "well, on the one hand this, on the other hand this" when describing what fundamentally happened. The bottom line is that Putin started an illegal war. He attacked a neighbour, unprovoked. It's an utterly disgusting war of aggression. I'm not going to try to balance that act of aggression with talk of how he's worried about Nato expansion. I'm too old for that shit. Would I have felt I could say this 10, 15, 20 years ago? Maybe not. But I'm getting on, and sometimes you have to call a spade a spade.

- Clive Myrie is a journalist
- *Do you have an opinion on the issues raised in this article? If you would like to submit a response of up to 300 words by email to be considered for publication in our [letters](#) section, please [click here](#)*

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2022.12.12 - Around the world

- [Peru protests Two dead and four injured as election calls grow after Castillo ousting](#)
- [Julian Assange Biden faces growing pressure to drop charges against WikiLeaks founder](#)
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[Peru](#)

Peru president paves way for early elections after two killed in latest protests

Dina Boluarte says she will submit bill to move elections forward by two years as thousands take to streets after ousting of predecessor Pedro Castillo



On Sunday, protesters in Lima called for elections after the dismissal of President Pedro Castillo. Photograph: Aldair Mejia/EPA

[Dan Collyns](#) in Lima

[@yachay_dc](#)

Mon 12 Dec 2022 11.49 ESTFirst published on Sun 11 Dec 2022 23.04 EST

Peru's new president, Dina Boluarte, has announced plans to move forward with general elections amid deadly protests over the ousting of her predecessor Pedro Castillo after he attempted to dissolve congress.

In a televised address early on Monday, Boluarte said she would submit a bill to bring general elections forward two years, to April 2024. But her proposal is unlikely to placate surging protests as Castillo supporters call for Peru's widely loathed congress to be closed and early elections.

Boluarte's announcement came after days of violent unrest across the country. In the city of Andahuaylas, clashes between Castillo supporters and police lead to two deaths – a 15- and 18-year-old – and four injured – among them a 19-year-old who is in a serious condition.

The two adolescents died “possibly as a result of gunshot wounds”, the head of Peru’s human rights ombudsman’s office, Eliana Revollar, told national radio. Boluarte announced a state of emergency in the zones of “high social conflict” in the southern regions of Apurímac, Arequipa and Ica, where protesters angry at what they see as a coup plot by congress to oust Castillo have blocked roads and stalled two airports.



Police clash with pro-Castillo protesters in Lima, Peru, on Sunday.
Photograph: Aldair Mejia/EPA

Protests were widespread in rural strongholds of support for Castillo, a former schoolteacher and political novice from a poor Andean region, who was [removed from office and detained on charges of “rebellion” on](#)

[Wednesday](#) after he announced he would shutter congress and rule by decree – just hours before he was due to face an impeachment vote. On Sunday, congress stripped Castillo of presidential immunity as he faces charges of “breaching the constitution”.

The demonstrators accuse Boluarte – Castillo’s vice-president who was sworn in just hours after he was ousted – of betraying the former leader and usurping the presidency. Protesters in the capital, Lima, joined thousands across the country clashing with riot police who used teargas and baton charges to push them back.

“We don’t agree with the way our president was ousted, with lies and trickery,” said Laura Pacheco, a Castillo supporter protesting in San Martín square in downtown Lima.

“[Boluarte] doesn’t deserve to be president, she hasn’t been elected by the people. We are defending our democratic rights, we don’t want to be governed by a usurper,” she added.

Lucía, who did not want to give her last name, was among hundreds of horn-blaring, flag-waving protesters calling for Boluarte and the deeply unpopular congress to go.

“We want the congress to be shut down, we want new elections for Peru, where the people can choose who governs them,” she said

“Castillo tried to shut down congress because that’s what the people wanted. It’s a vipers’ nest!” she added, highlighting the widely held view that the unicameral congress is a venal hub of vested interests and corruption.

While virtually all the protesters called for the shutdown of congress, some held placards calling Castillo a “national hero” – not because of his inept government but because he attempted to close the hated chamber, which has been consistently more despised than the roster of unpopular former presidents.

Some 86% of Peruvians disapprove of congress, more than the 61% disapproval rating for Castillo, according to a November opinion poll by the

[Institute of Peruvian Studies](#). The same poll indicated that the vast majority of Peruvians, 87%, would prefer fresh general elections and a renewed congress in the event that Castillo was ousted.

“The crisis has not abated,” said Fernando Tuesta, a political science professor at Lima’s Pontifical Catholic University and former head of Peru’s electoral authority.

“Despite the proposal to bring forward the elections, the government of Dina Boluarte, already weak, has to deal with an unreliable congress, a cabinet with holes in it and, above all, it has to know how to placate the demonstrations, which are growing angrily,” he said.



Demonstrators have taken to the streets in their thousands following the ousting of Castillo, who was facing an impeachment charge. Photograph: Aldair Mejia/EPA

“If it’s not handled well, [Boluarte] may become the centre for the attacks,” he added.

Boluarte, who had initially expressed her wish to [remain in office until 2026](#) when Castillo’s term officially ends, expressed her condolences to the families of the teenage victims. “I deeply regret the death of our compatriots in Andahuaylas, Apurímac, my homeland,” she said in her national address.

More than 20 journalists have been attacked during several days of protests, according to Peru's [national association of journalists](#), either due to "excessive use of force by police officers to aggression, insults and attempted stripping of journalists' work equipment by demonstrators", the association said in a statement.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/dec/12/peru-protests-two-dead-and-four-injured-as-election-calls-grow-after-castillo-oustering>.

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Julian Assange

Biden faces growing pressure to drop charges against Julian Assange

Biden faces a renewed push, domestically and internationally, to drop charges against Assange, who is languishing in a UK jail



Many of Julian Assange's supporters believe his case has reached a turning point that could lead to his freedom. Photograph: Kirsty Wigglesworth/AP

Eric Lichtblau

Mon 12 Dec 2022 03.00 EST Last modified on Thu 15 Dec 2022 11.11 EST

The [Biden administration](#) has been saying all the right things lately about respecting a free and vigorous press, after four years of relentless media-bashing and legal assaults under Donald Trump.

The attorney general, Merrick Garland, has even put in place expanded protections for journalists this fall, [saying](#) that “a free and independent press is vital to the functioning of our democracy”.

But the biggest test of Biden's commitment remains imprisoned in a jail cell in London, where WikiLeaks founder [Julian Assange](#) has been held since 2019 while facing prosecution in the United States under the Espionage Act, a century-old statute that has never been used before for publishing classified information.

Whether the US justice department continues to pursue the Trump-era charges against the notorious leaker, whose group put out secret information on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Guantánamo Bay, American diplomacy and internal Democratic politics before the 2016 election, will go a long way toward determining whether the current administration intends to make good on its pledges to protect the press.

Now Biden is facing a re-energized push, both inside the United States and overseas, to drop Assange's protracted prosecution.

Five major media organizations that relied on his trove of government secrets, including the *Guardian* and the *New York Times*, [put out an open letter](#) earlier this month saying that his indictment "sets a dangerous precedent" and threatens to undermine the first amendment.

At the same time, officials in Australia, where Assange was born and remains a citizen, met with American counterparts to appeal for his release. "My position is clear and has been made clear to the US administration: that it is time that this matter be brought to a close," Australia's prime minister, Anthony Albanese, told the Australian parliament late last month.

In Brazil, meanwhile, President-elect Luis Inácio Lula da Silva demanded an end to what he called the "unjust imprisonment" of Assange after a meeting with [WikiLeaks](#) editors lobbying for his freedom.

Some of Assange's defenders, who have attacked his prosecution as a trampling of the first amendment, say they are optimistic that the case may have reached a turning point that could ultimately lead to his freedom.

"This case is hugely significant," the Columbia University law professor Jameel Jaffer, who runs the Knight First Amendment Institute at the

university, said in an interview. “At the end of the day, I find it hard to believe that the Biden administration wants this case to be its press freedom legacy, and it *will* be its legacy if they continue to pursue it. That will overshadow everything else when it comes to press freedom.”

Justice department officials aren’t tipping their hand about where Assange’s prosecution might eventually lead, as he continues to challenge his extradition to the US before a British appeals court. The justice department declined to comment on all the outside calls to drop the case, but one official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said that Garland “has made clear that he will follow the law wherever it leads”, as he has in other politically charged cases.

For all the outside pressure on the justice department to drop the case, a critical factor could turn out to be the internal regulations that Garland announced in October banning the use of records seizures and other investigative steps against “news media acting within the scope of news gathering” except in what the department said would be limited circumstances.

The new regulations grew out of a year-long review that followed frequent complaints from news organizations about intrusive tactics used by the department during the Trump administration to gather up records from journalists and pry into news-gathering practices in the course of investigations into leaks and other sensitive matters.

One central dispute in Assange’s rise to notoriety has always been the question of whether he should be considered a journalist covered by the first amendment, as his advocates have long maintained, or a rogue operative who, as the Republican senator Ben Sasse of Nebraska once said, was “an outlet for foreign propaganda and … an enemy of the American people”.

Barry J Pollack, the lead lawyer for Assange in the US, told the Guardian that “the new regulations certainly cry out for someone at the highest levels of the justice department to take a fresh look at this prosecution to see whether it is really consistent with the new policy” and to determine “is this the type of case we want to be pursuing?”

“The timing is ripe for that,” Pollack said.

Assange has been a polarizing figure around the world for a dozen years now, ever since WikiLeaks began publishing and sometimes sharing with major media outlets, including the Guardian and the New York Times, millions of page of often-classified materials it had gathered from government whistleblowers and other sources. His advocates applauded him as a brash truth teller, while critics – often within the intelligence agencies – have attacked him for the damage they maintain the leaks have caused to ongoing operations.

His group’s first major exposés in 2010 documented American military abuses and missteps in Iraq and Afghanistan, and each subsequent batch of leaked materials, from secret state department cables to CIA hacking tools, brought Assange more notoriety and attention.

Beyond the massive leaks, Assange was also facing sexual assault allegations in Sweden – although the investigation was eventually dropped because Swedish prosecutors said [the evidence was not strong enough](#). To avoid capture, he took refuge in 2012 in the Ecuadorian embassy in London under a deal granting him political asylum. The CIA and the Trump administration were so fixated on the secrets he had exposed that they discussed the prospect of kidnapping Assange from the embassy and assassinating him, according to a [report last year from Yahoo News](#).



Joe Biden repeatedly asked the UK to extradite the WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange. Photograph: Kirsty Wigglesworth/AP

The justice department, under Trump, first brought criminal charges against Assange in 2019, when British authorities arrested and dragged him out of the embassy. Assange, looking dishevelled with a long, white beard, yelled: “This is unlawful, I am not leaving.”

Beginning less than two weeks after Biden was inaugurated in January of 2021, his justice department has repeatedly asked the British courts to renew the American request for Assange’s extradition. After a lengthy battle in the British courts, the then home secretary, Priti Patel, approved the US extradition request in June, but Assange is appealing against that decision, arguing that he was “being prosecuted and punished for his political opinions”.

Almost all of the 18 charges brought against Assange in the 2019 indictment center on the actual publication online of secret military and government material by WikiLeaks, much of it garnered from former US military whistleblower Chelsea Manning. Only one of the charges accuses Assange of actively working to help Manning secure the classified information. In that instance, prosecutors charged that Assange offered to help Manning to

crack the password for one classified military system – an attempt that failed.

Manning was ultimately sentenced to 35 years in prison for leaking government secrets before President Barack Obama commuted the remainder of her sentence in 2017. At a court-martial hearing in 2013, Manning insisted that there was never pressure from WikiLeaks to seize any secret material from the military's computer systems. "The decisions that I made to send documents and information to (WikiLeaks) and the website were my own decisions, and I take full responsibility for my actions," Manning said.

The charges against Assange for obtaining and publishing classified information, without any active role in actually stealing it mark "the crossing of a legal rubicon", said Jaffer at Columbia University. That's an ominous legal threshold, he said, for Assange and all journalists.

"It's the first time the US government has used the Espionage Act to go after a publisher and the implications are huge," Jaffer said. Assange "has been indicted for activity that reporters are engaged in every day and that reporters have to engage in every day to inform the public. This would have dramatic implications for national security journalism."

This article was amended on 12 December 2022 to clarify that Assange faced sexual assault allegations, not charges, in Sweden. Also, Biden's inauguration year was 2021, not 2020.

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Music

Patti LaBelle rushed offstage after bomb threat made at Wisconsin show

Singer abruptly evacuated just a couple of songs into her concert after the bomb threat forced authorities to evacuate the theatre

The moment Patti LaBelle is rushed offstage after reports of bomb threat – video

[Sian Cain](#) and agencies

Sun 11 Dec 2022 18.42 EST Last modified on Tue 13 Dec 2022 09.42 EST

Patti LaBelle was abruptly rushed offstage just a couple of songs into a Christmas concert in Milwaukee, after a bomb threat forced authorities to suddenly evacuate the venue.

Footage of the 78-year-old singer's sudden evacuation from the stage at the Riverside Theater began to circulate on social media on Saturday night shortly after the incident.

“Hold up! Wait!” LaBelle exclaims, before several men quickly remove her from behind the microphone and escort her from the stage. Members of the crowd can be heard asking what has happened as the lights go dim on stage.

Patti LaBelle was taken off stage by security at a concert in Milwaukee tonight following a bomb threat pic.twitter.com/SeuCPrWVDj

— philip lewis (@Phil_Lewis_) [December 11, 2022](#)

Shortly afterwards, the nearly full 2,500-seat theatre was evacuated.

Concert attender Catherine Brunson, who documented the evacuation on Facebook Live, [told the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel](#) that the evacuation

happened two songs into LaBelle's concert just before 9.30pm.

"We came out and police had the block taped off ... A whole lot of people were pretty upset ... It's scary," Brunson said.

Scott Pierce, who also attended the concert, said everyone had exited the theatre calmly, but it's "just sad that someone does this".

Early on Sunday morning, Milwaukee police captain Warren Allen Jr said K9 units had searched the theatre and no explosive devices were discovered and there was no threat to the public.

The investigation into what had happened is "fluid and ongoing", he added.

LaBelle, an R&B legend known as "the godmother of soul", has yet to issue a public statement about the incident.

The operator of the Riverside Theater, Pabst Theater Group, said it would work with LaBelle to reschedule the show.

Associated Press contributed to this report

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2022/dec/12/patti-labelle-rushed-offstage-after-bomb-threat-made-at-wisconsin-show>

Bali

Bali's governor says Indonesia's ban on sex outside marriage poses no risk to tourists

Island's governor Wayan Koster says visitors 'would not need to worry' about changes to the country's criminal code



Bali's governor has said tourist to the Indonesian island 'would not need to worry' about changes to the criminal code which include a ban on sex outside marriage. Photograph: Agung Parameswara/Getty Images

Reuters

Mon 12 Dec 2022 01.42 EST

Visitors to Bali will not be put at risk by Indonesia's newly ratified criminal code, the island's governor said, dismissing concerns that revised laws

which include articles criminalising sex outside marriage may scare away tourists from its shores.

Indonesia's parliament last week [passed the controversial bill](#) that also prohibits cohabitation between unmarried couples.

Seeking to reassure visitors, Bali's governor Wayan Koster noted in a statement on Sunday that the new laws, which come into effect in three years, could only be prosecuted if there was a complaint by a parent, spouse or child.

Those who "visit or live in Bali would not need to worry with regard to the entry into force of the Indonesian Criminal Code", he said.

The governor said provisions in the criminal code on this issue had been altered from an earlier, stricter version so "would provide a better guarantee of everyone's privacy and comfortableness."

Bali's government would ensure "there will be no checking on marital status upon check-in at any tourism accommodation, such as hotels, villas, apartments, guest houses, lodges and spas," Wayan said.

Wayan also denied what he said were "hoax" reports of cancellations of flights and hotel room bookings, adding that data from travel agents, tour and accommodation operators, as well as airlines, showed the number of people set to visit Bali from December 2022 to March 2023 had increased.

Bali is the centre of tourism in Indonesia and the tourism association is targeting foreign arrivals on the predominately Hindu island to reach pre-pandemic levels of six million a year by 2025. Decades in the making, legislators hailed the passage of the criminal code as a much-needed overhaul of a vestige of Dutch colonial rule. Officials say it aims to uphold "Indonesian values" in the world's largest Muslim-majority nation.

But Maulana Yusran, deputy chief of Indonesia's tourism industry board, said last week the new code was "totally counter-productive" at a time when the economy and tourism were starting to recover from the pandemic.

The United Nations has also expressed concern over threats to civil liberties posed by the criminal code, which also includes laws that make it an offence to insult the president, the national flag and state institutions.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/dec/12/balis-governor-says-indonesias-ban-on-sex-outside-marriage-poses-no-risk-to-tourists>

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[China](#)

China scraps tracking app as zero-Covid policy is dismantled

Health authorities sound warning on infection rate, with hundreds of thousands of doctors redeployed across the country



China's primary Covid tracking app will be retired on Tuesday. Photograph: Mark R Cristino/EPA

Helen Davidson in Taipei

@heldavidson

Mon 12 Dec 2022 07.08 ESTFirst published on Mon 12 Dec 2022 01.00 EST

China has announced plans to scrap its primary Covid tracking app in the latest rollback of pandemic control measures, just days after abruptly abandoning its long-running zero-Covid policy.

It came as health authorities warned of widespread infections on the horizon, and redeployed hundreds of thousands of doctors and nurses to intensive care units in preparation for an Omicron surge through the population of 1.4 billion people.

On Tuesday the government-run “communications itinerary card” will be retired, according to an official announcement on Monday. The app [tracked people's movements](#) using mobile phone signals, identifying those who had been in high-risk areas in order to control their travel to other areas.

The national app was a central pillar of the technological infrastructure that guided the government’s Covid response. A plethora of local and provincial apps used health data which often could not be shared with other regions.

Online, residents shared screenshots of their final logins and farewelled the app. “Goodbye itinerary card, concerts here I come,” wrote one person. “The past few years we have witnessed ‘history’ one time after another, and I hope that there will never be a day when it will be used again,” wrote another.

Some expressed concern about the vast amounts of personal data collected by the app and others like it. “I hope there will be mechanisms and measures to log out and delete this,” said one.

The app is the latest tenet of [China’s zero-Covid policy to be dismantled](#). Over the past week testing requirements have been greatly reduced, domestic travel restrictions lifted, and infected people allowed to quarantine at home instead of being sent to specialised facilities.

Beijing authorities said fever clinics at hospitals in the city had received more than 22,000 patients on Sunday, 16 times the number a week ago.

“The current trend of the rapid spread of the epidemic in Beijing still exists,” Li Ang, a spokesperson for the city’s health commission, said at a briefing on Monday. “The number of fever clinic visits and flu-like cases increased significantly, and the number of ... emergency calls increased sharply.”

In recent weeks, local cases have been trending lower since a late November peak of 40,052, official figures show. Sunday's tally of 8,626 was down from 10,597 new cases the previous day. However, since mandatory testing was drastically scaled back and test stations dismantled, the official case numbers are no longer considered a reliable measurement. Videos showed long queues in Shanghai at the few remaining testing sites left open for people working in vulnerable sectors.

On Sunday China's top disease expert warned of a coming surge in cases. Zhong Nanshan said the Omicron variant was "spreading rapidly", and that one person could infect 22 others.

Authorities are preparing for almost 300,000 doctors and nurses to be redeployed to intensive care units across the country. China's health system is concentrated in major cities and along the wealthier east coast. The government has faced criticism for not using the zero-Covid period to build its capacity. Nationally it has just one intensive care bed per 10,000 residents, far below other nations in the region. 3.6

With low vaccination rates among the vulnerable elderly demographics, the rapid change of rules has caused some fear and alarm among the population. There were also widespread reports of [shortages of medication and rapid tests](#) in pharmacies and online.

Ahead of January's lunar new year – the country's busiest travel period – Zhong urged people to get booster shots.

"It is highly unlikely that people will be restricted from travelling home for lunar new year celebrations in 2023, but it is still important to step up preparations," he said, according to state media.

Online there was concern among students who are supposed to sit for a major exam in late December. The postgraduate admissions test requires the expected 5 million participants to travel across the country and gather in large groups.

In his interview, Zhong optimistically appeared to suggest a return to pre-pandemic life in China within months.

“I was asked when our lives can return to where we were in 2019. My view is that in the first half of next year after March,” he said, according to the South China Morning Post.

“Although I can’t guarantee it, the trend says it should be around that time.”

China’s restrictions for virus containment and control was initially successful against earlier variants of the disease and allowed most Chinese people to live a largely normal life for much of the last three years. But the system was overwhelmed by the increased transmissibility of later variants like Omicron. The government faced unprecedented protests last month against arduous and frequent lockdowns, as well as other restrictions that were having a major social and economic effects.

Seemingly in response, many of those restrictions have been abruptly shelved. Videos spread on social media showed abandoned quarantine centres and testing sites, littered with the refuse of the former policy. State media and health messaging has pivoted to emphasising the low severity of Omicron, and urging individual responsibility. One official video which shows people removing their face masks with apparent relief was criticised over its suggestion to ease mask wearing just as Covid begins to spread uncontrolled.

Additional reporting by Chi Hui Lin

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/dec/12/china-scaps-tracking-app-amid-widespread-dismantling-of-zero-covid-policy>.

Headlines thursday 22 december 2022

- [NHS ‘Surge in demand’ expected after ambulance workers’ strike](#)
- [Live Zelenskiy tells US Congress aid is not charity as Biden announces \\$1.85bn support package](#)
- [Live Minister admits more needed to ease trade after damning Brexit business survey](#)
- [Brexit Three-quarters of UK firms say EU deal has not boosted business](#)

NHS

NHS expects surge in demand after ambulance workers' strike

'Knock-on effects' predicted after dispute in England and Wales led to 'substantial reduction in 999 calls'

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

'We want to save lives': ambulance staff strike across England and Wales – video report

[Caroline Davies](#)

Thu 22 Dec 2022 04.54 EST Last modified on Thu 22 Dec 2022 06.04 EST

Health service representatives have warned of an intense demand on emergency services after the one-day strike by paramedics.

A plea to the public to only call ambulances in life-threatening situations during the industrial action resulted in a significant drop in demand on Wednesday.

But Saffron Cordery, the interim chief executive of [NHS](#) Providers, said a "surge in demand" was expected over coming days.

She said: "We know that demand was significantly down." This was partly due to the public who had "heeded the advice only to call an ambulance if it's an extreme emergency".

It was also due to some people not seeking treatment at all. "And I think that's what we are really worried about. It's this unseen risk that is sitting out there in communities," she told Times Radio.

“What we think today, tomorrow, the next few days will bring us, actually, is quite a surge in demand for emergency treatment, people turning up at A&E, potentially calling ambulances because they are in a condition that has significantly deteriorated.”

Thousands of nurses [picketed on Tuesday](#) while on Wednesday ambulance staff staged their [biggest strike in 30 years](#). The stoppages came as unions and ministers remained deadlocked over pay negotiations on Wednesday.

Matthew Taylor, the chief executive of the NHS Confederation, said the NHS had “coped as well as could be expected”.

“We saw a quite substantial reduction in 999 calls,” he told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme on Thursday. “The challenge is that demand doesn’t disappear. So, I think we are expecting more intense demand today.

“And that comes on top of a health service which is already finding it very difficult to deal with demand when we have critical incidents in many areas. We are hearing that yesterday there was more demand in primary care so more people phoning 111 and more people being referred for out-of-hospital services.

“So we coped as best we could yesterday. But it’s incredibly important that we recognise that we cannot go on coping with industrial action in the NHS because each time it happens there are direct consequences but also all sorts of knock-on effects.”

He added: “We won’t fully know the consequences of yesterday for a couple of days.”

“We will repeat the call to trade unions and government to step away from rhetoric and step towards negotiation.”

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The Daily Telegraph [reported](#) that the health secretary, Steve Barclay, was poised to offer an expedited pay deal.

Unions have said they expect NHS workers to be offered a 2% increase next year, based on a letter sent by Barclay to the NHS pay review body. At least 11,509 staff were absent from work across [England](#) during strikes by the Royal College of Nursing on Tuesday, and 13,797 appointments and procedures had to be rescheduled, according to NHS England.

Thousands of ambulance workers took individual action on Wednesday, with members of the military stepping in to take their place. The next ambulance strike is due to take place on 28 December.

Workers across several other industries are also due to strike in the run-up to Christmas. On Thursday, strikes were being held by Unite members working for Highlands and Islands airports in Scotland, National Highways workers in London and the south-east and the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) in the north-west, Yorkshire and Humber and north [Wales](#).

On Friday, the National Highways and DVSA strikes were due to continue, while Royal Mail workers are set to begin a two-day national stoppage. On Christmas Eve, strikes are scheduled by RMT railway workers from 6pm, and London bus workers at Abellio.

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Brexit

Three-quarters of UK firms say Brexit deal has not boosted business

British Chambers of Commerce presents government with urgent recommendations as members report struggling to sell into EU

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



Workers at a manufacturing company. Of BCC members surveyed, 77% of firms said the post-Brexit deal with the EU had not helped them to expand.
Photograph: Rui Vieira/PA

[Heather Stewart](#)

Thu 22 Dec 2022 07.09 ESTFirst published on Wed 21 Dec 2022 17.30 EST

More than three-quarters of firms say the government's post-Brexit trade deal with the EU has not helped them to expand their business in the last two years despite promises that Brexit terms were "[oven-ready](#)".

A survey by the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) has prompted the business lobby group to present the government with five urgent recommendations for enhancing the agreement, which has left many exporters struggling to sell into the EU under the current terms.

More than half (56%) of the BCC members surveyed who trade with the EU said they had experienced problems complying with new rules for exporting goods, while 45% reported issues trading in services. Overall, as many as 77% of firms trading under the deal said it had not helped them to increase sales or expand.

The BCC's director general, Shevaun Haviland, said: "Businesses feel they are banging their heads against a brick wall as nothing has been done to help them, almost two years after the TCA [trade and cooperation agreement] was first agreed. The longer the current problems go unchecked, the more EU traders go elsewhere, and the more damage is done."

The group's members, the majority of which are small- and medium-sized businesses, highlighted difficulties administering EU rules on VAT; inconsistent application of customs rules; and new limits on business travel.

On regulation, two-thirds of members said they would prefer to continue using the EU's CE mark of product quality, instead of switching to the UK's new post-Brexit equivalent, [the UKCA](#).

The shadow international trade secretary, Nick Thomas-Symonds, said: "This is a damning report and shows the mess the Conservative government have made over trade policy. For over three-quarters of businesses to say that agreements struck by the government are not helping them to grow or increase their sales is unacceptable."

The TCA was the core of Boris Johnson's "oven-ready" Brexit deal. The then prime minister announced that it had been struck [on Christmas Eve two years ago](#).

It allows UK goods to avoid EU tariffs but imposes additional customs and regulatory checks and other "non-tariff barriers", as Britain opted to be

outside the EU's customs union and single market.

The TCA is due to be reviewed in 2026, when it will have been in operation for five years, but the BCC is calling on the government to negotiate some changes immediately.

"There are clearly some structural problems built into the TCA which cannot be addressed until it is reviewed in 2026. But as we set out in our report to government there are some issues that do not need to wait on months of negotiations or major reviews to be fixed," said Haviland.

One key demand is for the government to seek an early resolution to [the standoff over the Northern Ireland protocol](#), to "stabilise" the trading relationship with the EU.

Talks between the two sides on the protocol are continuing, after [Rishi Sunak told the US president, Joe Biden](#), that he would like to see the impasse ended before next year's 25th anniversary of the Good Friday agreement.

Controversial legislation championed by Liz Truss that would bypass the protocol, which the EU had warned [could lead to a trade war](#), appears to have been shelved for the moment while negotiations take place.

The BCC's other proposals include seeking an agreement to lift veterinary checks on agrifood exports; and negotiating an opt-out from the rule that forces small exporters to work with a "fiscal representative" based in the EU, in order to levy VAT.

Echoing other trade bodies including manufacturers' group Make UK, the BCC would also like to see the CE mark continue to apply to goods sold in Britain.

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The BCC's call for action from the government came as research from the Centre for European Reform (CER) thinktank claimed Brexit had shaved 5.5% off GDP and cost £40bn in tax revenues.

[In a report](#), the CER's John Springford compares Britain's performance since Brexit with a basket of similar economies.

Using this approach, known as the doppelgänger method, he finds that the economy is likely to have been £30bn, or 5.5% smaller in the second quarter of 2022, than it might have been had [Brexit](#) not happened. This is at the high end of recent estimates.

Springford argues that the weaker economy has had a knock-on effect on public finances, contributing to [Sunak's decision to increase taxes](#).

“If the UK economy had grown in line with the doppelgänger, tax revenues would have been around £40bn higher on an annual basis,” he said.

The Conservative peer Gavin Barwell, who was previously Theresa May's chief of staff during the then prime minister's fraught Brexit negotiations, urged his colleagues to acknowledge the impact of leaving the EU on the economy.

“Our politicians can't go on ignoring this economic self-harm for ever. That doesn't mean we have to rejoin, but it does mean we need to reduce the very damaging barriers to trade that we have introduced with our nearest neighbours,” he said.

A government spokesperson said: “The TCA is the world's largest zero-tariff, zero-quota free trade deal. It secures the UK market access across key service sectors and opens new opportunities for UK businesses across the

globe. Despite difficult global economic headwinds, UK-EU trade is rebounding, with recent data showing that UK trade to both EU and non-EU countries is above pre-Covid levels.”

This article was amended on 22 December 2022 to make clear that it was the terms of Brexit that were “oven-ready”.

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2022.12.22 - Spotlight

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- Celebrity how we met Val McDermid and Jo Sharp: ‘I Googled her to make sure she was a real person’
- Best of 2022 No 2 – The Quiet Girl
- ‘It gave me such a lift’ Guardian readers’ best films of 2022
- The rise and rise of Beth Mead Euro 22 winner and now Sports Personality of the Year winner

Explain it to me quickly**Celebrity**

Nepo babies: what are they and why is Gen Z only just discovering them?

They're the celebrity children scoring big creative breaks. But are their careers – and cheekbones – proof meritocracy is dead?



(L-R) Famous ‘nepo babies’ Lily-Rose Depp, Gwyneth Paltrow and Dakota Johnson. Composite: Rex/Shutterstock/Image Press Agency/NurPhoto/Drew Altizer Photography/George Pimentel

[Alyx Gorman explains it to Calla Wahlquist](#)

Thu 22 Dec 2022 01.02 EST Last modified on Thu 22 Dec 2022 01.03 EST

Alyx, I keep seeing TikToks about “nepo babies”. What is a nepo baby and why do we hate them?

The answer to your first question is easy: nepo is short for “nepotism”. And a baby, in this instance, means the child of someone who’s already

successful. You don't have to be a baby to be a nepo baby. It is an all-ages phrase.

The nepotism baby discourse kicked off in February with a tweet about the cast of the TV series Euphoria.

Wait I just found out that the actress that plays Lexie is a nepotism baby omg 😱 her mom is Leslie Mann and her dad is a movie director lol
pic.twitter.com/s3Mh5QERgC

— girl idk... (@MeriemIsTired) [February 21, 2022](#)

This tweet is amazing for a few reasons. The first is that the “movie director” in question is Judd Apatow, one of the most powerful producers in Hollywood. Additionally, as the internet would later find out, the showrunner of Euphoria, Sam Levinson, is a nepo baby himself (his dad directed Good Morning, Vietnam).

By the time that tidbit came out, the nepotism discourse had reached fever pitch (and been shortened to nepo because: too many syllables). Dozens of buzzy young celebrities, from Zoë Kravitz to Maya Hawke and Dakota Johnson, were being outed on TikTok for their famous families (yes, anyone who was old enough to read People magazine in 2007 already knew).

But many who weren't old enough to read People magazine in 2007 learned for the first time that nepo babies were [filling their screens; their airwaves](#); the pages of their glossy magazines and just generally getting big creative breaks well before anyone else in their age bracket ([we knew](#)).

Now, to the next part of your question: why do we hate them?

Patently, we don't. We are fascinated by celebrities' children and always have been. We also don't think that nepo babies lack talent (shout out to my fave [Mary Shelley](#)).

But we also *resent* them.

Why are we talking about this now?

After much [discourse](#) in the earlier months of the year (most fabulously this Bloomberg hot take titled [Open Your Mind to the Benefits of Nepotism](#)) the whole thing kicked back off in earnest when New York magazine dropped a frankly incredible cover, celebrating the year of the nepo baby and [flowcharting all of Hollywood's genealogical hook-ups](#).

Are there any Hollywood starlets who aren't nepo babies? I thought that was just the accepted way in.

Yes, there are Hollywood stars that aren't nepo babies. For instance, some just have stage moms. But still, it's hard out there for the unconnected.

If we all know it happens, and having connections is a recognised way to get ahead in the industry, I'm assuming the nepo babies themselves are extremely chill and open about their privilege?

I once saw Connor Cruise DJing next to a wax mannequin of his own father in Los Angeles, so yeah, some nepo babies are pretty upfront about it. But many are not fond of the tone of the present discourse. We know because they are being asked about it in interviews. Lily-Rose Depp, who one could argue has benefitted as much from inherited cheekbones as inherited fame, [told Elle](#): “It’s weird to me to reduce somebody to the idea that they’re only there because it’s a generational thing”, and also called it sexist. This prompted several top models to [loudly roll their eyes](#) on Instagram stories.

Meanwhile, Zoë Kravitz, revisiting talking points from the aforementioned Bloomberg hot take, [told GQ](#): “It’s completely normal for people to be in the family business.”



Zoë Kravitz, the daughter of actor Lisa Bonet and musician Lenny Kravitz.
Photograph: Stewart Cook/Rex/Shutterstock

Gwyneth Paltrow, in conversation with fellow nepo Hailey Bieber (née Baldwin), explained how family connections can actually [be a disadvantage](#), because “once your foot is in the door, which you unfairly got in, then you almost have to work twice as hard and be twice as good” (we ... no).

And just two days ago, Lily Allen, [not unreasonably](#), pointed out that being the child of a famous person isn’t exactly easy ([we knew](#)).

Is this just a Hollywood thing?

As Lily Allen noted, nepo babies are everywhere! (Hello, Justin Trudeau.) While the nepo baby chatter has mostly been centred around the most visible examples (famous people), the outrage underpinning it is broader.

Inherited wealth makes it easier to get ahead in *every* industry. Which is why New York magazine’s deep dive draws a clear distinction between being a nepo baby and simply being rich.

Because having *not only* inherited wealth, but *also* a parent who can stick their foot in the door for you makes succeeding that much easier again.

If a field is highly compensated, highly regarded, or just highly visible (hello, journalism), you can bet you'll find second or even third (fourth, in [Drew Barrymore's case](#)) generation dynasties working within it.

So, is this just Gen Z making the discovery that every generation makes, that meritocracy is a lie and all the scales are rigged?

Basically, yes.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2022/dec/22/nepo-babies-what-are-they-and-why-is-gen-z-only-just-discovering-them>

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How Val McDermid met Jo Sharp: ‘I Googled her to make sure she was a real person’



Jo (left) and Val at Portobello beach in Edinburgh.

Crime writer McDermid, 67, kept seeing geography professor Sharp, 53, at literary events. They eventually had a drink at the bar in 2013 and now live together in Edinburgh

[Lizzie Cernik](#)

Thu 22 Dec 2022 01.00 ESTLast modified on Thu 22 Dec 2022 03.27 EST

In February 2013, crime writer Val McDermid was invited to speak at the University of Oxford. “It was at my old college of St Hilda’s,” she says. When she spotted she had been tagged on Twitter by an attendee, she felt nervous. “I’d had an unfortunate incident a few months before – someone had thrown ink in my face at a signing,” she says. “This tweet had a cartoon profile image rather than a picture, so I looked her up to make sure she was a real person.”

She discovered her new Twitter fan was Jo Sharp, a geography professor from Glasgow. “I was in Oxford doing some research,” says Jo. “I’d contacted a professor I knew there, to meet up. She told me she was going to see Val McDermid speak and I could come along.” Jo decided to go even though she had not read any of Val’s books. She tweeted the details of the event, tagging Val in her post. “My friend was a huge fan of her writing, so we stayed afterwards to be introduced,” says Jo. When she told Val she wasn’t from Oxford, Val admitted she already knew. “I told her I’d Googled her,” she laughs. “There was definitely something that caught my attention.”

In March, they met again at the Aye Write literature festival in Glasgow. Once again, they had a brief chat and exchanged a few messages on Twitter. It wasn’t until September 2013 that they got to know each other better at Bloody Scotland, a crime-writing festival in Stirling. “By this point, my friends were joking that I was stalking Val,” says Jo. They met up at a bar and chatted all evening. “We talked about all sorts: music, books, politics, gaming,” says Val. “We covered a lot of ground over the course of a few hours. I was intrigued by her, and she had lots to say for herself.”

At the time, neither of them saw each other romantically, which made their meet-up more relaxed. Jo was happily single and focusing on her career, while Val was coming towards the end of a long-term relationship. The following month, Jo travelled to Tanzania for a field trip, and their friendship continued to grow. “We broke Twitter because we were sending so many direct messages,” says Val. “Apparently there’s a limit on the number you can send.” Soon, they began to realise there might be more between them than friendship. “We were having these increasingly intense conversations,” says Jo. “Val really understood me.”

That January, Val’s relationship ended. She drove to Glasgow from her home in Northumberland to see Jo, and from that moment on they were never apart.



In May 2014, they moved in together in Edinburgh. “I grew up on the east coast and it’s less rainy,” laughs Val. They had a humanist civil partnership ceremony in 2016, which they celebrated with dinner and drinks near their home. “It ran from noon until 11pm, and the London contingent staggered out of the restaurant at the end of the night to get the sleeper [train] home,” says Val. “The whole day was joyous. I don’t think I stopped grinning,” adds Jo.

Both describe their relationship as “incredibly supportive”. About a year after they first met at Val’s speaking event in Oxford, Jo remembers stumbling across a photo of them together there. “It felt like a moment in history for us,” she says. “Neither of us was looking for anything, but our worlds just collided that day.”

Val McDermid’s latest thriller, 1989, is out now. To support the Guardian, buy your copy from bookshop.theguardian.com

Want to share your story? Tell us a little about yourself, your partner and how you got together by filling in the form [here](#)

This article was amended on 22 December 2022 to correct the spelling of the city of Stirling.

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Best films UK 2022Movies

Best films of 2022 in the UK: No 2 – The Quiet Girl

Sent to stay with distant relatives in rural Ireland, nine-year-old Cáit brings love back into their weary lives – though this gentle story has sinister depths

- [50 best films of 2022 in the UK](#)
- [More on the best culture of 2022](#)



Full of secrets ... Catherine Clinch in The Quiet Girl. Photograph: Curzon



[Claire Armitstead](#)

[@carmitstead](#)

Thu 22 Dec 2022 01.00 EST

Colm Bairéad's stunning directorial debut, about a nine-year-old girl fostered out to distant relatives for a summer by parents unable to cope, deserves to be as much of a classic as the 19th-century novel that becomes young Cáit's bedtime reading, Heidi. In place of goats in the Alps, Bairéad and cinematographer Kate McCullough give us a dairy farm in the lush landscape of County Waterford, where the gruff Seán (Andrew Bennett) tends his cows, while the desperate-to-please Eibhlín (Carrie Crowley) teaches her to cook and fetch water from a well of unknown depth.

This apparently gentle story has its own murky depths: the bottle-fed calves that Cáit learns to feed have been removed from their mothers; the room where she sleeps and the clothes she wears belong to a past that is kept secret from her and from us, even though it is signalled in the very first of the film's sly half-reveals by her ne'er-do-well father (Michael Patric), as he grudgingly drops her off in his beaten-up car.

Faithfully based on [Claire Keegan](#)'s novella Foster, though unfolding in a mix of Irish and English, the film is literary and entirely cinematic in its sinister potential. The backstory of Cáit's feckless father and eternally pregnant mother is pure Thomas Hardy, while the scenario of a child abandoned to strangers in the middle of nowhere is a knowing nod to gothic horror. In the event, its most brutal moment comes through a side swerve into comedy, when the officious neighbourhood gossip (Joan Sheehy) takes it upon herself to spill all the beans.

Otherwise, the jeopardy of the adult world is revealed to Catherine Clinch's eternally vigilant Cáit through averted eyes, leading questions, or the strange unleashings of a card game or a funeral. She's an innocent whose own silence is a mystery: her bedwetting hints at trauma, while the grace with which she initiates a relationship with Seán, by slipping into step with him as he sluices down his cowshed, hints at an intuitive wisdom.

Perhaps the true story, the film suggests, is not two adults rescuing a child, but a child bringing two adults back to life. For all their kindness and generosity, meals with Seán and Eibhlín are joyless affairs. Typically, the turning point is glimpsed through a half-open door, as Cáit watches them cosying up to each other over the washing up. It's only a tiny gesture of affection, the touching of two heads at the kitchen sink, but it is also a moment of transformative magic.

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‘It gave me such a lift’: Guardian readers’ best films of 2022



Pictures perfect ... (from left) *Nope*, *The Northman*, *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*. Composite: Alamy

From the sweet pathos of The Quiet Girl to the giddy thrills of Top Gun: Maverick and the gleeful silliness of Jackass Forever, Guardian readers spotlight their pick of the year

Guardian readers

Thu 22 Dec 2022 03.00 EST

The Banshees of Inisherin

Martin McDonagh is such an incredible writer, and he can direct like hell. Here, he manages to do the impossible and make a film better than In Bruges and Three Billboards. I've always adored Farrell and Gleeson, but they both outdo themselves. I cannot wait to see it again. I also wonder if there are any friends who could be expunged from my life ... **Chris Lycett, 44, Colchester**

Black Panther: Wakanda Forever

I saw Wakanda Forever in the theatre on opening weekend, with my girlfriend who is from Nairobi – a hi-tech city in Africa – and she knows some of the languages they spoke and sang. I wanted to draw for Marvel when I grew up, and I, like everyone, found Chadwick Boseman just world class in every way. I am still upset at his passing. **Dmitri Kalmar, 48, Manhattan**

The Quiet Girl (An Cailín Ciúin)



Still centre ... Catherine Clinch in *The Quiet Girl*. Photograph: Everett Collection Inc/Alamy

This Irish language film was a wonderful rendering of a childhood summer away from home, with Catherine Clinch playing the eponymous child. The stillness she creates at the centre of the film and the subtlety accorded to the gradations of change in her new surroundings were set against the coarseness of her own family and led to an emotional and convincing climax, free of sentimentality. A beautiful film. **Andy Clark, 61, Whitley Bay**

The Northman

I love being surprised by movies and *The Northman* did just that. The cinematography was beautiful, with mysterious and dark undertones. The violence and beauty seamed to merge effortlessly. Not to forget the amazing Alexander Skarsgård, Anya Taylor-Joy and Nicole Kidman, who delivered great performances. **Leticia Theobald, 40, Stevenage**

Decision to Leave

A familiar story told in a way that is unique to its director. Park Chan-wook toys both with the audience and the characters, inviting us to laugh and feel

with them, although none of us know what is going on or where the story is going. It's a detective noir set in 2022, with the most cinematic usage of smartphones and technology I have seen. If you like the director's previous movies, you'll be delighted to see all of his cinematic and storytelling tricks here. Park Chan-wook is at the height of his powers as a manipulator and entertainer. **Bojan, 28, North Macedonia**

Aftersun

Aftersun is a wondrous debut film by Charlotte Wells. The stars of the film, Paul Mescal and Frankie Corio, both give incredible performances as a father and daughter on a summer holiday in a fading Turkish resort. The actors inhabit their roles in a naturalistic manner and through both what is said and unsaid show a loving, flawed relationship between parent and child. The film felt incredibly fresh for the empathy it had towards both characters. Many moments have stuck with me, but the image of Mescal crying on his bed as well as Corio awkwardly singing while her father refuses to join her are two I have revisited over and over again. **Charlie Bailes, 30, Newcastle**

Licorice Pizza

The first time I saw this, on a gloomy January weekend, it gave me such a lift that I went back to the cinema a couple of days later to rewatch it. There's something intangible about its fever-dream, screwball quality that creates a feeling of absolute joy. You can almost hear Paul Thomas Anderson chuckling to himself behind the camera as the perfectly cast Cooper Hoffman and Alana Haim brilliantly bring his lead characters to life. The film has made me smile throughout a trying year simply by thinking about it. I ended up seeing Licorice Pizza four times in the cinema. It is now my favourite movie of all time. **Ian McCawley, London**

Turning Red

Pixar's Turning Red is a cute version of the Incredible Hulk where the protagonist turns into an adorable giant red panda whenever she gets emotional. Turning Red is my favourite film of 2022 because everything

about it spoke to me: the anime-influenced style, the early 2000s setting, the fixation on boybands, the themes of friendship, fandom and growing up. In short, this film was made for 13-year-old me – and at 31, I loved it too.

Carolyn Percy, 31, Bradley Stoke, South Gloucestershire

Tár

For me it's Todd Field's Tár, hands down. It's an incredibly well-written, acted and shot film, with such an impressive harnessing of sound as a crucial protagonist. The film offers a complex representation of gender-art power relations and negotiations. As a lesbian, I was particularly thankful for such a layered cinematic portrayal of a lesbian antihero, and I must say I haven't felt this excited about a sapphic villain since Mulholland Drive.

Mima, 46, Zagreb, Croatia

Barbarian

I watched more TV than film in 2022, but Barbarian came out of nowhere and left a mental wound that took days to heal. It followed some horror tropes with finesse, subverted others to great effect, and interwove an unsettling commentary about modern America. Most importantly, it managed to engender terror, revulsion, yet also a reluctant empathy towards the unexpected house guest lurking in the darkness of this little gem.

Ray Leon, 54, Brisbane, Australia

Everything Everywhere All at Once



Mind-blowing ... Michelle Yeoh in *Everything Everywhere All at Once*.
Photograph: A24/Allstar

After watching this movie for the first time I remember wishing there was a way I could travel to another dimension where I hadn't yet seen this movie so I could enjoy the experience of having my mind blown all over again.
Menzi Reed, 35, Sweden

Top Gun: Maverick

This accomplished an impossible mission of being better than the original. A film it's impossible to leave without feeling giddy from emotion, as though you've been in Tom Cruise's jet yourself. **Stephanie Herd, 40, Glasgow**

Jackass Forever

No politics, no thought – just stupid fun. I laughed so hard in the theatre, people thought I'd lost my mind or was on drugs. Jackass Forever came at a time when I needed to laugh. Two years of pandemic and too many angry people and all I wanted was a bunch of middle-aged men getting the crap knocked out of each other and cracking up about it. **Don Hall, 56, Wichita**

The Batman

Matt Reeves has created a film that is not only incredibly accurate to the comics, but is also an exciting, fresh reintroduction of a character that the audience are familiar with. All the elements of this film work. Michael Giacchino's unnerving score, the brilliant makeup – especially on Colin Farrell as the Penguin – and the performances are all top tier. Robert Pattinson is transcendent, Paul Dano is terrifying and Zoë Kravitz was born to play Catwoman. **Naomi, London**

Elvis

Baz Luhrmann's Elvis is a stunning, fully theatrical tour-de-force of film-making. Every element is perfectly chosen and put together: music, costumes, sets, which stories to tell, and accurate with just enough cinematic licence to bring the story to life. The tone is perfect, striking the right balance between drama, humour and tragedy. I have to single out Austin Butler as Elvis in what has to be one of the great breakout performances of all time. From the moment he appears on screen, he has you totally convinced that he is Presley. It's also made me fall in love with Elvis all over again. My partner has asked if there isn't somewhere I can go to be treated for Elvis addiction. **Martin McDonald, 57, Manchester**

Nope

Nope showed us the dizzying heights that can be reached by blockbuster cinema when it has the right artist at the helm. Sweeping spectacle. Challenging and thought-provoking themes (whose right is it to document anything, let alone a UFO?). Thrilling action set pieces. It helped restore my faith in the Hollywood system this year. **Scott, London**

Triangle of Sadness

I love this film because it sums up society today: soulless influencer, Russian anti-communist, middle-class arms dealers meet poor workers and staff on a cruise ship, all exploited to serve and deliver their customers'

every whim. Except after an explosion on the boat (caused by pirates) their experience on a desert island ensures a role swap. It's a true Lord of the Flies experience. Oh, and the food poisoning and sea sickness are unforgettable. So funny, so tragic, so disturbing. **Jane Warren, West Sussex**

The Unbearable Weight of Massive Talent



Onscreen chemistry ... Nicolas Cage in *The Unbearable Weight of Massive Talent*. Photograph: Lionsgate/Katalin Vermes/Allstar

My favourite was *The Unbearable Weight of Massive Talent*, because the love of cinema is palpable, even the silliest jokes land, and the onscreen chemistry between Nicolas Cage and Pedro Pascal is surprisingly heartwarming. It's the perfect apotheosis of a career in myth-making (as Cage might put it). **Robert Howells, 34, London**

The Stranger

A dark psychological thriller made all the more disturbing by how realistic it felt. The colour palette is cold, despite being set in Australia, and the minimalist soundtrack imbues the film with tension. As the two main characters circle each other and secrets are revealed, Joel Edgerton and Sean Harris skilfully convey their deteriorating mental state and how the choices

they have both made have taken their toll on them. **Adam Ridley, 37, Newcastle upon Tyne**

The Lost King

For me, it's The Lost King, starring Sally Hawkins and Steve Coogan, in which the character played by Hawkins embarks on an adventure to locate and unearth the skeleton of Richard III. As a lecturer myself, I particularly enjoyed the way the film pricked the bubble of academic arrogance. The story plays up local "amateur" knowledge, and the consuming passion of pursuing a goal, while remaining true to yourself. It's a wonderful journey of self-discovery. **James Derounian, 65, Winchcombe, Gloucestershire**

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BBC Sports Personality of the Year

The rise and rise of Beth Mead: Euro 22 winner and now Spotty winner

The Arsenal forward has gone from being a plus one at the Ballon d'Or awards to winning Sports Personality of the Year

'An honour': Beth Mead wins Sports Personality of the Year – video



[Suzanne Wrack](#)

[@SuzyWrack](#)

Thu 22 Dec 2022 03.00 EST Last modified on Thu 22 Dec 2022 05.56 EST

From plus one to runaway favourite. If there was any risk of England's Beth Mead getting carried away with her golden boot-winning and player of the tournament heroics as the [Lionesses won a first major trophy](#) at the Euros in the summer, then it was quickly stomped on in October.

The forward was photographed at the Ballon d'Or awards ceremony alongside her partner, her Arsenal teammate Vivianne Miedema, and the

caption on the image read: “Vivianne Miedema and a guest”. That “guest”, who laughed off the error, would go on to finish as runner-up to Barcelona’s Alexia Putellas for the international award after a stellar year, but the miscaptioning spoke to just how rapid a rise Mead’s has been on the global stage.

On home soil, Mead’s profile has exploded since the final at Wembley. The 27-year-old has become the first female football player, and just the sixth footballer (after Bobby Moore, Paul Gascoigne, Michael Owen, David Beckham and Ryan Giggs), to win [BBC Sports Personality of the Year](#).

It is deserved, but it is also bittersweet, because, when Mead went up on stage to collect the trophy, she did so with a ruptured anterior cruciate ligament injury that has probably ended her season and destroyed any hope of carrying her form for England into the World Cup in Australia and New Zealand in July. Her “guest” on the night, Miedema, shared that journey [after rupturing the ACL](#) in her left knee in Arsenal’s 1-0 defeat to Lyon, less than a month after [Mead suffered hers in a 3-2 loss to Manchester United](#).

Mead, though, is used to fighting back stronger. The Whitby-born player’s phenomenal 2022 – in which she scored the most goals and created the most assists and chances at the Euros, after creating 64 chances for Arsenal in the calendar year and finishing the season as the [fans’ player of the season](#) and the WSL all-time leader in assists – came after [the bitter disappointment at being omitted](#) from the Team GB squad for the Olympics.

Mead scored twice in [Arsenal’s 3-2 defeat of Chelsea](#) on the opening day of the new season after being left out of the squad for Tokyo and she didn’t look back. After her third hat-trick for England in six months, following the arrival of the new England manager, Sarina Wiegman, Mead said her confidence had been restored and that she had “channelled my disappointment in the correct way”.

Mead’s talent has been long known by those that have watched the women’s game. She was recruited by Arsenal in 2017 after she scored 77 goals in 78 games for Sunderland. In her first season with the Black Cats, she finished

as the National League top scorer with 23 goals in 23 games as Sunderland won the league and the FA Women's Premier League Cup.



Beth Mead was the key figure for England at Euro 22, in which she scored the most goals and created the most assists and chances. Photograph: Martin Rickett/PA

In her second season she bagged 30 goals in 28 games. The following year, 2014, she led the line as Sunderland earned promotion to the Women's Super League and then scored in the team's stunning 2-1 defeat of the then champions, Liverpool, in their first match in the top flight before going on to finish the season as the league's top scorer.

It was her angry and aggressive side being brought out that the then England manager, Phil Neville, said would take her to the next level. After England's 2-0 win over Denmark before the 2019 World Cup, he said: "The penny has dropped. It's like: 'Do you want to go to Blackpool on your holidays or do you want to go to the moon?' She now wants to go to the moon. Before she was happy to go to Whitley Bay and have fish and chips."

She had forced her way into contention for the World Cup after her place had been uncertain. "She's ready to play," Neville said at the time. "She wasn't six months ago. We had very harsh words with her, and she knew it.

We had to really tell a few home truths to someone who was probably at a level she was happy with. But we knew she could go to a different level.”

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The Olympic disappointment helped power her closer to reaching her full potential on the pitch, but a much deeper heartbreak fuelled the new urgency to hit the top heights. Mead’s mum, June, was diagnosed with terminal cancer in 2021.

“I know I’m not going to share all those moments with my mum for the rest of my life any more, so to share that moment with her last summer was just incredible,” Mead told the BBC after her Spotty nomination was announced. “For me, football’s always been my first true love.

“My mum sacrificed so much, she worked two jobs and I wouldn’t be where I am without them. Nearly a year down the line we found out it was incurable. She’s still fighting.”

Her dad, Richard, said: “The diagnosis with her mum, that was a trigger for her to show the world what Beth Mead is really about. I think in the Euros she managed to do that.”

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2022.12.22 - Opinion

- Here's the essential skill for assessing our politics: knowing the difference between lies and bullshit
- The trip that finally conquered my desperate yearning to be cool
- 'There is nothing on TV more disorientating': the brilliant weirdness of the reality TV Christmas special
- Rishi Sunak leads the Tories in name alone – it's fear of Farage that's driving the agenda

[**OpinionPolitics**](#)

Here's the essential skill for assessing our politics: knowing the difference between lies and bullshit

[Aditya Chakrabortty](#)



We have suffered both. Some never speak the truth because they don't know or care about it. Others know the truth but lie anyway



Illustration: Ben Jennings/The Guardian

Thu 22 Dec 2022 01.00 EST Last modified on Thu 22 Dec 2022 07.18 EST

Sometimes it falls to an old book to tell us what's new, to a white-bearded philosopher based far from Westminster or Washington to clarify the shifts in our sharp-suited politics. So spare yourself the annual round-ups in the newspapers or the boy-scout enthusiasm of podcasters. To understand the great political shift of this year, the work you need is a piece of philosophy called – what else? – [On Bullshit](#).

I offer it to you this Christmas because surely no reader of mine can resist an essay that begins: “One of the most salient features of our culture is that there is so much bullshit. Everyone knows this.” Statements like that made it a bestseller upon re-publication in 2005 and turned its then-75-year-old author, [Harry Frankfurt](#), from a distinguished moral philosopher at Yale and Princeton into a chatshow guest.

But to open the book now is to get a blast of something quite different, in a climate that just didn’t exist two decades ago. Read today, *On Bullshit* taxonomises an entire style of government. It foretells the age of Donald Trump and [Boris Johnson](#).

The task Frankfurt sets himself is to define bullshit. What it is not, he argues, is lying. Both misrepresent the truth, but with entirely different intentions. The liar is “someone who deliberately promulgates a falsehood”. He or she knows the truth or could lay hands on it – but they certainly aren’t giving it to you. The bullshitter, on the other hand, “does not care whether the things he says describe reality correctly. He just picks them out, or makes them up, to suit his purpose.” Bullshitters couldn’t give two hoots about the truth. They just want a story.

In that distinction lies an explanation for this era of politics. Commentators have struggled for years to coin the phrase for now. “Populist” doesn’t work. Too often, it merely denotes what the author and their friends dislike, throwing together clowns such as Beppe Grillo with social democrats such as [Jeremy Corbyn](#). A similar problem bedevils “strongman”, a label stuck on Xi Jinping and Jair Bolsonaro alike. But “bullshitter” – that sums up just how different Trump and Johnson are from their predecessors.



‘Bullshit is where newspaper stories about Italians demanding smaller condoms meet plans for an airport on an island in the Thames.’ Photograph: Peter Byrne/PA

Some enterprising future editor of a dictionary of political terms will carry the word “bullshit” and cite as examples: writing [two opposing columns](#) on

Brexit, [claiming the NHS](#) will be £350m a week better off and affecting a hurt expression when asked the whereabouts of your [promised 40 new hospitals](#). *Come on!* Those little-doggy eyes beseech the hard-faced TV interviewer. Didn't everyone know that was bullshit?

Socially, there is little to distinguish Johnson from David Cameron: both are Bullingdon boys manufactured at Eton. In policy, too, there is a fair carryover between George Osborne's "[northern powerhouse](#)" and Johnson's "levelling up", or between Cameron's vow to get net immigration down to the tens of thousands and the pledges made by Johnson's home secretary, Priti Patel. The great divide is in rhetoric: how Johnson talked to voters and the promises he made us. They were never meant to be taken at face value.

Among the media class's artisanal industries of the past few years has been trying to find a thread that runs through Johnson the journalist, the globalist mayor of London and the Brexit prime minister. Frankfurt furnishes that link: it is bullshit.

Bullshit is where [newspaper stories](#) about Italians demanding smaller condoms meet [plans for an airport](#) on an island in the Thames meet promises of an "[oven-ready](#)" Brexit deal. They are electioneering fables rather than manifesto commitments, grand gestures over small print, cheerful dishonesty in place of lawyered mendacity. In other words, they are all just careerist bullshit.

Much the same goes for Liz Truss, although she was clearly not as good at it. Looking back, this summer's Tory leadership contest can be seen as a final hurrah for the "anything goes" era. And it certainly applies to Trump. "[I will build a great, great wall](#) on our southern border, and I will have Mexico pay for that wall." Bullshit. "[Sorry losers and haters](#), but my IQ is one of the highest." Bullshit. A "[sea of love](#)" at his inauguration that broke all records. Bullshit, bullshit, bullshit. Frankfurt's book offers a theory of a generation of politicians who now appear to be leaving the stage.



‘A ‘sea of love’ at Donald Trump’s inauguration that broke all records. Bullshit.’ Photograph: Saul Loeb/EPA

Lies can be shown up: Saddam Hussein had no weapons of mass destruction. But there is no point factchecking bullshit, as parts of the British media still do over Brexit or the New York Times did with Trump. For a bullshitter, facts are beside the point – the real aim is to produce a story that erases the line between truth and falsehood. It’s why the philosopher concludes: “Bullshit is a greater enemy of truth than lies are.”

We all lie sometimes, and around millions of tables there will be much bullshit spoken over the Christmas turkey. In British politics, the era of bullshit followed on naturally from a long spell of lies. Before Johnson, the most effective Tory of the post-Thatcher era was Osborne.

He blamed Labour and Gordon Brown for the banking crash, only later admitting that was untrue. He declared Labour’s 2008 package to bail out the banks would spark a run on the pound, before confessing: “Broadly speaking, the government did what was necessary.”

Most of all, he claimed that slashing benefits was essential to bring down borrowing and was being done fairly. Remember “we are all in this together”? Except a study at the end of the coalition by the late John Hills, of

the LSE, alongside other leading academics, showed that the coalition's tax and benefit changes had "a net fiscal cost" – which meant they increased the deficit. Not only that, but "the poorest 30% [of Britons] lost or broke even on average and the top half gained". Heading the Treasury, Osborne was in charge of a machine that could calculate the effects of his policies. He would have or should have known the truth as he laid out each budget. And yet voters were fed something entirely different.

One might see these as common or garden political lies – falsehoods that could be checked and that aimed at nothing more than establishing a poll lead for Osborne's team. They were not the alternative reality of Vote Leave. But if the currency of truth is sufficiently debased, voters may eventually choose the altogether more entertaining humbugger. In that lies a warning for both Rishi Sunak, the down-to-earth multimillionaire, and Keir Starmer, the man who said he was Corbyn before revealing himself to be Tony Blair meets [Gordon Brittas](#), the TV sitcom manager whose words never match results or deeds.

One topic Frankfurt doesn't address is the audience for bullshit. Why do people buy it? To which we might add another question. Why have swathes of the political establishment and the press spent the past few years claiming Brexit is a success or that levelling up is serious or that any alternative to the most venal dishonesty is just impossible? Answers would be welcome but were we to press for any, I suspect we'd be told to drop the bullshit.

- Aditya Chakrabortty is a Guardian columnist
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Snapshot of 2022Books

The trip that finally conquered my desperate yearning to be cool

[Megan Nolan](#)



An encounter in a New York nightclub left me squirming with inadequacy, a feeling I thought I had left behind

- What was the image on your phone that defined 2022? [Writers give their perspectives](#)



'I felt the grotty hangover slough off me and the nagging guilt for not being hot, for not being worthy of documentation, wane.' Megan Nolan's snapshot of 2022.

Thu 22 Dec 2022 03.00 ESTLast modified on Thu 22 Dec 2022 09.43 EST

In October, in [New York](#) City, in my early but firmly established 30s, I made a harrowing discovery: I still cared about being cool. I knew already that I still wanted lots of vain, self-serving things, like the professional admiration of a certain kind of serious male writer, or for everyone I know to be aware of it when I manage to run for more than seven minutes. I want people to think I'm talented and nice-looking and fun, but I thought I'd left the need for cool behind.

There was a period in my late teens and early 20s when to have my photograph taken at a club night felt like the most important thing in the world. My life at the time had been swiftly vacated of meaning, structure and any events beyond partying: I had the feeling that nightlife could be a real community, that it meant something beyond getting wasted and finding someone to sleep with. I had the feeling that coolness was something attainable and tangible, that it could be the redemptive twist I needed after some difficult years. I thought that coolness could save me.

Twelve years on, years that encompassed a miraculous amount of change for me, I thought I had disinvested from that particular faith. Then I found myself in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, at a party that I was too old, too culturally clueless and eventually much too high for, nervously eyeing the guy taking photographs. Good God, I thought, it's the Cobrasnake.

For a particular kind of kid from my generation, the [Cobrasnake](#), real name Mark Hunter, was the party photographer to end all party photographers, the documentarian of a certain sort of mildly alternative, excessively physically attractive social scene. In my desperate, late teen years it was his photography that made me believe that there was a certain image I could distill myself into that would free and vindicate me. I thought my longing had to do with how distant the mostly American landscape he photographed was from where I sat, shivering, in a damp Dublin attic. But I recently discussed him with a friend who grew up only a couple of hours outside New York City, who told me he felt just the same about those photos despite the physical proximity, that the land of cool had been just as unreachable. There exists somewhere – or hopefully it doesn't any longer – one picture taken of me and my best friend by the Cobrasnake at a night in Dublin, me wearing a pair of tights as a cardigan with something else stupid tied around my head, and I remember the cringing, blatant look in my eyes in the picture, saying “Am I sexy? Does everyone like me?”

Suddenly here he was in New York, and I felt as frightened and invisible and ugly as I ever had. I was visiting the city to celebrate the launch of my paperback in the US. I had come to see writing as a sort of gift I could give myself to evade these juvenile and unsatisfiable urges to be seen as cool. Surrounded by all the beautiful kids with their apparently carelessly assembled outfits and their jutting collar bones, I knew I had not lost the yearning after all.

Soon after that, I went upstate to stay with my editor, Jean, and her family as I worked out some edits on my second novel. I had partied for a fortnight, and as we arrived into the powerful stillness of her home I felt the grotty hangover slough off me and the nagging guilt for not being hot, for not being worthy of documentation, wane. For a week I wrote, calm and engaged and actually happy. I walked in my breaks, was warned out of woods by some hunters and listened to music that was not, and would never

be, cool. In the evenings I got stoned and played [Bananagrams](#) at hilarious length, not sure if the words were really words. I made progress with my book, I ate vegetables, I laughed at their kid and felt admiration for their way of living – one which was rooted in action and conversation, rather than image and representation. A day before Halloween, I passed by a sign for a haunted house which said “GO THIS WAY” and I thought, well, sure, OK.

- Megan Nolan is an Irish writer based in London. Her novel Ordinary Human Failings is published by Vintage on 15 June, 2023.
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Reality checkedTelevision

‘There is nothing on TV more disorientating’: the brilliant weirdness of the reality TV Christmas special

[Yomi Adegoke](#)



From festive insults to ropey charity singalongs – all clearly shot at the wrong time of year – seasonal specials from the likes of Towie are a comical joy. Hopefully their days aren’t numbered ...



‘As synonymous with the season as putting up the tree’ ... the TOWIE Christmas special. Photograph: PR IMAGE

Thu 22 Dec 2022 02.00 EST

For superfans of *The Only Way Is Essex*, [Christmas](#) was cancelled months ago. In October it was announced that due to budget concerns, the annual *Towie* Christmas special, *The Only Way Is Essexmas*, had been axed. For 11 out of the 12 years the show has been broadcast, the special has aired, and its cancellation has raised questions about the show’s future, amid declining ratings and a shrinking cast.

Though I stopped watching *Towie* some time ago, I too felt saddened by the news. In the same way lapsed *EastEnders* fans dip back into the show on Christmas Eve, I like to check in on what the *Towie* lot are up to once a year. Watching Chloe Sims and her sisters pretend to open presents in matching pyjamas is as synonymous with the season as putting up the tree. The Christmas episode has always been one of its standouts; *Towie* broke the mould with a notoriously dire live recording in 2012 and cemented their status as a festive harbinger in the public imagination by recording a Christmas charity single covering Wham!’s *Last Christmas*. The cancellation of its festive special might mark the beginning of the end of the series, but I

hope it doesn't mark the beginning of the end of something far bigger: the reality TV Christmas special.

There is an inherently surreal quality to reality TV specials, even compared to other episodes that hinge on holidays such as Halloween or Valentine's Day. Watching the Made in Chelsea cast swipe at each other over Christmas dinner, the Geordie Shore gang get jiggy under the mistletoe or the catty Real Housewives completely fail to embody the season's spirit never fails to feel comically contrived. There is nothing on TV more disorientating. Normally, the timeline on these programmes is hazy – which makes the fact they're largely faked less obvious. But during the Christmas period, we watch cast members pulling crackers and singing carols in the full knowledge that it was not filmed on Christmas Day. The suspension of reality is even more extreme.

This, frankly, is saying something. On a normal day, watching feuding characters make no attempts to avoid each other in order to serve a plot is one thing, but watching them break bread at a Christmas dinner is even more ludicrous. This made the showdown between Victoria Baker-Harber and Cheska Hull in the season six Made in Chelsea finale all the more iconic. "Why are you being so mean? It's Christmas!" Cheska had pleaded with her adversary in the midst of their fight. If it had been a festive film, this would have been the moment Victoria Scrooge learned the error of her ways. Instead, she lobbed a timely insult, referring to Cheska as a "fucking fat turkey" at the dinner table. Towie has seen similarly heated exchanges during Christmas episodes, such as when Gemma "the GC" Collins burned Ferne McCann with a suitably Christmassy barb: "Let's hope Santa brings you a sack of morals this year, because you need it, darling."

Still, despite the beefs, they do have their Hallmark movie moments. With sitcoms, these episodes aren't central to the plot and usually feel tacked on to the end of a series. But in reality shows they often act as a main event. They are filled with grand gestures and the wrapping up of storylines as well as presents. It was a Christmas episode that saw Caggie and Spencer finally get together in season two of Made in Chelsea and Arg finally declare his love to Gemma in Towie – vowing to spend the holiday together in 2017.

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I can't help but feel that the Christmas TV schedule will be lacking without the Towie festive episode. Though it might be cheesy and staged, it's an excuse to watch other people argue in Christmas jumpers, people who are not your immediate family. Isn't that the true meaning of Christmas?

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Opinion[Nigel Farage](#)

Rishi Sunak leads the Tories in name alone – it's fear of Farage that's driving the agenda

[Martin Kettle](#)



The threat that the former Ukip leader may attract rightwing support inside and outside the party is causing sleepless nights



Nigel Farage campaigning for the Brexit party ahead of the European parliament elections in 2019. Photograph: Ian Forsyth/Getty Images

Wed 21 Dec 2022 10.38 EST Last modified on Wed 21 Dec 2022 17.03 EST

In arguably the [best book on British politics](#) published in 2022, Michael Crick suggests that in the past half-century, this country's five most significant politicians have been Margaret Thatcher, Tony Blair, Alex Salmond, Boris Johnson – and Nigel Farage. The first four exerted their influence on events by getting elected to high office. The fifth, Farage, did not. But his influence is as strong today as ever.

Farage's case for inclusion on this select list rests on two things. The first is his potent ability to connect with the public. As one of his media advisers puts it: "He speaks fluent human." The other is his unmatched ability to influence other politicians without engaging with them directly, without ever displaying much discernible interest in policy, without getting elected to parliament, without ever having run anything, and in spite of leaving a trail of enemies and political casualties in his wake.

In spite of all of these things, Crick concludes, Farage has been: "a more significant player than most leaders of the traditional political parties, more influential than quite a few prime ministers". Fail to understand this, and you

may fail to understand not only the [Brexit](#) referendum of 2016 but also to understand continuing British politics of the early 21st century at all, right up to and including the present time.

He doesn't make daily headlines just now, but his influence is as strong today as ever. That's because, although Farage nominally [retired from politics](#) a couple of years ago, his flirtations with a return to the fray continue to shape the way that politics is evolving. In fact, it is hard to understand the Conservative party as it staggers from 2022 into 2023 without the Farage factor. The same, to a lesser extent, is even true of Labour.

The Farage factor is really the *fear of* Farage factor. In the Tories' case, you may suppose, given [Labour's lead in the opinion polls](#), or in the light of the Liberal Democrats' stunning [byelection victories](#) in previously safe Tory seats, that the minds of most Conservative MPs are now fully concentrated on the very real threat to their seats from Keir Starmer and Ed Davey.

Not a bit of it. The threat that keeps many Tories awake at night is not from Starmer or Davey, but the one from Farage. It's the threat, for which there are in fact only tantalising wisps of anything one would normally dignify as evidence, that Farage is about to return as leader of the Ukip and Brexit party successor, Reform UK, and campaign in the next general election on an anti-immigration platform that will reshape British politics.

If this looks a curious anxiety, consider the two parliamentary by-elections in north-west England this month. In both [City of Chester](#) and [Stretford and Urmston](#), Reform finished a distant fifth, well behind not just Labour (which held both seats) and the Conservatives, but the Lib Dems and the Greens. In Chester, Reform won 2.7% of the vote; in Stretford and Urmston, 3.5%. Since both seats are in the north-west, where the Farage threat is deemed to be high, these results may seem something of a corrective to the prevailing Tory fear. But you can forget that.

It may be tempting to treat this anxiety with a “more fools they” dismissal. But this fails to take account of the still febrile state of the Tory party at the end of the year of three prime ministers. It fails to take account of the fact

that much of the Tory right at Westminster agrees with Farage. It fails to grasp, in particular, that much of the party as a whole feels particularly vulnerable, post-Brexit, to public anxiety about borders.

Above all it fails to see that large parts of the party do not regard Rishi Sunak as what he actually is – the Tory party’s best chance of minimising its losses against Starmer in 2024. Instead, these Conservatives see Sunak as a stopgap who, if he veers off their agenda, should be ousted in favour of a leader better able to defend the party’s right flank against Farage. Ask yourself at this point why Johnson, though accepting that he could not run again as leader when [Liz Truss quit in October](#), is now once again putting himself about at Westminster and pledging to stay as an MP, and you may have a clue to what some MPs would like to happen next year.

Nowhere is the fear of Farage more clear or more potent than over immigration policy. Polls show that [six out of 10 voters](#) – and three-quarters of 2019 Tory voters – think Britain has lost control of its borders. Farage has greater backing to deal with this issue than either Sunak or Starmer. [One in six 2019 Tory voters](#) claim they would vote for Reform next time. Suella Braverman is attempting to position herself as the tribune of these Farage-fearing Tories. Sunak is not standing up to them.

The Duke of Wellington, later a Conservative prime minister, once said that the presence of Napoleon on the battlefield was worth 40,000 extra soldiers to the other side. In the duke’s party today, they think that about Farage. “He can move numbers, he can move polls, he can move people,” a Tory MP [said last week](#). Well, maybe he can. Maybe he can’t. But in the Tory party it’s the thought that he can that matters right now.

- Martin Kettle is a Guardian columnist
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[China](#)

China ‘behind the curve’ in reporting Covid surge, WHO says

Officially there are relatively low numbers of intensive care cases but ‘anecdotally ICUs are filling up’



Emergency health workers transport a patient to a fever clinic at a hospital in Beijing on 21 December, 2022. Photograph: Jade Gao/AFP/Getty Images

Guardian staff and agencies

Wed 21 Dec 2022 21.57 EST Last modified on Thu 22 Dec 2022 01.01 EST

China may be struggling to keep a tally of Covid-19 infections as it experiences a big spike in cases, a senior [World Health Organization](#) official has said, amid concerns about a lack of data from the country.

Official figures from [China](#) have become an unreliable guide after the country of 1.4 billion people this month began dismantling its unpopular zero-Covid lockdown and testing regime.

The abrupt change caught a fragile health system unprepared, with hospitals scrambling for beds and blood, pharmacies for drugs and authorities racing to build special clinics. Experts say China could face more than a million Covid deaths next year.

“In China, what’s been reported is relatively low numbers of cases in ICUs, but anecdotally ICUs are filling up,” said Mike Ryan, the WHO emergencies director.

“I wouldn’t like to say that China is actively not telling us what’s going on. I think they’re behind the curve.”

The WHO said it was ready to work with China to improve the way the country collects data around critical factors such as hospitalisation and death.

Dozens of hearses queued outside a Beijing crematorium on Wednesday, even as China reported no new Covid deaths in its growing outbreak, sparking criticism of its virus accounting as the capital braces for a surge in cases.

A Reuters witness said they saw a heavy police presence and about 40 hearses queueing to enter while the parking lot was full outside a crematorium in Beijing’s Tongzhou district.

Inside, family and friends, many wearing traditional white clothing and headbands of mourning, gathered around about 20 coffins awaiting cremation. Staff wore hazmat suits and smoke rose from five of the 15 furnaces. It was not possible to verify whether the deaths were caused by Covid.

Other residents in the Chinese capital reportedly face waiting days to cremate relatives unless they pay steep fees to secure timely services, funeral home workers said, also indicating a growing death toll.

Workers at two different funeral parlours in Beijing told Reuters there had been a surge in residents looking to cremate deceased relatives over the weekend, leading to queues and delays.

One worker at the large Babaoshan funeral parlour in western Beijing advertised customers could skip the long queueing and registration process – for a 26,000 yuan (\$3,730) fee.

“For whole of Beijing, speedy arrangement of hearses, no queue for cremation,” the worker said in a promotion for the service on the popular short video app Douyin.

The Shanghai Deji Hospital estimated that half of the city’s 25 million people would become infected by the end of the year.

“In this tragic battle, the entire Greater Shanghai will fall, and we will infect all the staff of the hospital!” an update on its official WeChat account late on Wednesday read. “We will infect the whole family! Our patients will all be infected! We have no choice, and we cannot escape.”

The WHO director general, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, told reporters the agency needed more detailed information on disease severity, hospital admissions and requirements for intensive care units for a comprehensive assessment.

“The WHO is very concerned over the evolving situation in China, with increasing reports of severe disease,” he said.

Speaking in Geneva on Wednesday, Ryan said the surge of cases in China was not exclusively due to the lifting of restrictive policies but also the lagging vaccination rate.

He said vaccination booster shot uptake rates among people in China over the age of 60 and most at risk of severe disease lagged behind many other countries and that the efficacy of the Chinese-made vaccines was about 50%.

He noted that there had been a surge in vaccination rates in China over the last weeks, adding that it remained to be seen whether enough vaccinations could be done in the coming weeks to stave off the impact of an Omicron wave.

“That’s just not adequate protection in a population as large as China, with so many vulnerable people,” Ryan said.

“Vaccination is the exit strategy from Omicron,” he added while noting that China had dramatically increased its capacity to vaccinate people in recent weeks.

Wang Guangfa, a respiratory specialist from Peking University First hospital, told the state-run Global Times newspaper that the death toll might rise sharply and predicted a spike in severe cases in Beijing over the coming weeks.

“We must act quickly and prepare fever clinics, emergency and severe treatment resources,” he said.

China has nine domestically developed Covid-19 vaccines approved for use, more than any other country, but they have not been updated to target the highly infectious Omicron variant.

Beijing has so far insisted on using only the domestically produced vaccines, which are not based on mRNA technology but older technologies.

Berlin sent its first batch of BioNTech Covid vaccines to China to be administered initially to German expatriates, a German government spokesperson said on Wednesday, the first foreign coronavirus vaccine to be delivered to the country.

No details were available on the timing and size of the delivery, although the spokesperson said Berlin is pushing for foreigners other than German nationals to be allowed access the shot if they want it.

In a letter to be sent to German citizens in mainland China, the government said it would offer basic immunisations and booster shots of vaccines approved for use in the European Union for free to anyone over 12 years of age.

“We are working on the possibility that besides Germans also other foreigners can be vaccinated with BioNTech,” the spokesperson told

journalists in Berlin.

Reuters and the Associated Press contributed to this report

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[**China**](#)

Surge in China's military operations reflects 'new normal' under Xi Jinping

President has made escalations against foreign powers more common amid drive to beef up People's Liberation Army



Chinese fighter jets. The PLA sent 39 warplanes and three naval vessels into Taiwan's air defence identification zone on Wednesday. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images



Helen Davidson

@heldavidson

Thu 22 Dec 2022 04.51 EST Last modified on Thu 22 Dec 2022 05.52 EST

A rush of Chinese military activity across the region this month has capped off a year of increased aggression, as President [Xi Jinping](#) displays China's increased military might despite economic struggles and the impact of the zero-Covid policy and its sudden end.

This month the People's Liberation Army – the Chinese Communist party's military wing – has broadened its aerial incursions into Taiwan's air defence identification zone (Adiz), come to blows with Indian troops in the Himalayas, run military drills near Japan and participated in major joint exercises with [Russia](#).

Analysts say the activity is a sign of a “new normal” under the increasingly militaristic rule of Xi, who has made huge efforts to [overhaul and modernise the PLA](#).

“Three of the five [PLA] theatre commands are involved in operations centred around their specific mission areas, which is definitely an impressive feat,” said an independent defence analyst, Ben Lewis. “I think this is a clear

demonstration of how far along the PLA is in its development process, which is based on its desire to conduct operations in support of its wide variety of objectives simultaneously.”

On Wednesday the PLA sent 39 warplanes and three naval vessels into Taiwan’s Adiz, with many on a path around the south-east corner of the island. Such a trajectory used to be rare but this year they and other escalated acts have become more common.

After the US House speaker, Nancy Pelosi, visited Taiwan in August, the PLA surrounded the main island with [massive live-fire exercises](#), repeatedly crossing the median line, an unofficial maritime border between Taiwan and China. Such crossings have continued, significantly raising the bar of what is considered regular activity.

Last week a record number of 16 nuclear-capable H-6 bombers were among the PLA aircraft crossing into the Adiz.

“Taiwan is clearly a focal point for PLA modernisation, and the PLA is a political tool applying intense, continuous [military coercion towards Taiwan and its neighbours](#),” said Drew Thompson, a visiting senior research fellow at the National University of Singapore’s Lee Kuan Yew school of public policy and a former US state department official.

This week Chinese state media reported “unprecedented” Chinese naval exercises in the Philippine Sea, crossing the Osumi and Miyako straits between Taiwan and Japan. The flotilla contained a record number of destroyers, according to the Global Times, including the Liaoning aircraft carrier, which had not been spotted in any public exercises for months, even during the post-Pelosi drills.

It came just days after Japan [announced a defence budget increase](#) and new defence strategies in which China was labelled an unprecedented “strategic challenge”. Chinese state media characterised the mission as crossing “beyond the first island chain” to send a message amid “Japan’s recent militaristic moves”.

And on Monday Russia announced joint naval exercises with [China](#), to begin on Wednesday. The Russian defence ministry said the Varyag missile cruiser, the Marshal Shaposhnikov destroyer and two corvettes of Russia's Pacific fleet would take part in manoeuvres in the East China Sea, and that the Chinese navy planned to deploy several surface warships and a submarine for the exercise.

The drills are a sign of China and Russia's strengthening military ties. This year, Xi and [Vladimir Putin](#) announced a limitless friendship, weeks before Putin's invasion of Ukraine. Xi has had to balance that friendship with global condemnation of the invasion, but the Chinese Communist party has largely been supportive of Russia – at times explicitly endorsing the invasion – and the two have grown closer militarily.

In November the two air forces flew joint patrols over the Sea of Japan and the East China Sea, with Russian bombers landing in China for the first time and Chinese bombers flying to an airbase in Russia. In September, China for the first time sent forces from three branches of the military to participate in joint exercises with Russian troops.



Visitors tour past military vehicles carrying ballistic missiles at an October exhibition in Beijing highlighting Xi Jinping and China's achievements under his leadership. Photograph: Andy Wong/AP

“Diplomatically, the exercises are a clear demonstration that China regards Russia as a security partner and will not be breaking relations because of the Ukraine invasion,” said Bill Hayton, the author of [The South China Sea: The Struggle for Power in Asia](#).

“The Indian government may, however, be unhappy that its main strategic partner, Russia, is exercising with its adversary, China, at a time of confrontation.”

Last week it was revealed that [Indian and Chinese troops had fought](#) in disputed Himalayan border regions in the most serious confrontation since [the Galwan Valley clash in June 2020](#), when dozens were killed in hand-to-hand combat.

Lewis said the clash, which occurred around the line of actual control (LAC) in Arunachal Pradesh, shared similarities with the Taiwan Adiz flights in that they appeared to be attempting to raise the bar of normal activity.

“The PLA has diverted significant resources to develop military infrastructure and forces near the LAC,” he said. “They used this attack to change the status quo in the area while pretending that their high number of forces pulling back from the LAC was a de-escalation.”

At the same time as the heightened military activity, China is [experience a surge in Covid cases](#), and likely deaths, after abruptly lifting restrictions. The health system is straining, the economy is facing new struggles with widespread reports of absenteeism due to sick employees, and there is fear and confusion among the population.

“I think it’s worth considering in the light of ending zero-Covid that operations are still clearly a priority and that the PLA is managing Covid sufficiently to keep their operational tempo at this level,” said Blake Herzinger, a nonresident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute thinktank.

“But to some extent it’s also just what we should expect from the military that Xi wants to build.”

Analysts also said all the activity potentially served a propaganda purpose while Covid surges through China and causes political problems for Xi, as well as serious social and health problems for the population.

“For China watchers/western media, military exercises do better in the news cycle than Covid because they are relatively novel,” Lewis said. “For state-run media, it keeps up the strong China message that Beijing is hoping to push.”

M Taylor Fravel, a professor of political science and director of Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s security studies programme, noted that state media reporting of PLA exercises was traditionally selective and never gave a full picture of the “operational tempo”.

“Now, all the state media attention to these various exercises may have another purpose,” he said. “Namely, to show that despite the outbreak China remains a strong and capable military power, lest anyone might think China would soften its position in various international disputes.”

The Associated Press contributed to this report

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Jair Bolsonaro

‘We will not surrender’: Bolsonaro militants demand coup as Lula prepares to take power

Concerns grow over bewildering displays of devotion to Brazil’s outgoing rightwing president



Bolsonaro supporters protest against the election result outside a military base in Rio de Janeiro. Photograph: Bruna Prado/AP



Tom Phillips in Boa Vista

Thu 22 Dec 2022 04.00 EST

The “Soldier of the Homeland” and “the Patriot” loitered outside the jungle infantry brigade in this distant Amazon city, beseeching the troops inside to launch a military coup.

“SOS armed forces! Save our nation!” said the Soldier, a brawny marine corps reservist who gave his nom de guerre for fear of being jailed.

“We want the armed forces to establish law and order,” agreed the Patriot, a 30-year-old cosmetics saleswoman with similar anxieties about being identified.

The pair have been camped outside the base in Boa Vista since 1 November, the day after their radical rightwing leader, Jair Bolsonaro, saw his hopes of a second presidential term [dashed in Brazil’s election](#).

Nearly two months later, with the leftist former president [Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva](#) poised to take power, the pair are among thousands of citizens who continue to protest outside military installations across the country, demanding a coup that never comes.



Demonstrators hold a banner that reads: ‘The people ask the army for help’. Progressives have poked fun at such Bolsonarista demos outside military barracks. Photograph: Bruna Prado/AP

“If need be, we’ll stay here for 120 days – or a year. But we will not surrender our homeland,” insisted the Soldier, a 34-year-old former gold miner and marine. “We will not accept this guy as our president,” he said of Lula. “We will *never* accept this.”

With just days until Lula’s inauguration, they would appear to have little choice.

On the afternoon of 1 January, the leftist icon, who governed from 2003 to 2010, is due to be formally returned to the presidency at the age of 77. Vans have begun removing Bolsonaro’s belongings from the presidential residence after an anarchic four-year reign during which there were nearly 700,000 Covid deaths and a surge in Amazon destruction.

Many progressives have poked fun at the Bolsonarista demos outside military barracks and regional commands, amid some bewildering displays of devotion to Brazil’s outgoing president.

At one rally in south Brazil, pro-Bolsonaro militants were filmed [singing Brazil's national anthem to a tyre](#). Elsewhere, they have been filmed

prostrating themselves in prayer or screaming wildly outside special operations bases and engineering units, in the hope of sparking an uprising.

Footage of bizarre marching sessions has also been ridiculed on social media.



Bolsonaro supporters have blocked roads and camped outside military buildings while pleading for intervention from the armed forces.
Photograph: Wagner Meier/Getty Images

But some experts caution against sneering at the protests, which, while small, suggest the radical grassroots movement energised by Bolsonaro's presidency is likely to outlive his rule.

"It's cadre formation," the Duke University Latin America expert John D French said of the pro-Bolsonaro vigils. "They are building a movement."

Consuelo Dieguez, a journalist who has written a book about Brazil's burgeoning right, said she had initially been one of those giggling at the eccentric demonstrations of allegiance to Bolsonaro from predominantly elderly supporters.

"At first I thought it was all rather funny. [I wondered] where have all these lunatics come from?"

But as the weeks went by, and the protesters dug in, Dieguez's amusement turned to distress. "I still think these people are bonkers but I no longer think it's funny," she said.

Dieguez's angst stemmed not from the scale of the mobilisations, which involve only a sliver of the 58 million voters who backed Bolsonaro's failed campaign against Lula. "If all of Bolsonaro's voters had hit the streets, goodness knows what might have happened to this country ... there'd have been a rebellion," she said.

Nor did she see any risk of the military actually staging a pro-Bolsonaro coup d'état. "Bolsonaro's finished. Everyone's abandoning him," she said.

What disturbed Dieguez was the level of extremism on show at the rallies.



Brazil's president-elect in São Paulo last week. Security has been increased to shield Lula and his supporters from violence at his swearing-in ceremony.
Photograph: Carla Carniel/Reuters

"It's almost an aberration that you have people in society thinking and acting in such a way. It's shocking. How did society produce this? How can people be so dissatisfied they feel inclined to stand outside an army barracks asking for military dictatorship? What's going on? ... What happened to our society to produce such radicalised people?" she asked.

The risks of such radicalisation exploded into view this month when hardcore Bolsonaristas [rampaged through the capital](#), Brasília, burning buses and cars, in what some saw as an attempt to spark a 6 January-style insurrection. Security has been stepped up to shield Lula and his supporters from similar violence at his swearing-in ceremony.

But the Soldier and the Patriot saw nothing radical or anti-democratic about their actions, and denied being “vandals” or “crooks”.

“We’re family people … we all feel aggrieved and this is our cry for help so the armed forces come and intervene,” said the Soldier, urging a military junta to seize power to purge Brazilian politics of leftist kleptomaniacs.

As the sun beat down on their roadside protest camp, they regurgitated a stream of falsehoods and insinuations about how Bolsonaro was robbed of re-election by fraud-riddled voting machines and tyrannical supreme court judges.

“Bolsonaro was the real winner,” the Patriot declared.

“We want either a new election or for President Bolsonaro to take charge,” said the Soldier, hailing a “historic” patriotic movement he claimed had attracted 10,000 locals to the gates of the jungle infantry brigade where he stood.

On the afternoon the Guardian visited only about a dozen remained, sat on plastic garden chairs and in hammocks and surrounded by banners reading: “Brazil Was Stolen”, “Civil Resistance” and “We fervently want peace”.

“It’s ridiculous,” said Dieguez. “But it’s worryingly ridiculous.”

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[Venice](#)

Glass barriers keep St Mark's Basilica dry during Venice floods

Simple structures protect 900-year-old church from seawater that previously proved damaging



Visitors walk on a raised path in St Mark's square past glass barriers preventing seawater from flooding the basilica. Photograph: Domenico Stinellis/AP

Associated Press

Thu 22 Dec 2022 04.23 EST Last modified on Thu 22 Dec 2022 04.41 EST

It is a simple solution, but one that may keep the marble columns and valuable mosaics of St Mark's Basilica in [Venice](#) safe from seawater-induced erosion: a set of glass barriers installed around the 900-year-old church has kept its floors dry during frequent high tides.

Even after it evaporates, water leaves behind salt crystals that corrode the marble bases of the columns and the floor mosaics, said Mario Piana, the architect and restoration expert in charge of St Mark's.

The barriers are made of glass mounted on a base of armoured concrete that is buried below the pavement of St Mark's Square to resist the force of surging water. Piana said the system could keep out up to 1.10 metres (3ft 6in) of water in the square, equivalent to a tide of 1.90 metres above sea level.

"Let's hope that, from now on, there are no more high waters that will touch the base of the basilica," Piana said during an on-site visit, emphasising the fragility of the clay-brick structure.



The barriers are made of glass mounted on a base of armoured concrete that is buried below the pavement of St Mark's Square. Photograph: Domenico Stinellis/AP

The palatial city of Venice, built on log piles among canals, has grappled with flooding since its foundation 1,600 years ago. But, like other coastal areas, rising sea levels and more extreme weather that scientists associate with the climate crisis, have meant more frequent high tides.

While the basilica was built on what was one of Venice's highest points at the time, it now sits on one of the city's lowest because of subsidence and rising sea levels.

As a result, St Mark's is flooded more than most places and remains vulnerable, despite the activation of the [Mose underwater barriers](#) around the lagoon city in 2020 to protect Venice from floods over 1.3 metres.

Flooding in [November 2019](#) was especially devastating because the water could not recede quickly following repeated deluges, leaving parts of the basilica submerged for up to 24 hours.

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[Flood waters getting into the basilica](#) have been happening frequently out of season, too, making it all the more vulnerable and pushing officials to devise the new glass barriers as a defence.

Piana said the glass and concrete barriers were part of a larger engineering project to set up a series of channels below the surface of the church and its namesake square to carry off water from the lagoon and keep it from flooding the square.

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Fiji

Fiji deploys military for ‘law and order’ as power hangs in balance after election

Frank Bainimarama, the prime minister, is yet to concede defeat, while opposition parties claim enough seats to form government



Fiji’s military will assist police in maintaining ‘security and stability’, the country’s police commissioner has said. Photograph: Tevita Rasiga Tumoi/Republic of Fiji Military Forces

Guardian staff and agencies

Thu 22 Dec 2022 01.32 ESTFirst published on Thu 22 Dec 2022 00.49 EST

Fiji’s military will assist police in maintaining “security and stability” after last week’s election [delivered a hung parliament](#), the country’s police commissioner has said – an alarming development in a country where there have been four military coups in the past 35 years.

The Pacific country is waiting for its president to recall parliament so lawmakers can vote for a new prime minister after a national election showed no party received a clear majority.

A coalition of three parties say they have a combined majority and have agreed on the People's Alliance leader, [Sitiveni Rabuka, as prime minister](#). Fiji First and the incumbent prime minister, Frank Bainimarama, have not conceded defeat.

Both men have led coups in the past.

Opposition parties have disputed reports – cited by police and Bainimarama as reason to bring in the military – that businesses or homes of Fiji's large ethnic Indian population have been targeted or stoned in the wake of the election. The opposition groups have called for evidence of this.

At a media conference on Thursday, the National Federation party leader, Biman Prasad, said Fiji First's secretary general, Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, who was the attorney general in Bainimarama's government, was "trying to create fear in the minds of people" and should accept the election result.

"He is not accepting they lost this election, people voted for change," Prasad said.

The police commissioner, Sitiveni Qiliho, said a decision had been made to call in the military after he met with Bainimarama as well as the minister for defence and policing, Inia Seruiratu, and the military commander, Maj Gen Jone Kalouniwai.

"We came to an agreement for RFMF personnel to assist police with the maintenance of law and order, amidst growing concerns of racial tension," a [statement](#) published on Thursday read.

Qiliho said the decision was based on reports received that "minority groups continue to be targeted and information of planned civil unrest received".

The police commissioner also cited “threats made against minority groups who are now living in fear following recent political developments”.

“While the army and navy personnel have been called in to assist, police will continue to lead the overall security operations,” he added.

Bainimarama issued a statement saying the military had been deployed to complement the police in maintaining law and order. “The reports of harassment suffered by our citizens and violence targeted at Indo-Fijian homes and businesses in the wake of the election are deeply disturbing,” he said in a Facebook post.

Fiji’s president, Ratu Wiliame Karavuwa, has until 2 January to summon parliament, media outlet Fiji Village reported, citing a letter sent by Karavuwa to the coalition partners. The prime minister must be voted in by more than 50% of lawmakers on the parliament floor.

Bainimarama and Rabuka were initially deadlocked after the election. Rabuka’s People’s Alliance Party won 21 seats and the affiliated National Federation Party won five seats, while Bainimarama’s Fiji First party secured 26 seats.

That left Sodelpa, which won three seats, holding the balance of power. The party decided on Tuesday in a close 16-14 internal vote to go with Rabuka – a vote that Fiji First is now questioning.

The Pacific island country, with a population of 900,000, had a history of military coups before constitutional reform in 2013 to remove a race-based voting system that favoured indigenous Fijians over ethnic Indians.

In 2006, Bainimarama instigated a coup and was installed as prime minister the year after, before leading Fiji First to majority government at the 2014 and 2018 democratic elections.

Rabuka is a former prime minister who instigated a coup in 1987 before bringing back democratic elections in 1992 and led the country through to 1999.

The Social Democratic Liberal Party (Sodelpa), a power-broker holding three seats in the hung parliament, supports policies favouring indigenous Fijians, and on Tuesday signed a coalition agreement with Rabuka's People's Alliance and the National Federation Party.

However Sodelpa's board must meet again, after the validity of the decision to back the coalition was challenged by the party's general secretary and Fiji's supervisor of elections.

Sayed-Khaiyum, from the governing Fiji First party, lashed out at Rabuka, accusing him of sowing division in Fiji. "The entire rationale of this man has been to divide Fiji to gain political supremacy," Sayed-Khaiyum said. "And we can see that simmering through again. In fact it's not simmering, it's boiling."

A day earlier, Rabuka and two other party leaders announced they were forming a coalition with a total of 29 seats against Fiji First's 26 and would form the next government.

"A government we hope that will bring the change that people had been calling out for over the last few years," Rabuka said at a news conference. "It's going to be an onerous task. It will not be easy, and it was never easy to try and dislodge an incumbent government. We have done that, collectively."

Rabuka's announcement had prompted the New Zealand foreign minister, Nanaia Mahuta, to send her congratulations on Twitter, saying New Zealand "looks forward to working together to continue strengthening our warm relationship".

But the New Zealand prime minister, Jacinda Ardern, took a more cautious approach, saying she was waiting until the dust settled.

The Australian Associated Press, Reuters, Agence France-Presse and AP contributed to this report

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- [Train strikes Passengers brace for disruption as stoppages begin](#)
- [Public sector Wages rise by 2.7% in a year as strikes loom](#)

Business liveRail strikes

UK train strikes: Rishi Sunak says government will not shift on rail negotiations – as it happened

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Rail strikes

UK strikes: standoff continues as Sunak says no change in pay stance

Rail bosses and unions also signal they will not budge, as RMT's Mick Lynch says there is 'no deal in sight'

December rail strikes begin as Britain faces weeks of disruption over festive period – video

[Gwyn Topham](#), [Peter Walker](#), [Julia Kollewe](#) and [Alex Lawson](#)

Tue 13 Dec 2022 13.52 ESTFirst published on Tue 13 Dec 2022 02.51 EST

The standoff between UK ministers, bosses and unions over pay showed no sign of reaching resolution on the first day of four weeks of planned rail strikes by thousands of rail workers.

RMT members will again bring train services around Britain to a halt on Wednesday, while Royal Mail workers in the CWU will carry out their third of six days of walkouts in the run-up to Christmas. Nurses are due to start strike action on Thursday.

Rishi Sunak reiterated that the government was unable to shift its position on pay, implying that the only way to end the widespread strikes across the railway and other sectors would be for unions to back down.

In comments to his cabinet, the prime minister said: "While the government will do all we can to minimise disruption, the only way we can stop it completely is by unions going back around the table and calling off these strikes."

Rail bosses and unions signalled they would not budge in the pay dispute, with the general secretary of the RMT, Mick Lynch, saying there was "no deal in sight".

The latest wave of strikes across the network by 40,000 members of the RMT at Network Rail and at 14 train operators left passengers facing severely reduced services. Another 48-hour strike follows later in the week.

Sunak told ministers that the winter would be “a challenging period to get through”, an official readout of his comments said. He said the government had been “fair and reasonable” in agreeing independent recommendations for public-sector pay rises, “and in facilitating further discussions with the unions and employers”.

His official spokesperson said there were plans to mitigate any disruption, but it was “for unions to decide whether they want to keep inflicting this sort of damage on the public”.

The transport secretary, Mark Harper, said people faced another Covid-style “virtual Christmas” as a result of the industrial action, with an overtime ban at train operators also affecting passenger services through the rest of the month until strikes in early January.

Lynch said the union would press ahead with strikes and “review at the end of that if there’s no settlement on the table and we’ll decide what our next steps are, but at the moment there is no settlement to be had”.



The RMT's Mick Lynch (centre) said the union would press ahead with strikes. Photograph: Vuk Valcic/SOPA Images/REX/Shutterstock

The strike left about a fifth of normal train services running around the country on Tuesday. Trains will continue to run only between 7.30am and 6.30pm on Wednesday, with a reduced service on main intercity and urban lines, and no trains at all in much of rural England, Scotland and Wales.

Network Rail has urged passengers to seek alternative travel or to plan ahead and check with operators for the latest information on services. Disruption should also be expected in the morning of the day after each strike.

Harper did not deny that the government had [intervened to scupper a possible deal](#) between the RMT and train operators. Speaking on the BBC, he declined to answer questions on whether the government had insisted on adding controversial driver-only operation clauses, but replied: “Reform has been on the table all the way through this process.”

The former transport secretary Grant Shapps, who is now the business secretary, told the Commons business select committee later on Tuesday that “productivity improvements” and modernisation were needed to boost pay in rail and Royal Mail. He added: “The worst thing that we could do is follow the 1970s, which is to chase inflation and then end up not beating it. And then everybody is in a worse place.”

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He said the government wanted to raise pay across the public sector but claimed: “If you were to simply say yes we'll do this, this and this ... the

upshot is everybody's taxes will need to go up, we think by about £25bn."

The RMT's membership voted [to reject an improved offer](#) from Network Rail in a referendum, whose result on Monday confirmed strikes would go ahead. Network Rail said the deal, of 9% over two years with staff travel benefits and a guarantee on jobs until 2025, was its "best and final offer". The union leaders opposed the offer because of significant changes to working practices.



Southeastern trains parked in sidings near Ashford station in Kent during Tuesday's strike. Photograph: Gareth Fuller/PA

Another union, Unite, voted to accept the offer from Network Rail. A third union, TSSA, has suspended industrial action while it ballots its members.

Lynch said the changes Network Rail wanted to impose would cut 50% of the maintenance regime on the railway and force staff to work more nights and weekends.

The Network Rail chief executive, Andrew Haines, struck a pessimistic note. "Where I stand today, I'd have to say that with the level of disruption the RMT are imposing, the way forward isn't obvious," he said.

The RMT national strikes take place on 13-14 and 16-17 December, while the overtime ban across 14 train operating companies will affect services from 18 December until 2 January, before more strikes on 3-4 and 6-7 January. A Network Rail strike from 6pm on 24 December to 7am on 27 December will bring passenger trains to an earlier end on Christmas Eve, but mainly affect engineering works.

The Office for National Statistics said 417,000 working days were lost to labour disputes in October, the highest number since November 2011. Nurses prepare to go on strike on Thursday, as the Royal College of Nursing general secretary, Pat Cullen, said staff were “not getting an extra penny” despite talks on Monday.

Royal Mail workers will resume two days of strikes on Wednesday after six days of action in the last few weeks, with two more to follow just before Christmas.

One place where resolution appears to have been reached is at Felixstowe, the UK’s biggest container port, which saw strikes through the summer. Its owner, Hutchison Ports, said a pay deal of 8.5% had been accepted.

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Economics

UK public sector wages rise by 2.7% in a year as strikes loom

Real pay for all workers also lags behind inflation, piling on pressure amid cost of living crisis

- [Business live: latest updates](#)



Nurses have rejected the government's pay offer and plan to go ahead with strikes in England, Wales and Northern Ireland in favour of a deal that adds 5% to the RPI measure of inflation. Photograph: Peter Byrne/PA

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Tue 13 Dec 2022 06.01 ESTFirst published on Tue 13 Dec 2022 03.31 EST

UK public sector wages increased by 2.7% in the year to October, according to official figures that will fuel the anger of rail and health sector workers

preparing to go on strike in the run-up to Christmas.

The figure falls vastly short of the headline rate of inflation, now 11.1%, laying bare the cost of living challenge that is hitting public sector workers particularly hard.

Private sector workers received a 6.9% pay rise, according to the latest data from the Office for National Statistics, but much of the increase was driven by bumper pay packages in the financial sector and staff in the accountancy and legal professions.

The headline rate of pay rises for all workers excluding bonuses rose to 6.1% in the three months to October, from 5.7% in September.

[Real pay chart](#)

When the pay data was adjusted for inflation, pay for all workers fell by 2.7%, cutting living standards at a time of financial stress for millions of people.

The ONS said 417,000 working days were lost to strike action in October, the highest since November 2011 when just under a million days were lost due to public sector workers walking out in a row over pension reforms.

[Working days lost to strikes chart](#)

Ministers have said they will fund a pay rise of 3% for public sector workers and give nurses an average of 4% in line with a pay review body's recommendations.

However, Tuesday's figures show the growing disparity between the protection against inflation being offered to some in the private sector and the public sector norm.

[Public sector pay chart](#)

Nurses have rejected the offer and plan to go ahead with a series of strikes in England, Wales and Northern Ireland in favour of a deal that adds 5% to the retail prices index (RPI) measure of inflation, taking their claim to 19%.

Nurses' leaders have said they are prepared to negotiate over the final settlement, but say health ministers have failed to consider the offer.

Economic inactivity chart

The TUC general secretary, Frances O'Grady, said workers were suffering a reduction in their living standards before a recession that could cut living standards further.

"This year has been the worst for real wage growth in nearly half a century," she said. "We are now on the brink of a damaging recession with the threat of 1m lost jobs."

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She urged Rishi Sunak to negotiate with public sector unions to head off strike action.

"The prime minister should stop attacking working people trying to defend their pay, and sit down to negotiate fair pay rises with unions," she said.

Most economists have forecast Britain will enter a year-long recession after a slump in orders across much of the private sector.

Employers in several sectors, including the manufacturing industry, have begun to dismiss workers, pushing up the unemployment rate to 3.7% from 3.6%. The number of vacancies also fell in the three months to October, showing that employers are becoming more circumspect about filling jobs while the economic outlook remains uncertain.

There was better news for the government from employment data showing thousands of people who took early retirement returning to the labour market.

The economic inactivity rate, which shows how many people are outside the labour market, decreased by 0.2 percentage points in the three months to October from the previous quarter to 21.5%. The fall was driven by those aged 50 to 64 years returning to work.

A rush to early retirement among those aged over 55 combined with soaring numbers of workers taking time off work because of ill health is widely blamed for a shortage of workers coming out of the Covis-19 pandemic.

Much of the increase in employment was in the public sector and mostly in the NHS. There were an estimated 5.77 million employees in the public sector in September 2022, 73,000 (1.3%) more than in September 2021. Of these, 47,000 were employed by the NHS.

The chancellor, Jeremy Hunt, said: “While unemployment in the UK remains close to historic lows, high inflation continues to plague economies around the world as we manage the impacts of Covid-19 and Putin’s invasion of Ukraine.”

Hunt added: “To get the British economy back on track, we have a plan which will help to more than halve inflation next year – but that requires some difficult decisions now. Any action that risks embedding high prices into our economy will only prolong the pain for everyone, and stunt any prospect of long-term economic growth.”

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[Energy bills](#)

Does a kettle use more electricity than a TV? How much power your gadgets use



It's hard to weigh up how much electricity your appliances are using without accurate measurements. Composite: Guardian Design/Getty Images

We test what devices consume, with households increasingly worried about rising energy prices



[Samuel Gibbs](#) Consumer technology editor

Tue 13 Dec 2022 01.00 EST Last modified on Tue 13 Dec 2022 04.11 EST

How much does it cost to charge your phone or your toothbrush? Is it really cheaper to use the microwave to cook your food, as has been suggested? With the cost of electricity putting the squeeze on all our finances, and a house full of tech, I decided it was time to see how power-hungry everyday devices really are.

We are constantly told that all manner of appliances chew through electricity, and that you can make huge savings by [switching off “vampire devices” at the wall](#). But is that really true? To cut through the fog and find out myself, I grabbed a power meter and spent the last two months testing everything I could.

[Cost per use table](#)

Some devices get a bad rap for a good reason, guzzling electricity like nobody’s business. Some older wifi routers will fall into that category, and my testing suggests you may also be paying more than you think to watch

TV. I was also surprised at how much it cost to use our hairdryer. However, I found that other devices were reassuringly frugal.

Some manufacturers provide electricity consumption figures for their products. Others print the maximum amount of power a device can use in watts (W) on its plug.

Cost per hour table

Measuring the amount of electricity used yourself with a simple power meter is easy. They cost under £20, slot in between your device and the power socket and can typically measure from 0.5W and up. You may be surprised by what you find.

To convert watts into kilowatt-hours (kWh), the energy unit in which consumption is measured, simply divide by 1,000 and multiply by the number of hours in use.

Here's the good, the bad and the ugly from my research.

The good

According to my testing, a lot of the technology made in the last five years was fairly energy efficient, drawing less than 0.5W in standby mode, so would cost a maximum of £1.50 if left plugged in all the time for a year, but likely far, far less.

That included the TV, monitor, smart kettle, smart bulbs, [Xbox games console](#), smart hubs for the lights and thermostat, and many other devices, including various phone, tablet and laptop chargers.

However, one standout was my 10-year-old **Panasonic microwave**, which consumed 2W when not doing anything other than displaying the time – a £6-a-year charge I could do without.

Wirelessly connected systems typically consumed a little more. [Sonos speakers](#), which connect via wifi to each other and the internet, drew between 1W and 3W (£3-£9 a year) when on standby, depending on age.



Is your household as energy efficient as it could be? Photograph: Westend61/Getty Images

Smart speakers were pleasingly energy efficient. Amazon's [Echo Dot with Clock](#) and Google's [Nest Mini](#) consumed less than 0.5W when idle and only 2.3-4W (less than 0.13p an hour) when pumping out music at maximum volume.

LED smart bulbs were also fairly efficient, consuming about 6W (0.17p an hour) when turned up to maximum brightness, which is roughly the same as their non-smart equivalents.

Charging portable electronics is generally low-cost. Smartphones typically cost less than 1p a full charge, while an [iPad Air](#) costs about 1.4p, and a laptop, such as the [14in MacBook Pro](#), costs 3.4p to fully power back up. A [Philips electric toothbrush](#) costs less than 3p in electricity to use a year.



Have you wondered how much electricity your Xbox consumes?
Photograph: Red Robots Mediagrab/Reuters

Modern set-top boxes also consume very little power. The latest [Apple TV 4K](#) and Sky's [new Stream box](#) draw less than 0.5W in standby and cost 0.07p and 0.14p an hour respectively while watching movies. Older boxes, such as [Sky Q](#), consume about 12W (0.4p an hour) when watching TV but go into a deep sleep overnight, drawing less than 0.5W when not recording or updating.

The bad

Generally speaking, if a device has a screen or emits light, it consumes more electricity. Google's [7in Nest Hub](#) draws about 2.7W (0.09p an hour) when displaying photos, costing roughly 1.5p a day to keep plugged in. Amazon's bigger [Echo Show 10](#) costs just under 4p a day to run.

My **28in 4K Asus computer monitor** costs just over 1p an hour to use. However, my TV produced one of the biggest surprises. My mid-range **55in LG OLED TV** costs 2.2p an hour to watch for HD content. Start watching HDR content or gaming, however, and the cost increases to about 3.3p an hour.

The **Xbox** consumes about 6p an hour when gaming, which with the TV costs less than 10p an hour – far less than a gaming PC would cost.

However, using a console such as an Xbox for streaming TV costs about 2p an hour, which could quickly add up.

Another surprise might be just how much electricity your wifi router consumes. Some older models can consume as much as 18W (£53 a year). The more modern [**Linksys Velop MX5300**](#) that I use draws about 10W, costing £29.78 a year in electricity per unit, of which I have four dotted around my house. Turning off the internet to save electricity probably isn't realistic but asking your provider for the latest, more efficient model may save you some money.

The ugly

Anything that heats or moves consumed the most power in my testing, which is almost all domestic appliances.

Cooking is expensive regardless of what you do but the oven is one of the priciest. An electric fan oven at 200C costs about 45-55p an hour to run.

My **850W microwave** costs about 40p an hour to run but cooks food significantly quicker. However, a gas hob can still be cheaper to use. Heating 800g of lentil soup in 10 minutes on the smallest ring cost 0.14p compared with about 2p in the microwave.



Using your oven can be pricey. Photograph: MBI/Alamy

Even tea and toast quickly adds up. My **Morphy Richards two-slot toaster** costs about 1p a toasting, while boiling 0.5L of room-temperature water costs about 2p. However, I can save about 30% of the electricity by heating the water to only 85C for coffee using a smart kettle.

Doing the washing is fairly costly, too. A 72-minute 40C daily wash cycle in a **7kg Samsung washing machine** costs 25p in electricity but significantly more at higher temperatures or longer cycles with more spins.

One surprisingly expensive item was the hairdryer. A **Parlux 2200W dryer** costs about 6p to use for 10 minutes.

Electric heaters are also expensive to run. Even a relatively efficient **Dyson fan heater** costs 16p an hour to keep a small room at 20C when the ambient temperature is 14C, which is about 5p more than the amount of gas burned an hour by my 2013 combi boiler heating the whole house under similar conditions.

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Hot drinks, free coats, cold, hungry children: the shocking reality of Britain's winter 'warm banks'



‘It’s a good place to warm up and have a chat’ ... Michael Thompson at the Gainsborough library warm bank. Photograph: Alicia Canter/The Guardian

Just six months ago, the idea of spaces where people could escape freezing homes was met with disbelief. Now at one library in Suffolk, young families, restaurant workers and a former NHS cleaner are among those taking refuge



[Amelia Gentleman](#)
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Tue 13 Dec 2022 00.00 EST Last modified on Wed 14 Dec 2022 06.01 EST

A few weeks ago, when the black mould began creeping up the walls of her house again, Carla Francesca, 41, started to search for places she could escape to with her two-year-old daughter. For a few hours, at least, they would be able to avoid the damp and the smell of mildew.

On Thursday, she spent some of the morning at the Gainsborough library in south-east Ipswich, in [one of the city's newly designated warm banks](#). The modern building is kept heated to 21C; its cafe offers free hot drinks and has a welcoming smell of toast. It feels like a healthier and more cheerful place than her home, where she has been keeping the heating off during the day to

save money, and has experimented with keeping some of the windows open in an attempt to stop the spreading mould.

A decade ago, food banks were an unfamiliar concept but by last winter, the country's largest food bank supplier, the Trussell Trust, was [delivering 2.2m emergency parcels](#). With a cost of living crisis intensifying, food banks are being supplemented this year with the new austerity innovation – [a free space anyone can visit to avoid getting cold](#) at home, at a time when [turning on the heating has become unaffordable](#) for many.

It might be tempting to dismiss warm banks as a gimmick, not just a rebranding of existing services but a politically smart way for councils and charities to highlight that they are being forced to respond to rising costs. But the people running the [thousands of venues](#) are taking them very seriously. Analysis by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation suggests that 4.3m households [have already curbed their spending on heating](#) this year. Councils all over the country are working [with charities to set up warm spaces](#) in theatres, museums, cathedrals, fire stations and cafes.



‘We’re totally nonjudgmental. Anyone can come in and do anything they like’ ... Mandy Grimwood, manager of Gainsborough. Photograph: Alicia Canter/The Guardian

At a glance, Gainsborough library looks just like any other library, and many of the people in the cafe know nothing about the warm bank initiative, but the staff here are proving a new kind of support in a subtle way and their approach seems to be working. People come in to print out a document and stay in the cafe for hot drinks. Rails of free clothes (known as “kindness racks”) are available for visitors to choose whatever they want. On Thursdays, library staff and volunteers pack up bags of pears, potatoes, bananas, apples, peppers and carrots, and sell them for the reduced price of £2. Cartons of free period products have been slotted in between book displays on the library shelves, to make it easy for people to help themselves.

There was a calm and friendly atmosphere on Thursday, but some of the visitors were very acutely in need. One woman came in with her daughter, 10, (who said she was off school because she missed the bus), and explained very straightforwardly that she was there to use the free internet access on the library computers, hoping to sell some of her belongings because she was short of money as a result of recently becoming re-addicted to crack cocaine, after managing to not use it for 15 years. Her daughter was very hungry, and happily ate free soup and toast offered by volunteers. Staff invited them back for a Christmas party at the library later in the month.

“No one’s going to come if it’s just a warm space. You wouldn’t want to say: ‘I’m going there to keep warm’ because of the stigma,” says the library’s manager, Mandy Grimwood, explaining that the library’s warm bank model is about getting people to visit the building for neutral reasons – using the computers or the free wifi – and encouraging them to stay. “We’re totally nonjudgmental. Anyone can come in and do anything they like. We’re not going to say: ‘Shh – this is a library.’”



People make use of the facilities at Gainsborough library. Photograph: Alicia Canter/The Guardian

Several visitors said they were in stable jobs and were stopping by to pick up the subsidised food bags. “A lot of people who weren’t struggling before now say they’re finding things hard. We’re seeing twice as many coming in for the popup food shop,” says Grimwood. A year ago, the library sold about 20 bags a week to visitors; this year it’s selling about 45, and has started doing cut-price bags of soap, shampoo and deodorant once a month. “It’s people of all ages. They’re really honest – they tell the volunteers they’re struggling. We’re regularly referring people to the food bank when they tell us they have no food.”

At [the Find food bank](#), a few hundred metres down the road, volunteers are also busy preparing regular food parcels and Christmas hampers (with about 1,000 due to be delivered to Ipswich families). “We’ve noticed that the just-about-managing families we used to hear so much about have slipped under the line and are now not managing, and the families who were managing are slipping into just managing,” says Annie Porter, a long-term volunteer. “We’d be happy if we never had to pack up another food parcel, but the numbers are going up faster every year.”

By midday about half the library cafe's 16 tables and chairs are taken. Suffolk has had its first frost of December that morning, and most people comment as they walk in on how cold it is outside and how cosy it feels inside the building. All 45 of the county's libraries, run by the Suffolk Libraries charity since 2011, have classified themselves as warm rooms – “warm and welcoming places where anyone can come during the colder months”. Ipswich's town hall and several sports centres are also offering spaces where people can gather if [they can't afford to heat their homes sufficiently](#) during the day.

Bristol's Labour mayor, Marvin Rees, anticipated the need for warm banks in June, announcing: “It almost sounds like wartime, but we'll be working with community organisations to set up warm places that people can go to if they need to, come the autumn.” In July, the financial journalist and money adviser [Martin Lewis wrote](#): “Can't believe I'm writing this, but I wonder if this winter we'll need ‘warm banks’, the equivalent of ‘food banks’, where people who can't afford heating are [invited to spend their days at no cost with heating](#).”



Volunteers at the Find food bank. Photograph: Alicia Canter/The Guardian

The initiative has been greeted simultaneously as brilliant and horrifying. Some people have been dismayed by the cheerfully practical promotion of

warm banks as a hopeful, we're-all-in-it-together [community response to the cost of living crisis](#). They view the creation of emergency places where people can huddle to keep warm as something [much more dystopian and depressing](#).

Others point out that had austerity funding cuts not forced local councils to shut down so many community centres over the past decade (such as the [more than 500 children's centres that closed in England](#) between 2010 and 2018) then officials would not be having to scrabble together such idiosyncratic lists of places where people can escape the cold. The Local Government Association, which represents councils in England, points out that ideally the benefits system would provide a safety net for low-income households to actually meet their living costs.

“It does baffle me that both my partner and I are in full-time work, and I still come here every week for the fruit and vegetables,” says Libby, 23. She and her mother and grandmother are all buying the large £2 bags of fresh food, and stop in the library cafe for a cup of tea.

She finished a degree in musical theatre last year, and is working as a supervisor at a restaurant, on £9.50 an hour minimum wage. “I’m not earning enough yet to start paying back my student loan. We’re renting privately and everything feels expensive.” She and her partner turn the heating on for just an hour a day at 10.30pm to make the house warm before they go to sleep, and for the rest of the time she wraps herself in a fluffy yellow blanket; she appreciates day shifts at work, which allow her to spend the day in the warm.

Her grandmother says she and her husband, both retired, are also increasingly careful about the length of time the heating is left on. “We cover up under a couple of blankets, and cuddle up together. We’re very conscious about the money.”



Sarah Woolven. Photograph: Alicia Canter/The Guardian

Sarah Woolven, 46, who used to volunteer at the cafe, says she puts on extra jumpers at home, and a kaftan on top of these layers, but hates the way the chill of an unheated building worsens her sciatica. “There’s no embarrassment about spending time here, because it’s so friendly,” she says.

Few of the people who spend time in the cafe go through to borrow books, although the library staff are busy creating library cards for reception classes at the local primary school. A lot of books are reserved by email, with many local readers popping in to collect cosy crime novels or displaying an escapist enthusiasm for the US crime writer Jeffery Deaver and the young adult writer Colleen Hoover. A copy of *Be Your Own Therapist: Boost Your Mood and Reduce Your Anxiety in 10 Minutes a Day* is waiting for collection.

“We’re not pushing books on people,” says Grimwood, adding that she wants people to feel welcome to come in to just use the library’s electricity to charge their phones for a while. If they feel inclined to stay to join the Men Can Talk group, or join evening table tennis and indoor curling games, so much the better.

Grimwood says that, having worked as a librarian in [Suffolk](#) for 30 years, she is no longer disturbed by the intensity of the difficulties some visitors are experiencing, although some volunteers are more easily upset by the very visible needs of some of the children who come in. “You can tell the people who are struggling financially. One woman often comes in and spends most of the day here. She’ll ask us: ‘Have you got any spare food. Is there anything spare?’”

About 30 winter coats were taken from the rail last month. “We haven’t had clothes rails until this autumn,” Grimwood says. “In the past we’ve occasionally done 10p jumble sales, but there wasn’t much interest. This year there seems to be a real need. People keep asking: ‘Are you sure I can really take this?’ There were quite a lot of school uniforms, which went very quickly.”

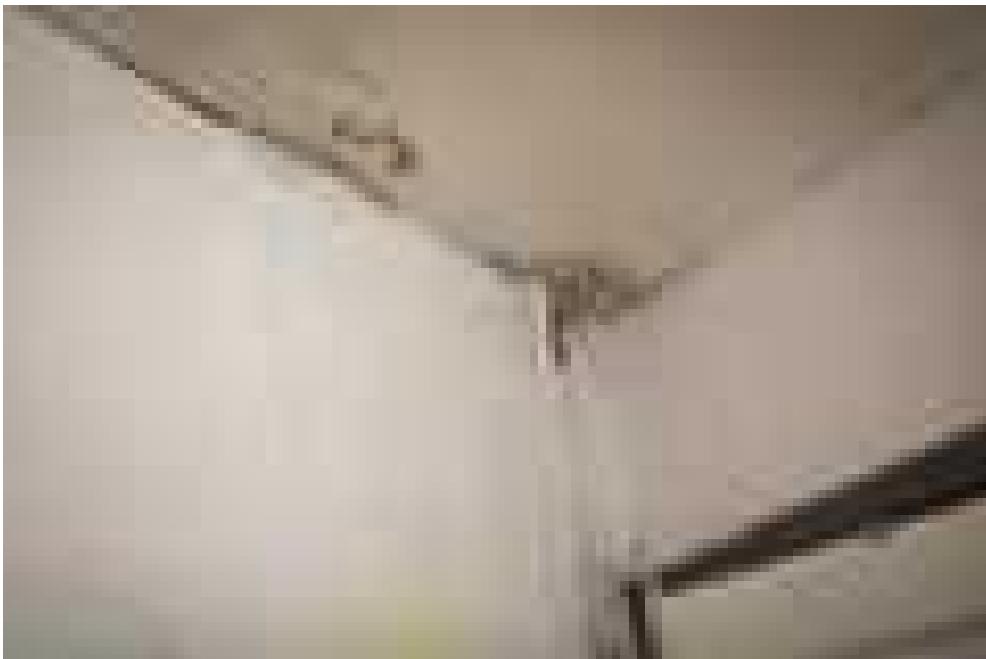
Several visitors are very upset when they describe their difficulties with heating their homes. Most struggle to put a precise figure on how much more they are paying, articulating general unease that the £5 or £10 top-up payments made from phones to the gas and electricity smart meters seem to be running down much more swiftly. Michael Thompson, 57, a former NHS cleaner, says he is noting down the daily consumption on his meter to calculate how much heating his home actually cost. The library is a useful place to “warm up with a cup and have a chat”, he says. “When you’re at home alone it can be lonely.”



Carla Francesca and her daughter at their home in Ipswich. Photograph: Alicia Canter/The Guardian

Carla Francesca says she is very worried about the damp and mould spreading through her house. Periodically she sprays it and bleaches it, removes the stained wallpaper and tries to cover the black patches with two layers of new, dry paper. The musty smell is still noticeable the moment you step inside. “It’s coming up everywhere – behind the skirting boards, around the windows. I had to move my daughter’s cot because the mould spread from the cot to some of her toys,” she says. “It would help to have the heating on longer, but it’s just so expensive.”

(After the Guardian sent images of the mould patches, an [Ipswich](#) borough council spokesperson said: “We didn’t know that the tenant had a current mould problem. Now that we are aware, we have arranged for a surveyor to visit the property next week to explore what can be done.”)



Mould on the walls and ceiling of Francesca's home in Ipswich. Photograph: Alicia Canter/The Guardian

Francesca says it is a relief to spend some time in the cafe, and stops to talk to the librarian about getting new library cards for her older children, who are in primary school. She is annoyed that the council did not take her concerns about the mould seriously ("They told me not to dry clothes inside, but that's not what's causing the problem"), but she is careful to point out that her family's difficulties are relatively minor, compared with other people's. She has been putting money aside to buy gloves and hats for Ipswich's homeless population, and plans to donate the clothes her children have outgrown to the library's clothes rail.

"We're really lucky," she says. "My partner is in full-time work, so there are people a lot worse off than us. It's hard for everyone, isn't it?"

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[Review](#)

Pandemic Diaries by Matt Hancock review – rewriting history

Assembled after the fact, these ‘diaries’ strain the usual definition – and the patience of those wanting a fuller account of government mistakes



‘There are kernels of truth in here, some uncomfortable, about why politicians make the decisions they do.’ Matt Hancock outside parliament.
Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian



Gaby Hinsliff

Tue 13 Dec 2022 01.00 EST Last modified on Tue 13 Dec 2022 01.02 EST

If you want to get under the skin of politics, nothing beats a good diary.

And what distinguishes the best – from Alan Clark and Tony Benn to Alastair Campbell and more recently Sasha Swire – is the willingness to be vulnerable. A diarist's job is to capture how it felt in the heat of the moment, however mortifying it might be to read in retrospect. Everything else is just publicity. Or in the case of [Matt Hancock](#), who never actually kept a diary but hasn't let that stop him publishing one, a book concocted after the event (but before the public inquiry) with the help of journalist Isabel Oakeshott from a mishmash of old papers, notes and emoji-laden WhatsApps. And with the selective benefit of hindsight, what the former health secretary mainly sees is – surprise! – all the times he was brilliantly prescient, and all the times his Downing Street nemesis Dominic Cummings wasn't. If you couldn't bear watching him on I'm a Celebrity, I'm afraid this book may go down like a plate of sheep's unmentionables.

New Year's Day 2020 finds our eagle-eyed hero in his kitchen, seizing on a tiny newspaper story about an obscure pneumonia outbreak in Wuhan and resolving to find out more. Five days later, he's quizzing chief medical

officer Professor Sir Chris Whitty about “the likely need for a vaccine”. (In fairness, Hancock has a tech geek’s love for scientifically engineered solutions to problems, meaning that bit might actually be true.) But still he can’t get his Brexit-focused colleagues to wake up, or let him call a Cobra meeting. Even when the penny finally drops, and despite what Hancock grandly calls his economist’s ability to “see the behaviour of individuals at the scale of whole societies”, for some inexplicable reason Cummings keeps arranging big meetings behind his back. Stepping back for a moment, you don’t have to pick a side in the Cummings-Hancock war to see the practical difficulties of trying to run a Covid strategy with these two, plus a prime minister who in the middle of the second deadly wave apparently inquired about testing his dog to see if it had had Covid.

Hancock is bullish in dismissing what he calls “incredibly hurtful” allegations, mostly in the Guardian, about the handling of government Covid contracts. He still insists the biggest unwitting virus spreaders in care homes were staff moving between them, not patients being discharged from hospital untested. Perhaps we’ll have to wait for the public inquiry to rule on all that, although Hancock does concede those staff movements could in hindsight have been stopped earlier. It’s striking, however, how few entries care homes get in a story dominated by the more ultimately successful races to procure PPE, tests and vaccines.

Towards the end things take a surprisingly Mills & Boon turn, as Hancock is surprised by his “feelings” for aide Gina Coladangelo, which he is shortly afterwards caught on CCTV expressing. “I’ve always known from the novels that people will risk everything (for love),” confides Hancock, in precisely the sort of sentence that should never make it into “the novels”. What’s never quite explained is exactly how Coladangelo morphed from old university friend sending helpful texts about his choice of socks into a quasi-official role helping him “communicate”, and ultimately a job on the Department of Health board, some months before they got together. Personally, I’d rather read more about the exact capacity in which Gina went with him to debrief the PM in the Downing Street garden one fine May evening and less about the end of his marriage.

What ultimately stuck in my head however was an oddly poignant account of Hancock driving home through London in mid-February, as the

government's scientific advisers began secretly preparing options for a lockdown, past pubs full of people with no idea their lives were about to turn upside down. Just for a moment, you feel the burden leaders carry of knowing the things most of us would rather not. The Downing Street whiteboard with "who do we not save?" written on it; the mathematical models outlining just how many could die; the fear of running out of body bags. There are kernels of truth in here, some uncomfortable, about why politicians make the decisions they do. It's just a shame extracting them feels much like enduring one of I'm a Celebrity's bush tucker trials; all that groping through muck and grubs, just for a couple of plastic stars.

Pandemic Diaries: The Inside Story of Britain's Battle Against Covid by Matt Hancock with Isabel Oakeshott is published by Biteback (£25). To help the Guardian and Observer, [order your copy from guardianbookshop.com](https://www.guardianbookshop.com). Delivery charges may apply.

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Becoming a chatbot: my life as a real estate AI's human backup

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2022.12.13 - Opinion

- The right says strikes are abusive and wicked. I say they have helped build our society
- From Wagatha Christie to Donald Trump: can rapid-fire real-life drama upstage the news?
- 'You remember Wendy – she slept with your father': what I learned writing Mum's Christmas cards
- Standup success was sweet, but the review I cared about most was written on a biscuit

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The right says strikes are abusive and wicked. I say they have helped build our society

[Owen Jones](#)



Don't believe Rishi Sunak or other Tory union-busters: a strong Labour movement raises everyone's living standards



Members of the Communication Workers Union march in London on 9 December, when Royal Mail workers went on strike. Photograph: James Manning/PA

Tue 13 Dec 2022 01.00 EST Last modified on Tue 13 Dec 2022 08.55 EST

Respect for tradition, we are told, underpins the Conservative party. But there's one tradition for which it has unwavering contempt – strike action: a part of our culture and heritage it has ferociously and instinctively demonised as an antisocial attack on the general public. Tories are known to extol the virtues of rugged individualism, but it seems the collective suddenly matters when industrial action is declared. Then, it seems, society – which in previous Tory eras was doubted to even exist – becomes a totem to be protected from sinister forces, from a malign and externalised striking rabble.

Strikes bring inconvenience. Of course they do. They disrupt our normal life, our plans, our expectations. But the concentrated attempt to stigmatise the very notion of the strike is something that must be resisted. The strike – and the threat of striking – should be celebrated precisely because it underpins many rights and freedoms we now take for granted. Union struggles in the 19th century played a pivotal role in shortening the working day, and in the 20th century, in creating the weekend. In the postwar heyday of union power, they drove up incomes. Strikes are a profound social good.

Yet how little this argument is heard. Anti-union sentiment is profoundly embedded in our political culture. When the Tory chairman, Nadhim Zahawi, suggested on national television that the upcoming nurses' strike [would aid](#) Vladimir Putin by worsening inflation in the west, it was yet another crude illustration of this very British phenomenon, echoing Margaret Thatcher's denunciation of striking miners as the "[enemy within](#)" in the 1980s. This hostility has a long pedigree and, historically at least, the Tories have been known to be candid about their real intentions.



RMT picket at Slough railway station, 8 October 2022. Photograph: Maureen McLean/Rex/Shutterstock

As the 20th century dawned, the Tories defended a legal ruling making unions financially liable for profits lost to strikes, leading the Conservative prime minister Stanley Baldwin to later confess: "The Conservatives can't talk of class war. They started it." In 1926, they introduced a raft of anti-union laws in the aftermath of the [general strike](#), including the banning of [solidarity industrial action](#).

But while unions were hobbled in the 1930s, a spirit of collectivism nurtured by wartime sacrifice helped their rebirth. The three-decade social democratic consensus established by Clement Attlee's Labour government led the Trades Union Congress in 1968 to boast that it had grown from a "small

debating assembly” into a body that shared “in the making of government policies, taking part in administering major social services and meeting on equal terms with the spokesmen of the nation’s employers”. This was the era in which Britain enjoyed its highest ever sustained period of economic growth, which – thanks in part to strong unions – was more equitably distributed, boosting the pay of ordinary workers.

When the oil shock of the 1970s sent prices surging, unions mobilised in an effort to match wages with the cost of living. The grand climax – the winter of discontent – was successfully spun by Thatcher to label unions as national bogeyman for a generation. Her successors took up that framing as well. When Tony Blair became prime minister in 1997, he promised that his government would “leave British law the most restrictive on trade unions in the western world”. And David Cameron assailed Ed Miliband as “taking his script from the trade unions”, and turned the screw further, with even more restrictive laws.

But today this anti-union approach jars with political reality. One poll has suggested that nearly six in 10 voters back the nurses’ strike, and another found that more people backed the rail strike than opposed it. After an unprecedented fall in living standards, the default position of millions whose pay packets are shrivelling in real terms has become “well, fair play to them, at least someone is taking a stand”.

While earlier generations of Tories may have used the language of class warfare openly, their modern cohort is savvier. They seek to isolate striking workers from the wider public, portraying them as somehow separate from society at large. Rishi Sunak denounces strikers as a threat to “hardworking families”, as if nurses, paramedics or transport workers are excluded from that category. But this attempt to separate striking workers from society at large collides with the reality people see every day. The withdrawal of strikers’ labour is so noticeable precisely *because* of how central they are to our way of life. Rather than a middle-finger salute at the general public, it is one part of society crying for help from another.

Despite all the talk of monstrous disruption, for most the real inconvenience is struggling to pay bills and feed their children, rather than the irritation of a

postponed train journey. [Real wages are projected](#) to be lower in 2026 than they were in 2008.

Indeed, a fundamental reason for wages being so low and conditions so poor in the UK is because of the dilution of union power. According to one study, the “changes in bargaining power” suffered by unions [explains half of the decline](#) in the share of the economy going to wages over four decades in several rich countries, including Britain. Rather than union action inconveniencing everybody else, the decline of unions has [dragged down](#) the wages of non-unionised workers, too, according to a US study. A strong labour movement, in other words, brings up everyone’s living standards.

A strike, then, isn’t antisocial behaviour, on a collision course with the interests of the wider public. By neutering the threat of strike action with authoritarian laws, the Tories have succeeded only in weakening a mechanism with a proven record in raising the living standards of all workers. Despite the mythology, no one goes on strike on a whim. A worker forfeiting a day’s pay isn’t just a sacrifice for the sake of their own interests, it’s a gamble and a sacrifice. Indeed, one of the government’s fears is that a victory for nurses or railway workers would embolden the pay claims of other workers – an anxiety that is well founded.

Union membership should be honoured not just as a democratic right, but as a cornerstone of collective prosperity. Even many union sympathisers have retreated from such an argument, instead blaming bosses and government for any regretful breakdown in industrial relations. But to strike isn’t a sin, or antisocial or an act of mendacity: it’s a key to a society less beset by injustice than our own.

- Owen Jones is a Guardian columnist
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Theatre

From Wagatha Christie to Donald Trump: can rapid-fire real-life drama upstage the news?

[Arifa Akbar](#)



Dramatising the latest watercooler story doesn't guarantee you box-office success. The stiffest competition may come from reality's own high drama



Lucy May Barker (Rebekah Vardy) and Laura Dos Santos (Coleen Rooney) in *Vardy v Rooney: The Wagatha Christie Trial* at Wyndham's theatre, London. Photograph: Tristram Kenton/the Guardian

Tue 13 Dec 2022 03.00 EST Last modified on Tue 13 Dec 2022 08.27 EST

Just before the curtain came up on [Vardy v Rooney: The Wagatha Christie Trial](#), producer Eleanor Lloyd spoke to the audience about its breakneck transposition from real-life courtroom drama to stage show and the “high-wire act” that such theatre becomes. The part-verbatim show dramatises the case that was detonated soon after Coleen Rooney dropped her Instagram grenade and Rebekah Vardy filed for libel.

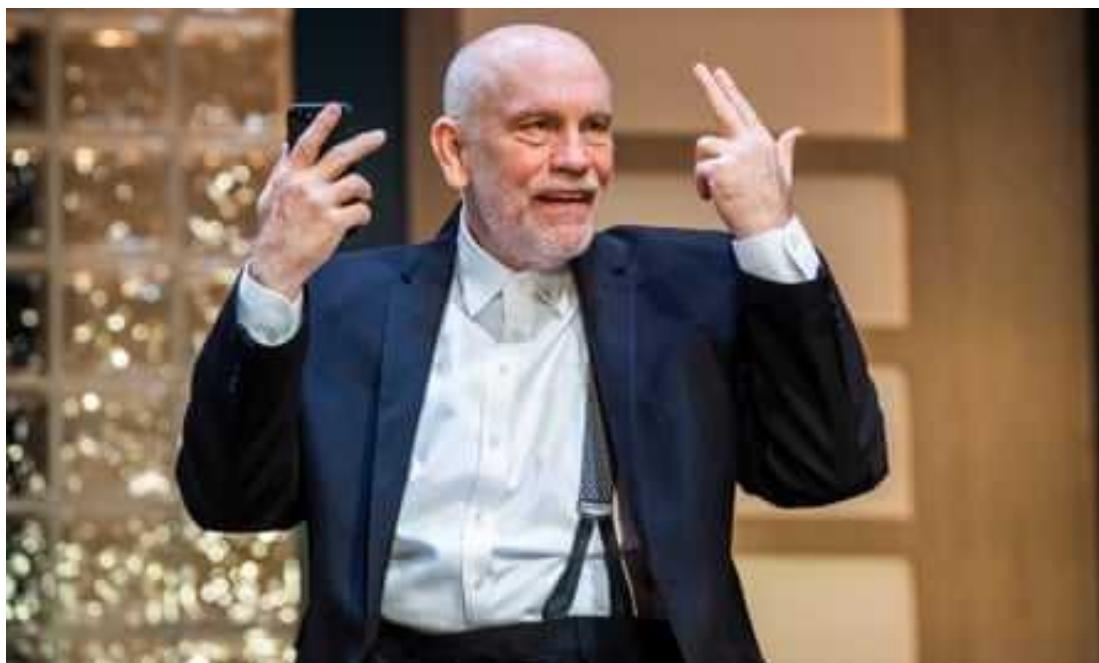
Having run in the high court and been reported in the media only a few months earlier, here it was again, reprising the best lines, from [chipolata-gate](#) to [Davy Jones's Locker](#). Laying its public interest debate aside, it was indisputably the watercooler story of the spring and summer, its incredible WhatsApp turns holding us rapt.

That, in some ways, guarantees a degree of commercial appeal, although there are drawbacks too: a drama replicating reality so soon after the event runs the risk of setting up a competition with the real story’s own high drama. Lloyd wasn’t wrong to call it a “high-wire act” in the sense that the

best might already have come in the news stories. How could this show replicate the sugar-rush of those revelations? It is not surprising that the tension was missing in the theatre's courtroom: the case's most car-crash lines were too familiar to us to really shock. We'd laughed or gasped at them only a few months earlier. Now we tittered with recognition but they sounded ersatz.

There are some instances when reality is simply a more powerful medium and fictional drama can't raise the stakes, or value – at least not when we are still pressed up so close to the drama of the new story. At least the Wagatha play was based in verbatim form (there is a [TV drama](#) launching, groan). Real life gives us more drama than fiction ever could in this case, I think, because its central players are real and the form therefore carries the added sense of "truth".

Mike Bartlett's play about Donald Trump, [The 47th](#), was anti-climactic for just this reason. Real life simply couldn't be trumped, even with the imaginative re-framing of the story in a near-future with baroque plot-turns and a very amusing impersonation of the former president by an orange-skinned Bertie Carvel. The jokes, speeches and storming of the Capitol were too reminiscent of recent real events, and not half as shocking. Imagination clung too closely to fact in the end and was smothered by it.



John Malkovich in Bitter Wheat, written and directed by David Mamet at the Garrick theatre, London, in 2019. Photograph: Tristram Kenton/the Guardian

[A musical about Silvio Berlusconi is under way](#) which I hope is not straitjacketed in the same way. It is billed as an “almost true story” – presumably weaving fiction into the facts we know of Berlusconi’s life and leadership. Produced by Francesca Moody, who was behind Phoebe Waller-Bridge’s Fleabag, the story will be told through a “fierce feminist lens” according to Moody, and perhaps this will liberate its imagination.

Often real-life-based dramas fail because they can’t illuminate anything new. But at their worst they appear to be riding on the back of a sensational news story. This was the case with David Mamet’s [Bitter Wheat](#), and Steven Berkoff’s [Harvey](#), both dramatising the Harvey Weinstein sex scandal. What exactly was the point, beyond salaciousness? Alongside this, the unsavoury decision to dramatise the scandal from Weinstein’s point of view, with the added discomfort of two male writers ventriloquising for him at a time when women might better have been given a voice.

There is an argument, more generally, to say that the creative process needs time to turn real life into something more than testimony or imitation alone – to gain insights, find new perspectives, plumb depths. That said, many of the quick-response dramas on screen made during the pandemic about frontline workers and the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020 reflected our world back at us with immense and immediate power. These were produced in real time, as events were occurring, rather like Ali Smith’s seasonal quartet series. They were mirrors of events churning in the world, which held value in that charged moment.



Come from Away by Irene Sankoff and David Hein at the Phoenix theatre, London, in 2019. Photograph: Tristram Kenton/the Guardian

But after that moment is gone, we do need drama to bring something more, I think. [One such show that recently ran at the Chisenhale Gallery, in London,](#) featured excerpts of a film made inside a closed mental health hospital ward in 2021 to reflect the pandemic's effects on young inpatients. This film was set against live performances by some of the same young people, since discharged (and included their responses to the film). Seth Pimlott, who curated the show, said it demonstrated how drama could help us better understand difficult real-world experience.

Maybe creative licence is key: to make a news story into something different. The 9/11 musical [Come from Away](#), based on the true story of over 6,000 travellers grounded in the tiny town of Gander on the island of Newfoundland for five days after the Twin Towers attacks, sounds like the unlikeliest of hit shows. What is remarkable about the real-life aspect is that it is so marginal to the main event of the terrorist attacks, and the far bigger, more catastrophic drama happening in New York. It is clear in the musical that something else is being done with the use of the documentary material. The plot, as it stands, is slight. Nothing happens outwardly beyond the grounding of these planes and passengers, and yet so much happens in terms of relationships and emotional connections. By coming at the news story

sideways, it becomes fresher. The imagination, in the end, needs to upstage the facts and so achieve the high-wire act of the real-life drama.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2022/dec/13/from-wagatha-christie-to-donald-trump-can-rapid-fire-real-life-drama-upstage-the-news>

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[Opinion](#)[Christmas](#)

‘You remember Wendy – she slept with your father’: what I learned writing Mum’s Christmas cards

[Zoe Williams](#)



There I was, filling them out for her, when the revelations started flying



There comes a time when your eyes are too far gone to write your own messages. Photograph: Posed by models. FG Trade/Getty Images

Tue 13 Dec 2022 02.00 EST Last modified on Tue 13 Dec 2022 02.17 EST

Unless you die before it happens, there comes a point in every person's life where your eyes are too far gone to write your own [Christmas](#) cards, and someone else has to do it for you. My aunt did it for my uncle, then my mum did it for my aunt, and now I'm doing it for my mum.

We're off to a strong start – I've got as far as "Dear John", when she says: "No, John died! He died 18 months ago," then, beadily, "what have you written?", as if I've done something outlandishly yet characteristically stupid.

"It's fine," I say. "We'll just throw it away and start again."

"It's a terrible waste of a card," she objects.

"This whole enterprise is a waste of card."

"One of my favourite cards, though!"

Then I have a brainwave: I'm going to send this card to John and Norma Major.

“Do you have their address?”

“Nope, I'm just going to send it to their local cricket club.”

“What are you going to say?”

“I'll say: ‘I think you did OK on Brexit, but the [cones hotline](#) was stupid.’”

“OK, good.”

After that, I am careful to check all parties are alive before I start writing, which unleashes a tide of medical information so detailed that I could perform surgery on all her friends myself. It always ends: “But now they're fine. Fit as a flea.”

She wants to write something more than “Love, G”, but she can't write “Merry Christmas” because that's already printed in the card. The only thing she hates more than a cliche is a platitude, but to make a pithy, personal remark, I need more biographical detail. Who exactly is Allison? “I used to work with her – very quiet, closed person.” “How about: ‘Dear Allison, I hope time has managed to penetrate your reserve?’” “No.”

“Who's Wendy?” “You remember Wendy: she slept with your father.” “Why would I remember that?” (Wait, I *do* remember). “Why are you sending her a card?” She looked at me like I was the most suburban person ever to hold a pen. “This was a long time ago.”

“Who's Sandra?” “Hilarious woman. Terrible mother. Worst mother in the world.” “OK: ‘Dear Sandra, I hope you and your brood are thriving, but if they are, somebody has been spreading lies about you.’” “Fine,” she says, which surprises me.

“Who's Alan?” “Wonderful painter; he could never come out to his parents – it was really sad.” “He's your age?” “Little bit older.” “OK, so now he's 90 and his parents are approximately 110, and you need to give me some information I can use.”

When I got to “J”, I was surprised to find not only my ex-husband but his entire extended family. So I played all those with a very straight bat, except I added to my ex’s, after “Merry Christmas”: “You arse – I pray God it’s your last.” Then: “(Lolololol. I’m writing my mother’s cards. You should see what I put in your brother’s.)”

My mother squinted at this for a bit while she was signing it, but my writing was tiny and she didn’t have a hope.

“Who’s Frank?” “He’s the one who really likes Keir Starmer.” This certainly narrows it down, in her diehard lefty cadre, but I’m still struggling to place him. “How about: ‘You must be very glad of the constitutional reforms announced at this festive time?’” “I think that was mainly Gordon Brown,” she said, then diverted to how statesmanlike Brown looks now, concluding that I should send him a card. “I’m not sending Gordon Brown a card.” “And yet you send my favourite card to John Major.”

“What if I die between posting them and them arriving?”

“You’re not going to.” “People will think I’m so strange.” “Seriously, the least of your problems once you’re dead is what people think of you.”

“That’s when it matters most what people think, when they’re just about to go to your funeral.” “Why would they even think you were strange?” “Well, to be writing cards, on the brink of death. One ought to be doing something fun.” “Are you crazy? This is the most fun we’ve had in years.”

Every name in this article has been changed, apart from John (RIP), John and Norma Major, Keir Starmer and Gordon Brown.

Zoe Williams is a Guardian columnist

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/dec/13/you-remember-wendy-she-slept-with-your-father-what-i-learned-writing-mums-christmas-cards>

Snapshot of 2022Comedy

Standup success was sweet, but the review I cared about most was written on a biscuit

Jordan Gray

It was hard not to get caught up in my own hype at the Edinburgh fringe. A heartfelt gift restored my humility

- What was the image on your phone that defined 2022? [Writers give their perspectives](#)



‘Dazzled into a dull apathy by my own success, this gesture was enough to set me off sobbing.’ A cookie baked by Jordan Gray’s wife, Heli. Photograph: Jordan Gray

Tue 13 Dec 2022 03.00 EST Last modified on Tue 13 Dec 2022 11.51 EST

There is no version of this article that doesn't cast me a braggart. But I hope you'll forgive me a spot of self-aggrandising when I tell you that I am not the hero of this story.

My career exploded this year. Friday Night Live. The London Palladium. But it all started on 1 August at the [Edinburgh festival](#) fringe, with my solo standup show Jordan Gray: Is It a Bird?

A life-changing five-star [review](#) from this paper on day two set everything in motion. From there, the hype train never slowed down. Another five-star review from the Independent, another from the Scotsman, another from the Telegraph ... (I promise this string of boasts is pertinent to the story). It got to the point that a gorgeous four-star review from the Times felt like a kick in the broveries (lady testicles). As the days passed, trapped in one long "lightning bolt moment" that every comic dreams of, I became jaded by all the successes, in such quick succession.

All the while, amid a steady stream of congratulatory flowers and cards, the venue staff's WhatsApp group was abuzz with rumours of a "mystery package" left for a "Mrs Jordan Gray" at one of the festival hubs. It took us two days to track it down: two full carrier bags of plastic tubs, filled with mysterious blocks wrapped in brown paper.

Here is where I introduce my wife, Heli. She is the one consistent joy in my life. She's a croupier from the Czech Republic. Her mind is fascinating. Her heart is overflowing. And her baking is ... hit and miss. Almost to a mathematical certainty. She holds a perfect a 50% batting average. A mouth-watering tart; a disappointing muffin. Some glorious shortbread; a sickening flan. A world-class bakewell; a Victoria sponge that tastes like a screaming match at a Citizens Advice bureau.

After a long courtship online, Heli brought a splodge of grey matter to our first in-person date, which she mercifully identified as "strudel". A grim affair, dusted with so much powdered cinnamon that I came up from my first bite looking like a yuletide Scarface. But a month later, she baked me a heavenly batch of lemon cookies that retroactively justified the evolution of the human tongue.

Back to the mysterious bags. No note or card to identify the sender ... but the human gastrointestinal system never forgets. Bag number one contained half a dozen tubs of the same grey strudel that Heli fed me on our first date. To my shame, I shared most of the strudel with the venue staff, a gaggle of malnourished teens who wouldn't know the difference between strudel and strychnine, which is just as well.

But, as per Heli's record, bag number two was a bona fide hit. An entire Bábovka – a delicious chocolate-marbled Czech bundt cake, upon which I subsisted for the rest of the festival.

And then, at the bottom of the second bag, there was a tiny surprise tub containing the homemade cookie you see in the picture. If I hadn't already recognised the baking, I'd know that handwriting anywhere. My wife was "proud of me".

I instantly pictured Heli in our tiny kitchenette back home in Southend, lovingly hand-piping her pride on to that heart-shaped medallion, gingerly packing the tubs to ensure her message survived the journey hundreds of miles north. Dazzled into a dull apathy by my own success, this simple heartfelt gesture was enough to set me off sobbing. A token of love from the woman who moved across the country to marry me, only for me to take off around the country on tour. The hero who covered my half of the rent for years while I peddled my knob gags to the public for bucket-change.

I will remember that biscuit for the rest of my life, because it restored my humility. It was by far the best "review" I received all month, and a part of Heli must have known I'd never bring myself to eat it. Which is maybe for the best. Because the law of averages says it probably tasted like shit.

- Jordan Gray is a comedian. Her show *Jordan Gray: Is It a Bird?* runs at the Soho Theatre in London from 13 to 23 December
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2022.12.13 - Around the world

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Lockerbie plane bombing

Lockerbie bomb suspect in US custody was ‘abducted from home’ by warlord

Mohammed Abouagela Masud accused by US of having set timer for bomb that destroyed the Boeing 747, killing 270 people in 1988



Paul Hudson holds up a banner of pictures of Lockerbie bombing victims, including that of his daughter Melina, on 12 December in Washington DC.
Photograph: Anna Moneymaker/Getty Images

[Jason Burke](#) Africa correspondent

Mon 12 Dec 2022 18.14 EST Last modified on Tue 13 Dec 2022 16.18 EST

A former Libyan intelligence operative accused of preparing the bomb that brought down [Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie](#), Scotland, in 1988 was taken into US custody after being abducted from his home by a notorious warlord and then detained by an armed militia for two weeks, the Guardian has been told.

Mohammed Abouagela Masud appeared briefly in court in Washington DC on Monday, accused of having set the timer for the bomb that destroyed the Boeing 747, killing 270 people in the most deadly terrorist attack to have taken place on British soil.

[The US Department of Justice announced it had custody of Masud](#) on the weekend, but gave no details of how he had arrived in the US.

Officials with knowledge of the case in Libya told the Guardian that Masud was seized at his home in the capital's Abu Salem neighbourhood by forces loyal to [Abdel Ghani al-Kikili, known as "Gheniwa"](#), who commands the Stability Support Authority (SSA) of the Tripoli-based Government of National Unity (GNU).

At the time, Masud's family told local media that he had been kidnapped by armed men, and accused Tripoli authorities of remaining silent on the abduction.

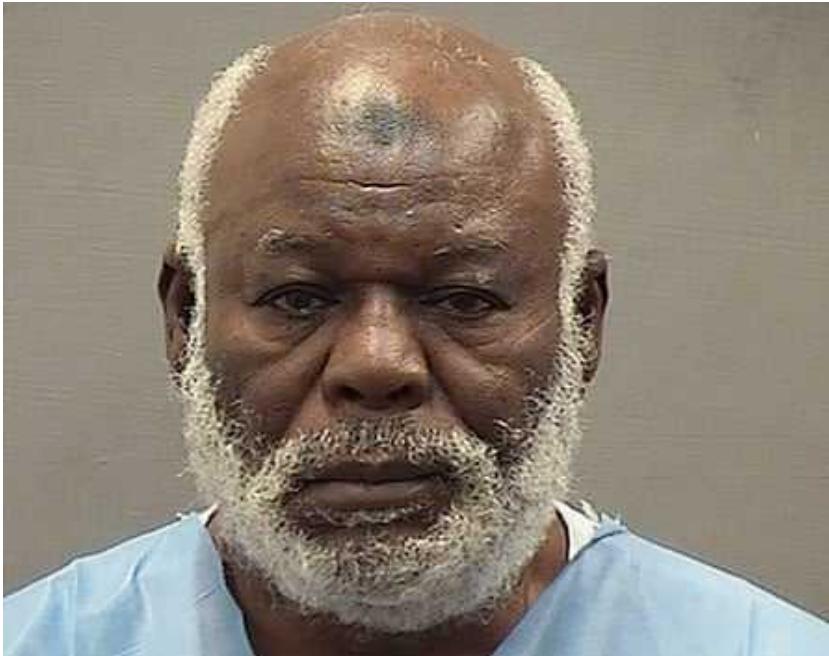
Masud was living in his home after being released from prison six months ago after serving a 10-year sentence for crimes committed under the former regime of Muammar Gaddafi.

After his detention, the suspected bomber was taken to a military base in Misrata, where he was held by one of the militias in the port city.

Around a week later, those holding Masud were contacted by his family who had been frantically trying to trace the missing man. They were reassured that he would return home safely within a short time, the officials said.

However, within another week, a "team of Americans" arrived in Misrata, bundled Masud on to a flight in a private jet from the city's airport to Malta, the Guardian was told.

Masud's nephew, Abdulmenam Marimi, told Reuters on Monday that the family only learned he had been moved to the US when they saw it reported on the news.



Mohammed Abouagela Masud. Photograph: AP

It has not been possible to confirm all the details described by the officials, who are well-placed to know of the case, but experts said the account was “highly plausible”.

Amnesty International has described al-Kikili as an abusive militia commander whose subordinates have a “well-documented history of crimes under international law and other serious human rights violations”. The SSA has responsibility for arresting individuals in “national security” cases.

“For over a decade, militias under his command terrorized people in the Tripoli neighbourhood of Abu Salim through enforced disappearances, torture, unlawful killings and other crimes under international law,” [the organisation said in 2022](#).

Al-Kikili [denied Amnesty’s allegations](#), saying that the SSA was “very keen to apply Libyan law first, which takes into account standards of justice and human rights, and it works within the framework of official state institutions”.

The National, a newspaper based in the UAE, [reported](#) on Monday that Masud’s nephew said his uncle was detained by forces linked to the defence

ministry of Libya's internationally recognised GNU on 17 November, then taken to Misrata, 200km from the capital.

Libya is split between two administrations, and is the site of a proxy struggle for influence between countries including Egypt, Russia, the UAE, Turkey and western nations. The GNU is based in Tripoli.

It is unclear which militia held Masud in Misrata, but all have been repeatedly accused of multiple human rights abuses, including torture, illegal detention, extrajudicial executions, forced displacement and exploitation of migrants.

Jake Sullivan, the US national security adviser, told reporters at Monday's White House press briefing: "Today is a good day because Masud will be facing justice for his alleged role in the 1988 Lockerbie bombing. I will say that this was done in a lawful manner according to established procedures. For more specifics on how it happened I would refer you to the justice department because they're best positioned to be able to speak to that."

The US Department of Justice did not initially respond to a request for comment. In a statement, Michael H Glasheen, the acting assistant director in charge of the FBI's Washington field office, said: "The lawful arrest and presentment in court of the alleged bombmaker ... is the product of hard work and partnerships across the globe."

Scottish prosecutors, who have been closely involved in the investigation, have said the families of victims were told that Masud had been extradited to the US.

The Pan Am flight from London Heathrow to John F Kennedy airport in New York exploded at 31,000ft over [Scotland](#) on 21 December 1988. A total of 259 people were killed onboard, while fiery debris from the destroyed plane killed another 11 on the ground in Lockerbie.

According to the US affidavit, Masud was a key figure in the plot, along with Abdelbaset al-Megrahi and Al-Amin Khalifah Fhimah. Al-Megrahi was jailed for life for mass murder by three Scottish judges at a special court

sitting in the Netherlands in 2001. Fhimah was later acquitted at a trial.

Investigators say Masud met with the other two men in Malta, where he had been directed to fly by a senior Libyan intelligence official with a prepared suitcase. He was asked to set the timer by the other two men, and the suitcase travelled via feeder flights to the hold of the Boeing 747.

Three months after the bombing, the US alleges, Masud and Fhimah met with then Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, who “thanked them for carrying out a great national duty”.

At the time, Gaddafi was in conflict with the west, but under his leadership Libya later renounced terrorism and accepted responsibility for the aircraft bombing in 2003 in return for relief from economic sanctions.

After Gaddafi’s fall, Masud, a longtime explosives expert for the country’s intelligence service, was taken into custody by Libyan law enforcement. In 2017, US officials received a copy of an interview with Masud carried out by Libyan authorities soon after his arrest.

In that interview, US officials said, Masud admitted building the bomb used in the Pan Am attack and working with the two men charged earlier to plant it on the plane. He said the operation had been ordered by Libyan intelligence and that Gaddafi had thanked him and others after the attack, according to an FBI affidavit.

In late 2020, the US justice department announced charges against Masud. With Masud in Libyan custody, though, his prosecution remained largely theoretical.

Additional reporting by David Smith in Washington

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/dec/12/lockerbie-bomb-suspect-masud-us-custody>

[Nuclear power](#)

Breakthrough in nuclear fusion could mean ‘near-limitless energy’

Researchers managed to release more energy than they put in: a positive gain known as ignition

'Major scientific breakthrough': US recreates fusion – video

[Nicola Davis](#) Science correspondent

[@NicolaKSDavis](#)

Mon 12 Dec 2022 14.15 EST Last modified on Tue 13 Dec 2022 13.05 EST

Researchers have reportedly made a breakthrough in the quest to unlock a “near-limitless, safe, clean” source of energy: they have got more energy out of a nuclear fusion reaction than they put in.

Nuclear fusion involves smashing together light elements such as hydrogen to form heavier elements, releasing a huge burst of energy in the process. The approach, which gives rise to the heat and light of the sun and other stars, has been hailed as having huge potential as a sustainable, low-carbon energy source.

However, since nuclear fusion research began in the 1950s, researchers have been unable to demonstrate a positive energy gain, a condition known as ignition.

That was, it seems, until now.

According to a report in the Financial Times, which has yet to be confirmed by the National Ignition Facility (NIF) at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California that is behind the work, researchers have managed to release 2.5 MJ of energy after using just 2.1 MJ to heat the fuel with lasers.

Dr Robbie Scott, of the Science and Technology Facilities Council's (STFC) Central Laser Facility (CLF) Plasma Physics Group, who contributed to this research, described the results as a "momentous achievement".

"Fusion has the potential to provide a near-limitless, safe, clean, source of carbon-free baseload energy," he said. "This seminal result from the National Ignition Facility is the first laboratory demonstration of fusion 'energy-gain' – where more fusion energy is output than input by the laser beams. The scale of the breakthrough for laser fusion research cannot be overstated.

"The experiment demonstrates unambiguously that the physics of Laser Fusion works," he added. "In order to transform NIF's result into power production a lot of work remains, but this is a key step along the path."

Prof Jeremy Chittenden, professor of plasma physics at Imperial College London, agreed. "If what has been reported is true and more energy has been released than was used to produce the plasma, that is a true breakthrough moment which is tremendously exciting," he said.

"It proves that the long sought-after goal, the 'holy grail' of fusion, can indeed be achieved."

But experts have stressed that while the results would be an important proof of principle, the technology is a long way from being a mainstay of the energy landscape. To start with, 0.4MJ is about 0.1kWh – about enough energy to boil a kettle.

"To turn fusion into a power source we'll need to boost the energy gain still further," said Chittenden. "We'll also need to find a way to reproduce the same effect much more frequently and much more cheaply before we can realistically turn this into a power plant."

Prof Justin Wark, professor of physics at the University of Oxford, added that while, in principle, the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory could produce such a result about once a day, a fusion power plant would need to do it 10 times a second.

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And there is another point: the positive energy gain reported ignores the 500MJ of energy that was put into the lasers themselves.

However, Chittenden stressed the NIF was designed for a scientific demonstration, not as a power plant. “The efficiency of converting electrical energy to laser energy was not a factor in its design,” he said.

“Anyone working in fusion would be quick to point out that there is still a long way to go from demonstrating energy gain to getting to wall-plug efficiency where the energy coming from a fusion reactor exceeds its electrical energy input required to run the reactor,” he added.

“The experiments on NIF demonstrate the scientific process of ignition and how this leads to high fusion energy gain, but to turn this into a power station we need to develop simpler methods to reach these conditions, which will need to be more efficient and above all cheaper in order for inertial fusion to be realised as a fusion power source.”

The latest results, if true, top the last big breakthrough by the facility which came just last year when it was announced that the team had hit [70% of the laser energy](#) put in to the experiment released as nuclear energy.

This article was amended on 13 December 2022 to replace a Rubicon reference, on usage grounds.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/dec/12/breakthrough-in-nuclear-fusion-could-mean-near-limitless-energy>.

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[Hong Kong](#)

Trial of Hong Kong tycoon Jimmy Lai delayed after British lawyer denied visa extension

Democracy activist and founder of Apple Daily tabloid newspaper potentially faces life in prison over charges of conspiring to collude with foreign forces



Jimmy Lai was charged under a sweeping national security law imposed by Beijing with the support of the Hong Kong government in 2020. Photograph: Anthony Wallace/AFP/Getty Images

*[Helen Davidson](#) in Taipei
[@heldavidson](#)*

Tue 13 Dec 2022 00.17 EST Last modified on Tue 13 Dec 2022 03.51 EST

A [Hong Kong](#) court has delayed the national security trial of media mogul Jimmy Lai until September 2023, after a hearing revealed Lai's British

lawyer had been denied a visa extension and forced to leave.

Lai's trial was scheduled to begin on Tuesday, but has faced delays, including the Hong Kong government's attempts to prevent his British lawyer Tim Owen from representing him.

The new trial dates are 25 September to 21 November next year, but questions over his legal representation remain.

The trial was supposed to begin last month [but was postponed](#) after the court heard that Hong Kong's immigration department had withheld Owen's application for an extension of his work visa. On Tuesday the court learned that the application had been denied and Owen had left Hong Kong, according to local media.

Prosecutors had previously sought to bar Owen from the case, arguing there was a national security risk in having overseas lawyers working on national security cases. After Hong Kong's highest court rejected this submission, Hong Kong's government appealed to Beijing's highest legislative body, the National People's Congress Standing Committee (NPCSC) to "interpret" its judgment.

On Tuesday, the court heard the NPCSC had not responded to the request to rule on whether foreign lawyers – who are allowed to represent Hong Kong clients under special circumstances – can work on national security cases.

Last week Tam Yiu-chung, Hong Kong's representative delegate on the Standing Committee, said barring foreign lawyers from working on national security cases "matched with the legislative spirit and logic of the national security", Hong Kong Free Press reported. Tam also said that national security defendants could be sent to the mainland for trial if they could not find a lawyer in Hong Kong.

Tam has previously suggested defendants could be extradited to the mainland for trial "if the (Chinese) government thinks it is necessary."

Lai, a 75-year-old democracy activist and founder of the Apple Daily tabloid newspaper, potentially faces life in prison over charges of conspiring to collude with foreign forces, brought under a sweeping national security law imposed by Beijing with the support of the Hong Kong government in 2020.

Lai had recently completed a jail sentence for protest-related convictions, but on Saturday he was sentenced to a further five years and nine months for fraud, related to a contractual dispute. Supporters had suggested the conviction – over one of his companies violating terms of a lease – was politically motivated. The judge, Stanley Chan, said the case was “a simple case of fraud” and not connected to politics or press freedom.

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[China](#)

Mother fears for Chinese Covid protester held for nine days

Yang Zijing, 25, apparently detained in Guangzhou after taking part in rallies against harsh restrictions



People walk past barriers stacked to the side in the Haizhu district of Guangzhou province after protests against Covid restrictions. Photograph: AP

Agence France-Presse in Beijing

Tue 13 Dec 2022 04.13 EST Last modified on Tue 13 Dec 2022 04.33 EST

A young protester has been held in police detention in southern [China](#) for nine days after taking part in rallies against Covid restrictions, her mother has said, expressing fear and anguish over her daughter's safety.

China last week effectively [ended its harsh zero-Covid policy](#), after years of economic damage and simmering public discontent [that erupted](#) in

nationwide protests on a scale unseen in decades.

But while the decision to lift the regulations prompted a wave of jubilation – and suggestions by state media that the government was responding to the changing mood of the people – police had already begun a crackdown.

Yang Zijing, 25, was detained on the evening of 4 December in the southern metropolis of Guangzhou after attending a protest the week before, her mother said.

“They detained so many people who were gradually released, why is she still in there?” she said.

The woman, surnamed Gao, said her daughter’s roommate had told her that a group of police asked to check the water meter and did not show identification when entering. “They searched the apartment and took her away, along with her phone and laptop.”

Agence France-Presse has learned of multiple cases of mostly young protesters detained for up to 24 hours in Beijing and Shanghai, with police deploying sophisticated technology to track them down and threaten them in phone calls and in-person interrogations.

Gao rushed to Guangzhou on 8 December upon learning of her daughter’s detention, but she and a lawyer have been refused access to either her daughter or the police officer handling her case. “They refused to give us any information,” she said.

Under Chinese law, when an individual is taken into custody and interrogated, police have 24 hours to decide whether to release them or formally detain them. If a suspect is detained, they must then be transferred to a pretrial detention centre within 24 hours.

But Gao said police had still not transferred Yang to a detention centre – allegedly due to the “epidemic situation”.

A police officer at the Guangzhou station told AFP he could not comment on Yang's case over the phone.

A lawyer offering pro bono advice to protesters said on condition of anonymity that most detentions she was aware of had not exceeded 24 hours. But at least six demonstrators in Shanghai and Guangzhou had been held for a week or longer with some likely to receive criminal charges, she said.

"There were no reports about [the protests] in Chinese media and I had no idea it happened ... I didn't know why they were holding up blank paper," said Gao, referring to the sheets of paper held at protests as a symbol of opposition to censorship.

Friends of Yang described her as a bookish and introverted person who possessed a strong sense of social justice and advocated for marginalised groups. But she had suffered during the pandemic as a recent graduate working in a tough economic climate, her mother said.

"She was struggling financially. She felt like she couldn't do anything in the past two years, lockdowns were everywhere," she said. "Now everyone thinks about the benefits that China's reopening will bring, but what about the people who are locked up for demanding reopening?"

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Wieambilla shooting

Queensland police officers Matthew Arnold and Rachel McCrow ‘didn’t stand a chance’ in Wieambilla shooting

Police commissioner Katarina Carroll says it’s a miracle two officers survived after being confronted by a ‘hail of gunshots’

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Queensland police officers constable Rachel McCrow and constable Matthew Arnold were killed after arriving at a Wieambilla property searching for Nathaniel Train. Composite: Queensland police

Cait Kelly

Mon 12 Dec 2022 19.47 ESTLast modified on Thu 15 Dec 2022 20.41 EST

Queensland's police commissioner, Katarina Carroll, has said two officers killed in a shooting in Wieambilla on Monday night "did not stand a chance" and it was a miracle that two others managed to survive the ambush.

Constables Matthew Arnold, 26, and Rachel McCrow, 29, arrived at the property seeking information about [missing man Nathaniel Train](#) when confronted by a "hail of gunshots", with another officer suffering a bullet graze and a fourth surviving by hiding in long grass. A neighbour was also gunned down.

A special response team of 16 officers then shot dead three people following a siege.

Speaking from Chinchilla on Tuesday morning, Carroll described the deaths of two officers as "devastating".

She said she had been to the property that morning to look at the "confronting" scene and been briefed on the start of the investigation.

"I've got to say, from what I have seen, they didn't stand a chance," she said. "The fact that two got out alive is a miracle."

When asked what she saw at the scene, Carroll said the officers had been shot at in an open area.

"Look, I won't go into too much of that, other than to say that when you are in that scene, walking towards the house and where this apparently took place, they were in an exposed area," she said.

"I would go back to say that I cannot believe that two officers got out alive," she said.

The assailants then lit a grass fire to locate the officer who had hidden. When a 58-year-old man, a neighbour from another property, arrived to check what was happening, he was also shot and killed.

“From what I understand, the neighbour was going to see what was occurring and I’m not sure if it was because of the fire or hearing weapons being shot,” Carroll said. “But that neighbour, like my officers, didn’t stand a chance either.”

A siege situation ensued, with 16 specialist police officers and PolAir responding to the incident. Three attackers were killed in the firefight, and all three are currently considered offenders.

The deceased police officers were new to the force, and both were stationed in the close-knit community of Tara, Carroll said.

“Matthew was sworn in as a police officer in March 2020, while Rachel was sworn in last year in June 2021,” she said. Both officers started their careers in Dalby before transferring to Tara.

“Losing one of our own has a profound impact on every single officer and their families. To lose two officers in one incident is absolutely devastating,” Carroll said.

“This event is the largest loss of police life we have suffered in a single incident in many years.”

Carroll said she would be visiting their families soon and that the investigations of the scene could take weeks.

On Tuesday morning Queensland’s premier, Annastacia Palaszczuk, announced state flags would be lowered to half-mast, and some buildings, including Brisbane’s Story Bridge, would be lit up in blue and white to commemorate the dead officers.

The president of the Queensland Police Union, Ian Leavers, said a fundraiser had been set up for their families.

“They were both amazing people who were well respected by their colleagues and those who were close to them,” Leavers said.

“I spoke with Matthew’s father last night. It’s hard to know what to say. He was devastated.

“Our thoughts go out to Matthew’s parents and Rachel’s family as well.”

Their names will be added to the police remembrance wall in the botanical gardens in Brisbane and in Canberra, he said.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/dec/13/queensland-police-shooting-officers-matthew-arnold-rachel-mccrow-named-wieambilla-qld>

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