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[**Opinion**](#)[**Emmanuel Macron**](#)

Orbán, Le Pen... voters are sending a chill message to Europe's beleaguered centre

[Will Hutton](#)



Emmanuel Macron faces the fight of his political life as the presidential election opens today. His fate has lessons for parties continent-wide



Marine Le Pen, the far-right Rassemblement National party's presidential candidate, speaks on French TV channel TF1 on 6 April. Photograph: Ludovic Marin/EPA

Sun 10 Apr 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Sun 10 Apr 2022 03.09 EDT

Today's Brexit Conservatives will hate the comparison, but there are inconvenient parallels between their domestic agenda and Hungary's newly elected, self-confessed apostle of democratic illiberalism, Viktor Orbán, French uber-nationalist and anti-immigrant Marine Le Pen and Poland's murky [Law and Justice party](#). All trumpet a boastful nationalism and disregard international law, all aim to create a hostile climate for immigrants, all believe the electoral system should be manipulated for their advantage, all distrust a pluralist media, all want to limit dissent and expand summary policing powers, all incline to traditional views about sexuality and the family and, to varying degrees, all are climate change deniers.

All habitually dissimulate and even lie; criticism is fake news. The Johnson government's police, nationality and borders and election bills come from these same rightwing, anti-Enlightenment, illiberal roots, as does its assault on public service broadcasting and, of course, the big beast of them all, Brexit. Paradoxically, Brexit Toryism is very European – if [Europe](#) at its worst.

Yet for the mainstream centre and liberal left the threat is that electorates, far from caring about this retreat from openness and democracy into nationalist, anti-democratic closure, happily collude with it, even vote for it. Orbán emphatically won [two-thirds of the vote](#) in Hungary last Sunday as war raged in Ukraine, even if aided and abetted by a rigged media and voting system. Similarly, French voters, having briefly rallied to President Emmanuel Macron as war leader, are now inclining to Le Pen, who is expected to run him a close second in the first round of the presidential election today. In the final runoff on 24 April, the pollsters are saying the result is too close to call – even if Macron is still considered to be just ahead.

What's going on? One factor is the impact of globalisation on advanced economies' economic and social structures, captured by the famous "[elephant curve](#)" depicting how globalisation has influenced global income distribution over the decades. The curve in the middle is the relative improvement of incomes in many medium-income countries, particularly of their middle class, who have been helped as their countries catch up with richer neighbours. The elephant's long, drooping tail is the continuing disadvantage faced by the world's poor, the downward sloping of the trunk is what has happened to the incomes of the mass of workers in industrialised countries, while the last triumphant upward curve of the U-shaped trunk describes the ever lusher incomes of the elite – globalisation's unchallenged beneficiaries. When ordinary French voters, at the wrong end of this global phenomenon, accuse Macron of being the president of the rich, this is what they mean.

But the political ramifications are not playing out traditionally, as the French elections show. Voters may want to vent their anger on the unfairness, but rather than look to a fragmented left for reform and an affirmation of social solidarities, they are tempted by explanations that blame foreigners' incursions into their national space and many believe that illiberal, quasi-racist patriotism offers the best response. Le Pen is a brilliant exponent. [France](#) knows her time-honoured hostility to immigrants and especially Muslims, but criss-crossing France on her presidential campaign she has emphasised how her "patriotic" economic policies favouring small business and local producers will mean independence from foreigners, more jobs and lower prices. She has abandoned talking about France leaving the EU – the self-defeating nature of Brexit is obvious even to her – which has helped her

court mainstream voters, aided by having an even more extravagant anti-immigrant candidate, Éric Zemmour, on her right adding to her apparent new reasonableness.

Emmanuel Macron is discovering, just as Blair did in Britain, that you cannot govern just as a centrist

But she remains toxic. She is an “organicist”, seeing French society as “a living being threatened by foreign bodies”, as Ivonne Trippenbach and Franck Johannès wrote in *Le Monde* last week. Her project is to regenerate organic French society by privileging pure French nationals. This will involve a constitutional coup – rewriting the constitution with its roots in the 1789 revolution, suspending much EU law and withdrawing from the European convention on human rights. “Politics,” she says, “comes before law.” Moreover, her economic programme is unworkable. Her election would split France, stop its economic resurgence in its tracks, unleash racist demons and transfix the EU.

France’s left, like Britain’s, has had to perform a difficult straddling act. It needed to keep its lines open to the disconcerted centre with its worries about crime and immigration, while challenging capitalism’s worst proclivities, as well as affirm its commitment to strong social support and above all assert its belief in the best of Enlightenment values. It has failed calamitously, in part because of its own endemic divisions and in part because Macron made a better pitch to the centre. But Macron is discovering, as Tony Blair did in Britain, that you cannot govern just as a centrist. Durable governing coalitions are of the centre and centre-left or centre and centre-right, otherwise there is no organising governing political philosophy or sufficient electoral ballast. Macron is in difficulty because he has jettisoned too much of the left. He has a fortnight to reclaim that ground and build a durable coalition.

Yet Ukraine’s incredible stand against Vladimir Putin’s criminal war – and President Volodymyr Zelenskiy’s eloquent appeals to the best of what Europe and the west must stand for – is a game-changer. It has not only re legitimised the EU and brought it together – it is a forceful call to all

western electorates about where illiberalism, uber-nationalism and suppression lead.

Blaming foreigners, appealing to a mystic conception of your country and trying to transmute you and your party into unchallenged masters of the state lead to what is happening in Ukraine. The centre and centre-left – in Britain, in France, indeed everywhere in Europe – have to make that case, along with feasible if aggressive programmes that make capitalism work for the common good. It is time to reassert the best of ourselves and it falls to Macron over the next fortnight to find the words, energy, his moderate left-of-centre roots and the elan to do just that. It is a common European fight. Epic times.

Will Hutton is an Observer columnist

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Opinion[**Rishi Sunak**](#)

The Observer view on the Sunak family's tax affairs

[Observer editorial](#)

The chancellor still has many questions to answer but it is clear that he has further damaged citizens' trust in UK democracy



Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak with his wife Akshata Murthy.
Photograph: Ian West/PA

Sun 10 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT

It has never been enough for politicians to abide by the law. Voters quite rightly expect much more: for their leaders to uphold standards of integrity and honesty and the spirit of the rules that they expect everyone else to live by. This is why the revelations about the financial affairs of [Rishi Sunak](#) and his wife are so damaging, not just to him personally, but to the government in which he serves and the wider political system. Sunak's wife appears to have reduced her tax liability through tax arrangements that call into

question their household's commitment to paying their fair share into the Treasury coffers that Sunak, as chancellor, is responsible for.

Sunak is believed to be the [wealthiest member of parliament](#). But his own fortune is dwarfed by that of his wife, Akshata Murty, whose stake in her father's business Infosys is worth around £690m, making her one of the UK's [richest women](#). Sunak is not only one of the most senior members of the government, he is widely acknowledged to have prime ministerial ambitions. It is therefore reasonable to expect that he and his wife would make meticulous efforts to organise their financial affairs so that their primary tax liability is in the UK, the country in which they and their children live and which Sunak clearly aspires to lead.

The revelations of the last few days are therefore extraordinary in what they reveal, both about Sunak's lack of political skill and his diminished sense of responsibility to the exchequer. First, we learned that despite living in the UK, Murty is non-domiciled for UK tax purposes, meaning that she pays tax on her global income in India rather than the UK. We do not know whether and how much tax she paid on the £54.4m in dividends she has received from Infosys over the last seven years; whether tax was paid at the lower rate that is applicable in India or whether she may even have used a tax haven to [reduce her tax liabilities further](#). Second, it transpires that Sunak, like his wife, held a US green card during six years as an MP and 18 months as chancellor. This means he was a permanent US resident for tax purposes, legally committed to making "the US your permanent home" while a [senior UK minister](#). It also means Murty had made that commitment to US authorities, yet Sunak's defence of her non-domiciled status in the UK was that she eventually planned to [move to India](#) to care for her parents. Lastly, it has emerged that Sunak has been listed as a beneficiary of [tax haven trusts](#) in the British Virgin Islands and the Cayman Islands since becoming chancellor. The British Virgin Islands are the subject of an anti-corruption [inquiry](#) set up by the British government, due to report in the [coming weeks](#).

There are substantive issues here about how much Sunak and Murty have saved in terms of their tax liabilities in this way. The exact figure is unknown but could be substantial. Even though Murty has now said she will pay taxes on her global income in the UK, if she remains non-domiciled, she

stands to save [£280m in inheritance tax](#) under the provisions of a 1956 Anglo-Indian tax treaty. It is completely inappropriate for the chancellor and his wife to use the tax-reducing potential of non-domiciliary status in a way that simply isn't available to the vast majority of British citizens, many of whom will be paying more tax as a result of Sunak's spring statement.

Quite aside from the substantive issues, Sunak's defensive reaction has revealed his own sense of entitlement. He has criticised journalists asking entirely legitimate questions about his wife's [financial interests in Russia](#), as other companies have pulled out. His political allies have tried to write this off as a "political hit job". The source of these leaks is irrelevant to the questions they raise. Sunak appears bemused that voters might expect him to go above and beyond the law in terms of his family's tax affairs.

There are parallels with the other scandals to hit this government: the fact that illegal parties were held in Downing Street attended by Boris Johnson as the public were expected to abide by strict lockdown restrictions that prevented some from saying goodbye to their loved ones. The whiff of financial corruption that hangs over the question of how Johnson funded the [renovation of his Downing Street flat](#). The fact that there have been no consequences for Priti Patel after the independent adviser on the ministerial code found she had broken it by [bullying civil service staff](#). This all contributes to the sense that we are governed by ministers who regard the rules as being for other people, not themselves.

As we saw with the expense scandal more than a decade ago, this damages citizens' trust in democracy. A new survey on the future of democracy published in the *Observer* today finds 78% of the public think politicians understand their lives badly and just 6% think their voters' views are the main influence on government decision-making. Sunak has done much more than weaken his own leadership prospects: he has undermined public faith in politicians more broadly.

OpinionUkraine

The Observer view on the west's response to war in Ukraine

Observer editorial

In the face of Vladimir Putin's cruelty, Nato must consider taking much tougher options



People wait to board a bus during their evacuation in Kramatorsk, Ukraine, on 9 April. Photograph: Andriy Andriyenko/AP

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Russia's missile attack on [Kramatorsk](#) railway station is an act of unforgivable barbarism. How many more such atrocities must occur before western leaders admit their Ukraine strategy is failing? How many more children must die before Nato stops making excuses for inaction? How much longer before Joe Biden, Boris Johnson, Olaf Scholz and the rest face up to what seems an inescapable choice: either intervene directly – or lose?

These are uncomfortable, frightening questions. But with every missile that explodes, with every illegal cluster bomb and artillery shell, with every war crime committed, they become harder to duck. Sanctions on Russia and arms for Ukraine are celebrated by western governments as an unprecedented, unifying success. They tell each other what a good job they're doing. But it's not working. [Vladimir Putin](#) has been branded a war criminal and pariah. His funds have been frozen, his cronies penalised. Moscow's strategic objectives have not been met, his discredited army is a vicious rabble, his war aims are in ruins, just like Mariupol and Kharkiv. His country faces incalculable long-term economic and reputational damage.

But Putin does not care. He does not stop. Nor is there any sign he will. Good-faith attempts to talk sense to him have failed, used by the Kremlin to obfuscate and delay. Hopes that internal opposition may unseat him remain mere hopes. Meanwhile, Ukraine's brave, terrified citizens await the next dreadful blow while their president pleads for more arms, more help, more anything.

Russian "[monsters](#)" were responsible for the carnage at Kramatorsk, Volodymyr Zelenskiy said. It was part of a deliberate strategy to kill civilians and create a lifeless wasteland. "They have not abandoned their methods. Lacking the strength and courage to fight us on the battlefield, they are cynically destroying the civilian population... This is an evil that has no limits. And if it is not punished, it will never stop," Zelenskiy said.

He's right. Of course he's right. Anyone watching television or reading uncensored newspapers and social media knows he's right. And so, too, do all 30 Nato powers. Yet even as they condemn Kramatorsk, [Bucha](#) and other obscenities, millions more unprotected Ukrainians are told to expect an even greater enormity – an all-out offensive in eastern Ukraine by reinforced Russia troops.

This, as the west watches, is what Ukraine's democracy has been reduced to by Putin. The people's choice: run for your life or face being raped, tortured and killed.

Such barbarity cannot stand. Continued, shaming, ineffectual western shouting from the sidelines is unacceptable. The sooner Biden and the rest stop wringing their hands and start calling the shots the better. Though welcome, Boris Johnson's show of solidarity in Kyiv yesterday will not change calculations in Moscow. Putin rules by fear. So frighten him back. He does not want a fight with the west, let alone a third world war – Nato's excuse of last resort for refusing to confront him. He knows he'd lose. It scares him.

So here are some of the hard choices western leaders must urgently consider. First, direct intervention to create a safe haven in western Ukraine, where displaced people may congregate instead of fleeing abroad. Inform Moscow in advance of its location and boundaries. Be clear it will be protected by Nato air power and ground forces invited in by Kyiv.

Second, declare the unoccupied city of Odesa off-limits. Send naval forces into international waters in the Black Sea and warn [Russia](#) to cease coastal bombardments or face serious, unspecified consequences. Third, tell Putin that if his artillery and missile units fire on civilians again, as in Kramatorsk, they will be deemed legitimate Nato military targets. Fourth: supply fighter planes and tanks to Kyiv. Fifth: block all Russian fossil fuel exports.

These are radical choices. The risks are obvious. But the only alternative is endless slaughter. If the west is serious about stopping the war, these and similarly robust actions may be the only way left.

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OpinionRishi Sunak

The stench of entitlement is now oozing from Rishi Sunak's home as well as Boris Johnson's

[Andrew Rawnsley](#)



The chancellor's family fortune was shielded from his own tax collectors – how could he expect the public not to be outraged?



Rishi Sunak and Akshata Murty: ‘You needed your smallest violin to accompany his lament that the couple were the victims of a ‘political hit job’.’ Photograph: Reuters

Sun 10 Apr 2022 03.29 EDT

During the furore about who picked up the bill for the lavish makeover of the prime minister’s flat, the chancellor’s people made a big thing of declaring that there was no risk of Rishi Sunak generating a stink such as wallpapergate. The Treasury released a statement pointedly letting it be known that Mr Sunak had paid for the refurbishment of his family quarters in Downing Street from his own deep pockets. Shortly afterwards, an admiring Tory MP chuckled to me: “Rishi is rich enough to buy his wallpaper himself.”

After the many tawdry episodes associated with Boris Johnson, the idea that his next-door neighbour was scandal-free recommended Mr Sunak to Tory MPs as their next leader. The contrast between the two men – a cash-grubbing prime minister splattered with sleaze versus a chancellor advertising himself as the squeaky-clean, family man – also made Mr Sunak the more attractive figure to voters.

Although that was only a short time ago, it seems like ancient history. That was before the public was outraged to learn that his wife, Akshata Murty, the daughter of an Indian billionaire, has been using [non-domicile status](#) to avoid paying UK taxes on her massive overseas earnings. It transpires that the chancellor is truly a believer in lower taxes – so long as they are for his own family.

The first response to the uproar from Mr Sunak, his wife and their apologists was to protest that she was breaking no laws by exploiting this tax break for the mega-rich. That was revealing about them in itself, because it so spectacularly failed to understand why people would be angry even if the arrangement was legal. Some of the public may resent the great wealth of the Sunaks, some may admire it, some may care a lot that they enjoy stratospheric riches way beyond the dreams of most Britons and some may care not a bit. Nearly all of the public will have had a reasonable expectation that the Sunaks followed the tax rules that apply to the typical voter.

For an Instagram politician, it took the chancellor a remarkably long time to grasp how untenable this was

The chancellor's family's fortune being shielded from his tax collectors would smell rotten in any circumstances. The current context made it absolutely toxic. He is ratcheting up the taxes on tens of millions of Britons with modest incomes who have no choice but to pay up. He responded to criticism of his recent spring statement by arguing that the Treasury did not have the funds to do much to alleviate the cost of living crunch on poorer households. Only for everyone to learn that there would be more money in the kitty if the chancellor's wife paid tax in the way most people do. It was the morality, stupid. It was the inequity. It was the unfairness.

For an Instagram politician who is an obsessive curator of his personal image, it took the chancellor a remarkably long time to grasp how untenable this was. The Sunaks initially even tried to persuade us that they deserved not to be the target of fury, but objects of sympathy. You needed your smallest violin to accompany his lament that the couple were the victims of a “[political hit job](#)”. In one notably self-pitying interview, the chancellor went so far as to claim that his opponents were attempting “to smear my

wife" in order to "[get at me](#)". It is true that he has enemies, the biggest of whom is not sitting in a newspaper office or on the opposition benches, but living next door at Number 10. Regardless of the origins of the leak and the motives of the leaker, there is no "smear" in discussing whether it is right for the chancellor's wife to take advantage of a tax scheme unavailable to the vast majority of Britons.

The storm had been raging for 48 hours before Mr Sunak fully grasped how career-endangering this had become. The couple issued a statement in the name of his wife that made a nonsense of their previous assertions about why she has not been paying UK taxes on her [overseas earnings](#). The statement announced she would be doing so in future, claiming now to "understand and appreciate the British [sense of fairness](#)". That was the minimum necessary to try to contain the damage to her husband's reputation before it was irreparably broken. It had been striking how very few Conservative MPs were willing to put themselves in front of a microphone to defend him. A growing number of Tories had been privately saying that Mr Sunak could not remain at the Treasury if his wife didn't change her tax status.

Asked to name the price of a loaf, he channelled Marie Antoinette when he answered: 'We all have different breads in our house.'

The chancellor will be hoping that they have retreated to a position that is more sustainable, but there are still [outstanding questions](#) about the family's tax affairs which the media and the opposition will continue to press. There has been no promise to pay the very large sums, which some estimates put at £20m, she has saved from the arrangement [over the past decade](#). It will be legitimately asked: if it is right and fair that she pays UK tax on her overseas income in future, isn't it right and fair that she makes good on the tax swerved in the past?

Questions will also persist about Mr Sunak's character and judgment. It will be even more of an issue whether a super-rich chancellor can be the man to persuade less affluent Britons that they will have to endure hard times. Even some Tories raised their eyebrows when the Sunaks made a donation of more than £100,000 to his old school, [Winchester College](#), at a time when he

is denying state schools the resources they say they need. Asked recently to name the price of a loaf, he channelled Marie Antoinette when he answered: “We all have different breads in our house.” Houses would have been a more accurate answer, because they own at least four properties in the UK and abroad as well as having the use of two government residences, the Downing Street flat and Dorneywood in Buckinghamshire. Colleagues have boggled that the Sunaks judged this to be the right time to be spending loads of money on a swimming pool, tennis court and gym complex at their manor house in his Yorkshire constituency. It’s maybe not the best look for a chancellor jacking up taxes amid the most severe squeeze on real incomes in decades.

There’s much debate among Tories about why the chancellor failed to appreciate that his wife’s tax position was bound to cause uproar. Is it because he is so rich or because his political instincts are so poor that he could not see how this would look through the eyes of the electorate? Did he understand that it would look terrible, but foolishly assumed that it could be kept hidden? Did he expect it to be revealed one day, but gambled that it wouldn’t trigger an outcry? Did he anticipate an outcry, but reckoned he could brazen it out? Was he naive, idiotic, complacent, cavalier or arrogant?

His popularity went up like a rocket during the pandemic. Now it is coming down like a stick. His approval ratings, once the envy of every other politician at Westminster, were already tumbling. In our latest Opinium poll, they have fallen further to a record low score of minus 15. Among Tory members, the most authoritative survey of their views of ministers suggests that he has plummeted from top of their pops to third from bottom.

This will be greeted with the salty tears of a grinning crocodile next door at Number 10. In terms of the jostling for power within the Tory hierarchy, anything that hurts the chancellor is regarded as helpful to the prime minister. The self-inflicted wounding of the man who was, until very recently, his likeliest successor will make Mr Johnson feel more secure in the premiership. Which also means that this is surely further bad news for the Tory party’s standing with the public.

The two most senior members of the government have now scandalised the country. Partygate came about because so many of the inhabitants of

Number 10 thought that they were free to flout the Covid restrictions imposed on everyone else and were encouraged to behave atrociously by having a boss with a career history of shameless rule-breaking. A similar sense of entitlement led the chancellor and his wife to decide that there was nothing wrong with avoiding paying UK tax on a huge portion of their vast family income.

There's a pattern to the behaviour of this government. Its leaders demand painful sacrifices of everyone else while claiming special privileges for themselves. There's one rule for them. There's another for the little people. That's how they act because that's how they think.

Andrew Rawnsley is Chief Political Commentator of the Observer

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Observer comment cartoon

Rishi Sunak

Rishi Sunak and Boris Johnson as Laurel and Hardy – cartoon

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[Notebook](#)[Ed Sheeran](#)

Ed Sheeran has a plan to tackle claims of plagiarism

[Tim Adams](#)



Fresh from his legal success, the singer now films his creative process in the studio



The Beatles, in a scene from Peter Jackson's documentary about the band.
Photograph: TCD/Prod.DB/Alamy

Sat 9 Apr 2022 10.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 9 Apr 2022 14.52 EDT

Since I first saw it last year, I can't stop [rewatching that minute](#) in Peter Jackson's Beatles documentary when Paul McCartney, noodling around on his guitar in front of a yawning George and Ringo, locates the chords and words to Get Back. Accounts of McCartney's facility for melody – waking up with Yesterday in his head – have long been parables of the creative process, but seeing, in Jackson's film, a song that all the world is about to know take form in real time is to witness something like a casual miracle.

Speaking to *Newsnight* on Friday, Ed Sheeran suggested that such footage may become a legal necessity. Of his courtroom [victory against claims of plagiarism](#) in his song Shape of You brought by the grime artist Sami Switch, Sheeran noted how these days in the studio he employs a version of CCTV to ensure no hook or bass line is seen to be stolen. "I just film everything," he said. "We've had claims come through on the songs and we go, 'Well, here's the footage... You'll see there's nothing there'."

The most famous case of musical borrowing was upheld against George Harrison, whose My Sweet Lord appeared to lift the structure of the 1963 hit

He's So Fine. Sheeran, the most prolific of current melody makers, is desperate, he suggested, not to get to "the George Harrison point where he was scared to touch the piano because he might be touching someone else's note". Still, it seems that the kind of big bang euphoria of Get Back appearing out of the ether will be a thing of the past. Songwriters will become like Premier League strikers, waiting for the verdict of VAR before they can celebrate a goal.

The corrections



TS Eliot: blessed with a good editor. Photograph: George Douglas/Getty Images

Over the course of this weekend, the [centenary of TS Eliot's masterpiece *The Waste Land*](#) is being celebrated in a festival of music and performance at 22 London churches. Scanning the programme, one crucial component seemed to be neglected. There was no aria or ragtime segment in praise of editors. It's always worth remembering that were it not for the red-pen interventions of Eliot's friend, Ezra Pound, the opening line of the poem would not have been "April is the cruellest month", but "First we had a couple of feelers down at Tom's place". And the gospel voices this weekend might have been hymning something titled not *The Waste Land* but He Do the Police in Different Voices.

The long game



Tiger Woods: destined for greatness. Photograph: Bob Strong/UPI/REX/Shutterstock

Watching Tiger Woods force himself around the Masters course after his car accident, I remembered commissioning a profile for this paper, exactly 25 years ago, just before he first sauntered out at Augusta. I dug that piece out to reread it, as a kind of before and after. The story quoted Woods's father, Earl, the retired Green Beret lieutenant colonel: "Tiger will do more than any other man in history to change the course of humanity," he prophesied. "More than Gandhi?" his interviewer asked. "Yes, because he's qualified through his ethnicity to accomplish miracles. He's the bridge between east and west. He's the chosen one. The world is just getting a taste of his power."

Watching Woods's face a quarter of a century on, you tend, as with all sporting greats in their last act, to see not the enormous triumphs of his career, but the apparent torments of never quite living up to that impossible billing.

Those whom the gods want to destroy first give them parents who believe them to be the second coming..

Tim Adams is an Observer columnist

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OpinionEnergy

Britain was promised a bold and visionary energy plan. But we've been sold a dud

[Jim Watson](#)

One of Britain's top scientists says the new power security strategy does little to help people or the planet



A target to double onshore wind capacity by 2030 was removed from the UK energy security strategy. Photograph: Wales/Alamy

Sat 9 Apr 2022 14.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 9 Apr 2022 14.52 EDT

These are unsettling times. As scientists have issued [ringing warnings](#) about the dangers we face from continued fossil fuel burning, an [energy crisis](#) has been triggered by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This unprecedented double threat clearly requires an urgent response, which the government supplied last week in the form of its [energy security strategy](#). And it includes some eye-catching headlines, particularly on the expansion of nuclear power.

But does it deliver what it says on the tin?

The answer is straightforward. It fails. At the heart of most definitions of energy security is reliability of supplies for households and businesses. This is usually complemented by a focus on affordability. It is no good if energy is available, but the price is too high for businesses to function or households to keep warm.

The new strategy does very little to deal with the immediate impacts of high fossil fuel prices. While the government has announced some help for households via loans and a council tax reduction, this is simply not enough. The energy price cap has already risen to almost £2,000 a year and a further rise is due in the autumn. This comes on top of a wider cost of living crisis and high levels of inflation.

While more money to help people pay their bills is needed, this must be accompanied by action to prevent these acute impacts in future. This means making homes more efficient and switching away from fossil fuels for heating. It is nearly a decade since effective policies for home energy efficiency were cancelled and replaced with new approaches, such as the green deal, which have failed spectacularly. As a result, the steady improvements in efficiency and financial benefits to households have virtually stopped. A new programme of home upgrades is urgently needed. This would not only reduce our dependence on gas, but would also cut bills and carbon emissions.

According to many headlines, nuclear power is the “centrepiece” of the strategy. The government’s plans are ambitious, but delivery will be difficult. New nuclear plants will not have an impact for many years. The Treasury’s fingerprints are visible in the careful caveats in the strategy, including an insistence that new projects are “subject to a value for money and relevant approvals”. This reflects the long history of rising costs within the nuclear sector and the financial risks that consumers or taxpayers will be exposed to.

British nuclear power programmes have been the subject of many false dawns. In 1979, energy minister David Howell announced a programme of

10 nuclear reactors over the next decade. Only one reactor was built, at Sizewell in Suffolk. In 2010, the coalition government agreed to another [eight-reactor programme](#). That new programme has also produced only one plant: [Hinkley C in Somerset](#), which is due to [start operating in 2026](#). While nuclear can reduce emissions and improve some aspects of energy security, the new plans will only be realised if the industry can bring down costs.

The government has pulled its punches and avoided measures that would have a more immediate impact on energy security

The real heart of the strategy is [increased ambition for offshore wind](#), which is due to expand at least fourfold by 2030. This is a genuine British success story from which politicians should learn lessons. Initially very expensive, it has been supported by a series of policies by successive governments – and that has brought costs down dramatically. Pushing further with an increased target makes a lot of sense. But it will require more investment in electricity network infrastructure, not just the wind turbines themselves.

The government's willingness to learn from success has clear limits, though. When the strategy turns its attention to onshore wind and solar, logic fails. The costs of both technologies have also fallen dramatically in recent years. They get some warm words, including aspiration that solar capacity will expand by five times by 2035. There are also innovative plans for a few local communities to share the benefits of new onshore wind farms. But a target to double capacity by 2030 was [taken out at the 11th hour](#) and very restrictive planning rules for onshore wind remain.

Realising these increased ambitions for renewable electricity will require further market reforms. At the moment, cheap renewable power does not translate into low bills for consumers. This is because gas plants often set the wholesale price and their costs are very high. Reforms are needed so that businesses and households can get access to the economic benefits of cheaper renewables. Reforms are also needed to ensure that there is enough flexibility in the system to deal with higher and higher shares of generation that depends on the wind and sun.

Finally, what of the role of fossil fuels, which are at the root of the crisis? Plans to produce more in the UK are understandable, but are not the long-term solution to climate change or energy security. They will have very little impact on prices, but could help to squeeze out some Russian imports. The promise of a new independent study of fracking is a distraction, however. It is clear that fracking in the UK is nowhere near as easy to implement as it has been in the United States. Its contribution to gas needs will be modest at best. Industry claims that fracking could produce a large share of the UK's gas demand are not credible, based on the evidence we have so far.

In short, the government has pulled its punches and avoided measures that would have a more immediate impact on energy security – mainly by reducing the amount of energy we need to use. Instead, it has produced a mixed bag of energy supply proposals. While some are credible, a large nuclear power programme will require huge amounts of political and financial capital. History suggests that this will be very difficult to deliver.

Professor Jim Watson is director, UCL Institute for Sustainable Resources

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[**Names in the newsPeaky Blinders**](#)

I doff my flat cap to Cillian Murphy in the Peaky Blinders finale

[Rebecca Nicholson](#)



Unlike some series, the hugely popular gangs of Birmingham saga knew when to stop and just how to do it



Gangster-turned-MP: Cillian Murphy as Tommy Shelby in Peaky Blinders.
Photograph: Robert Viglasky/BBC/Caryn Mandabach Productions Ltd.

Sat 9 Apr 2022 12.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 9 Apr 2022 14.53 EDT

Last Sunday night, almost four million people [tuned in](#) to witness Cillian Murphy signing off as Tommy Shelby – for now, at least.

The finale of *Peaky Blinders*, which had spent much of the season hinting that it might do away with our antihero for good, instead opted to keep matters open, with a masterful twist that might as well have been an apology for all of the meandering routes it took to get there. (I can't have been the only one wondering why the gangster-turned-MP, who remained handy with a firearm and loose with the law, still appeared to have more scruples and ethics than most of the bunch currently in charge of the country.) The final episode was a deserved reward for those of us who stuck with the show, during what I found to be a confusing last season.

I spent much of it trying to work out why Tommy was in bed with Oswald Mosley, figuratively, and with Diana Mitford, literally, and how the IRA factored into fascism and what that had to do with the opium trade in Boston.

About halfway through, I found the best approach was to avoid actively attempting to make sense of it and instead let the spectacle carry me to the end. Without that last episode, I suspect I would have felt a bit cheated, but with it, it felt like a fair deal.

Another series that increasingly seems as if it is driven by spectacle over sense is *Killing Eve*, also in its final stages, which will soon attempt to [wrap it all up](#) in a neat bow. Good luck with that.

Like *Peaky Blinders*, I have stuck with it and each episode is pleasurable: it looks good, travels the world, has a sense of humour and a brilliant cast. But I have long since given up on trying to fathom what, exactly, the point of it is, especially when it comes to The 12, the mysterious group at the centre of the plot. Who is in The 12, who is out of The 12, who wants them dead and why? Does it matter? We may find out. It is just as likely that we won't.

I am willing to accept that, as I was often warned it would, too much television has turned my brain to mush. Then again, I have also been catching up on last year's [Station Eleven](#), which has a tricky structure and premise, and its complexities have been handled deftly, to magical effect. I have nothing against surface charm, but I was pleased to find a series that pushes beyond it.

Natasha Lyonne: a lack of false modesty is the sign of a real pro



Natasha Lyonne: ‘put your awards where people can see them!’ Photograph: Mario Anzuoni/Reuters

Last week’s edition of the *New Yorker* included a rambunctious [profile](#) of the actor Natasha Lyonne, whose career has been long, varied and always intriguing. Lyonne was promoting the new season of her series *Russian Doll*, a thought experiment disguised as a timeloop comedy, though she talked a good talk about everything from quantum physics to inherited trauma.

One of my favourite parts came when the writer of the piece notes seeing two of Lyonne’s acting awards, for her comeback stint in *Orange Is the New Black*, on her piano in her New York apartment. “You always read about people who say, ‘I put my awards directly in the garbage, because I’m grounded’. No! Put your awards where people can see them!” said Lyonne, describing those who take the more low-key approach as “schmucks”. I am all for an end to faux-humility, and women celebrating themselves for a job well done. I read a lot about the great *EastEnders* star [June Brown](#) last week, who died at 95, and many of the stories came with a sense of, “they don’t make them like they used to”. But for a moment, reading that profile of Lyonne, I thought that perhaps they still do.

Anne McIntosh: cyclists are not the menace she thinks they are



Anne McIntosh: enough of this mobile madness. Photograph: Martin Godwin/The Guardian

The Conservative politician Baroness McIntosh of Pickering has called for a [ban on cyclists using mobile phones](#) after a close encounter near the Houses of Parliament, in which a cyclist came towards her, “one hand bicycling, one hand on the mobile phone, on the wrong side of the road”.

Motorists, of course, are banned from using phones while driving, but cyclists would face less specific prosecution for careless or dangerous cycling. The former minister wondered why the Department for Transport had not addressed the issue of using a phone while cycling. It sounds as if the wrong side of the road part was also a problem, though the rules dictating where to cycle are fairly clear.

There are few words more inflammatory in the UK than “cyclists”, so I approach this with caution. But as a cyclist and a driver, I feel qualified to argue with myself about who is entitled to what space and whether the “road tax” exists. Phone usage while driving is an enormous problem and anyone who drives on a motorway regularly will notice that the tougher penalties

that came in last month have done little to dissuade drivers from checking their phone while driving at 70mph.

Cyclists do, on occasion, cause accidents through careless cycling, although travelling at a lower speed and weighing far less than a car means such accidents are not usually as catastrophic. It seems a bit premature to start to shift our attention to cyclists when there is still a wide perception that it's normal to send a text from the fast lane.

Rebecca Nicholson is an Observer columnist

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[For the record](#)UK news

For the record

This week's corrections

Sun 10 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT

The threshold at which people start paying national insurance will rise in July to £12,570, not £12,750 as we said ([Tories fear poll disaster over high taxes](#), 3 April, p1).

We should have referred to industrial disputes, not strikes, in the headline that read [Strikes at highest in five years as pay is hit by inflation](#) (3 April, p19).

The writer Peter Handke is Austrian, not German, as a comment piece said ([Ukraine matters, but 30 years ago so did Bosnia. Where was the outcry then?](#), 3 April, p48).

We misspelled the first name of Kanye West as “Kayne” ([Sunaks’ £5m Santa Monica flat offers sun, sea, and a pet spa](#), 3 April, p17).

A gallery of photographs showing improvised goalposts ([The grid](#), 27 March, New Review, p6) included one picture taken in Skopje. Our caption should have referred to that being in North Macedonia, not Macedonia.

The solution for [Everyman crossword 3,937](#), published on 27 March, was left blank in last week’s edition (New Review, p46). It has been published on p46 of today’s review section.

Other recently amended articles include:

[Lower inflation, better jobs ... in France la vie est belle](#)

[The talented women who had their eyes, if not their hands, on the prize](#)

Walks and rhubarb: how Catherine the Great looked to England for top parenting tips

*Write to the Readers' Editor, the Observer, York Way, London N1 9GU,
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[Observer letters](#)[Education](#)

Letters: Ofsted, take note – learning is about more than recall

People's memories are patchy. If school inspectors can't remember things, why should they expect children to?



Ofsted's obsession with memory is 'misplaced'. Photograph: Peter Titmuss/Alamy

Sun 10 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT

Ofsted's obsession with memory as the key to children's learning and as a measure of the effectiveness of a school's curriculum is misplaced ("[Ofsted's 'pop' quiz tests are unfair to schools, say heads](#)", News). Learning is more than recall and everyone's recall is patchy. If tested themselves, how many inspectors could remember what they were told a year or two before on a previous inspection? If inspectors can't remember, why should they expect learners, especially young children, to? The chief inspector should ponder the wisdom in the old adage, education is what remains after you've forgotten what you learned in school.

Professor Colin Richards
Spark Bridge, Cumbria

The report by the head of [Ofsted](#), Amanda Spielman, on the serious delays in young children's development as a result of the lockdown periods is hardly surprising in view of the fact that the Labour government's inspired provision and policy of setting up Sure Start centres in 1999 has been scuppered by Tory governments cutting the funding by two-thirds since 2010. By the onset of the Covid lockdowns, more than 500 centres had been closed.

This is a classic example of how national policies repeatedly come and go. The head of Ofsted and the government have an opportunity to demand and fund the re-establishment of pre-school centres for young vulnerable children. Their staff's skills, experience and established centres are a national resource that have been able to adapt to the vagaries of national lockdowns, and mitigate some of the sad picture Spielman reveals.

Simon Clements
Sheffield

As an experienced schools' inspector, I am fully aware that the humanities and creative subjects are severely neglected by numbers of maintained and independent schools alike in the run-up to year 6 Sats tests, preparation for the 11+ in grammar school areas and entry to leading independent schools. All such measures represent cramming, with all the attendant disadvantages. Gradgrind, you are not yet dead.

As for 11- and 12-year-olds being unable to explain clearly the "principles of the rule of law", perhaps our illustrious PM and his chancellor should take the same test. How do your readers believe they would score?

Una Stevens
Compton, Winchester

We need GPs of all ages

Torsten Bell uses US data to claim that when GPs retire, the use of other emergency services rises ("[Why baby boomers might end up healthier if](#)

[their GPs retire early](#)”, Comment). This in itself would be an argument to strengthen primary care in the UK. Bell then claims that new GPs are more likely to pick up a new diagnosis of diseases such as Alzheimer’s, concluding that GPs retiring can be a good thing for patients, while pointing out that it also pushes up the cost of healthcare.

We believe that GP continuity of care not only [saves lives and money](#) but also leads to [longer life expectancy](#). The age of your GP is not the problem here. It is the absolute lack of them. The UK is facing a GP crisis that long predates the pandemic. We need to retain our GPs at all stages of their careers – but especially those with many years of experience – who are also best placed to support and mentor junior GPs and the ever-growing number of allied healthcare professionals who are being employed to try to prop up a failing system in the UK.

Dr Lizzie Toberty, GP lead, Doctors’ Association UK; **Dr Ellen Welch**, GP, Cumbria; **Dr Simon Hodes**, GP, Watford; **Dr Shan Hussain**, GP, Nottingham; **Dr Lizzie Croton**, GP, Birmingham; **Dr Neena Jha**, GP, Hertfordshire; **Dr Louise Hyde**, GP, Wales; **Dr Rosie Shire**, GP, Warrington; **Dr Kartik Modha**, GP, London; **Dr Ayan Panja**, GP, Hertfordshire

Group athletes by strength

If Kenan Malik is right and it’s strength and muscle mass that’s causing a problem for transgendered athletes to change category from male to female or vice versa, then perhaps the categories are wrong (“[From pool to track: disputes over trans athletes mustn’t make everyone a loser](#)”, Comment). Why not base them on strength and muscle mass, say simply categories 1, 2 and 3, depending on where the athlete’s personal readings put them on a scale combining both these factors. Each sport would have to reorganise, but why we need to categorise people simply into being male or female has always puzzled me.

I know it keeps things straightforward but things sometimes need to change, and making people fit into convenient boxes doesn’t work for everybody.

Ian Hogg

North Leigh, Witney, Oxfordshire

Long Covid: does rehab work?

Ravi Veriah Jacques is right to highlight the lack of treatments for long Covid syndromes, particularly for those with prominent fatigue, and the lack of research underlying this (“[I have long Covid and despair that the government ignores its blight](#)”, Comment). He may be right about the link with chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS). But we disagree when he rejects rehabilitation treatments, such as graded exercise therapy (GET) and cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT), which have been shown to help fatigue related to many illnesses, such as multiple sclerosis and CFS. It would be bizarre indeed if long Covid were to be the only illness that rehabilitation could not benefit. Their helpfulness does not imply that the illness is psychological.

As leaders of the Pace trial that he mentions, we also think he is misinformed regarding the Pace trial of these treatments for chronic fatigue syndrome, which showed that CBT and GET were moderately effective and safe treatments, so long as properly negotiated and delivered by trained therapists. Yes, Nice has recently advised that GET should not be offered and CBT only used to reduce distress, but four of the medical Royal Colleges did not endorse this advice as they considered Nice had made errors when reviewing the evidence.

CBT and GET may help some sufferers from long Covid but, unless we fund research to test them, we will never know for certain.

Prof Peter White, emeritus professor of Psychological Medicine at Queen Mary University of London; **Prof Trudie Chalder**, professor of Cognitive Behavioural Psychotherapy, King’s College London; **Prof Michael Sharpe**, professor of Psychological Medicine, University of Oxford

Birthday wishes

Anna Bahatelya’s 100th birthday wish reminded me of an old story regarding Hitler and his desire to know his future (“[What do I wish for my 100th birthday? That Putin will die](#)”, News). He had heard of a rabbi who had a reputation of being able to foresee, with some accuracy, future events.

Hitler summoned the rabbi to Berlin and asked if he could foretell when he, Hitler, would die.

He answered that all he could predict was that it would occur on an important Jewish holiday. Hitler asked which holiday and the rabbi replied: “Fuhrer, when you die it will be an important Jewish holiday.”

Ronald Oliver

Elie, Fife

Make mine a ploughwoman's

Regarding the furore over the renaming of a ploughman's lunch to a ploughperson's lunch (“[May I have a word about... a right cheese and pickle barney](#)”, Comment), why not introduce a ploughwoman's lunch, similar to the first, but with the addition of an egg? As in a croque monsieur becoming a croque madame, the poached egg on top supposedly reminiscent of a bonnet.

Margaret Riley

Blackrod, Lancashire

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OpinionSociety

Covid has shown flexible working is a benefit only for the privileged few

[Sonia Sodha](#)



A pilot of four-day weeks is unlikely to bear fruit for low-paid staff with little power to negotiate terms



Illustration by Dominic McKenzie

Sun 10 Apr 2022 02.30 EDT

It feels strange now to recall that two years ago we had just entered a three-month stretch of government-enforced hermithood as the battle with Covid was joined. I lived alone, forbidden from spending time with anyone else, so my social life consisted of Saturday nights in front of my laptop doing a virtual pub quiz. It quickly became the new normal, but now I wonder how I ever adjusted.

One of the aspects of lockdown living I would like to reintroduce, though, is cutting my working week. As a freelance, for a while there was just less work available. And so, having written about the theory of the [four-day week](#), I found myself living it in practice. Lucky enough to afford to take the hit, I discovered I loved having more time to myself – even though there wasn't actually that much to do.

It has made me a more enthusiastic proponent of shorter working hours. So I will watch with interest the results of the world's largest [four-day week pilot](#) launched last week. The trial will involve 3,000 workers across 60 British companies, who will be paid the same salary for a shorter working week.

The case for a four-day week starts with the insight that human progress should not just be measured by the accumulation of “stuff”, but rather of time. One hundred and fifty years ago, Britons worked on average a [62-hour week](#), an appalling thought. Who’s to say our current conception of full-time work, the five-day week, is right? As technology from the wheel to the widget means societies can produce more and more with the same human input, it seems a no-brainer to think that we should bank some of the gains by enriching our lives with more time spent with people we love on the things we enjoy, rather than more consumer goods.

There are other benefits. Substituting more time over increases in collective wealth will also be better for the environment. And by embedding a more flexible working culture for both men and women, a shorter work week would help reduce the [gender-based pay gap](#) (much of which is accounted for by part-time work holding mothers back from progressing in workplaces where working full time is the norm).

The concern, however, is that only some will get to benefit from these changes. Our labour market is riven not just by inequalities of pay but in working conditions, such as the amount of flexibility and autonomy employees are permitted. This was notable during the pandemic. While some of us got to work more flexibly from home, sometimes, admittedly, in less-than-ideal conditions, many others, especially those in lower-paid work, experienced little change in how they worked, having to put their health at risk to continue the daily grind. And now, as many white-collar companies embrace hybrid working, allowing their workers to [cut down on commuting](#), others are stuck paying more for less frequent public transport or having to contend with the rising cost of petrol to get to and from work.

While 80% of us would like to reduce our working week, few are in a position to negotiate this without losing pay

The experience of technology has been different, too. Zoom may not be quite the same as sitting in a room with colleagues, but for me it has reduced time spent in unnecessary meetings. In contrast, some workers report they have experienced greater use of surveillance technology since the pandemic, which was already being deployed by companies such as [Amazon](#), which

uses it to track worker movements around the warehouse. Tools such as [keystroke and phone call monitoring](#) erode autonomy, privacy and trust between employer and employee.

While [80% of us](#) say we would like to reduce our working week, few are actually in a position to negotiate this with their employers without losing pay. Mass historical reductions in working time have been achieved as a result of collective union bargaining. But today, a fraction of employees are covered by collective bargaining agreements and the [typical union member](#) is a middle-income, professional public sector employee, with low-paid private sector workers out in the cold. It is also easy to see how the productivity argument, the idea that people working shorter weeks are more efficient and so can get almost as much done in less time, appeals more to white-collar employers than those in service sectors that depend on intensive human interaction, such as childcare and social care.

So the danger is that better-off workers in a position to demand more from their employees will benefit from innovations in working time, while less affluent workers feel little benefit. That has happened in [France](#), where, despite higher levels of unionisation, managers have disproportionately benefited from measures to reduce working time.

The government, too, seems to be retreating from its manifesto commitment to make flexible working the default. It has picked cheap fights on flexible working as [tabloid fodder](#), with ministers accusing civil servants working from home of laziness and seeming to back an it's-not-work-if-you're-not-at-your-desk [culture](#).

The difficulty is that working time improvements are no different to those in pay. They cost employers money and involve a redistribution of profits from owners to workers. The share of GDP that goes to workers in the form of wages is lower than it was at its peak in the [1970s](#) and average working time hasn't changed much since either.

So the risk of this new trial is that it demonstrates that a move to a shorter working week isn't cost-free and consequently gets ignored by most employers, save those who see this as a way of making themselves more competitive when it comes to recruitment and retention. The economic

reality is that a shorter working week will never be delivered through the goodwill of employers. Just as it took the union movement to negotiate the significant reductions in working time that meant people were no longer expected to work on Saturdays, it will only happen in an economy where workers have more power to negotiate what's good for them.

Sonia Sodha is an Observer columnist

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OpinionRefugees

Russian spies? No wonder we recoil from this demonisation of refugees

[Nick Cohen](#)



Ministers have mobilised anti-east European sentiment before. Now they just look spiteful



A protester holds a ‘waive UK visas’ placard in support of Ukrainian refugees at a rally in Trafalgar Square in London on 2 Apr 2022.
Photograph: Vuk Valcic/SOPA Images/REX/Shutterstock

Sun 10 Apr 2022 02.00 EDT

Boris Johnson could end the inhumanity of Britain’s treatment of Ukrainian refugees today. He need only say that the UK will do what every European Union country has done and grant them temporary protection. No visa forms designed to catch you out. No insolent officials throwing up obstacles. Just come. You are welcome.

Hungary is virtually a Putin puppet state, but had taken [530,000 Ukrainian refugees](#) by the end of March. Ireland’s neutrality periodically disgraces it, but nevertheless it expects to house [30,000 by Easter](#). Hungary’s population is a seventh of the UK’s. Ireland’s less than a tenth. Yet, as of last week, the UK has accepted just [12,000 refugees](#).

We are imposing visa restrictions because opposition to the free movement of Europeans has become a neurotic obsession for our ruling class. If we were not so in thrall to American notions that racism solely consists of white supremacy, we would recognise the lethal prejudice for what it is.

For a generation, Europeans have been the British right’s “other”. The mythical European “superstate”, not the actual Russian empire, was the UK’s greatest enemy. Opposition to the explosion of immigration after Tony Blair’s government allowed freedom of movement to eastern Europeans gave victory to the right in the Brexit referendum of 2016 and general election of 2019. Even a terrible war cannot blow away the conviction that to win Conservatives must hammer European migrants.

I want to emphasise the political nature of the decision to slam the door in Ukrainians’ faces. Too many people writing about the restrictions have lost themselves in the wilderness of the [Home Office](#) bureaucracy, from where few emerge with their sanity intact. But if Priti Patel and Johnson had ordered the civil service to drop restrictions on Ukrainians, it would have done so and got on with the arduous job of finding them accommodation.

Instead, they calculated that maintaining rightwing support required spreading conspiracy theories as malicious as any they spin against people of colour. “White privilege” is a useless concept when dealing with the racism Europeans inflict on each other rather than on the descendants of their former colonial possessions. Worse than useless, in fact. In the run-up to the Brexit referendum and today, it allows the cynics in charge of our politics to plausibly deny that they are engaged in race-baiting. How can they be when their targets’ skins are white?

Remember that the latest polling gives Labour a nine-point lead over the Conservatives on immigration. Rightwing opinion has been outraged by the Johnson administration’s failure to keep its [impossible pledge to stop boats](#) filled with asylum seekers crossing the Channel. Like David Cameron claiming a decade ago that he could reduce net migration to the tens of thousands, vainglorious boasts are eating away at Johnson’s support. When war began, the political imperative to stop migration from eastern Europe by any means necessary appeared overwhelming.

For all that, demonising Ukrainian refugees challenged even this government’s dark storytellers. They were overwhelmingly women and children, whose men had stayed behind to fight. They were fleeing an unprovoked invasion, by – and since we were talking about colonialism – a

fascistic imperial power. The world could see the crimes against humanity the Russians were inflicting on civilians.

Undeterred, Patel insisted that among the desperate and traumatised were Russian spies. “I’m afraid it is naive and misguided to think that only men can be covert operatives,” she told a Conservative party conference last month. “There are those who would come to our country, who would mean us harm and who plot to strike at our very way of life.”

Read that disgraceful justification for visa controls again and compare it with the Russian state’s attempt to brainwash its subjects into believing Ukrainians are Nazis. There is the same contempt for evidence. Patel does not say where she found Russian spies among the refugee exodus because she cannot. Note too the sheer implausibility of both claims. Why would Nazis create a free society with a Jewish leader? How could Russian intelligence benefit from smuggling a mother of two into the spare room of a Northamptonshire rectory?

British citizens who offered to open up their homes have found their own government is bent on blocking their generosity

Nothing made sense apart from Patel’s warning against those who “mean us harm and who plot to strike at our very way of life”, which perfectly captured the cabinet.

Yvette Cooper, Labour’s shadow home secretary, told me that the only meaningful security check Patel could run is one that takes seconds at international airports: scanning a passport and seeing if the owner is on a watch list. No one would have raised the smallest objection if she had done so. Instead, Conservative ministers used an evidence-free scare about an invented Russian plot to abandon the victims of war.

British citizens who offered to open up their homes have found their own government is bent on blocking their generosity. Traumatised people strung out along the European rail system or still waiting in Ukraine must navigate Whitehall regulations on their phones. Inevitably, most cannot find a way through dozens of pages of forms and document upload demands, and

abandon their plans to come to the UK, which suited the government just fine, until it realised to its evident astonishment that it had bet on the nastiness of Conservatives and lost.

A significant number of Tory voters have not thanked the government for treating them as racists. It turns out they meant it when they said they welcomed genuine refugees and, as far as they could see, Ukrainians fleeing Putin's bombs were just that.

From Enoch Powell to Brexit, the popular complaint has been that liberal-minded governments have opened up the country to immigration without so much as a by your leave from the governed. As [Sunder Katwala](#) of the British Future thinktank says, whether it is with Afghans who served British forces or Ukrainian refugees, voters are now turning on this government for not being liberal enough.

Patel and Johnson [realise their mistake](#) and are in the grotesque position of pretending that no one is as frustrated as they are at the cruelties of their own system.

If they meant it, they would announce today that Britain will match the European Union's generosity to Ukrainians. They won't because they cannot escape the fear – or should that be the hope? – that when British people say they want to do good in the world, they are lying.

Nick Cohen is an Observer columnist

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Headlines

- [Coronavirus UK Covid symptoms list expanded with nine more signs of illness](#)
- [Tell us Have you caught Covid in the UK for the first time recently?](#)
- [Children Pandemic has delayed social skills of young children, says Ofsted chief](#)
- [Live UK politics: time not right for ‘indulgent’ leadership contest even if PM is fined, says minister](#)

Coronavirus

UK Covid symptoms list expanded with nine more signs of illness

Symptoms including shortness of breath, feeling tired and loss of appetite added to official list



Covid tests for sale at £2 each in a Tesco branch in Taplow, Buckinghamshire, on Saturday. Photograph: Maureen McLean/Rex/Shutterstock

Rachel Hall

@rachela_hall

Mon 4 Apr 2022 04.34 EDTFirst published on Mon 4 Apr 2022 03.46 EDT

The official list of Covid-19 symptoms on the [NHS](#) has been extended to cover nine new symptoms, including sore throat, fatigue and headache.

They join the three symptoms of a fever, a new and persistent cough, and a loss or change in taste or smell, [according to nhs.uk](#).

Extending the list may help reduce infections by helping people detect whether they may have Covid; however, it coincides with the [end of the offer of free universal Covid-19 tests](#) to help people confirm whether they have the virus.

Covid [infection levels have hit a record high](#) in the UK, with almost 5 million people estimated to be infected.

The new signs are:

- Shortness of breath.
- Feeling tired or exhausted.
- An aching body.
- A headache.
- A sore throat.
- A blocked or runny nose.
- Loss of appetite.
- Diarrhoea.
- Feeling sick or being sick.

A note on the website states: “The symptoms are very similar to symptoms of other illnesses, such as colds and flu.”

The UK has had just three symptoms on the list since the emergence of the virus two years ago, despite other organisations such as the World [Health Organization](#) (WHO) and the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention in the US having longer symptom lists for some time.

It is understood the government’s chief medical officer would have needed to sign off on the expanded list of symptoms.

In England, some people still qualify for free tests in certain circumstances, but most people are now expected to pay or go without. Under the previous testing regime people only qualified for PCR tests if they had one of the three symptoms or if they had been invited to take a test.

Prof Tim Spector, the lead scientist of the Zoe Covid-19 symptom tracker app, praised the decision in [a tweet](#) in which he said the NHS had “finally changed” the symptom list after two years of lobbying. “Pity they have the order wrong, but it’s a start and could help reduce infections,” he said.

In March he suggested that the shorter symptom list, along with the decision to drop isolation advice and withdraw free testing, could have driven up transmission rates.

Spector said last month: “Many people are no longer isolating when they have symptoms, either because they feel they don’t have to any more or because they or their employers still don’t recognise symptoms like runny nose or sore throat as Covid.”

On Friday the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said that 4.9 million people in the UK were estimated to have had Covid-19 in the week ending 26 March, up from 4.3 million in the previous week. The ONS said an estimated one in every 13 people in England had the virus during that week.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/04/uk-covid-symptoms-list-expanded-with-nine-more-signs-of-illness>

Coronavirus

Tell us: have you or a family member caught Covid in the UK for the first time recently?

We would like to hear from people, especially those who are high risk or over 70, who have got Covid for the first time in the last two months



Last week universal testing for Covid-19 came to an end in England.
Photograph: Maureen McLean/REX/Shutterstock

[Guardian community team](#)

Mon 4 Apr 2022 04.41 EDT Last modified on Mon 4 Apr 2022 06.18 EDT

With Covid cases on the rise and the official list of symptoms in the UK now including [nine new signs of illness](#), we would like to hear from people, or their family members, who have caught Covid for the first time since the pandemic began.

When and how did you catch Covid? What were your symptoms like and how has it affected you? We're particularly interested in hearing from people who are high risk or over 70 who have been cautious or shielding the last two years.

Share your experiences

You can get in touch by filling in the form below or contact us [via WhatsApp](#) by [clicking here](#) or adding +44(0)7766780300. Your responses are secure as the form is encrypted and only the Guardian has access to your contributions.

One of our journalists will be in contact before we publish, so please do leave contact details.

If you're having trouble using the form, click [here](#). Read terms of service [here](#) and privacy policy [here](#).

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/04/tell-us-have-you-caught-covid-in-the-uk-for-the-first-time-recently>.

Children

Pandemic has delayed social skills of young children, says Ofsted chief

Rising numbers unable to understand facial expressions and have communication and self-care delays



‘Children have had less time in early education, less time interacting with others outside the family,’ says Ofsted’s chief inspector, Amanda Spielman. Photograph: Linda Nylind/The Guardian

[Rachel Hall](#)

[@rachela_hall](#)

Mon 4 Apr 2022 05.40 EDTFirst published on Mon 4 Apr 2022 04.25 EDT

An increasing number of young children have been left unable to understand facial expressions after having fewer opportunities to develop their social and emotional skills during the pandemic, the education watchdog for England has said.

Amanda Spielman, Ofsted's chief inspector, said the worst affected were the most vulnerable children, with those living in smaller homes without gardens typically spending more time on screens during successive lockdowns, which also resulted in delays in learning to walk and crawl.

She said it was clear from four briefings on education recovery published by Ofsted that the pandemic had created "lingering challenges".

She said: "I'm particularly worried about younger children's development, which, if left unaddressed, could potentially cause problems for primary schools down the line."

In the briefing on early years, based on inspections of 70 providers in January and February 2022, some said children had "limited vocabulary" while some babies had "struggled to respond to basic facial expressions", partly due to interacting with people wearing face masks.

Speaking on BBC Radio 4's Today programme, Spielman said the pandemic and lockdowns had resulted in delays in learning speech and language; problems with social interaction and confidence, such as not knowing how to take turns and struggling to make friends; and delays in walking and crawling, with more obesity as a result.

Children were also not at the expected level in developing vital self-care skills, such as being potty trained, tying their shoelaces and taking their coats off, she added.

She said: "Children have had less time in early education, less time interacting with others outside the family. For some children they've not much interaction at all if they've spent all their time looking at screens. Children have been talking in the funny voices of cartoons they've been spending enormous amounts of time watching."

To assist their child's development, Spielman advised parents to speak to their children as much as possible and take them out for walks to the shops and to the park so they could see the world and take exercise. "Those basic

parenting things are more important than delaying their entrance to school,” she said.

She said schools were well-prepared to deal with children at a range of developmental levels, noting that the most effort would be put into children who have had the worst experiences over the pandemic.

The inspectorate has seen “lots of really good work” across early years, schools and further education, including on catchup strategies to close gaps in knowledge and skills.

But Ofsted found that funded places for two-year-olds had not been used as much as before the pandemic, which Spielman said she hoped she “will see reversed” as normal life returns.

The reports showed that some staff members at nurseries have come up with innovative ways to help young children catch up, such as through a “chatter group” with a diary to record activities, or encouraging children to express their feelings through “emotion cards” with images of children displaying different facial expressions.

In schools, Ofsted found the pandemic was continuing to affect pupils’ knowledge and mental health, with leaders reporting lower resilience and confidence, and increased anxiety and disruptive behaviour. Headteachers also raised particular concerns about children in reception year, who they said had delayed speech and language development, as well as disadvantaged pupils and those with special needs.

Some schools reported that safeguarding disclosures had increased, especially around domestic abuse.

For older secondary pupils in years 11 and 13, teachers are struggling to help pupils catch up on content they had missed while simultaneously preparing them for exams. Some headteachers observed that certain GCSEs, such as triple science, had become less popular.

James Bowen, director of policy for school leaders’ union the National Association of Head Teachers, said: “Schools work incredibly hard to give

pupils the extra support they need but they cannot do it alone – the government must also invest in early years services for disadvantaged families, as well as vital services like speech and language therapy, so that those children who need specialist support receive it as early as possible.”

A Department for Education spokesperson said: “Our ambitious recovery plan continues to roll out across the country, with nearly £5bn invested in high-quality tutoring, world-class training for teachers and early years practitioners, additional funding for schools, and extending time in colleges by 40 hours a year.

“We have simplified the national tutoring programme to reach as many pupils as possible, with funding going directly to schools from next year. The Nuffield early language intervention programme is also being used by the majority of schools to improve language skills of reception-age children.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/apr/04/pandemic-has-delayed-social-skills-of-young-children-says-ofsted-chief>

[Skip to key events](#)

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

UK politics: government's former ethics chief apologises over 'partygate' Covid breach – as it happened

This live blog is now closed. Our latest politics stories are below:

- [Former UK government ethics chief apologises after party fine](#)
- [Fines issued over Downing Street party the night before Philip's funeral](#)
- [UK Covid symptoms list expanded with nine more signs of illness](#)
- [Russia-Ukraine war: latest updates](#)

Updated 6d ago

[Nicola Slawson \(now\)](#) and [Kevin Rawlinson \(earlier\)](#)

Mon 4 Apr 2022 12.01 EDTFirst published on Mon 4 Apr 2022 04.17 EDT



Helen MacNamara has apologised after being fined for partygate breach.
Photograph: (UK Government)

[Nicola Slawson](#) (now) and [Kevin Rawlinson](#) (earlier)

Mon 4 Apr 2022 12.01 EDTFirst published on Mon 4 Apr 2022 04.17 EDT

Key events

- [6d agoEvening summary](#)
- [6d agoGovernment's former ethics chief apologises over Covid breach](#)
- [6d agoPM's spokesman defends end of free testing, saying it was 'simply unsustainable'](#)
- [6d agoDowning Street declines to say whether Boris Johnson believes lockdown laws were broken at No 10](#)
- [6d agoMinister says it isn't time for 'self-indulgent leadership contest'](#)

Show key events only

Live feed

Show key events only

From 6d ago

[10:25](#)

Government's former ethics chief apologises over Covid breach

Helen MacNamara, the government's former ethics chief, has said she is sorry after being fined over the partygate scandal.

She said she has paid the fine she was handed reportedly in connection with a leaving do held in the Cabinet Office on 18 June 2020 to mark the departure of a private secretary.

I am sorry for the error of judgement I have shown. I have accepted and paid the fixed penalty notice.

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[6d ago](#) [12:01](#)

Evening summary

Nicola Slawson

Here's a roundup of the key developments from the day:

- **The government's former ethics chief has apologised for her “error of judgment” after she was fined by police for attending a party in the Cabinet Office during lockdown.** Helen MacNamara, who now works for the Premier League, issued a statement after a leak naming her as one of the 20 people issued with fines after a Met investigation.
- **Downing Street has declined to say whether Boris Johnson believes coronavirus laws were broken at No 10 after fines were issued.** The prime minister's official spokesman said: “The prime minister wants to comment at the conclusion of the process and not at the middle of it.”
- **Keir Starmer called for the names of all senior officials fined for Downing Street parties to be made public.** The Labour leader said the government was “taking the public for fools yet again”. He said the prime minister had “misled the public” and presided over “widespread criminality”, adding that [Boris Johnson](#) is “unfit for office”.
- **Now is not the time for a “self-indulgent leadership contest” if Boris Johnson is fined over the Partygate scandal, a minister has said.** Asked if the prime minister should resign if he's fined, the Wales secretary, Simon Hart, told Sky News he thinks “the world has moved on a considerable distance”.
- **Officials being fined for lockdown-breaking parties in Downing Street is “not the most important issue in the world” given**

atrocities in Ukraine, Jacob Rees-Mogg has said, while also arguing that Boris Johnson did not mislead people over the events. The Brexit opportunities minister defended his dismissal of the Partygate row as “fluff” in the context of the war in Ukraine and the cost-of-living crisis and also told LBC radio that some coronavirus restrictions imposed during lockdown were “inhuman”.

- **The prime minister’s official spokesman has defended axing universal free coronavirus tests as new symptoms for Covid-19 were designated, saying lateral flow spending was “simply unsustainable”.** He said: “... the provision of free tests was costing taxpayers £2bn a month and that is simply unsustainable.”
- **Parliament does appear to have a problem with drug-taking, shadow education secretary Bridget Phillipson has said.** The Conservatives have removed the whip from David Warburton, the MP for Somerton and Frome, who is understood to be facing allegations of sexual harassment, cocaine use and failing to declare a loan. Phillipson said: “I personally have never witnessed that, but it would appear that there is a problem that it is taking place.”

That’s it from me today. Thanks for joining me.

For the latest news on Ukraine, follow our dedicated live blog:

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[6d ago](#) [11:42](#)

Read the [full story](#) on **Helen MacNamara**’s fine from my colleagues **Rowena Mason** and **Paul MacInnes** here:

The government’s former ethics chief has apologised for her “error of judgment” after she was fined by police for attending a party in the Cabinet Office during lockdown.

Helen MacNamara, who now works for the Premier League, issued a statement after a leak naming her as one of the [20 people issued with](#)

[fines after a Met investigation.](#)

She said: “I am sorry for the error of judgment I have shown. I have accepted and paid the fixed-penalty notice.”

MacNamara was fined in connection with a leaving party held on 18 June 2020 to mark the departure of a private secretary, Hannah Young, who was moving to New York to take up a role with the British consulate general. She is said to have provided a karaoke machine for the event, which is understood to have been one of the most raucous under investigation.

Boris Johnson was not present at the event but the former cabinet secretary Mark Sedwill and the former No 10 aide Dominic Cummings are reported to have been in attendance.

Cummings has written a blog defending Young and saying: “It is deeply, deeply contemptible that not just the PM but senior civil servants have allowed such people to have their reputations attacked in order to protect the sociopathic narcissist squatting in the No 10 flat.”

MacNamara left government in February 2021 and joined the Premier League the following May, where she holds the position of chief policy and corporate affairs officer.

Hired due to the depth of her experience and her contacts within 10 Downing Street, MacNamara has led the league’s response to the government’s [fan-led review of football governance](#), which last autumn called for the introduction of an independent regulator for the game.

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[6d ago 10:56](#)

Linda Geddes

Ministers are finally acknowledging what has been patently obvious since the beginning of the pandemic: Covid is associated with far more than the

oft-cited symptoms of high temperature, persistent cough and loss of sense of smell and taste.

With little fanfare, a [further nine potential symptoms have now been added](#) to the official list on the NHS website, including diarrhoea, loss of appetite, sore throat and tiredness.

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has recognised many of these symptoms since April 2020, as have numerous other governments. So why has the UK taken so long – and will anyone take any notice?

British scientists have long called for a broadening of the official symptoms list. According to research published in February 2021, the inclusion of fatigue, sore throat, headache and diarrhoea in the criteria to qualify for a PCR test could have enabled 96% of symptomatic cases to be detected – a third more than relying on the “classic” three symptoms alone.

Indeed, some scientists suspect it's precisely because access to free testing has been scrapped for most people in England that the government has updated the list.

“We were always told that the barrier to expanding the list was that adding more symptoms could overwhelm the testing capacity, so it makes sense that since free testing has now stopped, the list has been updated,” said Prof Tim Spector, lead researcher of the Zoe Covid symptom study app, who has [been lobbying for this change](#) for two years.

Read the full story here:

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[6d ago 10:25](#)

Government's former ethics chief apologises over Covid breach

Helen MacNamara, the government's former ethics chief, has said she is sorry after being fined over the partygate scandal.

She said she has paid the fine she was handed reportedly in connection with a leaving do held in the Cabinet Office on 18 June 2020 to mark the departure of a private secretary.

I am sorry for the error of judgement I have shown. I have accepted and paid the fixed penalty notice.

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[6d ago](#)[10:04](#)

The DUP is threatening to frustrate efforts to return to a powersharing executive at Stormont until Westminster acts to restore Northern Ireland's status within the UK internal market.

Its leader **Sir Jeffrey Donaldson** has said that, while he is a committed devolutionist who believes direct rule from Westminster would result in bad decisions for Northern Ireland, the price of his backing would be amending the protocol that has created trade barriers on goods shipped to the region from Great Britain. Addressing a party election event at a cinema in Dundonald in east Belfast, he told colleagues:

The protocol must be replaced with arrangements that protect Northern Ireland's place within the United Kingdom.

The DUP collapsed the executive in February when its first minister **Paul Givan** resigned in protest at the protocol.

The move automatically ousted Sinn Féin deputy first minister **Michelle O'Neill** and removed the administration's ability to meet or make significant decisions.

Powersharing rules mean a properly functioning administration can only be formed if the largest unionist and largest nationalist parties agree to enter the joint office of the first and deputy first ministers.

Donaldson said the replacement of the protocol must be achieved either by way of a negotiated agreement with the EU or by the UK government acting unilaterally.

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[6d ago 09:43](#)

The UK needs a proper energy strategy from the government, rather than going “cap in hand” to dictators, Starmer has added. Asked by broadcasters whether the shadow business secretary, **Jonathan Reynolds**, was right to agree over the weekend that the country needed to prepare for energy rationing, the Labour leader said:

We don't need energy rationing. We do need an energy strategy. And going from one dictator in Russia for your oil and gas, cap in hand to another dictator in Saudi Arabia is not an energy strategy.

We need a strategy that is fast-forwarding on renewables and on nuclear, retrofitting so that we can actually keep our houses and our homes warmer.

That is the strategy, the security strategy, that we need for this country and we don't have it from this government.

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Updated at 09.49 EDT

6d ago09:17

Labour leader **Keir Starmer** said “nobody” in the party would be asked to sign a non-disclosure agreement after making accusations of sexual harassment.

Asked about reports of the practice within Labour, he said:

I cannot comment on the individual cases. What I can say is nobody in the Labour party is asked to sign a non-disclosure agreement in relation to sexual harassment.

That is against our policy.

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Updated at 09.24 EDT

6d ago09:05

Keir Starmer called for the names of all senior officials fined for Downing Street parties to be made public.

The Labour leader said the government was “taking the public for fools yet again”.

He added:

I think it is very important that the prime minister makes sure that all those who are given fines, certainly in senior positions, are named.

We seem to be going through this process where instant by instant, fines are coming out but the public are being left in the dark. The public complied with the rules. They are entitled to know who didn’t comply with the rules and what is going on.

Starmer later said:

If the prime minister wants to come to parliament and tell us that he was repeatedly lied to by his own advisers then let him do that.

The idea that he had no idea what was going on in his home and his office and he only gave answers because he was lied to by his officials is a case he needs to make. I would like to see him make that case because I don't think he can.

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[6d ago 09:03](#)

Labour leader **Sir Keir Starmer** said the prime minister had “misled the public” and presided over “widespread criminality”, adding that [Boris Johnson](#) is “unfit for office”.

Asked by broadcasters if the prime minister should return to parliament to correct the record on earlier statements about Partygate, Starmer said:

It is absolutely important that the prime minister is honest and accountable to parliament. I shouldn't have to say that.

That has been a principle for a very long time. The idea that we are even debating whether it is all right for the prime minister to have lied about this shows just how far the standards have sunk under this prime minister.

He needs to come to parliament to be held to account. He has not only misled the public about this, he has presided over widespread criminality in his home and his office and that is why I am convinced he is unfit for office.

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Updated at 09.22 EDT

[6d ago](#)[08:02](#)

Domestic oil and gas will play an “important part” of the UK strategy after minister **Jacob Rees-Mogg** said “every last drop” of oil should be extracted from the North Sea, Downing Street said.

The prime minister’s official spokesman said:

Certainly it’s right that domestic-produced oil and gas will play an important part of the transition to net zero.

He also confirmed the delayed energy security strategy will be published on Thursday.

Asked about transport secretary **Grant Shapps**’ criticism of onshore wind turbines, the prime minister’s official spokesman said:

We’ve said when it comes to onshore wind, this needs to be done when it’s locally supported. You’ll see more about our position on energy in our strategy published on Thursday.

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Updated at 08.27 EDT

[6d ago](#)[07:38](#)

PM's spokesman defends end of free testing, saying it was 'simply unsustainable'

The prime minister’s official spokesman has defended axing universal free coronavirus tests as new symptoms for Covid-19 were designated, saying lateral flow spending was “simply unsustainable”.

He said:

I think we need to look at where we are in the course of this pandemic. We know there is relatively high prevalence of Covid at the moment but because of vaccines, because of therapeutics and other approaches, we are not seeing it have the knock-on impact when it comes to requiring the most intensive hospital treatment.

At the same time, the provision of free tests was costing taxpayers £2bn a month and that is simply unsustainable.

He said ministers expect the public to use their “good judgment” on whether to go out if they have symptoms.

The spokesman said:

I think anyone, even pre-Covid, would recognise if they have symptoms of an infectious disease, something like flu, they should stay home and not infect their loved ones or colleagues, and it is that sort of good judgment that we expect to see going forward.

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Updated at 08.05 EDT

[6d ago](#) [07:31](#)

Jacob Rees-Mogg’s assessment that some of the coronavirus restrictions during lockdown were “inhuman” has not been backed by Downing Street.

The prime minister’s official spokesman said:

I think at all times the government took action to save both lives and livelihoods and that was always a balanced judgment that sought to be informed by the latest evidence we had.

We have established an inquiry to take a proper view and learn lessons about what happened and there will be more to say then. But certainly at all times the government sought to act in the best interests of the United Kingdom.

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[6d ago](#)07:29

Downing Street declines to say whether Boris Johnson believes lockdown laws were broken at No 10

Downing Street has declined to say whether **Boris Johnson** believes coronavirus laws were broken at No 10 after fines were issued.

The prime minister's official spokesman said:

The prime minister wants to comment at the conclusion of the process and not at the middle of it.

Asked if he agreed with Welsh secretary **Simon Hart**'s assessment that the "world has moved on" from the partygate allegations, the spokesman said:

We recognise the strength of feeling around this issue which is why the prime minister came to the House to apologise and has talked about the mistakes made. We'll have more to say at the conclusion of the process.

He said Johnson has not received a fixed penalty notice.

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Updated at 09.03 EDT

[6d ago](#)07:16

Here's a bit more detail on the fine former deputy cabinet secretary **Helen MacNamara** has reportedly received.

[The Telegraph reports](#) the government's former ethics chief is among the first group of people to receive a fixed penalty notice in connection with the partygate scandal.

MacNamara's karaoke machine was reportedly used at the event on 18 June 2020. The party got so "raucous" that there was reportedly a drunken brawl.

She received a £50 fine on Friday after police concluded she had broken Covid laws by attending a leaving party for Hannah Young, a Downing Street aide, who was leaving to take up a role with the British consulate general in New York, the paper reports.

The karaoke party, held in the cabinet secretary's office at 70 Whitehall, took place at a time when all indoor gatherings were banned. At the time people were also advised not to sing in public and singing was also banned during funerals.

MacNamara's role involved being in charge of propriety and ethics across Whitehall at the time, advising all government departments on standards.

□ □ NEW: The Government's former head of propriety and ethics has been fined over a "raucous" karaoke party in the Cabinet Office at which there was a drunken brawl.

FPNs also issued over the No10 party in April 2021.

(w [@evansma](#) & [@benrileysmith](#)) <https://t.co/Af3AP0qR5I>

— Tony Diver (@Tony_Diver) [April 3, 2022](#)

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Updated at 07.22 EDT

[6d ago](#)[06:00](#)

The trial of an alleged terrorist for the murder of MP **Sir David Amess** has been halted again after the judge tested positive for Covid-19.

The defence case for **Ali Harbi Ali** had been due to start today at the Old Bailey, having previously been delayed for a week when three jurors tested positive.

Justice Sweeney has since come down with Covid, though he is symptomless. The trial is listed to resume on Thursday.

Ali, 26, is accused of stabbing 69-year-old Amess, the MP for Southend West, to death during a constituency surgery in Leigh-on-Sea on 15 October last year.

The defendant, from Kentish Town, north London, denies murder and preparing acts of terrorism.

Please note: Because this is an active court case we cannot allow discussion on it below the line, any comments on this update will be removed.

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Updated at 07.26 EDT

[6d ago](#)[05:58](#)

Ukraine will “rise again and take her place once more among free and sovereign nations”, **Boris Johnson** has said.

In a video posted to Twitter, the prime minister said:

From the moment the Russian invasion began, and troops and tanks burst across their frontier, Ukrainians have defended their homeland with invincible courage and tenacity, and we in Britain are lost in admiration for their valour and patriotism.

Our job is to do everything we can to support them.

Putin will never break the spirit of Ukraine's people or conquer their homeland.

Ukraine will rise again and take her place among free and sovereign nations once more.

□□□ pic.twitter.com/0VWziRkRGO

— Boris Johnson (@BorisJohnson) [April 4, 2022](#)

Johnson outlined the military support Britain has given to Ukraine, as well as humanitarian aid.

He said:

All the tanks and guns in Vladimir Putin's arsenal will never break the spirit of Ukraine's people or conquer their homeland.

Britain will never waver from supporting our friends and I have not the slightest doubt that when this time of agony is over, Ukraine will rise again and take her place once more among free and sovereign nations.

The UK is to push for tougher international sanctions against Vladimir Putin's Russia and increase supplies of arms to Ukraine as evidence of atrocities continue to emerge from the war zone, PA news reports.

The foreign secretary, **Liz Truss**, will meet her Ukrainian counterpart, **Dmytro Kuleba**, in Warsaw today ahead of key G7 and Nato talks later this week where she will push for tougher economic measures against “the Putin war machine”.

Follow our dedicated Ukraine liveblog here:

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Updated at 06.09 EDT

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2022.04.04 - Spotlight

- ['Of course I like life!' Shane MacGowan on the Pogues, his 'death wish' and his sideline in erotic art](#)
- [Joy Labinjo I wanted to correct the notion that Black people arrived in Britain with Windrush](#)
- ['It's the holy grail' Is Jerusalem still the play of the century? Top playwrights give their verdicts](#)
- ['Kids are interested in everything' Krishnan Guru-Murthy and Lizo Mzimba on Newsround at 50](#)



'I miss the early days of the Pogues. That was a lot of fun' ... Shane MacGowan.

Photograph: Ellius Grace/The Guardian

[The G2 interview](#)

'Of course I like life!' Shane MacGowan on the Pogues, his 'death wish' and his sideline in erotic art

'I miss the early days of the Pogues. That was a lot of fun' ... Shane MacGowan.

Photograph: Ellius Grace/The Guardian

Now 64, the singer has somehow survived decades of drink and drugs, only to face depression and 'nameless fear'. But there's no sign of him mellowing

by [Simon Hattenstone](#)

Mon 4 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 5 Apr 2022 04.46 EDT

To say I'm excited is an understatement. Shane MacGowan, the reclusive former Pogue, has agreed to an interview. MacGowan has not talked to a British newspaper for 10 years and there is so much to ask him, not least how he is still alive. MacGowan, a brilliant lyricist and songwriter at his peak, drank and drugged himself to the point of destruction 40-odd years ago. Fans have feared for news of the inevitable ever since. But amazingly he's still with us, living in Ireland with his journalist wife, Victoria Mary Clarke, and about to publish a gigantic book of his art, handwritten lyrics and school essays. Dublin, here I come!

A few days before the interview, I receive a message from Victoria. "If you can be here for a few days, you will have more of a chance of getting him in a good mood!" Ah. MacGowan is almost as famous for his irascibility as for his music. A few days in Dublin sounds lovely, but impractical. I apologise to Victoria, and tell her I can only do the Friday as arranged.

On the Wednesday, I get another message from her. "Just to warn you, he is very depressed and anxious." MacGowan always gave the impression nothing bothered him – he would say what he liked when he liked to whom he liked. Anxiety was the last thing you associated with him. And yet he has said he had his first breakdown aged six and suffered with depression through much of his life.

I get into Dublin about 10am. Victoria says Shane will be in bed till at least noon and agrees to meet me at the hotel close to their home. She drives up in their ancient battered green Merc. Victoria is a youthful 55-year-old with emerald green eyes. Everything is green in MacGowan's life. She and MacGowan, 64, have been together on and off (much more on than off) for 35 years. We go for a coffee and a walk along the beach close to their house. It's a beautiful day, and Victoria is as sunny as the weather. She grew up in the Irish countryside with hippy parents (an Irish mother and English stepfather), whereas MacGowan lived in London with his Irish parents and spent the school holidays on his maternal grandparents' family farm in Tipperary. Victoria first met him in a pub in Temple Fortune, north London, when she was 16 and he was 24. He was with fellow Pogue Spider Stacy and told her she had to buy Spider a drink because it was his birthday. She told him to fuck off. But she was mesmerised. Back then he was phenomenally

creative, held a room as soon as he walked in, drank for fun rather than out of necessity, and was a sex symbol despite the rotting teeth and Jumbo ears.

When their friend Johnny Depp suggested that having children would be the making of them, she told him they were too irresponsible. “I said the thing is, if we had children, Shane would probably set fire to them. I was terrified Shane was going to burn down the house because he was always dropping his cigarettes. He set fire to John Belushi’s bungalow at Chateau Marmont.”

The young MacGowan was a proud contrarian – he could happily wear a union jack jacket and have IRA tattooed across his head at the same time. As for the Pogues, they created a unique brand of riotous punk-folk. MacGowan’s songs were short stories that referenced literature, music, Gaelic mythology and the Bible. There were songs of yearning (A Pair of Brown Eyes), of exile (Fairytale of New York), of protest (Streets of Sorrow/Birmingham Six), and covers that were even better than the originals (Dirty Old Town). For a few brief years in the 1980s, the Pogues (originally called Pogue Mahone, the anglicisation of the Gaelic *póg mo thóin*, meaning “kiss my arse”) were wonderful.

Victoria says he has changed hugely since then, as has their relationship. They are closer than ever, she still finds him funny and fascinating, but she is as much a carer as a partner these days. MacGowan uses a wheelchair and has to be hoisted out of bed by the official carer. In 2016 he fell and broke his pelvis. Then he had a fall on his Zimmer frame and broke his right knee. And another fall, this time tearing the ligaments in his left knee. He has never recovered.



MacGowan and his wife, Victoria Mary Clarke. Photograph: Ellius Grace/The Guardian

In some ways, Victoria says, she would have liked to have had a more normal life. “More domestic. I’m someone who likes to keep the place quite clean.” MacGowan was known for living in filth and never bathing. “He still doesn’t have baths. He showers very occasionally.” How does he smell? “He smells fine. But he wasn’t into making the place look nice.”

Victoria is extraordinarily open. She talks about her relationship with MacGowan; relationships with other musicians whom she would rather I didn’t mention who wanted to marry her; how she had longed to be famous then hated being the Wag of a pop star and realised she wouldn’t have found fame much fun; how she suffered from addiction to drinks and drugs just as much as MacGowan did but has come out of it healthier than he has.

She looks at her phone. It’s almost 2.30pm. She sounds anxious. “I said we’d be back at 2pm.” So we head to MacGowan Mansions, which is actually a flat on a modest gated estate. She gives him a kiss and apologises for being late. He is watching a Clint Eastwood film. He spends a lot of his time watching movies and TV.

In some ways, MacGowan looks better than he used to. His new teeth are perfect, his hair is in great nick and his waxy skin is flawless, even though it doesn't seem to have seen sunlight in years. In other ways he looks terrible – old, immobile, saggy. He sits on his green armchair, dressed in black, with a long silver crucifix hanging from his neck as if auditioning for the priest in a Dracula movie. On the walls are pictures, some drawn by Victoria, some by him. Above the fireplace is a crowded pew of religious icons.

Victoria heads off to make a drink. I introduce myself, and ask how he is.

"I can't walk any more," he says. Does he still use the wheelchair? "Yeah, that's how I travel about."

"Did you have a pleasant chat around the hotel?" MacGowan somehow manages to make the question sound sinister.

It was never easy to understand his slur, but now his words are so slow and indistinct they merge into one. He still has a presence – though a rather sad one. Victoria returns with a mug of tea for me and a tall glass of gin and tonic for him. Mainly tonic – she says he doesn't drink so much since his accidents.

"We went for a walk," I say. "It was lovely."

"Yeah," she says. "We went to the beach."

"Oh, right," he says.

"I didn't snog him," she says out of nowhere. "Or shag him."

"I didn't accuse you," he says.

"No, I know. I'm just saying," she says.

"*Chhhhhhhhhhhhhhh.*" His laugh sounds like a snore.



MacGowan onstage with the Pogues c1990. Photograph: Michel Linssen/Redferns

“I’m too old,” I say, unsure how to respond.

“How old are you?” he asks.

“Fifty-nine,” I say.

“I’ve done older!” she says. “That’s not very old.”

They both laugh. “That’s not very old,” he confirms.

“I was really old in my 30s, but I’m much younger now than I was,” Victoria says.

He starts singing My Backpages. “I was so much older then / I’m younger than that now.” MacGowan can still hold a tune.

“What’s that Bob Dylan one about being young?” she asks.

“*That was a Bob Dylan song,*” he says.

“What’s the other one, then?”

“Well, he did a few, didn’t he?” He sniffs.

“Forever Young – that one’s also Bob Dylan.”

“Oh yeah,” he says, slurping his gin incredibly loudly.

Victoria brings in bound collections of his art, much of which is in the new book, *The Eternal Buzz and the Crock of Gold*. There is an introduction from the art critic Waldemar Januszczak, praising MacGowan’s “demented, wild, fascinating, scabrous kind of energy”, particularly the Catholic and sexual imagery, and saying that he is one of the few pop star artists Januszczak admires. The pictures were mainly drawn, in ballpoint pen or felt tip, when he was on the road and off his head. They reflect his character – punky, spiky, rude, religious, funny, surreal, half-arsed, filthy. Many are so densely cross-hatched they are virtually scrubbed out. Victoria points out a picture of Bono as Lord Edward Fitzgerald, leader of the 1798 United Irish rebellion.

Why did you turn Bono into Fitzgerald, I ask.

“I don’t remember.”

“You did these when you were totally wasted,” she says.

“Yeah.”

It’s hard to get anything beyond a monosyllable from MacGowan. In between there are long silences. He makes it clear he doesn’t want to talk.

“You’ve got lovely skin, Shane,” I say, randomly.

“Oh thanks sweetie, *Chhhhhhhhhhhh*.” He snore-laughs.

“Let’s see some of the filth, then,” I say.

“The *filth!*” he repeats, possibly affronted.

“Erotic art,” Victoria says.

“Well, filth is a better word. *Chhhhhhhhhhhh*.”

We look at various pictures – a woman with huge nipples smoking a cigar, an array of penises, penetration, fellatio, upside down S&M crucifixions, the works. Have you got a favourite, I ask. “Not really, no.” His short stubby sentences sound so weak they could be dying breaths. They are quickly followed by robust slurps of gin.



Featured in the book *The Eternal Buzz and the Crock of Gold*. Photograph: Shane MacGowan

One of my favourite pictures is a martini with an eye for the olive and a syringe for the stick. It reminds me of the Buñuel film, I say – what's it called? ‘Un Chien Andalou. There's one shot in it of an eyeball getting sliced with a razor. I would say this is more Dalí. *Schhhhhhlrrrrp*.’

I ask if he is still writing songs. “No. I've got a block.” The truth is he has had a block since the late 1980s.

“You wrote one a few weeks ago, didn't you?” Victoria says encouragingly.

Silence.

Was it good, I ask? He has been recording with the Irish indie band Cronin.

He looks at her, despairingly, wishing the conversation, or me, away.

“I thought it was good,” she says. “Shane, is there anything you’d like to talk about?”

“Not really, no. *Chhhhhhhhhhhh.*”

I’ve always been fascinated by the mix of Irish and English influences on MacGowan. His father did a degree in economics, and had a successful career working in management for C&A in London. Shane was a bright kid, and excelled at English. His writing won him a scholarship to the top public school Westminster, though he was expelled at 14 for selling drugs. He suffered another breakdown and spent six months in psychiatric hospital, including his 18th birthday. When he was released he found a new purpose in punk. In 1976, he achieved a level of pre-fame fame when the NME featured a photo of him bleeding from his ear under the headline “Cannibalism at Clash gig” after was bitten by his friend Jane Crockford (later of the post-punk band Mo-dettes) at a concert at the ICA in London.

Did living in England made him feel more Irish? “I didn’t live in England,” he protests. OK, did living in England most of the time make you feel more Irish?

“Yes.”

Why? He looks at Victoria despairingly. “God, these questions are fucking ...”

“There’s nothing I can do,” she says to him gently. “You’re going to just have to say something about something. Do you want me to close the curtains? The sun seems to be bugging you.”

Victoria leaves the room to talk to the carer.

“Victoria said you had bad anxiety yesterday,” I say. “How are you feeling now?”



The Pogues in 1984. Photograph: Steve Rapport/Getty Images

“Yes, I had a sudden attack of horrible fear. Nameless fear.” He softens.

I’ve had that, I say – it’s paralysing, and makes you loathe yourself because it’s so pointless. “Well, that’s you. You’re projecting.” He’s got a point.

For all his cussedness, MacGowan is still fantastically sharp. Despite his hostility, he’s got a lovely smile, which he occasionally lets me see.

Victoria told me you like the royal family and cried when Prince Philip died, I say. “Nooooo!” he says, outraged.

“You know you like the royal family,” she says.

“*She* likes the royal family.” And you? “I’ve got nothing against them.”

“You watch The Crown a lot!” she says.

“I watched the first series.”

“You’re lying now. You watched all of it.”

“I can’t remember, you know.”

Does he miss being on the road? “Not really, no. I miss the early days of the Pogues. That was a lot of fun.”

What are your best memories? He gives her another “Oh God” look.

Were you aware of how creative you were back then? “Yes.”

I remind him of something he once said – that in his songwriting he wanted to remind people of how rich Irish culture was, so they would return to the literature of the land and be proud of what such a small country had produced. Silence.

If Waiting for Godot was the play in which nothing happened twice, this is the interview in which nothing happened 200 times. And yet, weirdly, I feel I’m beginning to understand him.



With Kirsty MacColl in 1994. Photograph: Patrick Ford/Redferns

Critics of the Pogues complained that they weren’t properly Irish. But that was to miss the point. MacGowan was writing about the experience of being a London Irishman, a Paddy. He wrote about the discrimination the Irish faced in Britain, Republican politics and miscarriages of justice. He made many young Irish people born in Britain to Irish parents feel proud of their Irishness for the first time. He reclaimed the racist Paddy stereotype and

embraced it (even if he ultimately reinforced it). Many of the songs were about being drunk, and he said he was never going to fake it onstage, so he was pretty much permanently pissed. Then he discovered heroin. He only got clean in 2000 after [Sinéad O'Connor dobbbed him into the police](#) with the blessing of Victoria.

I ask how he feels about the Pogues' most famous song, Fairytale of New York, being voted the UK's most popular Christmas song in 2019.

“It pisses me off when people always talk about it,” he says.

Why? “Cos. Cos it just pisses me off, all right?”

Have you got a favourite song? “I’ve got a few, but that’s not one of them”

Which ones? “*I said* I’ve got a few”

“He said which ones?” Victoria says.

“Oh, stop.”

I love A Pair of Brown Eyes, I say. It’s one of many that come to mind. “White City I like a lot. No, not A Pair of Brown Eyes.” You don’t like that? “No.”

In 1991, the Pogues sacked MacGowan from the band even though he by and large *was* the band. He had become too unreliable. He formed the Popes, which was little more than a Pogues tribute band. [The Pogues](#) split up in 1996, reformed in 2001 with MacGowan and finally split up again in 2014. They didn’t record any new music second time round.

I ask how he fills his days now. Are you listening to much? “Not really, no.”

Are you reading? “No, not really.”

The story, possibly apocryphal, is that, by the age of 10, MacGowan was reading James Joyce’s Ulysses. Is it true? “Ten, 11 or 12,” he says. “It’s the anniversary this year. My dad was very into that, and he got me into it. My mother read a lot as well.”

Do you think people were right to refer to you as a genius? “Probably, yeah.”

What made you a genius? “God! Fucking *ridiculous* question!”

In the 2020 Julien Temple documentary *Crock of Gold*, the former Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams visits MacGowan and they reminisce (well, Adams does) about their long friendship. On the eve of peace talks with then prime minister Tony Blair, MacGowan asked him to pass on the message: “*Tiocfaidh ár lá*” (“Our day will come”).



MacGowan as a toddler, in a still from *Crock of Gold*.

Do you see much of Adams? “No. He’s been here a few times. He’s a very easy person to talk to,” he says pointedly.

“The priest comes round,” Victoria says buoyantly. “That happens regularly. He talks a lot.”

“Yeah, he talks a *hell* of a lot.”

I’m staring at the icons on the mantelpiece. Have you always had faith? “I was brought up with it, you know.” Have you ever lost it? “Yes, a few

times.” Because of stuff that has happened? “I don’t know.” Does your faith get stronger as you get older? Silence.

Victoria brings out some more art – cartoon characters called Bim and Dim. Did you like cartoons as a kid, I ask. Silence.

“You did like cartoons,” Victoria says, exasperated, “You *did!*” Silence.

“Shane, you definitely liked cartoons. I know you did. You liked the Phantom.”

“Yeah,” he finally concedes.

“Shane, you’re looking at him as if he’s here to kill you or torture you, but he’s not. He’s here cos he’s interested. And he’s trying his best. Come on – you’re not making it easy.”

Do you hate talking in general or just interviews, I ask. “Just interviews.”

Why? “After the first album we were totally misinterpreted.”

In what way? “In what way was I misinterpreted?” He looks at Victoria. Now I’m beginning to feel sorry for him. He seems on the verge of despair.

“That’s a fair question,” Victoria says.

“It wasn’t just me – it was the group.”

But they were only interested in you? “Yes. It turned into that.”

And you didn’t like that? “Yes.” It was undemocratic? “I just told you: I don’t like it.” I’m just asking why, I say. “I don’t know why I don’t like certain things. *Schhhhhhllrrrrp.*”

Did journalists misinterpret you when they said you had a death wish? He nods. “I still don’t.” Contrary to popular belief, you actually like life? “*Yes!*” he explodes passionately. “*Of course* I like life.”

“That’s not always a given,” Victoria says.

“Well, I like life!” he says adamantly.

“I don’t always like life,” Victoria says.



MacGowan in 1977. Photograph: Ian Dickson/Rex Features

Has she ever not wanted to live? “Yes, quite a lot of the time. But Shane never seems to want not to live. That’s what’s weird.”

Is life good, I ask him. “I’m working at it,” he says. I have a feeling it’s fear of death more than love of life that keeps him going.

Pretend I’m not here; would you say you were in a good place? “Yes. Yes!” Will you be happy when I’ve gone? “Probably, yeah, Chhhhhhhhhhhh. You’ve worn me out, Si.”

Victoria shows me what the book will look like when it’s finished. It’s huge and incredibly heavy. They are publishing 1,000 copies at £1,000 each. She told me earlier that they need money for his care.

I ask him if he worries about money. “It’s important when you haven’t got it.” Did you not earn as much as you should have done in the first place or have you spent it all? Silence.

“That may be a personal question,” Victoria says. “Sweetpea, are you going to say anything helpful for the book?” She looks at me. “I’ll probably have to go quite soon.” Silence.

“Look, it’s a picture book,” he eventually says. “That’s all there is to it. People seem to like the pictures.” She goes to put on her coat.

“You’ve been pretty reckless with drink and drugs,” I say. “Have you had any regrets about how you’ve lived your life before? *“Of course!”*” Another passionate explosion.

“She’s done a great job,” he says suddenly. He’s talking about how Victoria has put the book together, but he could just as well be talking about everything else she’s done for him. “Put that in,” she says, delighted. “Put that in.”

Does he think he would still be here without her? A heavy pause, even by his standards. “She lights up my life,” he says from the heart.

“I definitely want to help him to stay alive for as long as possible,” Victoria says. She heads towards the door, waiting to give me a lift back into town.

“Shane,” I say, “I’d like to say it’s been a pleasure, but it’s not been the easiest.”

“*Chhhhhhhhhhhh,*” he snore-laughs in agreement.

“Why don’t I take a picture of the two of you together?” Victoria says from the door.

“No thanks,” we both say simultaneously, smiling at each other.

It’s impossible not to warm to him when he smiles like that – however horribly he has treated you.

Take care, I say.

“God bless,” he says.

The Eternal Buzz and the Crock of Gold is available to pre-order at
store.shanemacgowan.com.

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Interview

Joy Labinjo: ‘I wanted to correct the notion that Black people arrived in Britain with Windrush’

[Kemi Alemoru](#)

For her latest show, the Dagenham-born artist bridges the personal and the political by bringing forgotten but crucial figures back to life



Figuring it out ... Joy Labinjo in her studio in Haringey, north London.
Photograph: Deniz Guzel/Tiwani Contemporary

Mon 4 Apr 2022 04.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 5 Apr 2022 05.04 EDT

Joy Labinjo is one of those lucky people who describes their childhood as “idyllic”. Born in 1994, she grew up playing in the streets of Dagenham, running between her family’s three-bedroom semi-detached and her grandparents’ house a few streets down to drink cups of tea and dip biscuits

into them until they were soggy. There were birthday parties on Saturdays and church on Sundays. Around the age of 10 she gained a reverence for her community, taking it upon herself to organise the family photographs. Carefully she laid them out in albums, labelling the dates and adding the names of people she could remember. Her initial work as a figurative painter consisted of reinterpretations of these beloved moments.

Although these images were honouring her love of family, her mother and father (a teacher and biochemist respectively) took a while to come round to the idea of her pursuing art as a career. But the last few years have seen Labinjo's star rise. She completed a residency in Greece, has exhibited her work at the Royal Academy and in galleries from Newcastle upon Tyne to Lagos. Moreover, as you walk down the stairs of Brixton tube station you are greeted by a huge mural celebrating the buzz of Black hair salons that she was commissioned to paint by [Art on the Underground](#).

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Labinjo's work centres Black characters either from her own life or ones that she feels connected to in some way. Her time at university in Newcastle "cemented" her need to "celebrate Blackness" given how white the population was. She describes her time there as "isolating" due to other students making "rogue racist comments" in her presence. "I didn't feel like I belonged there. I think that's what took me back to drawing family photographs." She would then incorporate other images that inspired her; anything as random as a pattern she might have seen while going about her daily life ("In one painting, the wallpaper was inspired by a Topshop skirt").

Labinjo's practice has evolved to bridge the personal and the political. Recently, she displayed a number of bold nude self-portraits at the Tiwani Contemporary gallery in Lagos, Nigeria, which she says was a "bit of a fuck you" to the way her body feels policed when she's in her family's country of origin. "I know it's for my own protection that people will tell me to cover up, but it just feels very patriarchal; the nudes were a chance for me to show myself on my own terms." She had initially been nervous that her

grandmother would not want to attend but was pleasantly surprised when she turned up in a *gele* (Nigerian traditional dress) with her friends.

Labinjo's next exhibition, *Ode to Olaudah Equiano*, extends her love of exploring the nuance and beauty of the Black experience by lifting the lid on Black British figures who played a significant role in the 18th-century abolitionist movement. The exhibition features large portraits of these mostly forgotten names, reimagining their lives with the same vibrancy she brings to the explorations of her family life.

Forgotten histories: four works by Joy Labinjo



Joy Labinjo's *Ignatius Sancho*, 2022. Photograph: Courtesy of the artist/Chapter Arts Centre/Tiwani Contemporary

Ignatius Sancho, 2022

"After reading David Olusoga's [Black and British: A Forgotten History](#), a story I enjoyed was that of Ignatius Sancho. He was a slave who bought his freedom and became the first Black man to vote in Britain. A plaque in his memory was unveiled in Greenwich Park in 2007."



Joy Labinjo's Terra Firma, 2022. Photograph: Courtesy of the artist/Tiwani Contemporary

Terra Firma, 2022

"This was the first painting in the nude series but I wasn't sure about it. I came to the studio one evening and photographed myself sat on the bench and went from there. [Art](#) has the power to see the beauty where we might not. Sometimes I would step back and think: 'Joy, you're kind of beautiful.'"



Joy Labinjo's Olaudah Equiano, 2022. Photograph: Courtesy of the artist/Chapter Arts Centre/ Tiwani Contemporary

Olaudah Equiano, 2022

"I originally thought the man in the red jacket was Equiano, as that's what Penguin used for the cover of its reproduction of The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano. However, it's not him. I found images of an engraving that was in the original, and this image was inspired by that."



Joy Labinjo's Ode to Olaudah Equiano, 2022. Photograph: Courtesy of the artist/Chapter Arts Centre/ Tiwani Contemporary

Ode to Olaudah Equiano, 2022

"I decided to make some work that could correct the notion that Black people arrived in Britain with the Windrush. They were present before, in part due to colonisation and the slave trade. Olaudah Equiano (who I originally thought this picture was of) was enslaved but managed to buy his freedom. His powerful memoir helped to abolish slavery."

Ode to Olaudah Equiano is at [Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff](#), to 3 July.

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Is Jerusalem still the play of the century? Top playwrights give their verdicts



A proper night out ... a scene from *Jerusalem* at the Royal Court in 2009.
Photograph: Tristram Kenton/The Guardian

As Mark Rylance returns to the West End stage as the rambunctious Rooster in Jez Butterworth's shaggy state-of-the-nation play, six writers consider its power and legacy

Interviews by [Andrew Dickson](#)

Mon 4 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Mon 4 Apr 2022 01.47 EDT

It was the play that had [critics searching for superlatives](#) and audiences queueing out of the door. When *Jerusalem* opened at London's Royal Court in 2009, it developed a near-mythical reputation almost instantly. And when it transferred to the West End and then on to Broadway, the legend was complete. Shaggy, rambunctiously comic and centred on Mark Rylance's outsized performance as Johnny "Rooster" Byron, a Falstaffian ruffian dispensing drugs and tall tales to teenagers in the West Country woods, *Jerusalem* was a state-of-the-nation play in the strangest sense. It sets up a contemporary England half-drunk on history, where even Rooster's hangers-on expect giants to rise up near the A14 – and not just because they've popped too many pills. Could any of this be real? Some even [declared it "the play of the century"](#). To mark its return to the West End, six playwrights consider its power and legacy – and ask whether its titanic reputation still stands.



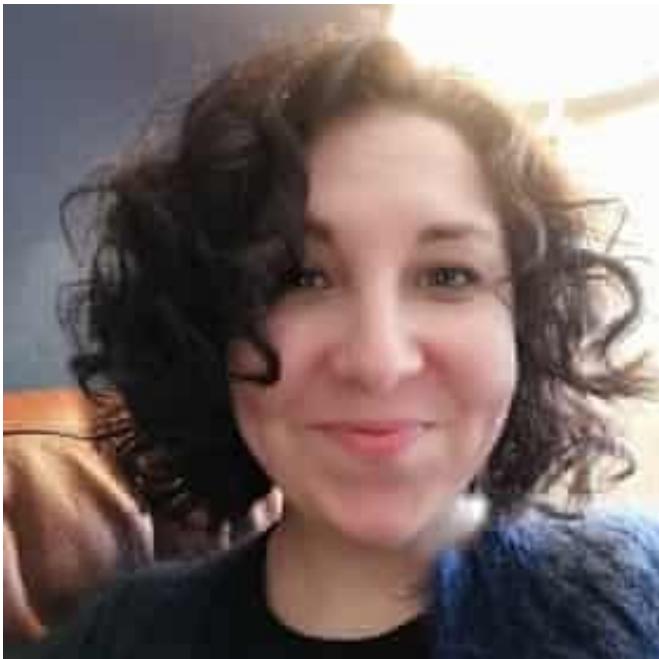
Photograph: Dan Wooller/Rex/ Shutterstock

‘I’ve probably stolen its technique’ – James Graham

I saw *Jerusalem* in previews, before the verdict came in that it was [a historic piece of theatre](#). But you could tell even then: the way the audience reacted was completely joyous. There are all these epic themes, but it was also a huge amount of fun: a full and proper night out. I’ve spent a long time trying to understand its DNA. I’ve often used it as a text when working with emerging writers. For all that it’s so wild and sprawling, it’s very tightly constructed. There’s [a linearity of time, uniformity of place, a set group of characters](#) – it’s not quite Greek, but nearly.

I love that Jez Butterworth, its writer, signposts the storytelling right at the start: you’ve got this guy living in a caravan in the woods, the council wants to evict him, and he says: “I’m not going.” You get the dramatic proposition, the tension, the conflict – all in the first couple of minutes. I’ve probably stolen that technique a bit. [Best of Enemies](#) explicitly signposts the end at the very beginning.

A number of the scripts I’ve written have been about [politics and the corridors of power](#). In *Jerusalem*, the politics are implicit not explicit, metaphorical not literal, and I really admire how bold Jez was with it: here’s this thing called “*Jerusalem*”, it’s a self-declared state-of-the-nation play, it’s about Englishness. It takes courage to do that.



‘Reviving a play about Englishness seems ill-judged’ – Bea Roberts

I got a Megabus really early in the morning from Bristol to see *Jerusalem* in London’s West End. I queued for tickets as early as I could. The only seat I could get was up in the gods, but then I got chatting to a lady whose friend hadn’t turned up, and she offered me a seat in her box. It was an incredible, delirious, unexpected day.

The show made my body shake: the pounding noise of it, the energy of the performances. It was also thrilling to see on stage something from the West Country, which is still remarkably rare. As someone who grew up there, to me it felt really authentic: that self-deprecating sense of humour, the jokes about [BBC Points West](#), a love for the countryside but also an acknowledgment of the smallness of that world.

Should the play be revived? I’m not sure. I read the script again recently and [there’s a lot that feels dated](#): the laddish chat about “birds” and the racial references – will they change those or at least acknowledge them? I understand it’s a safe bet for producers, this big, much-loved hit – and I loved it too. But at a time when theatre is grappling with questions of diversity and representation after Black Lives Matter, and when we’re seeing

the rise of nationalism post-Brexit, doing a play about defending homeland and Englishness seems ill-judged. Maybe they'll be able to interrogate that, or give it context, but I'm not sure. So much has changed.



‘Rylance thanked his chiropractor. I understand why’ – Amy Berryman

I had just graduated from acting school and moved to New York. There was all this buzz about [this British play that had landed on Broadway](#). Everyone seemed to be talking about it, in particular Mark Rylance’s performance as Rooster Byron. So we bought tickets.

I was determined to be an actor at the time, and was mainly looking at it through that sort of lens: “How’s he doing that, what’s he doing with his body?” It was otherworldly, the way Rylance transformed himself into this extraordinary muscular force. You see a lot of remarkable performances in New York, but this was something else. I remember listening to his acceptance speech after he won a Tony for best actor – and here was this lovely, rather sweet, small man, not this giant, epic thing I saw on stage. [He thanked his chiropractor](#). I think I understand why.

As someone who didn't grow up in England, I'm sure [some of the references went over my head](#). But what appealed to me was this sense of its world being so complete. And its characters felt universal. I remember being totally along for the ride.



‘Where is Rooster now? What happened to the women?’ – Atiha Sen Gupta

I never saw *Jerusalem* the first time around – I couldn't get a ticket – so I bought the text and read it. What struck me was how lyrical and beautiful the writing was: poetic, dense, multilayered. Then there's the fascinating question of Rooster and what kind of character he is: we see him as the ultimate outsider, existing on the margins, but we're also deeply drawn to him. I wish I'd been able to see Rylance's performance to figure out how – or if – he resolved that.

The play is packed with symbols of Englishness, from [St George's Day to maypoles to Spitfires](#). Some reviewers fondly alluded to Rooster as a [metaphor for a lost England](#) – a decaying man, a decaying empire. But, as someone who grew up in Britain in a leftwing Asian family, empire is not something I have any nostalgia for. The drama [has also been hailed as the definitive English play in the modern canon](#). While it's necessary to ask,

“What or who is England?”, I don’t think there’s a single answer. There are many Englands.

Much as I’d like to finally see it, I wonder if, instead of just [reviving Jerusalem with the same director and some of the same cast](#), a more interesting approach would be for someone to write a new play responding to it. Where is Rooster now? What happened to the female characters, who we don’t hear a lot from? How have they all navigated Brexit and Covid? That could be fascinating.



Photograph: Alicia Canter/The Guardian

‘I went six times. It’s the holy grail’ – Polly Stenham

I was working on a project at the Royal Court when *Jerusalem* was in rehearsals, and there was something in the air – a sense that something really exciting was being created. One day I was having a cigarette with one of the crew, a guy called Stick who’d been building the set, and he said: “You absolutely *have* to see this.” I ended up going six times. I made everyone I knew go, even people who never went to the theatre.

I was a fairly inexperienced writer at the time – [my second play, Tusk Tusk, had just been staged](#) – and I learned so much from the script. I didn’t realise that you could be epic and grand, but also funny and up-to-date. There’s all that stuff about myths and Englishness, but there’s banter, and gags about Girls Aloud. Jez is such a generous writer: even minor characters get their riffs and arias.

And then the climax, [the scene where Rooster is drumming](#), incanting the names of spirits and ghosts! As a writer, if you can create that kind of energy, it’s the holy grail. I think it’s also worth saying that the director Ian Rickson, who I’ve worked with subsequently, is so important, both in the way he worked with Jez to help bring it into existence and the way it appeared on stage. He’s a proper writers’ director.

Jerusalem wasn’t tidy, it wasn’t perfect, it wasn’t commercial. It was sprawling and wild and dangerous – and I felt completely lit up by it. If you see a handful of plays like that in your lifetime, you’re doing well.



Photograph: Dan Wooller/Rex/ Shutterstock

**‘I felt like I was at a Countryside Alliance rally’ –
Mark Ravenhill**

Jerusalem is old-fashioned in the best ways: it's got this big three-act structure, two intervals, three hours-plus. Hardly anyone does that any more. At first you think: "Oh, this is a sort of pastoral comedy." But then the momentum builds and it turns into this epic state-of-the-nation play. The confidence and craft of that is so impressive. Jez – whom I've never met – is a hugely talented writer, absolutely no question.

And Rylance was definitive. It's immensely rare for one of the greatest actors of their generation to connect with a piece of new writing: it felt like you were watching [Laurence Olivier play The Entertainer](#) [by John Osborne] or [Anthony Hopkins do Pravda](#) [by David Hare and Howard Brenton].

However, I did sense odd things, too, as much in the audience reaction as anything else. When I saw it at the Royal Court during that initial run, it was summer 2009. Gordon Brown was in power and [you could sense that it was the end of the New Labour era](#). Something was changing. That image in Jerusalem of the spirit of England being under threat from busybodies and petty bureaucrats – that England has got befuddled and stoned, is living in its caravan in the woods, but will rise to its feet and conquer once more – that seemed to do something to the audience.

We were in central London, but it was like being in the middle of [a Countryside Alliance rally](#). As I left, I thought: "The Tories are going to win the next election."

- [Jerusalem is at the Apollo theatre, London, 16 April-17 August.](#)
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‘Kids are interested in everything’: Krishnan Guru-Murthy and Lizo Mzimba on Newsround at 50



News hounds ... (*from left*) Hayley Hassall, Ricky Boleto, Julie Etchingham, Lizo Mzimba, Krishnan Guru-Murthy, John Craven, Ore Oduba, Ellie Crisell, De’Graft Mensah and Sonali Shah. Photograph: BBC

From the environment to diversity, the children's news show has been setting the agenda for decades. Two former presenters explain what it taught them – and why it still matters



[Sam Wollaston](#)

[@samwollaston](#)

Mon 4 Apr 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Mon 4 Apr 2022 05.14 EDT

At 5.20pm on Tuesday 4 April 1972, a man with shiny black hair said: “Hello,” and made television history. Small confession: no recording of that first edition of Newsround exists, so I don’t know for sure that he said hello, but thereafter he always began: “Hello again,” so it is more conjecture than a wild guess. The television history part is a fact. Fifty years on, with children asking questions about war and their need for a trustworthy, sensitive source of news, Newsround is more important than ever.

It played a big part in my own childhood. In those days – the 70s – you came back from school and put the telly on. John Craven – the man with the shiny hair, as well as a nice line in 70s shirts and, later, offensively brightly coloured jumpers – told us what was going on in the cold war and Northern Ireland, as well as a lot of brighter news stories, generally involving animals. (The debut episode included a report about ospreys returning to Scotland.) “He is clearly one of the most influential journalists of the last 50 years,”

says [Krishnan Guru-Murthy](#), Channel 4's lead newsreader. "And strangely unsung. When you think of the names thrown around over the past half-century, Craven is up there with David Dimbleby."



Influential ... John Craven presenting Newsround in 1973. Photograph: BBC Pictures Archives

John Craven's Newsround, as it was called then, featured in Guru-Murthy's childhood, too. He used to come home from school in Blackburn and settle down to Newsround with a cup of tea and a crumpet. He didn't know then that, a decade or so later, from 1991 to 1994, he would be on the other side of the screen, reporting and presenting for the show.

Newsround was one of the world's first TV news magazines made specifically for children. It was commissioned as a short series by the BBC's Children's department, but using BBC News facilities. It began life with a handful of staff and a couple of typewriters. (I always thought the percussive original opening theme sounded like a report being bashed out on a typewriter.)

Craven understood that the way to make a presenter more friendly was to bring them out in front of the desk

Krishnan Guru-Murthy

Craven – now 81, hair less black and shiny, but still very much around on Countryfile – was the main man for 17 years, until 1989. In those days before the internet and 24-hour rolling news, Newsround would sometimes be the first opportunity for the [BBC](#) to put out a big story. The news of the assassination attempt on Pope John Paul II in 1981 and the loss of the space shuttle Challenger in 1986 were broken on the programme.

Post-Craven, Newsround became a stepping stone to more grown-up careers. Helen Rollason (Grandstand's first female presenter) and Julie Etchingham (now an anchor on ITV News at Ten) did stints. Guru-Murthy covered the breakups of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia while still at university. “It was an incredible time to be learning about journalism,” he says. “There were so many geopolitical events. We didn’t shy away from any story; we assumed that children were interested in everything. They were very formative experiences, trying to explain complex events to a young audience in a way that would really bring it home to them.”

It was brilliant training, he says. “I constantly find myself going: do I need to explain this, do a bit of background; should we have a map?” He is talking to me from his home, but he is heading to Ukraine any minute now. Behind him, on a big screen, CNN is showing scenes of the war.

It has also helped him stockpile a commodity that is invaluable in the delivery of news: trust. When Channel 4 News did some audience research a few years ago, “the viewers were saying: ‘We trust Krishnan because we have grown up with him, watching him on Newsround.’”

Lizo Mzimba, who presented from 1998 to 2008 and is now the BBC’s entertainment correspondent, has joined our video call. He has a healthy trust fund, too. “It’s really useful having people who have watched you [when they were kids]. Occasionally, you bump into somebody on the red carpet and they say: ‘God, I used to love watching you on Newsround.’ It helps break the ice a bit. They’re less on their guard – it’s that guy I used to watch on Newsround, I know him, I trust him. You get a better relationship with them and better answers.”

Guru-Murthy and Mzimba say Newsround taught them to use short sentences and simple words wherever possible. Mzimba covered floods in Mozambique, Hurricane Katrina and 9/11 for the show, but he also has fond memories of some of the less serious things, such as a piece about triathlons that had him signing off in a swimming pool, wearing a big pair of orange armbands: “Lizo Mzimba, Newsround, doing the doggy paddle.”

It wasn’t all collapsing regimes for Guru-Murthy, either. During his time, they did a mock general election for kids. He also went on the road with Take That, for a piece about fan mania. The sillier stuff hadn’t been part of the career plan. “I wanted to head towards my broadcasting heroes. I never imagined I would be sitting in the cupboard with Edd the Duck, but it was great fun.”



Presenters Chris Rogers, Kate Sanderson (now Gerbeau) and Lizo Mzimba in 1998. Photograph: PA Images/Alamy

Newsround also set the agenda. “It was pushing environmental news long before adult news was,” says Guru-Murthy. “Kids were interested in the world, in animals, the environment, in saving the planet. We were making programmes about that agenda because that’s where kids were already. It’s not about adults deciding what children should be interested in; this was the BBC meeting a need that was out there already.”

It led the way on diversity, too. “The makers of Newsround were much more aware of the need to reflect the audience, for kids to see people who look like them, and that also meant bringing in younger presenters,” says Guru-Murthy, mentioning Lucy Mathen (who now runs the Indian blindness charity Second Sight) and Terry Baddoo (now a writer-producer at USA Today), who preceded him.

Mzimba says: “As a young black boy living in the UK, I was particularly aware of people like Trevor McDonald and Moira Stuart. Then later figures on Newsround, like Terry Baddoo and Krishnan, of course. In a way, it was more subconscious than conscious, but they were all really key figures in making me think that perhaps this was the kind of job I could do in the future, so I will be eternally grateful to them for the path they trod.”

In production and sets, too, Newsround was ahead of the curve, says Guru-Murthy – even back in the Craven days. “He understood that the way to make a presenter more friendly was to bring them out in front of the desk,” he says. “People standing up, moving around the studio, things like that.” Now, all the newsreaders do it.

The way people – children included – get their news has changed dramatically in the past 20 years. In 2002, Newsround moved to the new channel [CBBC](#), expanding from a single programme on weekday afternoons to bulletins throughout the day, seven days a week. “We were lucky when we did Newsround and the main activity after school was watching television, so CBBC had a huge grip on children’s time and attention,” says Mzimba. “With the internet and social media, it’s a challenge to get younger people more engaged, because they don’t come to traditional news programmes in the way they used to.”

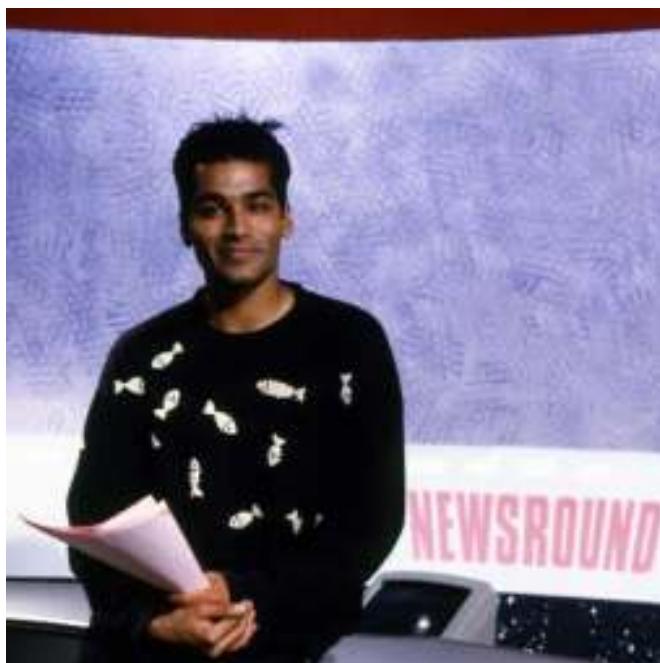
Newsround was pushing environmental news long before adult news was ... that’s where kids were already

Krishnan Guru-Murthy

“It is frustrating that kids don’t have the same tradition of watching [TV news](#),” says Guru-Murthy. “But that’s just a challenge of the world today. We’ve got to take it on, wise up to it, and we are doing.”

On the day I am speaking to the two former presenters, one of the current presenters, [De'Graft Mensah](#), leads the morning bulletin with a piece about [World Book Day](#). This may not be news in the traditional sense, but is justifiable, says Guru-Murthy. “As a parent, I know it’s hugely significant – it’s what kids are talking about that day – so in terms of their world it’s the big story.” Then there is a report from Ukraine about refugees, especially children, on the border with Poland. This leads nicely into a feature by Marianna Spring, the BBC’s specialist disinformation reporter, about misleading news and how to spot it.

Doing a story such as Ukraine for children is not that different from doing any kind of story, says Guru-Murthy. “You try to explain as much of the history – the Soviet Union and Putin – as you can, briefly and concisely. And you have to show quite a lot of the imagery, certainly the bangs and the disruption, but you would be very careful about the amount of distressing footage of people, especially of children.”



Krishnan Guru-Murthy presenting in 1991. Photograph: BBC

There is a duty of care to the viewer, he says. While his target audience was eight to 12, there might have been younger children watching; their parents had the right to put them in front of it and for them not to be distressed by the content. “That didn’t mean you couldn’t tackle very serious news or

would have to sanitise; we would just explain and contextualise, not scare anyone. It's the opposite of a lot of news now, especially on the internet, which is driven towards hyping and trying to get clicks."

In July 2020, the 4pm programme was axed, with the focus moving to the 7.45am edition, BBC iPlayer and a website of explainers and features, including [Happy News](#) (maintaining a Newsround tradition of covering good news as well as bad). The BBC estimates that 2 million children watch the show at least once a week in schools, while the website attracts 750,000 unique browsers a week. Since the invasion of Ukraine, viewership of the online bulletin has increased by 25%.

So: another 50 years, then? Of course, they both say yes, that you only have to look at the world to see the need for Newsround. That "might not be on television, but it will be in the media they are consuming in 50 years' time," says Guru-Murthy. Although he is no longer with the BBC, he gets in a dig at those who bash it. "Just look at what the BBC is doing in Ukraine and Russia. I look forward to seeing what Netflix, Amazon and Apple are doing in comparison. When you've got a real war, cultural war is put into sharp perspective."

Five questions from schoolchildren

My own kids have grown up with Newsround, just in school rather than after it. Their mum is a primary school teacher, one of the 75% of them who use Newsround as a teaching tool. She asked the six- and seven-year-olds in her year 2 class if they had any questions for the former presenters. They did.

Why does Newsround exist?

Krishnan Guru-Murthy: To explain what is going on in the world in a way that is clear, with facts you can trust.

Lizo Mzimba: Because there is a demand for it. Children are interested in news; they deserve to get it in a way that is specifically tailored to their interests and the way they absorb information.

Where do you find the news?

KGM: Most of the time, it comes from us finding things out from our journalists around the world, asking people what is going on and then telling you about it.

Is it all true?

LM: Newsround works really hard to make sure what it says is accurate and in the correct context.

KGM: We tried very hard to get it right – harder than most adult news programmes.

Is it dangerous?

KGM: Sadly, a lot of children live in dangerous places. To tell you about their lives and to explain what's going on, you sometimes have to go to dangerous places, but you try very hard not to put yourselves at risk in the process.

What did you learn from doing it?

LM: When you're gathering information in order to put out a programme like Newsround, you have to understand things yourself before you can explain it to somebody else. So it's a wonderful way to learn about the world we live in – all the issues that affect people of all ages.

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2022.04.04 - Opinion

- To have a child or not is a huge decision. So why is there so little discussion of it?
- Britain's on the rocks – no wonder we're hitting the cocktails
- 'Cost of living crisis'? No – this is a social emergency that will define who we are
- Sunak pours scorn on the OBR's dire warnings – but the facts speak for themselves

[Republic of Parenthood](#)[Children](#)

To have a child or not is a huge decision. So why is there so little discussion of it?

[Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett](#)



More open conversations and better support are needed for people grappling with this momentous choice



‘For the first time in history, half the women in England and Wales have not had a child by the time they reach 30.’ Photograph: Alex Segre/Alamy

Mon 4 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Mon 4 Apr 2022 08.02 EDT

Long before I became pregnant, I would ask people how they knew that they wanted to have children. Was there a lightning moment, or had the longing grown and grown until it became too much to ignore? Of course, the answers I got were as varied as people themselves. Some were able to distill it into a clear instant: taking hold of a small child’s hand for the first time, or seeing a baby on a bus one day and knowing, suddenly. Others were influenced by life events: the death of a parent was a common one, leading them to reflect on how bloodlines unfurl, wanting to see a little of that beloved parent manifest in a new being. Others had always known, in their bones, since their own childhoods.

Then, for women, there was the so-called biological clock. Not so much a desire for a child, but an awareness that time [could be running out](#), and a sort of not-wanting, a double negative: not-wanting to have not had a child. Many of these women expressed guilt at not having felt “the longing”, as though an innate-seeming, visceral dose of baby fever was the norm, and, in their absence of strong maternal feelings, they were deviating from it. But it does not seem that way to me, and besides, my own feelings were far from simple. At times it felt as though my body was at war with my brain. There

were so many rational reasons not to become a parent, and yet the longing I felt was so powerful that it was making me unspeakably sad not to be.

I say “body”, but of course I don’t know. I can write only of how it felt, but scientifically, the jury remains out on whether the desire for parenthood is down to nature or nurture, and both biology and culture are likely to contribute. We are social animals, and social pressure can be enormous. I like to think that I was immune to this, though during 2020-21 it felt as though everyone I knew was having a baby, except me. I sat on the sidelines, wanting it, but dithering.

It is, of course, a privilege to dither. Before the advent of contraception, becoming a parent couldn’t really be described as a decision at all. Perhaps this is why my search for historical sources that showed women interrogating the question was rather fruitless. Even speaking to women of older generations, who came of age post-contraception, there’s a sense that there wasn’t much thought given to the question. “It’s just what you did”, is a sentence that came up, time and time again, and several older women have expressed their admiration for my generation for taking the prospect so seriously.

Role models are also a factor. My mother has quite a few friends who are child-free, and so I never grew up believing that motherhood was destiny. I knew that there were many kinds of life that one could have, and also that I could have a relationship with children in other ways: as an aunt, a godparent, a friend. In fact, I found that the decision to be child-free was far better documented than the decision to become a parent. It feels as though there is still a taboo when it comes to expressing having had entirely rational doubts about becoming a parent, only to go ahead and take the plunge. I have lost count of the number of times that I have read that you should only do so if you are “100% sure”. As someone who, for a variety of reasons, has never been 100% sure about anything in my life, that feels pretty shaming.

It feels to me as though we need more open conversations about the decision-making process, and better ways of supporting people who are in the midst of it. We are surrounded by panic about the birthrate – for the first time in history, half the women in England and Wales [have not had a child](#)

by the time they reach 30, yet there still seems to be little exploration of the fact that many western countries are what could be termed hostile environments for new parents. There are many reasons – economic, educational, environmental – why a person may delay parenthood, and my generation and those younger than it face unprecedented hardships. On top of that, there is evidence to suggest that women are happier without children and a spouse. When a happiness expert [spoke about this in 2019](#), people were enraged, but the fact remains that the sexist balance of domestic labour makes a lot of women miserable, and who can blame them for choosing another path?

As with anything to do with parenthood, we could do with less judgment, and more listening. And perhaps, as Sheila Heti [suggests in Motherhood](#), the constant questioning is all “a huge conspiracy to keep women in their thirties – when you finally have some brains and some skills and experience – from doing anything useful with them at all”.

What's working: Even though I decided motherhood was for me, I found the 2015 essay collection *Selfish, Shallow, and Self-Absorbed: Sixteen Writers on the Decision Not to Have Kids* fascinating, especially as it included men, one of whom (Geoff Dyer), as the New York Times reviewer pointed out, shows “what it looks like to have a relationship to the topic that is completely unburdened by guilt or self-doubt”.

What isn't: I find myself hating the tone of a lot of pregnancy books targeted at women, which feel infantilising and identity-sapping. I dislike being referred to as a disembodied “mum”, and language such as “lady garden” and “sore parts” makes me want to scream. As for some of the advice, a section on the idea of “freedom Friday” – which sees a husband deign to give his wife one “night off” a week, followed by “top tips on how not to hate your partner” made me wonder if I had entered a wormhole straight to the 1950s. Sadly, barbiturates were not suggested as a remedy.

- Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett is a Guardian columnist

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OpinionCocktails

Britain's on the rocks – no wonder we're hitting the cocktails

Richard Godwin



With cocktails booming in popularity, it appears they may be a link between hard times and hard liquor



‘A cocktail is an event, a treat, a promise of an extravagant evening to come.’ Photograph: Lara Hata/Getty Images

Mon 4 Apr 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Mon 4 Apr 2022 14.28 EDT

It is far from an exact science, taking a nation’s pulse from what it’s drinking. Cocktail sociology tends, alas, to be looked down upon by the powers that be. The field is sadly overreliant on the datasets of second-rate spiced rum brands. Still, cocktails are, apparently, [selling in record numbers](#): they accounted for almost one-tenth of alcohol sales in bars and restaurants between April and October 2020, compared with 6% before the pandemic; and the at-home cocktail market has grown 44% year on year. Why the explosion in popularity? As someone who has spent a few negronis correlating vermouth trends with socio-economic factors, I think there are two conclusions to draw.

The first is that the British will use anything as an excuse to drink: crash, plague, war, depression, we’re not fussy. At-home sales of alcohol [increased by 24%](#) in the year from March 2020. Not only did at-home drinking nearly cancel out the losses of bars and restaurants during lockdown (overall alcohol sales were only down by 1.2%), it changed what we were drinking: the five o’clock cocktail ritual became an anchor amid the amorphous days and a proxy for all the things we couldn’t do: travel, socialise, laugh. It’s also far less effort making a margarita than making sourdough. As a result,

beer was down 14%; spirits were up 7.3%. [Waitrose](#) reported that pandemic tequila sales went up by 175%, with liqueur sales rising by 78%.

Now restrictions have eased, we're seeing another mini-boom. Pubs and bars have filled once more, but now customers know precisely how much vermouth they like in their martini. AG Barr, the Scottish sugary drink manufacturer, found a 13% increase in customers ordering cocktails compared to pre-pandemic, and the trend for home mixing continues unabated. "Gin is up. Rum is up. Everything is up," reports Dawn Davies, head buyer of the retailer the Whisky Exchange. "It's a bit: 'What cost of living crisis?'"

The picture is a little more complicated than that: millions cut back during the pandemic; the longer-term trend is that we are [drinking less](#) anyway; and for me at least, the move to cocktails is about drinking less but drinking better. A beer is a release after a long day; a cocktail is an event, a treat, a promise of an extravagant evening to come. Moreover we are already a couple of decades into what bartending types call the "second golden age of the cocktail" – taking the 1910s-30s as the first golden age. When I first started mixing, in 2008 or so, it was hard to find the key ingredients in non-specialist retailers. Now there is a passable crème de violette in Lidl and ready-to-drink porn star martinis in M&S.

That brings me to the second overarching trend: the affinity between hard times and hard liquor. The American drink historian David Wondrich dates the current revival to post-9/11 New York. It was in the early 2000s, as New York entered its hipster phase, that bartenders began poring over old-timey bar manuals and coming up with modern classics such as the [paper plane](#) and the French pearl. The movement really got going in Britain post-financial crash, which is when the boom in craft gin distilleries began in earnest. Cocktails that were derided in the 1960s as fusty, old-fashioned things ("I will not be part of her cocktail-generation," sang baby boomer icon Don McLean) and in the 1990s as tacky, synthetic, things (this was the era of the dreaded Long Island iced tea) turn out to be the ideal accompaniments to these frightening and frivolous times. They are celebration and consolation in one.

There's also a more specific correlation between the popularity of cocktails and economic inequality. The first high point of cocktails was in the age of the robber barons, rampant deregulation, boom and bust. The low point coincided with the postwar settlement of 1945-79 or so, when average incomes in the west rose in line with strong overall economic growth. At this point, egalitarian beer and aspirational wine were the things to drink. [Cocktails](#) hit the mainstream again only as incomes yawned apart.

Will they endure? I doubt all those garden hot tubs and Peloton subscriptions will survive the cost of living crisis. But some luxuries are bomb-proof. Lipstick is one. Martinis are another. These are relatively affordable ways of escaping reality for a moment. I suspect we'll be sinking them for a while yet.

- Richard Godwin is the author of The Spirits and writes a weekly newsletter about cocktails at thespirits.substack.com
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Opinion**Poverty**

‘Cost of living crisis’? No – this is a social emergency that will define who we are

[John Harris](#)



Too many people remain outside the political conversation and vulnerable to the meanest kind of policies



Illustration: Matt Kenyon for the Guardian.

Sun 3 Apr 2022 07.27 EDT Last modified on Mon 4 Apr 2022 08.22 EDT

Lexie lives in rural north Wales. She is disabled, and her husband recently lost his job in the building trade. The heating and hot water in their council house is oil-fired, and the price of 500 litres of fuel has just gone up from £235 to £480. They have also just found out that their annual electricity costs are rising from £1,851.15 to £2,564.33. Their four sons are aged from eight to 18. They have not put their home's radiators on since last November.

I [first wrote about Lexie](#) – not her real name, but the one she has used to write diary entries for a research project called [Covid Realities](#) – in January. Around 10 days ago, we had another conversation. She talked about squeezing multiple meals from the cheapest of ingredients (she had somehow managed to get five dinners out of a bag of 11 frozen chicken pieces), washing with hot water boiled on the stove, and the endless financial traps that she and her family now have to try to somehow avoid.

Lexie has a mobility vehicle provided as part of her disability benefits, but the soaring cost of diesel means it has to be mostly used for the school run. Of late, her husband has been offered a few job interviews, but found that

the impossible cost of travel has ruled them out: local public transport is thin on the ground, and anyway, the nearest bus stop is two miles from their house. Visits to the supermarket have to be carefully rationed, but that means buying basic goods from the local convenience store, where everything is more expensive. Lexie worries most, she says, about her youngest child, who has asthma. His coughing fits are sometimes so bad that he vomits. “It’s because he’s cold,” she told me. “I know it is. But there’s nothing I can do. I can’t pull heat out of the air.”

The kind of want and hurt Lexie’s family are suffering may sound as if it places them on the edges of society. The truth is that there are millions of British people like them, and those numbers are increasing fast. A stark metric is the UK’s level of absolute poverty, which is defined as being a household income less than 60% of the median income level of 2010-11, adjusted for inflation – a measure that usually goes up only in times of recession. [The Resolution Foundation forecasts](#) that over the next year, the fall in real incomes means another 1.3 million people in the UK – including 500,000 children – will be pushed into this category, taking the [total number to 12.5 million](#).

Has the scale of this social emergency sunk in yet? Last Friday was the day when the costs of some of life’s most basic elements – from gas and electricity to social housing rents – [shot up](#), way beyond a 3.1% increase in benefits. As the cost of food continues to rise, energy bills [are set to go up](#) again in the autumn. Continuing [cuts to local services](#), accelerated by inflation, mean that the last-ditch help so many people need – children’s social care, advice on housing and debt, and so much more – is in a more parlous state than ever. As Lexie’s experiences show, [almost a third of disabled people](#) live in poverty, an aspect of the story that gets far too little attention. Abstractions such as “the cost of living crisis” do not do enough justice to 2022’s mounting sense of dread; neither does the cliched view of people having to choose between heating and eating, when a lot of people will soon be unable to afford either.

Across the country, this weekend saw [protests](#) against yet another economic calamity being loaded on to the poorest people, and there will be more to come. The government, meanwhile, seems split between indifference and paralysed panic. Though Rishi Sunak’s spring statement offered no

meaningful action at all, the backlash that followed it saw speculation about help that may belatedly arrive as things get even worse. But Conservative politics is still largely locked into that grim narrative that splits people into workers and mere claimants, even though the sheer number of lives turned upside down by rising living costs is undermining its twisted logic. Labour has unquestionably good intentions, but also tends to stick to a script centred on “working families”, presumably for fear of scaring the swing voters it sees as being judgmental about so-called welfare. That leaves too many people outside the political conversation and vulnerable to the meanest kind of policies.

One thing we rarely talk about is when and how basic hardship began to become so inescapable. In the much-maligned 1970s, when trade unions were strong and the welfare state was entering its last years as a dependable safety net, income and wealth inequality were at an all-time low – and though poverty was an issue, it had yet to be allowed to run rampant. Then came the reinvention of Conservatism under Margaret Thatcher. In 1979, about 13% of children lived in relative poverty; by 1992, the figure was 29%. It consistently declined under New Labour, before increasing again after 2010. Thanks to David Cameron and George Osborne, rhetoric about “welfare” reached a new nadir, and policy followed the same trajectory. At the same time, the kind of precarious work that locks people into poverty was allowed to hugely increase. The basic story was plain enough: the UK was once again being pulled away from any lingering affinities with European-style social democracy towards the market-driven individualism of the US, and the idea that poverty is either best ignored, or thought of as a failure of character.

But there has always been a pull in the opposite direction, towards solidarity and collectivism rooted not so much in ideology as in basic morals. Beyond Westminster, that view of things is now evident in the wider culture, thanks to such voices as the footballer Marcus Rashford and the cook and anti-poverty campaigner Jack Monroe. Public opinion seems to have shifted, thanks partly to the pandemic having acquainted more people with the benefits system and highlighted glaring inequalities. In the annual British Social Attitudes survey of 2011, 77% agreed that benefits for the unemployed were “too high and discouraged people from finding a job”, as against the idea that they were “too low and caused hardship”. But in the

latest survey, that figure had dropped to 45% – the first time since 2000 that it had been the less popular of the two views. This, perhaps, highlights why Sunak’s indifference became a much bigger talking point than he had bargained for.

In the midst of yet another crisis, we are about to find out who we now are: either the mean, hard-faced country many politicians still believe in, or a society moving in a more compassionate direction. Who will decide? I wonder about Tory MPs who represent newly acquired seats in Labour’s old heartlands, whose constituency caseloads must increasingly be full of real hardship; there must also be plenty of voters who have long thought of themselves as sitting well away from poorer parts of the population, but are now seeing such distinctions fall away. Therein lies both a grim kind of hope and yet another injustice – because the people who should surely have the loudest voices are those who have been suffering for years and are now facing a level of want that is almost beyond words.

- John Harris is a Guardian columnist

- **Guardian Newsroom: The cost of living crisis**

Join Hugh Muir, Richard Partington, Anneliese Dodds MP and youth campaigner Christiana Adane, in a livestreamed event on the cost of living crisis and the effect on the poorest households on Thursday 14 April 2022, 8pm BST Book tickets [here](#)

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[Economics viewpoint](#)[Rishi Sunak](#)

Sunak pours scorn on the OBR's dire warnings – but the facts speak for themselves

[Richard Partington](#)



The chancellor would prefer forecasts to be more upbeat, but the economic outlook is unremittingly bleak



Rishi Sunak has chosen to prioritise pre-election tax cuts rather than addressing the cost of living crisis. Photograph: Justin Tallis/AP

Sun 3 Apr 2022 18.38 EDTFirst published on Sun 3 Apr 2022 08.41 EDT

Rishi Sunak should be used to grim economic forecasts. In his two years as chancellor, he's been warned to brace for the worst jobs crisis since the 1980s, a recession without parallel for three centuries, and the biggest shock to the public finances since the second world war.

Not everything came to pass. [Extending furlough](#) – rather than ending it early as the chancellor planned – prevented unemployment from hitting levels unseen since the days of his political idol Nigel Lawson.

Nonetheless, the chancellor is said to have taken issue with the Office for Budget Responsibility for overshadowing his spring statement with [dire economic forecasts](#). Anonymous sources told the Times that Sunak “absolutely viscerally hates the OBR”, saying the Treasury forecaster had made unidentified “normative policy judgements” – expressing an opinion about the way things ought to be, rather than impartially describing the outlook for the economy and public finances.

Sources close to Sunak have downplayed the leak, suggesting there is no truth to the anonymous briefing. Yet it would fit with a pattern. Leaks to another friendly newspaper suggested the chancellor was [frustrated with the BBC](#). Far from the image of the smooth operator of his early months in the job, brand Sunak's gloss appears to be wearing thin.

There are good reasons why the tide is turning. None of those are because impartial bodies are putting an ideological spin on things. Unfortunately for the chancellor, the facts speak for themselves.

The independent Treasury economics forecaster had told the public Britain was heading for the biggest annual fall in living standards since the mid-1950s, while Sunak was far from the tax cutter he proclaimed. His spring statement peroration promised the biggest net cut to personal taxes in over a quarter of a century. The OBR verdict, however, was clear: the tax burden would rise, not fall, to the highest level since Clement Attlee was prime minister in the late 1940s.

At worst, these statements could be accused of being a bit too colourful for an impartial body. Richard Hughes, the chair of the OBR, is said by those who know him to be keen on such factoids, ensuring they are peppered through the forecasts perhaps more readily than his predecessor, Robert Chote.

However, these gobbets remain far from normative. Such terms might grab media attention and risk upstaging the chancellor. Yet clear and relatable communication is vital for conveying knotty economic matters for a broad audience. To err on the side of caution for the fragile ego of a chancellor would be folly.

Even so, it doesn't take a colourful OBR report to know the economic outlook is unremittingly bleak, as the inevitable consequence of a once in a century pandemic is followed by war in Europe for the first time in decades.

Faced with the intense squeeze on living standards, a chorus line of charities and thinktanks have warned poverty is set to surge and questioned the chancellor's resolve to do his utmost to help those most at risk. Andrew Bailey, the governor of the Bank of England, warned last week that the

poorest in society would suffer most from the worst inflation shock since the 1970s. Yet intervening in the economy to affect distributional outcomes is not in the Bank's remit.

The verdict from the Institute for Fiscal Studies and the Resolution Foundation could hardly be clearer: Sunak has unique powers to cushion families from the cost of living crisis, yet chose to prioritise pre-election tax cuts for tomorrow ahead of addressing problems today. If Sunak was keeping tabs on those overshadowing him by pointing this out, he would make a very long list indeed.

Without passing judgment on the desirability of his actions, the OBR said Sunak had offset only a third of the overall fall in living standards. It also said the chancellor still had £30bn of fiscal firepower left in the tank. It doesn't take a Treasury watchdog to know more could have been done. Besides, Boris Johnson told the public just as much – admitting less than 24 hours after the spring statement that further action was warranted.

In Sunak's defence, the watchdog warned relatively small changes to the economic outlook could wipe out this headroom within self-imposed limits for the public finances. Debt interest costs are set to surge to a record £83bn next year – making it the fourth largest item of public spending after the NHS, state pension and education.

It was here the chancellor perhaps wanted the public's attention focused, in keeping with the spirit of the OBR's creation by George Osborne as a form of straitjacket for government finances.

Set up as a police officer for ensuring deficit reduction stuck to its course in 2010, the OBR – suitably based in the Ministry of Justice just a short walk from the Treasury – was planned as a way to show Osborne was serious about balancing the books.

Some were cynical about its foundation. One senior policymaker said it was seen more as a gimmick at first, believing the Tories wanted their own equivalent of Labour granting the Bank of England operational independence in 1997.

It has faced criticism for being subject to political influence in the past, including under Sunak as recently as last year, when it was alleged to have used out-of-date economic forecasts at his request.

The times have however changed, both for the OBR and our collective economic priorities. It has grown into a vital authority on the economy, publishing clear reports when the Treasury might seek to bury bad news. Concerns today are less focused on risks to the public finances and more on outcomes for public wellbeing. “We are, frankly, never going to be Greece,” one senior policymaker told me.

As the [National Institute for Economic and Social Research](#) has argued, Britain should design a new fiscal framework to get away from a “budgetarian” approach that sees tax and spending decisions through the lens of arbitrary targets, set to arbitrary dates coincidental with elections.

In a world where too much government policy operates by the smoke and mirrors of political surprise and partial leak, the OBR is an important check and balance.

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[Pakistan](#)

Pakistan's supreme court delays verdict on fate of Imran Khan

Country remains in political turmoil as it awaits ruling on PM's move to dissolve parliament and call election



A supporter of the ruling Tehrik-e-Insaf party celebrates after Imran Khan dissolved the national assembly. Photograph: Shahzaib Akber/EPA

[Shah Meer Baloch](#) in Islamabad and [Hannah Ellis-Petersen](#)

Mon 4 Apr 2022 14.45 EDTFirst published on Mon 4 Apr 2022 05.33 EDT

Pakistan remains without a government and engulfed in political turmoil after the supreme court delayed its verdict on whether the prime minister, [Imran Khan](#), had violated the constitution by dissolving parliament rather than face a no-confidence vote.

Khan's decision to call for parliament [to be dissolved on Sunday](#), rather than allow a no-confidence vote on his premiership that was expected to oust

him, had been justified by him on the basis that it was an alleged “foreign conspiracy” led by the west against his government.

Khan, a former playboy cricketer turned conservative Islamist politician, alleged that almost 200 members of the opposition had colluded with the US to topple his government – though Washington has denied involvement. In a speech after dissolving parliament, Khan said the conspiracy had been “thwarted” and [Pakistan](#) would instead have fresh general elections in the next 90 days.

But the opposition, who had tabled the no-confidence vote and claimed to have enough support to win, have alleged Khan’s move was in violation of Pakistan’s constitution and simply an attempt to retain power. They accused the prime minister of treason and submitted a petition to the supreme court on Sunday challenging the actions.

But despite the chief justice promising to issue a verdict on Monday, the hearing was adjourned in the afternoon without any evident reason. It will resume on Tuesday but it is unclear when there will be a ruling.

Marriyum Aurangzeb, an opposition spokesperson, said she expected the court to “give a ruling as per the constitutional provisions” but expressed concern at the “chequered history” of the court’s partiality and tendency to rule in favour of the military and establishment.

“Our wish is for the judgment to be given by the supreme court bench as soon as possible, because every minute and every second the judgment is not coming is an additional burden not only on the constitution but on the entire governance framework,” she said.

Whatever the court decides, Pakistan looks to be heading for fresh elections before the completion of the current term of the parliament and prime minister in 2023. Khan is pushing for immediate elections while the opposition wants the opportunity to weaken and unseat Khan via a lost no-confidence vote before holding an election.

The delayed verdict pushes Pakistan deeper into political instability. Khan nominated the former chief justice Gulzar Ahmed as caretaker prime minister until elections, but in the meantime Pakistan has no cabinet or government as both were dissolved and interims have not been decided.

In a packed and tense courtroom on Monday, Farooq Naek, the lawyer representing the opposition coalition, told the five-judge panel it was essential the supreme court “issue a verdict today”.

However, the chief justice, Ata Bandial, said it needed to fully hear both sides of the argument. “We can’t pass a decision in the air,” he added.

Babar Awan, the lawyer for Khan’s Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, told the judges: “Imran Khan has asked me to urge you that we are ready to go to election.” However, he was reprimanded by the chief justice, who replied: “The court will only review the speaker’s ruling, not political statements.”

Many believe that while Khan has lost the support of the powerful military establishment and even members of his own ruling coalition, the delay by the court indicates it is unlikely to go against the prime minister and will agree that fresh elections, rather than a no-confidence vote, should take place.

Nusrat Javed, a journalist and political analyst, said: “The court would have given the immediate relief if they have thought there has been violation of the constitution.”

He added: “I don’t expect any negative decision against Imran Khan’s decision on Sunday to dissolve the parliament.”

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[Hong Kong](#)

Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam says she will not seek second term

Chief executive to leave office at end of June after five years marked by upheavals of anti-government protests



Carrie Lam's 42-year career as a civil servant will end on 30 June, with the election to replace her taking place next month. Photograph: EyePress News/Rex/Shutterstock

[Vincent Ni](#) China affairs correspondent and agencies

Mon 4 Apr 2022 06.51 EDTFirst published on Sun 3 Apr 2022 23.56 EDT

Hong Kong's leader, [Carrie Lam](#), who has governed the Chinese region since 2017, has announced she will not seek a second five-year term of office.

Lam's tenure as the chief executive of one of Asia's most significant financial hubs has been marked by the [upheavals of anti-government](#)

[protests](#) and, more recently, Covid-19. Critics have accused her of helping Beijing to curtail Hong Kong's freedoms.

Her announcement came as media reported that Hong Kong's chief secretary, John Lee, the territory's second most senior official, was likely to resign to join the race to replace Lam, with the election taking place in May.

Lam, the first female leader in the former British colony, said on Monday at a regular press briefing: "There's only one consideration and that is family. I have told everyone before that family is my first priority in terms of my consideration. They think it's time for me to go home."

Her term as the city's chief executive will end on 30 June, concluding her career as a civil servant that began in British-ruled Hong Kong in 1980. She told the press on Monday she had informed Beijing last year about her desire to step down after her current term, and that Beijing was receptive.

Born in 1957, Lam, who describes herself as a devout Catholic, took office in 2017 with a pledge to unite a city that was growing increasingly resentful of Beijing's tightening grip.

In December last year, Lam admitted the difficulties in running Hong Kong. In an interview with the state-owned Global Times, she said the past four years or so might have been the most challenging for Hong Kong since its handover to [China](#) in 1997.

"What is most regretful is I was unable to unite Hong Kong society better," she said, stressing that the "one country, two systems" policy was functioning well in her city. "Gradually, I believe Hong Kong society will be more united, and our citizens should be more confident for its future."

Critics see her as a divisive figure. Two years after her appointment, millions took to the streets in sometimes violent anti-government protests that ultimately led Beijing to impose a sweeping national security law in June 2020, giving it more power than ever to shape life in Hong Kong. More recently, her administration's insistence on zero Covid caused further controversy.

“Her slavish devotion to Beijing can be seen mirrored in Hong Kong’s Covid strategy, which has been characterised by numerous U-turns as well as a strenuous attempt by officials to ignore advice from medical professionals,” said Louisa Lim, author of the forthcoming book [Indelible City: Dispossession and Defiance in Hong Kong](#).

City leaders are [selected by a small committee of 1,500 members stacked with pro-Beijing loyalists](#), so whoever becomes the next leader will do so with Beijing’s tacit approval, analysts say.

Lee, 64, a security official during the prolonged and often violent 2019 pro-democracy protests, was promoted in 2021 in a move some analysts said signalled Beijing’s priorities for the city related to security rather than finance or the economy. Lee did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The leadership election was pushed back from 27 March to give the government time to [battle a Covid outbreak](#) that has infected more than a million of the 7.4 million people in the former British colony.

Since Hong Kong returned to Chinese rule in 1997, it has had four chief executives, all of whom have struggled to balance the democratic aspirations of some residents with the vision of China’s Communist party leaders.

Reuters contributed to this report

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[Sri Lanka](#)

Sri Lanka's cabinet resigns as protesters' anger grows over economic crisis

All 26 cabinet ministers aside from the president and the prime minister quit as unrest over the country's worst financial crisis in decades continues

Sri Lanka police use teargas at protests over economic crisis – video

Agence France-Presse

Sun 3 Apr 2022 20.04 EDT Last modified on Tue 5 Apr 2022 06.59 EDT

Sri Lanka's entire cabinet aside from the president and his sibling prime minister resigned from their posts on Sunday as the ruling political clan seeks to resolve a mounting economic crisis, with a social media blackout failing to halt another day of anti-government demonstrations.

The south Asian nation is facing severe shortages of food, fuel and other essentials – along with record inflation and crippling power cuts – in its [most painful downturn since independence from Britain in 1948](#).

All 26 ministers in the cabinet aside from President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and his elder brother the prime minister, Mahinda Rajapaksa, submitted letters of resignation at a late-night meeting, the education minister, Dinesh Gunawardena, told reporters.

The move clears the way for the president to appoint a new cabinet on Monday – and some of those stepping down may be reappointed.

It came with the country under a state of emergency imposed after [a crowd attempted to storm the president's home in the capital Colombo](#), and a nationwide curfew in effect until Monday morning.

Earlier, the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB), Sri Lanka's main opposition alliance, denounced a social media blackout aimed at quelling intensifying public demonstrations and said it was time for the government to resign.

"President Rajapaksa better realise that the tide has already turned on his autocratic rule," SJB lawmaker Harsha de Silva told AFP.

Troops armed with automatic assault rifles moved to stop a protest by opposition lawmakers and hundreds of their supporters attempting to march to the capital's Independence Square.

The road was barricaded a few hundred metres from the home of opposition leader Sajith Premadasa, and the crowd engaged in a tense standoff with security forces for nearly two hours before dispersing peacefully.



Sri Lankan army soldiers stand guard near Independence Square in Colombo. Photograph: Dinuka Liyanawatte/Reuters

Eran Wickramaratne, another SLB lawmaker, condemned the state of emergency declaration and the presence of troops on city streets.

"We can't allow a military takeover," he said. "They should know we are still a democracy."

Social media blackout

Internet service providers were ordered to block access to Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter and several other social media platforms but the blackout [did not deter several small demonstrations elsewhere in Sri Lanka.](#)

Police fired teargas to disperse university students in the central town of Peradeniya, though protests in other parts of the country ended without incident.

Private media outlets reported that the chief of Sri Lanka's internet regulator resigned after the ban order went into effect.

The blackout was rescinded later in the day after the country's Human Rights Commission ruled that the defence ministry had no power to impose the censorship.

The streets of Colombo stayed largely empty on Sunday, apart from the opposition protest and long lines of vehicles queued for fuel.

But police told AFP that one man had died by electrocution after climbing a high-tension pylon near Rajapaksa's home. Residents said he was protesting rolling power cuts.

Mass protests had been planned for Sunday before the social media blackout went into effect, but organisers have postponed the rallies until after the curfew is lifted on Monday.

Internal rifts

The escalating protests have led to fissures within the government, with the president's nephew Namal Rajapaksa condemning the partial internet blackout.

"I will never condone the blocking of social media," said Namal, the sports minister.

He was among three members of the Rajapaksa family who later resigned, along with finance minister Basil and the eldest brother Chamal, who held the agricultural portfolio.

A junior party has also hinted it may leave the ruling coalition within a week.

The move would not affect the government's survival but threatens its chances of lawfully extending the country's state of emergency ordinance.

Western diplomats in Colombo have expressed concern over the use of emergency laws to stifle democratic dissent and said they were closely monitoring developments.

Sri Lanka's influential Bar Association has urged the government to rescind the state of emergency, which allows security forces to arrest and detain suspects for long periods without charges.

Solidarity protests were staged elsewhere in the world over the weekend, including in the Australian city of Melbourne, home to a large Sri Lankan diaspora.

A critical lack of foreign currency has left Sri Lanka struggling to service its ballooning \$51bn foreign debt, with the pandemic torpedoing vital revenue from tourism and remittances.

The crisis has also left the import-dependent country unable to pay even for essentials.

Diesel shortages have sparked outrage across Sri Lanka in recent days, causing protests at empty pumps, and electricity utilities have imposed 13-hour blackouts to conserve fuel.

Many economists also say the crisis has been exacerbated by government mismanagement, years of accumulated borrowing and ill-advised tax cuts.

Sri Lanka is negotiating with the International Monetary Fund for a bailout.

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Dinosaurs

112m-year-old dinosaur tracks damaged in Utah by construction machinery

Damage evaluated as minor, but fractures to the rims of several prints cannot be repaired at the Mill Canyon track site



A theropod dinosaur track at Moab, Utah.

Photograph: Gary Whitton/Alamy

[Richard Luscombe](#)

[@richlusc](#)

Mon 4 Apr 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Mon 4 Apr 2022 15.14 EDT

They survived intact for 112m years through scorching summer heat and freezing winters at Utah's Mill Canyon. But several of the world's most important and historic dinosaur footprints were damaged beyond repair earlier this year when a construction crew arrived to build a new boardwalk for tourists.

The extent of the harm to the footprints – and those of an ancient crocodile crossing in the canyon near Moab – was detailed in a [Bureau of Land Management \(BLM\) report](#) into the January incident published last week.

According to the bureau, the good news was that the damage was evaluated as minor, and would have been much worse if local residents had not spotted tire tracks from heavy machinery on the ground, resulting in the boardwalk project being immediately halted.

But fractures to the rims of several of the delicate prints cannot be repaired at the [Mill Canyon dinosaur track site](#), where at least 10 species of dinosaur are known to have left more than 200 individual tracks dating to the early cretaceous period. Future freeze-thaw cycles could cause the cracks to widen, the BLM warns.

According to the report, the damage was caused by both foot traffic and construction equipment as a contractor used a digger to remove the old boardwalk at the site's most popular area, seeking to replace it with a new, raised platform from which the public could view the tracks.

“As a result, trace fossils were damaged,” the report, written by BLM paleontologist Brent Breithaupt, states. “Unfortunately [one] trace was repeatedly driven over, as recent tire tracks indicate that this area was impacted by the backhoe and other vehicles.”



Inspectors from the Bureau of Land Management examine damage to the Mill Canyon Dinosaur Track site. Photograph: U.S. Bureau of Land Management

All the areas where damage occurred, Breithaupt noted, “should have been flagged for avoidance and construction crews should have avoided driving vehicles in the area”.

The boardwalk replacement project is now on hold until at least the summer as the bureau assesses how to avoid further damage.

“To ensure this does not happen again, we will follow the recommendations in the assessment, seek public input, and work with the paleontology community as we collectively move forward on constructing boardwalks at the interpretive site,” the bureau said in a statement.

The irreparable damage, however, angered environmentalists. “I’m absolutely outraged that the BLM has apparently destroyed one of the world’s most important paleontological resources,” Patrick Donnelly, Great Basin director at the center for biological diversity, said [in a statement](#) when the incident occurred.

“This careless disregard for these irreplaceable traces of the past is appalling. It really calls into question the bureau’s competence as a land-

management agency.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2022/apr/04/112m-year-old-dinosaur-tracks-damaged-in-utah-by-construction-machinery>.

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Myanmar

Tourists urged to avoid Myanmar as junta prepares to reopen to world

Travel agents and aid workers raise issues of safety and note that tourism dollars will only benefit the ruling military



Military vehicles march in a formation during a parade to mark Armed Forces Day in Nay Pyi Taw, capital of Myanmar, last month. Photograph: Xinhua/Rex/Shutterstock

[Rebecca Root](#) in Bangkok

Sun 3 Apr 2022 19.59 EDT Last modified on Fri 8 Apr 2022 04.42 EDT

Foreign tourists have been urged to avoid visiting [Myanmar](#) after the junta signalled plans to open up the country despite widespread ongoing rights abuses and violence including kidnappings and killings by the military, as well as food shortages and regular blackouts.

More than a year after it seized power and ousted Aung San Suu Kyi, Myanmar's military has announced it plans to reopen for tourism and resume international flights on 17 April.

"I would not suggest anyone travels there," said Michael Isherwood, chair of the Burma Humanitarian Mission and program director of charity Backpack Medics. "If Burma reopens to tourists, it's primarily to benefit the junta," which is oppressing the population.

When there were murmurs of a reopening late last year, Tin Tun Naing, the minister for planning, finance and investment for Myanmar's ousted National Unity Government told [The Straits Times](#) it wasn't a time for sightseeing and urged people not to visit.

Myanmar closed its borders, like many countries, to prevent the spread of Covid-19 in early 2020. At that time, an elected government led by Aung San Suu Kyi ruled the country but a military coup in February 2021 saw that power ceded. Resistance groups emerged and since then the south-east Asian country has been racked with violence, protests and economic collapse.

UN high commissioner Michelle Bachelet said last month Myanmar's humanitarian crisis continues to expand amid systematic brutality by security forces. "The economy is on the brink of collapse. Over 14.4 million individuals are now assessed as being in humanitarian need," she said, predicting that "food scarcity will sharply increase over the coming months".

The UK government currently "advises against all but essential travel to Myanmar", stating the risk of being arbitrarily detained or arrested.

Opening to tourism could signal a return to normalcy when "Burma is anything but normal these days," said Isherwood, citing random arrests, the burning of villages, rape and extrajudicial killings in the ethnic and border areas.



Commander-in-Chief General Min Aung Hlaing attends a military parade to mark the 77th Armed Forces Day. Photograph: Xinhua/Rex/Shutterstock

According to the United Nations Human Rights Council, more than 1,600 people have died at the hands of security forces, 12,500 have been detained, 44,000 have been displaced, and 14 million require humanitarian assistance. [Hundreds of children are also being held for ransom](#) in unknown locations.

Last year, the Association of South-east Asian Nations (Asean) attempted to broker a peace plan with the junta government although little progress has been made on moving that forward.

Reopening to tourism was “an effort to promote a narrative of control and globalisation … an effort to establish the de facto authorities as being in control of the country, being legitimate”, said one aid worker living in Myanmar, who requested anonymity for safety reasons.

Tourists signify stability, said Bertie Alexander Lawson, CEO of Myanmar-based boutique travel agency Sampan Travel, and an image of stability is likely one the authorities want to project, he added. The security risk is higher now compared with a couple of years ago, said Lawson, but safe travel was possible “if you’re going with an operator that is taking the risk seriously”.

Visitors should, however, be informed of the context they're coming into and calculate whether they're going to have a positive impact on Myanmar communities, he said.

Jochen Meissner, founder and director of Yangon-based travel agency Uncharted Horizons Myanmar, advised against travel. "Even here [in Yangon], every day there are bomb attacks or assassinations, [and] a lot of army on the streets."

While the junta government will likely make sure the main tourist attractions are safe, Meissner said he wouldn't encourage anyone to visit for a holiday.

Only those vaccinated against Covid-19 will be able to enter the country before having to do a week-long quarantine with two PCR tests. Other challenges tourists will face include a lack of access to cash, following the buckling of the banking system, and power blackouts. "There are big parts of Yangon that are in total darkness on an evening so I'm not sure it'll be very conducive for tourist travel," said the aid worker.

Some parts of the country, including Kayah state and Chin state, formerly popular with tourists, will also be off limits, Lawson said. In such areas, there are reports of worsening living conditions with limited water, electricity, and internet access.

Meissner said: "Everything is not OK here."

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/04/everything-is-not-ok-here-tourists-urged-to-avoid-myanmar-as-junta-prepares-to-reopen-to-world>

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- ['Incredibly transparent' Minister defends non-domicile tax status of chancellor's wife](#)
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- [Non-doms 12% of residents in London's richest parts claimed status in 2018](#)

Rishi Sunak

Labour says Rishi Sunak must ‘come clean’ about wife’s non-dom tax status

Keir Starmer says it would be ‘breathtaking hypocrisy’ if Akshata Murty was using schemes to reduce tax



Rishi Sunak (left) and his wife, Akshata Murty. Photograph: Reuters

[Peter Walker](#) and [Aubrey Allegretti](#)

Thu 7 Apr 2022 07.23 EDTFirst published on Thu 7 Apr 2022 04.59 EDT

Labour has called for clarity over why Rishi Sunak’s wife, [Akshata Murty](#), uses non-domicile status, as Keir Starmer said it would be “breathtaking hypocrisy” if she had been reducing her tax liabilities while the chancellor was raising taxes on others.

Murty receives about £11.5m in annual dividends from a stake in her family’s IT business empire, Infosys, which is headquartered in Bengaluru, India, and listed on the Indian and New York stock exchanges.

Under UK tax laws, Murty's status as a non-dom means she does not have to pay tax on dividend payments from overseas companies. As of Wednesday, UK resident taxpayers in the highest income band pay a 39.35% tax on dividend payouts.

After her status [was revealed by the Independent](#) a spokesperson for Murty said that because she was a citizen of India, which does not allow Indians to hold the citizenship of another country simultaneously, she "is treated as non-domiciled for UK tax purposes". They added: "She has always and will continue to pay UK taxes on all her UK income."

However, tax experts have said non-dom status is not automatic but a choice.

Prof Richard Murphy, a Sheffield University academic who co-founded the Tax Justice Network, said: "Domicile has nothing to do with a person's nationality. In other words, the claims made in the statement issued by Ms Murty are wrong, and as evidence, just because a person has Indian citizenship will never automatically grant them non-dom status in the UK."

Graphic: top nationalities of non-doms in the UK

The Labour MP Chris Bryant said the statement needed to be clarified: "This is just wrong. Non-dom status is not automatic and the Treasury needs to urgently clarify this inaccurate statement.

"After shutting down legitimate questions about Infosys and its operations in Russia last week, it's time for [Rishi Sunak](#) to come clean."

Starmer said Sunak "has very, very serious questions to answer".

The Labour leader told Sky News that Sunak had repeatedly raised taxes: "He says all of this is necessary, there's no option. If it now transpires that his wife has been using schemes to reduce her own tax, then I'm afraid that is breathtaking hypocrisy.

"We need complete transparency on this, so that we can all understand what schemes she may have been using to reduce her own tax."

Earlier, the business secretary, [Kwasi Kwarteng](#), insisted that the chancellor and his wife had been “incredibly transparent” about the arrangement, but was unable to say whether she paid tax on foreign earnings in India or another jurisdiction, such as the Cayman Islands.

Speaking to BBC Radio 4’s Today programme, he said: “She’s an Indian citizen. And so she, as you say, pays tax here on UK income, but pays tax abroad on foreign income.”

But asked where she paid tax abroad – in India or elsewhere such as the Cayman Islands – Kwarteng said: “I don’t know anything about her tax affairs.

“What I do know is that she’s been very clear about the fact that she’s an Indian citizen. Once she’s lived here for 15 years, the non-domicile status falls away. So that will happen in a few years. I don’t know when.

“And she’s been very transparent about that. The chancellor has been incredibly transparent in the declaration of interests when he became a minister.

“The Treasury, the department which he works in, knows about all those affairs. And there is a measure of transparency and he’s been very honest about that. And I think, as far as I’m concerned, that’s good enough for me. And I think we should move on from that story.”

Earlier, Kwarteng told Times Radio that non-domicile status had existed in the UK “for more than 200 years”.

He said: “That’s something that’s been well established ... I think there’s a lot of malicious attacks on someone who, after all, is a private citizen and is not a politician.”

A representative for Murty was contacted for comment.

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Rishi Sunak

Rishi Sunak's wife claims non-domicile status

Tax status allows Akshata Murty to avoid tax on foreign earnings



Akshata Murty earns an estimated £11.5m a year in dividends from her stake in Indian company Infosys. Photograph: Samir Hussein/WireImage

[Rupert Neate](#)

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Wed 6 Apr 2022 15.28 EDT Last modified on Thu 7 Apr 2022 16.19 EDT

Rishi Sunak's multi-millionaire wife claims non-domicile status, it has emerged, which allows her to save millions of pounds in tax on dividends collected from her family's IT business empire.

Akshata Murty, who receives about £11.5m in annual dividends from her stake in the Indian IT services company Infosys, declares non-dom status, a scheme that allows people to avoid tax on foreign earnings.

Murty, the daughter of Infosys's billionaire founder, owns a 0.93% stake in the tech firm worth approximately £690m. The company's most recent accounts suggest that Murty's stake would have yielded her £11.6m in dividend payments in the last tax year.

Under UK tax laws, Murty's status as a non-dom would mean she would not have had to pay tax on the dividend payment from overseas companies. Infosys is headquartered in Bengaluru, [India](#), and listed on the Indian and New York stock exchange. By contrast, UK resident taxpayers would pay a 38.1% tax on such dividend payouts (rising to 39.35% from today).

A spokeswoman for Murty said: "Akshata Murty is a citizen of India, the country of her birth and parents' home. India does not allow its citizens to hold the citizenship of another country simultaneously. So, according to British law, Ms Murty is treated as non-domiciled for UK tax purposes. She has always and will continue to pay UK taxes on all her UK income."

The Treasury declined to comment.

The revelation, first reported by the Independent, comes a day after it was revealed that Sunak and Murty [donated more than £100,000](#) to the chancellor's old private school, Winchester College.

It is understood that Sunak, the chancellor, declared his wife's tax status to the Cabinet Office when he became a minister in 2018, and he had also made the Treasury "aware, so as to manage any potential conflicts".

Tulip Siddiq, the shadow economic secretary to the treasury, said: "The chancellor has imposed tax hike after tax hike on the British people. It is staggering that – at the same time – his family may have been benefiting from tax reduction schemes. This is yet another example of the Tories thinking it is one rule for them, another for everyone else."

"Rishi Sunak must now urgently explain how much he and his family have saved on their own tax bill at the same time he was putting taxes up for millions of working families and choosing to leave them £2,620 a year worse off."

Under current law, Murty will automatically be deemed domiciled after living in the UK for 15 years. Murty, who married Sunak in 2009, soon after they met while studying for a masters in business administration at Stanford University in Silicon Valley, moved to the UK in 2015.

The non-domicile status, first introduced under King George III in 1799, is legal and can be used to avoid paying UK tax on income from overseas rents and bank interest as well as foreign dividends. Non-doms can live in the UK all year round.

The revelation of Murty's tax status comes as Sunak's popularity with voters plunges over his handling of the cost of living crisis. Sunak's net favourability is down 24 points since just before his spring statement on 23 March, to minus 29, according to a YouGov survey.

It is the lowest ever favourability polling for the chancellor, and puts his support below that of Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer (minus 25) for the first time since he took office.

In his spring statement last month, Sunak raised the tax burden on UK taxpayers to its highest level since the 1940s, even as the population faces the biggest squeeze on living standards on record. The Resolution Foundation thinktank suggested Sunak's package of measures would push 1.3 million people, including 500,000 children, into poverty.

Murty had previously faced accusations that she was collecting “blood money” dividends from Infosys's continued operation in Russia despite the invasion of Ukraine. Following mounting pressure, the company last week announced that it was “urgently” closing its office in Russia.

Sunak, who has repeatedly called on British companies to pull out of Russia in order to “inflict maximum economic pain” on Putin’s regime, had refused to comment on his wife’s 0.93% stake in Infosys.

Murty, whose family business is estimated to be worth around £3.5bn, has used the valuable tax status as recently as April 2020 – two months after her husband was put in charge of setting taxes for the country, according to two people familiar with her financial arrangements.

This article was amended on 7 April 2022 to reflect that the applicable tax rate for dividends rose to 39.35% from 6 April 2022 – although the previous rate is relevant to the article's reference to Infosys dividend payments in the last tax year.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/apr/06/rishi-sunaks-wife-claims-non-domicile-status>

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London

Non-doms: 12% of residents in London's richest parts claimed status in 2018

More than one in 10 paid no tax on offshore income in Kensington and the Cities of London and Westminster



A row of Edwardian houses in Kensington. Western European non-doms are predominantly found in Westminster and Kensington and Chelsea.
Photograph: A Astes/Alamy

[David Batty](#)

Thu 7 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 7 Apr 2022 11.07 EDT

More than one in 10 residents of some of London's wealthiest neighbourhoods have claimed “non-dom” status at some point, meaning they paid no tax on their offshore income.

UK-based people who have benefited from this special tax status by claiming another country as their legal “domicile” made up more than 12% of residents in two parliamentary constituencies in 2018 – Kensington, and the Cities of London and Westminster, according to an analysis of [HM Revenue and Customs](#) data. In five of the most affluent council wards they accounted for more than a quarter of residents.

The [study by the London School of Economics](#) and the University of Warwick found that the number of people who had ever claimed non-dom status in the UK rose from 162,000 in 2001 to 238,000 in 2018.

It found that these people were most commonly working in finance, management consultancy and accountancy, with 22% of top earning bankers having claimed non-dom status.

[Most ‘non-doms’ live in London and the south of England](#)

It emerged on Wednesday that Akshata Murty, the wife of Rishi Sunak, [claims non-dom status](#), which would allow her to save millions of pounds in tax on dividends collected from her family’s IT business empire.

The highest earning non-doms work in the film industry and sport, likely to be famous actors, directors, producers and Premier League football players, according to the researchers. Their average earnings in 2018 were £2m, almost four times more than the income of non-dom bankers.

Outside London, some of the highest numbers of non-doms were found in Oxford and Cambridge, where they made up more than 1% of the population in two parliamentary constituencies. These included 310 people working in higher education, who the researchers said were likely to be foreign senior managers and professors employed by the two elite universities.

Non-doms pay no tax on income or capital gains accrued outside the UK, unless they bring the money into the country. This has allowed the super-rich, such as [Roman Abramovich](#), owner of Chelsea football club, Lakshmi Mittal, the steel tycoon, and the media baron Viscount Rothermere, to avoid paying significant sums to HMRC.

Interactive

The study, The UK's 'non-doms': Who are they, what do they do, and where do they live?, analysed the anonymised personal tax returns of everyone who claimed non-dom status at some point between 1997 and 2018.

It found that non-doms made up two-fifths of top earners – those whose annual income was more than £125,000 – in the oil industry, a quarter of those in the car industry and a sixth of those in film and sports.

The very wealthy were most likely to claim non-dom status, according to the researchers. More than two-fifths of those who earned £5m or more in 2018 have claimed non-dom status at some point since 1997, compared with less than three in 1,000 among those whose income was under £100,000.

This trend was even greater among migrants, with 84% for those earning above £5m having claimed non-dom status at some point.

More than 10% of residents in some affluent London neighbourhoods are non-doms

One of the report's authors, Mike Savage, professor of sociology at LSE, said the report showed that non-dom status has contributed to inequality in the UK by attracting the global super-rich to work here.

He said: "What this study is really showing is that inequality in the UK isn't just a British problem, it's to do with the way in which rich people, who can command a high income, are working in the UK. We assume [they're coming here] because the non-dom clause is an attractive part of the package they get here. So it's facilitating the rise of the super rich."

Wealth and non-dom status graph

More than 93% of non-doms were born abroad, coming mainly from the US, India and western Europe, especially France, Germany and Italy, the study found. The number of Indian non-doms has risen most rapidly, from about 4% of the total in 2001 (3,200) to almost 14% in 2018 (22,700).

The study also found that migrant non-doms cluster in national enclaves in London. Western European non-domes are predominantly found in Westminster and Kensington and Chelsea. American non-domes are most prevalent in Islington, Camden and Hackney.

Those from other English-speaking countries, including Australia, Canada and South Africa, are clustered around Wandsworth, Merton and Richmond, as well as in Surrey. Meanwhile, Indian non-domes reside in more suburban areas such as Harrow, Hillingdon and Bromley.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/apr/07/non-doms-12-of-residents-in-londons-richest-parts-claimed-status-in-2018>

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2022.04.07 - Spotlight

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- 'If you want to know about sex, it's in the songs' Joan Jett on punk, privacy and almost joining the army
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- 'I've always wanted to know their names' English Heritage brings Roman town's lost Edwardian navvies to life

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‘It always felt good here’: how Sheffield’s brutalist Park Hill estate survived the haters and their bulldozers



Brutalist living updated ... phase 2 of Park Hill. Photograph: Oliver Wainwright

Branded a no-go area in the 80s, this immense complex was almost flattened like several of its neighbours. But an often painful redevelopment is giving it a new lease of life



[Oliver Wainwright](#)
[@ollywainwright](#)

Thu 7 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 7 Apr 2022 16.06 EDT

‘I love Park Hill because you always know when you’re home,’ says Joanne Marsden. ‘When I come back on the train, I look up and think: ‘Wow, I’m here. I’ve made it.’’ She’s talking about the colossal housing estate that stands on the hillside above [Sheffield](#) like a great concrete castle, where she was born in 1965 in her nan’s back bedroom. Her grandparents were among the first residents to move into the bold vision of 1,000 council flats when it opened in 1961, her grandad taking a job in the boiler house that heated the homes. Marsden got her own flat a few doors down when she had her first child, then moved out in the 90s when the family grew. But, after some time in London, she moved back here in 2015, into one of the newly refurbished flats in the first phase of the estate’s redevelopment.

“They modernised it and put bling on it,” she says, “but I can’t say it feels any better than what it were. It always felt good living here.”

Eighteen years after Sheffield city council sold the entire estate to the developer Urban Splash for £1, with the hope of seeing it refurbished in a few years, the project is about two-thirds of the way through. Almost scuppered by the 2008 financial crisis, and beset by funding problems ever since, the first phase opened in 2013; the second phase is nearly finished. It marks the completion of 450 flats, of which 20% are classed as affordable, as well as 356 student bedrooms in a third phase, which opened last year. The current state of the place – still completely derelict at one end, spruced up at the other – reads as a surreal diagram of how attitudes to postwar architecture have shifted over the years, and how an estate can be scrubbed up for sale in different ways.

Designed by the architects Jack Lynn and Ivor Smith when they were in their 20s, working at Sheffield council's architects department, Park Hill was the jewel in the crown of the Labour authority's housebuilding boom, [a dazzling essay in “the new brutalism”](#). It was built on the site of a cleared slum, but rather than rehousing the residents in towers, the architects attempted to replicate the tightly packed grid of the area, with elevated streets stacked to form blocks that snaked down the hillside.

“It was amazing for playing out,” says Marsden. “We’d go up in the lift with our bikes, ride all the way along the street, then cycle down the hill through the middle of the estate, right back to the bottom. No matter what the weather was, you could always play out because of the covered streets.”

As well as providing a fun vertical playground, the “streets in the sky” were an ingenious way of dealing with the sloping site, so you could access any floor of the building from ground level at different points on the hillside (sadly no longer the case, with access confined to a central entrance). It might look like an intransigent megastructure, but the blocks have totally different characters, as the frame adapts to the context like a concrete chameleon. At the top of the hill, it’s the scale of low-rise terrace housing, while by the time it reaches the bottom it becomes a 14-storey cliff face, the roofline remaining a constant height throughout.

With a butcher and baker, doctor and dentist, as well as community centre, creche, primary school and four pubs, it was conceived as a self-sufficient

hillside hamlet. “We had it all,” says Marsden. “You didn’t have to go into town for anything.” It became famous throughout the world: a 1962 book, [Ten Years of Housing in Sheffield](#), documenting the council’s programme, was published in English, French and Russian.



Park Hill in 1961 ... the ‘streets in the sky’ were designed to be wide enough to drive a milk float along. Photograph: Roger Mayne Archive/Mary Evans Picture Library

The story of what happened next is well told, if not always accurately. The collapse of the Sheffield steel industry in the 1980s, aided by Margaret Thatcher’s onslaught, saw mass unemployment, with many dumped in Park Hill with no choice in the matter. What had been a source of intense municipal pride became branded a sink estate, the elevated streets synonymous with muggings, drug addicts and an easy getaway for burglars. People saw it as a no-go area, a place of no hope. But that’s not how Marsden remembers it.

“It wasn’t a no-go area at all,” she says. “That was just what people who had never been here said. You talked to anybody who lived here and they didn’t fear nowt. You could walk through the landings at any time of day and it was fine.” The dodgy reputation, she thinks, “was engineered to get us out of

there so they could redevelop it. It was a time when people wanted access to inner-city living and they realised how valuable the site was.”

Had it not been listed by English Heritage in 1998, Park Hill would almost certainly have been demolished. A second similar estate nearby, Hyde Park, was partly flattened in the 90s, its remnants horribly clad like a fridge, while a third scheme, Kelvin Flats, was erased completely.

“We were the only ones stupid enough to take it on,” says [Tom Bloxham, the founder of Urban Splash](#). He is sitting in the vegan cafe that now occupies one of Park Hill’s ground floor commercial units, dressed in a black Prada x Adidas tracksuit, with a matching hat. “When I first looked at the place online, I thought: ‘Fucking hell, that looks like a disaster,’” he recalls. “From the outside, it looked really crap. But as you get inside it, you see there is this object of beauty.”

He was wooed by what residents had enjoyed for decades: the fact that every flat is double aspect; each has its own balcony and views on to green space; every one faces south. “And it has better space standards than modern so-called ‘luxury’ flats,” he adds, exceeding the now defunct [Parker Morris minimum space standards](#) even before they were adopted in the 60s.

But fixing it up hasn’t been straightforward. The project had to be rescued from the jaws of the 2008 financial crisis with a £39m injection of public funding, which saw the first phase completed in 2013. Then Urban Splash had to be [bailed out](#) by the regeneration giant [Places for People](#), with which it formed a joint venture to complete the second phase, while the [student housing provider Alumno took over the third](#). The fourth phase, which includes a big [arts centre at ground level](#), has planning permission, but funding remains up in the air.



Student housing at Park Hill, part of phase 3 of the redevelopment.
Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

The first block received a mixed reception: it was [nominated for the Stirling prize](#), but purists were aghast. Following Historic England’s “squint test” principle (that it should still be recognisable as Park Hill from a distance), everything was ripped out except the concrete frame. The rhythm of the facade was inverted, so that what once had been window became wall, and vice versa, while the subtly toned brickwork was exchanged for shimmering aluminium cladding panels in eye-searing tones of bright yellow, red and orange. The work of architects Egret West and Hawkins\Brown, it screams “Regeneration!” from every angle, a tutti-frutti billboard trumpeting the public-private asset transfer from the hilltop with garish glee.

“We had to do something radical,” says Bloxham. “The perception of the place was so bad back then, we had to make a big statement. It did the job it was supposed to do – it got people talking.” Almost a decade later, the second phase of work at Park Hill – joined to the first by a trio of bridges – couldn’t be more different. From a distance, it looks almost exactly as the day the building first opened. “It’s more like how you’d treat a listed Victorian house,” says Bloxham. “More subtle and sensitive.”



Joanne Marsden: ‘We had it all. You didn’t have to go into town for anything.’ Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

The brickwork has been cleaned, revealing that subtly coloured gradient from terracotta at the base, through ochre, to pale mustardy yellow bricks at the top floor, each level matched with coloured mortar. The window openings are where they were originally, only bigger and more thermally efficient. Step inside and the elevated streets feel as they once did, except the tarmac floor has been exchanged for a rubberised version, with geometric patterns cast in front of each front door, inspired by the 1970s lino doormats that residents laid outside their flats. A huge amount of work has been done to improve thermal performance, including insulating the exposed concrete beams inside the flats, after thermal imaging of the first phase revealed how much heat was being lost through the concrete frame – which can’t be clad externally, due to the listed status.



Joanne Marsden's children, Levene and Marcus, on the estate in 1990.
Photograph: Courtesy of Joanne Marsden

“We wanted to keep as much of the building as we possibly could,” says Annalie Riches, of Mikhail Riches architects, the firm that [won the 2019 Stirling prize for its pioneering low-energy social housing](#) in Norwich. “I loved the brick from the beginning – it kind of humanises the structure, as something that’s been laid by hand. And it was in really good nick, with not a single crack.” It was a battle to convince both the developer’s project manager (“Who would want to move into the old brick one when you’ve got the shiny one next door?”) and Historic England, which wanted the estate to read as a whole. But thankfully the architects persisted.

Their argument for a light-touch approach was aided by the words of Grenville Squires, who was caretaker at Park Hill for 28 years. “I think of her as an elderly lady who’s fallen on hard times,” he said of the building, when refurbishment first began. “She just wants to wash her face and put on a new frock.”

While the first phase went all out with the neon makeup, Mikhail Riches has given the grande dame a more dignified makeover, with some subtle flourishes of their own. On their site visits, the architects noticed how residents used to personalise their flats by painting the brick walls outside

their balconies – highlighting the individual lives within the bigger uniform grid. At the same time, they realised they would need to insulate these exposed brick walls. One observation informed the other, leading to a solution of coloured render, in 13 shades of lilac, blue and green, lining the flanks of the recessed balconies. The result is a subtle optical trick, recalling the [colouring of Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation](#): from straight on, it looks like Park Hill always has, but, from the sides, you can make out the individual homes.



Geometric patterns have been cast in front of each front door, inspired by the 1970s lino doormats that residents laid outside their flats. Photograph: Tim Crocker

Juggling the internal plans, meanwhile, turned out to be a fiendishly complex jigsaw puzzle, given that no two units are the same. “We thought we had four flat types to work with,” says Riches. “But it turned out to be 37.” Ivor Smith, one of Park Hill’s original architects, had always regretted not designing windows facing on to the raised streets, as the lack of overlooking was blamed for antisocial behaviour, but the load-bearing structure makes it impossible to cut new openings. Instead, the architects have cleverly inserted a thin vertical window next to each front door, complete with little shelves on which the new residents have already started displaying their possessions.

A neat row of pot plants in the window greets visitors to the home of Craig De Gouveia, a South African software engineer, who moved into one of the new flats in January. “I’m into brutalism, and I was attracted by the ethos of the original development,” he says. “The ceilings are quite low by modern standards, but you get so much natural light up here, as well as amazing views across the city.”

How does he feel about buying a flat that was built as council housing? “There’s obviously a sense of guilt that comes with it, and the conflicts of any area being regenerated,” he says. “But otherwise it would probably be derelict or knocked down. At least it’s preserved something meaningful.”



Construction hoarding outside Park Hill. Photograph: Oliver Wainwright

Urban Splash insists that every former council tenant was offered the right to return to Park Hill, but, given that they had been rehoused elsewhere for a decade, few took up the offer. Rules in the tenancy agreement forbidding the homes’ newly raw concrete walls to be painted also put some tenants off, banned from recreating their cosy nests of magnolia and Anaglypta.

“I don’t buy this nostalgic thing of the good old days when it was all social housing,” says Bloxham. “To make a place work you need to bring multi-tenure, you need to bring mixed uses, you need to bring change.”

At the top of the hill stands the future final phase, the last block to be “decanted” of its tenants a few years ago, which is still technically in council ownership. It is encircled with a construction hoarding, emblazoned with the words: “We were never derelict”, from a poem by Sheffield’s young poet laureate, Otis Mensah, ironically commissioned to celebrate the regeneration. “Just displaced and out of sight,” it continues. “Carrying home inside us / When home they tried to break.”

It’s a damning assessment of the council’s neglect of this public asset, but one that should be a call to arms. With more than 20,000 people on the city’s council housing register, Sheffield could take this final flank of homes on for itself and restore them to their original status – a monument to what the welfare state can do, and a beacon of municipal pride.

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Interview

‘If you want to know about sex, it’s in the songs’: Joan Jett on punk, privacy and almost joining the army

[Fiona Sturges](#)



‘My image was my armour. It’s not like I went around punching people, but people were intimidated’ ... Jett. Photograph: Shervin Lainez

Forty years after topping the charts with *I Love Rock’n’Roll*’s snarling menace, Jett is still rocking out. She talks about the sexism she faced, nurturing today’s female stars and her dad sneaking into her early gigs

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When Joan Jett was 13 years old, she had her first lesson on the electric guitar her parents had given her for Christmas. “I went in there all excited and said to the teacher: ‘I wanna play rock’n’roll,’” she says. “And he said to me: ‘Girls don’t play rock’n’roll. Let me teach you [the folk song] On Top of Old Smokey instead.’” Jett never went back for a second lesson – instead, she bought a book and taught herself to play. It wouldn’t be the last time a man tried to put her in her place: “It’s the hand in the face telling you ‘You can’t do this’ or ‘Don’t do that’,” she says. “And it’s not just in rock’n’roll, it’s everywhere.”

This year marks 40 years since [I Love Rock’n’Roll](#), Joan Jett and the Blackhearts’ cover of a song originally by the Arrows, reached No 1 in the Billboard Hot 100 and stayed there for seven weeks. The Blackhearts were Jett’s second band; her first, the Runaways, in which she played rhythm guitar, had barged their way on to the Los Angeles punk scene in 1976, making their debut with the raucous single [Cherry Bomb](#). By 1979, they had split up. Since those heady, chaotic early years, Jett has barely stopped. At 63, she continues to release albums on her label, Blackheart Records, and, pandemic notwithstanding, tours relentlessly. As the decades have passed, veneration of Jett as a feminist pioneer and all-round force of nature has grown. In 2010, Kristen Stewart played her in the biopic *The Runaways* (with Dakota Fanning as the band’s singer, Cherie Currie), while in 2018, *Bad Reputation*, Kevin Kerslake’s documentary named after one of Jett’s signature songs, traced her rise from snarling teen to rock’n’roll grande dame.

It’s late afternoon at Jett’s Long Island home when we speak via video call. In a low-ceilinged room illuminated with fairy lights, she is relaxing after a

late night playing her first concert in months. “Excuse my casualness here,” she says, slumped in an armchair, iPhone propped up on her knees. Dressed in regulation black vest and jeans, she is toned and athletic-looking. Her hair is just as it ever was: dyed black and heavily layered in the classic rocker’s shag cut. Liza Minnelli in Cabaret was among the inspirations for the teenage Jett’s look. “I loved the androgyny, or the gender-bending thing or however you want to put it,” she reflects. “My image was my armour. It’s not like I went around punching people, but people were intimidated and that was purposeful.”

Also on our call is Jett’s longtime manager, producer, co-writer and best pal Kenny Laguna. As a keyboard player in the 1960s, he performed on a string of bubblegum hits including Mony Mony by Tommy James and the Shondells. He and Jett have worked together since 1979, when the Runaways fell apart and she graduated from rhythm guitarist to lead singer of the Blackhearts. As Laguna puts it in the documentary, he brought the pop while she “brought the menace”. Their relationship is entirely platonic – it was Laguna’s wife, Meryl, who suggested he seek out Jett after reading about her in the British music press. Nonetheless, they sound just like a married couple with their bossing and bickering. “Lift your head up, Kenny!” Jett barks at him, when he lets his camera slip. “We can’t see your mouth. It’s very unnerving.”

Jett spent much of the pandemic at home going stir-crazy, so she couldn’t be happier to be back on stage. “It’s the longest I’ve ever gone [not performing] since I started in the business. There’s this song that Kenny and I wrote many years ago called You Don’t Know What You’ve Got, and that’s actually the case. It was pretty distressing, but then it was a gift in other ways. It forced you to slow down, and a lot of people have trouble with that, me included.”



The Runaways in 1976 (l to r): Jackie Fox, Joan Jett, Sandy West, Cherie Currie and Lita Ford. Photograph: Michael Ochs Archives/Getty Images

Along with a tour, there's a new album, *Changeup*, a collection of acoustic versions of old tracks including *Crimson* and *Clover* and *Bad Reputation*. Jett loves to find new ways to play old songs – “You find all these nooks and crannies that you didn't know were there,” she says. When I ask if she feels she might go mad if she has to crank out *I Love Rock'n'Roll* one more time, she looks appalled: “Not at all. For me, you're playing it in front of new people every time, so it's new. It can never be the same. I don't want to have a lackadaisical attitude about these things. I don't ever want to fake it.”

Jett, who is the eldest of three siblings, credits her work ethic to her parents – her mother was a secretary and her father sold insurance. “I never saw them sitting around being lazy,” she says. “They instilled in me that I could do whatever I wanted to do, but I'd have to work hard at it.” For a while, they lived in Maryland, where Jett's parents got her a horse. “We weren't a rich family so I don't know how they did that. But I'd travel about 40 miles on the weekends and I would take lessons in exchange for cleaning the stables. And I learned something from that.”

The family later moved to LA, where Jett started hanging out at Rodney's English Disco, a Hollywood nightclub that would play “glitter music” by the

likes of the Sweet, David Bowie and T Rex. The music impresario Kim Fowley also frequented Rodney's and put Jett, who was just 16, in touch with a young drummer, Sandy West. Jett went round to West's house, they jammed for a bit and then called up Fowley and played a song down the phone. He was so impressed that he appointed himself their manager and helped recruit the rest of the band: singer Currie, guitarist Lita Ford and bassist Jackie Fuchs.

The Runaways weren't exactly welcomed with open arms. At gigs, people threw bottles, spat at them and called them sluts. Jett would go backstage and cry. Critics, struggling to get their heads around the notion of an all-girl punk band, dismissed them as a novelty act. "No one gave us any credit that we could play at all," she says. "And that was really galling because we played better than a lot of the bands we opened for."



'No one gave us any credit that we could play' ... Jett on stage with the Runaways, 1977. Photograph: Paul Natkin/Getty Images

Weren't her parents anxious about her being out all night playing dives? "I'm sure they were but they never said anything," Jett replies. "They obviously told me to be careful and keep my wits about me. But they knew that I loved what I did." Her parents had recently separated and, years later,

Jett discovered her father used to secretly go to her gigs: “He would stand at the back and I never even knew he was there.”

In contrast to their chilly reception in the US, the Runaways were adored in Europe and, for a while, the band set up home on a houseboat in Chelsea in London. “England values rock’n’roll!” pipes up Laguna. “I mean, you guys make rock’n’roll stars knights, right? I guess we canonise our movie stars. The Sex Pistols went to No 1 with pretty raw songs in England, but in America they didn’t do anything. The Runaways had humungous hits in Japan and Scandinavia, but they weren’t even considered by most American radio stations.”

What paltry media coverage they got in the US invariably focused on their appearance and sexuality. Early in her career, Jett recalls doing an interview and being asked about sex. “And I thought to myself: ‘Well, here it is. If I answer this question, then every question will be about sex, and they’ll never talk about the music.’ I knew not to discuss my personal sex life ever – and I mean ever – in public, and not to feel bad about it. If they wanted to know about sex, it’s in the songs. It’s all there in the lyrics.” She’s not wrong: anyone curious about Jett’s sexual orientation need only pay attention to the pronouns in her version of Crimson and Clover (“Now I don’t hardly know her, but I think I could love her”). “Because you know everyone else has diarrhoea mouth now, and can’t keep it shut about what they do and who they fuck,” Jett continues. “I think rock’n’roll needs to have mystique. Especially with the way people are on social media – it doesn’t have that mysterious quality any more, which to me is tragic.”

The Runaways lasted three-and-a-half years, and Jett had a blast, travelling the world and meeting her heroes, from Ramones to Sid Vicious. But a shadow was cast on the band’s history when, in 2015, Jackie Fuchs alleged that Fowley raped her at an aftershow party while she was incapacitated on quaaludes, in full view of Currie and Jett. Fowley died six months before Fuchs went public with the allegations. Both Jett and Currie issued statements denying having witnessed the assault. Jett wrote: “Anyone who truly knows me understands that if I was aware of a friend or a bandmate being violated, I would not stand by while it happened.”



Jett with Kenny Laguna, 2018. Photograph: C Flanigan/Getty Images,

I ask Jett if the allegations led her to re-evaluate Fowley and her time in the band. There is a pause and she shakes her head. “I mean, Kim and I were friends. We got along, I wrote songs with him … I don’t know what else to say about it really.”

When the Runaways split in 1979, musical differences were cited, though Jett was also uncomfortable at the way the band were being marketed. A photoshoot in which Currie was seen reclining in a corset was a particular source of ire. After the band went their separate ways, Jett started drinking heavily (she’s all but teetotal now) and developed a heart infection that landed her in hospital. During her recovery, she toyed with joining the army. “I knew I could use some discipline and direction,” she reflects. Jett says she has always felt a strong kinship with soldiers, and has played shows for troops in Kuwait, Kosovo, Iraq, Uzbekistan, Puerto Rico, Oman and beyond. “I feel connected to the military because I almost joined. Like now, when you see countries [like Ukraine] really fighting for freedom, it’s very moving and I know not to take that freedom for granted.”

Jett was at her lowest ebb when she met Laguna. When I ask her if it was him that pulled her up and stopped her from self-destructing, she replies: “Absolutely. I had hope. Someone that believed in me. Nobody believed in

me and all of a sudden this guy comes out of nowhere and writes songs with me. And then he hung around me and started to like me.” “Love you,” corrects Laguna gently, and Jett’s eyes suddenly fill with tears and she sniffs: “I’m getting emotional, sorry. I’m gonna put the phone down for a second. Kenny, you talk.”

Laguna reminds me that Jett was 15 when she started writing songs. “The first song she ever wrote was You Drive Me Wild. When Wanda Jackson heard it, she went nuts. She said: ‘I’ve gotta record this.’ Joan was a little kid writing this stuff. Her poetry was overlooked partly because of the electric [guitars] but also because people weren’t taking women rock’n’rollers seriously. If she’d been a guy, they’d have treated her like Tom Petty or Bob Dylan.”

Laguna and Jett still have the rejection letters from the record companies that passed on their Blackhearts demos – all 23 of them. Rather than throw in the towel, they started their own label and sold records at shows. For a time, Laguna’s Cadillac was the company office (the label is now run by his daughter and Jett’s goddaughter, Carianne Brinkman). The release of I Love Rock’n’Roll in 1982 coincided with the rise of MTV and suddenly they were everywhere. The single sold 10m copies and the band were soon playing stadiums.

Jett is back, the tears all gone. I remark that she seems to have taken several younger musicians under her wing over the years. Bikini Kill’s Kathleen Hanna, whose biggest single Rebel Girl was produced by Jett, has said she is “like family”. She is also close to Miley Cyrus, who covers Cherry Bomb at concerts, and who gave a speech thanking Jett “for fighting for our freedom” when she was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2015. “I always try to make sure that I connect with and support [young women] in any way I can,” she says. “Most of the time they’re going through the same things that I’ve been through many times over.” Despite this, talk of her legacy makes her uncomfortable. Jett doesn’t like to be put on a pedestal. “When people say “punk queen”, I’m, like, you got Patti Smith, man, you can’t compete with that. I want to be ‘a’ one rather than ‘the’ one, otherwise the only way is down. There’s this Maya Angelou quote which says: ‘People

will forget what you said, people will forget what you did but people will never forget how you made them feel.' I just wanna make people feel good."

Changeup by Joan Jett and the Blackhearts is out now on Blackheart Records.

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Xi Jinping and Joe Biden. Illustration: Getty/Guardian Design

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How to stop China and the US going to war

Xi Jinping and Joe Biden. Illustration: Getty/Guardian Design

Armed conflict between the world's two superpowers, while not yet inevitable, has become a real possibility. The 2020s will be the decade of living dangerously

by [Kevin Rudd](#)

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As images of destruction and death emerge from Ukraine, and refugees flee the country in their millions, the world's attention is rightly focused on the horror of what many once thought an impossibility in the 21st century: a large-scale modern war in Europe. In this grim moment, however, it is all the

more important to think through and coldly reassess the dangers presented by other potential conflicts that could be sparked by growing geopolitical tensions. The most significant among these is the risk of a war between the United States and [China](#). The salutary lesson of our time is that this scenario is no longer unthinkable.

The 2020s now loom as a decisive decade, as the balance of power between the US and China shifts. Strategists of both countries know this. For policymakers in Beijing and Washington, as well as in other capitals, the 2020s will be the decade of living dangerously. Should these two giants find a way to coexist without betraying their core interests, the world will be better for it. Should they fail, down the other path lies the possibility of a war many times more destructive than what we are seeing in Ukraine today – and, as in 1914, one that will rewrite the future in ways we can barely imagine.

Armed conflict between China and the US in the next decade, while not yet probable, has become a real possibility. In part, this is because the balance of power between the two countries is changing rapidly. In part it is because, back in 2014, [Xi Jinping](#) changed China's grand strategy from an essentially defensive posture to a more activist policy that seeks to advance Chinese interests across the world. It is also because the US has, in response, embraced an entirely new China strategy since 2017, in what the Trump and Biden administrations have called a new age of strategic competition. These factors combined have put China and the US on a collision course in the decade ahead.

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We have arrived at a point in the long evolution of the US-China relationship when serious analysts and commentators increasingly assume that some form of crisis, conflict or even war is inevitable. This thinking is dangerous. The advantage of diplomatic history – if we study it seriously – is that the risk of talking ourselves into a crisis is real. The discourse of inevitability takes hold, mutual demonisation increases, and the public policy response, ever so subtly, moves from war prevention to war preparation. The

sleepwalking of the nations of Europe into war in 1914 should remain a salutary lesson for us all.

In my view, there is nothing inevitable about war. We are not captive to some deep, imaginary, irreversible forces of history. Our best chance of avoiding war is to better understand the other side's strategic thinking and to plan for a world where the US and China are able to competitively coexist, even if in a state of continuing rivalry reinforced by mutual deterrence. A world where political leaders are empowered to preside over a competitive race rather than resorting to armed conflict.

Indeed, if we can preserve peace in the decade ahead, political circumstances may eventually change, and strategic thought may evolve in the face of broader planetary challenges. It may then be possible for leaders to imagine a different way of thinking (the Chinese term is *siwei*) that prioritises collaboration over conflict, in order to meet the existential global challenges confronting us all. But to do that, we must first get through the current decade without destroying each other.

I have been a student of China since I was 18, beginning with my undergraduate degree at the Australian National University, where I majored in Mandarin Chinese and Chinese history. I have lived and worked in Beijing, Shanghai, Hong Kong and Taipei through different diplomatic postings, and have developed many friendships across greater China. I have travelled back to China and Taiwan regularly in the past 40 years, including in my role as prime minister of Australia, personally meeting with Xi Jinping and other senior Chinese leaders. I admire China's classical civilisation, including its remarkable philosophical, literary and artistic traditions, as well as the economic achievements of the post-Mao era in lifting a quarter of humanity out of poverty.

At the same time, I have been deeply critical of Mao's depredations of the country during the Great Leap Forward of 1958, which left 30 million dead from starvation; the Cultural Revolution, which led to millions more deaths and the destruction of priceless cultural heritage; and human rights abuses, which continue to this day. I am still haunted by the thousands of young faces gathered in Tiananmen Square in late May 1989. I spent the better part

of a week walking and talking among them – before the tanks moved in on 4 June. I have simply read and seen too much over the years to politely brush it all under the carpet.

That's why I could not avoid the whole question of human rights when, in 2008, I returned to Beijing as Australia's prime minister on my inaugural visit. On the first day I delivered a public lecture in Chinese at Peking University, where I argued that the best classical ideals of friendship within the Chinese tradition – the concept of *zhengyou* – meant that friends could candidly speak to each other without rupturing the relationship. With those ideals in mind, I raised human rights abuses in Tibet in the middle of my speech.

The Chinese foreign ministry went nuts. So, too, did the more supine members of the Australian political class, business community and media, who did what they always do and asked: "How could you upset our Chinese hosts by mentioning the unmentionable?" The answer was straightforward: because it happened to be the truth, and to ignore it was to ignore part of the complex reality of any country's relationship with the People's Republic.



The US president, Joe Biden, meets with his Chinese counterpart, Xi Jinping, in November 2021. Photograph: Mandel Ngan/AFP/Getty Images

Just as I have lived in China, I've also lived in the US, and have a deep affection for the country and its people. I am intimately aware of the differences between the two countries, but I've also seen the great cultural values they have in common – the love of family, the importance that Chinese and Americans attach to the education of their children, and their vibrant entrepreneurial cultures driven by aspiration and hard work.

No approach to understanding US-China relations is free from intellectual and cultural prejudice. For all my education in Chinese history and thought, I am inescapably and unapologetically a creature of the west. I therefore belong to its philosophical, religious and cultural traditions. The country I served as both prime minister and foreign minister has been an ally of the US for more than 100 years, and actively supports the continuation of the liberal international order built by the US out of the ashes of the second world war. At the same time, I have never accepted the view that an alliance with the US mandates automatic compliance with every element of American policy. Despite pressure from Washington, my political party, the Australian Labor party, opposed both the Vietnam war and the invasion of Iraq. Nor am I complacent about the failings of American domestic politics and the unsustainable economic inequalities that we find increasing across American society.

The judgment I bring to bear on US-China relations also reflects my personal loathing for jingoistic nationalism, which, regrettably, has become an increasingly prominent feature of Chinese and American public life. This may be emotionally satisfying to some and politically useful for others, but it brings about no good whatsoever. Above all, when it comes to international relations, nationalism is a very dangerous thing indeed.

The current state of US-China relations is the product of a long, contested history. What emerges across the centuries is a recurring theme of mutual non-comprehension and suspicion, often followed by periods of exaggerated hopes and expectations that then collapse in the face of differing political and strategic imperatives. Over the past 150 years, each side has blamed the other for the relationship's failings.

In its narrowest conception, the modern relationship between China and the US has relied on common economic self-interest. At other times, this has been supported by a sense of shared goals in the face of a common enemy – at first the Soviet Union and, after 9/11, to a much more limited extent, militant Islamism. More recently, China and the US have developed shared concerns about global financial stability and the impacts of climate breakdown. Human rights have always remained an underlying point of friction. Despite occasional flirtations by the Chinese Communist party (CCP) with various forms of political liberalisation, there has been, at best, a sullen tolerance for each other's political systems. For a long time, these various pillars – economic, geostrategic and multilateral – combined to support the relationship in a way that's been relatively robust. But one by one, over the last decade, each pillar cracked.



Lieu island in the Taiwan strait, close to China. Photograph: An Rong Xu/Getty Images

Most Americans, including educated elites, struggle to understand how politics works in the People's Republic of China. And the lack of American familiarity with the Chinese cultural canon, its logographic language, its ancient ethical concepts and its contemporary communist leadership can cause Americans to feel uncertain and distrustful about this newly emerged rival for the mantle of global leadership.

This chasm of distrust has been growing for many years. Washington no longer believes in China's self-proclaimed "peaceful rise". The US national security establishment, in particular, now holds the view that the CCP has never had any compunction about deceiving its political or strategic adversaries. It sees such language as little more than a diplomatic ruse, while China spreads its influence, backed by military power, throughout the world. It points to [island reclamation](#) in the South China Sea, the building of Chinese naval bases around the Indian Ocean, and Chinese [cyber-attacks](#) on the US government as evidence of the reality of Chinese aggression.

Each side points to the other as the guilty party. Beijing does not buy Washington's claims that it has no interest in "containing" China's rise. As evidence, China [points to](#) increased arms sales by the US to Taiwan despite repeated American promises to reduce these, the trade war that Beijing sees as a concerted effort to cripple its economy, and the American campaign [against Huawei](#), which it sees as an effort to stymie China's technological advance. Beijing reads Washington's insistence on freedom of navigation for itself and its allies in the South China Sea as hostile interference in Chinese sovereign waters.

In Thucydides's History of the Peloponnesian War, the ancient Greek historian concluded that "it was the rise of Athens and the fear that this instilled in Sparta that made war inevitable". Taking this as his starting point, the Harvard professor of government, Graham Allison, has developed the notion of the Thucydides Trap. This, he explains, is "the natural, inevitable discombobulation that occurs when a rising power threatens to displace a ruling power". According to Allison's model, based on his examination of multiple historical case studies, where this dynamic is present, war is more likely than not.

In many respects, many elements of Thucydides's Trap are already present in the US-China relationship of today. It is relatively easy to envisage a series of events that mutates into a sort of cold war 2.0 between the US and China, which, in turn, runs the risk of triggering a hot one. For example, hackers could disable the other side's infrastructure, from pipelines and electric grids to air traffic control systems, with potentially deadly results. More conventional military exchanges are also within the realm of the

possible. The US has Asian allies it has sworn to protect, and China's ambitions push up against those alliances. From Taiwan to the South China Sea and the Philippines to the [East China Sea and Japan](#), China is increasingly testing the limits of US defence commitments.

While Beijing's chief aim for the modernisation and expansion of its military has been to prepare for future Taiwan contingencies, China's growing military, naval, air and intelligence capabilities represent, in the American view, a much broader challenge to US military predominance across the wider Indo-Pacific region and beyond.

Of greatest concern to the US is the rapid expansion and modernisation of the Chinese navy and its growing submarine capabilities, as well as China's development, for the first time in its history, of a blue-water fleet with force-projection capabilities beyond its coastal waters. This has enabled China to expand its reach across the Indian Ocean, enhanced by a string of available ports provided by its friends and partners across south-east Asia, south Asia and all the way to east Africa and Djibouti in the Red Sea. Added to this is a wider pattern of military and naval collaboration with Russia, including recent [joint land-and-sea exercises](#) in the Russian far east, the Mediterranean and the Baltic. These have caused American military thinkers to conclude that Chinese strategists have much wider ambitions than just the Taiwan Strait.

Changes in the balance of power are one part of the story. The other is the changing character of China's leadership. Not since Mao has China had a leader as powerful as it has right now. Xi's influence permeates every level of party and state. He has acquired power in a way that has been politically astute and brutal. To take but one example, the anticorruption campaign he has wielded across the party has helped "clean up" the country's almost industrial levels of corruption. It has also enabled him to "clean out" – via expulsion from the party and sentences to life imprisonment – nearly all the rivals who might otherwise have threatened his supreme authority.

For Americans who imagined that as China adopted a free market economy it would one day become a liberal democracy, China's new leadership represents a radical departure. As Washington sees it, Xi abandoned any

pretence of China ever transforming itself into a more open, tolerant, liberal democratic state. He has also adopted a model of authoritarian capitalism that is less market-driven and prioritises state enterprises over the private sector, and he is tightening the party's [control over business](#). Even as Beijing appears determined to rewrite the terms of the international order, the US also sees Xi as fanning the flames of Chinese nationalism in a manner that is increasingly anti-American. The US sees Xi as determined to alter the status quo in the western Pacific and establish a Chinese sphere of influence across the eastern hemisphere.



Soldiers of People's Liberation army before an address by President Xi on China's national day in October 2019. Photograph: Jason Lee/Reuters

Washington has also concluded that Xi decided to export his domestic political model to the rest of the developing world by leveraging the global gravitational pull of the Chinese economy. The ultimate objective is to create an international system that is much more accommodating of Chinese national interests and values. Finally, the US has concluded that these changes in China's official worldview are underpinned by a powerful Chinese party-state that is increasingly on a self-selected collision course with the US.

Of course, China doesn't see it like that. Xi's view is that there is nothing wrong with China's political-economic mode, and that while Beijing offers it to others in the developing world to emulate, it is not "forcing it" on any other state. Xi points out the considerable failings of western democracies in dealing with core challenges, such as the Covid-19 pandemic. He argues that China has modernised its military in order to secure its longstanding territorial claims, particularly over Taiwan, and he makes no apology for using the Chinese economy to advance its national interests. Nor does he apologise for using his newfound global power to rewrite the rules of the international system and the multilateral institutions that back it, arguing that this is precisely what the victorious western powers did after the second world war.

The CCP's goal under Xi is also to pull China's per-capita GDP up to "the level of other moderately developed countries" by 2035. Chinese economists typically place that somewhere between \$20,000 and \$30,000, or a level similar to South Korea. This would require a further doubling or tripling of the size of China's economy. Given the party's controversial 2018 decision to remove the two-term limit on five-year presidential terms, Xi could remain China's paramount leader through the 2020s and well into the 2030s. It is likely to be on his watch that China finally becomes the largest economy in the world, supplanting the US after more than a century of global economic dominance. With this shift in the global balance of power, Xi will probably feel emboldened to pursue a growing array of global ambitions over these next 15 years – none more consequential to him than to see the return of Taiwan to Beijing's sovereignty.

In the eyes of China's leadership, there is only one country capable of fundamentally disrupting Xi's national and global ambitions. That is the US. That's why the US continues to occupy the central position in Chinese Communist party strategic thinking.

Xi is no neophyte in his understanding of the US. He visited the country during his earlier political career, once as a junior official in the 1980s, where he famously stayed with a family in rural Iowa, and again more than 20 years later when, as Chinese vice-president, he was hosted by then US vice-president [Joe Biden](#) on a weeklong visit to various American cities and

states. In 2010, Xi sent his only child to Harvard University for her undergraduate degree. Xi also hosted multiple US delegations throughout his political career, in Beijing and in the provinces.



A US Marine helicopter takes off as US and Philippine marines take part in a joint amphibious assault exercise off the waters of the South China Sea in March 2022. Photograph: Ezra Acayan/Getty Images

Despite all this, Xi neither speaks nor reads English. His understanding of the US has always been intermediated through official Chinese sources of translation, which are not always known for accuracy or nuance. And official briefings, generated from China's foreign policy bureaucracy and intelligence community, rarely see the US in a benign light. (Chinese officials, wary of angering Xi, also provide analyses that conform to what they believe he wants to hear.)

Still, Xi's direct experience of the US exceeds the direct experience of China of any American leader, including Joe Biden. No American leader has ever spoken or read Chinese, and all have been similarly reliant on intermediate sources. As a Mandarin speaker, I was fortunate as foreign minister and prime minister of my country to be able to communicate directly with my counterparts and other Chinese officials in their own language. More western political leaders will need to do so in the future.

For many reasons, much of the American strategic community discounts the idea of China's peaceful rise or peaceful development altogether. Instead, many believe that some form of armed conflict or confrontation with Beijing is inevitable – unless, of course, China were to change strategic direction. Under Xi's leadership, any such change is deemed to be virtually impossible. In Washington, therefore, the question is no longer whether such confrontation can be avoided, but when it will occur and under what circumstances. And to a large extent, this mirrors the position in Beijing as well.

There is, therefore, a moral and a practical obligation for friends of China and friends of the US to think through what has become the single hardest question of international relations of our century: how to preserve the peace and prosperity we have secured over the last three-quarters of a century while recognising the changing power relations between Washington and Beijing. We need to identify potential strategic off-ramps, or at least guardrails, which may help preserve the peace among the great powers while also sustaining the integrity of the rules-based order that has underpinned international relations since 1945.

To borrow a question from Lenin: “What is to be done?” As a first step, each side must be mindful of how their actions will be read by the other. At present, both sides are bad at this. We must, at a minimum, be mindful of how strategic language, actions and diplomatic signalling will be interpreted within each side’s political culture, systems and elites.

Developing a new level of mutual strategic literacy, however, is only the beginning. What follows must be the hard work of constructing a joint strategic framework between Washington and Beijing that is capable of achieving three interrelated tasks:

- 1) Agreeing on principles and procedures for navigating each other’s strategic redlines (for example, over Taiwan) – which, if inadvertently crossed, would probably result in military escalation.
- 2) Mutually identifying the areas – foreign policy, economic policy, technological development (eg semiconductors) – where full-blown strategic

competition is accepted as the new normal.

3) Defining those areas where continued strategic cooperation (for example, on climate change) is both recognised and encouraged.



Kevin Rudd, when Australia prime minister, in 2010 with China's then vice-president Xi Jinping. Photograph: Andrew Taylor/Reuters

Of course, none of this can be advanced unilaterally. It can only be done bilaterally, by senior negotiators who have been charged by the two countries' presidents with an overarching responsibility for the relationship. As with all such agreements, the devil will, of course, lie in the detail – and in its enforcement. Such a framework would not depend on trust. It would rely exclusively on sophisticated national verification systems already deployed by each country. In other words, the integrity of these arrangements would not rely on Ronald Reagan's famous "trust, but verify" approach, which Reagan insisted on with the Soviet Union, but rather on "verify" alone.

A joint strategic framework of this type will not prevent crisis, conflict or war. But it would reduce their likelihood. Of course, it would also not prevent any premeditated covert attack by one side against the assets of the other as part of a complete violation of the framework. But where a joint

framework could assist is in managing escalation or de-escalation in the event of accidental incidents at sea, in the air or in cyberspace.

I'm not so naive as to believe that any agreed-upon joint framework would prevent China and the US from strategising against the other. But the US and the Soviet Union, after the near-death experience of the Cuban missile crisis, eventually agreed on a framework to manage their own fraught relationship without triggering mutual annihilation. Surely it's possible to do the same between the US and China today. It is from this hope that the idea of managed strategic competition comes.

Certainly, the rest of the world would welcome a future in which they are not forced to make binary choices between Beijing and Washington. They would prefer a global order in which each country, large and small, has confidence in its territorial integrity, political sovereignty and pathways to prosperity. They would also prefer a world whose stability was underpinned by a functioning international system that could act on the great global challenges of our time, which no individual nation can solve alone. What happens next between China and the US will decide if that is still possible.

*This is an adapted extract from *The Avoidable War: The Dangers of a Catastrophic Conflict between the US and Xi Jinping's China*, which will be published in the UK by Public Affairs on 28 April*

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[Roman Britain](#)

English Heritage brings Roman town's lost Edwardian navvies to life

Exhibition identifies 11 of the forgotten labourers who uncovered Corbridge Roman town on Hadrian's Wall



Surtees Forster (front centre) poses with other labourers in 1907 after the discovery of the Corbridge Lion. He later died in the first world war.
Photograph: Fairless family

[Mark Brown](#) North of England correspondent

Thu 7 Apr 2022 02.01 EDT

His name was Surtees Forster and he is pictured with his bucket directly in front of what was by any standards a sensational Roman discovery. That was in 1907. Nine years later he was dead, killed on the western front at the [Battle of Flers-Courcelette](#).

The poignant story of Forster and other “forgotten” labourers is to be told by English Heritage in a new exhibition at [Corbridge Roman town on Hadrian’s Wall in Northumberland](#).

Much is known about the Edwardian-era excavations of the site but until now little has been known about the boys and men who did the punishing physical work.



A colourised picture of the Edwardian labourers Billy Nicholson and Robert Henry Guy at the Corbridge dig. Photograph: English Heritage

The [curator Frances McIntosh](#) said she had always been struck by the people in the grainy black and white photographs who moved the tonnes and tonnes of earth to allow the excavations to happen. “I’ve always wanted to know their names,” she said. “These are men forgotten about and overlooked because they were the working men, they were in unstable, short-term contracts. They were labourers, agricultural workers, brickies ... but the excavations could not have been done without these guys.”

McIntosh has been sending copies of photographs to parish councils, contacting Facebook groups and using local newspapers to help find the names of the people in the photographs. So far she has managed to name 11 men and make contact with the families of three of them.

The photographs have been colourised and will go on display – outside in the ruins themselves – in the hope more names can be found.

“You do look back at black and white photographs and forget that things were in colour, the same as you forget there was colour in the Roman world,” said McIntosh. “You come to a Roman site and see yellow, or grey, or brown stone but actually the buildings would have been much brighter. You look at a black and white photograph from Edwardian times; that’s not what life was like, it was in colour.”



‘Someone must know who he is.’ English Heritage is keen to identify all the Edwardian labourers at Corbridge. Photograph: Historic England

Forster was one of the men identified. In the photograph he looks tiny in front of one of the most sensational finds – a stone lion attacking a goat, today known as [the Corbridge Lion](#). Forster was just out of school, and around him were the working men who helped find it.

The sense of achievement is obvious. “We know from the memoirs of one of the supervisors that the men were really proud of the work they did. When they first came they just thought of it as another job but that changed. They were men who worked in the brick factory, they were miners, they were

gardeners, they became really proud of what they were doing,” McIntosh said.



A colourised picture of Edwardian labourers at work in Corbridge.
Photograph: English Heritage

The men were involved in excavations uncovering objects that now make up one of the most important Roman collections in Britain. Corbridge began as a Roman military fort and evolved into a civilian settlement, which was the most northerly town in the Roman empire.

Another striking photograph shows a boy cheerfully holding about six baskets. “It is such a great image,” said McIntosh. “I really think someone must know who he is, surely. I’m desperate for someone to be able to recognise him.”

Extraordinary Exploration: The Edwardian discovery of Coria is at Corbridge Roman town on Hadrian’s Wall.

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The UK is cut adrift by Johnson's Brexit fantasy – when Ukraine shows the need for solidarity

[Martin Kettle](#)



For all the prime minister's ambitions on the world stage, the big decisions are being made by Washington and Brussels

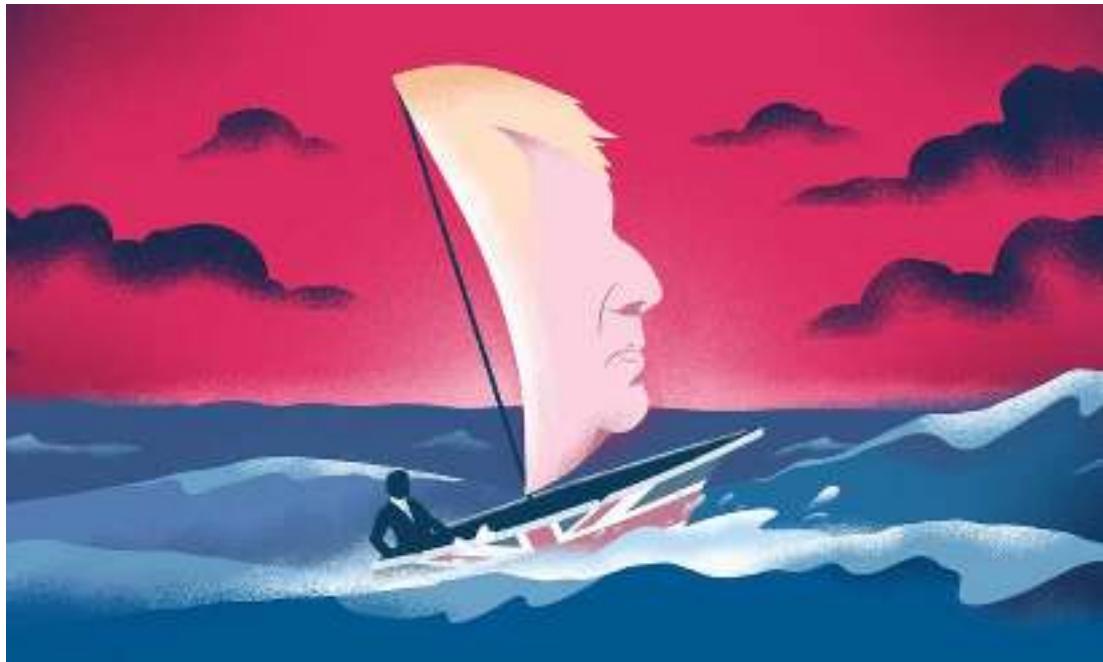


Illustration by Sébastien Thibault

Thu 7 Apr 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 7 Apr 2022 05.10 EDT

Two years ago, during the first Covid lockdown, Boris Johnson came face to face with a reality which until that moment he had seemed reluctant to acknowledge: the unwelcome truth that he was not the all-powerful prime minister of the whole UK. Because health policy is a devolved matter, on Covid he [was prime minister of England alone](#).

To be an effective leader, therefore, he would have to go against his instincts and cooperate. Predictably, Johnson proved to be not very good at cooperating, and as a result effectiveness suffered. The imposition and then the easing of Covid restrictions around the UK became ever-more confused and politically driven. A global health problem became entangled with Johnson's denialism, with the narcissism of small differences between the governments, and with his increasingly chaotic management of the Tory party at Westminster. In short, Johnson himself became part of the problem of fighting Covid.

Two years on, we are again witnessing something similar. This time, the challenge to good governance and effective statecraft is playing out on the European stage, not the domestic one. Before the Russian invasion of

Ukraine, Brexit had allowed Johnson to promote a foreign policy that indulged his instincts as a British prime minister of the old school as he imagined it, strutting his verbose stuff – or at least as much as international Covid restrictions would permit – as the leader of what he portrays as a newly restored and independent global power. But war in Europe has challenged that illusion head on.

In the task of confronting Russian aggression and rebuilding a democratic Ukraine, the route to effectiveness also requires clear-headed cooperation and alliance-building. That's not easy among so many nations with different interests and histories. But it means that it is more important than usual to build trust between European nations for the long term. Yet in Johnson Britain has a leader who is ill-suited to that overridingly necessary cooperative task. He is, to put it mildly, an unreliable ally.

If one moment embodied this problem in visual terms it was that footage of a seemingly isolated Johnson during the official photo sessions at the Nato summit in Brussels on 24 March. For a few embarrassing moments he is apparently standing on his own, looking into the middle distance for someone to talk to among the assembling western leaders who greet one another with handshakes and smiles. Johnson's embarrassment was only brief and should not be overstated, but the image spoke to larger realities – to the self-inflicted isolation of Britain on the world stage after Brexit, and to a level of undoubted suspicion towards Johnson among foreign governments.

This is not to imply that Johnson or Britain have played an unimportant role in the Ukraine conflict so far, let alone a reprehensible one. Britain's military support for Ukraine before and after the invasion has been weighty, important and ongoing. London is also said to be playing a significant role in pressing others to take war crimes cases to the international criminal court. And Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, has repeatedly and publicly praised the UK's and Johnson's contributions.

Nevertheless the picture is mixed. Britain was slow to impose strong sanctions, on which the pace has mostly been made by the US, which imposed further measures against Russian banks and officials on

Wednesday, and by the EU, which this week [signalled a ban](#) on Russian coal and ships that may become a complete embargo on Russian fossil fuel products. Britain also continues to be a very deliberate laggard on refugees, imposing visa conditions of a complexity and severity unmatched by any other European country.

Nor has Britain matched its anti-Russian rhetoric with evidence of the kind of serious long-term strategic resets on which the EU and Germany have embarked. Johnson is [expected](#) to say important things on energy on Thursday, but there is no evidence that he is driving the international effort. That is hardly surprising, since most of the key decisions on sanctions are being made by Washington and Brussels. Britain has not got a seat at those tables. This is in part the result of Brexit and in part a reflection on Johnson's own character. In truth the two cannot be separated.

Just as Johnson eventually realised two years ago that he could not make Covid policy for the whole of the UK, so today he is now almost certainly aware that Brexit is not the success that he claimed it would be. The government's benefits of Brexit [document](#), published in January, embodies this absurdity in more than 100 glossy pages, full of inflated claims and pie-in-the-sky speculations. By indulging these nonsenses, Johnson leaves the door open for the Conservative right to drive through a deregulatory economic agenda that will simply make things worse. But he also weakens Britain's ability to play its part alongside those who should be its allies.

The evidence of Brexit's damage is in plain sight. This is particularly true in the UK economy, where serious labour shortages in low-skill sectors are now running into the rising cost of food caused by Covid, higher fuel prices and Ukraine-related shortages. Growth forecasts have been revised downwards, supply chains are under growing pressure, and even Rishi Sunak [admitted](#) last week that Britain's poor trading performance might in part be the result of Brexit. Although Britain's cost-of-living crisis cannot be entirely laid at Brexit's door, it is indisputable that it is a significant part of the problem and, moreover, that there is no end in sight of the difficulties it is causing.

The same is true of the problems over Britain's borders, control of which was supposedly the great prize of [Brexit](#). It seems barely to have dawned on

Johnson that secure borders are only secure if there are effective controls on both sides and that this requires cooperation, especially with Ireland and France. Instead, both are treated almost with indifference. If Britain reneges on the Northern Ireland protocol or fails to implement it while insisting that Russia must respect and uphold international law, the chorus of contempt will stretch from the Atlantic to the Urals and it will be fully deserved.

The tragedy, at a time when the whole of [Europe](#) has to pull together to protect its values and its freedoms against Russia, is that Britain under Johnson is, at best, failing to play the important role in this alliance for which its size and resources equip it. At worst, by continuing to play Brexit games under a leader for whom others have so little respect or trust, it may even be undermining an alliance on which, in the end, we will all depend.

- Martin Kettle is a Guardian columnist
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[**Opinion**](#)[**Climate crisis**](#)

'Learning to live with it'? From Covid to climate breakdown, it's the new way of failing

[**George Monbiot**](#)



The government is trying to wish away problems such as flooding by doing nothing. It's incompetence by design



A warning sign in Shrewsbury, Shropshire, in February 2020 after the river Severn breached emergency defences. Photograph: Oli Scarff/AFP/Getty Images

Thu 7 Apr 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 7 Apr 2022 12.27 EDT

We have a new term for doing nothing: “learning to live with”. Learning to live with Covid means abandoning testing, isolation and wearing masks in public places. Living with it, dying from it, what’s the difference? The same applies to climate breakdown. It’s not just that countries like the UK have failed to play their part in preventing this catastrophe. They have also failed to prepare for it.

While our primary effort should still be to decarbonise our economies, to prevent even worse impacts, we also need to brace ourselves for the heating that’s now unavoidable. But, as the government’s climate change committee [points out](#), adaptation in the UK is “under-resourced, underfunded and often ignored”. The head of the committee has spoken of a “[wilful reluctance](#)” to include adaptation in policymaking.

In the five years since the committee last reported on this issue, for example, [570,000 new homes](#) have been built without heat adaptation: in other words, as temperatures rise they’re likely to overheat in the summer. Doubtless,

many of them have also been built on flood plains. As always, it's much cheaper and easier to prepare for such disasters than to seek to live with them. But government policy is to wish away these problems.

This government is incompetent by design. Doing nothing is what Tory donors pay for. Doing nothing is what the billionaire press demands. Doubtless we'll soon be told we need to take "personal responsibility" for ensuring our homes are not flooded and our power lines are not destroyed by storms.

But this failure to act is not confined to the government: it's a general failure. On Sunday, the Cambrian railway line that runs from Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth [reopened after six weeks](#) of emergency engineering. In February, the Severn, swollen by a series of storms, had knocked out the ballast, leaving the track suspended in mid-air in 33 places.

As I know to my cost, because I used to rely on it, this is the latest in an apparently endless series of disasters to afflict the line. One bridge alone – the Black Bridge near Machynlleth – was closed about 30 times as a result of river flooding in the 2010s and 10 times in 2020 alone. Last summer, at a cost of £3.6m, Network Rail [raised it](#) by a metre. Again, the line was shut for six weeks. But none of this solves the underlying problem: the fast and violent response of local rivers to heavy rainfall. As climate chaos brings more intense rain, this is likely to become even worse.

There is a rapidly developing science called [natural flood management](#). It shows how, with the right interventions upstream, rivers can be [slowed](#) and their flood peaks reduced. This involves, for example, increasing their "hydraulic roughness", allowing them to braid and meander and form islands and other obstacles that slow the flow; improving infiltration, so that water soaks into the ground rather than flashing off the surface; and reconnecting rivers to their floodplains, so that wetlands and fields are flooded (with compensation for farmers), rather than homes and infrastructure.

Fascinatingly, a [new tranche](#) of [evidence](#) suggests that among the most effective interventions is reintroducing beavers. Their dams, especially when

there is a [long series](#) in the course of the river, appear to be highly effective at [holding back](#) flood waters and [reducing](#) flood peaks. The beaver could be the rail traveller's best friend.

Long sections of the rivers affecting the Cambrian line were straightened and shortened during an entirely misguided phase of river management in the mid-20th century. At that time, engineers, “without any apparent scientific evidence base”, according to [a paper](#) in the journal Progress in Physical Geography, believed that rivers needed to be cleared, dredged and “trained”. The result is that water rushes down them much faster than it would otherwise have done. Using only hard engineering to control floods – building higher walls and embankments – tends to [divert water](#) to the next crisis point. It requires constant [reinforcement](#) and upgrading.

But when I asked the company what works it had undertaken to slow the flow and reduce the flood peaks of the rivers that affect the line, it told me: “Network Rail is not carrying out any work of the nature you listed. Our focus is on building additional resilience into local rail infrastructure.” It is now shelling out [another £2m](#) on “rock armour” to protect the parts of the line washed out in February. As so often in the UK, the idea of making the problem smaller, rather than simply pouring more money, rocks and concrete into making the defences higher, doesn’t seem to occur. Working only at the bottom of the catchments, our engineers wait for a wall of water to arrive and pray that this time their defences are high enough.

There is no learning involved in “learning to live with”. It tends to mean an inability to adapt to new realities, and in some cases looks like a total retreat into abstraction. In 2020, the US conservative commentator Ben Shapiro [claimed](#) that 10 feet of sea level rise wouldn’t be a problem, because people could just “sell their homes and move”. Sell them to mermaids, presumably. A few days ago, a senior executive at the Institute of Economic Affairs [suggested](#) that instead of preventing climate breakdown, we could simply “build sea walls”. It is not just denial we’re up against. It’s a belief in magic.

- George Monbiot is a Guardian columnist. He will discuss Regenesis at a Guardian Live event on Monday 30 May. Book tickets in-person or online [here](#)

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OpinionLGBT rights

By cancelling its LGBT conference, the government shows its lack of concern for our rights

Nancy Kelley

Instead of answering demands from organisations like mine for conversion practices to be banned for trans people, No 10 shut down the event



Reclaim Pride Protest in London, July 2021. Photograph: Vuk Valcic/SOPA Images/Rex/Shutterstock

Thu 7 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 7 Apr 2022 03.44 EDT

This week, the government cancelled its first global LGBTQ+ conference which was meant to further equality and help tackle pressing issues like violence and hate. It did this after more than 150 other charities and community organisations from across the LGBTQ+ rights and HIV sector – including Stonewall – withdrew our support for the event.

We made this choice because, after years of waiting, the prime minister broke his promise to our community to ban conversion practices for all LGBTQ+ people. In the space of just a few days, official [government policy zigzagged](#): first a weak ban, then no ban, then finally a weak ban that only protects cis lesbian, gay and bi people, leaving transgender people out in the cold.

This is in spite of the fact that trans people are one of the groups at highest risk from conversion practices. The UK government's [own research](#) shows that 4% of trans people have been exposed to them. Last week, the LGBTQ+ charity Galop published research on [abuse in the home](#), which found that 11% of trans people have been exposed to conversion practices by their own family. Most of the victims were harmed while they were still children.

Conversion practices that target trans people are not new, they are not hidden and they are absolutely not harmless. Abuse of trans people is woven through the whole sorry history of anti-LGBTQ+ conversion efforts. Trans people were being “treated” with [electroshock therapy on the NHS](#) well into the 1970s. Today, anti-trans groups talk publicly about having a goal of “100% desistence”; or targeting trans children and young people with conversion practices until no more trans people exist. You can order manuals for conversion practices to use on your trans or gender-questioning child on mainstream websites.

The harm done is acute, and sometimes lifelong. Around the world, 14 countries, from Taiwan to Canada, have already banned conversion practices nationwide, and in many others it has been banned at state level. In all but two cases, these bans cover both sexual orientation and gender identity, because all forms of this abuse are unacceptable and harmful, and because all conversion practices targeting LGBTQ+ communities have the same basic motivation. In the words of the UN independent expert: “The injury caused by conversion therapy begins with the notion that an individual is sick, diseased and abnormal due to their sexual orientation or gender identity and must therefore be treated.”

An effective, inclusive ban on conversion practices is [overwhelmingly supported by the British public](#). It is supported by the governments of Scotland and Wales, who have been clear that they will legislate and regulate to protect trans people, even if the UK government will not.

It is supported by the medical establishment, including the British Psychological Society, British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, Royal College of Psychiatrists, as well as NHS England and Scotland. These professional bodies are signatories to a [Memorandum of Understanding on Conversion Therapy](#), and are all actively campaigning for an inclusive and enforceable ban, while working to ensure their members are confident in supporting LGBTQ+ patients ethically and well.

It is supported by progressive and inclusive faith leaders. Indeed, this week, in a last-ditch attempt to get the government to see sense, the former archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, along with a number of religious leaders, delivered a letter to Downing Street calling for a trans-inclusive ban and stating that: “To be trans is to enter a sacred journey of becoming whole: precious, honoured and loved, by yourself, by others and by God.”

And it is supported by the LGBTQ+ community. We have worked so hard across our movement to get the UK government to see that an effective, inclusive ban on conversion practices is a necessary and straightforward foundation for any country that wants its LGBTQ+ citizens to be able to live their lives freely. They have not listened and LGBTQ+ people will not stay silent.

The decision to cancel the conference shows just how seriously the UK government has let down our community – our trust has been shattered. As we approach the 50th anniversary of Pride, it is vital that the prime minister works actively to begin rebuilding trust and set a clear direction for ministers to consistently support all LGBTQ+ people.

That must start with a commitment to legislating for a trans-inclusive ban on conversion practices. Trans people are no less worthy of respect, compassion and protection than cis lesbian, gay and bi people. It supports all of our rights, or none of our rights.

- Nancy Kelley is the chief executive of Stonewall
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OpinionMen's fashion

Having a quiet drink, I eyed a group of lads nervously ... and then I saw their manbags

[Adrian Chiles](#)



The Staffordshire posse were trying hard to exude menace. I found them rather sweet



One man and his bag. Photograph: Edward Berthelot/Getty Images

Thu 7 Apr 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 7 Apr 2022 05.21 EDT

I went for a pint with a couple of friends in a nice country pub near Lichfield. It was all rather peaceful until a posse of half a dozen or so local rascals made their entrance. They were all different versions of each other. Their haircuts were short, but just long enough to merit the application of product. Their T-shirts and trousers were all extremely tight. I hope there was an elasticated element to those jeans or what was left of their journey through puberty might be bumpy. If they were 18, I'm a Dutchman.

As they lined up along the bar to buy their individual pints of lager, another aspect of their garb became apparent: strung across their skinny bodies, every one of them had a handbag – well, a man-bag or boy-bag, I suppose we have to call it. This accessorising rather took the edge off any menace they had about them and, being in a leafy part of Staffordshire, there wasn't a lot of menace to them in the first place.

They looked so sweet, their cockiness dissipating a little as they got nervous about being served. I prayed they would; I couldn't have borne to watch them file away disappointed, handbags and all. As it was, they took their

lagers over to a big table around which they sat and talked about football, swearing quite a lot. Bless them.

I asked some youths of my acquaintance what the hand/man/boy-bags were all about. Apparently, they're part of the uniform of the roadman. No, me neither. The Collins English Dictionary says the roadman is "a man who spends a lot of time on the streets in a group, and who may be involved in selling drugs". Drugs!? Trust me, this lot won't have had anything stronger than Calpol in their boy-bags, but it's still good to know what their look was all about, what lifestyle they aspire to.

- Adrian Chiles is a broadcaster, writer and Guardian columnist
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North Korea

North Korea could hold nuclear test next week, US envoy warns

US says Pyongyang may escalate recent provocations with a weapons test on 110th anniversary of founder Kim Il-sung's birth



North Korea has conducted a series of missile launches in recent months and fears of a possible nuclear test come as the US says it has ignored requests from Washington to resume denuclearisation talks. Photograph: KCNA VIA KNS/AFP/Getty Images

[Justin McCurry](#) in Osaka and agencies

Wed 6 Apr 2022 23.24 EDTFirst published on Wed 6 Apr 2022 19.59 EDT

North Korea could be planning its first nuclear weapon test in nearly five years, according to a senior US official who urged the regime to step back from further provocations following [its recent long-range missile test](#).

Sung Kim, the special representative for [North Korea](#) policy at the US state department, said Washington believes Pyongyang could demonstrate its growing nuclear weapons capacity on 15 April, an annual holiday held to celebrate the 110th anniversary of the birth of the country's founder, Kim Il-sung.

"We are worried that in connection with the upcoming anniversary, the DPRK may be tempted to take another provocative action," Kim told reporters on Wednesday, using the country's official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

He added: "I don't want to speculate too much, but I think it could be another missile launch, it could be a nuclear test."

"Hopefully, the anniversary can pass without any further escalation."

North Korea has conducted six nuclear tests since 2006, four of them under the current leader, [Kim Jong-un](#). Its last test, in 2017, was followed by a self-imposed moratorium as Kim prepared for his first denuclearisation summit with Donald Trump the following year.

The Biden administration has called for a resumption of talks "without preconditions" but has made clear that the aim would be the removal of North Korea's nuclear deterrent, a concession few analysts believe Kim Jong-un is willing to make as long as he believes the US is a threat to his regime..

The North has continued to ignore Washington's offers to resume discussions on removing all nuclear weapons from the Korean peninsula, Sung Kim said.

"We have not received any response from Pyongyang, which is very disappointing, because we have sent several messages, both public and private, inviting them to a dialogue without any conditions," he said.

"Instead they have initiated a series of missile tests that recently culminated in at least three ICBM launches. These actions pose a serious threat to regional stability."

He added: “The DPRK finds itself isolated in unprecedented ways. It has shut itself off during the Covid pandemic. Only the resumption of diplomacy can break this isolation, and only then can we pick up the important work that has been done before.”

Sung Kim said China – the North’s main ally and biggest trading partner – and Russia were not helping Joe Biden’s push to restart talks with the North Korean leader.

Negotiations aimed at containing Pyongyang’s nuclear threat appeared to make progress under Trump, but then halted after he and Kim failed to agree on sanctions relief in return for verifiable moves to dismantle the North’s nuclear arsenal.

US and South Korean officials have said Pyongyang appears to be repairing underground tunnels at the Punggye-ri nuclear test site, which it had purportedly demolished in 2018 to show its willingness to denuclearise.

After Biden took office, North Korea began a series of missile tests – 13 in all – that culminated last month in the launch of a ballistic missile that could theoretically deliver a nuclear warhead to the US mainland.

On Tuesday, Kim Jong-un’s powerful sister Kim Yo-jong warned that Pyongyang will use its nuclear weapons to “eliminate” South Korea’s army in the event they launch a preemptive strike.

Sung Kim said that Washington was pushing for a fresh resolution condemning Pyongyang’s actions at the UN security council.

But he noted that in six earlier efforts this year, Russia and China “have consistently blocked our efforts to produce a UN public statement”.

He said: “We believe that the unprecedented number of DPRK ballistic missile launches this year and the instability they bring to the Korean peninsula are obviously in nobody’s interest, and we call on [China], as well as Russia, to work with us to send a very clear message through the security council that North Korea’s actions are unacceptable.”

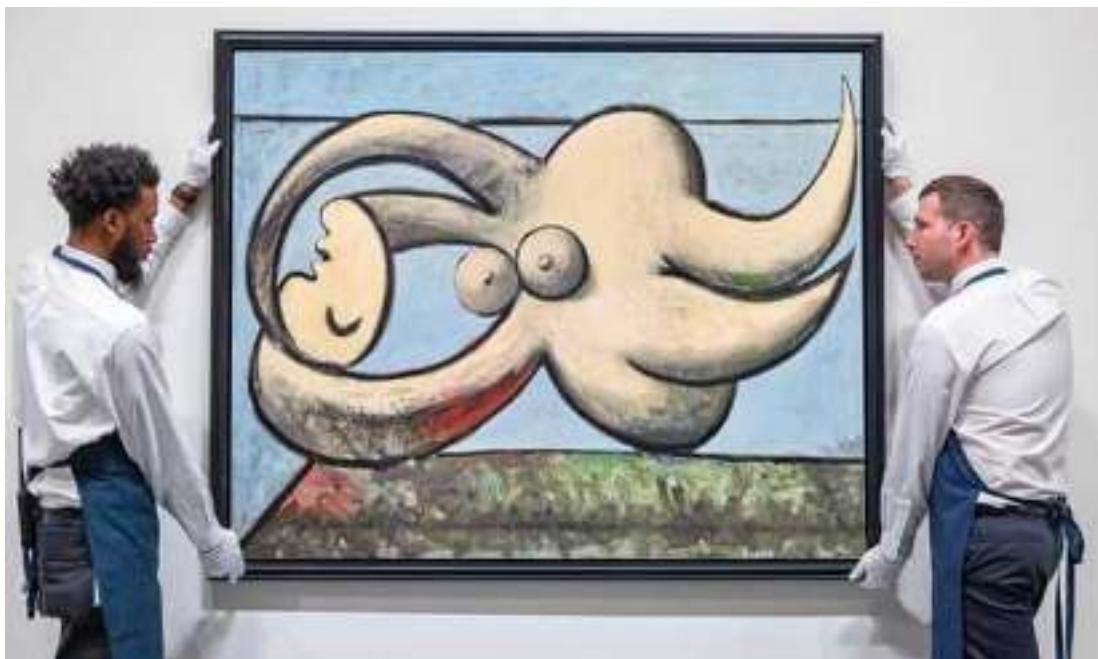
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[Pablo Picasso](#)

Picasso portrait of lover and muse to appear at auction for first time

Sotheby's expects *Femme nue couchée*, which depicts Marie-Thérèse Walter as a sea-creature, to fetch over \$60m next month



Picasso's *Femme nue couchée* will go on sale at Sotheby's in May
Photograph: Julian Cassady/Sothebys

[Harriet Sherwood](#) Arts and culture correspondent

[@harrietsherwood](#)

Thu 7 Apr 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 7 Apr 2022 14.54 EDT

A sensuous depiction of Pablo Picasso's muse and lover as a multi-limbed sea creature, completed during the most prolific year of the artist's life, is to appear at auction for the first time.

Femme nue couchée (Naked woman reclining) is expected to sell for more than \$60m next month, a reflection of the desirability among collectors of

Picasso's images of Marie-Thérèse Walter.

"Picasso's portraits of his golden muse Marie-Thérèse are undeniable hallmarks of 20th century art," said Brooke Lampley, chair and head of global fine art sales at Sotheby's, which is selling the painting.

Femme nue couchée was "a deeply lyrical ode to the artist's unbound desire for Marie-Thérèse; with her fin-like, endlessly pliable limbs, the portrait continues to enchant as it perfectly captures Picasso's muse as the ultimate expression of his genius".

Picasso's relationship with Walter – considered one of the great love affairs of the 20th century – was for many years a closely guarded secret.

At the age of 45 and unhappily married, the artist fell for the 17-year-old Walter when he noticed her through the window of Galeries Lafayette in Paris in 1927. "I'm sure we shall do great things together. I'm Picasso," he told the teenager, who had no idea who he was.

She inspired paintings, drawings and sculptures, some of which are considered the greatest works from Picasso's eight-decade-long career.

An [exhibition at Tate Modern](#) four years ago was devoted to Picasso's output in 1932, in particular his intense portraits of Walter.

"There were many notable years in the long, dramatic career of Pablo Picasso, but 1932 stands out as particularly momentous," said Julian Dawes, Sotheby's co-head of modern art in New York.

"In this 'year of wonders', Picasso produced the most sensuous depictions of his great muse and lover Marie-Thérèse Walter, who would inspire some of the artist's most iconic images."

In Femme nue couchée, Walter is depicted with the sensuous limbs of a sea-creature. She was an enthusiastic and proficient swimmer, whose grace in the water was an enduring fascination for Picasso, who never learned to swim.

The lovers had enjoyed trysts by the sea in the summer of 1928, when Picasso secretly installed Walter in a holiday camp close to where the artist, his then wife, Olga Khokhlova, a Russian-Ukrainian dancer, and their son Paulo were staying.

Last year, Picasso's *Femme assise près d'une fenêtre* (Marie-Thérèse) sold for \$103.4m at auction in New York.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2022/apr/07/picasso-portrait-of-lover-and-muse-to-appear-at-auction-for-first-time>

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Global development

‘Toxic combination’ of issues threaten world’s health and human rights – BMA

Doctors’ group says the pandemic heightened inequalities, with populism and conflict also negatively affecting global healthcare



A mural in São Paulo, showing Brazil’s president Jair Bolsonaro and Covid pulling against health workers, asks: ‘Which side of the rope are you on?’
Photograph: Nelson Almeida/AFP/Getty Images

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[Nicola Kelly](#)

Thu 7 Apr 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 7 Apr 2022 06.32 EDT

Health-related human rights are under intense threat across the globe with devastating consequences for the public and healthcare professionals, a new report from the British Medical Association warned.

The [study](#), which examines the links between human rights and healthcare, identifies a “toxic combination” of emerging issues that have undermined human rights standards, putting renewed stress and pressure on populations around the world. BMA researchers say climate change, disinformation, neoliberalism, populism and socioeconomic inequalities are threatening “the vulnerable, the foreign, the marginal, the displaced, the ‘other’.”

“This is a really critical moment to think through whether we’re serious about equalities in healthcare and basic universal provision,” said Dr Julian Sheather, one of the authors of the report. “We’ve got rising costs of healthcare, rising needs of healthcare and real challenges about how health goods can be distributed around the world. Globally, we’re at a turning point.”

Inequalities were brought into sharp focus by the pandemic with the more powerful, wealthy countries given greater access to vaccines and personal protective equipment, the BMA said. Researchers found global cooperation had a direct impact on health outcomes, with resource-poor countries more exposed to Covid infections.

Social media and other new technologies allowed governments to deliver public health messaging around the pandemic, including monitoring and interventions such as test and trace, but it also gave rise to the spread of health misinformation and increased state surveillance encroaching on the privacy of its citizens. This misinformation “undermines and undercuts” trust in the health authorities and medical opinion, Sheather said.



Hospital staff sit in a basement, used as a bomb shelter, during an air raid alarm in Brovary, Ukraine, March 2022. Photograph: Felipe Dana/AP

“Populist politicians of a particular ilk have shown themselves adept at channelling their [citizens’] fears for short-term political advantage. The potential effects of these populist appeals on health-seeking behaviour can be extremely damaging,” Sheather said in the report, pointing to the example of [Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro’s public discourse on Covid](#), who called the virus a “little flu”, which should be faced “like a man, not a boy”.

Conflict has also had an adverse effect on global human rights and health. The protection of medical staff and facilities during conflict are of particular concern, with hospitals and medics targeted, as seen most recently in Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"Medical professionals and facilities should be sacrosanct, yet we see them deliberately and systematically attacked," Sheather said. "We need to be moving to a time of restraint and respect for international humanitarian law."

Populations who have been displaced and sought asylum in neighbouring countries or farther afield are at greater risk of poor mental and physical health, and face significant challenges accessing healthcare.

The report sets out the effects forced displacement of the Roma population have had on living standards and healthcare. It shows that one in three Roma are living in housing without running water and that Roma women are 4.5 times more likely to have a low birth-weight baby than a non-Roma woman, with their babies 2.8 times more likely to be born prematurely.



Approximately 4,300 Roma live in the Lunit IX district of Kosice, Slovakia, most of them in abject poverty in crumbling high-rise apartment buildings. Photograph: Sean Gallup/Getty Images

Research also highlights the plight of the 600,000 Myanmar Rohingyas trapped in the country, confined to camps with inadequate food, healthcare and education, and routinely subjected to state violence. Those who have fled over the border to refugee camps in Bangladesh have limited access to healthcare, and inadequate resources to support the hundreds of thousands of people living there.

Climate change and its links to more prevalent diseases and virus strains, as well as the transfer of infections on migration routes, was also found to be a major contributing factor to human rights imbalances between countries. Sheather says the transfer of viruses from non-human to human hosts, as seen during the pandemic, will “continue to be a feature of climate change”.

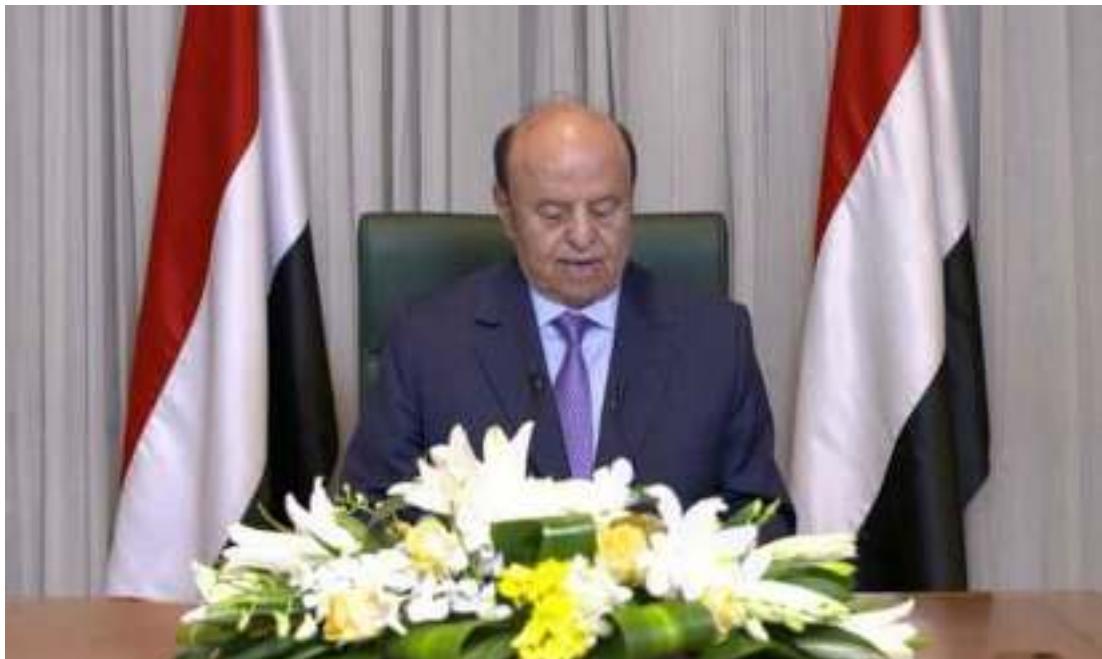
The BMA makes urgent recommendations to policymakers, including the removal of barriers for migrants to access healthcare systems and greater support from wealthier countries to displaced and migrant populations. Clear recording of human rights violations during war, with a specific list of those that relate to health and healthcare were also urged, with health professionals calling for a strengthening of the international criminal court.

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Yemen

Exiled Yemen president steps aside as truce raises hopes of end to war

Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi says a newly established council will lead negotiations with Iranian-backed Houthis



Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi delivers a speech in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia as he delegates his own powers to a presidential council. Photograph: Yemen TV/Reuters

Associated Press in Sana'a

Thu 7 Apr 2022 04.43 EDT Last modified on Thu 7 Apr 2022 05.48 EDT

Yemen's exiled president has stepped aside and transferred his powers to a presidential council as international and regional efforts to end the country's long-running civil war gained momentum with a two-month truce.

Saudi Arabia and the [United Arab Emirates](#), major players in the conflict, appear to have had a role in Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi's decision, quickly

welcoming it with a pledge of \$3bn (£2.3bn) in aid. The head of the new council has close ties to Riyadh.

Whether the switch will expedite an end to the grinding war remains to be seen, as UN-sponsored negotiations have been at an impasse and fighting, airstrikes and missile attacks continued until late last month. The Houthis did not immediately comment on Hadi's announcement.

Hadi said the newly established council would run the internationally recognised government and lead negotiations with the Iranian-backed Houthis, according to a statement aired on state-run media.

The move is meant to unify the anti-Houthi camp after years of infighting and disputes, and was almost certainly orchestrated in Riyadh, where Yemeni factions were meeting over the past week to discuss efforts to end the war.

"With this declaration a presidential leadership council shall be established to complete the implementation of the tasks of the transitional period. I irreversibly delegate to the presidential leadership council my full powers," Hadi declared on Yemen's state-run TV.

Hadi also sacked the vice-president, Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar, a powerful military figure, and delegated Ahmar's powers to the presidential council.

The presidential council is chaired by Rashad al-Alimi, an adviser to Hadi and former interior minister with the government of the former president Ali Abdullah Saleh.

Alimi enjoys close ties with [Saudi Arabia](#) and other political groups inside Yemen, including the powerful Islah party – the transnational Muslim Brotherhood's branch in Yemen.

The council has seven members, including Aidarus al-Zoubaidi, head of the secessionist Southern Transitional Council – an umbrella group of heavily armed and well-financed militias propped up by the UAE since 2015.

Sheikh Sultan al-Aradah, the powerful governor of energy-rich Marib province, was also named a member of the council. So was Tariq Saleh, a militia leader and nephew of the late president who has close ties with the UAE.

Hadi was named president of Yemen in 2012 with a mission to oversee a democratic transition following its Arab spring uprising that ended Saleh's longtime rule.

However, the Houthis, a religious movement turned rebel militia, allied with Saleh and seized the capital Sana'a in 2014, forcing Hadi and his government into exile in Saudi Arabia.

Months later, Saudi Arabia formed a military coalition and entered the war to try to restore Hadi's government to power.

The conflict has in recent years become a regional proxy war that has killed more than 150,000 people, including more than 14,500 civilians. It has also created one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world.

Welcoming Hadi's move, Saudi Arabia urged the presidential council to embark on UN-led negotiations with the Houthis to find a "political, final and comprehensive" settlement to the conflict, according to the state-run Saudi Press Agency.

The powerful Saudi crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, has also met with the council head and its members, according to Saudi state-run TV.

The warring sides announced a [two-month ceasefire](#) earlier this month, the first nationwide truce in Yemen in six years.

Hadi's announcement came as Yemeni talks called by the Saudi-based Gulf Cooperation Council entered their final day on Thursday. The Houthis boycotted the GCC-facilitated efforts because they are taking place in Saudi Arabia, their adversary's territory.

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Malaysia

Two Britons are among four tourists missing after diving trip in Malaysia

The group, which also includes a French woman and a Norwegian woman, disappeared during diving training off the southern town of Mersing



The search and rescue operation for four divers, including two Britons, reported missing off Mersing in southern Malaysia. Photograph: Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency

Associated Press
Thu 7 Apr 2022 00.29 EDT

Malaysian authorities were searching on Thursday for four Europeans, including two Britons, who disappeared during diving training off a southern island.

The divers are a 46-year-old British man, a 14-year-old British boy, an 18-year-old French woman and a 35-year-old woman from Norway.

The Malaysian maritime enforcement agency said the four went missing while diving at an island nine nautical miles (16.5km) off the coastal town of Mersing in southern Johor state.

The search began immediately after the tourists went missing on Wednesday afternoon before being halted for the night due to poor visibility. The search resumed early on Thursday.

Malaysia reopened its borders to foreigners on 1 April after they were closed for more than two years during the Covid-19 pandemic. Malaysia's immigration department said more than 55,000 foreigners entered the country in the first four days since the border opened.

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Rishi Sunak

Labour accuses Sunak family of avoiding tens of millions in taxes

Chancellor obfuscated while imposing steep tax rises on ordinary Britons, says shadow minister



Rishi Sunak and his wife, Akshata Murty. Labour says their actions raise ethical questions. Photograph: Vickie Flores/EPA

Clea Skopeliti

Sat 9 Apr 2022 05.47 EDT Last modified on Sun 10 Apr 2022 00.41 EDT

Rishi Sunak and his family potentially avoided paying tens of millions of pounds in taxes through his wife's "non-dom" status while the chancellor imposed tax rises on the public, Labour has said.

The chancellor's wife, [Akshata Murty](#), gave in to mounting pressure on Friday, announcing she would pay UK taxes as Sunak's position began to appear increasingly tenuous.

Murty said she understood that many felt her tax arrangements were not “compatible with [her] husband’s job as chancellor”, adding that she appreciated the “British sense of fairness”. She will pay tax on all future worldwide income and for the last tax year, but not on backdated income.

Louise Haigh, the shadow transport secretary, accused Sunak of failing to be transparent about his family’s financial arrangements while raising taxes for millions during a deepening cost of living crisis. Haigh said that while it was “clear” the arrangement was legal, many Britons would be questioning the ethics involved.

“The chancellor has not been transparent. He has come out on a number of occasions to try and muddy the waters around this and to obfuscate,” she told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme.

“It is clear that was legal. I think the question many people will be asking is whether it was ethical and whether it was right that the chancellor of the exchequer, whilst piling on 15 separate tax rises to the British public, was benefiting from a tax scheme that allowed his household to pay significantly less to the tune of potentially tens of millions of pounds less.”

The Guardian estimates that Murty has potentially avoided about [£20m in tax](#) because of her status, for which she currently pays £30,000 a year.

Under non-dom rules, Murty did not legally have to pay tax in the UK on the estimated £11.5m in annual dividends she collects from her stake in Infosys, her billionaire father’s IT business. UK tax residents would be expected to pay about £4.5m in tax on the dividend payment.

In a press conference on Friday, Boris Johnson admitted he had not been told about Murty’s non-dom status. But he denied anyone at No 10 was briefing against the Sunaks, and praised the chancellor for doing an “outstanding job”.

Haigh’s remarks follow [calls from Labour and the Lib Dems](#) for an investigation into whether Sunak breached the ministerial code by failing to be transparent. Under pressure, the chancellor on Friday confirmed he had a US green card – meaning he had declared himself a “permanent US

resident” for tax purposes for 19 months while he was chancellor and for six years as an MP.

A source confirmed Murty also held a green card. This admission appears to weaken Sunak’s defence of his wife being a non-dom because she one day planned to return to live in India.

Furthermore, despite bowing to pressure to pay UK tax on future income and for the last tax year, Murty will retain her non-dom status. This could in future allow her family to legally avoid paying inheritance tax.

Amid these calls for further scrutiny of the chancellor’s tax arrangements and financial interests, Sunak was defended by Kevin Hollinrake, the Tory MP for Thirsk and Malton in North Yorkshire.

Hollinrake denied allegations of Murty’s non-dom status being a “tax dodge”, arguing that Conservative and Labour governments had both used non-dom status in policy to attract wealthy people to the UK.

Speaking on the Today programme, Hollinrake said: “This is not a tax dodge. It is a deliberate policy to attract wealthy people from other countries around the world to the UK on the basis that they create jobs and create wealth in the UK that benefits everybody.”

The Guardian has learned that just days before Sunak raised national insurance contributions, affecting millions of people, the Treasury introduced a new low-tax scheme that is partly devised to benefit some wealthy non-dom investors.

Hollinrake went on to defend Sunak for continuing to hold a green card and for paying taxes in the US even after he became chancellor, saying that he needed one when he was working there.

He added that Sunak “then came to the UK and declared that position with the Cabinet Office”. “It doesn’t reduce his taxation in the UK at all. In fact with a green card you can often pay more tax,” he said.

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[Akshata Murty](#)

Five key questions Rishi Sunak and Akshata Murty have yet to answer

Analysis: While the chancellor says his wife paid all UK taxes due, pressure is building over what he hasn't said about their finances



Rishi Sunak, leaving 11 Downing Street on Wednesday, has defended his wife's decision to claim non-domicile status. Photograph: Alastair Grant/AP

[Rupert Neate](#) and [Rowena Mason](#)

Sat 9 Apr 2022 04.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 9 Apr 2022 04.01 EDT

Rishi Sunak is under huge pressure over his financial affairs and those of his wife, [Akshata Murty](#), the daughter of an Indian billionaire who made his money in IT. These are the key unanswered questions:

How much tax did the chancellor's wife pay on her £11.5m annual dividends from Infosys – and where

did she pay it?

Three days after it was revealed that [Murty claims non-domicile status](#), allowing her to avoid UK tax on her foreign earnings, Murty and Sunak have failed to explain how much tax she paid on the £54.5m of dividends she collected over the past seven-and-a-half years.

Sunak, who as chancellor oversees tax rules, said his wife paid all taxes due in the UK, “and every penny that she earns internationally, for example in India, she would pay the full taxes on that”.

Critics pointed out he said Murty “would pay” full taxes on overseas income, not that she had paid it or stated how much. They said Sunak gave India only as an example, leaving open the possibility that Murty may have used a tax haven, where no taxes would have been due. She has previously collected other dividend income in Mauritius, a tax haven.

Why did Sunak and Murty have US green cards and when did they give them up?

The couple had green cards when living in the US before Sunak became an MP, but still had them until late in 2019 – [when Sunak was already chancellor](#).

Green card holders must file annual US tax returns and are “responsible for reporting your income and paying taxes on any foreign earned income”. One major question is whether Murty paid US taxes on her Infosys dividends, but not UK tax, while taking advantage of her non-dom status.

Sunak said Murty did not want to become a British citizen because she regarded herself as Indian and she was planning to return to India. “She loves her country like I love mine”, he said. However, people applying to become US green card holders are required to make a legal commitment to “make the US your permanent home”. It is legitimate to ask why Murty was prepared to make the US her home for tax purposes, but chose to take

advantage of her non-dom status to legally avoid paying UK tax when her husband was the second-most powerful person in government.

Did Sunak waive his salary as a minister in 2020 in order to avoid paying US tax?

When Sunak was appointed chief secretary to the Treasury in 2019 he waived his salary for five months – a total of £34,000.

Instead he earned the MP's basic salary, which was then about £81,932. This is about \$103,000 at today's exchange rate. This is just under the maximum threshold of (\$108,700) that US green card holders can earn overseas and avoid paying US income tax, under the foreign earned income exclusion scheme.

Callout

Sunak and the Treasury did not comment. A government source said Sunak did not take his full ministerial salary for the first five months because the Cabinet Office asked him to forgo it as it had reached the maximum cap for ministerial salaries that year.

Does Murty have other overseas income beyond Infosys – how much, what tax does she pay and where?

Murty's earnings are not made public, because Sunak has not declared anything on his register of ministerial interests beyond her ownership of a UK vehicle called Catamaran Ventures UK. There is no mention of her shareholding in Infosys, or any other financial interest. It is not clear why this has been considered not relevant to the declaration, but ministers usually discuss their financial situation with the prime minister's adviser on ministerial interests before it is decided what they need to make public.

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How much money is in Sunak's blind trust, and where is it located?

There are huge unanswered questions over Sunak's blind trust and what shareholdings or other investments have gone in it. The first mention of Sunak's trust appeared in 2019, when he became a Treasury minister, but it is possible he had shareholdings in it before that. The MPs register of interest says MPs do not have to declare the existence of blind trusts to the public and that MPs do not know how their assets are being invested, and are not allowed to give instructions about investments.

However, they can receive reports on the trust's overall performance, realise the assets, and give general directions about the investments when the trust is established. This means Sunak may be aware roughly what is in his blind trust. Before he became an MP, he was involved in managing hedge funds, including Theleme and the Children's Investment Fund, which have links to the Cayman Islands.

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Rishi Sunak

Sunak's wife to pay UK tax after outcry, as PM denies non-dom knowledge

Akshata Murty says she realises many felt her arrangements were not 'compatible with my husband's job as chancellor'

[Sunak defends wife's tax status as Labour and No 10 deny leak](#)



The chancellor, Rishi Sunak, and his wife, Akshata Murty own a £5.5m holiday home in California. Photograph: Mark Cuthbert/UK Press/Getty Images

[Rowena Mason](#), [Rupert Neate](#) and [Jessica Elgot](#)

Fri 8 Apr 2022 14.50 EDTFirst published on Fri 8 Apr 2022 08.03 EDT

Rishi Sunak's wife, [Akshata Murty](#), bowed to pressure to pay UK taxes on Friday night, after Boris Johnson said he had been unaware she was a "non-dom" and fresh questions emerged over the couple's tax affairs.

With Sunak's position under increasing threat, Murty said she realised many people felt her tax arrangements were not "compatible with my husband's job as chancellor", adding that she appreciated the "British sense of fairness".

She will pay tax on all worldwide income in future and for the last tax year, but not on backdated income, which could have saved her an estimated £20m of UK tax on foreign earnings from her billionaire father's Indian IT company.

However, her decision is unlikely to stop the scrutiny of Sunak and Murty's tax affairs and financial interests, with calls from Labour and the Lib Dems for an investigation into whether Sunak has broken the ministerial code by failing to be transparent.

Sunak was on Friday forced to confirm he had a US green card – meaning he had declared himself a "permanent US resident" for tax purposes for 19 months while he was chancellor and for six years as an MP.

A source close to the couple also confirmed [Murty](#) held a green card as well.

[callout](#)

The disclosure appears at odds with Sunak's defence of his wife being a non-dom – he said she intended to one day return to live in India.

The Guardian has also discovered the Treasury last week brought in a [new low tax scheme](#) that is partly designed to benefit some wealthy non-dom investors – just days before Sunak's national insurance rise hit millions of working people at the height of a cost of living crisis.

The new laws specifically mention fund manager non-doms as a category of people who can benefit by not having to pay tax on foreign earnings through the new vehicles.

The Treasury had previously claimed Sunak had made no changes to non-dom policy since 2017, raising new questions over whether the Treasury was

fully informed about Sunak's family's tax arrangements when formulating policy.

number of non-doms

In a press conference on Friday, Johnson admitted he had not been told about Murty's non-dom status. But he denied anyone at No 10 was briefing against the Sunaks, and praised the chancellor for doing an "outstanding job".

However, Downing Street insiders revealed that an away day this week descended into acrimony between No 10 and No 11 aides, over the source of the Murty leak and longstanding tensions over the Partygate scandal.

Tory MPs said they believed it was possible Johnson could seek to move Sunak from the Treasury in a summer or autumn reshuffle if he survives the current crisis threatening his chancellorship.

The revelations have prompted a political outcry over Sunak's lack of transparency about his wife's financial affairs.

While promising to pay UK tax on all income, Murty will retain her non-dom status, which could in future allow her family to legally avoid an inheritance tax bill of more than £275m.

In her statement, Murty said she did not want her non-dom status to be a "distraction" for her husband.

"For this reason, I will no longer be claiming the remittance basis for tax," she said. "This means I will now pay UK tax on an arising basis on all my worldwide income, including dividends and capital gains, wherever in the world that income arises. I do this because I want to, not because the rules require me to."

"These new arrangements will begin immediately and will also be applied to the tax year just finished."

UK taxpayers are required to pay a 40% take on inheritance (above £325,000), while non-doms are exempt from the tax. Murty has assets of at

least £690m held in Infosys shares, tax charged on this at a rate of 40% would be £276m.

Murty and Sunak also own four properties worth more than £15m in total, and she also holds substantial investments in other companies.

It is understood Sunak and Murty, [who own a £5.5m California penthouse holiday home](#), have donated \$3m (£2.3m) to a US university in recent years.

The chancellor's spokesperson insisted that under US law "you are not presumed to be a US resident just by dint of holding a green card".

She said Sunak followed all guidance and continued to file US tax returns, but specifically as a non-resident, in full compliance with the law.

"As required under US law and as advised, he continued to use his green card for travel purposes. Upon his first trip to the US in a government capacity as chancellor, he discussed the appropriate course of action with the US authorities. At that point it was considered best to return his green card, which he did immediately.

"All laws and rules have been followed and full taxes have been paid where required in the duration he held his green card."

[non-dom income source](#)

Holders of green cards are required to pay US tax on their worldwide income – and also to make a legal commitment to "make the US your permanent home".

They are required to file annual US tax returns, and are "responsible for reporting your income and paying taxes on any foreign earned income". This raises the suggestion that Sunak may have been required to pay US tax on his publicly funded MP's salary.

Under non-dom rules, Murty did not legally have to pay tax in the UK on the estimated £11.5m in annual dividends she collects from her stake in Infosys,

her billionaire father's IT business. UK tax residents would be expected to pay about £4.5m in tax on the dividend payment.

Murty has said she paid tax on the dividends overseas, but has refused to state how much she paid or in which country. She has previously [collected other shareholder income via the tax haven of Mauritius](#), which does not tax dividends.

Liberal Democrat leader, Ed Davey, has written to Simon Case, the cabinet secretary, and Lord Geidt, the independent adviser on ministers' interests, demanding an urgent inquiry.

His letter said: "How could the man who is responsible for UK tax policy regard any permanent residency status for the United States as acceptable? This would be a huge conflict of interest – and a serious breach of the ministerial code."

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Sunak earlier told the Sun that Murty "loves her country like I love mine", and said she had always been domiciled in India. He said she was entitled to use the non-dom arrangement as she was an Indian citizen and planned to move back to her home country to care for her parents.

Under non-dom rules, Murty previously paid £30,000 a year for the right not to pay UK tax on her overseas income. The status would have automatically ceased once she has resided in Britain for 15 years, a milestone it is understood she will reach in 2028.

On the tax breaks for fund manager non doms, a government spokesperson said the new regime "was consulted on widely and voted through by a majority in the House of Commons".

They added: "It was introduced as part of a review aimed at boosting UK competitiveness – ensuring that taxes paid by those institutions affected was proportionate to other jurisdictions, enabling the UK to remain as an attractive place to invest and create jobs."

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‘It’s what they do’: voters in Sunak’s Yorkshire seat react to wife’s tax status



‘Rich people, they don’t pay tax’: Rishi Sunak’s constituency home at Kirby Sigston in North Yorkshire where opinions have been varied about his wife’s tax controversy. Photograph: Richard Saker/The Guardian

Constituents in the chancellor's Richmond constituency give their verdict on the non-dom status of his wife, Akshata Murty



[Helen Pidd](#) North of England editor

Fri 8 Apr 2022 13.17 EDT Last modified on Fri 8 Apr 2022 17.48 EDT

All was quiet on Friday outside the £1.5m North Yorkshire manor house the Sunaks occasionally call home – apart from the builders beavering away on the swimming pool being constructed in the paddock by the family lake.

One of the workers said he had never met their clients, but he knew all about [the tax arrangements of Akshata Murty](#), better known round these parts as Mrs Sunak. Was he bothered? He shrugged. “It’s what they do.” Who? “Rich people. They don’t pay tax and poor people do.”

A few miles up the road in Northallerton, the biggest town in Sunak’s Richmond constituency, there was genuine anger from some staunch Conservative voters at Murty’s [non-dom](#) status.



Carole Gates: ‘It makes me cross and it does change my opinion of Rishi.’
Photograph: Christopher Owens/The Guardian

“It matters,” said 79-year-old Carole Gates “If they [the Sunaks] are both resident in the UK they should be paying all their taxes here.

“It makes me cross and it does change my opinion of Rishi. I thought he was doing his best and that he was doing quite a good job, but he has gone down in my estimation a lot.”

She wasn’t sure she could vote for him again. But where to go instead? She wrinkled her nose at the suggestion of Keir Starmer’s Labour party.

Others had already fallen out of love with Sunak before the latest revelations. Hotel housekeeper Jade Green, 27, accused Sunak of having no idea what life was like for ordinary people.

Sunak’s decision to [lend struggling households £200](#) to help with their soaring energy bills had gone down particularly badly.

“I’ve worked my arse off to get out of debt and I feel like this will get me back into it again,” she said. “The cost of everything is going up. It costs me £30 a week to drive to work now – that’s three hours wages for me. Sunak hasn’t got a clue.”

Though she is in work, Green relies on universal credit to pay most of her rent, and the government's housing allowance is too meagre to cover most properties in affluent Northallerton, she complained.



Jade Green: 'It costs me £30 a week to drive to work now ... Sunak hasn't got a clue.' Photograph: Christopher Owens/The Guardian

The wider constituency is one of the wealthiest in the north of England, ranked 450th out of 533 on [the index of multiple deprivation](#).

Outside Betty's tea room, Ronnie Wood ("not that one"), said he was done with the Tories. Murty's non-dom status is "just another skeleton being brought out of the closet", said the 61-year-old.

He was sceptical whether it would change anything – "I find it disappointing the complacency of the general public, how accepting people are. I think we should expect more of our MPs."

But he personally was not voting Conservative again, because of Boris Johnson, not Sunak: "I don't believe a word he says."

Gary Scaife, a retired doubleglazing fitter enjoying an alfresco pint with his wife, Julie, thought Sunak's political career was not yet dead.

“I still think he is a good lad. I think he will still be the next prime minister whenever Boris Johnson goes, but I won’t be voting for him again,” he said. Why? “Taxes. Everything is going up. My van used to cost £155 a year to tax – I just renewed it and it’s £275.”

Despite widespread anger in the constituency, no one seemed to think Sunak was in any danger of losing the seat he has held since 2015, when he took over from William Hague.



Gary and Julie Scaife: ‘I still think he is a good lad,’ says Gary. Photograph: Christopher Owens/The Guardian

He won a 27,210 majority in 2019, with Labour coming a very distant second. Some defended him on the basis that Murty hadn’t done anything illegal.

And as one woman put it: “At the end of the day, he kept everyone fed and watered and put a roof over everyone’s head during the lockdowns, and their taxes are their business and nobody’s else’s.”

Sunak remains popular among many local business owners, even in the pubs where the teetotal chancellor never orders a pint.

Deba Crow-Clark, landlady of the Tickle Toby Inn, said Sunak had helped her personally: “He’s never been anything other than supportive to us, and also to my sister, who runs an ice-cream parlour over the road.

“She’s actually friends with him. They go to a step class together at the local leisure centre. He goes there on a Sunday with his security guards.”

She didn’t know much about the tax stuff – “But who likes paying taxes? I know I don’t want to pay inheritance tax, for example, so who am I to criticise? But I don’t have a bad word to say about Rishi or his wife.”

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I gave birth, then they put me in a coma: Grace Victory on surviving Covid and bonding with her baby



Grace Victory with her son, Cyrus. Photograph: Kate Peters/The Guardian

The YouTuber was admitted to hospital seven months pregnant and ended up in a coma. A year after she finally met her son, she talks about her incredible

recovery



[Sirin Kale](#)

Sat 9 Apr 2022 05.00 EDT

While in a coma and on life support, Grace Victory had hallucinatory and terrifying dreams. She was sex trafficked. Doctors removed her legs. Her ovaries were operated on, and her children harvested. She woke up dead, in Reading.

It was January 2021, and the 31-year-old influencer was in hospital with Covid-19. She remembers the dreams as vividly as if they were the plot of her favourite TV show. They're "embedded in my brain", Victory says, "as real memories. Being told it didn't happen – it's like, well, it did."

Victory had begun to feel unwell around 17 December 2020. She had a fever and couldn't hold down any food. Doctors advised her to go in for monitoring, and she flung some slippers and toiletries into an overnight bag. At the time, she was seven months pregnant with her first child. She was admitted to Northwick Park hospital in north-west London with dangerously low oxygen levels, and on Christmas Eve, her son, Cyprus, was delivered by emergency C-section. By Christmas Day, she was in intensive care. The

following day, Victory was put in a coma. Twenty-four days later, she went into cardiac arrest, flatlining for four minutes.

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Doctors restarted her heart, and Victory remained in the gloom of an induced coma. "I was between the worlds, and it was hell," Victory says. The first time doctors tried to rouse her from the coma, she woke up screaming. She lashed out in confusion and tried to pull out her tubes. "I felt like a lion in the jungle," she says, "fighting for my cubs. There was this deep rage for everyone, because it was like: where is my fucking child?"

Nurses reassured Victory that Cyrus was at home, being cared for by her partner, songwriter Lee Williams. But she still couldn't meet him in person for the first time since his birth, due to Covid-19 visitor restrictions. It would be nearly three months before Victory would be reunited with her son.



Victory with her partner, songwriter Lee Williams. Photograph: Kate Peters/The Guardian

In mid-February, Victory finally started to come around properly. For the next three weeks, she lay in her ICU bed, weak, bored and morose. She

longed to feel the sun on her face; to look out of a window and see trees swaying in the breeze. To breathe unassisted, without a tracheostomy tube in her throat. Artificial air doesn't taste real. "It feels like a machine," says Victory. "When you breathe normal air, it's warmer and softer."

And then, on 8 March 2021, Victory picked up her phone and tweeted from her ICU bed. "I'm awake," she wrote to her 104,000 Twitter followers, who had been waiting for news. The tweet was liked 56,000 times, and made national headlines. But Victory's story of Covid-19 survival and recovery doesn't end with one viral tweet. It's ongoing. The trauma is baked into her bones. It has accompanied her on every faltering step – through ICU and rehab, and, finally, returning home to live with her family.

Over a year later, Victory is ready to talk about her harrowing near-death experience. It's a story of two parts: the Grace she once was, and the Grace she has become. "I've been a survivor my whole life," she says. "I've been through a lot. Now I'm letting the whole survivor identity go, and it's like, OK, who am I outside of this? Who is Grace outside of trauma and survival and overcoming? Who am I, without all of that?"

Before she contracted Covid-19, Victory – an influencer who posted videos about relationships, body image and mental health to her YouTube channel; partnered with brands including Sky and Pandora on her [Instagram account](#); and wrote two books – was an incorrigible workaholic who, by her own admission, didn't make enough time for family and friends. "When you're working class," she says, "you're taught to grind, grind, grind, work, work, work, and obviously I live in London, where the cost of living is wild. So I always knew that I was working too much, but I couldn't get out of that cycle."

We're speaking at her home in north-west London. Williams is in the room next door, attending to Cyprus, who is a bright and inquisitive toddler. Their living room betrays their status as new parents. Surfaces are stacked with bottles; a playpen in the corner overflows with soft toys; CBeebies plays on the television. I arrive just as Victory is finishing her photoshoot, and the exertion of standing for photographs has drained her. "Can I sit down?" she asks the photographer, before slumping on a stool. Later, she explains that

she's about "90% recovered", but still struggles with fatigue and limited mobility in her left arm.

I think I got big because I was a bit different. Back then, everyone was white and quite posh, and I wasn't. I'm quite normal

Victory was born to a white British mother and black father of Caribbean heritage, and grew up in a council flat in High Wycombe. Her father, she writes in her memoir, was a heavy cannabis user and physically abusive towards her mother, although never to Victory or her sister.

To escape, Victory enrolled in the Jackie Palmer Stage School in Buckinghamshire, whose alumni include James Corden and Eddie Redmayne. She went on to secure parts on TV, and was an extra in the Harry Potter franchise. "I was modelling at two," she says, "and then doing TV shows, films, dancing all the time." Being a working child actor meant she always felt less like a child than the head of the family, particularly when, aged 15, she threw her father – who was separated from her mother, but had a habit of dropping around unannounced – out of the house, tired of his abuse. She is not embittered about this accelerated childhood spent on film and TV sets. "That's the stuff that saved my life," she says. "I wouldn't change it."



Grace wears shirt, and dress in main image, both [asos.com](https://www.asos.com). Earrings, [lovenesslee.com](https://www.lovenesslee.com). Styling: Bemi Shaw. Hair: Christopher Long. Makeup: Bianca Spencer. Photograph: Kate Peters/The Guardian

Aged 16, Victory was raped, and attempted suicide twice. She subsequently began therapy, and launched a YouTube channel as a creative outlet from a boring admin job. Her first videos were about beauty, but over the years, she would speak about her PTSD, therapy and struggles with eating disorders in confessional videos, becoming a body-positive activist and brand ambassador for Nike's plus-size range, and a mental health ambassador for Mind, and publishing a memoir and a book about self-care. "I think I grew big because I was a bit different," she says of her career. "Back then, everyone was white and quite posh, and I wasn't. I'm quite normal, and I think people can relate to my experiences." Today, she's primarily transitioned to [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com), deleting all of her old YouTube content, and she has 250,000 followers on the platform.

When Victory was pregnant with Cyprus in 2020, she knew she wanted his childhood to be different from her own. "A natural childhood ... to be safe and content," she says. And she loved being pregnant: "It was like, oh my God, this is incredible." Victory was not frightened of the Covid-19 pandemic. "I never paid too much attention to it," she says. "Obviously I did the usual – wore masks, washed my hands. I didn't go out much, but I didn't like going out much anyway. I'm quite antisocial. The chaos in the world was nothing compared with the chaos that I've had internally before, with childhood PTSD, depression, anxiety."

People want me to say the reunion with Cyprus was beautiful, but it wasn't. I hated it. He didn't feel like he was mine

Despite the circumstances, Cyprus's birth was a joyful, calm experience. Williams sang The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face as doctors delivered Cyprus. "It was very peaceful and quick," says Victory. "So although things turned out to be horrendous, the process of conception and carrying Cyprus and bringing him into the world was actually really beautiful." She briefly touched her son before he was whisked to neonatal intensive care, but because she had Covid-19, she wasn't permitted to hold him.

The following day, her condition had worsened and Victory was taken to intensive care. She remembers saying goodbye to Williams at the entrance to the unit. “He was crying,” she says. “He never cries. I thought, OK, this is obviously serious.” Victory texted her family and friends, telling them she was certain she was going to die, although she has no memory of sending the messages. Weirdly, there was no fear. Then doctors put her under, and she entered a liminal state, running from the shadowy forces that haunted her dreams.

Victory’s body bears the scars of her three-month ICU stay. She shows me a snaking line between her breasts, from the chest compressions. Her tracheotomy scar looks red and sore. But the mental scars take longer to heal, and Victory struggles with survivor’s guilt.

“Why did I survive?” she says. “Why have I recovered and pretty much gone back to normal? There was a Covid mummy who died – the clot went to her heart. She was from the UK and she was 30 and she had a baby, and it just rocked me, because her baby’s going to grow up without his momma, and that could have been Cyprus.” She thinks about this often. “The thought of a young black boy living in London without a mum is just really hard for me,” she says. “Because I know that life is tougher when you’re a person of colour.”



Victory feeding Cyprus for the first time in hospital: ‘I hadn’t kissed him yet. I was scared I wasn’t clean enough – I smelled like hospitals.’
Photograph: Courtesy of Grace Victory

Being away from Cyprus for the first months of his life “was fucking shit”, says Victory, with a bluntness recognisable to her fans. So was her reunion with her son, on 21 March last year. “People want me to say it was beautiful,” says Victory, “but it wasn’t. I hated it. Because he didn’t feel like mine. I was in hospital, and he was going to have to leave, so it was bittersweet, and I was so ill and weak.” She describes the day after Cyprus’s first visit as the worst day of her life. She lay in bed and finally everything hit her. “I thought, I’m going to die. I’m going to die. I’m dying. I want to die. I was still on a lot of medication, so I was high and sad and out of it at the same time. Kind of numb, but feeling everything as well. Rock bottom.”

From April until July, Victory was in what she calls “crisis mode”. “I wasn’t eating. I was really depressed.” She looked in the mirror and didn’t recognise herself. “I was three sizes smaller,” she says. “Pale, my head was bald, my skin was grey.” Victory was transferred to Hillingdon hospital in north-west London for rehabilitation, where she had to learn to sit up, to sit in a chair, to stand up, to walk. Every exhausting, fumbling step forward was for her son, she says. “Cyprus was my biggest motivator. I needed to get out of there.”

She was finally discharged in May 2021. At home, she rebuilt her relationship with Williams, who was traumatised by the experience of watching his partner nearly die. “He’s definitely got PTSD,” says Victory. “We both have. And it’s only now coming out for him, because the whole time it was all about me and our son.” (Victory has received a formal diagnosis; Williams has not.) Williams, who is a friendly and affable presence, is not ready to speak about the emotional impact of Victory’s hospitalisation, but in a Father’s Day Instagram post he said that looking after Cyprus while being unsure if his mother would survive was “the hardest thing I’ve ever had to do”.

I am going to be vaccinated. I had to get signed off by my medical team. I would tell people to do what you need to do to look after yourself

Being absent for the first months of Cyprus's life has not damaged Victory's relationship with her son. "We're attached healthily," she says. "He's a mummy's boy. I put him to bed every night. Being a parent is amazing. I think the experience of being away from him has meant that I'm a more chilled out mum ... because it's beautiful to watch him explore the world, knowing there was a chance that I wouldn't be here."

Victory is effusive about the medical staff, particularly the nurses who aided her recovery. "They were outstanding," she says, "above and beyond ... There were so many bonding moments with the nurses, and they've obviously seen horrific things." But she plans to use her experience to push for change in how ICU patients are treated, and she's already met with hospital staff to give feedback. Victory talks about how there weren't any hair products suitable for her to wash with in the ICU, as a mixed-race woman. Staff woke her up at 3am to check her blood pressure and at 5am for a bed bath, making it impossible to sleep through the night. "There are things that they need to change to benefit the patients," she says, "and I would be honoured to be able to bring that about and bring awareness as well."

She has also become an advocate for what she calls "Covid coma mummy survivors", and has set up a closed Facebook group in which women can share their experiences. It's a space to speak about "memory, fatigue, the guilt around not being there for your child", says Victory. "Not being able to breastfeed, which was a massive thing for me, that I'm still mourning." They are, relatively speaking, the lucky ones: at least [33 pregnant women](#) are known to have died of Covid-19 in the UK since the pandemic began. Research indicates that pregnant women are [13 times more likely to die](#) from Covid than people of a similar age who are not pregnant. (This is because pregnancy suppresses the immune system, making it more difficult to fight infection.)



Grace and Lee's clothes, [asos.com](https://www.asos.com). Cyprus's dungarees and vest, both [babymori.com](https://www.babymori.com). Photograph: Kate Peters/The Guardian

Despite these statistics, pregnant women have lagged behind the rest of the population when it comes to uptake of the Covid-19 vaccine, largely due to confused and contradictory messages from healthcare professionals and the government about the benefits of vaccination. Some pregnant women reported being turned away from vaccine centres; others were warned against vaccination by midwives citing the thalidomide scandal. (In reality, data has shown that [Covid-19 vaccines are safe in pregnancy](#)). Of the pregnant women hospitalised with Covid-19 since vaccinations became available in 2021, 98% were unjabbed.

Victory fell ill before the Covid-19 vaccine was rolled out. I ask whether she's vaccinated now. "I am going to be," she says. "I had to get signed off from my medical team, and I got signed off last month." Given her advocacy for ICU survivors, I ask whether she would also encourage pregnant women to get vaccinated. "I would tell people to do what you need to do to look after yourself, and for you to feel comfortable going forward with your pregnancy," she says. It's an equivocal answer, and I ask whether it might not help more people if Victory were to champion the vaccine.

I think people want me to become this spokesperson for Covid and pregnant women. But I don't want to be on that pedestal

"I hear that," she says. "But when you go through so much trauma ... for me personally, I don't want to be an advocate for things that I don't know everything about. I'm an advocate for you making your decision with what you want to do." Later, Victory returns to the topic obliquely. "I sometimes think that people want me to become this spokesperson for Covid and pregnant women," she says. "But I don't want to be on that pedestal, I really don't. It's too much pressure and you'll say something and it will be misconstrued or taken out of context or spun a certain way."

I understand her perspective: Victory didn't ask for any of this. She's applying the same boundaries in her personal and professional life; working shorter hours, for example, even if it means her earnings go down. "I don't want to just walk through life with my head in the sand, saying yes to things I don't really want to do. It's important to me to live a life that's for me," she says. Unexpectedly, Victory tells me that, given the opportunity to go back in time, she wouldn't change anything. "The growth I've had this year in therapy has been the biggest compared with the six years of therapy I've had beforehand," she says. "Tightening my boundaries, my relationships are better, being grateful, working less. All the stuff I've wanted to do I've only done because of this."

Victory describes her pre-Covid self as someone who was "ungrateful, a workaholic, and separate from everything and myself". In the room next door, Williams is hushing a babbling Cyprus. Victory looks me in the eyes, but I can feel her awareness drifting to the next room. "Now, I feel brave, and I feel soft, and I feel vulnerable," she says. "But I haven't found the words for me yet. And I guess the next few years is me figuring that out."

In the UK, Samaritans can be contacted on 116 123, or email jo@samaritans.org. You can contact the mental health charity Mind by calling 0300 123 3393 or visiting mind.org.uk. In Australia, the crisis support service Lifeline is on 13 11 14. In the US, the suicide prevention lifeline is 1-800-273-8255. Other international helplines can be found via befrienders.org

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Mud-caked feet, berries for breakfast and hiding from hunters: my life as a deer



Geoffroy Delorme, photographed in Bord-Louviers forest, France, in February. Photograph: Alexandre Guirkinger/The Guardian

When still a teenager, Geoffroy Delorme dropped out of his lonely childhood to live among the animals in the woods of Normandy – and stayed for seven years. What did it do to him?

Geoffroy Delorme

Sat 9 Apr 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 9 Apr 2022 04.49 EDT

For some time, a fox has been sleeping in our garden. One evening I decide to follow it across the fields at the back of our house and into the forest. I step inside 10 metres, then 10 more – just enough to feel a shiver of adrenaline before turning on my heels. After that first visit, I venture a little further each evening. As soon as the house is asleep, I open my bedroom window, slip behind the hedge and cross the field to the big trees and the bustle of the animals.

Home-schooled, I have spent most of my childhood almost entirely alone, without friends or classmates, without holidays or school trips, and apart from these nocturnal escapades I sit in my room studying by correspondence. By the time I am 16, this life has become a kind of torture. On the day of the baccalaureate, the school leaving exam, I throw my registration letter into a maize field and resolve to spend not only my nights but also my days in the forest.

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Bord-Louviers is a forest of 4,500 hectares (11,120 acres) located in the département of Eure. Its horseshoe shape melds perfectly with the fourth bend in the Seine. If I travel from east to west, I pass through vegetation made up principally of pines and beech trees to reach a denser forest of oak and wild cherries. I base myself in the east, on a big overhanging rock called la Crutte, which dominates the whole of the Seine valley.

I keep the modern world out as much as possible, retaining only what is strictly necessary. First of all, a change of clothes to keep out the cold: two pairs of canvas trousers and a pair of jeans, alpaca wool underpants, linen T-

shirts, virgin-wool pullovers and two seaman's caps. To keep them from rotting, I store these clothes in sealed bags in a rucksack, buried in the forest.

For cooking, I use only a small aluminium frying pan and a pot for boiling water. I decide to follow an omnivorous but vegetarian-inclined diet. I cannot imagine living in a natural habitat and eating the wild animals that live there, even though nature is obviously overflowing with predators. I buy tins of food and hide them at the foot of a tree, under a pile of branches and dead leaves. Unfortunately, a few days later, wild boar discover my hoard. All the tins are disembowelled by their razor-sharp trotters.

Hauling my shopping back into the forest in a 50-litre rucksack is, frankly, exhausting. In fact, in order to survive, I decide that my most efficient strategy is to eat what I already have at my disposal. Bramble, silver birch, hornbeam and bay leaves, "dry" fruits such as chestnuts, beechnuts, seeds or hazelnuts, and also dandelions and sorrel.

I discover the willowherb with its edible root. You dig it out with a knife and eat it raw. There are also nettle roots, wild carrots. Let's be honest: at first it's frankly repellent. The [red dead-nettle](#), for example, a plant whose proteins are essential for survival – well, it tastes like a spoonful of compost. But it's not all bad: clover flowers have very agreeable sweet notes. To slake my thirst, I use a sock to filter rainwater then put it in my billycan and boil it on a little wood fire.

My "territory" covers about 500 hectares (1,235 acres). And I soon start finding my way around. There are the paths followed by the animals, which I know by heart, and then a few special tricks that I develop with experience. Olfactory points of reference are essential, particularly at night. The oaks give off a scent of old wooden beams. If I approach a pond, my nostrils catch the scent of rushes and mud. My eyes get used to the darkness.

One fine morning a roe deer, the one that I would come to call by the French name Daguet, crosses my path and comes to a standstill a few steps away from me. Very slowly, I crouch down. I am fascinated by his big, shiny black eyes. We stare at one another for a few minutes, which seem to last for hours. He turns away and plunges into the undergrowth.



Fougère, one of the deer Delorme befriended. Photograph: Geoffroy Delorme

Soon afterwards, I'm eating from a bramble that provides a good supply of small leaves, slightly withered but very nourishing nonetheless. I've been savouring this salad for three-quarters of an hour when a face emerges from the bushes in front of me. Rather than running away as a normal roe deer would, Daguet chooses to stay and observe me. He seems to have decided to find out more about this newcomer who has invited himself into his home.

A few days later, I encounter him again, lying at the foot of a tree. I approach gently, hiding behind each tree in turn to avoid attracting attention. I decide that I've developed an unusual talent for approaching stealthily, unless he is just pretending not to see me. Just to be sure, I move out from behind the tree so he can't miss me, then move towards him slowly, half crouching. He regards me calmly. Unbelievable. The rascal has been mocking me from the beginning, letting me advance from tree to tree like an idiot. When I'm about 10 metres away, Daguet gets to his feet and stretches. I stop. He considers me. And we stand like that for half an hour. It's a magical moment. I have a sense of total communion with him and all the other things that surround us. My heart and soul are at peace. My brain is on hold.

The Native Americans used to say that when hunting roe deer you shouldn't think about them too much, in case they sense your thoughts and make their escape. That seems entirely reasonable to me. Thoughts become moods and moods become scents. So I force myself to have positive thoughts, in the hope of making my silent dialogue with Daguet last as long as possible.

After a while, my legs go numb, and I'm not sure what to do, when at last he starts moving forward. I walk slowly behind him. His ears point backwards, in my direction. The leaves rustle under my weight and make him start a few times. He sets off at a trot and then stops again, turns around and waits for me. It's thrilling. A wild animal is trying to tame me.

Suddenly a bark can be heard in the distance. It must be Six Points, another roe deer I come across regularly. Daguet runs off at such incredible speed that I find myself all on my own like a fool in the middle of the oak wood.

Sharing the lives of roe deer involves giving up a number of things. Generally speaking, you have to forget all about the human codes of life in society, such as saying "goodbye" when you leave. You also have to give up on certain conventions like eating at a fixed time or sleeping at night.

Since I started living in the forest, I've become exhausted. I wake up far too often and struggle to get back to sleep. The hooting owls, the screeching foxes, and particularly the boar make a terrible racket. They squeak and scream and grunt and run in all directions. But the worst enemy of sleep is the cold. Several times I suffer from hypothermia. It is the same every time: I go to sleep, start dreaming, and all of a sudden I wake up quite numb, feeling as if I am going to be sick.

After a few weeks, the lack of sleep starts to make me hallucinate. I hear voices, see silhouettes, sometimes I even feel as if I am flying. I am wiped out. I begin asking myself serious questions as to how this adventure is going to end.

The problem is that I never rest. During the day I look for food and build shelters to protect myself from the weather, which takes an insane amount of time. They quickly attract insects, so I have to rebuild them every day. I

must adopt a more efficient way of living; there must be something I'm missing.

I find the answers by observing Daguet. Roe deer rest day and night for one- or two-hour cycles. I realise that sleeping at night isn't compulsory, as long as you rest from time to time. To do that, I crouch down, with my right hand on my left knee and my left hand on my right knee and my head between my arms. I decide to base the rhythm of my life on his; except that, since my stomach has just the one chamber, when he chews the cud, I meditate instead.



Delorme covers his feet with mud to protect them from insect bites.
Photograph: Alexandre Guirkinger/The Guardian

For the first few months, the insects wouldn't leave me in peace: I was bitten everywhere. But over time my skin hardens and thickens, and my resistance to the cold improves. Washing is easy. In the middle of the forest there's a remarkable group of trees called the Four Brothers. Four magnificent beeches, 40 metres high, that have grown perfectly symmetrically, forming at their centre a big cauldron that acts as a collecting point for rainwater. Dental hygiene isn't a problem, because I no longer eat sugar. I run my index finger over my teeth with a mixture of water and ash and the job's

done. Obviously, this little cocktail doesn't taste like supermarket toothpaste, but compared with the flavours of my new wild diet, it's fine.

At this stage of my adventure, I'm still returning to civilisation a few times a month. The processed foods that I find in the family fridge are just as appetising as before, but I find them increasingly difficult to digest. I take a hot shower, sleep for a few hours in my childhood bed and leave before daybreak. I avoid my parents, who disapprove of my new man-of-the-woods lifestyle and have no qualms about saying so. Do I wash my clothes? No. I don't want to bring the smells of the world of human beings into the forest. It would make my friends extremely nervous.

Early one morning, I walk with Daguet to the pine grove where Six Points is master. It's very early, and very dark. Some little noises like whispering can be heard. Suddenly, a few metres away, I can just make out Star, Six Points' doe. She is lying down. When she notices Daguet, she sniffs, rises to her feet and struggles towards us, barking faintly.

Daguet retreats with a series of little hops. I'm ready to follow him but I'm worried about Star, who doesn't seem to be in the best shape. I have deep respect for this very intelligent little female. She lies down again. A few moments later, visibly weakened, she struggles up again, her whole body trembling, takes a step forward and then stops.

I see a thin trickle of fluid emerging from her hindquarters. She groans. I take a few steps to the side to gain a better view of her pale rump, when I realise that she is giving birth. Two trembling hoofs dangle into the void. Minutes pass: another contraction, then another, when, all of a sudden, out comes the young fawn, falling to the ground: bam! Deep within me I feel an immense joy. He is a little male and I call him Chévi. Star licks him all over then runs her tongue affectionately over his muzzle.

A couple of months later, I'm walking with Daguet. Summer is well advanced. It is warm, the sky is deep blue and the sun is blazing. After eating some fruit, I lie down in a clearing. Daguet joins me and the strangest thing happens: he curls up with his head on my knee. A moment later, he lifts his head slightly, yawns, looking at me, then rests it against my thigh, near my hand. I stroke his cheek with my thumb. He seems to like that. I

withdraw my hand gently to put it on his back. I stroke him for a long time. He is sleeping deeply, because I feel the weight of his body getting increasingly heavy against me.



Magalie, one of the deer Delorme got to know. Photograph: Geoffroy Delorme

So we take advantage of this peaceful morning; the bees spin around above our heads and gather pollen from the few flowers scattered about the meadow. Not a sound disturbs the fullness of the moment.

The hardest part of living in the wild is making it through the winter. I learn to stock up, to collect plants in the spring and dry them. Nettle, mint, oregano, dead-nettle, meadowsweet, yarrow, angelica ... Of course, you want to be certain that you can tell edible plants from poisonous ones. Angelica, for example, is almost indistinguishable from hemlock. Wild garlic is easily confused with meadow saffron. The problem with meadow saffron is that you can eat it and then sleep like a baby. The toxic effects only set in after a number of days, once the sly perennial has attacked your liver, which is bound in the end to explode.

Every now and then I go to my parents' house. For several months, I have had a strange sensation when putting my feet on concrete floors. They are

hard, cold and perfectly flat. I'm not used to them any more. While I'm recharging my camera batteries, I am assailed by smells. The smell of the fridge, the smell of bleach, of heating, of carpet, of clothes, clean or dirty, even the smell of the people who live in the house.

One interminable autumn night, I have been walking with Star for a few hours. She has probably left Chévi somewhere in the beech forest with Six Points and Daguet. It is cold in the early light, and the undergrowth is covered with a thick layer of mist. In the plantation currently under development, the brambles have been crushed by tractors, and we struggle to find a place where food hasn't been replaced by mud.

It has been raining constantly for several days. We move into the pine forest where it is less damp. Star eats some chanterelles, and I put the rest in my billycan. My plan is to cook them over a wood fire this evening. I'm soaked, I'm cold, and a good hot soup made from old nettles and bramble leaves with mushrooms will do me the world of good.

Then, all of a sudden, something strange vibrates under my feet. An earthquake? In Normandy? Impossible. A gunshot rips through the silence of the forest. I look around for Star. Panicking, she is climbing the narrow valley that overlooks the forest path. The ground goes on vibrating more and more intensely, when I see about 20 red deer, stags and does, charging towards me in a disorderly gallop. I manage to hide behind a tree. At last the crazed herd disappears into the distance. A second rifle shot rings out and a bullet grazes Star. She dashes past me, barking to signal the danger to the others: "Baaah! ... Baaah! ... Bah, bah, bah!" She runs with all her might.

I hear four blasts on a hunting horn, the signal for roe deer. The hounds spread terror through the undergrowth

My blood freezes and I drop my billycan and run after her through the pinewood. I struggle to follow her, because the trees are densely packed together and there are so many branches on the ground that it is hard to run while also looking ahead. Finally, she slows down. I see her tottering slightly. I run over to try to gauge the seriousness of her wound. In the distance I hear four blasts on a hunting horn – the signal for roe deer. The

hunting hounds spread terror through the undergrowth. Star sets off again, leaping as best she can. A few hundred metres further on she takes refuge in a dense thicket of blackthorn bushes, an almost impregnable fortress.

The hounds arrive but, seeing my aggressive stance, continue on. A moment later, the hunters show up, shouting loudly, accompanied by more dogs on leashes. I leave my rucksack by the entrance to the path along which Star fled. Since it is impregnated with my scent, it will confuse the pursuing hounds. I hide nearby. They pass, my ruse works, and I know they won't be coming back straight away.

I stay hidden for another hour or so, long enough for the beaters to move away. I'm extremely worried about my friend. As soon as possible, as evening approaches, I go back to see her. My poor Star. She is lying fatally wounded in the chest. She is trembling, and my eyes fill with tears. The life gradually slips from her body. She looks at me, uttering little sobbing cries, before resting her head on the ground. She starts to fall asleep in the still, grey day. "Oh, forgive me, Star, I wasn't able to protect you. I promise I'll look after Chévi. He's only five months old. I'll take care of him so that he gets big and strong and has his own territory. A fine territory. I promise you, my friend. I promise."

The clouds are reddish against the pale November air. My friend closes her eyes. The sun has just set. I stay there, by her lifeless corpse, for several long minutes. I have to move poor Star. I know the hunters will come in search of her. They know they hit her; they will go looking for her with bloodhounds. I take my friend in my arms to bury her far from the site of the hunt. Her 20 kilos are too heavy for me. My strength is failing, but I don't want my friend to end up on someone's plate. She deserves better than that. I hold her tightly and redouble my efforts. Once I have reached my destination, I break the ground with the survival knife that I carry with me at all times, and then continue digging by hand, but the ground is too hard. I can't make a deep enough hole. I set Star in the shallow trench then camouflage her body with two palisades of fir-tree branches bound with linen twine, then bring them together to make a little roof, a discreet grave. I cover the whole thing over with soil, moss and bracken.

Spring has arrived. I use a gimlet to dig a little hole in the trunks of silver birches to collect sap. If the tree is big and generous I can get a good litre in a single night. The juice is deliciously sweet and gives me all the essential minerals that I have so cruelly lacked during the winter. I also like to lick the sugary sap that runs down the trunks of the pine trees. It has an astonishing flavour, a springlike freshness.

One afternoon, Chévi and I are walking in a grove under the branches of a magnificent birch. Chévi lies down. The treetops dance slightly in a warm south wind. I lie down on a bed of ferns and contemplate the translucent tangle of emerald foliage. We stay there a long time. At sunset we get up, still drowsy. As we walk, I allow myself to be filled by the warm smells that have accumulated during the day; the honeyed aroma of the grasses makes my head spin. Nightjars flit nervously overhead, in search of insects, breaking the monotony with their very particular call, like the purring of a cat. A few moments later, we pause in the middle of the oak wood, where a male tawny owl is hooting loudly. A female joins in a duet that makes the darkness ring. The full moon casts its pale light on the undergrowth. I feel the roots moving under my feet. I hear the trunks creak like rigging when a zephyr stirs the canopy.

We climb to a thinly wooded plateau. Chévi looks at me and raises his head slightly, just as a shooting star passes overhead. I make a wish: that we can be friends for life and nothing will ever part us. Dawn approaches, and the mists of the Seine and the Eure mingle and evaporate as the sun's first rays settle on the surface of the lakes below. In the distance I hear roosters crowing, while the village church at the bottom of the valley rings out its first chime. A black fox returns from a good night's hunting. The last boar cross the dew-drenched fields to reach the depths of the forest before humanity awakens. In the summer the days are long ...

One night, I go home. What I want most is a hot shower. The gate to the house is double-locked, so I climb over it. At the front door I put my key in the lock and it sticks. I can't open it. I try the garage door and a second door that lets me into the house. I go to the fridge: it's empty. I look in the food cupboards: they're empty, too. Some are even locked. I leave with tears in my eyes. I know it is the last time I'll be coming to this house. I walk at a

jog, without turning around, to get back as quickly as possible to the ones that I now think of as my real family: the roe deer.

As soon as I reach the forest, I look for Chévi but I can't find him. The hours pass, and a wave of depression hits me. I walk back and forth along his usual routes without seeing him. In the early afternoon, physically and emotionally exhausted, I set off for another part of the forest where he and I are in the habit of relaxing. It is then that I spot his silhouette. I run to him, full pelt, and hug him. With both hands around his neck I start weeping on his shoulder. He stands motionless for several minutes. I feel his heart beating against my cheek, and he rests his muzzle on my shoulder. The warmth of his body does me good. His fur bristles as if he is shivering, then he starts licking my face. I'm so happy to see him, to be his friend.

This is an edited extract from *Deer Man* by Geoffroy Delorme, published by Little, Brown (£16.99). To support the Guardian and Observer order your copy at guardianbookshop.com. Delivery charges may apply.

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Blind date: ‘I think she liked me. There may have been a little kiss’



Photograph: Alicia Canter/The Guardian

Lizzie, 27, special needs teacher, meets Denise, 30, student adviser

Sat 9 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT

Denise on Lizzie



What were you hoping for?

To enjoy my blind date's company, some chemistry between us and ultimately have a pleasant evening with lots to talk about.

First impressions?

Attractive – she had a positive demeanour about her and was very intriguing.

What did you talk about?

Movies. The TV series 90 Day Fiancé. Tattoos and piercings. Kickboxing. Star signs. Switzerland. And our first experience of going on a blind date. The conversation was seamless – there was never a dull moment.

Any awkward moments?

As far as I can remember, not at all!

Good table manners?

Yes, 10 out of 10.

Best thing about Lizzie?

Very easy to talk to, approachable and someone I can see myself dating.

Would you introduce her to your friends?

I would be happy to.

Describe Lizzie in three words

Funny, attractive, genuine.

What do you think she made of you?

That I could hold down a relatively interesting conversation.

Did you go on somewhere?

Unfortunately not – it was a school night – but nevertheless we stayed at the restaurant until closing time – a sign of a great date, perhaps?

And ... did you kiss?

Ha ha, yes, we did. There was some chemistry in the air.

If you could change one thing about the evening what would it be?

Most probably have one or two more cocktails.

Marks out of 10?

8.

Would you meet again?

I would be happy to. We exchanged numbers, so I'm assuming that she'd want to meet up again too.



Denise and Lizzie on their date

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.

Lizzie on Denise

**What were you hoping for?**

A nice evening and to meet someone new.

First impressions?

I thought she was pretty. I noticed her bright shirt, which was lovely – I think that was the first compliment I gave her.

What did you talk about?

What we do for work, which is fairly similar. Holidays.

Any awkward moments?

Not really. I was worried I was eating too many prawn crackers in front of her, as I'd arrived feeling very hungry.

Good table manners?

Lovely.

Best thing about Denise?

She was easy to talk to and we did a lot of laughing. I felt like we clicked.

Would you introduce her to your friends?

Definitely, I think she'd fit in well.

Describe Denise in three words

Funny, sweet, pretty.

What do you think she made of you?

I think she liked me. She gave me a few compliments, which are always nice to hear.

Did you go on somewhere?

Unfortunately I had work the next day.

And ... did you kiss?

There may have been a little kiss ...

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If you could change one thing about the evening what would it be?

I would have liked a date on a Friday, so I could have stayed out later.

Marks out of 10?

9.

Would you meet again?

I'd like to. Even if things don't turn romantic, it would be nice to make a new friend. She is a lovely person.

Denise and Lizzie ate at [Giggling Squid](#), Chislehurst, Kent. Fancy a blind date? Email blind.date@theguardian.com

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TikTok

The rise of TikTok: why Facebook is worried about the booming social app

Chinese-owned video platform is set to overtake the advertising scale of Twitter and Snapchat combined

TikTok: five of the UK's favourite videos



A man looking at his phone walks past a restaurant in Beijing displaying a TikTok logo. Photograph: Greg Baker/AFP/Getty Images

[Mark Sweeney](#)

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Sat 9 Apr 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 9 Apr 2022 05.08 EDT

TikTok is on track to overtake the global advertising scale of Twitter and Snapchat combined this year, and to match mighty YouTube within two years, as trendsetting teens and young adults make it the hottest social app of the moment – and [Facebook](#) is worried.

The Chinese-owned video-sharing platform is forecast to catch up with YouTube by 2024 when both are predicted to take \$23.6bn (£18.2bn) in ad

revenue, despite [TikTok](#) being launched globally 12 years after its Google-owned rival.

Helped by unparalleled moments of cool at the height of the pandemic – Idaho labourer Nathan Apodaca [skateboarding along to Dreams](#) put Fleetwood Mac’s album Rumours [back in the top 10](#) more than four decades after its release – TikTok’s surging growth belies the metronomic pace of its name.

Last year, it overtook the global ad take of Snapchat, previously the [digital hangout of choice for teens and twentysomethings](#), and by the end of this year it will have surpassed that of Twitter. This year it is predicted to triple worldwide ad revenues, to \$11.6bn, more than the \$10.44bn for Snapchat and Twitter combined.

“TikTok’s user base has exploded in the past couple of years, and the amount of time users spend on the app is extraordinary,” says Debra Aho Williamson, principal analyst at Insider Intelligence, which compiled the ad spend forecast. “It has moved well beyond its roots as a lip-syncing and dancing app. It creates trends and fosters deep connections with creators that keep users engaged, video after video.”

TikTok landed its billionth user in 2021, four years after global launch, half the time it took Facebook, YouTube or Instagram, and three years faster than WhatsApp. Earlier this week, analysts at data.ai revised a prediction that TikTok would hit 1.5 billion monthly active users this year, after its analysis revealed it had surpassed that milestone by 100 million users within the first three months.

The company is winning the battle for the “sweet spot” of social media users, those in the 18- to 25-year-old demographic where [Facebook is seeing its biggest declines](#), with parent company Meta trying to stem the exodus by attracting them to stablemate Instagram.

TikTok is also becoming increasingly addictive. Despite the platform supposedly being restricted to those aged 13 and over, [about 16% of three-and four-year-olds view TikTok content](#), according to research

commissioned by media regulator Ofcom. This rose to 29% of all children in the five- to seven-year-old age group.

Last year the typical TikTok user spent 19.6 hours on average per month on the app, according to data.ai – equalling Facebook, the global leader in time spent by users on social media. For TikTok, this represents an almost fivefold increase in just four years, up from 4.2 hours in 2018.

“Facebook has always been the biggest competitor in this space for dominating users,” says Sam O’Brien, the chief marketing officer at performance marketing company Affise. “But it seems it can’t quite tap into convincing TikTok’s loyal users to revert back to its platform. TikTok has figured out its own way to give the platform an addictive quality.”

Mark Zuckerberg’s Meta still dominates the market – Facebook has 2.9 billion monthly active users, and Instagram another 2 billion, with Insider Intelligence putting their 2024 ad revenues at \$85bn and \$82bn respectively. Even so, it emerged last month that fear of TikTok had led it to hire a lobbying firm to paint the company as the “[real threat, especially as a foreign-owned app](#)”.

“Meta clearly sees itself in a battle against TikTok for the hearts, minds and attention spans of millennials, a significant chunk of the social media market,” says O’Brien. “TikTok has experienced a staggering growth of users since the onset of the global pandemic, taking over a huge chunk of its competitor’s audience.”

Meta’s tactics aim to exploit the suspicion promoted under the Trump administration that Chinese companies, from telecoms giant Huawei to TikTok’s parent ByteDance, [pose a national security threat](#) as potential conduits of personal data to Beijing.

Two years ago, India, one of the world’s biggest markets for social media usage, banned 59 Chinese apps, including TikTok. However, Trump’s plans to force ByteDance to sell its international operations to a US firm, [such as Microsoft or Oracle](#), petered out after he lost the US presidential election.

Nevertheless, suspicions remain among many users including those in the UK, which has [banned Huawei equipment](#) from being used in mobile phone networks. Last year, research found that almost a third of all Britons were concerned that TikTok might [share their personal data with the Chinese government](#). Among those aged 18 to 34, a third believed it would hand over their data on request from China.

ByteDance has also come under pressure at home as Beijing has looked to [rein in the power of the country's tech titans](#). Billionaire co-founder Zhang Yiming unexpectedly announced in May that he would [step down as chief executive](#), and in November relinquished the role of chairman, as ByteDance underwent a [major restructure breaking it into six business units](#).

Nevertheless, the company remains in rude health and last December was named the [world's largest unicorn](#) with a valuation of \$353bn – up from \$80bn a year earlier – with the markets hopeful of a blockbuster initial public offering in the future. ByteDance saw its total revenues, including its Chinese operation and substantial in-app and ecommerce business, grow by 70% last year to about \$58bn, up from \$34.3bn in 2020.

While Meta remains a much larger business and revenues rose 37% last year, to \$118bn, Zuckerberg has felt the need to launch a commercial counterattack to shore up and diversify his advertising-based business model.

Always quick to [ape the successful innovations of rivals](#), Meta is exploring launching virtual coins, [nicknamed “Zuck bucks”](#) by staff, for users of Facebook and Instagram to buy and use, in a very similar strategy to that already employed highly successfully by TikTok.

Earlier this week it emerged that TikTok is now the most lucrative app in the world for in-app purchases. TikTok users spent \$840m on its virtual “coins” currency, which can be used to “tip” creators and promote videos, in the first quarter – up 40% year on year.

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“It’s the biggest quarter for any app or game ever,” says Lexi Sydow, head of insights at data.ai, which published the report. “It’s the first app ever to beat a game in consumer spend in a given quarter.”

Zuckerberg’s revenue diversification plans follow an ill-fated launch of direct TikTok copycat Lasso in 2018, which shut after just 18 months. Meta is persevering with rival short-form video product Reels, which launched on Instagram in 2020 and Facebook last year, but despite its efforts TikTok’s momentum shows no signs of slowing down.

“Some young people have switched off Facebook entirely,” says Jamie MacEwan, senior media analyst at Enders. “In the UK, 18-to-24s spend as much on TikTok as Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp combined. There is rampant competition for time. TikTok is the one growing fastest right now, and has scale, it’s the one to watch.”

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TikTok

TikTok: five of the UK's favourite videos

Unlikely stars, unexpected stories and, of course, a silly video of a pet

- [The rise of TikTok: why Facebook is worried about the social app](#)



Nathan Evans with his Official Number 1 Single award for Wellerman.
Photograph: OfficialCharts.com/PA

[Mark Sweney](#)

[@marksweney](#)

Sat 9 Apr 2022 05.00 EDT

Sea Shanties

[Former postman Nathan Evans' rendition of Wellerman](#), a 19th-century folk song about the whaling trade, went viral during the Covid lockdown in the first half of last year and single-handedly revived the sea shanty. The 27-year-old Scotsman, who now has more than 1.5 million followers on TikTok, went on to be picked up by Polydor and had a No 1 in the UK singles chart.

Francis Bourgeois

The UK's favourite trainspotter, real name Luke Nicholson, began making videos during the pandemic. They proved a surprise hit – he has 2.3 million followers – and [has even “interviewed” former footballer Thierry Henry](#). Bourgeois, who was born in Harlesden, west London and then moved to Somerset as a child, has since quit his job to pursue his passion full-time and in January was named a [brand ambassador for GB Railfreight](#).

Pool Cleaning

Who knew that watching videos of a guy cleaning a pool would attract 12.7 million followers on TikTok? Miles, a Bedfordshire-based pool and hot tub engineer known as The Pool Guy, has proved a splash hit with [his often strangely soothing and satisfying videos](#) attracting as many as 150m views.

Mesha Moinirad

It's not all dances and sea shanties. Personal trainer Mesha, who in 2013 was diagnosed with inflammatory bowel disease after a burst appendix, has used TikTok and other platforms to raise awareness and help others. An ambassador for Crohn's and Colitis UK, his videos, which [include showing how he changes his stomach bags](#), attracted as many as 171m views.

And the winner is – a cat

And further proof that when it boils down to it people go online to watch silly videos of animals, the most viewed TikTok in the UK last year involved a cat. There have been almost 200m views [of “Mia the Cat”](#) successfully navigating a path laid over rows of upturned paper cups in a hallway, set to

the Mission: Impossible theme tune. Dogs on skateboards, eat your hearts out.

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Putin still has friends in the west – and they're gaining ground

[Jonathan Freedland](#)



The EU's united response to the war may not last long with Viktor Orbán around. We must hope he's not joined by Marine Le Pen



French presidential candidate Marine Le Pen during a campaign trip in Perpignan, southern France on Friday. Photograph: Lionel Bonaventure/AFP/Getty Images

Fri 8 Apr 2022 12.53 EDT Last modified on Fri 8 Apr 2022 13.59 EDT

That picture of Vladimir Putin, alone at the end of a long Kremlin table, may prove one of the enduring images of this war – but it is deceiving. Because although every day brings fresh confirmation that the Russian dictator is drenched in blood, with the [rocket attack on Kramatorsk](#) only the latest evidence, he is not friendless. Naturally, he has allies among his fellow brutal world leaders, whether in Minsk, Damascus or Beijing, but he has chums in less expected places too. In a conflict cast by both sides as Putin v the west, the Russian leader has powerful friends behind enemy lines – and, even if his western admirers have had to engage in some deft footwork since the invasion of Ukraine, they are gaining ground.

The most flagrant example is Viktor Orbán, apostle of what he calls “illiberal democracy”, who last weekend [secured a fourth term](#) as ruler of Hungary. It would be wrong to say he was “re-elected”, because that might imply a genuine election, which this wasn’t: Orbán controls the Hungarian media and the entire apparatus of the state.

To be sure, he had to tone down the pro-Putinism during the campaign; he [admitted Ukrainian refugees](#) and went along with EU sanctions on Moscow. But now he can revert to type. He has become the EU's longest-serving leader, armed with an absolute majority in Budapest and a seat on the European Council in Brussels. As one seasoned Europe-watcher puts it, when it comes to doing Putin a favour and sabotaging future action by the EU, "Orbán can deliver". Given that the key to the western response to the Russian invasion has been unity, and that the EU and Nato work by consensus, one spoiler can thwart everyone else.

Still, this weekend Putin will be eyeing an even bigger prize. Sunday sees the first round of voting in the French presidential election, and polls show a [surge in support](#) for the perennial candidate of the far right, Marine Le Pen. In a head-to-head contest against Emmanuel Macron, the likely second round in a fortnight, the gap between the two [is tiny](#), well within the margin of error. After 2016, the year of Brexit and Donald Trump, no one should be reckless enough to rule out a shock in France.

Le Pen's links to Putin are more blatant than most. In October 2014, her party [borrowed €9m \(£7.5m\) from a Russian bank](#) to fund its campaign for local elections. Her promo material for this current contest, admittedly printed before the invasion, features a smiling picture of her with the butcher of Moscow.

Like Orbán, she was quick to put some distance between herself and Putin. She condemned the invasion, while a key party ally took a bus to pick up Ukrainian refugees. She's been lucky too, blessed by the presence in the race of Éric Zemmour, standard-bearer of the even further right whose adulation of Putin and initial hostility to Ukrainian refugees has allowed Le Pen to look moderate by comparison. That has enabled her to focus on the cost of living crisis and to exploit Macron's near-toxic unpopularity with the many millions of French voters who see the incumbent president as arrogant, elitist and contemptuously out of touch.

Yet there can be little doubt what a Le Pen victory would mean. Until the recent volte-face, her party's MEPs stood in the way of almost every EU measure that might discomfort Putin. And even though Frexit is no longer a declared Le Pen dream, her programme of treaty revision would, in effect,

dismantle French membership of the EU, weakening the body, perhaps fatally – which is exactly what Putin wants. As for Macron’s other rival, the leftist Jean-Luc Mélenchon, put it this way: over the years, he was far more rhetorically exercised against Nato and the US than he was about Putin and [Russia](#).

Of course, Orbán and Le Pen catch the eye because they are either in high office or terrifyingly close to it. But Putin’s western friends on both the right and left can be found closer to home too. The British circle of devotees is not confined to the likes of Nigel Farage, who once named Putin as the [world leader he most admired](#), or George Galloway, whose [Twitter profile](#) featured until this week not one but two broadcasting gigs with the Putin-controlled media outlet RT, details hastily deleted after Twitter [identified](#) Galloway’s account as “Russia state-affiliated media”. No, the more troubling ties are nearer the top. Plenty of European observers have noted the Conservative party’s [fondness for oligarch cash](#), as well as its recent slowness in tackling dirty money, suspecting the latter is, as one puts it, “a return on the investment Moscow made in British politics”. True, Britain has not hesitated to arm Ukraine, but to some sceptical European eyes, that looks a bit like the Orbán or Le Pen manoeuvres: hasty efforts at belated detoxification.

All of which is perhaps small beer compared with the big one, the most powerful western friend Vladimir Putin ever had: Donald Trump. He’s no longer in the White House, though he could well be back in 2024, while the legacy of his admiration for Putin – who he praised as a “genius” – lives on in his party. A January [poll](#) found that Republicans had a more favourable opinion of Putin than they did of Joe Biden or Kamala Harris. Fox News’s top-rated anchor, Tucker Carlson, has been airing Kremlin talking points on his show, including the false claim that the US is funding biological weapons labs in Ukraine, and he’s fond of suggesting that he has less beef with Putin than he does with US liberals. After all, [asks Carlson](#): “Has Putin ever called me a racist?”

This gets close to the heart of the matter. For a certain stripe of rightist, Putin has long embodied an alternative to western cultural decline at the hands of the liberals: a nationalist, conservative, white, Christian ideal uncorrupted by

feminism or gay rights. That picture has become confused since the 24 February invasion, now that it is Putin who is slaughtering white Christian Europeans. But plenty cling to it all the same.

For now, that is a minority position. But the success of Orbán and Le Pen shows Putinism has put down strong roots in the west, ones that might survive the current storm. Mark Leonard, director of the European Council on Foreign Relations, worries about what happens six months from now, when westerners become desensitised to images of violence in [Ukraine](#) and when the cost of living is through the roof. “Eventually the political space will open up for someone to say, ‘This conflict is too expensive – and maybe Putin’s not that bad anyway’.”

It means the struggle against Putinism will not be fought with sanctions and arms alone. Nor will it be conducted solely in Russia or Ukraine. The threat is not so far away. The [call is coming from inside the house](#).

- Jonathan Freedland is a Guardian columnist. To listen to his podcast Politics Weekly America, search “Politics Weekly America” on Apple, Spotify, Acast or wherever you get your podcasts
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OpinionRishi Sunak

You have to admit The Rishi Sunak Show is hilarious. The non-dom episode is the best yet

[Marina Hyde](#)



The hapless chancellor just can't get anything right – you should see him answer questions about his wife's tax arrangements



Rishi Sunak and Akshata Murty at the British Museum in London, February 2022. Photograph: Vickie Flores/EPA

Fri 8 Apr 2022 08.37 EDT Last modified on Sat 9 Apr 2022 00.22 EDT

A debilitating week for Treasury-based luxury [casualwear influencer](#) Rishi Sunak. He used to seem invincible; now he's the pocket Samson who's just taken a massive haircut courtesy of his wife. I know Rishi wants to be prime minister and stuff, but it's increasingly difficult to imagine how the mega-rich chancellor would persuade ordinary British people to do difficult things. Mate – you can't even persuade your own wife to pay you tax.

But before I get accused of being a sexist by ... hang on, let me get my lorgnette ... [James Cleverly](#), we'd better have a recap of developing events, which now include a [US green card controversy](#). Initially believed to be watching his political oxidisation on Pacific time, the chancellor is in fact on these shores. I hear Lynton Crosby has banned Easter getaways, meaning Sunak will have to unwind in one of his houses in this country, as opposed to the high-end [Santa Monica apartment](#) he owns in a complex that includes a pet spa.

Anyway, he has granted a hotly defensive exclusive interview to the Sun, which runs under the apoplectic banner LAY OFF MY MISSUS. And I

think you'll agree that headline truly captures the way Rishi Sunak speaks. This, quite simply, is a guy who is as at-home screaming a warning out of a van window as he is indulging in a desultory [browse of Mr Porter's fine knits](#), his cursor hovering briefly over a £495 smoke-blue James Perse cashmere hoodie before the window is closed in listless pique. There are some injustices even a knitwear purchase can't alleviate. Even so, I think the headline could have been punchier. I'd have gone with PAY TAX? IN THIS ECONOMY?!

As for the meat of the interview, I hugely enjoyed the implication that the £30,000 annual flat fee required for Akshata Murty to retain her non-dom status is the typical foreign national experience in this country. As Rishi explains of Murty's completely legal arrangements: "That is how the system works for people like her who are international who have moved here." (Great to hear that at least one part of any of the UK system works. "The system works" is really not a phrase you're hearing a lot right now.) Very enjoyable, too, to read the furious commentary about Murty on MailOnline and in the Daily Mail, whose proprietor Lord Rothermere inherited his own non-dom status from his father. Again: the system works.

And listen, what's not to love about this latest episode of Sunak's fish-out-of-water comedy? Recent outings have seen the rarefied protagonist's hilarious interactions with the ordinary world. The one where he goes to the petrol station and fills up [someone else's car](#), then tries to scan his card on the [barcode reader](#). The one where he fails to do anything meaningful in his mini-budget to alleviate the cost of living crisis for the poorest households, then promptly [gives an interview](#) in which he trills: "We all have different breads in my house." The one where he scans the popular press and comes up with the perfect person to self-pityingly compare himself to in a manner that in no way caused his spads to kick a hole in the wall. As [Sunak explained](#): "Both Will Smith and me, having our wives attacked ..." Come on! It's a funny show!

Moving on to the villain trying to sabotage him, their precise identity remains a mystery. Where are all the mean stories about Sunak coming from? Not quite sure we need to activate Nancy Drew on this puzzle – Sunak's naked manoeuvring, coupled with his vanishing act every time an unfavourable partygate story broke for Boris Johnson, suggests at least the

dim possibility that his aggressor may be known to him. My own fan theory, however, is that this is a show where Sunak plays both protagonist and antagonist. Or to put it another way, he is his own worst enemy.

The current stories are not a “smear”, as he claims, but the totally predictable consequence of his family’s financial arrangements, which he should have seen coming a mile off. It may be perfectly legal, but it is obviously – obviously! – a giant piss-take if the chancellor’s own wife has non-dom status.

Apologies for returning to an achingly familiar furrow for this column over the years, but it really doesn’t have to be this way. The Hong Kong tax code, often cited as the most efficient and avoidance-proof in the world, is around 350 pages. The ever-expanding UK tax code is the world’s longest, currently running to more than 22,000 pages, having increased vastly in size under both Labour and Conservative governments. Unsurprisingly, it amounts to a charter for myriad types of avoidance. Tell you who should do something about this, just like all his recent predecessors should have but didn’t: [Rishi Sunak](#).

Instead, he prefers to spend his days saying no to pleas to alleviate hardship, which seems to exist in a universe beyond his comprehension. Hard to pick a low point, but I’ll go with the time he turned down the request from the hugely respected educational recovery tsar Kevan Collins for £15bn in pandemic catch-up funding for children. Sunak would only fork out £1.4bn, which isn’t even twice what he spent [buying people free burgers](#) with “eat out to help out”. Collins [resigned in despair](#). It emerged that an internal presentation had shown Sunak and others in Downing Street how failure to invest £15bn now in this failed generation of children would result in the state paying upwards of £160bn down the line in welfare and criminal justice. And still Sunak said no, presumably on the basis that that would all be someone else’s problem in the future. As David Cameron reportedly said to his aides before his post-referendum resignation: “Why should I do all the hard shit?”

And why should Rishi Sunak do it either? Why shouldn’t his wife tick the box and keep paying her 30 grand a year to stay out of things? Why shouldn’t statements of fact be denounced as smears? All sorts of things are

optional if ordinary people would only realise it. Let them eat different breads.

- Marina Hyde is a Guardian columnist
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If the rest of Europe can protect the poorest from rising bills, why can't Britain?

[Carsten Jung](#)

Rishi Sunak might learn from politicians on the continent, where the vulnerable are being insulated from the worst effects of soaring energy costs



‘International examples contrast with Rishi Sunak’s spring statement in which he announced almost no targeted support for lower earners.’
Photograph: Jessica Taylor/AFP/Getty Images

Sat 9 Apr 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 9 Apr 2022 11.37 EDT

The governor of the Bank of England, Andrew Bailey, has warned that Britons are facing a “historic shock to real incomes”, with [energy price rises this year](#) larger than any single year in the 1970s. The disastrous impact this crisis will have on people’s livelihoods is clear: [600,000 could fall into](#)

poverty and millions will be unable to afford essentials. But so far the chancellor, Rishi Sunak, has only introduced halfhearted half measures.

As we face an epochal challenge to living standards and energy supply, there are policies already in place elsewhere that Sunak could learn from: countries such as Germany and Ireland are doing more to protect the most vulnerable, doing more to switch to energy-saving measures and doing more to wean themselves off fossil fuels.

This year, the German government has provided a €200 boost for people on benefits, as well as a €100 topping up of child support and at least €270 for people on housing assistance, next to a €300 lump sum payment (pre-tax) to all employees. A low-income family with two children could receive at least €657, plus a possible heating subsidy of €490. With other measures this could fill more than two-thirds of the cash shortfall caused by increased energy prices. By comparison, the average low-earning UK family would receive less than half of that amount (£270, or about €325) plus bills support that will have to be paid back.

Elsewhere, France and Italy have moved much more decisively than the UK to limit energy price increases facing households. This has been done through measures including requiring the state energy company to sell electricity at well below market price and tax cuts on electricity.

Equally eye-catching are examples of innovative policies to encourage lower energy use. As petrol prices surge, public transport is one of the most effective ways of keeping costs for the economy down. For three months, Germany is offering all citizens the use of regional transport for only €9 a month. Some US cities have also shown that reduced or free public transport fares can increase use. And New Zealand is halving public transport fares for three months in response to high fuel prices. France has been experimenting with free public transport since 2018 and Paris just slashed its ticket prices.

This comes on top of European countries' support schemes for home insulation. Ireland, for example, has just passed a grant policy that provides

up to 50% of the costs of a deep retrofit. In contrast, the UK has nowhere near the same ambition.

All these international examples contrast with Sunak's [spring statement](#) in which he announced almost no targeted support for lower earners. Analysis by the Institute for Public Policy Research thinktank, where I work, shows that low-income households still face an average cash shortfall of £320 this year, with some facing up to a £700 hit. This would leave many of the UK's poorest in poverty with no option but to miss out on essentials, such as food or home heating. As millions of households are having to cut back on spending, this will also drag down economic growth.

Staggeringly, what the chancellor did announce was heavily skewed towards higher earners. [We estimate](#) that, on average, high-income households received four times the support of lower-income households.

These were Sunak's policy choices, but it's not too late to change tack. His first priority should be to establish a livelihood guarantee for low earners. This means ensuring that their living standards do not fall below what they were last year.

The government could have achieved this by increasing benefits in line with inflation, to ensure people's income stays in line with the price of products and services they need. This could be combined with an increase in child benefits and additional measures to alleviate pressure from household bills. With this, the chancellor would virtually fully maintain living standards for low and medium earners at a cost of £9bn – just £1.5bn more than what he spent on his poorly targeted policy package.

He could also learn from other countries' energy saving measures. IPPR has proposed large-scale investment in home insulation, allocated via an easy-to-use "GreenGo" system. This would provide a one-stop shop for people to transition to cleaner transport, housing and consumption, with an initial focus on energy-poor homes, which require support the most.

All of this is eminently feasible and affordable. For instance, our proposed package to almost fully protect low and middle earners could largely be paid

for by a windfall tax on energy companies – a type of tax that the EU is set to endorse soon.

So don't let the government convince you that its hands are tied, because this is a crisis with global dimensions. In fact, it is precisely by looking overseas that we can see that better policy choices are possible.

- Carsten Jung is a senior economist at the Institute for Public Policy Research
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Guardian Opinion cartoon

Rishi Sunak

Martin Rowson on Rishi Sunak and money management – cartoon

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[Space](#)

First all-private astronaut team lifts off for ISS in milestone SpaceX flight

Crew of four on way to space station in mission hailed by Nasa as putting ‘commercial business up in space’



The SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket blasts off from the Kennedy Space Centre in Cape Canaveral, Florida, with the first all-commercial space team, bound for the International Space Station. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Reuters in Cape Canaveral

Fri 8 Apr 2022 23.20 EDT

A SpaceX rocket ship has blasted off carrying the first all-private astronaut team ever launched to the [International Space Station](#) (ISS), a flight hailed by industry executives and Nasa as a milestone in the commercialisation of spaceflight.

The team of four selected by Houston-based startup Axiom [Space](#) Inc for its debut spaceflight and orbital science mission lifted off on Friday morning from Cape Canaveral, Florida.

Live video webcast by Axiom showed the 25-storey [SpaceX](#) launch vehicle – consisting of a two-stage Falcon 9 rocket topped by its Crew Dragon capsule – streaking into the blue skies over Florida's Atlantic coast.

Cameras inside the crew compartment beamed footage of the four men strapped into the pressurised cabin, seated calmly in their helmeted white-and-black flight suits as the rocket soared toward space.

Nine minutes after launch, the rocket's upper stage delivered the crew capsule into its preliminary orbit, according to launch commentators. Meanwhile the rocket's reusable lower stage, having detached from the rest of the spacecraft, flew itself back to Earth and safely touched down on a landing platform floating on a drone vessel in the Atlantic.

Launch webcast commentator Kate Tice described the liftoff as “absolutely picture-perfect”. One crew member could be heard telling mission control in a radio transmission: “That was a hell of a ride.”

If all goes as planned, the quartet led by the retired [Nasa](#) astronaut Michael Lopez-Alegria will arrive at the space station on Saturday, after a 20-hour-plus flight, and the autonomously operated Crew Dragon will dock with the ISS.



The crew on the rocket before take-off. Photograph: AP/SpaceX

SpaceX was directing mission control for the flight from its headquarters near Los Angeles.

Nasa, besides furnishing the launch site, will assume responsibility for the astronauts once they rendezvous with the space station to undertake eight days of science and biomedical research.

The mission, representing a partnership among Axiom, SpaceX and Nasa, has been touted by all three as a major step in the expansion of commercial space ventures collectively referred to by insiders as the low-Earth orbit economy, or LEO economy.

“We’re taking commercial business off the face of the Earth and putting it up in space,” the Nasa chief, Bill Nelson, said before the flight. The shift enabled his agency to focus more on sending humans back to the moon, to Mars and on other deep space exploration, he said.

Friday’s launch also stands as SpaceX’s sixth human space flight in nearly two years, following four Nasa astronaut missions to the space station and the “Inspiration 4” launch in September that sent an all-civilian crew to orbit for the first time. That flight did not dock with the ISS.

While the space station has hosted civilian visitors from time to time, the Ax-1 mission will mark the first all-commercial team of astronauts to use the ISS for its intended purpose as an orbiting research laboratory.

The Axiom team will be sharing the weightless work environment with seven regular, government-paid ISS crew members: three American astronauts, a German and three Russian cosmonauts.

Lopez-Alegria, 63, the Spanish-born Axiom mission commander, is also the company's vice-president for business development. His second-in-command is Larry Connor, a real estate and technology entrepreneur and aerobatics aviator from Ohio designated as the mission pilot. Connor is in his 70s; the company did not provide his precise age.



The SpaceX rocket in flight. Photograph: Rex/Shutterstock

Rounding out the Ax-1 team are investor-philanthropist and former Israeli fighter pilot Eytan Stibbe, 64, and Canadian businessman and philanthropist Mark Pathy, 52, both serving as mission specialists. The flight makes Stibbe the second Israeli in space, after Ilan Ramon, who perished with six Nasa crewmates in the 2003 space shuttle Columbia disaster.

The Axiom crew members may appear to have a lot in common with many of the wealthy passengers taking suborbital rides in recent months on board

the Blue Origin and Virgin Galactic services offered by billionaires Jeff Bezos and Richard Branson, respectively.

But Axiom said its mission went far beyond space tourism, with each crew member undergoing hundreds of hours of astronaut training with both Nasa and SpaceX.

The Ax-1 team also will be conducting about two dozen science experiments including research on brain health, cardiac stem cells, cancer and ageing, as well as a technology demonstration to produce optics using the surface tension of fluids in microgravity, company executives said.

Launched to orbit in 1998, the space station has been continuously occupied since 2000 under a US-Russian-led partnership including Canada, Japan and 11 European countries.

Nasa has no plans to invest in a new space station once the ISS is retired, around 2030. But Nasa selected Axiom in 2020 to build a new commercial wing to the orbiting laboratory, which is currently the length of a football field.

Plans call for eventually detaching the Axiom modules from the rest of the station when it is ready to be decommissioned. Other private operators are expected to place their own stations in orbit once the ISS is out of service.

In the meantime, Axiom said it has contracted with SpaceX to fly three more private astronaut missions to the space station over the next two years.

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[The Observer](#)[Donald Trump](#)

Harsh truth: Trump's social media app follows long line of failed ventures

Truth Social seems to be going the way of Trump Steaks and Trump Vodka as it sees low engagement weeks after its release and resignations from executives



Three weeks after Truth Social was launched, its download chart position dropped to 116. One study found that downloads have fallen by as much as 95%. Photograph: Muhammad Ata/IMAGESLIVE/ZUMA Press Wire/REX/Shutterstock

[Edward Helmore](#)

Sat 9 Apr 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 9 Apr 2022 20.03 EDT

By any measure, Truth Social, Donald Trump's social media platform, has had a rough start.

Engagement is low, the initial flood of downloads of the app have withered to a trickle and the first resignations of its top staff have begun. It's too soon to tell if it's a stiff, but as with many Trump businesses that fail to take off, the former US president appears to be washing his hands of it: he has barely used it.

The Twitter clone, where posts are called “truths”, was launched with high expectations on President’s Day in February. It was briefly the most downloaded free app on Apple. But three weeks after Truth Social was launched, its download chart position dropped to 116. Last week it failed to break the top 200. One [study](#) found that downloads have fallen by as much as 95%.

It now seems Truth Social may be heading the same way as Trump Steaks and Trump Vodka, just to name a few. Slapping the Trump name on a product that others produce better just does not work – especially now.

Yet – judging by his public pronouncements – it was meant to be a very different story this time. “I created Truth Social … to stand up to the tyranny of big tech,” Trump said in October, 10 months after he was permanently banned from [Twitter](#).

But users, many anticipating a direct channel to Trump and Trumpist thought as the former president prepares for a 2024 presidential run, have been left sorely disappointed by the Truth Social experience.

An estimated 1.2 million users who have the Apple-only app have faced long wait times to access the platform. “Thank you for joining!” reads the Truth Social prompt. “Due to massive demand, we have placed you on our waitlist.” Even Trump appears to be steering clear, and has still only posted on the platform once.

Meanwhile, Digital Word Acquisition Corp, the special acquisitions vehicle or Spac, bringing Truth Social public is [under investigation](#) by the SEC. The deal had been anticipated to reward investors with millions – and Trump himself as much as a billion – but the company has now been rocked an exodus of executives.

Last week Josh Adams and Billy Boozer, Truth Social's chiefs of technology and product development, resigned from the company. [The Washington Post](#) reported that the resignations came after the Trump Media & Technology Group CEO, Devin Nunes, the former US congressman, attempted to install his own allies to run the company.

Truth Social's service issues comes as Tesla's CEO, [Elon Musk](#), became Twitter's largest shareholder acquiring a 9.2% stake in the company as well as a seat on the board.

Musk, who has had a series of run-ins with US financial regulators over financial disclosures made on social media, has signaled that he plans to advocate for changes on the platform where he has 80.4 million followers. Shares in Twitter rose more than 27%.

Last month, he asked his followers if Twitter was failing to adhere to free speech principles. “Free speech is essential to a functioning democracy. Do you believe Twitter rigorously adheres to this principle?” he asked.

After more than 2 million users responded, Musk [wrote](#): “Given that Twitter serves as the de facto public town square, failing to adhere to free speech principles fundamentally undermines democracy.”

With speculation mounting that Musk could use his shareholder and board-member power to restore Trump to Twitter, where he had 90 million followers before he was disbarred after the 6 January Capitol riot, the purpose and fate of Truth Social hangs in the balance.

[Trump Media & Technology Group](#), the Trump venture that advisers said last year would become a “media powerhouse”, initially presented Truth Social as the centerpiece of its ambitions to counter what the former president routinely call “fake news media” and to establish a social media presence he currently lacks. But, according to the Post, Trump has “privately fumed” about Truth Social’s slow take-up and glitches and considered joining rival competitor Gettr.

For several reasons, Truth Social may have been a step too far, said David Carr at [SimilarWeb](#). The analytics firm estimates Truth Social visitors at

200,000 daily, skewed 70% male, compared to 1 million for Gettr. Twitter averages 217 million.

“In the case of Truth Social, Gettr and Parler had already emerged to cater to the same audience Truth Social is going after,” said Carr. “So it needed to be 150% better, and so far it hasn’t created great engagement. If Trump had posted a ton of content, and there really was a pent up demand for it, maybe things would have been different.”

But the apparent failure of Truth Social presents certain truths about social media itself. Most users don’t come to it, besides perhaps Twitter with its relatively low number of users, for political communication; one-sided conversations rarely inspire engagement, and sites require large numbers of users and traffic to make social impact.

“Community management professionals I know often talk about the ‘empty party’ problem of how you get the conversation going from a dead stop, and it’s not an easy problem to solve,” Carr said.

At the heart of the issue is what Joshua Tucker, co-director of the NYU [Center for Social Media and Politics](#), terms “network effects”. “Social media sites are more valuable to you the more people are using them. Like a phonebook, it’s of no value if it only has one name in it,” he said.

Part of Truth Social’s problem was that it set out to exclude a large part of the political spectrum. “They went after the Maga portion of the population, so they were starting with one hand tied behind their backs,” Tucker said. “It’s a tough sell, even before the problems of the launch and rollout.”

Yet Trump has been routinely under-estimated in the past, said Tucker, “yet he somehow seems to lend being a fairly unsuccessful business person to being an incredibly successful political candidate”.

Truth Social was created to counter what many conservatives deride as “cancel culture” censorship from the left. But because of its conservative dominance Trump’s social media platform has become medium for “trolls, self-declared and self-made experts, conspiracy theorists, attention-seekers of all stripes”, said Mark Federman, of the University of Guelph-Humber.

“Trump’s motivation for Truth Social was to … take control of his voice amplification. That’s failed, so he’s had to admit defeat,” he added.

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[Russia](#)

Russia heading for worst recession since end of cold war, says UK

Central bank makes surprise cut to interest rates as inflation soars under pressure from war sanctions

- [Russia-Ukraine war: latest updates](#)



The governor of Russia's central bank, Elvira Nabiullina, has cut interest rates from 20% to 17%. Photograph: Bloomberg/Getty Images

[Graeme Wearden](#)

Fri 8 Apr 2022 11.50 EDT Last modified on Fri 8 Apr 2022 12.50 EDT

Russia is heading for its deepest recession since the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the UK government predicted on Friday, as Moscow's central bank unexpectedly cut its key interest rate to support its shrinking economy.

The Foreign Office said Russia's GDP is expected to contract by between 8.5% and 15% this year, as the series of sanctions imposed following the war in [Ukraine](#) hit activity.

That would be more severe than in 2009, after the financial crisis, [when Russia's economy shrank around 7.8%](#), and would be the worst decline since [GDP fell for several years in the early 1990s](#).

Longer term, expert predictions suggest GDP growth will continue to be depressed as the country is cut off from western technology, the UK added, [as it announced sanctions on Vladimir Putin's two adult daughters](#).

Western sanctions on Russia mean that about 60%, or £275bn, of its foreign exchange reserves are currently frozen, the UK added. That prevented Moscow making dollar debt repayments this week, putting it closer to defaulting on its debts.

Russian firms have already reported a marked contraction in business activity in March, with output and new orders tumbling and inflationary pressures soaring.

With a steep recession looming, the Bank of Russia has announced a surprise cut to borrowing costs. The Central Bank of the Russian Federation (CBR) will lower its key lending rate from 20% to 17% from Monday, six weeks after [doubling interest rates in an emergency attempt to prop up the rouble](#).

The cut shows the bank is pivoting its focus to support the economy, as the recent recovery in the rouble following the introduction of capital controls eased inflation worries.

The CBR said inflationary pressures had softened, while financial stability risks had stabilised. It also cited the economic cost of sanctions, saying the external conditions remained challenging, and were "considerably constraining economic activity".

“Today’s decision reflects a change in the balance of risks of accelerated consumer price growth, decline in economic activity and financial stability risks,” said the CBR, adding that it could lower rates again at future policy meetings.

The rate cut shows the CBR is “confident that the most acute phase of the economic crisis has now passed”, said Liam Peach, emerging Europe economist at Capital [Economics](#), and that a major and destabilising bank run had been avoided.

Peach predicts further gradual interest rate cuts over the course of this year, as the central bank attempts to bring inflation back to target.

The rouble has recovered from the record lows in the early days of the Ukraine invasion, when it plunged to 135 roubles to the US dollar. It has now risen back to around 80 roubles to the dollar, helped by restrictions on moving money abroad and a ban on foreign currency sales.

February’s interest rate rise also encouraged Russians to save their roubles, supporting the currency.

The surge in commodity prices since the war began has also helped Russia’s finances, with Europe continuing to buy oil and gas to meet its energy needs.

But the freeze on Russia’s foreign exchange reserves means Moscow is moving closer to its first debt default since 1998. Earlier this week, the US blocked attempts to pay more than \$600m (£461m) owed to Russian bond investors, leading Moscow to make payments in roubles instead. That could be classed as a default, once a 30-day grace period expires.

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Several economists have forecast Russia could suffer a double-digit contraction this year. The Institute of International Finance predicted last month that Russia’s economy would shrink 15%, with the recession wiping out 15 years of economic gains by the end of 2023. Further energy boycotts

would drastically impair Russia's ability to import goods and services, deepening the recession, it warned.

The London Platinum and Palladium Market announced on Friday it was suspending two Russian government-owned precious metals refineries from its good delivery lists with immediate effect.

The decision bars the two refiners from selling platinum and palladium into the London market, the world's largest. The palladium price jumped 8% after the move, on concerns of supply disruption to the precious metal used in catalytic converters.

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[**Fox News**](#)

Lara Logan, who compared Fauci to Mengele, says Fox News pushed her out

Logan says network ‘does not want independent thinkers’ as Fox stays quiet on reports it dropped her after November remark



Lara Logan, pictured here in 2013, has not appeared as a guest on Fox News since making the comment about Fauci. Photograph: Chris Pizzello/Invision/AP

[*Martin Pengelly*](#) in New York

[*@MartinPengelly*](#)

Sat 9 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 9 Apr 2022 01.01 EDT

The former CBS reporter Lara Logan, who compared Dr Anthony Fauci to the Nazi doctor Josef Mengele, has claimed she was “pushed out” at [Fox News](#) because the conservative network does not want “independent thinkers”.

“I was definitely pushed out,” Logan [told Eric Metaxas](#), a conservative [radio host](#), this week. “I mean, there is no doubt about that. They don’t want independent thinkers. They don’t want people who follow the facts regardless of the politics.”

Fox News has not commented on reports that it “[quietly benched](#)” Logan over her remark about Joe Biden’s chief medical adviser. On Friday, a spokesperson for Fox News said the network would not comment.

Logan has not appeared as a guest on Fox News since making the comment about Fauci. There have been no new episodes of her show on the [Fox Nation](#) streaming service, Lara Logan Has No Agenda, which is still available.

Logan made the comment about Mengele, the “Angel of Death” who conducted medical experiments at the Auschwitz concentration camp, [in November](#), during a discussion of the Covid pandemic on [Fox News Primetime](#).

Logan said: “Dr Fauci, this is what people say to me, that he doesn’t represent science to them.

“He represents Josef Mengele, Dr Josef Mengele, the Nazi doctor who did experiments on Jews during the second world war and in the concentration camps, and I am talking about people all across the world are saying this.”

The show’s host, Pete Hegseth, and another guest, the Fox News host Will Cain, did not respond.

The Auschwitz Memorial [said](#): “Exploiting the tragedy of people who became victims of criminal pseudo-medical experiments in Auschwitz in a debate about vaccines, pandemic and people who fight for saving human lives is shameful. It is disrespectful to victims and a sad symptom of moral and intellectual decline.”

Jonathan Greenblatt, chief executive of the Anti-Defamation League, said: “There’s absolutely no comparison between mask mandates, vaccine

requirements and other Covid-19 mitigation efforts to what happened to Jews during the Holocaust.”

Fauci, whose work has generated threats to his safety and that of his family, told MSNBC Logan’s remark was “unconscionable” and “absolutely preposterous and disgusting … an insult to all of the people who suffered and died under the Nazi regime in the concentration camps”.

Fauci also said he found it “striking … how she gets no discipline whatsoever from the Fox network – how they can let her say that with no comment and no disciplinary action?”

Logan rose to fame with CBS during the Iraq war and the Arab spring. After leaving CBS in 2013 over errors in a report about the Benghazi attack, she moved into conservative media.

In March, Logan told a rightwing online show she was “dumped by Fox” and added: “I was taken off the air at Fox just before they went into a whole marathon of war porn in Ukraine.”

She also repeated Russian talking points about “Nazis” in Ukraine and said Fox News had “a few people like Jesse Watters and Tucker Carlson who are doing their best to add some context and to show what this war is really about”.

Speaking to Metaxas, Logan also said she did not like being called a “darling of the right wing”.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2022/apr/09/lara-logan-fox-news-mengele-fauci-remark>

[**France**](#)

From cat lover Le Pen to far right's red card: French election in five moments

Candidates polish their images and rightwinger Zemmour is shown the red card by Zinedine Zidane's brother



Macron's campaign rally in the La Défense business district of Paris.
Photograph: Samuel Boivin/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock



[Jon Henley](#) in Paris

[@jonhenley](#)

Sat 9 Apr 2022 03.00 EDT

France's [2022 presidential election campaign](#) has been curiously devoid of passion and excitement – partly because for so long its outcome looked a foregone conclusion. But amid the general apathy, some revealing moments have stood out.

‘La force tranquille’

Elected five years ago as “neither of the right nor the left”, [Emmanuel Macron](#) is seen as having veered rightward in office – and winning over disillusioned left-leaning voters will be crucial to a second term. At his one big rally of the campaign, Macron cheekily recycled not just the two successful campaign slogans of France’s first Socialist president, François Mitterrand (“A calm strength” [*“La force tranquille”*] and “France united”), but also a far-left, anti-capitalist battle cry first coined in 2002: “Our lives are worth more than their profits.” It didn’t go unnoticed.

‘I couldn’t live without my cats’

Marine Le Pen's long campaign to detoxify the far-right, anti-immigration party Rassemblement National (National Rally), founded by her father, Jean-Marie Le Pen, in 1972, has also involved a sustained effort to soften her own image. In an intimate [TV interview](#) she opened up about her sometimes troubled childhood, confessed to the problems her surname had caused her – and rhapsodised at length about the six cats who share her life, revealing she has recently passed the diploma to become a registered breeder. Nobody hates a cat lover, do they?



Marine Le Pen making friends with a cat on a visit to a shelter in 2020.
Photograph: Christophe Archambault/AFP/Getty Images

A stab in the back?

Valérie Pécresse, the rightwing Les Républicains candidate, has had a miserable campaign, representing a divided party, playing a more hardline role than she is comfortable with and suffering multiple defections by senior party figures. She wasn't helped by the pointed lack of public backing she received from perhaps the most senior of all, Nicolas Sarkozy, who at one stage opted to support PSG at a football match rather than attend a Pécresse rally. When the former president's name was mentioned, it was resoundingly booed.



A Pécresse poster in a street in Marseille. Photograph: Daniel Cole/AP

Don't mess with me

Arguably the most heated debates were a series of face-to-face confrontations between the far-left firebrand Jean-Luc Mélenchon and the far-right TV polemicist Éric Zemmour, bad-tempered affairs that at times descended into outright slanging matches – so much so that during [one encounter](#) Zemmour complained he was being unfairly bullied. “You didn’t seriously come on here, opposite me, and expect to be stroked?” responded the famously belligerent leader of La France Insoumise (Unbowed France). The exchange went viral, not least for the *double entendre*.



Mélenchon prior to taking part in a televised debate with Zemmour.
Photograph: Bertrand Guay/AFP/Getty Images

Red card for the (far) right winger

The clash between the fanatically anti-immigration Zemmour and one of France's great sporting heroes was only ever going to end one way. The [extreme-right candidate was sent off](#) when he turned up for a kickabout at a five-a-side football club in Aix-en-Provence founded by the football legend and former France captain Zinedine Zidane, the son of Algerian immigrants, and run by his brother. "Get them out of here. All of them," Noureddine Zidane said, minutes after Zemmour – whose campaign had booked the venue, but not revealed who it was for – arrived with cameras in tow. Zidane 1, Zemmour 0.



Zemmour at Zidane's football club. Photograph: Bertrand Guay/AFP/Getty Images

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/09/france-presidential-election-macron-v-le-pen>

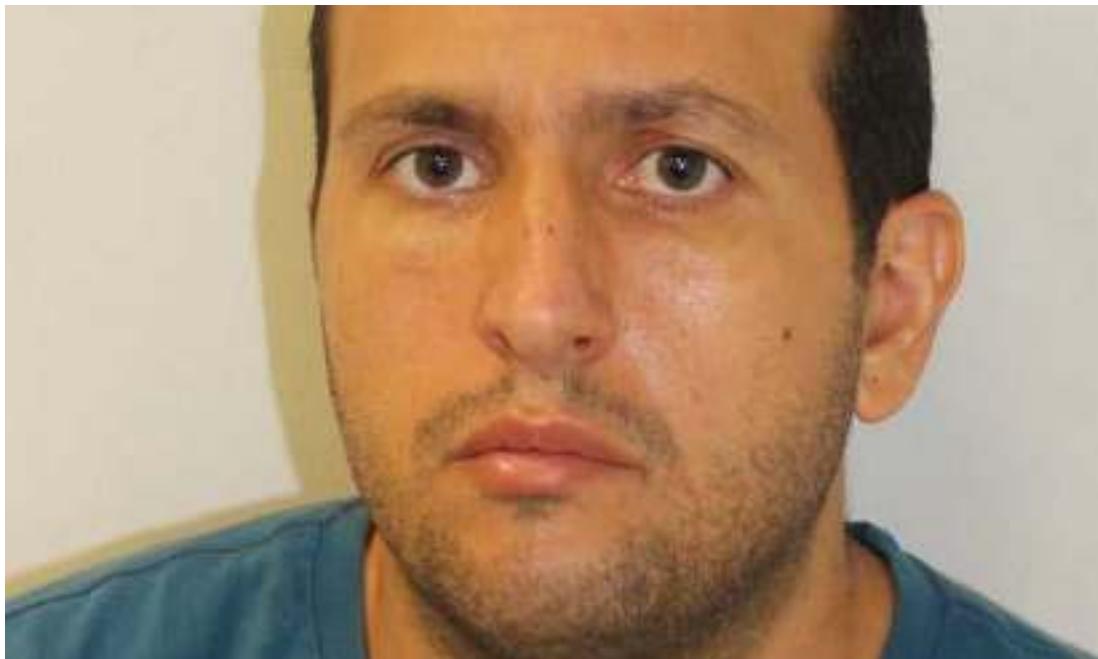
Headlines

- [Breaking news Sabina Nessa killer Koci Selamaj jailed for minimum of 36 years](#)
- [Koci Selamaj Concerned hotel staff called police hours before Sabina Nessa murder](#)
- [Easter headache Transport hubs brace for busiest weekend since Covid](#)
- [Live UK air travel industry warned about disruption over busy Easter getaway](#)

[London](#)

Sabina Nessa murder: Koci Selamaj jailed for minimum of 36 years

Thirty-six-year-old who murdered primary school teacher in south-east London receives life sentence



Koci Selamaj had pleaded guilty to murdering the primary school teacher Sabina Nessa. Photograph: Metropolitan police/PA

[Kevin Rawlinson](#)

Fri 8 Apr 2022 06.41 EDTFirst published on Fri 8 Apr 2022 05.32 EDT

Koci Selamaj has been jailed for life at the Old Bailey with a minimum term of 36 years for the murder of the primary school teacher Sabina Nessa.

Sentencing Selamaj, 36, Mr Justice Sweeney said Nessa was the “wholly blameless victim of an absolutely appalling murder which was entirely the fault of the defendant”.

Her death added to “the sense of insecurity” particularly felt by women walking through the city at night.

“She had every right, as her family said, to be walking through the park all glammed up and out to enjoy herself after a long week at work,” Sweeney said. “The defendant robbed her and them of her life.”

The judge noted Selamaj’s guilty plea and lack of previous convictions. But he added: “It is a striking feature of the defendant’s case that, clearly deliberately, it is not suggested by him that he had any remorse for what he did to Sabina Nessa.”

The judge said it was “cowardly” of Selamaj to refuse to attend his sentencing but that he had no power to force him.

Before the sentencing, Nessa was described as a kind, funny and innocent animal lover. On Thursday – day one of the two-day sentencing hearing – her parents, Abdur Rouf and Azibun Nessa, said: “You would never have thought that your child would die before you, not in a way our Sabina died.”

Addressing Selamaj in a statement read to the court by the prosecutor, they said: “You had no right to take her away from us in such a cruel way. The moment the police officer came to our house and told us she was found dead our world shattered into pieces.



A girl holding a picture of Sabina Nessa at a vigil last year. Photograph: Gareth Fuller/PA

“How could you do such a thing to an innocent girl walking by, minding her own business? You are not a human being, you are an animal.”

Nessa’s sister Jabina Islam called Selamaj a “coward” after he refused to come to court on Thursday.

She called her sister an “amazing role model” who was “powerful, fearless, bright and just an amazing soul” who deserved to be safe as she walked through the park on the night she died.

Nessa’s body was found in Cator Park, in the Kidbrooke area of south-east London, on 18 September last year. The body of the year 1 teacher at Rushey Green primary school in Catford was found covered with leaves near a community centre in the park.

She was killed while on her way to meet a friend in a bar the night before. The court heard Selamaj, who has a history of domestic violence, drove to London from Eastbourne, East Sussex, to carry out the killing.

After the sentencing, DCI Neil John of the Metropolitan police described Selamaj as an “evil coward”. He said: “It is highly unusual for someone to

go from zero to a crime of this magnitude. We are pleased Selamaj will spend the majority of his life in prison.”

The prosecutor, Alison Morgan QC, said the attack was “premeditated, not in the sense that he targeted Sabina Nessa but because it targeted any lone female”.

Having happened upon Nessa as she walked home, the garage worker severely beat her, before killing her by asphyxiation and making a cursory attempt to conceal her body, the court heard. Morgan said: “This was a murder involving sexual or sadistic conduct.”

While an earlier hearing was told a pathology report had uncovered no positive evidence of a sexual assault, the prosecution said other physical evidence – none of which was disputed by the defendant – demonstrated a “sexual motivation that must have existed”.

Morgan said that, before travelling to London to carry out his attack, Selamaj met his former spouse and tried unsuccessfully to get her to have sex with him in his car. He also checked into a room at an Eastbourne hotel, near his home, in which his former wife worked, behaviour the prosecutor suggested was “indicative of his premeditation to have some kind of sexual encounter that evening”.

It has also emerged that police were called hours before the killing when Selamaj got into a dispute with staff about payment for the room. However, Sussex police said the matter was resolved and police were not required to attend.

In the absence of any explanation from Selamaj, the prosecution invited the court to conclude his motivation had been sexual during the first day of sentencing. Questioned by the judge, Selamaj’s lawyer, Lewis Power QC, said his client offered no challenge to the prosecution’s case.

Asked if the defendant would explain why he had carried out the murder, he said he could not help the court, adding that Selamaj simply accepted he had

done it and noted that his client had given him no instruction to express any remorse.

Selamaj initially accepted responsibility for Nessa's death, but pleaded not guilty to murder at a pre-trial hearing on 16 December. But he changed that plea to guilty on 25 February, as his trial was due to begin at the Old Bailey.

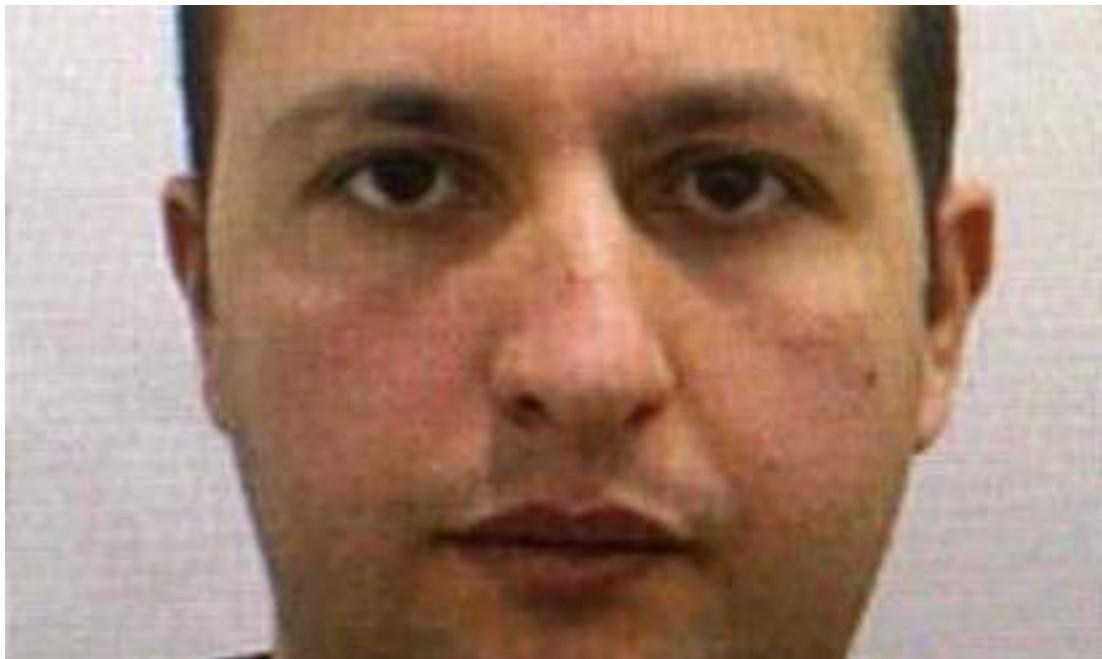
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[Crime](#)

Concerned hotel staff called police hours before Sabina Nessa murder

Staff were uneasy after Koci Selamaj booked room at his estranged wife's workplace, but police did not attend



Koci Selamaj battered and strangled his victim, Sabina Nessa, on 17 September last year. Photograph: Rex/Shutterstock

[Caroline Davies](#)

Fri 8 Apr 2022 05.32 EDT Last modified on Fri 8 Apr 2022 12.20 EDT

Staff at a hotel were uneasy about the behaviour of Koci Selamaj and called the police hours before he murdered Sabina Nessa, but officers failed to attend, it has emerged.

On the day of the killing, Selamaj, 36, a petrol station worker who lived in Eastbourne, stayed in a £300-£400 room at the Grand hotel in the seaside

town, where his wife, Ionela, worked. He had booked a room three days earlier.

His wife had left him weeks previously owing to domestic abuse, including “throttling” her at least three times, detectives said. While at the hotel, Selamaj propositioned his wife for sex, which she refused.

Hotel staff, knowing that Selamaj lived nearby, were uneasy at the booking and called 101 to alert police, detectives said. But Sussex police did not dispatch any officers.

Selamaj later drove from Eastbourne to Kidbrooke, in south-east London, a suburb he is believed not to have visited before, where he battered and strangled Nessa, 28, a primary school teacher who was a stranger to him, as she walked through Cator Park to meet a friend at about 8.30pm on 17 September last year.

Metropolitan police detectives described it as a “pre-meditated, sexually motived murder”. Selamaj pleaded guilty in February to the murder.

DCI Neil John said: “We have an individual who booked this hotel on the 17th. We know from speaking to his partner that he had asked her to meet in the car during the day of the 17th at the Grand hotel where he propositioned her for a sexual encounter. She obviously said no.”

Detectives said staff grew concerned after Selamaj was asked to pay for the hotel room. DS Mark Johnson said: “A member of the hotel staff called 101 ... They were a bit uneasy about him. They knew he lived close by so there was something not quite right about him.”

DCI John said: “The hotel staff was uncomfortable about his demeanour. They just weren’t comfortable. He was questioning and querying why they wanted him to pay now.”

Explaining the decision by Sussex police not to attend, John added: “Police can’t go to everything. The police operator did the right thing as in that moment there was no cause for any great concern. The operator informed

the staff that the call had been reported, and if there was more cause for concern to call the police back and they would reassess.”

Sussex police said: “Police were contacted about 4.40pm on Friday 17 September to reports of a disagreement between a man and staff at a hotel in Eastbourne earlier in the day, around the payment of a room. The matter was resolved and police were not required to attend.”

The Independent Office for Police Conduct, which investigated the call, released a statement on Friday declaring they were not investigating the incident.

A spokesperson said: “The information we were provided with indicated that hotel staff had contacted police reporting he was ‘acting strangely’ and refused to pay for his stay.

“The call handler completed security checks about Koci Selamaj on their computer systems and established the bill had then been paid. We advised Sussex police that, based on the information they provided, it did not meet the criteria for a referral.”

Nessa was hit an estimated 34 times with a metal traffic warning triangle that Selamaj chose to use after buying a rolling pin in Sainsbury’s, before she was strangled. Her body was discovered 24 hours later covered with grass near a community centre in the park. Her underwear was missing, her dress pulled up and her bra exposed.

On Thursday, the Old Bailey heard how Selamaj arrived back at the hotel at midnight after killing Nessa and checked out the following morning.

Selamaj’s wife told police she had left him weeks before. “The wife was spoken with and she revealed that there was domestic violence in that relationship,” John said. “Part of that domestic violence had involved up to three occasions where she was throttled at the neck. None of that had been reported to the police.

“When we spoke to her, she was very upset, very delicate, as you can imagine, finding out what her husband has done. She has now gone back to

Romania. It's had such a huge impact on her that she has decided to return home.”

Through automatic number plate recognition cameras, detectives were able to track Selamaj’s return to Eastbourne via Kent. The murder weapon was found in the Teise River in Kent but no forensic evidence could be retrieved.

Officers said of his motive that it would be speculation to attribute it to his wife leaving him. “When he was cautioned he said ‘what would happen if I open up now?’ That’s the only thing he has said to the police all throughout the investigation.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/apr/08/concerned-hotel-staff-called-police-hours-before-sabina-nessa>

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Transport

Airlines and cross-Channel services brace for busiest weekend since Covid

Air travellers told to allow extra time for queues, while Eurotunnel expects rising traffic and P&O ferries remain suspended



Travel chaos at Heathrow Terminal 2 as families try to get away for the Easter holidays. Photograph: Rex/Shutterstock

Gwyn Topham Transport correspondent

[@GwynTopham](#)

Fri 8 Apr 2022 01.01 EDT Last modified on Fri 8 Apr 2022 09.18 EDT

Airlines and cross-Channel services are braced for their busiest weekend since the start of the pandemic, with outbound and returning holidaymakers set to swell numbers at [ports that are already struggling to cope](#) with surging demand.

With all areas of the UK now on Easter holidays, passengers have been told to allow extra time to negotiate airport queues, as [high rates of Covid infections](#) worsen staff shortages at check-in and security.

Meanwhile, tailbacks on the major roads to the Channel are expected to intensify, as Eurotunnel expects rising traffic in both directions and P&O Ferries services remain suspended.

Airports are redeploying office staff with security clearance to frontline roles where possible to help mitigate the chaotic scenes of recent days, particularly at Manchester airport.

Manchester Airports Group's chief executive, Charlie Cornish, warned passengers on Friday that waiting times of up to 90 minutes at security could persist for months. In a lengthy public apology, he said the airport had "cut costs just to survive" the pandemic, including voluntary redundancies.

However, following the "stunning recovery" in demand after Omicron and the relaxation of travel restrictions, "the simple fact is that we don't currently have the number of staff we need to provide the level of service that our passengers deserve".

"We have just not been able to hire people quickly enough," Cornish said. "Practically, staff shortages mean that we cannot open all the security lanes we need. While we still expect most passengers to get through in less than 30-40 minutes, there will be times over the next few months when waiting times will rise to between 60 and 90 minutes."

He said the airport had interviewed more than 4,000 people over the last two months, with more than 200 people currently being vetting before training, and 250 new security staff should start work by early May.

He said the airport was trying to avoid the alternative of limiting capacity and cancelling flights: "We do not think cancellations are what our customers want to see. While we know they don't want long queues either, we are committed to operating all flights safely."

The Greater Manchester mayor, Andy Burnham, has urged the government to help speed up the security clearance of new recruits. Police and transport staff from the city will be drafted in to help manage queues at the local authority-owned airport.

EasyJet, which has had to [axe hundreds of flights](#) this week, said it would be pre-emptively cancelling a further 50 flights a day over the weekend to minimise disruption. Large numbers of crew remain sick with Covid, affecting services at Gatwick, Luton and Manchester. However, the airline said it would still be operating more flights than at any point since 2019 – about 1,600 a day, 300 more than in August 2021.

According to data from analysts Cirium, some 769 flights have been cancelled by UK airlines in the last week, mainly British Airways and easyJet, and 367 outbound flights have been delayed for two hours or more.

The aviation regulator has warned airlines to set “deliverable schedules” to reduce the number of cancelled flights. In a letter to aviation firms, the Civil Aviation Authority chief executive, Richard Moriarty, said: “Instances of late notice cancellations and excessive delays at airports are not just distressing for affected consumers but have the potential to impact confidence levels across the industry, at just the point when passengers are returning to flying.”

A higher influx than normal of returning passengers, after last weekend’s outbound peak at the start of most UK schools holidays, could also test queues at immigration.

A Home Office spokesperson said people “may face a longer wait time than usual due to a high number of passengers”. They added: “We are working closely with all UK ports and airports to ensure passengers have the smoothest possible journey, and we will continue to deploy our staff flexibly to manage this demand.”

The Port of Dover has warned of a further intensely busy period after much of the town was gridlocked last weekend as drivers sought to avoid queues for cross-Channel departures. Last weekend’s leisure traffic, with 30,000 departing passengers, was three times the level of a year ago, the port said.

Operation Brock, the traffic management scheme to deal with post-Brexit congestion, has remained in place, closing a 23-mile stretch of the M20 towards Dover to park thousands of queueing lorries.

P&O Ferries said it hoped to resume cross-Channel services at some point next week, when it hopes to have two of its four vessels based in Dover cleared to sail by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency. One ship, the Pride of Kent, was detained last week owing to concerns about the readiness of its new replacement crew, after the [mass sackings last month](#).

Passengers booked with P&O on the Dover-Calais route have been told they cannot travel this weekend, as the rival operator DFDS, which had been accommodating P&O customers, is now fully booked.

High winds have also affected some services in the past week, and freight shipping was halted at Southampton port on Thursday.

The AA said holiday traffic on UK roads would peak on Good Friday, and 27.6m car journeys were expected over the Easter weekend.

There will be some disruption for people seeking to travel by rail next weekend as extensive engineering work by Network Rail and HS2 will close the west coast mainline between London Euston and Milton Keynes.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/apr/08/airlines-and-cross-channel-services-brace-for-busiest-weekend-since-covid>

[Skip to key events](#)

[Business live](#)[Business](#)

Russia heading for deepest recession since Soviet collapse, UK warns, as inflation jumps – as it happened

Rolling coverage of the latest economic and financial news

- Latest: Russian consumer prices jump over 7% in a month
- [UK: Russia heading for deep recession as sanctions hit](#)
- [Russia cuts interest rates from 20% to 17%](#)
- [Food prices hit record highs as Ukraine war rattled wheat and oil markets](#)
- [UK airlines warned over travel disruption](#)
- [Airlines and cross-Channel services brace for busiest weekend since Covid](#)
- [Customs IT meltdown adds to long delays at Channel crossings](#)

Updated 2d ago

[*Graeme Wearden*](#)

Fri 8 Apr 2022 12.20 EDTFirst published on Fri 8 Apr 2022 03.06 EDT



The Moscow headquarters of Russia's Central Bank, which cut interest rates from 20% to 17% today
Photograph: Maxim Shemetov/Reuters

Graeme Wearden

Fri 8 Apr 2022 12.20 EDTFirst published on Fri 8 Apr 2022 03.06 EDT

Key events

- [2d ago Closing post](#)
- [2d ago Russian inflation accelerated to two-decade high in March](#)
- [2d ago FTSE 100 closes at eight-week high](#)
- [2d ago UK: Russia heading for deepest recession since Soviet Union collapsed](#)
- [2d ago UK sanctions daughters of Putin, and Lavrov](#)
- [2d ago Russia's central bank cuts interest rates to 17%](#)
- [2d ago Global food prices surge to record highs](#)

Show key events only

Live feed

Show key events only

From 2d ago

05:57

UK: Russia heading for deepest recession since Soviet Union collapsed

Russia is heading for its deepest recession since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the UK government has predicted.

Economists expect Russia's GDP this year to contract by between 8.5% and 15%, the UK says, as it [announces sanctions on Vladimir Putin's two adult daughters.](#)

GDP growth is likely to be depressed over the longer term, as Russia is cut off from Western technology, it adds.

Around £275bn, or 60% of Russian foreign currency reserves, are currently frozen, the UK estimates, which has hampered Moscow's ability to support its economy.

Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said:

Our unprecedented package of sanctions is hitting the elite and their families, while degrading the Russian economy on a scale Russia hasn't seen since the fall of the Soviet Union.

But we need to do more. Through the G7, we are working with partners to end the use of Russian energy and further hit Putin's ability to fund his illegal and unjustified invasion of Ukraine.

Together, we are tightening the ratchet on Russia's war machine, cutting off Putin's sources of cash.

[Last month the Institute of International Finance](#) forecast that Russia's economy would shrink by 15% this year, and that any further boycotts of Russian energy would drastically impair its ability to import goods and services.

Those recession concerns prompted Russia's central bank [to cut interest rates from 20% to 17% this morning](#).

[#Russia](#) delivers surprise rate cut by 300bps from 20% to 17% amid recession, Ruble rebound. Financial-stability risk no longer rising, Bank of Russia says. Central bank says further cuts could come at future meetings. Ruble stays below 80 per Dollar.
pic.twitter.com/olaQr7FMrh

— Holger Zschaepitz (@Schuldensuehner) [April 8, 2022](#)

The foreign currency freeze stopped Russia paying holders of its sovereign debt more than \$600m earlier this week. The US Treasury blocked Russia's ability to make debt payments in dollars through American banks, meaning Moscow had to set aside roubles instead. That could count as a debt default, after a 30-day grace period.

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Updated at 06.03 EDT

[2d ago 12:20](#)

Closing post

Time to wrap up for the week. Here's a round-up of our stories:

Goodnight. GW

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Updated at 12.21 EDT

2d ago 12:14

Russian inflation accelerated to two-decade high in March

Just in: inflation in Russia accelerated last month as the plunge in the rouble drove up import costs and sanctions hit the economy.

Data just released shows that Russian consumer prices jumped by 7.61% in March alone, the fastest monthly increase in inflation since 1999.

The annual CPI index rose by 16.69% in March, sharply up on February's 9.15%.

Inflation Rate in Russia increased to 16.70 percent in March from 9.20 percent in February of 2022. <https://t.co/63c4utFrrC>
pic.twitter.com/s0hWM2jvL1

— Trading Economics (@tEconomics) [April 8, 2022](#)

Reuters has more details:

In March, sugar prices jumped 44% compared with February, while prices for onions and washing machines rose 50% and 46%, respectively.

#BREAKING Inflation in Russia hit 16.7% in March year on year, according to data from the statistics agency Rosstat.

— CGTN Europe (@CGTNEurope) [April 8, 2022](#)

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2d ago 11:45

FTSE 100 closes at eight-week high

In the City, the UK's blue-chip stock index has closed at its highest level in two months, as European markets shrug off concerns over slowing growth and the ongoing Ukraine war.

The [FTSE](#) 100 has jumped 1.5% today, or 118 points, to end at 7,670 points.

Miners and oil companies were in the top risers, such as **Anglo American** (+4.8%), **Shell** (+3.9%) and BP (+3.7%). Banks and retailers also rallied.

Stocks were up across Europe too, despite concerns that the cost of living crisis will slow the recovery. Germany's **DAX** gained around 1.4%, while France's **CAC** index was 1.3% higher ahead of the first-round vote in France's presidential election this weekend.

David Madden, market analyst at **Equiti Capital**, wrote:

Stock markets are on track to finish higher this afternoon as traders have shrugged off the negative headlines about additional sanctions on Russia, as well as the chatter about higher interest rates from the Federal Reserve.

By and large, it was a negative week for equities as countries revealed plans to target Russia's energy exports. Earlier today, Japan announced that it will ban the importation of coal from Russia – the EU made a similar announcement during the week. Dealers are getting used to the idea of even higher interest rates from the Fed as US central bankers are open to hiking rates by 50 basis points in a bid to tackle rising inflation.

[**#fechamento**](#)

• 8/4/22 12:50

Europa

□ □ [**#DAX**](#) +1,46% 14.283,02

□ □ [**#FTSE100**](#) +1,51% 7.666,00

□ □ [#CAC40](#) +1,34% 6.548,22
□ □ [#Stoxx50](#) +1,48% 3.858,35 <https://t.co/YXDwDD1JUa>

— Alex Princival (@alex_princival) [April 8, 2022](#)

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Updated at 11.51 EDT

[2d ago 11:19](#)

[Russia's central bank's interest rate cut](#) at an unscheduled meeting of policy makers today is a sign that efforts to stabilize the country's financial system are having an effect, says the **WSJ**:

In a statement announcing the reduction in the key rate to 17% from 20%, the Bank of Russia said the ruble's rebound from sharp losses in the days immediately following the Feb. 24 invasion had reduced the risk that inflation would move sharply higher.

Russia's central bank reduced its key rate to 17% from 20%, a slight stepping back from the emergency measures taken in response to punishing Western sanctions <https://t.co/1Sz0uy5Enq>

— WSJ Central Banks (@WSJCentralBanks) [April 8, 2022](#)

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[2d ago 10:51](#)

The costs of insuring merchant ships sailing to ports in the Black Sea has spiraled out of control, Bloomberg reports this afternoon.

This is becoming a huge potential impediment to the movement of Russian cargoes from the region, adding to the pressures on its economy.

Here are the details:

Underwriters are charging as much as 10% of the value of a ship's hull -- basically the vessel's worth as an asset -- for what is called additional war-risk premium, according to four people involved in the market.

Some are simply quoting to cover at prices that they know will be refused. There was almost zero cost prior to the war.

It means that insurance now likely exceeds the cost of hiring the vessel itself. A \$50m, five-year old tanker hauling a standard 1 million-barrel Russian cargo would need \$5m just in insurance premiums -- about \$1.5m above the cost of hiring the carrier.

The cost of insuring a ship going into the Black Sea is spiraling out of control as war risks mount (including drifting mines). Hiring a Suezmax (1m barrels) from the Black Sea to Italy costs about \$3.5 million -- but the insurance adds another \$5 million<https://t.co/lp9zcJnZEb>

— Javier Blas (@JavierBlas) [April 8, 2022](#)

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[2d ago 10:31](#)

While Russia is cutting interest rates, Sri Lanka has **doubled** them as the economic meltdown gripping the country continued.

The Central Bank of Sri Lanka's (CBSL) monetary board raised its standing lending facility to 14.50% and its standing deposit facility to 13.50%, both up 700 basis points.

It acted to try to tackle inflation, with prices having soared due to crippling shortages of basic goods driven by a devastating economic crisis.

Earlier this week, the Sri Lankan rupee plunged to become the world's worst-performing currency, while its sovereign dollar bonds are trade at deeply distressed levels.

There have been warnings that Sri Lanka facing the imminent threat of starvation, as [Hannah Ellis-Petersen](#), our South Asia correspondent, reported:

Over the past few months, Sri Lanka has been facing a dire financial crisis on multiple fronts, triggered partially by the impact of Covid-19, which battered the economy, as well as mounting foreign debts, rising inflation and economic mismanagement by the government, led by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa.

The country barely has any foreign currency reserves left, leading to dangerous shortages of food, gas and medicines as it is unable to import foreign goods, while people are enduring power blackouts of up to eight hours a day. The situation has pushed thousands [out onto the streets in protest](#) in recent days, calling for the resignation of the president.

Protestors have been hit with teargas and water cannon in some instances and dozens have been arrested, but it has done nothing to prevent citizens from across all generations and walks of life turning out on the streets.

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[2d ago 10:17](#)

Elsewhere in the markets, the pound has dropped below \$1.30 to its lowest level against the US dollar since November 2020.

Sterling is under pressure against the dollar, as America's central bank has underlined its determination this week to tighten monetary policy to tame inflation, by unwinding its stimulus package.

The pound falls below \$1.30 for the first time since November 2020, as the Bank of England's hawkishness begins to pale compared to the Fed
<https://t.co/cqCi3JLCXO> pic.twitter.com/O8hSh4LAPU

— Bloomberg UK (@BloombergUK) [April 8, 2022](#)

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[2d ago](#)[09:55](#)

[Today's interest rate cut](#) suggests that Russia's central bank is confident that the "most acute phase of the economic crisis has now passed" and a bank run has been avoided, says **Liam Peach**, Emerging Europe Economist at [Capital Economics](#).

Peach predicts that further, gradual, rate cuts are likely over the course of this year as the CBR tries to bring inflation back to target, adding:

The decision came as a surprise as no official meeting had been scheduled until late-April (we had expected a 300bp cut in June), but the press statement pointed to two developments.

First, the central bank said that "there is a steady inflow of funds to fixed-term deposits", which suggests that the CBR has become confident that its emergency rate hike to 20% at the end of February, alongside capital controls and other measures, prevented a major and destabilising bank run.

The second is that the CBR said that "weekly data point to a noticeable slowdown in current price growth rates".

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[2d ago 09:45](#)



Joanna Partridge

UK travel news: HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) says it has “successfully made changes” to its network, allowing traders and hauliers to use the goods vehicle movement service (GVMS), a post-Brexit customs system which has not been available for over a week.

The portal, which is used to create a goods movement reference (GMR) number needed for exporting from and importing to the UK, had been [suffering an outage since last Thursday](#).

Even though HMRC had said hauliers could use other documentation to show that a customs declaration had been made, as part of its contingency measures, industry insiders had complained that the GVMS outage was adding to lengthy queues of HGVs trying to reach France by ferry or Eurotunnel.



Lorries queued in Operation Brock on the M20 near Ashford in Kent yesterday
Photograph: Gareth Fuller/PA

Thousands of lorry drivers were caught in the gridlock, which was also partly caused by reduced sailings from Dover while P&O Ferries is out of service, plus [extra Easter tourist traffic](#), and a backlog of freight traffic.

HMRC said:

“Contingencies will remain in place over the weekend to continue to ensure the movement of goods and allow continued testing.”

From midday on Monday, all traders will have to create a GMR - a barcode - with GVMS in order to transport their goods.

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Updated at 10.14 EDT

[2d ago 08:15](#)

Back in the UK, the cost of living crisis means households are more worried about their personal finances than they have been in at least a

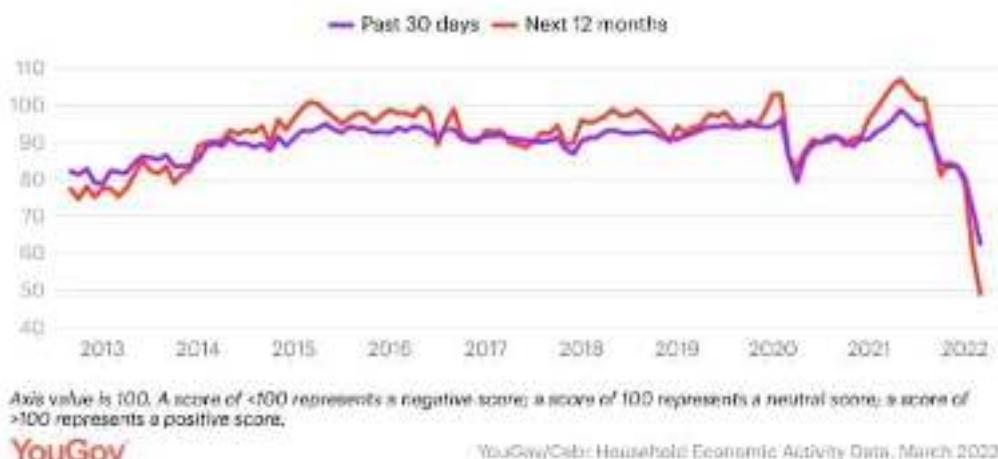
decade

The latest analysis from YouGov and the Centre for [Economics](#) and Business Research show that confidence about household finances is the lowest since the survey began 10 years ago.

Households were more pessimistic about the outlook over the next year, and reported a sharp deterioration over the last month, as rising food and energy prices hit budgets.

YouGov/Cebr: Household finance measures hit record lows (again) as cost of living crisis drags on

Compared to one month ago, how has your household's financial situation changed? And how do you think your household's financial situation will have changed 12 months from now?



UK household finance confidence Photograph: CEBR/YouGov

Emma McInnes, Global Head of Financial Services at **YouGov**, says:

“The ongoing cost of living crisis and uncertainty caused by continued conflict in Ukraine has, once again, seriously impacted on both consumer confidence and the public’s household finances. For the second month running, tumbling household finance measures - both retrospective and forward-looking – find themselves at their lowest ever level since tracking began almost ten years ago.

Aside from a small uptick in job security outlook, confidence and household finance figures, combined with house price scores stagnating

after four months of growth, have largely contributed to the overall consumer index continuing to fall”

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[2d ago 07:15](#)

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[2d ago 06:57](#)

Here's **Craig Erlam**, senior market analyst at **OANDA**, on today's cut to [Russia's main interest rate today](#):

The Bank of Russia [CRB] is seemingly buoyed by recent actions from the Kremlin despite severe sanctions continuing to be imposed by the West.

The capital controls that have been imposed have helped to shore up the rouble which appears to have given the CBR confidence that interest rates no longer need to be so high.

It cut the Key Rate by 3% and left the door open to further cuts depending on financial and economic conditions. At 17%, the rate remains extremely high as inflation is still expected to spike and the economy severely contract.

When the Ukraine war began, the rouble plunged from below 80 to the US dollar to as low as 135 roubles/\$1.

But it has now recovered to near February's pre-invasion levels, supported by capital controls including a ban on banks and brokers selling dollars, euros and other foreign currencies, and [curbs on sending money abroad](#).

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[2d ago](#) [05:57](#)

UK: Russia heading for deepest recession since Soviet Union collapsed

Russia is heading for its deepest recession since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the UK government has predicted.

Economists expect Russia's GDP this year to contract by between 8.5% and 15%, the UK says, as it [announces sanctions on Vladimir Putin's two adult daughters](#).

GDP growth is likely to be depressed over the longer term, as Russia is cut off from Western technology, it adds.

Around £275bn, or 60% of Russian foreign currency reserves, are currently frozen, the UK estimates, which has hampered Moscow's ability to support its economy.

Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said:

Our unprecedented package of sanctions is hitting the elite and their families, while degrading the Russian economy on a scale Russia hasn't seen since the fall of the Soviet Union.

But we need to do more. Through the G7, we are working with partners to end the use of Russian energy and further hit Putin's ability to fund his illegal and unjustified invasion of Ukraine.

Together, we are tightening the ratchet on Russia's war machine, cutting off Putin's sources of cash.

[Last month the Institute of International Finance](#) forecast that Russia's economy would shrink by 15% this year, and that any further boycotts of

Russian energy would drastically impair its ability to import goods and services.

Those recession concerns prompted Russia's central bank [to cut interest rates from 20% to 17% this morning](#).

[#Russia](#) delivers surprise rate cut by 300bps from 20% to 17% amid recession, Ruble rebound. Financial-stability risk no longer rising, Bank of Russia says. Central bank says further cuts could come at future meetings. Ruble stays below 80 per Dollar.
pic.twitter.com/olaQr7FMrh

— Holger Zschaepitz (@Schuldensuehner) [April 8, 2022](#)

The foreign currency freeze stopped Russia paying holders of its sovereign debt more than \$600m earlier this week. The US Treasury blocked Russia's ability to make debt payments in dollars through American banks, meaning Moscow had to set aside roubles instead. That could count as a debt default, after a 30-day grace period.

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Updated at 06.03 EDT

[2d ago](#)[05:33](#)

UK sanctions daughters of Putin, and Lavrov

The UK has added Russian president Vladimir Putin's daughters to its sanctions list, matching a move by the United States this week.

Katerina Tikhonova and **Maria Vorontsova**, Putin's two adult daughters with his former wife Lyudmila Shkrebneva, and **Yekaterina Sergeyevna Vinokurova**, daughter of foreign minister Sergey Lavrov, will be subject to travel bans and asset freezes.

The UK say the move will further target “the lavish lifestyles of the Kremlin’s inner circle”.

By freezing the assets and limiting the travel of Putin’s allies, the UK Government is sealing off reservoirs of cash funding the conflict, while also making sure those who have benefited from Putin’s rule feel the consequences.

New sanctions on Russia

- EU ban on Russian coal imports
- ban on Russian ships in EU ports

- UK sanctions Putin’s daughters

— Scott Beasley (@SkyScottBeasley) [April 8, 2022](#)

My colleague Rupert Neate wrote about **Tikhonova** and **Vorontsova** earlier this week:

Katerina Tikhonova, 35, the younger daughter, was born in Dresden in 1986 while Putin was working as a KGB spy. Tikhonova, who uses the surname of her maternal grandmother, studied at St Petersburg State University and Moscow State University and has a master’s degree in physics and mathematics.

As well as studying, Tikhonova has a passion for Japanese culture and acrobatic rock’n’roll dancing, an athletic form of boogie-woogie. In 2013 she and her dance partner came fifth in the world championships in Switzerland.

It was [footage from her dance competitions](#), compared with pictures from the website of Moscow State University, where she works, that helped to first establish that Tikhonova was Putin’s daughter in 2015.

Putin’s elder daughter, Maria Vorontsova, 36, is a paediatric endocrinologist, studying the effects of hormones on the body.

In 2019 Vorontsova, who lives in a penthouse apartment opposite the US embassy in Moscow, gave an interview on Russian state TV revealing plans for a £500m medical venture aimed at helping to cure cancer.

Vorontsova [married the Dutch businessman Jorrit Faassen](#), and the couple lived in the penthouse of an exclusive apartment building in Voorschoten, near the Hague. In 2014 some Dutch neighbours called for her to be expelled from the country after the downing of MH17 by pro-Russia forces over Ukraine.

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Updated at 05.35 EDT

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2022.04.08 - Spotlight

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Prison, lawsuits and a glovebox of fake cash: the film the KLF didn't want you to see



Justified and ancient ... a car is driven off Cape Wrath in a reconstructed scene from Who Killed the KLF? Photograph: Bohemia Euphoria

The enigmatic rave duo refused to approve Chris Atkins's documentary on them – and then he got five years for tax fraud. He explains how he channelled their anarchic spirit and made it anyway, Ford Timelord and all

Chris Atkins

Fri 8 Apr 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 8 Apr 2022 23.58 EDT

In 2009 my long suffering producer Ian Neil sent me a text: “You should really make a film about the [KLF](#).” This enigmatic and brilliant band were a mainstay on Top of the Pops in my youth, and were best known for burning all their money in the mid 90s, when I was a middle-class teenage anarchist and thought that torching a million pounds was by far the best thing you could do with it. “Aren’t they dead?” I replied.

It turned out that the two members of the KLF, Bill Drummond and Jimmy Cauty, were very much alive, but had gone to extreme lengths to destroy their legacy. They had deleted their entire back catalogue in 1992 and written a vow of silence on a car, which they promptly pushed off a cliff. A few enquiries revealed we weren’t the first people to suggest making a documentary, but the band had told everyone else to piss off.

However, I had just made a documentary, [Starsuckers](#) – in which we sold fake stories to the tabloids – that was partly inspired by the KLF’s own press-baiting stunts. This coincidence got me a sit down with Bill and Jimmy, and they insisted on meeting in a dingy cafe in Farringdon, London, like the one in The Apprentice where the losers gather before getting fired.

The pair were then in their mid 50s, and patiently listened as I explained how our film would chart their extraordinary journey from sampling stolen records in a south London squat to becoming one of the biggest bands in the world a couple of years later: six UK Top 10 hits in 18 months that crashed an entire mythological rave universe into transatlantic pop culture. They nodded sagely, and very politely told me to piss off.

Normally that would be the end of it. The rules of film-making dictate that music documentaries require the artists’ consent. No access meant no rights

to music, and no first-hand stories. But I kept ruminating on this exasperating paradox: that the band with the most unhinged story imaginable was slipping into obscurity because they didn't want their story to be told. It was my cameraman Chris Smith who made the mistake of drunkenly asking: "Well, what would the KLF do?" The answer was suddenly obvious: they'd stuff the rules and get on with it. Which is exactly what we did.

The story of the KLF is a reminder that you rarely make anything interesting by doing things the right way

To make [Who Killed the KLF?](#) we started by reconstructing the band's more dramatic gestures, and kicked off with the big one: Bill and Jimmy igniting £1m cash on the remote Scottish island of Jura. The Bank of England has pretty tight rules about reproducing the Queen's currency, for obvious reasons. But my mother found an old £50 Houbion banknote, long out of circulation, and printed off half a million quid's worth. We drove to Scotland where I hired a couple of extras who fleetingly looked like Bill and Jimmy, and took the ferry to Jura. Burning money is extremely satisfying; we got a bit carried away and accidentally set fire to a hut. Thankfully, my fake Bill was also a fireman and it was quickly extinguished.

I later took my car for an MOT and got a very worried call from the garage. "There's 50 grand cash in your glovebox, mate."

"Don't worry, it's all fake," I replied, before realising this probably didn't help.



All abroad, all abroad ... the real Bill, Jimmy and Ford Timelord, on the trail of Abba in 1987. Photograph: Lawrence Watkins

We next recreated the KLF pushing a car off Cape Wrath. I tracked down the identical model, a Nissan Bluebird. My lookalikes pushed it towards the cliff's edge before the elderly owner slammed on the brakes. In retrospect we should have used stuntmen and safety ropes, as his eyesight wasn't too great and it twice nearly went over.

Bill and Jimmy always brought witnesses on their original adventures, who were only too happy to give us first-hand testimony. The journalist James Brown, later editor of Loaded, was still a teenager when he accompanied them to Sweden in a doomed attempt to persuade Abba not to sue the KLF for illegally sampling Dancing Queen. It turned out Abba lived in Henley-on-Thames, so they burned half the offending records in a field and threw the rest into the North Sea. Claire Fletcher was a young Radio 1 producer who was told to get on a plane with no idea where she were going. She landed in Jura where her passport was stamped with the KLF logo, was handed a yellow cape and joined a huge Wicker Man ceremony. Claire met her future husband at the rave afterwards and they now have four kids, one of whose initials spells KLF. We gathered many similarly surreal tales, but still had the same central problem: I was making a film about two people who refused to talk to me.

They may have written a [step-by-step guide to having a No 1 hit](#), but the story of the KLF is a reminder that you rarely make anything interesting by doing things the right way. Our anarchic approach was rewarded when a contributor arrived with a couple of dusty audio cassettes, that had sat in his loft for years, containing old interviews. The quality was scratchy but the contents were gold; some parts were really dark, others had me crying with laughter. The pair were finally opening up about their emotional journey, and the story could now be told in their own words. However, I could still remain completely objective, unlike in most music docs where the narrative is tightly controlled by the artists themselves.



The heat is on ... burning £1m on Jura, as recreated in Who Killed the KLF?
Photograph: Bohemia Euphoria

Everything was going swimmingly until I was given a [five-year prison sentence](#) for tax fraud in 2016. I had used a dodgy tax scheme to fund Starsuckers, and HMRC prosecuted everyone involved. I spent nine months in HMP Wandsworth (recounted in my book [A Bit of a Stretch](#)), after which I was moved to an open prison. The conditions were far more relaxed, enabling Chris to sneak in my laptop so I could quietly start editing. Being incarcerated was extremely beneficial for the creative process: free from the distractions of social media, alcohol and idiotic executive producers.

I was released in December 2018. I had a rough cut that mostly resembled a radio play, with amazing audio commentary but nothing to look at. Within three weeks I was filming more reconstructions in an abandoned biscuit factory that we turned into Trancentral, the south London [squat](#) where the KLF started their empire. I tracked down the band's sound engineer and sourced the same equipment they used on hits such as 3am Eternal and What Time Is Love? More stand-ins were hired; I think we went through four Bill and Jimmys.

But there was one central character missing. [The KLF](#) drove everywhere in a battered American police car, Ford Timelord, that featured in all their music videos, and even appeared on BBC Breakfast. The original car was long destroyed by Jimmy, but I found an ardent fan who had lovingly recreated this legendary vehicle, right down to the seat fabric and tax disc. We took Ford Mk 2 filming in Suffolk, and were chased out of a field by an irate man.

I broke into waste ground in Turnpike Lane and buried a fake Brit, as the KLF did with their real award at Stonehenge

A more difficult obstacle was how to deal with the music. My lawyer Simon Goldberg came to the rescue, and said that as long as we were critiquing the music, we could make use of a copyright exclusion called "fair dealing" for the purposes of criticism and review. That way, we might be able to use limited clips of their music, as long as we gave them appropriate acknowledgement. Thankfully, my film is chockful of critique, not least from the KLF themselves, so this all worked out.

Everything was going swimmingly (again) until there was a pandemic. We filmed the very last shot on the 23 March 2020, hours after Boris Johnson's stay-at-home order. I broke into some waste ground in Turnpike Lane, London, and buried a fake Brit award, as the KLF did with their real award at Stonehenge. We edited the film through lockdown, and waited until now, when cinemas are thriving, to release it.

But the KLF were not going to stop being unpredictable. Despite vowing to never reissue their music again, the band released their biggest hits on

Spotify on 1 January 2021. Bill and Jimmy said they wanted to assemble these tracks into one place, before they died and their kids had to deal with it.

Shortly afterwards, we were sent a string of legal threats from the duo's publisher, Warner Chappell, accusing us of copyright infringement. Apparently they neither appreciated the irony that an underlying meaning of KLF is Kopyright Liberation Front nor that the very music they were harrumphing about was riddled with uncleared samples.

A few weeks ago Bill asked me for a coffee with him and Jimmy, in the cafe we had met in a dozen years before. I went with both hope and trepidation: their blessing would make any issue with Warner Chappell much easier, but would they try to block the film?

In the end, they were extremely kind and welcoming. "We've seen it," Bill grinned. This knocked me for six, given we had avoided sending out links before the release. "And we love it." Jimmy had a quibble about the sequencer we had used in the reconstruction, and Bill noted that he wasn't the stage manager of [Ken Campbell's epic 1976 production of Illuminatus!](#), but the production designer. I recounted how I had spent more than a decade following in their footsteps, feeling like an honorary member of the KLF.

"What are you doing now?" I asked. "Working," replied Bill, with no further explanation. Enigmatic and brilliant to the last. "See you back here in 10 years," I told them, and I was on my way.

Who Killed the KLF? is available now to buy or rent on [Amazon Prime Video](#), [Apple TV](#) and other streaming services, and screens in select cinemas at the end of April.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2022/apr/08/who-killed-the-klf-the-film-drummond-cauty-did-not-want-you-to-see>

Consumer rights

Easter travel chaos: what to do if your flight is delayed or you catch Covid

Flight's cancelled? Missed it as a result of queues? Stuck at a ferry port? We look at your rights



Long queues at Manchester airport's security. Photograph: Phil Noble/Reuters

[Miles Brignall](#) and [Rupert Jones](#)

Fri 8 Apr 2022 09.15 EDTFirst published on Fri 8 Apr 2022 05.26 EDT

With many schools breaking up at the start of the month, the Easter getaway was supposed to be well under way by now – but instead it's been a week of travel chaos.

Airlines have cancelled scores of flights a day, there have been delays at airports and ferry terminals and Covid cases are sweeping the country. We look at your rights if you find yourself seriously delayed or unable to travel.

I was due to travel this weekend but my flight's been cancelled. What are my rights?

Airlines [have cancelled more than 1,000 UK flights](#) in recent days because of high levels of crew absences in part related to Covid infections, but also because they have not rehired enough staff since lockdowns eased.

If your flight was cancelled in the two weeks before its departure date and you have chosen to abandon the whole trip rather than find another way to get to your destination, you are entitled to a full refund of the fare you paid, plus compensation.

EU regulation 261/2004 compensation rules have been written into UK law, meaning you have exactly the same rights to claim flight compensation as you did before Brexit.

If your flight was short-haul – less than 1,500km – you are entitled to compensation of £220 a passenger. For middle-distance flights of 1,500 to 3,500km the figure rises to £350 and for a long-haul destination more than 3,500 km away it is £520.



The vast majority of cancelled flights involve easyJet and BA. Photograph: Amer Ghazzal/REX/Shutterstock

Can I ask to be rerouted or for the airline to pay for an alternative flight?

If a flight is cancelled before you are due to depart, irrespective of the reason, you have the right to ask to be rerouted on an alternative flight, either with the same airline or another one. In some cases the airline will offer this – BA told us this week it had been doing so – but it may not always be the case.

If an airline cancels your flight at the last minute and you are forced to buy a new flight with a rival carrier, you can claim the cost of the replacement flight. If your original flight was more expensive, however, you'd be better off requesting a full refund.

Be aware that airlines often refuse these requests or to cover things such as onward travel by another form of transport to your original destination, but you are entitled to the money.

If you are rerouted by your original airline and the replacement flight arrives more than two hours late, you are entitled to £220 compensation a passenger for flights of up to 1,500km.

Don't the airlines have the 'extraordinary circumstance' get-out?

If flights are cancelled because of extreme weather or an air traffic control strike, for example, the EU 261 compensation rules no longer apply.

This does not, however, extend to staff absences, according to Coby Benson, a flight compensation expert at the law firm [Bott & Co](#). He says airlines have tried to argue in a number of court cases that staff illness was an extraordinary circumstance and that they should be exempt from having to pay compensation, but they have been rebuffed each time.

The overwhelming majority of affected flights this week have been cancelled by just two operators, British Airways and easyJet, suggesting this is not an industry-wide problem.

My flight was cancelled more than two weeks before travel. Will I be compensated?

No, but you are entitled to a full refund or a replacement flight.

I missed my flight because I was stuck in a long queue trying to get through the chaos at Manchester airport. Will they pay up?

It's highly unlikely. It might seem very unfair given that the airport has been in chaos all week, but Benson says he is not aware of any possible legal basis that would allow passengers to pursue the airport operator for their losses.



Long queues for check-in at Manchester airport. Photograph: Mark Waugh/The Guardian

Will my travel insurance pay up for a missed departure?

The better – ie. the more expensive – policies often include cover for missed departures. The exact circumstances vary, but they will generally protect you in the event you miss the departure of your international flight, ferry, cruise ship or train because of a strike or other public transport disruption. It is unclear, however, if they would cover the incidents such as this week's airport chaos.

Policies usually provide missed departure cover if there is an accident involving the vehicle you are travelling in or it breaks down, but not general traffic delays.

What's happening on the ferries to France?

A large number of P&O Ferries customers face having their Easter holidays ruined after fully booked DFDS announced it would no longer honour P&O tickets from Dover to France.

DFDS had been accepting P&O passengers since its rival suspended its Dover-Calais crossings on 17 March after it sacked nearly 800 members of staff so it could hire cheaper agency workers.

The mutual agreement was paused on 8 April because of a lack of capacity, leaving ticket-holders having to rebook with DFDS themselves or Eurotunnel. P&O Ferries has said it hopes to get its ships back in action next week.

P&O passengers unable to travel this weekend are entitled to a full refund, but unlike air passengers they are not entitled to compensation or rerouting.



Traffic queues to check in at the port of Dover. Photograph: Gareth Fuller/PA

What about the Stena route to Ireland?

Stena announced earlier this week [that it was cancelling all ferry services](#) between Fishguard in south Wales and Rosslare until 12 April. Ticket-holders have been told that they can travel on Irish Ferries services from Pembroke docks instead.

This will not present too many problems for drivers, but foot passengers and cyclists face having to make the 27-mile journey themselves. Stena staff told *Guardian Money* this week that no alternative transport had been laid on, but that passengers not travelling in vehicles could ask for a full refund if they didn't wish to travel.

Am I allowed on a flight or ferry if I have Covid?

The advice from most experts is that you should not travel if you are displaying Covid symptoms. Few would argue that is morally the correct stance.

[The government's guidance for England](#) published on 1 April states that if you have tested positive for Covid, you should “try to stay at home and avoid contact with other people for five days”. It doesn’t say you can’t travel. Rather it says that if you leave your home during this time, there are steps you can take to reduce the chances of passing it on to others, including wearing a mask.

How far you are likely to get if you try to travel with Covid will depend on where you are going and, perhaps, whether you are visibly ill.

Rory Boland, the editor of Which? Travel, says: “While the government advises that people do not have to self-isolate when they have Covid, some airlines and ferry operators will ask you not to travel with them.

“Most travellers we hear from who have symptoms of Covid take a test beforehand and, if they are positive, decide that isolating at home is the responsible thing to do.”

He also says flexible booking policies and travel insurance “will continue to be essential to ensure passengers aren’t left out of pocket if they get Covid and can’t travel”.

If you do decide to carry on with your plans, you may be able to catch a flight or ferry, but you could be turned away if you are clearly unwell. Stena Line, for example, states: “When checking in, you will be asked to state your health condition. Passengers with any indication of suspected Covid-19 will be denied boarding.”

According to easyJet, for some journeys at some airports there may be a temperature check carried out at departure and/or arrival, depending on destination requirements. “Where there are temperature checks, if you do not pass, you will not be able to fly,” it says.

Those heading to the popular Easter destination of Morocco still have to present a valid vaccine pass and proof of a negative PCR test taken within 48 hours of boarding. It is also conducting random rapid antigen tests on arrival for selected groups of passengers.

In terms of coming back to the UK, since 18 March, anyone entering the country no longer needs to take a Covid test or fill in a passenger locator form, whether they are vaccinated or not.

Which destinations are test-free?

The government has removed the last Covid restrictions in England and a growing number of other countries are easing their rules, but many still have requirements for people arriving from overseas.

France dropped its requirement for a sworn statement that you have not had any Covid symptoms recently on 31 March. Fully vaccinated travellers only need to present proof of vaccination, though those flying into the country are required to fill in an EU passenger locator form.

Most adults travelling to Spain can enter without needing to do a test. You must, however, show valid proof of being fully vaccinated and fill in a Spanish “health control form” before you travel. The rules are different for children and teenagers. Unvaccinated youngsters aged 12 to 17 can provide a negative PCR or similar test taken within 72 hours prior to arrival. Spain is one of the countries that says it may do temperature checks on arrival and carry out additional tests if there are concerns.

Fully vaccinated foreign travellers entering Canada “by land, air or water” are longer required to do pre-entry tests as of April 1. You still have to submit your travel and vaccination details via the ArriveCAN website or app though, and on arrival border services staff may stop you and say you’ve been randomly selected for a mandatory Covid test.

It’s a fast-moving situation, and not every country making changes is easing its requirements. Which? recently published a guide to “[16 test-free travel destinations](#) for a no-hassle holiday,” including Mexico and Iceland.

What about cruises?

If you are going on a cruise, be aware that many operators have quite strict rules at the moment. P&O Cruises, Cunard and Saga are among those that

currently require you to do a Covid test at the terminal before you board. In the case of Saga it's two tests.

As you might expect, if you test positive, you won't be getting on board. P&O Cruises and Cunard say that if that happens, you and any guests travelling from your household will be given a "future cruise credit" to the value of your holiday. Saga says that your cruise will be postponed until a later date.

There are other rules too. Cunard stipulates that if you or a member of your household tests positive for Covid within 14 days of your holiday, you won't be allowed to travel. Saga says you will be denied boarding if you have returned to the UK from an overseas trip in the seven days before your cruise.

Will my travel insurance pay up if I catch Covid abroad?

It all depends on what cover you were offered when you bought the policy. Most travel insurers will cover any medical bills if you catch Covid while abroad. Some will pay for the extra accommodation and new flights required for a delayed return, but plenty will not. It really is a case of digging out your policy documents.

Staysure's enhanced and generous Covid cancellation cover, for example, only applies to policies bought after 29 April 2021, and only as long as the customer has had their recommended vaccinations. It will cover the cost of cancelling because one or all the party goes down with the virus. Plenty of other policies won't, particularly those bought some time ago.

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Brand or church? How Hillsong is facing a day of reckoning



People pray during a service at Hillsong Church in New York. Photograph: Andrés Kudacki/AP

Several years of scandals and a culture of secrecy has led to calls for an overhaul of the global Pentecostal megachurch

[Elle Hardy](#)
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It was an emotional [sermon](#) and Phil Dooley, the interim leader of the global evangelical megachurch Hillsong was preaching about pain.

“Pain happens in life – sometimes we cause the pain,” he told Hillsong congregations around the world from its Hills Campus headquarters in western [Sydney](#) last Sunday. “In order to get healthy, sometimes we have to go through some pain.”

Without directly referencing the recent troubles affecting the Pentecostal megachurch – which in the last two weeks alone include its founder [Brian Houston resigning](#) for breaching its code of conduct after two women said he had behaved inappropriately towards them, and the airing of an explosive documentary containing allegations about the church’s culture – Dooley also spoke about the need for “honest conversations” and added that “healing can only take place when we acknowledge this pain”.

The pain Dooley speaks of has been felt around the world. A respected church elder and Houston family confidant has resigned, nine of its 16 American church campuses have broken from the church, including the resignation of its first African American pastor and leader of Hillsong Atlanta which opened less than 12 months ago.

Sources say church attendance numbers, which have been rumoured to be in decline after several years of global scandals, have been noticeably down the last two Sundays. One production worker said camera crews were struggling to film the weekend’s sermons “without showing all of the empty seats”.

Hillsong – which has grown from a congregation of 45 in western Sydney in 1983 to churches in 30 countries and on six continents – is in crisis.

This week the Guardian has been made aware of rifts at the highest levels of the church that appear to run deeper than has previously been reported. This

split led to the resignations of senior figures in Australia and the United States which began prior to Brian Houston resigning from all positions at the church on 23 March.



Former Hillsong Church leader Brian Houston. Photograph: Mick Tsikas/AP

A rift in the church's factions

Publicly, divisions have played out between what might be termed the spiritual and business factions of the church. The Guardian now understands there has been a split in senior management in the business wing of Hillsong about the direction of the church, including the moving to a future without the Houstons and other senior board members.

There has also been significant debate within the highest levels of Hillsong about it operating as a brand rather than a church.

Sources have stated they feel conflicted about airing this information publicly, but fear the church will not change without external pressure.

Hillsong's troubles came to a head several weeks ago with the resignation of Hillsong stalwart Dr Gordon Lee from the Australian-based church eldership, the body that looks after spiritual governance.

Lee's resignation is believed to be due to concerns with the handling of Brian Houston's alleged "moral failings". Houston resigned as global senior pastor after an internal investigation into complaints that he behaved inappropriately towards two women found that he had breached the church's code of conduct.

In a [leaked transcript](#) of an all-staff meeting on 18 March, Sydney-based Hillsong general manager George Aghajanian noted there were a lot of rumours circulating started by "a few of the elders" who he claims were not involved in internal investigations.

"The elders' role is to basically pray for people, and to care for people spiritually," Aghajanian said. "But beyond that they have no government's [sic] authority in our church."

It is unclear whether the eldership has been formally dismissed, but sources say that Aghajanian's comments "reducing them down to nothing more than people who only prayed for the sick" means it has been effectively neutered.

Aghajanian's apparent attitude towards the elders has upset many staff and raised the ire of many in the "spiritual" faction of the church, and increasingly some within the "business" side of the church.

Sources with knowledge of Hillsong's power structure fear he could be using the crisis to consolidate his already considerable power.

After several years of scandals in Hillsong churches culminating in the sacking of "celebrity preacher" and head pastor of Hillsong New York City Carl Lentz, the church hierarchy has been restructuring its governance. Local boards are being disbanded and put under the authority of the Australian-based [global board](#), led by Aghajanian, who is described as the man behind the Houstons' throne. He presides over the church's business operations.



Carl Lentz, the former head pastor of Hillsong New York City, pictured here in July 2013. Photograph: Tina Fineberg/AP

The church has set up unpopular but [widespread use](#) of nondisclosure and non-compete agreements, routinely requiring workers and volunteers to sign NDAs, including Hillsong College students, who [must sign an NDA](#) each semester. While the church has said this is part of their “internal commitment to facilitate the protection of personal information” and necessary to comply with Australian privacy regulation, critics have long maintained it sets a culture of secrecy and fear, and forces people with complaints to take them in-house.

Those complaints are often investigated by George Aghajanian’s wife, Margaret, the church’s head of pastoral care oversight. She is said to have a substantial role in interpersonal affairs and has investigated a number of incidents that have rocked the church in recent years. Former Hillsong College student Anna Crenshaw, who has alleged she was a victim of sexual assault by a fellow staffer and went through an investigation led by Aghajanian, described repeated questioning, accused the church of sitting on statements, and of a culture where she believes the church has “protected the perpetrator over the victim”.

Last year, a Hillsong spokesperson [told Vanity Fair](#) Crenshaw's complaint led to an internal investigation which "did take some time to complete as there were multiple parties present at the time of the alleged behaviour". The perpetrator, Justin Mays, who was subsequently convicted of indecent assault, was "stood down" from his positions during the investigation.

The power couple is cited by some Hillsong insiders and regular parishioners as the reason they declined to speak on record. The Guardian has contacted the Aghajanians for comment.

One leader who is willing to speak publicly is Phoenix-based Pastor Terry Crist. A respected figure in the church beyond the United States, he [withdrew his six churches](#) from the Hillsong umbrella on 27 March.

Over the weekend, he spoke to the Guardian and repeated his call for an overhaul of Hillsong governance.

"I believe it is in the best interest of [Hillsong Church](#) globally to conduct an internal investigation related to board conduct, to immediately restore the Sydney eldership, to make the findings public, and to dismiss the board members who have protected the institution and not the people," he said.

Crist said his local parishioners are "very supportive" of his move to sever ties with Hillsong.

"Our church has always felt the tension between our need to focus on local ministry versus the expectation to focus on the global initiatives," he said. "I have heard from pastors all over the world this week expressing their concern for us and offering encouragement and prayers."

An expert in church governance has also warned that the resignation of Houston may not be enough, as leadership culture is rarely set by a single person.

'A culture change is almost impossible'

William Vanderbloemen is a church recruitment specialist who works with about 250 of the 400 largest churches in the United States.

“In my experience, whenever there is a sudden or scandalous departure of a pastor and serious questions about the organisation’s culture, there is also a need for a more holistic review of the administration,” he said.

“I’ve seen it so many times. Boards have to ask hard questions about who else should or shouldn’t step down. What about biological family or close friends involved in running the organisation?”

I don’t know that you can do a cultural overhaul without having some level of personnel overhaul

William Vanderbloemen

Vanderbloemen said churches in crisis are also prone to overcorrection where new leaders are hamstrung by overcontrolling boards.

“In a church like Hillsong where the founders are still the leader, a culture change is almost impossible without a leadership change,” he said.

“Phil Dooley is a great leader and I hope he will be able to turn things around. But in my experience, I don’t know that you can do a cultural overhaul without having some level of personnel overhaul.”

Many regular churchgoers agree the church needs to urgently change the upper echelons who have presided over several scandal-plagued years. Some have vowed to stay in the Hillsong “family” and fight to reform the church, but increasingly the pain of recent weeks is turning to outright anger.

A 27-year-old member of Kingdom City, which was until recently Hillsong Kansas City, said she is pleased the church will be returning to focus on local issues and that the Houstons had shown a “drastic change in attitude”.

Another member who has been attending Sydney’s Hills Campus for 22 years said she is staying on for now to fight for reforms, but “there is a group of us who have stated that if Brian returns or any Houston is appointed global senior pastor, we will leave”.

One recently departed Australian church staffer doubts that Hillsong – which has built much of its popularity on highly produced music and stadium

spectaculars – will ever be able to rein in its culture of “sex, drugs and rock’n’roll” and function as a church rather than a brand.

“I’ve seen behind the curtain, I’ve seen the inner workings – and that’s why I’m no longer part of Hillsong,” she said.

Elle Hardy is a freelance journalist and author of Beyond Belief: How Pentecostal Christianity is Taking Over the World

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You be the judge: should my girlfriend stop cranking up the heating?



Illustration: Joren Joshua/The Guardian

Steven wants to save on bills, Hannah hates feeling cold – and you decide who'll feel the heat in our online poll

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Interviews by [Georgina Lawton](#)

@georginalawton

Fri 8 Apr 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 8 Apr 2022 21.00 EDT

The prosecution: Steven

My girlfriend cranks the heating up year-round. It's expensive, unnecessary and bad for the planet

My girlfriend Hannah and I have lived together since September last year. Our home is a modern two-bedroom flat, so it retains its heat quite well and is very energy efficient. But we constantly disagree over what temperature to keep our home.

I prefer a cooler temperature in the house – I like it to be around 20C in the winter, but Hannah prefers it a few degrees higher. But if you're too cold, it's better to wear a jumper around the house rather than immediately reaching for the thermostat. I like to be able to move around the house without feeling too hot. There's also the environmental aspect to consider. We all know by now that overheating our homes isn't good for the planet.

Before we moved in together, Hannah lived in old student houses that were really cold so I think she craved a cosy home. She also grew up in the Middle East so she's not used to British winters. When we got our own place, I wanted to set boundaries around the heating by ensuring that we keep it at an agreed temperature. But, on a few occasions, I've come home from work and found the flat roasting. Hannah gets home before me and the first thing she does is crank up the temperature. I've come back and seen it at 26C. I'm like: "What's all this then?" Hannah will claim she's only had it at that level for a short amount of time.

I wanted to keep the flat at an agreed temperature, but I've come home and seen the thermostat at 26C

My parents were very strict about heating. My dad had a silly rule: “No heating until November.” And even then it was set low, to 18C. We never had it on in summer. I’ve always lived in a cold house.

Now it is getting warmer, but we’re still keeping the flat at 22C – that’s a compromise between 20C (too cold for Hannah) and 24C (too hot for me). Hannah wants me to consider turning up the heating in summer if she’s chilly.

But in my opinion it’s usually unnecessary to have it on unless it’s unusually cold. Also, energy bills are increasing rapidly. I don’t want a shock bill next winter, because I don’t want to financially compromise in other areas of our life.

The defence: Hannah

Women feel the cold more, and I want my home to be cosy. Wearing layers indoors is just annoying

I’m used to being warm. I was raised in the Middle East and I moved to England when I was 10 and found it hard to adjust to the climate. My family home was always really warm. It’s nice to come home to a cosy house when you have to deal with the cold at work (I’m a scientist in a lab) and outside.

I usually keep the flat at 22C, but I occasionally turn it up if I’m a bit cold. I don’t think that you should wear more layers at home, it’s annoying and uncomfortable having loads of clothes on. At home you should feel free. It’s not more environmentally friendly because wearing more clothes means you have to wash them more regularly.

It’s not an environmental thing because wearing more clothes means you have to wash them more regularly

This is also a gender thing; women are naturally colder and office temperatures are often tailored to men. In my lab, I wear jumpers and a lab coat when I’m working. Steven acknowledges that he grew up in a cold house and that it wasn’t good. I think he should be more flexible about

heating in our house. He shouldn't get so hung up on the number of the thermostat – he has this thing that if we make the house warmer than 22C he can't be comfortable. I think it's in his head a little bit.

I do sometimes turn the heating up to 26C in winter before Steven comes back from work. If I get caught I say: "It was just on for a bit and I'm going to turn it down again when I warm up." Having the heating on low overnight bothers me less because the duvet keeps me warm.

I do want the heating on in the summer. Summer weather in the UK is inconsistent so I can feel cold at times. Ideally, I'd turn the heating on most nights before bed, or when temperature drops below 15C – which still happens a lot in warmer months here. Having the heating on all year around is optimum for me. If one person is really warm or cold, we should both be open to adjusting the temperature accordingly. It depends who feels most strongly about it at the time.

I appreciate that our gas bills will be expensive with the price rising, but it's a necessity. I'd rather compromise in other areas to keep the heating on.

The jury of Guardian readers

Should Hannah turn the heating down?

Hannah needs to get real and layer up! Energy prices are going through the roof and Steven has already compromised enough. My daughter-in-law is from Brazil, but she is willing to put up with our chilly house.

Pennie, 64

Hannah is guilty on multiple counts – environmental, financial, mathematical. I empathise gender-wise, but applaud Steven's sensibilities. Maybe Hannah can use the scientific method to devise a greenhouse effect in one room? Anyway, deft layering won't warrant extra laundry.

Nyasha, 20

Ah, the perennial battle of the sexes – poor cold-blooded Hannah! But loungewear nowadays is light and comfortable. A zipper top over a T-shirt plus slipper socks should solve the issue if they agree to a truce of 20-22C –

and help with the environment and crippling bills.

Alan, 50

What a waste of both money and gas when all Hannah needs to do is put on a vest and a jumper. The argument about more washing just doesn't, well, wash! You can rewear indoor clothes for ages.

Kendra, 49

We all know it's no fun feeling cold but given where we are now with soaring energy prices and the climate crisis, it's hard to have much sympathy for Hannah. To some extent this is a cultural/climatic divide, so maybe Steven needs to introduce Hannah to some British traditions like long johns and the good old hot water bottle.

Dominic, 38

You be the judge

So now you can be the judge, click on the poll below and tell us: should Hannah turn the heating down?

We'll share the results on next week's You be the judge.

The poll will close on 14 April at 9am BST

Last week's result

We asked you if Niall should stop leaving the toilet seat up, something which drives his sister Nuala crazy.

54% of you said yes, Niall is guilty

46% of you said no, Niall is innocent

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Studying health inequalities has been my life's work. What's about to happen in the UK is unprecedented

[Michael Marmot](#)

Poverty is literally a matter of life and death for those on the margins, and the government has so far failed to step in



‘It is undignified to have to resort to food banks to feed your children; to wear two coats indoors against the cold.’ Photograph: Peter Summers/Getty Images

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Dignity. It is fundamental to who we are and our place in society. One way to deprive people of the opportunity to lead dignified lives is to take away the means to meet their material needs. It is undignified to have to resort to food banks to feed your children; to wear two coats indoors against the cold;

to plead against eviction because of an inability to pay the rent; to deny children a birthday party because of cost. The poorest people in the UK are about to experience a fresh wave of such indignities. These psycho-social assaults will be joined by the physical ill-effects of poverty.

My life's work has been studying the relationship between social conditions and inequalities in health. In the UK, a decade of austerity damaged public health and made health equity worse. But the cost of living crisis – and the chancellor's failure to deal with it – is unprecedented, with its threats to the health and wellbeing of the nation. A 54% rise in the energy price cap will now mean an average household will pay £1,971 a year for gas and electricity, at the same time that council tax, water bills and car tax are all increasing. In October, a further rise pushing the annual energy bill up to £2,300 is expected.

The typical working-age household will, according to the Resolution Foundation, experience a 4% fall in income, £1,100, in 2022-23. Surely, one might think, 4% is scarcely noticeable, hardly a matter of life and death? It is if you are on the margins.

The Resolution Foundation gives the example of a single parent, with one child, working 20 hours a week at a low-to-medium wage. In September 2021, this person might have had an income of £18,265. The precipitate removal of the universal credit boost will have reduced income by £1,040. The cost of living rise to September 2022 will take another £1,198 off income. With the chancellor's changes to taxes and allowances, and salary increases, this person's income in September 2022 will be £17,681 – £584 less than it was a year earlier. (By contrast, a couple working full-time, both at the median wage, will see their net income fall by 1%, £392.)

Inflation of more than 8%, and the government's failure to deal with the cost of living crisis for the poorest people – an unemployed single person will see a 15% drop in income – will put an extra 1.3 million people, including 500,000 children, below the poverty line.

When examining the effects on health and wellbeing because of this fall of income, there are at least three important considerations: the differential

effects of losses as against gains; relative and absolute poverty; and the value provided to people by welfare and public services.

If adding £500 to annual household income improves wellbeing, as the evidence shows, what does removing £500 do? According to Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky's influential research, the negative effect of a loss, in general, is twice as great as the positive effect of a similar gain. It is of fleeting intellectual interest whether taking away a few houses and yachts from an oligarch damages his health and wellbeing more than giving him a billion or two improves it. Of much greater concern is what removing £584 a year does to the life of someone who is struggling to get by. An extra £10 a week could help a little – save for a few weeks and buy your child a new pair of trainers. Taking away £10 a week can mean not just the choice between heating and eating but doing without both. And that will be bad both physically and psychologically.

A key insight is how much intellectual energy is involved in being poor. Scarcity – in the words of Sendhil Mullainathan and Eldar Shafir's book, [Why Having Too Little Means So Much](#) – reduces intellectual bandwidth. If you have to worry about whether you have food for dinner that evening, and for the rent on Friday, you have little space to think about anything else. Such stress can permanently affect the development of your children. A related concept is that it is not bad choices that lead people to be poor, it is poverty that leads to “bad” choices.

An abiding scientific and practical question is the health significance of absolute poverty – having insufficient money to meet one's basic needs – as compared with relative poverty – being poor relative to other people. The easy answer is that both are vital to health. In [our various reports](#), one of our six areas of recommendation was that everyone should have sufficient income to lead a healthy life. Income was not our only recommendation, but it relates intimately to several of the others: child development; adequate food and nutrition; and decent housing. Figures from the [Food Foundation show that](#) for households in the bottom 10% of household income to follow healthy eating guidance, they would have to spend 74% of their income on food. It is not ignorance or the inability to cook that is the problem. It is poverty.

But relative income is important, too. Following [Amartya Sen](#), relative inequalities in income relate to absolute inequalities in capabilities. An idea that goes back to [Adam Smith](#) is that the essentials of life include whatever is necessary to take your place in public without shame. This is about having agency, a sense of self-worth, and participating in networks of family and friends. Lack of income threatens these fundamental components of living in society, and damages mental and physical health.

The third issue is captured by the movement for universal basic services. If public transport were free at the point of use, if social housing were available and affordable, home heating affordable, nutritious food available without a cost premium, then relative lack of individual income would be less harmful for health. In the UK, public services were cut dramatically, and in regressive fashion, by a decade of austerity. The failure of allocations to public services to rise in line with inflation in the recent spring statement will mean further pressures on public sector pay and on the provision of public services.

In the decade before the pandemic, improvement in health in the UK slowed dramatically, inequalities increased, and health for the poorest people got worse. This was all amplified by the pandemic. Unless we deal with the inability of people to meet their basic needs, by adequate income and services, we are in danger of inflicting a humanitarian calamity in one of the richest countries in the world.

Michael Marmot is director of the UCL Institute of [Health](#) Equity and professor of epidemiology and public health at UCL. He has just published a new review on the role of business in reducing health inequities on 4 April

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[OpinionDinosaurs](#)

We're finding out more about dinosaurs than ever – but their sex lives still elude us

[Dave Hone](#)

With each new find, such as the dinosaur leg recently unearthed in North Dakota, scientists build a more colourful picture of the ancient reptiles



A scene from the BBC's *Dinosaurs: The Final Day*, with David Attenborough. Photograph: BBC/BBC Studios

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Although they became extinct 66m years ago, dinosaurs are always news. The latest manifestation of that is the media shower generated by [the discovery](#) of the perfectly preserved leg, including remnants of skin, of a dinosaur in North Dakota.

It is suggested that this dinosaur, discovered at the Tanis fossil site, died on the very day the asteroid that caused the mass extinction of all the dinosaurs struck the Earth. It sounds almost too good to be true, but should make for a fascinating TV documentary next week, [Dinosaurs: The Final Days](#), presented by Sir David Attenborough, naturally.

There are probably more palaeontologists working on dinosaurs today than at any point in history, and we have perhaps learned more about these incredible ancient reptiles in the past 20 years than in the previous 200. Plenty of once controversial and speculative ideas have been confirmed by the discovery of important fossils and diligent research on them. [Dinosaurs](#) were warm, active animals; some were intelligent and lived in groups; and they gave rise to birds, which are living dinosaurs.

These ideas have echoed in research for decades and have been mainstream from the 1990s onwards, but they act as a starting point for what has come since. We now have hundreds of specimens of dinosaurs, representing dozens of species, that are preserved with fossilised feathers. Moreover, we can track the evolution of feathers and their change from simple filaments to flight-capable aerofoils.

We have also discovered microscopic structures called melanosomes that in part give feathers and skin their colours, and allow palaeontologists to begin to reconstruct the colours and patterns of these animals. That's an astounding change in our ability to produce information from the fossil record and opens up enormous future possibilities for research.

Reconstructing the colour of a single individual, however impressive and interesting, is only of limited scientific value. We might be able to tell that it had a pattern that would work as camouflage, for example, or instead had very bright patterns that were likely for display, but it can't tell the whole story.

Males and females were likely to have had different colours in many species, and birds moult their feathers, so bright breeding colours might only be around for part of the year or white winter coats might appear in others. Juveniles might be different colours from adults, and there could be regional

variations, or things might evolve and change over time. All of these are reasonable possibilities and are the kinds of things that scientists can now assess. There's huge future potential for a massive expansion in our understanding of dinosaur colours and signals.

This can also be integrated with other finds. In 2016, [a paper](#) was published describing bizarre pairs of scrapes dug into the ground that were made by large, carnivorous (and at least possibly feathered) dinosaurs. They looked as if an animal had almost pawed at the ground and excavated a furrow with each foot, and there were lots of pairs. There was no indication that they might have been digging for food or water, and they didn't look like any known nest and would hardly work well as one. What they do resemble, though, are scrapes left in the ground by several different groups of modern seabirds during courtship rituals. This was, in fact, evidence of dinosaur displays and courtship.

It's a fascinating find and some great deductive work went into eliminating the possible explanations to leave this as the most likely one. However, while it provides extraordinary information about how at least one dinosaur was trying to find a mate, it leaves far more questions unanswered. Telling dinosaurs apart from their tracks is not easy, and "large carnivorous dinosaur" is about as close as it gets.

It would be wonderful to say it was a tyrannosaur, where we have some ideas about their social interactions (they fought each other, *a lot*), but we don't actually know, and it is all but impossible to find out. We also don't know what else they might have been doing in addition to making the scrapes. There would very likely have been various other rituals going on, bobbing or bowing like geese and albatrosses, for example, calls between couples, all kinds of possible dances or other moves, and feathers (if present) could have been fluffed up and shaken. Did this go on for minutes or days? We not only don't know, but it's almost impossible to conceive how we could know.

Thus, there are two distinctive and well-separated gaps in our knowledge of dinosaurs – the ones we are likely to fill and those that are almost impossible. The latter are numerous, but that doesn't mean they are necessarily out of reach. Until only a few years ago I would have said that

dinosaur colours were not only not known, but something we could never know, and that was true right up to the point that it wasn't. When some enterprising researchers realised that melanosome shape was linked to colour and that melanosomes could be preserved, it opened up a whole new set of possibilities that we have only just begun to explore, and other "impossibilities" may one day fall. And, of course, the more conventional gaps will still be filled in. Palaeontologists continue to find fossils of new species, from new areas, and to be able to piece back together the evolutionary history of these most incredible reptiles though all the new data that is coming in.

So for all the frustrating missing pieces that we have in the puzzle of dinosaur biology across the nearly 200m years that they were around, we have more than enough pieces to see what the true picture is, and more and more gaps are being filled. There are plenty that we'll probably never find, but it won't stop our knowledge from growing or our understanding improving, and the future of dinosaurs is a most rosy one.

- Dr Dave Hone is a senior lecturer at Queen Mary University of London, specialising in dinosaurs and pterosaurs. He blogs at Archosaur Musings, and presents the [Terrible Lizards](#) podcast. His latest book is The Future of Dinosaurs
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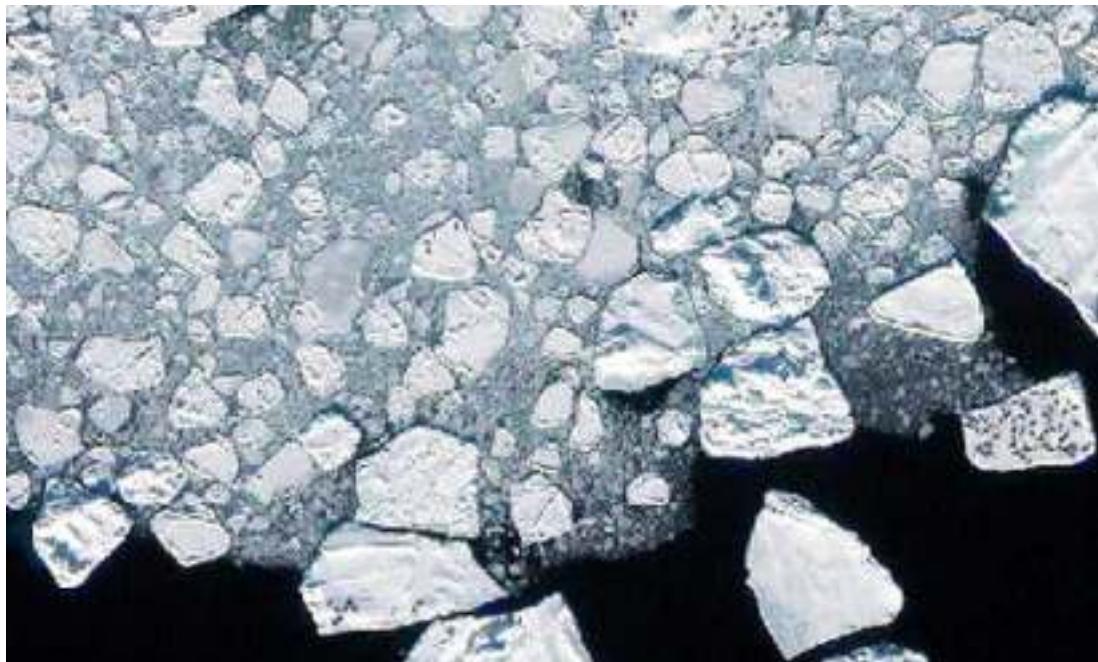
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Drone technology gives us the eyes of gods. Could it help us save arctic seals?

[Philip Hoare](#)



Images of harp seals taken from hundreds of miles above show their plight. They should spur us to action



'They resemble alien life forms glimpsed on another planet'. Harp seals off Greenland, photographed from a height of 600km. Photograph: © Maxar Technologies

Fri 8 Apr 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 8 Apr 2022 05.01 EDT

This week, [remarkable images](#) were released of harp seals scattered across a fragmented and rapidly disintegrating ice sheet east of Greenland. With record high temperatures and early melting in the Arctic, great cracks create a deadly mosaic on the sheet, an icy crazy paving on which you can make out dark specks – each one a seal, peering out as if bemused by its fate. In such an inhospitable environment, viewed from such height, the marine mammals resemble alien life forms glimpsed on another planet.

By 2035, it is estimated that the disappearance of [Arctic sea ice](#) will mean that around 7.5 million harp seals will lose their home. It is another cruel turn for animals that in the 20th century were extensively hunted for their fur – especially the flawless white pelts of their pups. They depend on the sea ice: it is the arena in which they rest after hunting for food, mate, and give birth. The ice is the centre of their lives.

Now an extraordinary surveying technique pioneered by scientists from the Royal Netherlands Institute for Sea Research and Wageningen Marine

Research offers a slender hope for the seals' future. Using satellite technology, superhigh resolution images are being produced in which each pixel measures 30x30cm. This allows for the individual identification of harp seals – despite the fact that the satellite is flying 400 miles over their heads.

By working in conjunction with a large-scale Norwegian aerial and ship-based survey using helicopters, drones and an aeroplane, an accurate count of these enigmatic animals may be possible for the first time. It is a measure of the climate emergency that we humans have to go so far above the Earth to determine the future prospects of the species with whom we share the planet. “The effects of climate change are most notable in the remote and inaccessible polar regions, out of sight for most of us,” Jeroen Hoekendijk of the Royal Netherlands Institute told me. “These new technologies provide a valuable tool to monitor [Arctic](#) seal populations and study the effects of the rapidly disappearing sea ice.”

But is it too late? Human technology has ever accelerated, with disregard for its impact on the natural world. It is strange how we sometimes have to see things from far away to realise their fragility or assess their beauty. The space race of the 1960s and 70s – which sometimes seemed like a race to leave an environmentally and nuclear-threatened Earth – had that effect. Courtesy of the Apollo moonshots, we knew what our planet looked like from outer space before we knew what whales looked like underwater. Even now, more humans have set foot on the moon than have reached the deepest part of the world’s oceans. Vastness can still defeat us. “The sea, everywhere the sea,” as the Haitian-Canadian writer [Dany Laferrière](#) has said, “and no one looking at it.”



‘The ice is the centre of their lives.’ A harp seal pup. Photograph: Minden Pictures/Alamy

We have moved a long way from Victorian surveyors prizing themselves on taking aerial photographs of imperial edifices by sending cameras attached to hot air balloons with cable-release shutters – even as hunters were roaming icy wastes killing seals to provide fur collars and coats. In 1880, a [young Arthur Conan Doyle](#), then a medical student, enlisted in an Arctic hunt for seals and whales, but having witnessed its brutality – 800 seals were killed in one day – he quickly came to regret his part in the “murderous harvest”. “Amid all the excitement,” Conan Doyle confessed in his private journal, “one’s sympathies lie with the poor hunted creatures.”

Nor was 20th-century technology good news for marine mammals. In the late 1940s British whaling fleets employed Supermarine Walrus amphibious military reconnaissance biplanes – made by the same Southampton company that produced the Spitfire – to search for pods of whales for hunters to harpoon. Tactlessly, they even named one of the planes Moby Dick. “It is the gunner’s business always to pick the largest animal, which calls for considerable experience,” noted one of the team, eyeing up their target.

The aerial hunters were assisted in their deadly photographic survey by their chief scientist from Cambridge. Now we rely on our ever more stratospheric

equipment to make amends, and the modern university of Cambridge's British Antarctic Survey team are detecting [walruses from space](#) with a view to conserve rather than kill them.

It's a remarkable trajectory. Now drone technology gives us the eyes of gods, in war and peace. It offers us a seemingly immortal, omniscient view, as if the whole of the world were under our control. Our planet seems reduced to a video game. Does it take this image of seals scattered in an almost abstract pattern on fractured ice to make us realise what we may have already lost? Or does this seal census signal a glimmer of hope, as seen through an extraterrestrial lens?

- Philip Hoare is the author of several books, including [Leviathan](#), The Sea Inside and Albert and the Whale
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OpinionRishi Sunak

Akshata Murty's non-dom status is totally legal – and perfectly toxic for Rishi Sunak

Gaby Hinsliff



In failing to take the initiative over the tricky issue of his family's wealth, the chancellor has dented his own brand



Akshata Murty and Rishi Sunak. ‘There are few more damaging charges than “one rule for them, another for the rest of us”.’ Photograph: James Veysey/REX/Shutterstock

Thu 7 Apr 2022 12.57 EDT Last modified on Thu 7 Apr 2022 14.42 EDT

Rishi Sunak sounded every inch the gallant, protective husband. His wife, Akshata Murty, hadn’t asked to be in the public eye, the chancellor [told the BBC plaintively](#), and he had found it “very upsetting” when she was targeted. Her money was her money, and the stake she held in the multibillion-pound family business Infosys – which was then still doing brisk trade in Moscow even as Sunak exhorted companies to cut ties with Russia – was strictly her affair, not his.

After all, isn’t every woman entitled to a professional life independent from her husband’s? The chancellor even wryly compared himself to the actor [Will Smith](#), who lashed out at the comedian Chris Rock after the latter joked about his wife’s hair, as if being reportedly [richer than the Queen](#) was just Akshata’s rotten luck too.

Only now it turns out there’s another, somewhat less endearing theory for why the chancellor might be anxious to move on from the subject of her fortune, and it’s that she doesn’t pay British tax on a chunk of it. Taxes are

rising for millions of Britons this month, but in the Sunak household, well, maybe not so much. For Murty has been [revealed as a non-dom](#): she pays British taxes on any earnings in this country but not on any income overseas, a perfectly legal choice but one that could conceivably have saved the Sunak household a tidy sum. And, to be clear, it is a choice, much as her husband's decision not to uprate benefits this month in line with unexpectedly soaring inflation was a choice.

Murty retains Indian citizenship. That's something she has every right to do, just as [Nick Clegg's wife, Miriam](#), had every right to remain a proud Spanish citizen when he was in government. But tax experts argue that the chancellor's wife could have opted to pay tax in the country where her husband sets it. That she didn't is, arguably, not surprising: in the circles in which she moves, it might seem crazy to risk the family inheritance just to spare a husband's political blushes. What really is astonishing, however, is that the chancellor seemingly imagined he could keep all this private, even while hiking taxes on people with nowhere to run from them.

There are few more damaging charges in politics than "one rule for them, another for the rest of us", as [Boris Johnson](#) so helpfully demonstrated by presiding over a regime that repeatedly broke its own Covid rules. Yet his supposed heir apparent has just walked straight into the same elephant trap.

Plenty of Conservative voters can cope with a leader who is cheerfully and unashamedly rolling in it, even in the middle of a crippling squeeze on living standards. Just look at the way they have indulged Jacob Rees-Mogg down the years. Nor should it prove impossible for a rich politician to govern well for the poor, given some capacity for human empathy and – call me a hopeless old romantic – the existence of data. Politicians who actually listen to the evidence in front of them and choose advisers capable of filling in their blind spots can and often do transcend their own narrow personal experiences; for anyone aspiring to lead a whole country, that's literally the job description. But what all voters can smell a mile off is politicians trying to pass themselves off as what they're not, and Sunak's everyman act is now wearing decidedly thin.

Borrowing a suitably humble-looking [hatchback off a supermarket worker](#) instead of using one of his own more luxurious cars for a post-budget photo

opportunity at the petrol pumps was clumsy but understandable, given that chancellors normally travel courtesy of a government driver. But failing to clarify his wife's tax arrangements in public, awkward as that might make dinner with the in-laws, is in a different league.

Non-dom status was a major political dividing line at the 2015 election, and Ed Miliband threatened to [scrap it if Labour won](#). Scrapping or restricting it has been at least a theoretical option for Sunak, too, at every budget or spring statement he has delivered. How long did the chancellor imagine he could avoid disclosing this very personal interest in public? What else do we not know about his wife's finances? And without full disclosure, how can we be sure his family circumstances aren't shaping his decisions, even subconsciously?

For Sunak, all this is hideously toxic. So toxic, indeed, that he could be forgiven for wondering where the constant drip, drip, drip of damaging information about his gilded lifestyle – the [f335 trainers](#) in which he was recently photographed, the [f100,000 personal donation](#) the Sunak-Murtys have made to his old public school – could be coming from, as the Metropolitan police's Partygate inquiry wends its way inexorably towards the prime minister's door.

The single biggest deterrent for despairing Tory MPs agonising over whether to trigger a leadership election is the fear of detonating something whose outcome they can't control or predict. If Sunak no longer looks like a sure thing, a reliable plan B likely to be accepted across the party, then putting in a letter to the 1922 committee becomes an altogether wilder roll of the dice.

But the truth is that whatever dark arts are being practised in dark corners, Sunak's star has been quietly waning for a while. The chancellor's job is to say no, but the [Treasury's tightfistedness](#) at a time of huge demands on the state evidently grates on some colleagues. In the absence of a clear Tory agenda driven by the prime minister, Sunak hasn't noticeably seized the opportunity to create one.

His biggest remaining asset was his air of general wholesomeness, a sense that in contrast to his chaotic neighbour here was a devoted family man with

no skeletons in his closets or wild, Covid-defying parties in his basement, and with sound political judgment to boot. But in failing to go on the front foot over what was always going to be the tricky issue of his family's wealth, the chancellor has effectively dented his own brand.

Faintly mad as this sounds, it now looks more likely than it did that Johnson will lead this government into the next election; that the [greased piglet](#), in David Cameron's immortal phrase, will wriggle free, if only because his party has run out of better ideas. If it all goes pear-shaped, Sunak will doubtless have other options. What a shame the rest of the country can't say the same.

Gaby Hinsliff is a Guardian columnist

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French presidential election 2022

Macron steps up warnings over French far right before first-round vote

President criticises ‘very clear xenophobia and ultraconservative aims’ as Marine Le Pen gains ground



A tattered campaign poster for Emmanuel Macron on a street in Paris on Thursday. Photograph: Emmanuel Dunand/AFP/Getty Images

[Angelique Chrisafis](#) in Paris

@achrisafis

Thu 7 Apr 2022 11.20 EDT Last modified on Fri 8 Apr 2022 00.24 EDT

[Emmanuel Macron](#) has ramped up his warnings of the danger posed by [Marine Le Pen](#) before the first-round vote in France’s presidential election this weekend, as he acknowledged he had not managed to contain all voters’ fears and hold back the far right during his time in office.

As Macron campaigns to become the first French president in 20 years to serve a second term, he has often been reminded of his 2017 victory speech in front of the Louvre where, after defeating Le Pen with 66% of the vote, he promised to ensure people had “no more reason to vote for extremes”.

Polls suggest he could once again go through to a runoff against Le Pen after this Sunday’s vote, and that she would significantly close the gap on him in a 24 April final round, with a [Harris poll](#) this week putting Macron on 51.5% to Le Pen’s 48.5%.

Le Pen has risen steadily in the polls in recent days, boosted by her promises to cut VAT on fuel in response to the cost of living crisis. Her political opponents have continued to warn that her anti-immigration project to prioritise native French people over non-French for housing, jobs and benefits, and to ban the Muslim headscarf from all public spaces, is xenophobic, racist and against the French constitution.

In a front-page [interview with Le Figaro](#) on Thursday, Macron was asked whether he bore part of the responsibility for the high support for the far right in the polls. Macron said he believed his government had “succeeded in attacking” certain factors of the far-right vote by lowering unemployment, creating jobs and beginning a process whereby factories opened after long years of deindustrialisation.

“But when you lead, govern or are president, you always have a part of responsibility,” he added. “On immigration, the results are insufficient, but we have reinforced border protections and hardened entry conditions to our territory in a context where the flow has considerably increased ... due to the international context.”

Macron said there had been more arrivals to [France](#) between 2017 and 2019 than in the two years previously. “A worry was born out of that: I haven’t managed to calm it, and it has fed the extremes.” But he added that France was not “submerged” by immigration. He said that if he won a second term, he would “reinforce the fight against illegal immigration” and facilitate sending home people who had not been approved to stay.

Macron said the far right in France was still “fundamentally” the same: it attacked the Republic, had a base of antisemitism, “very clear xenophobia, and ultraconservative aims”.

Support for the far right in the polls for the first round is at its highest point: Le Pen and her far-right rival Eric Zemmour, a former talkshow pundit, have more than 30% of support between them. Polls show Macron in first position for the first round on about 26.5%. Le Pen has risen to 23% in recent days. The hard-left Jean-Luc Mélenchon is in third on about 17% and also rising. A high number of undecided voters and a potentially high abstention rate means the outcome of Sunday’s first round remains open.

Macron said Mélenchon’s hard-left movement was not in the same category as the far right but brought “simplistic arguments and counter-truths that cultivate fears” in the same way.

Asked in another newspaper interview why he had not held back the tide of the far right, Macron said: “Extremes feed on fears, and fears are there: climate, geopolitics, the pandemic … I tried to bring answers. But when there are fears and big changes, the strategy of scapegoating works much better.”

Macron has promised to use a second term to cut taxes further, bring France to full employment after decades of mass unemployment, and raise the retirement age to 65. He said inflation in France was half the rate of Britain’s because the government had taken efficient measures to block electricity price rises and provided anti-inflation payments to low-income households.

Le Pen on Thursday brushed aside the worries of the financial markets over her rise in the polls. France’s borrowing costs increases as investors grew jittery over a closer-than-expected race. “The policies I want to implement are not meant for the stock markets, which will be a change from [Emmanuel Macron](#),” she told RTL radio.

Le Pen said if elected she would ban the Muslim headscarf from all public spaces, including the street. She said it would be enforced by police in the same way as seatbelt-wearing in cars. “People will be given a fine in the

same way that it is illegal to not wear your seatbelt. It seems to me that the police are very much able to enforce this measure,” she said.

Le Pen said the government’s tactic of catastrophising over her possible election no longer worked. “Scaremongering which entails saying that unless Emmanuel Macron is re-elected it will be a crisis, the sun will be extinguished, the sea will disappear and we’ll suffer an invasion of frogs no longer works.”

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John Lee: the hardline security official leading race to become Hong Kong chief



John Lee announced his intention to run after stepping down from his post as chief secretary. Photograph: Lam Yik/EPA

Ex-police officer who oversaw government crackdown on protesters in 2019 is sole candidate with Beijing's blessing

Rhoda Kwan in Taipei

Fri 8 Apr 2022 03.57 EDT Last modified on Sat 9 Apr 2022 23.21 EDT

John Lee, a career police officer turned hardline security official, is [running unopposed](#) to take over the top job in Hong Kong's elections next month. As the sole candidate with Beijing's blessing, he is all but guaranteed to become the next chief executive, according to local media reports.

Lee announced his intention to run after stepping down on Wednesday from his post as chief secretary, the city's second-highest post, less than a year after he was promoted to the position from top security official. Carrie Lam, who currently holds the position, announced on Monday she would not be seeking a second term.

Observers say Beijing's apparent choice of Lee, who as the city's top security official oversaw the government's strong-handed response to the 2019 pro-democracy protests and the first year of its national security crackdown, is a sign the Chinese leadership is gearing the governance of the city towards a focus on national security above all else – including its economy and a housing crisis.

John Burns, an emeritus professor of politics and public administration at the University of [Hong Kong](#), said: “The central government selecting Lee as chief executive indicates Beijing’s continuing concern for security in Hong Kong ... Apparently for Beijing, security continues to be the number one priority.”

A career in discipline

Lee, 64, has spent his entire career in the disciplinary forces, joining the police force as an inspector in 1977, and the government’s Security Bureau in 2012 as undersecretary of security. He rose to lead it in 2017. He holds a master’s in public policy and administration from Charles Sturt University in Australia.

Ivan Choy, a political science professor at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, said: “We know that he comes from the disciplinary force. In the disciplinary force, we emphasise loyalty, discipline and implementation. And so I think we would expect that this may be a major element in the future governance of Hong Kong.”

It was during Lee’s tenure as Hong Kong’s secretary of security that the city underwent the drastic changes under the [national security law](#), which critics say has been used to imprison and silence all political opposition and dismantle its civil society. Like Lam, he was among the first Hong Kong and Chinese officials to be hit by US sanctions for his role in the ongoing crackdown on rights and liberties.

This strict implementation of the national security law, observers say, is how Lee has proven his loyalty to Beijing. “He is a man with even better loyalty to Beijing,” Choy said, compared with Lam.

Hongkongers have not had a direct say in who serves as their chief executive since the handover in 1997. Instead, the post is selected by a small committee of society stakeholders called the Election Committee.

In March last year, Beijing overhauled the city’s electoral process, expanding the committee to 1,500 members but also tightening the criteria for candidates. New measures included a two-step national security screening process to ensure all members were loyal to the party.

Ensuring ‘patriotism’

Lee played a key role in implementing the system that critics say guarantees Beijing’s chosen candidate gains the top job. As chief secretary, he led a seven-person panel tasked with vetting all candidates for the election committee and the legislative council to ensure they fulfil the vague criteria of “patriotism”.

Under the new system, Hong Kong’s next chief executive election on 8 May will be picked by an election committee whose members have been vetted by a panel led by Lee.

“I must point out to you that the democratic process of Hong Kong started after [China](#) resumed exercising sovereignty. No country has monopoly on the model of democracy,” Lee said in a speech as chief secretary at an online event to discuss Hong Kong issues to the UN human rights council in last month.

Hong Kong’s previous chief executives have had to strike a balance between toeing Beijing’s red lines and ensuring the city’s place as an international financial centre. Lam had described it as a “dual accountability”.

Lee’s background in the force and his penchant for executing orders may mean the balance under his leadership will tilt increasingly towards Beijing.

“I think certainly at the beginning it will incline more to Beijing’s political will,” Choy said.

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Coronavirus

Omicron variant does cause different symptoms from Delta, study finds

Data from UK's Zoe Covid study confirms reports Omicron patients recover more quickly and are less likely to lose sense of smell or taste



Researchers reached their conclusions by matching people who had Covid when Delta was the most prevalent variant with individuals who were positive when Omicron dominated. Photograph: Justin Paget/Getty

[Nicola Davis](#) Science correspondent

[@NicolaKSDavis](#)

Thu 7 Apr 2022 18.01 EDT Last modified on Fri 8 Apr 2022 04.41 EDT

People who have the Omicron Covid variant tend to have symptoms for a shorter period, a lower risk of being admitted to hospital and a different set of symptoms from those who have Delta, research has suggested.

As the highly transmissible Omicron variant shot to dominance towards the end of last year, it emerged that, while it is better at dodging the body's immune responses than Delta, it also [produces less severe disease](#).

Now [a large study](#) has not only backed up the findings, but confirmed reports Omicron is linked [to a shorter duration of illness](#) and a [different collection of symptoms](#).

The study comes [just days after the NHS added nine further symptoms for Covid](#) to its existing list of fever, a new and persistent cough, and a loss or change in taste or smell. The researchers found people who had Covid when Omicron was prevalent were about half as likely to report having at least one of the latter three symptoms as those who had Covid when Delta was rife.

“It is a lesson that we need to be far more flexible in thinking what the virus is and how it is going to present than we have been, certainly in the UK,” said Prof Tim Spector, co-author of the research from King’s College London, adding that the team showed data to the government around five months ago that showed a sore throat was replacing loss of smell as a symptom.

The study, which is to be presented at the European Congress of Clinical Microbiology & Infectious Diseases and has been published in the Lancet, is based on data from 63,002 participants of the Zoe Covid study.

The researchers matched almost 4,990 participants who had a confirmed Covid infection between 1 June and 27 November 2021 – when Delta was the most prevalent variant – with 4,990 individuals who reported an infection between 20 December 2021 and 17 January 2022 when Omicron dominated, with the matching based on age, sex and whether they had received two or three vaccine doses. The experience of both groups were then compared.

The team found participants’ symptoms lasted on average 6.9 days during the period when Omicron dominated, compared with 8.9 days when Delta dominated, with infections during the Omicron period linked to a 25% lower likelihood of admission to hospital.

The results suggested only 17% of people who had Covid when Omicron dominated lost their sense of smell, compared with 53% when Delta dominated. However, a sore throat and going hoarse were both more common among the former.

Spector said the symptom-logging approach used in the research was an invaluable tool. “[It] should alert us what to look out for when there will inevitably be the next variant,” he said, adding action needs to be quicker in the future.

“We need to be much more reactive in public health messaging,” he said.

Dr David Strain, a senior clinical lecturer at the University of Exeter Medical School, who was not involved in the study, said the findings chime with what hospitals experienced at the start of the year when the BA.1 Omicron variant dominated. But the Omicron variant BA.2 has since taken over – and, in his experience, the picture has changed again.

“People in hospital are staying in hospital for longer and staff are testing positive for longer, so it is longer before they can return to work,” he said.

The research came as the React-1 study revealed the average prevalence of Covid across England was at the highest level ever recorded. Meanwhile, the UK Health Security Agency reported on Thursday that 15.3% of people aged 75 and over have received their spring booster Covid jab so far.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/07/omicron-variant-does-cause-different-symptoms-from-delta-study-finds>

US Capitol attack

Capitol attack investigators zero in on far-right Oath Keepers and Proud Boys

Panel appears to believe militias coordinated to physically stop certification of Joe Biden's election victory on 6 January last year



The panel has gained crucial evidence about the connections between the Oath Keepers and the Proud Boys in recent weeks. Photograph: Jim Urquhart/Reuters

[Hugo Lowell](#) in Washington

Fri 8 Apr 2022 03.30 EDT Last modified on Fri 8 Apr 2022 13.40 EDT

The House select committee investigating January 6 appears to believe the Capitol attack included a coordinated assault perpetrated by the Oath Keepers and the Proud Boys militia groups that sought to physically stop the certification of Joe Biden's election victory.

The panel's working theory – which has not been previously reported though the justice department has indicted some militia group leaders – crystallized this week after obtaining evidence of the coordination in testimony and non-public video, according to two sources familiar with the matter.

Counsel on the select committee's "gold team" examining [Donald Trump](#), the "red team" examining January 6 rally organizers, and the "purple team" examining the militia groups, are now expected to use the findings to inform the direction for the remainder of the investigation, the sources said.

The panel has amassed deep evidence about the connections between the Oath Keepers and the Proud Boys in recent weeks after it obtained hours of non-public footage of the leaders of the militia groups in Washington ahead of the Capitol attack, the sources said.

And the select committee has also now heard testimony from award-winning documentary film-maker Nick Quested on Wednesday about contacts between the militia group leaders, far-right political operatives and the Save America rally organizers, the sources said.

The information, which could play a large role in establishing for the select committee [whether Trump oversaw a criminal conspiracy](#) as part of his efforts to overturn the 2020 election, is being viewed internally as a significant breakthrough, the sources added.

Most crucially for the panel, it could form part of the evidence to connect the militia groups that stormed the Capitol on 6 January to the organizers of the Save America rally that immediately preceded the attack – who in turn are slowly being linked to the Trump White House.

In essence, the sources said, the select committee now appears to have the same degree of evidence as secured by the FBI and the justice department referred to [in recent prosecutions for seditious conspiracy](#) and other charges related to the Capitol attack.

A spokesperson for the panel declined to comment on witness testimony.

The gold, red and purple teams have been focused on the video footage for several weeks, the sources said, with initial attention turned towards a now-infamous meeting between the militia group leaders in a parking garage near the Capitol on 5 January.

But the select committee was unable to discern from the video whether the militia group leaders even discussed the Capitol or their plans for January 6 at that rendezvous, the sources said, and suspect the meeting was a set up to provide them an alibi.

The panel has reviewed the tape repeatedly, the sources said, and House investigators have come away with an uneasy feeling that Henry “Enrique” Tarrio, the former leader of the Proud Boys, sought to have the meeting documented to later absolve himself of wrongdoing.

Tarrio last week pleaded not guilty in a separate DoJ prosecution that accuses him of organizing the Capitol attack. The indictment states Tarrio on 4 January told other Proud Boy members: “I didn’t hear this voice note until now, you want to storm the Capitol.”

The select committee has instead become more interested recently in communications both between the militia group leaders and the purported January 6 rally organizers, including Ali Alexander and far-right media personality Alex Jones, the sources said.

That topic was one of the central lines of inquiry that the gold, red and purple teams attempted to establish during a seven-hour recorded interview with Quested, the source said.

At that interview, the select committee also examined in excruciating minute-by-minute detail a 17-minute edited clip of footage shot by Quested that documented the Capitol attack, and video that tracked Alexander’s movements around the Capitol building, they said.

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Imran Khan

Pakistan court orders Imran Khan confidence vote to go ahead

Supreme court rules PM acted unconstitutionally in dissolving parliament before confidence vote



The vote due last Sunday was widely expected to topple Imran Khan from power. Photograph: Saiyna Bashir/Reuters

[Shah Meer Baloch](#) in Islamabad and [Hannah Ellis-Petersen](#)

Thu 7 Apr 2022 14.23 EDTFirst published on Thu 7 Apr 2022 13.53 EDT

Pakistan's supreme court has dealt a devastating blow to the prime minister, [Imran Khan](#), by ruling that he acted unconstitutionally in dissolving parliament prior to a confidence vote he was expected to lose, and ordering the vote to go ahead this weekend.

In the conclusion to a hearing that has gripped Pakistan for the past four days, the chief justice of Pakistan, Umar Ata Bandial, said Khan had

violated the law in [his attempt to stop the vote](#), which was widely expected to oust him.

The verdict said Khan was wrong to instruct the deputy speaker of the house, a close ally, to suspend the vote and wrong to ask the president to dissolve parliament on Sunday morning.

The bench of five judges ordered that a session of the national assembly be held on Saturday to allow for the confidence vote to go ahead. No member of the parliament will be restricted from voting.

Speaking after the verdict, Khan said he would continue to fight and would address the nation on Friday. “I have always & will continue to fight for Pak till the last ball,” he [said on Twitter](#), adding that he had called a meeting of his cabinet on Friday.

The leader of the opposition, Shahbaz Sharif, congratulated the nation and said: “The Constitution of [Pakistan](#) has been restored. The judiciary of Pakistan has upheld itself and its sanctity and has strengthened the sovereignty of Pakistan and its judiciary.”

Raza Rabbani, an opposition senator and lawyer, said: “This is a landmark and historic judgment and it would help to uphold the rule of law. It will have far-reaching impacts on Pakistan and the democratic setup, as the speaker had violated the constitution of Pakistan.”

The vote was tabled by the opposition coalition last month over what it said was Khan’s political and economic mismanagement. As it drew closer there was a wave of defections from Khan’s supporters and it became apparent he had lost his majority and was certain to lose the vote.

But hours before the vote on Sunday, the deputy speaker threw out the motion over allegations that it was the result of a “foreign conspiracy” by the west to unseat Khan. Khan then instructed the president to dissolve parliament and declared fresh elections in three months’ time.

The move created a constitutional crisis and prompted an outcry from the opposition, who called it an undemocratic move by a prime minister trying

to hold on to power despite losing parliamentary support.

The opposition alliance took the matter up with the supreme court, where it has been deliberated for the past four days. On Thursday, on the final day of the hearing, chief justice Bandial emphasised that they wanted Pakistan to remain stable and noted that “assemblies can not be dissolved while a vote of no confidence is pending against the prime minister”.

Khan, 69, is a former playboy cricketer turned conservative Islamic politician who was elected in 2018 on the promise of rooting out corruption and boosting the economy.

Javed Nusrat, a prominent Pakistani columnist, said Khan could also continue to use the anti-American narrative against the supreme court because such narratives work.

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Conservatives

‘Partygate’: Whitehall braced for top staff to be implicated in Sue Gray report

Exclusive: civil service source cites concern over possible evidence senior officials knowingly broke rules



The government intends to keep most names in Sue Gray’s report into gatherings during lockdown secret. Photograph: Amer Ghazzal/Rex/Shutterstock

[Rowena Mason](#) Deputy political editor

Tue 5 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 5 Apr 2022 04.49 EDT

Civil service chiefs are braced for the behaviour of top Whitehall officials to be severely criticised in the Sue Gray partygate report, after the [government’s former ethics chief apologised](#) for attending an illegal gathering.

Amid speculation about whether [Boris Johnson](#) will be fined over lockdown parties in No 10, there is also consternation in Whitehall about how to deal with the fallout from senior civil servants being implicated as organisers of gatherings when the full report is finally published.

It comes as Helen MacNamara, the former head of propriety and ethics in the Cabinet Office, issued an apology after a leak named her as one of the [20 people issued with fines](#) after a Metropolitan police investigation. It is understood a leaving party for Kate Josephs, who ran the Covid task force, has also attracted fines in the first wave of penalty notices. Josephs is currently on paid leave from her job as chief executive of Sheffield City Council pending an investigation.

A senior source said there was concern that details in the report by Gray, herself a senior civil servant, would cast some civil servants in a bad light and there may be evidence that some knowingly broke rules when organising gatherings, leading to the potential for disciplinary action.

Gray has the power to name senior civil servants in her report although she may choose not to use it. In her [interim report](#), she named no names and referred only to the “senior official whose principal function is the direct support of the prime minister” – thought to be an allusion to Martin Reynolds, the principal private secretary.

[Contact the team securely: create a Protonmail account and email us at guardian.politics.desk@protonmail.com; or use Signal Messenger or WhatsApp to message +44 7824 537227](#)

The government has committed to revealing whether or not Simon Case, the cabinet secretary, receives a fixed-penalty notice but intends to keep other names secret. Gray will not know who has received a fine when she publishes her report after the conclusion of Scotland Yard’s inquiries.

Downing Street on Monday defended the “anonymous process” of the Met investigation, under which names of those being fined are not officially released. Some Tory MPs are increasingly unhappy about the “drip-drip” of

revelations, however, with backbencher Steve Brine saying: “I would have thought that the best thing is just transparency, open the curtains.”

The Met is expected to issue a further wave of fines in the next few weeks, with Gray publishing her full report as soon after that as possible, potentially after local elections purdah is over in May.

Despite the investigation, cabinet ministers attempted to draw a line under the partygate scandal on Monday. Jacob Rees-Mogg, the Brexit minister, said fines for the parties were “not the most important issue in the world” given atrocities in Ukraine while Simon Hart, the Welsh secretary, insisted the “world has moved on”.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/apr/05/partygate-whitehall-braced-for-top-staff-to-be-implicated-in-sue-gray-report>

[Politics](#)

Former UK government ethics chief issues apology after lockdown party fine

Helen MacNamara apologises for ‘error of judgment’ after leak named her as one of 20 people fined by Met



MacNamara was fined in connection with a leaving party held on 18 June 2020. Photograph: UK Government

[Rowena Mason and Paul MacInnes](#)

Mon 4 Apr 2022 11.30 EDT Last modified on Mon 4 Apr 2022 12.25 EDT

The government’s former ethics chief has apologised for her “error of judgment” after she was fined by police for attending a party in the Cabinet Office during lockdown.

Helen MacNamara, who now works for the Premier League, issued a statement after a leak naming her as one of the [20 people issued with fines after a Met investigation](#).

She said: “I am sorry for the error of judgment I have shown. I have accepted and paid the fixed-penalty notice.”

MacNamara was fined in connection with a leaving party held on 18 June 2020 to mark the departure of a private secretary, Hannah Young, who was moving to New York to take up a role with the British consulate general. She is said to have provided a karaoke machine for the event, which is understood to have been one of the most raucous under investigation.

Boris Johnson was not present at the event but the former cabinet secretary Mark Sedwill and the former No 10 aide Dominic Cummings are reported to have been in attendance.

Cummings has written a blog defending Young and saying: “It is deeply, deeply contemptible that not just the PM but senior civil servants have allowed such people to have their reputations attacked in order to protect the sociopathic narcissist squatting in the No 10 flat.”

MacNamara left government in February 2021 and joined the Premier League the following May, where she holds the position of chief policy and corporate affairs officer.

Hired due to the depth of her experience and her contacts within 10 Downing Street, MacNamara has led the league’s response to the government’s [fan-led review of football governance](#), which last autumn called for the introduction of an independent regulator for the game.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/apr/04/former-uk-government-ethics-chief-issues-apology-after-lockdown-party-fine>

Wind power

Boris Johnson blows cold on onshore wind faced with 100-plus rebel MPs

Opposition in cabinet as well as on backbenches to expansion of turbines in England widely seen as an eyesore



Boris Johnson helps to place a solar panel on a frame as he visits the Carland Cross windfarm in Newquay, Cornwall last June. Photograph: Jon Super/AP

[Rowena Mason](#), [Rob Davies](#) and [Helena Horton](#)

Tue 5 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT

Pro-green cabinet ministers are frustrated by Boris Johnson's decision to back away from ambitious onshore windfarm plans for England, as it emerged more than 100 Tory MPs are lobbying against the policy behind the scenes.

The prime minister, who is to announce his energy strategy later in the week, will announce big targets for [increasing nuclear power](#) and offshore wind, as well as exploiting more North Sea oil and gas.

But he has been hit by a [cabinet split over onshore wind](#), with Kwasi Kwarteng, the business secretary, and Michael Gove, the levelling up secretary, in favour, and others including Grant Shapps, the transport secretary, branding onshore turbines “an eyesore”.

Another nine ministers sitting in cabinet – Steve Barclay, Nadine Dorries, Simon Hart, Chris Heaton-Harris, Brandon Lewis, Priti Patel, Jacob Rees-Mogg, Mark Spencer and Nadhim Zahawi – signed a letter calling for a cut in support for onshore wind in 2012. The letter was orchestrated by Heaton-Harris, now responsible for party discipline, who co-ran a campaign called Together Against Wind and wrote a manual that was a “step by step guide on opposing a windfarm in your area”.

A spokesperson for Heaton-Harris would not comment on his communications with the prime minister about the issue of onshore wind.

One cabinet source said those cabinet ministers and Tory MPs arguing against the expansion in England said they “should look at the polling in favour of onshore wind. They are fighting a war from 10 years ago.”

The prime minister is expected to approve financial incentives to encourage communities to accept windfarms in exchange for lower energy bills, but changes to planning laws in England to make permission easier to get are less likely.

One government source said: “If you strip away the theatrics, everybody is talking about community consent. The PM has spoken about that, Kwasi has spoken about that. That’s one thing ministers would want to ensure that communities are to be paid to directly share in community infrastructure close by.”

He added: “The workhorse of Britain’s future energy needs is and will be offshore wind. There will be more onshore wind and it will be in windy

parts of Scotland. Let's see what happens in England.”

John Hayes, the Tory MP and former energy minister who led the charge against onshore wind in 2015, warned the government against overturning the moratorium put in place at that point.

“To reverse that would be extremely politically unwise but also the argument does not stand up in terms of environmental efficiency and energy efficiency,” he said, arguing against an expansion of onshore wind on the grounds of cost, protecting wildlife, and aesthetics.

One Tory MP said there was a WhatsApp group of more than 140 anti-onshore wind Conservative MPs, who would make it very hard for any energy bill with stretching onshore wind targets to pass. “It’s certainly way more than his [Johnson’s] majority,” he said.

Another Conservative MP put the number of rebels at more than 100, adding that the prime minister was not politically strong enough to get such proposals through his own party.

But Chris Skidmore, a Tory MP who runs the net zero support group, said: “We are at a fork in the road here. We either need to double down as Kwasi is doing and saying we need secure forms of homegrown clean energy. You could say look at the North Sea – but it’s gone. We’ve extracted most of it. Fracking – we’re not the States. So what you need is the tripartite plan of wind, nuclear and energy efficiency. There is public support for onshore that there wasn’t 10 years ago.”

Renewable industry sources were not downcast about the government’s plans. “[Johnson] needs to get energy bills down quickly, he’s not going to rule out onshore wind and solar. It’s a case of how you go about doing that in a way that gets it past the nimbys. He was interested in local electricity discount schemes, where the closer you live, the more you get off your bill,” the source said.

It comes as energy scientists criticised Shapp’s comments, in which he claimed onshore wind would be an “eyesore” and destroy the view in beautiful areas.

Dr David Toke, from the University of Aberdeen, said this is false, and that there is plenty of land, for example next to train lines, that is ripe for use.

He told the Guardian: “Only a small proportion of England is classified as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Yet, for example, there’s very few wind turbines near to motorway routes, which can hardly be classed as beautiful. As you go from England to Scotland by road or rail you will notice a definite increase in the use of land close to transport corridors for windfarms.

“The rules effectively banning windfarms in England are unique to planning in the UK and are a testament to the government’s political inability to mobilise this very cheap and clean source of renewable energy to reduce our energy bills.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/apr/05/boris-johnson-blows-cold-on-onshore-wind-faced-with-100-plus-rebel-mps>

[Skip to key events](#)

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

Channel 4 privatisation plans face Tory backlash – UK politics as it happened

This live blog is now closed. You can find our latest stories on Channel 4 below:

- [Channel 4 privatisation faces parliamentary revolt, senior Tories say](#)
- [Who's in the running to buy Channel 4?](#)
- [What you need to know about the privatisation of Channel 4](#)
- [Russia-Ukraine war: latest updates](#)

Updated 5d ago

[Nicola Slawson \(now\)](#) and [Kevin Rawlinson \(earlier\)](#)

Tue 5 Apr 2022 13.06 EDTFirst published on Tue 5 Apr 2022 04.28 EDT



Culture secretary Nadine Dorries is pushing ahead with controversial plans to privatisate Channel 4. Photograph: Sam Barnes/Alamy

[Nicola Slawson](#) (now) and [Kevin Rawlinson](#) (earlier)

Tue 5 Apr 2022 13.06 EDTFirst published on Tue 5 Apr 2022 04.28 EDT

Key events

- [5d agoEvening summary](#)
- [5d agoGovernment should feel ashamed over Channel 4 sell-off, Lords told](#)
- [5d agoGovernment facing Tory backlash over Channel 4 privatisation plans](#)
- [5d agoJohnson heavily criticised as adviser resigns](#)
- [5d agoChannel 4 plans could be 'revenge' for Brexit coverage, suggests Conservative media committee chair](#)
- [5d agoPrivatising Channel 4 'doesn't make any sense' and will cause 'great deal of damage', says Labour](#)

Show key events only

Live feed

Show key events only

From 5d ago

[09:24](#)

Government facing Tory backlash over Channel 4 privatisation plans

The government is facing a Tory backlash against plans to privatisate [Channel 4](#).

Ex-Scottish Conservative leader **Ruth Davidson** has spoken out on Twitter, calling the proposals the “opposite of levelling up”.

Channel 4 is publicly owned, not publicly funded. It doesn't cost the tax payer a penny. It also, by charter, commissions content but doesn't make/own its own. It's one of the reasons we have such a thriving indy sector in places like Glasgow. This is the opposite of levelling up

— Ruth Davidson (@RuthDavidsonPC) [April 5, 2022](#)

Meanwhile **Jeremy Hunt**, the former culture secretary, told Sky News:

I'm not in favour of it because I think that as it stands, Channel 4 provides competition to the BBC on what's called public service broadcasting — the kinds of programmes that are not commercially viable — and I think it'd be a shame to lose that.

Asked why he thought the government had made the decision to sell it off and whether money from the sale was a factor, Hunt said: "I don't know."

He continued:

And I'm not against privatisation in other contexts, but what I'm in favour of is competition.

And I think that we have very high standard of broadcasting in this country because we have competition not just in the very popular soap operas and boxsets and series that are going to be commercially very successful, but we also have competition in other areas, like news and documentaries, which are not likely to be commercially viable.

And I think it's really important to maintain that competition and I do think Channel Four is part of that ecosystem.

Last night former Cabinet minister **Damian Green** said Channel 4 privatisation was "very unconservative".

The sale of Channel 4 is politicians and civil servants thinking they know more about how to run a business than the people who run it. Very unconservative. Mrs Thatcher, who created it, never made that mistake.

— Damian Green MP (@DamianGreen) [April 4, 2022](#)

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Updated at 10.18 EDT

[5d ago](#) [12:54](#)

Evening summary

Here's a roundup of the key developments from the day:

- Boris Johnson is [facing a backlash from senior Tories](#) over plans to privatise Channel 4, with the former Scottish Tory leader Ruth Davidson [describing it as “the opposite of levelling up”](#). Davidson led calls for the government to reconsider, along with the former cabinet ministers Damian Green and Jeremy Hunt.
- DCMS select committee chair Julian Knight has questioned if the government's plans to forge forward with the privatisation of Channel 4 are “revenge”, adding that many Tories believe the move is “payback time” for “biased coverage”.
- Privatising Channel 4 “doesn't make any sense” and will cause a “great deal of damage to jobs and opportunities”, Labour has said. Shadow culture secretary Lucy Powell told BBC Radio 4's Today programme: “I can't find many people [who] are in favour of it.”
- The government should “feel ashamed” about announcing plans to sell off Channel 4 while MPs are not sitting, the Lords have heard. Liberal Democrat peer Lord McNally asked the culture minister Lord Parkinson: “Is he not ashamed that this extraordinarily well-run company is being dealt with in this way? A shabby decision made in an appalling way while the House of Commons is in recess.”
- The UK's LGBT+ business champion has resigned “with a heavy heart” over the government's “profoundly shocking” position on banning conversion therapy for transgender people. Iain Anderson

said trust and belief in the government's commitment to LGBT+ rights has been damaged, after a series of U-turns on plans to introduce legislation to ban conversion therapy.

- **Pro-green cabinet ministers are frustrated by Boris Johnson's decision to back away from ambitious onshore windfarm plans for England**, as it emerged more than 100 Tory MPs are lobbying against the policy behind the scenes and he has been hit by a cabinet split over onshore wind.
- **The UK government is moving too slowly to tackle the climate emergency, leading scientists have said in the wake of the latest IPCC report.** This comes after Jacob Rees-Mogg, the Brexit minister, declared that he supported “exploiting every last cubic inch of gas from the North Sea” the day the report was released.
- **Civil service chiefs are braced for the behaviour of top Whitehall officials to be severely criticised in the Sue Gray partygate report**, after the government's former ethics chief apologised for attending an illegal gathering.
- **A cross-party group of MPs and peers has joined forces with UK universities in calling for the visa scheme for Ukrainian refugees to be extended to temporary placements for students and academics.** The letter argues that the amount of interest shown in the sponsorship system illustrates that many Britons are willing to help.

That's it from me today. Thanks for joining me.

Here's our latest story on Channel 4 privatisation plans:

For the latest news on Ukraine, follow our dedicated live blog:

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Updated at 13.06 EDT

5d ago **12:44**

PA reports that a Conservative peer questioned that Channel 4's programming was made up only of "rare cultural gems".

Lord Hannan of Kingsclere read out a list of Channel 4's daytime programmes, including Kitchen Nightmares and Undercover Boss, as he hit back at claims that privatising the channel would diminish its output.

As peers asked the government about its plans to sell Channel 4, Lord Hannan said: "Ever since the announcement was made we have been hearing about all these rare cultural gems that are made possible by the unique way in which Channel 4 is financed, which somehow wouldn't be possible in a red in tooth and claw jungle of capitalism.

"I have just been looking at what the programming is now. With your permission I will tell the House, it is: Kitchen Nightmares; Undercover Boss; Steph's Packed Lunch; Countdown; a Place in the Sun; A New Life in the Sun; Sun, Sea and Selling Houses."

The former MEP and Vote Leave founder added: "Is it really credible to say that we are defending something that could not be provided by the private sector? Will the minister comment on the disparity between the funds that come from the private sector to independent production companies and those that come from state broadcasters?"

Culture minister Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay replied that he would not join Lord Hannan in "singling out particular programmes."

He added: "This is not about the content that Channel 4 currently produces or about its recent results. It is about making sure that it is able in the decades to come to compete, to invest and to continue to provide a range of programming which a range of people can benefit from."

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5d ago 11:38

Boris Johnson is facing a backlash from senior Tories over plans to privatise [Channel 4](#), with the former Scottish Tory leader **Ruth Davidson** describing it as “the opposite of levelling up”.

Davidson led calls for the government to reconsider, along with the former cabinet ministers **Damian Green** and **Jeremy Hunt**. The scale of Conservative opposition to the proposals has already raised questions over whether the government has the votes to pass the required legislation through the House of Commons, with even tougher opposition expected in the House of Lords.

Davidson said: “Channel 4 is publicly owned, not publicly funded. It doesn’t cost the taxpayer a penny. It also, by charter, commissions content but doesn’t make/own its own. It’s one of the reasons we have such a thriving [independent] sector in places like Glasgow. This is the opposite of levelling up.”

Green pointed out the channel was founded by a Conservative government, with part of its remit being to boost Britain’s private television sector: “The sale of Channel 4 is politicians and civil servants thinking they know more about how to run a business than the people who run it. Very unconservative. Mrs Thatcher, who created it, never made that mistake.”

Jeremy Hunt, a former culture secretary, told Sky News: “I’m not in favour of it, because as it stands Channel 4 provides competition to the BBC on what’s called public service broadcasting – the kinds of programmes that are not commercially viable – and I think it would be a shame to lose that.”

He said he had never considered privatising it when he was culture secretary.

Another Tory who criticised the proposed sale was the father of the house, **Peter Bottomley**, who said it was “bad for the diversity of television, bad for viewers and bad for independent producers”.

“It was considered in the mid-1990s and turned down. It should be rejected now,” he said.

The backlash came after the culture secretary, **Nadine Dorries**, [pushed ahead with plans to privatise Channel 4](#) after 40 years in public ownership.

Read the full story from my colleagues [Rowena Mason](#) and [Jim Waterson](#) here:

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Updated at 11.43 EDT

[5d ago](#) [11:35](#)

The government expects “a lot of interest from around the world” in its plans to sell [Channel 4](#), a minister has said.

In the Lords, [Labour](#) peer Lord Dubs asked:

If the government insists on pursing this policy, what safeguards will there be against a foreign company buying Channel 4 and there will be yet another of our major media owned by people outside this country?

Culture minister Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay replied:

Like the sale of any government asset, the sale of Channel 4 would need to meet a careful assessment process to ensure value for money for the taxpayer. Further detail will be set out in the white paper to address that.

To groans from peers, he added:

We expect a lot of interest from around the world in Channel 4.

Conservative former minister Lord Deben asked:

If a former constituent came up to me in the street and said Lord Deben, given Covid, the disastrous Brexit, the European war, the cost of living crisis, why has the government thought it urgent to bring

forward something for which there is no public demand, and real opposition across the House?

Lord Parkinson replied that not all constituents would “phrase it like that”, adding:

The risks of doing nothing are to leave Channel 4 reliant on linear advertising, currently 74% of its income comes from linear advertising which is a part of the broadcasting landscape which is changing rapidly, trying to compete with the likes of Netflix which spent 9.2 billion on original content in 2019 compared to 2.1 billion from all of the UK’s public service broadcasters.

We want to make sure that Channel 4 is fit for the future so it can continue to thrive and flourish.

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Updated at 11.45 EDT

[5d ago 11:09](#)

Government should feel ashamed over Channel 4 sell-off, Lords told

The government should “feel ashamed” about announcing plans to sell off [Channel 4](#) while MPs are not sitting, the Lords have heard.

Liberal Democrat peer **Lord McNally** said:

Will the government publish immediately the consultation which was completed over six months ago and which has not yet seen the light of day on which the Secretary of State (Nadine Dorries) is allegedly making this decision?

Is he not ashamed that this extraordinarily well-run company is being dealt with in this way? A shabby decision made in an appalling way while the House of Commons is in recess.

Culture minister **Lord Parkinson** of Whitley Bay replied:

The responses to the consultation will be published alongside the white paper to which I alluded in my initial answer. I disagree deeply with the rest of his question. The government values highly Channel 4 and the part it plays and has played for 40 years in our broadcasting ecosystem.

We want to ensure that its next 40 years and beyond are just as successful and it can flourish. It is doing that in a very rapidly changing and increasingly competitive media landscape. Channel 4 is uniquely constrained by its current ownership model and its current access to capital.

Lord Parkinson said the broadcaster would be an “attractive proposition for people to buy” because of its success.

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Updated at 11.21 EDT

[5d ago](#)[11:00](#)

The UK’s LGBT+ business champion has resigned “with a heavy heart” over the government’s “profoundly shocking” position on banning conversion therapy for transgender people, PA News reports.

Iain Anderson said trust and belief in the government’s commitment to LGBT+ rights has been damaged, after a series of U-turns on plans to introduce legislation to ban conversion therapy.

He is the latest in a series of high-profile individuals and groups to hit out at the government, with at least 100 organisations pulling out of its forthcoming landmark LGBT conference.

More than 80 LGBT+ groups and more than 20 HIV groups have said they will not take part in the Safe To Be Me conference, scheduled for June, unless **Boris Johnson** reverts to his promise for a trans-inclusive ban on conversion therapy.

Read more on that story here:

Last week it was initially announced that ministers were scrapping plans to ban the practice, sparking a furious backlash. A government spokesman confirmed that they were looking instead at ways of preventing it through existing law and “other non-legislative measures”.

However, within hours the PM was said to have “changed his mind” and a senior government source was quoted as saying legislation would be introduced.

The government now says it is committed to a legislative ban, but that separate work is required to “consider the issue of transgender conversion therapy further”.

When announcing the initial consultation into the conversion therapy ban, the government had said the protections would cover people in terms of their sexual orientation and gender identity.

Anderson said it had been the honour of his life to serve as the UK’s first LGBT+ business champion, but felt he had “no choice” but to resign.

In a letter to Johnson shared on Twitter he wrote:

As a young gay man I lived through fear and oppression under the backdrop of Section 28. I could never have dreamt then that a government - any government - would appoint an LGBT+ champion later in my lifetime.

However the recent leaking of a plan to drop the government’s flagship legislation protecting LGBT+ people from conversion therapy was devastating. Conversion therapy is abhorrent.

Only hours later to see this plan retracted but briefing take place that trans people would be excluded from the legislation and therefore not have the same immediate protections from this practice was deeply damaging to my work.

Anderson added that it was “profoundly shocking” that the government had backtracked on protection for transgender people during the same week that the first trans MP felt able to share his journey.

Jamie Wallis, conservative MP for Bridgend, last week came out as trans in a highly personal statement.

A government spokeswoman said:

We thank Iain for his contributions as LGBT Business Champion.

The government has a proud record on LGBT rights and we remain committed to building upon that work with sensitivity and care.

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Updated at 11.02 EDT

5d ago **10:35**

Helena Horton

The UK government is moving too slowly to tackle the climate emergency, leading scientists have said in the wake of the latest IPCC report.

This comes after **Jacob Rees-Mogg**, the Brexit minister, declared that he supported “exploiting every last cubic inch of gas from the North Sea” the day the report was released.

While the report warned that global emissions must peak by 2025 to stave off the worst impacts of the climate crisis, which would require decisive and immediate action from all countries, scientists say they are concerned the UK government is dragging its feet.

Dr Jem Woods, Interim Director of Centre for Environmental Policy at Imperial College and Reader in Sustainable Development, said:

There is minimal to zero alignment between the UK's net zero strategy and policies and crucial legislation that affect long run infrastructure and investment. In particular, the Local Plan 2030 which has been encouraging new house building has made no consideration of the implications for climate. We can also see similar issues with the Environment Act. New houses built over the next 10 years will lock-in infrastructural investments for decades to come with substantial implications for retrofitting as per Ajay's ([Gambhir](#)) point about not being offered heat pumps rather than gas boilers.

On Monday Rees-Mogg [declared that](#) “every last drop of oil from the North Sea” should be excavated.

Speaking to LBC radio, he said:

We need to be thinking about exploiting every last cubic inch of gas from the North Sea. We are not going for net zero tomorrow – 2050 is a long way off.

In response to Rees-Mogg's comments, **Ajay Gambhir**, a senior research fellow at the Imperial College London Grantham Institute for Climate Change and the Environment, warned:

It's 1,013 days since the UK government legislated for net zero ... we're not seeing translation of this into on-the-ground measures fast enough.

He added that their actions are unlikely to meet their own carbon reduction targets, let alone those set by the IPCC.

Read more here:

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5d ago09:50

Dorothy Byrne, president of Murray Edwards College, Cambridge, and the former head of news and current affairs at [Channel 4](#), has written a comment piece about the government's proposals to sell off Channel 4.

She writes:

In 1982, Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government [established Channel 4](#) in order to create an independent television production sector in the UK. Unlike the BBC or ITV, it was not to make any of its own programmes, not even its flagship Channel 4 News. All over the UK, independent companies sprang up to make its content. In the 40 years since, they have made billions of pounds – not just for themselves but also for Britain, selling their wares around the world. And, unlike the BBC, they have spoken with many voices, bringing diverse and radical ideas to the fore which had barely been heard before in mainstream broadcasting.

Yesterday, Boris Johnson's Conservative government announced it was [selling off the channel](#), claiming that by doing so it would boost independent production companies. This makes no sense. Instead of Channel 4 being a publicly-owned organisation that pumps hundreds of millions of pounds a year into the independent sector, it is being sold off, almost certainly to a giant TV production company, possibly from overseas. It will be in the interests of that company to make as many of its own programmes as it can and retain the rights in them.

Many people have never understood Channel 4's business model, and among them is the culture secretary, Nadine Dorries, the minister who announced yesterday that selling off Channel 4 would boost the independent sector. Appearing before the culture select committee last November, she said it was right that the government should evaluate the channel's long-term financial viability because Channel 4 was in receipt of public funding. She looked embarrassed when the Conservative MP Damian Green [pointed out](#) to her that Channel 4 gains its income from advertising, not the public coffers. How can a woman who didn't even know what the organisation's business model

was claim to be motivated by protecting its finances? Of course, as a publicly-owned organisation, Channel 4 also does not make a profit, pumping all its income back into programming, whereas its new owner will rightly expect a profit.

Read the full opinion piece here:

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Updated at 09.54 EDT

[5d ago](#)09:45

The DUP leader, **Sir Jeffrey Donaldson**, has accused Sinn Fein of not being honest about its plans for a border poll.

Donaldson, who was on a visit to the Foyle constituency on Tuesday, was commenting after **Michelle O'Neill** insisted her immediate focus was on the cost of living crisis and not a unity referendum.

The DUP leader said:

The outcome of this election will be vital for the future of Northern Ireland and will determine whether we focus on growing our economy, delivering jobs and investing in our infrastructure, or whether we face months and years of instability, focusing on a divisive border poll.

Sinn Fein should be open and honest about its divisive border poll plans. Only two weeks ago they were happy to talk about their divisive border poll plan in Washington and New York to senators and congressmen.

Why does Sinn Fein not want to talk about their divisive border plans in Northern Ireland? The people of Northern Ireland deserve honesty from Sinn Fein and its leaders.

SDLP deputy leader **Nichola Mallon** said it was “lazy politics” to call for a referendum on unity without doing the preparatory work on what a united Ireland would look like.

She told the PA news agency:

The SDLP has always said that it is lazy politics to just keep calling for a border poll, the hard work that needs to be done is setting out exactly what that would mean to people, what it would mean for a new health care system on the island, a new education system, a new housing system.

And that’s why the SDLP through the New Ireland Commission (party initiative) is setting out that detailed piece of work.

But, of course right now, the number one issue facing families is the cost of living emergency.

We have said that that is our number one issue in this election and that is why we set out a six-point action plan to help individuals and families through this really difficult time in terms of dealing with what is an absolute crisis.

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Updated at 09.57 EDT

[5d ago](#)09:24

Government facing Tory backlash over Channel 4 privatisation plans

The government is facing a Tory backlash against plans to privatise [Channel 4](#).

Ex-Scottish Conservative leader **Ruth Davidson** has spoken out on Twitter, calling the proposals the “opposite of levelling up”.

Channel 4 is publicly owned, not publicly funded. It doesn't cost the tax payer a penny. It also, by charter, commissions content but doesn't make/own its own. It's one of the reasons we have such a thriving indy sector in places like Glasgow. This is the opposite of levelling up

— Ruth Davidson (@RuthDavidsonPC) [April 5, 2022](#)

Meanwhile **Jeremy Hunt**, the former culture secretary, told Sky News:

I'm not in favour of it because I think that as it stands, Channel 4 provides competition to the BBC on what's called public service broadcasting — the kinds of programmes that are not commercially viable — and I think it'd be a shame to lose that.

Asked why he thought the government had made the decision to sell it off and whether money from the sale was a factor, Hunt said: “I don't know.”

He continued:

And I'm not against privatisation in other contexts, but what I'm in favour of is competition.

And I think that we have very high standard of broadcasting in this country because we have competition not just in the very popular soap operas and boxsets and series that are going to be commercially very successful, but we also have competition in other areas, like news and documentaries, which are not likely to be commercially viable.

And I think it's really important to maintain that competition and I do think Channel Four is part of that ecosystem.

Last night former Cabinet minister **Damian Green** said Channel 4 privatisation was “very unconservative”.

The sale of Channel 4 is politicians and civil servants thinking they know more about how to run a business than the people who run it. Very unconservative. Mrs Thatcher, who created it, never made that mistake.

— Damian Green MP (@DamianGreen) [April 4, 2022](#)

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Updated at 10.18 EDT

[5d ago](#)09:11

Here's the full text of Anderson's letter:

It has been the greatest privilege of my life to be [@GEOgovuk #LGBT](#) Business Champion. Sadly today I have resigned from that role. My letter to [@BorisJohnson](#) here  [pic.twitter.com/JTrd0yAZBB](#)

— Iain Anderson (@iain_w_anderson) [April 5, 2022](#)

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[5d ago](#)09:03

Johnson heavily criticised as adviser resigns

The government's LGBT business champion, **Iain Anderson**, has resigned in a letter to **Boris Johnson**, criticising the "deeply damaging" move to exclude trans people from protection from conversion therapy. Anderson wrote:

It has been the honour of my life to serve as the UK's first-ever LGBT+ business champion. However, I feel I have no choice but to tender my resignation from this role.

I do this with a very heavy heart. As a young gay man, I lived through fear and oppression under the backdrop of Section 28. I could never have dreamt then that a government – any government – would appoint an LGBT+ champion later in my lifetime.

However, the recent leaking of a plan to drop the government's flagship legislation protecting LGBT+ people from conversion therapy was devastating. Conversion therapy is abhorrent.

Only hours later to see this plan retracted, but briefing take place that trans people would be excluded from the legislation and, therefore, not have the same immediate protections from this practice was deeply damaging to my work.

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Updated at 09.25 EDT

[5d ago](#)[08:03](#)



Sally Weale

Covid is continuing to cause disruption in schools in England with attendance falling again, though the number of pupils off for Covid-related reasons has eased slightly in the past fortnight.

According to the latest official statistics from the Department for Education, 179,000 pupils were off for Covid-related reasons last Thursday, compared with 202,000 two weeks earlier.

Overall attendance in state schools fell again, however, down from 89.7% on March 17 to 88.6% on March 31. Though confirmed cases of Covid among pupils have fallen from 159,000 to 120,000, numbers absent due to restrictions in place to manage a school outbreak have doubled to 34,000, keeping absence rates high. Some parents may also have taken their children out of school early for the Easter holiday.

Absence rates among teachers and school leaders remain elevated at 8.7%, though there has been a slight improvement, down from 9.1% a fortnight earlier.

Paul Whiteman, general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, warned schools were at breaking point.

We continue to hear a sense of deep frustration from school leaders as they struggle to deal with the significant and on-going disruption caused by Covid – whilst the government removes every measure they have for controlling it.

We all assumed ‘living with Covid’ meant there would be very low case levels – this is clearly not case and absence rates remain at concerningly high-levels. School leaders feel they have been abandoned.

The ongoing risk of illness and chaos caused by staff absence, not to mention the mounting pressure of exams, Sats and Ofsted, is unsustainable. Our members and education are at breaking point.

Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, added:

These figures show that a fifth of schools had more than 15% of their teachers absent last week. It is very difficult to operate in these conditions.

The government's decision to withdraw free testing in such circumstances is a retrograde step, particularly with exams a few weeks away, and we have repeatedly urged ministers to reconsider.

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Updated at 09.28 EDT

[5d ago](#)**08:00**

The government has commissioned the British Geological Survey to advise on the latest scientific evidence around fracking, as ministers consider “all possible domestic energy sources” in light of the invasion of Ukraine.

Business and energy secretary **Kwasi Kwarteng** said:

We have always been, and always will be, guided by the science on shale gas.

It remains the case that fracking in England would take years of exploration and development before commercial quantities of gas could be produced for the market, and would certainly have no effect on prices in the near term.

However, there will continue to be an ongoing demand for oil and gas over the coming decades as we transition to cheap renewable energy and new nuclear power.

In light of Putin’s criminal invasion of Ukraine, it is absolutely right that we explore all possible domestic energy sources.

However, unless the latest scientific evidence demonstrates that shale gas extraction is safe, sustainable and of minimal disturbance to those living and working nearby, the pause in England will remain in place.

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Updated at 09.28 EDT

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Channel 4

Nadine Dorries presses ahead with plan to privatise Channel 4

Ministers hope to raise £1bn from sell-off ending broadcaster's 40 years in public ownership



The privatisation plan has met fierce opposition within the media industry.
Photograph: Jack Taylor/Getty Images

[Jim Waterson](#)

[@jimwaterson](#)

Mon 4 Apr 2022 15.20 EDTFirst published on Mon 4 Apr 2022 14.12 EDT

The culture secretary, [Nadine Dorries](#), is pushing ahead with controversial plans to privatise Channel 4, with the government backing proposals to sell off the broadcaster after 40 years in public ownership.

The government hopes to raise around £1bn from the sell-off, making it one of the biggest privatisations since Royal Mail went public a decade ago. Ministers have suggested they could spend the proceeds to boost creative training and independent production companies, essentially funding their levelling up agenda.

The plans had met fierce reaction from the media industry, with prominent broadcasters such as Sir David Attenborough suggesting the government was [pursuing an agenda](#) of “shortsighted political and financial attacks” on British public service broadcasters.

Channel 4’s chief executive, Alex Mahon, told staff of the news in an email on Monday night, saying: “We have been informed in the last hour that the government will shortly announce that the secretary of state has decided to proceed with the proposal to privatise [Channel 4](#).

“In our engagement with the government during its extended period of reflection, we have proposed a vision for the next 40 years which we are confident would allow us to build on the successes of the first 40. That vision was rooted in continued public ownership and was built upon the huge amount of public value this model has delivered to date and the opportunity to deliver so much more in the future.”

Mahon hinted that the current leadership of Channel 4 would not go down without a fight, suggesting that “ultimately the ownership of Channel 4 is for government to propose and parliament to decide” and the lengthy process of passing legislation to privatise the channel meant it was not a done deal.

On Monday evening Dorries tweeted that public ownership was “holding Channel 4 back from competing against streaming giants like Netflix and Amazon”. She added: “A change of ownership will give Channel 4 the tools and freedom to flourish and thrive as a public service broadcaster long into the future.”

The shadow culture secretary, Lucy Powell, described the move as “cultural vandalism”. She said: “Selling off Channel 4, which doesn’t cost the taxpayer a penny anyway, to what is likely to be a foreign company, is cultural

vandalism. It will cost jobs and opportunities in the north and Yorkshire, and hit the wider British creative economy.”

The channel is run on a commercial basis and carries adverts but reinvests all of its profits into making new programmes. Its current leadership has argued that a new private sector owner would instead seek to maximise profits at the expense of original and distinctively British programming.

Last year Dorries wrongly claimed in parliament that Channel 4 was in “receipt of public money”. In reality the channel operates without any public subsidy but it has the ability to access emergency borrowing from the state.

Despite this, the government has argued Channel 4 is too small to survive in the long term when competing against global streaming companies for programmes. Although it has grown the audience for its own All 4 catchup service, the broadcaster is heavily reliant on the traditional income that comes from selling advertising on live broadcasts.

Potential buyers for the broadcaster could include a streaming service, another British commercial broadcaster such as ITV, or a US media company such as Discovery – although they could all be put off by the need to meet public service requirements such as providing expensive current affairs programming.

Dorries’ decision comes days after the government, in consultation with Ofcom, [appointed the businessman Sir Ian Cheshire](#) as the chair of Channel 4 with an eye on privatisation. Michael Grade, the newly installed chair of Ofcom and a former chief executive of Channel 4, is also a supporter of privatisation – potentially making it easier to clear any regulatory concerns.

The announcement comes shortly after Dorries announced [another real-terms reduction in the BBC licence fee](#), which will result in further cuts to its budget.

Although the government would be likely to be able to pass the legislation required to privatise Channel 4 through the Commons, it could struggle in the Lords. There had been speculation in recent weeks that the prospect of a

tough battle to pass the relevant law would cause the government to abandon the privatisation plans as it prepares the ground for a general election due in the next two years. Instead, it appears to be betting it can push through the sell-off at speed.

Proposals to privatise Channel 4 have been made regularly during its existence but until now the broadcaster has always successfully retained its independence.

The latest sell-off proposals were made in the wake of the Conservatives' 2019 election campaign, when the broadcaster's news arm angered the governing party by replacing Boris Johnson with a melting block of ice during a debate about climate change.

Channel 4's former head of current affairs Dorothy Byrne also alienated Downing Street when she described the prime minister as “a known liar” and compared him to the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, in a speech to the media industry – views that are rarely publicly expressed by sitting senior news executives.

A formal consultation on whether to privatise Channel 4 was launched last year and attracted more than 60,000 submissions, with independent television production companies putting up a particularly fierce opposition. They argued ministers should be celebrating Channel 4 as a creation of Margaret Thatcher's government which helped turn the UK into one of the biggest global centres for media production.

A Channel 4 spokesperson said the government's announcement on Monday had been “made without formally recognising the significant public interest concerns which have been raised” during the consultation process.

“Channel 4 has engaged in good faith with the government throughout the consultation process ... Recently, Channel 4 presented DCMS [the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport] with a real alternative to privatisation that would safeguard its future financial stability, allowing it to do significantly more for the British public, the creative industries and the economy, particularly outside London.

“Channel 4 remains legally committed to its unique public-service remit. The focus for the organisation will be on how we can ensure we deliver the remit to both our viewers and the British creative economy across the whole of the UK.

“The proposal to privatisate Channel 4 will require a lengthy legislative process and political debate. We will of course continue to engage with DCMS, government and parliament and do everything we can to ensure that Channel 4 continues to play its unique part in Britain’s creative ecology and national life.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2022/apr/04/nadine-dorries-to-press-ahead-with-plan-to-privatise-channel-4>

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[Coronavirus](#)

‘I lowered my guard’: four people on catching Covid for the first time

ONS estimates that one in 13 people in the UK had Covid at the end of March. Some of them tell their stories



Cases of coronavirus infection have reached a record high since restrictions were lifted. Photograph: Amer Ghazzal/Rex/Shutterstock

[Clea Skopeliti](#) and [Rachel Obordo](#)

Tue 5 Apr 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 5 Apr 2022 03.16 EDT

The [number of people with Covid across the UK](#) has hit record levels, figures released on the day [England ended free testing](#) suggest.

One in 13 people in the UK were estimated to have Covid in the week ending 26 March, according to the [Office for National Statistics](#), including a record 6.6% of over-70s.

Four people speak about recently contracting Covid for the first time.

‘I don’t want to go everywhere with a mask on but I will have to’



Marie James

After avoiding Covid for two years, 72-year-old Marie James became ill in March. She’s since developed painful mouth ulcers that make it impossible to eat solid foods, which a nurse said was a sign that Covid had lowered her immune system. During the week she caught the virus, she “did a series of things unusually”, including wearing her high-grade mask less strictly than usual. “I shan’t be doing that again. I lowered my guard a little, very much to my regret,” she says. “Though I don’t want to go everywhere with a mask on, I will have to.”

James still has “one or two” tests at home. “If needed we’ll buy more. We’re lucky, we’ve got our pensions – it’s the people who can’t afford to do it,” she says. “Personally, I know they have to come to an end but people on benefits should be able to have them. If you can’t afford it, you’re not going to get a lateral flow test, are you?”

‘Do I heat the house, do I feed the girls or do I get Covid tests?’

David*, a 55-year-old office worker in Manchester, is one of those forced to make that choice. The father-of-two tested positive for the first time on 20 March. He still feels unwell – “I’ve got asthma, which is just making it a long road” – but having run out of lateral flow tests (LFTs), he is concerned his family may not know if they contract the virus. “If [my daughters and partner] get ill, I’ll be thinking, have I passed it on or have they got a cold?” he says. He’s also concerned about transmitting the virus to vulnerable people. “At least before, I could go online and order one ... You follow advice for two years and then they cut you off at the knees.”

Combined with the cost of living crisis, David is in a bind. “Do I heat the house, do I get food or do I get Covid tests? I get good food for the girls; I don’t want to get them cheap rubbish. That’s the choice we have.”

‘I had two weeks of a horrible illness’

“I had two weeks of a horrible illness but managed to avoid hospital,” says 39-year-old Jeremy, who is immunosuppressed because of the medication he takes for psoriatic arthritis and ankylosing spondylitis. “The shortness of breath really got to me but I monitored my oxygen saturation and it never dropped to dangerously low levels.”

Jeremy, who lives in Oxfordshire and works in animation, says he thinks he caught Covid after a local home education get-together for his daughter in March. “Since September we’ve been home educating but started attending some primarily outdoor gatherings last month.”

“We were more relaxed by this stage because I’d had four vaccines, and antivirals were now theoretically available to the immunosuppressed.”

“Living with Covid does not work for people like me. I was ill and still struggling with breathlessness. Covid has shifted the landscape for vulnerable people significantly.”

‘My head is completely blocked’



Clair Chapwell

Seventy-year-old Clair Chapwell, from north London, says she's "worried we'll all be permanently sick", with people testing less and being more relaxed about taking preventative measures against Covid.

Chapwell, who is semi-retired, said she thinks she caught Covid travelling back from France last Tuesday. "We were masked up but people are so casual now," she said. "My wife tested positive on Wednesday but I was negative. I had achy muscles and diarrhoea but thought it was something else.

"On Sunday I tested positive using an LFT. My whole head is blocked."

She has a birthday party planned for Saturday but doesn't think it will go ahead. "I'm testing every day but if I'm still positive we'll have to reschedule.

"I'm glad we went to France but maybe we took too many risks. Covid is unavoidable though. We've been very careful but you can't live your life behind a mask or indoors."

*Name has been changed

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Books

‘No one wants to be a little brother’: Belarus, Russia and Ukraine – a dysfunctional family affair

Putin loves to evoke the family to describe the relationship between our countries. But we have always known our identities are quite distinct



‘Ukraine did its best to escape the Soviet Union, Lukashenko deliberately returned to it’ ... Belarusian and Russian national flags. Photograph: Vasily Fedosenko/Reuters

[Sasha Filipenko](#)

Tue 5 Apr 2022 05.16 EDT Last modified on Tue 5 Apr 2022 05.21 EDT

Recently, as someone born in [Belarus](#) who has lived in Russia, I have often been asked the same question: why did Ukraine, Russia and Belarus, nations so closely related to each other, develop in such different ways? My answer

is very simple: this closeness has been greatly exaggerated by Moscow, and in fact we are all quite different.

I am the last Soviet first-former. My parents took me to school on 1 September 1991, just a few days after the empire essentially disappeared. My father filmed that day's events with a camcorder, and today we have in our family archive a quite remarkable document: in the video schoolchildren and their parents listen to the teacher's introduction, getting ready for a new, ordinary Soviet school year, still completely unaware of the fact that the Soviet Union is no more. They are now citizens of a new country, one which will have to start everything from scratch and fight for its own independence, struggling every day to break free from the Kremlin's clutches.

My mum is Russian; my father, Ukrainian. I have Russian, Belarusian and Tartar roots, and my surname is Ukrainian. I am a product of the Soviet Union and of the 20th century.

The Ukrainians broke free from the family, while the Belarusians reckoned that if you keep living with your parents, you don't have to pay the rent.

But I've never queried my own identity: I've always known I am Belarusian. If someone told me I was Russian because I wrote in Russian, I would be perplexed. I firmly believe that the Russian language is not Russia's property; for me it's merely a means of communication. Speaking French in Geneva doesn't make you French, speaking German in Zurich doesn't make you German – you remain Swiss, just as I, while speaking Russian, remain Belarusian.

I've understood this very well since I was a child, but my country's problem – a problem also faced by [Ukraine](#) – is that Moscow fails to understand it. In the eyes of the Kremlin, anyone who speaks Russian is a potential taxpayer. Belarus and Ukraine tried to solve this problem in different ways. The Ukrainians broke free from the tight family embrace with resolve, slamming

the door behind them, while the Belarusians reckoned that if you keep living with your parents, you don't have to pay the rent.



Belarusian opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya takes part in Belarus Freedom Day in March 2022 in Warsaw, Poland. Photograph: Aleksander Kalka/ZUMA Press Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

After a short spell as one of the last Soviet children, I readily became a schoolboy of the new Belarus; a transformation that, because of my age, happened remarkably easily, something that couldn't be said of my parents. Decades after the collapse of the USSR, like many other Belarusians, they turned to the Russian media for information every day; it was like a resident of Belgium trying to find out what was going on in their country by watching French state TV each evening. Saying farewell to the old country was quite a difficult process for my parents and when Lukashenko came to power in 1994 he understood that well. Not a bright person but a real political animal, he decided to build his career on Soviet nostalgia. While Ukrainian politicians played on their electorate's hopes, Lukashenko preferred to work with fear. Hope allows one to stay in power for one term; fear, for five. Since 1991, we have been looking in different directions.

For several decades, while Ukraine saw a succession of presidents replacing one another, Lukashenko repeated the same mantra to the Belarusians:

“While I am your president, there will be no war in Belarus.” In a country that for its entire history had suffered as a result of someone else’s conflicts, this promise became an efficient spell. But in 2022, paying his debts to Putin, Lukashenko turned Belarus into an aggressor, leaving his own people completely bewildered. It’s a good lesson: the dictator never thinks about you, the dictator only ever thinks about himself. If you make an unspoken agreement with him and keep silent for decades, whatever happens, one day he’ll dupe you.

Had it been up to him, Lukashenko would have definitely restored a mini Soviet Union a long time ago, but given the circumstances of the new world, even he sometimes had to think of the country’s finances and budget. That forced him to keep paying court to two capitals: sometimes Brussels, sometimes Moscow. This strategy allowed him to stay in power for nearly 30 years, and it is this strategy that is about to become his undoing. After supporting Lukashenko during the post-election protests in 2020 and letting him stay in charge, Putin demanded he finally demonstrate his loyalty by opening the country to the Russian troops, so they could attack Ukraine.



Vladimir Putin meets Belarusian president Aleksandr Lukashenko in Moscow in March. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

While Ukraine did its best to escape the Soviet Union, Lukashenko deliberately returned to it. While Ukraine wanted to travel to the future, Lukashenko dreamed of going back to the past. For many years, Putin stayed somewhere in between, flirting with liberal values, with [Europe](#), but eventually he understood: if the choice is between his country's freedom and his own personal power, he will choose the latter.

For both Putin and Lukashenko this is a question of survival. Both old men understand that there is no place for them in the future. In a free country, Putin wouldn't have been able to stay at the top for so long. It is impossible to imagine a candidate who never talks to their opponents becoming the president of Ukraine. That's exactly what we see today: Zelenskiy proposes a dialogue, but Putin can't listen to anyone else's point of view. This is the difference between our countries: Russia likes monologue, Ukraine likes argument and Belarus likes silence.

Different worldviews, different tactics and strategies. The only thing that does unite Russia, Belarus and Ukraine seems to be their geographic proximity. It's not about a family, which Putin loves evoking, for some reason calling himself its head; it's about – let me repeat – something as elementary as living in a communal space. If Ukraine and Belarus were able to split the continent, believe me, they would happily do it, separating themselves from Russia with seas and oceans.

Putin relies on Ukraine, Belarus and Russia having their origins in a great ancient state, but that's where the schism begins

So why has Ukraine, unlike Belarus, always been more radical in its desire to split up from Russia? Countries are like people, and people are all different; everyone struggles in their own way, based on their life experience. Unlike western Ukraine, for instance, Belarus has never experienced a relatively liberal life. Throughout most of its history, it was occupied by other countries, occasionally enjoying formal independence for brief periods.

Despite all our differences, in 2022 Putin still rejects the idea that our national identities have any distinguishing features. He doesn't feel what

I've always felt: that we are separate. Whenever I happened to be in Russia, speaking the Russian language, I would immediately come across petty everyday racism, little jokes about Belarusians, which only emphasised the fact that I came to Russia from a different country. They call you their brothers in the Kremlin – only when they want to occupy you.

Putin relies on Ukraine, Belarus and Russia all having their origins in a great ancient state, Kievan Rus, but that's precisely where the schism begins: the Ukrainians see those times in a radically different way, rightly pointing out that it is their country that can claim its descent from Kievan Rus, since its capital was in what is now Ukraine. Putin calls everyone around him little brothers, not really understanding that no one wants to be a little brother. Putin insists on the fact that in the Russian empire, the Ukrainians and the Belarusians were not seen as separate peoples, and that's where he makes a basic mistake, neglecting to ask whether they themselves saw themselves as such. Ukraine declared independence in 1917, but Putin isn't bothered about that: his memory is selective, allowing him to remember just one thing: that Stalin got rid of Ukrainian national leaders.

Every child asks at some point, are my parents really my parents? Are we really a family? Could I in fact be a foundling, an adopted child? You could say that both Belarus and Ukraine, having once been adopted by Russia, perceived this adoption differently for a long time, longing to move out of the toxic parents' home. Moscow didn't want to let its "children" go, perhaps unable to fully understand that those it had adopted many years ago weren't even teenagers – they were grownups. But now, the Kremlin will never again be able to claim it is the head of the family. You can just about imagine that half a century from today, the Russians and the Ukrainians might be able to establish some kind of dialogue and talk to each other, coldly yet with respect; but it's absolutely impossible to imagine them becoming a single state by mutual consent. The iron curtain, having crashed down once again, has severed those old Soviet family ties for good.

Translated from Russian by Anna Aslanyan.

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‘I’m going to get so roasted for this!’ The nail-biting University Challenge final – reviewed by last year’s winner



Reading University and Imperial College go head to head in the University Challenge final 2022. Photograph: BBC

Covering everything from voguing to ‘badass flags’, the grand final went down to the wire between Imperial and Reading – the first final not to feature an Oxbridge team in nearly a decade

Andrew Rout

Tue 5 Apr 2022 05.46 EDT Last modified on Wed 6 Apr 2022 07.16 EDT

‘Online trials, remote practices and virtual pub quizzes’: all challenges faced by teams trying to prepare for this year’s [University Challenge](#). But Covid gave contestants one that was far harder than any of those – meeting your teammates for the first time on the day of filming, especially in a game that depends so much on knowing your team’s strengths. The entertainment has not suffered, though – from first round dabs to 235 point winning margins, and no fewer than five games separated by five points, this season has certainly not struggled for drama. The same is true of last night’s nail-biting grand final.

The road to the final is often long and, due to the show’s convoluted quarter-final rules, often winding too. Not, though, for the Imperial College London quartet of Max Zeng, Fatima Sheriff, Michael Mays and Gilbert Jackson, who swatted aside St John’s, Cambridge, Exeter, Kings College London, Reading and Emmanuel College, Cambridge to make it to this stage. Their opponents: Sylvian Jesudoss, Margaret Ounsley, Michael Hutchinson and Kira Bishop, the University of Reading team completing the lineup of the first final not to feature an Oxbridge team in nine years. They knocked out the Scottish trio of Strathclyde, Dundee and Edinburgh, as well as beating Birmingham and St John’s, Cambridge, with their only blemish being a defeat to Imperial. This wasn’t necessarily reason to be downhearted, though: two teams have won the title despite facing previous conquerors in the final. Ahead of last night’s grand final, the only thing we could guarantee was that the trophy would go to a captain called Michael.

As the match started, a quick buzz from Zeng on Thucydides saw Imperial take an early lead, admirably dealing with the poetry bonuses. Reading’s Hutchinson quickly found himself striking back with a starter on modern pentathletes, giving them the lead thanks to a hat trick on musical modes. But Imperial then went on the rampage, with each player taking one starter,

including a typical geography buzz for Zeng and Jackson showing his knowledge of “badass flags”. They found themselves with a 90-25 lead, despite being unable to answer any of the bonus questions on drag culture (“I’m going to get so roasted on the internet for this,” joked Sheriff.)

Reading’s Hutchinson was able to stop the rot by identifying the shape of pi on the periodic table, and they kept up their 100% bonus conversion to close the gap to just 40. With an aria from John Adam’s Nixon in China falling on Reading’s deaf ears, it fell to Imperial’s Mays – who is Scottish – to seemingly guess the correct Scottish king and claim the music bonuses. Proving the old adage ‘if at first you don’t succeed,’ Imperial eventually guessed correctly the aria that represented Jiang Qing, the wife of Mao Zedong, taking a 55 point lead at half-time.

One could be forgiven for writing Reading off at this point, but they rose from the ashes, with Ounsley and Hutchinson sharing the next four starters between them. Wasting no time in conferring, they quickly brought the game level at 105-105. An early maths buzz from Hutchinson ended up granting Reading the second picture bonuses, letting them take a 15 point lead.

In the final minute, Imperial found themselves going into a five point lead, thanks to another geography starter for Zeng – and their good knowledge of moons. With both teams knowing the next starter would win the title, nerves began to kick in. Neither team could take the starter on sundews, and an incorrect interruption from Hutchinson cost Reading five points, putting Imperial 10 up. Mays was unable to pick up the bounce back, and as Paxman turned the next card, the gong went.

A man known for his work levitating frogs (and discovering graphene), Professor Sir Andre Geim, turned out to be doing the trophy presentation – after some minor fist/elbow bumping shenanigans. As the winning captain went up to receive the trophy, his teammates looked utterly relieved. This shouldn’t be too surprising, though – Imperial had just won by a nose the closest fought grand final since 2006. Given what a strong performance Reading put in, they must have been very grateful it was their Michael who collected the trophy.

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‘What the hell was that episode?!’ Can the soaps ever win viewers back?



Has the bubble burst? Coronation Street, Brookside and EastEnders.
Composite: Guardian Design; ITV/Shutterstock; MERSEY TELEVISION COMPANY LTD; BBC

A juicy plotline would once get tens of millions watching and talking about EastEnders or Coronation Street. But the water-cooler moments have gone and Neighbours has been given the chop. Is there hope for the soap?



[Stuart Jeffries](#)

Tue 5 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 5 Apr 2022 01.58 EDT

When Dirty Den Watts gave his alcoholic wife a present in the Queen Vic on Christmas Day 1986, 30 million viewers were watching. “This, my sweet,” Den snarled at Angie, “is a letter from my solicitor telling you that your husband has filed a petition for divorce.”

It’s easy to be wise after the event, but Angie’s mistake was to get drunk on the Orient Express on the way back from the couple’s second honeymoon in Venice and then blab to the barman that she didn’t really have only six months to live. Den, naturally, overheard this admission and realised that Angie had dreamed up the lie to bring her philandering husband (who had made 16-year-old Michelle Fowler pregnant, earning the enduring rage of her mum, Pauline) back into something like conjugal felicity.

The days when a British soap could attract more than half of the population are over. Thirty-five years later, EastEnders is struggling with ratings. Last

Christmas, the BBC soap pulled in just 2.9 million viewers, landing it in 10th place of the top 10 most-watched programmes on Christmas Day. The 40-minute episode promised two weddings and a big reveal (which turned out to be that [Dotty Cotton](#) isn't Nasty Nick's daughter, but Rocky's), but prompted disaffection on Twitter. "What the hell was that?!?" wrote one. "Where were the two 'actual' weddings? Why did not a single one of them walk down the aisle?!? Where was the big Nazi storyline? That was probably the most mediocre Christmas episode ever! Why did no one die?!"



Mike Baldwin (Johnny Briggs) at the Rovers Return, Coronation Street, in 2000. Photograph: ITV/REX/Shutterstock

I know what you're thinking: *Nazi* storyline?

It's not just that, for some, soaps have lost the plot. Rather, soaps have lost their place in the national discourse. When, for instance, in [Coronation Street](#) in 1998, Deirdre (née Hunt, later Langton, Rachid and Barlow) was jailed for fraud while her common lover, Jon Lindsay, walked free, the prime minister, Tony Blair, supported the Weatherfield One and promised to intervene. William Hague, the leader of the opposition, told the House of Commons: "The nation is deeply concerned about Deirdre – Conservatives as much as anyone else." As late as 2009, Barbara Windsor's Peggy Mitchell pulled a pint for the London mayor – Boris Johnson – after a tyre on his bike

was punctured outside the Queen Vic. “If you have any ideas how I could help Walford,” Boris oiled at Peggy, “here’s my card.” Not the first time our leader had mistaken fiction for fact.

Today such a waste of parliamentary time and stomach-churning cameos are scarcely conceivable, and not just because politicians have more important things to worry about. As the television ratings expert Stephen Price puts it: “The soaps’ dominance of traditional TV appears to be on the wane, no longer impervious to challenge from the linear opposition and losing fans to the streamers.” By “linear opposition”, he means shows such as Bradley Walsh’s [Breaking Dad](#) on ITV and BBC One’s [The Repair Shop](#). By “streamers”, he means the likes of [Netflix](#) and Amazon Prime and catchup services such as BBC [iPlayer](#) and Channel 4’s All 4. While TV viewing as a whole fell by 9% between 2017 and 2019, [Coronation Street](#)’s audience fell by 19%, while [Emmerdale](#)’s went down by 22% and EastEnders’ by 37%.

All soaps are ailing, then, but last month two soaps were terminated with a ruthlessness akin to the moment in Coronation Street in 1989 when Rita Fairclough’s nemesis, Alan Bradley, was dispatched by a Blackpool tram. BBC One’s [Holby City](#) was axed after 23 years, while Channel 5 decided to stop broadcasting the 37-year-old Australian soap [Neighbours](#), prompting its production company, Fremantle, to cancel it. Kylie Minogue, who found fame on the show as Charlene Robinson (née Mitchell), tweeted: “We had no idea how big the show would become and how passionately viewers would take it to heart. Pure love! I can still hear Madge calling ... CHARLENE!!!!” Minogue was recalling Neighbours’ glory years: when Charlene married Scott Robinson (Jason Donovan) in 1987, nearly 20 million Britons watched. Today, the Neighbours audience on Channel 5 averages 1.2 million – undeniably small, but double the 600,000 who watch [Hollyoaks](#) on Channel 4.

“It’s sad to see Neighbours go,” says [Phil Redmond](#), the creator of Brookside, Grange Hill and Hollyoaks. “But the truth is the world has moved on.” Television history is littered with terminated soaps: Crossroads, Eldorado, Family Affairs, Brookside. But if the axe can descend on Neighbours, a fixture on British and Australian TV for decades, perhaps no soap is safe.

In response, Britain's leading TV soaps are being moved around the schedules, but that may seem as futile as relocating the deckchairs on the Titanic. Coronation Street will broadcast three hour-long episodes on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, instead of dividing Monday and Wednesday into two separate half-hour chunks with another programme in between. Also on ITV, Emmerdale has moved from 7pm to 7.30pm, Monday to Friday, in order to accommodate an hour-long ITV News programme. In response, BBC One has moved [EastEnders](#) to a consistent 7.30pm time slot, Mondays to Thursdays. Emmerdale is currently winning the 7.30pm ratings battle.

Even as their ratings plummet, though, soaps are investing in the future. Despite MPs worrying about the outlay of the licence fee, the [BBC spent £87m](#) on a new set for EastEnders. A patch of wasteland next to the original set has been transformed into a new one, complete with replicas of the Mitchell brothers' garage, the Beales' fish-and-chip shop and, according to media-watchers' decoding of drone footage, the dramatically rich juxtaposition of a mosque next to the Queen Vic.

Last month, ITV announced that construction work has started on an expansion to the Coronation Street set, across the Manchester ship canal from MediaCityUK in Salford. "It's a testament to the confidence ITV has in the show that it is investing so much in our future," says [John Whiston](#), the managing director of continuing drama and the head of ITV in the north. "Mind you, I guess it won't be long before we blow it up, burn it down or crash a tram into it."



Kylie Minogue and Jason Donovan as Scott and Charlene in *Neighbours*. Their wedding in 1988 was watched by 20 million viewers. Photograph: FremantleMedia Ltd/REX

Are soaps still a worthwhile investment? Traditionally, they were appointment-to-view telly. After Larry Hagman's diabolical Texas oilman, JR Ewing, was shot in 1980, 83 million people in the US tuned in to watch the episode in which his killer was revealed. Viewers had to wait from the finale of series three to the fourth episode of series four to discover whodunnit. This sort of cliffhanger, or so you would think, is inimical to the binge-watching culture of Netflix and Amazon Prime. The drum "doof-doofs" marking the cliffhanger at the end of *EastEnders* was predicated on deferring gratification until the next episode, when viewers would learn, for instance, if Ethel ever did find her little Willy (spoiler alert: Willy was a dog – a pug – and he usually came back).

But, in 2007, the Netflix executive Ted Sarandos revolutionised how we watch TV, by drastically cutting the time between the cliffhanger and its resolution. "The television business is based on managed dissatisfaction," Sarandos told me in 2013. "You're watching a great television show you are really wrapped up in? You might get 50 minutes of watching a week and then 18,000 minutes of waiting until the next episode comes along. I'd rather make it all about the joy."

Another problem for soaps is that the “water-cooler effect” is no more. “There never was a water cooler – it was people talking about last night’s telly on the bus,” nitpicks Tony Jordan, a scriptwriter and series consultant who was for many years the driving force behind EastEnders. “But the principle remains: soaps were the original Fomo. You were afraid of missing out. That’s how we got audiences of upwards of 26 million.”



Kim turns up for Dave's funeral on Emmerdale in 1997. Photograph: ITV/Shutterstock

But time-shifting technologies and binge watching don't necessarily mean viewing is no longer communal. Beau Willimon, the creator of the Netflix drama [House of Cards](#), argues that the end of the singular, common viewing experience has been replaced by smaller “concentric circles” of conversation. He has a point: the water-cooler effect may be obsolete, but it has been replaced by virtual communities. Live-tweeting your joy at the return of [Ozark](#) or your disappointment at [Killing Eve's lamentable new series](#) on a mobile device to fellow fans while watching on another screen is what communal TV looks like in the digital age.

It is also simplistic to say that soaps are merely victims of streaming; they have also been beneficiaries of catchup services. Last summer, for instance, ITV bosses decided to add weeks' worth of episodes of Coronation Street

and [Emmerdale](#) to ITV Hub during the World Cup so that football fans could binge-watch between their favourite matches.

It's unwise to go too far with this argument, though. Take viewing figures for 14-20 March. The most-watched TV show was the penultimate episode of The Apprentice on BBC One, which had 6.7 million viewers, 2.1 million of whom watched not live, but on catchup services, notably iPlayer. By contrast, Coronation Street, [that week's top-rated soap](#), was watched by 5.5 million viewers, only 716,000 of whom saw it on catchup, notably ITV Hub, suggesting that soaps are more dependent on appointment-to-view main channel telly than any other TV format.

Humans just want dramatic stories; the problem is that soaps aren't providing them

Redmond argues that soaps' main problem is not streaming, multichannel TV or the multiplication from a TV set in the living room to phones, tablets and other mobile devices. Rather, soap operas have sold their souls and thereby hastened their demise. "They have spread themselves too thinly, so they are disconnected from reality. They should spend more time on scripts and developing characters. For some reason, humans just want dramatic stories; the problem is that soaps aren't providing them. It's a temptation to sensationalise – I know, I've done it myself – but it's a short-term fix. Quality control is what's important," he says.



Brookside's Grant family, from left: Barry, Sheila, Bobby, Karen and Damon. Photograph: MERSEY TELEVISION COMPANY LIMITED

Traditionally, British soap operas postured as slice-of-life telly, tackling issues such as racism, sexism, violence against women, suicide and cot death in a serious manner that you would never see in US soaps such as Dallas or Dynasty. They also helped to develop ordinary Britons' political and emotional literacy, argues Jordan. When the heterosexual Mark Fowler was diagnosed as HIV-positive in EastEnders in 1991, Britons brought up by the tabloids to believe it was a "gay plague" were dramatically disabused. Similarly, says Jordan, "When someone got cancer and struggled with it, that may have helped some people who thought they were weak, but realised they were just struggling, as was the character on the soap." Jordan hails soap writers such as Sarah Phelps (EastEnders) and Sally Wainwright (Coronation Street), whose angry passion for such issue-based dramas made them essential viewing.

When Coronation Street began in December 1960, its terraced Victorian street looked just like the one lived in by millions of Britons and caught the wave of kitchen-sink realism generated by John Osborne in the theatre and [Lindsay Anderson](#) at the cinema.



Busting myths about HIV ... Tod Carty as EastEnders' Mark Fowler.
Photograph: BBC

Jordan argues that soaps came into their own as Britain became socially fragmented. We needed good neighbours on TV, perhaps, because they were less likely to exist in real life. "One thing that made EastEnders popular is that you wanted to live there," says Jordan. "It was a community, when communities were disappearing. It was a rule on the show that nobody ever said: 'This place is shit – I'm off to Watford or Barbados.' Viewers had to want to live at No 3 Coronation Street or Albert Square ... they'd fit in to the community and Den Watts could be their landlord."

Soaps' social integrity was undone in the quest for ratings. A pivotal moment came when an aeroplane crashed into Beckindale during Emmerdale's ratings-grabbing 1993 Christmas special.

But sensational storylines need not show that a soap has lost its soul. Jordan recalls being deeply moved as a teenager as he watched a 1967 episode of Coronation Street in which a train derailed crossing the viaduct, crashing into the cobbles, trapping Ena Sharples and killing Sonia Peters. "It had integrity because the community came together," he says. He contrasts that with the notorious EastEnders storyline from 2011 in which Ronnie Branning switched her dead baby with Kat Slater's newborn child, which

prompted more than 9,000 complaints, many from bereaved parents objecting to its seemingly cynical sensationalism.

Watch the first episode of Coronation Street, broadcast in 1960.

Nine years ago, I wrote an article for the Guardian headlined: “[Soap operas: has the bubble burst?](#)” In it, I argued: “Soaps are like printed newspapers or the British monarchy – the only question is when they will do the equivalent of stopping the presses or making the last royal hanger-on live without taxpayer subsidy in a council flat.” You will have noticed that there are still printed newspapers and that no royal, not even Prince Andrew, lives in a council flat. Perhaps, like the death of Mark Twain, their demise has been exaggerated.

“There’s no reason why soaps can’t survive,” argues Jordan. “But I’m not an idiot. I know that in the days when there were 30 million viewers for EastEnders there were only four channels and now choice is virtually unlimited. I can do the maths. But there is a place for them, and a substantial audience, too, as long as they are written by – and seen by – people who care about the characters and their stories.”

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2022.04.05 - Opinion

- The Tories have created the NHS crisis – and they should own it
- Strangers saved me from choking to death – twice. Everyone should learn first aid
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OpinionNHS

The Tories have created the NHS crisis – and they should own it

Polly Toynbee



Not content with trying to blame NHS staff for failings, Sajid Javid is now setting targets that are simply impossible without proper funding



‘Average ambulance response times stand at a shocking 78 minutes.’
Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

Tue 5 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 5 Apr 2022 07.12 EDT

Who is to blame? In the hailstorm of bad NHS news, the government and its press outriders are trying, with some success, to shift guilt on to the NHS itself. The public is no longer clapping, they say, with only 36% of voters telling the British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey that they are satisfied with the NHS. That figure should frighten any government – unless people are persuaded to blame the NHS instead of its political masters. Look at the groundswell of rightwing commentary blaming “lazy” GPs and “overpaid bureaucrats”, with articles headlined “The public have lost faith in our NHS religion” (Daily Telegraph) and “Are we falling out of love with the NHS?” (Spectator). Will this strategy of shifting the blame work? Probably not.

The last time public approval fell so low was in 1997, when Tony Blair’s “24 hours to save the NHS” helped turf out a Tory government after years of underfunding. In the BSA survey, the three top reasons for dissatisfaction given were long waits, NHS staff shortages and inadequate government funding – not the treatment itself.

No miracle can save the Tories from facing the next election with the NHS in a crisis which they have created: waiting lists and staff vacancies will still be rising. Anita Charlesworth, research director at the [Health](#) Foundation, warns that a million more health and care staff will be needed when this decade of ageing reaches its peak. Trawling the world for staff can't fill the void caused when the Tories' 2010 budget axed training places for clinicians who would now be in service.

On Tuesday the Lords will again vote on former health secretary Jeremy Hunt's amendment demanding regular estimates of NHS staffing needs for the next five, 10 and 20 years. Former Tory health minister Julia Cumberlege, championing the amendment in the Lords, tells me that saving the £6.2bn a year wasted on agency staff would pay for the extra trainees. You can see why the Treasury blocks any revelation that a million more NHS staff will be needed. The present struggle is to retain staff whose pay was cut by an average of £850 last year.

The Tories may be comforted by 39% of the survey sample saying the NHS wastes money and 25% saying the NHS "must live within its means". Yet there is rock-solid support for its founding principles – free for everyone (94%) and paid from taxes (86%). Few on the Tory benches harbour Hayekian hopes of dislodging Aneurin Bevan's socialist system: they know it would be political suicide, and most know that private insurance dreams are unworkable nonsense.

The political algorithm is simple: fund the NHS well and satisfaction rises. Though funding is nominally back to historical growth, inflation saps it, with no chance of repairing a decade of its lowest funding growth ever, says Charlesworth. Ministers mock the "magic money tree", but they offer their own "magic efficiency tree", she says, as they double impossible "efficiency savings" to 2.2% which the NHS must squeeze out this year.

Ministers can blame Covid, but the NHS was already plagued with a 4.4m waiting list. There are fewer doctors, nurses, beds and intensive care places than in comparable countries. Their best hope is to blame those who are struggling to provide underfunded services, by putting themselves "on the side of consumers" against NHS professionals. Of course NHS staff aren't

all saints, and there are obstructive professional demarcations, but unpopular politicians attack respected public servants at their peril.

The NHS will never lack disasters, or even the sort of heart-rending callous treatment revealed in [the Ockenden report](#), on deaths caused by poor maternity care in Shrewsbury and Telford, which was valiantly exposed by determined victims. “Never again” gets repeated every time, but Alastair McLellan, editor of Health Service Journal (HSJ), says that for all the “lessons learned” he doubts there will be a time when disasters never happen. Each has its own local causes – [on this occasion](#), midwifery dogmatism on “natural” birth, arrogant doctors and managers who engaged in obfuscation. But as health secretary Sajid Javid vows to “go after” those responsible, he should note the report’s emphasis on lack of funds and staff.

Avoidable deaths are embedded in Javid’s own regular statistics, with funding at their root: when 6.1m patients languish on English lists, people die waiting. The HSJ tracks collapsing ambulance services, with 3,000 people suffering “severe harm” in February alone because of delays in reaching those with strokes and heart attacks. Average response times stand at a shocking 78 minutes, due to hour-plus handover times at hospital entrances. McLellan says the cause is “lack of social care filling the beds, preventing admissions, delaying ambulance handovers”. He expects coroner’s courts soon to record large numbers of deaths due to late ambulances.

Last week the government ended Covid restrictions and free tests in England, though infections [have hit their highest ever level](#), and the Office for National Statistics says that 1.5m people are reporting long Covid, which will have unknown consequences for the NHS. The Guardian [has revealed](#) how children’s mental services have been overwhelmed, a situation worsened by Covid. But for all the NHS’s troubles, hold on [to this](#): in the national patient survey in late 2021, most people report that they had good treatment, with 75% approval for hospitals, 83% for GPs and 88% for cancer. That suggests Tory attempts to rubbish the NHS will fail. The public complains about access to services, and for that they blame the government.

Last week the annual “mandate” from the secretary of state to NHS England laid out a deranged wishlist of [13 “objectives”](#), all of equal “priority”: 50m

extra GP appointments each year, more levelling up, no debts and 40 new hospitals. Objective number 12 is “The NHS will continue to support its workforce” (but not with pay). This sets out the NHS as it should be, as it would be on 2010 funding rates. As it is, it sets up the NHS to fail to meet impossible goals.

Polly Toynbee is a Guardian columnist

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OpinionSociety

Strangers saved me from choking to death – twice. Everyone should learn first aid

[Simon Hattenstone](#)



Imagine how many lives would be saved if more people (including me) knew how to deal with an emergency



'I was waiting for the inevitable when a waiter wrapped me in his arms, and whacked me in my abdomen.' Photograph: Daisy-Daisy/Getty Images/iStockphoto

Tue 5 Apr 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 5 Apr 2022 13.58 EDT

The first time I almost choked to death was eight years ago. I'd just interviewed Gordon Brown and had a big barney with him. I got to see his famous temper in full fury when I asked him about Iraq while he wanted to talk about the Scottish referendum.

I was upset. It was pissing down, dark, and I ended up in a Glasgow curry house by myself. I phoned up Murdo, the photographer on the assignment, while I was eating and took him through the interview bit by disastrous bit. A piece of naan stuck in my throat. Murdo was on the end of the line, hearing me retching. Then choking.

I stumbled over to the bar, managed to force out the word "wa-er" and pointed to the tap. The waitress started slowly filling a pint glass to the top. The room was spinning, and I was about to pass out. I remember so clearly what was going through my head – I'm hundreds of miles from home, alone, I've had a standup row with one of Britain's few political giants, and my

partner Diane and I aren't married so she might lose the house because of inheritance tax. What a shit way to die.

I was waiting for the inevitable when a waiter wrapped me in his arms, and whacked me in my abdomen. Once, twice, thrice, four times and then it flew out across the room – the naan that was determined to see me off.

My throat was too scratched to speak properly. I thanked him as best as I could, then I sat down and wept. The shock was so huge that I didn't even feel the pain. I returned to my table and just sat there till the restaurant closed. The waiter asked if I was OK, ordered me a cab, and I thanked him again for saving my life.

When I woke up the next day, my ribs were agony. However I moved, it hurt. But it seemed a small price to pay. I returned home, and never mentioned it to my family. I thought they would never let me go away on a job again. So I winced in silence, told them I'd slept badly.

The least I could have done is taken a first aid course so I could help save somebody when the same thing happened to them. But I didn't.

Last month, my daughter Maya and I met my friend Priscilla in a London pub. It was the first time Priscilla had been out to eat since the pandemic started and we were determined to make a good time of it. I ordered starters, and the best steak in the house. After the first course, I received bad news – a cousin had died. I went outside to tell my mum and sister, and returned to the table.

The steak had arrived – the thickest, juiciest steak you've ever seen. I talked about the call, got a bit emotional, and popped a bit of steak into my mouth and chewed. But not enough. This time round I knew that there was no way it was going down naturally or with water.

I headed straight for the bar, again. I couldn't get a single word out this time, I was losing oxygen so quickly. I pointed to my back, started hitting it, miming a plea for help. The trouble is when you're choking you look batty or dangerous – the kind of person you want to steer well clear of. And they

did. Priscilla [tried to Heimlich me](#), but didn't have the strength or knowhow. I was turning blue. Maya was watching. It was awful.

Priscilla screamed that I was choking. Everybody in the packed pub looked up, stared at me, and did nothing. I stopped panicking. I just had a dreadful sense of resignation – it would be all over in a minute or so, life is good, I don't want to die.

Then I felt myself being grabbed from behind. A clenched fist locked into a hand wrapped tight around my abdomen – in and up it thrust, in and up, again and again. On the fifth thrust the piece of steak shot out with a splattering of sickly phlegm. Everybody in the pub clapped, which was incredibly gracious of them considering I must have put them off their meal.

I lay on the floor exhausted. Maya was in tears, being comforted by a stranger. Priscilla and the waitress helped me up. I went outside, and we sat in silence. When I was in a fit state I went into the pub and asked who was my saviour. The man responsible told me he'd never done the Heimlich manoeuvre before, and that it was only when nobody else came forward that he thought he'd best have a try. My hero.

I thought that being saved from choking once was lucky; twice was tempting fate. It was time to learn how to look after myself and others. I watched videos about how to do [the Heimlich manoeuvre on others](#), and one showing [how to Heimlich yourself](#) using a chair – same principle, into your abdomen and upwards.

According to recent Office for National Statistics figures, an average of [351 people die](#) every year in the UK as a result of choking, and further analysis of reports published by coroners suggests the true toll is being hidden. Research commissioned by [the Red Cross](#) showed that 19 out of 20 of adults would be unable to save lives in first aid emergencies. The Red Cross, St John Ambulance and British Heart Foundation have called for it to be compulsory for every child to receive an hour of first aid education every year as part of their PSHE (personal, social, health and economic) education.

It makes sense. It's empowering, socially responsible, and saves lives. I would add that it should be compulsory for at least one member of staff on duty in eating or drinking establishments to know how to carry out the Heimlich manoeuvre.

As for me, I'm off to book a first aid course.

- Simon Hattenstone is a features writer for the Guardian
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[OpinionHungary](#)

Orbán's victory in Hungary adds to the darkness engulfing Europe

[Timothy Garton Ash](#)



The pro-Putin nationalist managed to turn the war in Ukraine to his advantage in a win that deepens the EU's troubles



‘Orbán won by telling Hungarians he would keep them out of this war, and that their bills would stay low due to his sweet gas deals with Putin.’

Photograph: Attila Kisbenedek/AFP/Getty Images

Mon 4 Apr 2022 11.01 EDT Last modified on Mon 4 Apr 2022 14.28 EDT

As I stood in a cold, disconsolate crowd in central Budapest late on Sunday night, listening to Hungarian opposition leader Péter Márki-Zay concede defeat in [the country's election](#), the Twitter feed on my phone filled with images of murdered Ukrainian civilians in the town of Bucha. Some of them had their hands tied behind their backs. Beside one murdered woman lay a keychain with a pendant showing the yellow stars on blue background of the European flag. The Ukrainian horrors are clearly far worse than the Hungarian miseries, but the two are fatefully connected.

It is a bitter irony that, just as we learn of some of the worst atrocities in Russian president Vladimir Putin’s war of terror against Ukraine, Putin’s closest ally among EU leaders, Hungarian prime minister [Viktor Orbán](#), is re-elected partly because he turned that very war to his own political benefit. As well as exploiting all the advantages he has already built in to a heavily rigged political system, such as gerrymandered constituencies and overwhelming media dominance, Orbán won by telling Hungarians that he would keep them out of this war – and that their heating bills would stay low due to his sweet gas deals with Putin.

In his victory speech, the Hungarian leader listed the “opponents” he had defeated. They included the international media, Brussels bureaucrats and the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, who has criticised him fiercely for his opposition to the weapon supplies and further sanctions that [Ukraine](#) desperately needs. So he tells us exactly who his enemies are – and friend Putin has hastened to congratulate him on his famous victory.

If the Hungarian six-party opposition coalition led by Márki-Zay had won, [Hungary](#) would have become a staunch western ally in the face of Russian aggression, as other central European countries such as Poland and the Czech Republic are proving to be. “Russians go home!” some youngsters chanted at the very end of that disconsolate opposition wake in Budapest, recalling a slogan from the time of the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956. Walking back at midnight across a deserted Heroes Square, I recalled how in that very place in June 1989 I had heard a young, seemingly idealistic Orbán himself call for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary. Yet now the ageing cynic is flatly refusing to let western arms supplies pass through Hungary in order to help the Ukrainian army send the Russians home. I wonder what he sees when he looks in the mirror.

An opposition government would also have joined the European public prosecutor’s office, enabling the pursuit of well-documented corruption in the use of EU funds. It would have kicked out the International Investment Bank, which the opposition says is closely linked to the Putin regime. And it would have set about the difficult process of turning Hungary back into a proper liberal democracy.

Instead, Orbán’s Fidesz party has once again secured a two-thirds supermajority, enabling it to change the constitution at will. Whatever honeyed assurances it gives in Brussels or Washington, it will continue to consolidate what political scientists describe as an electoral authoritarian regime. Hungary’s political system is now closer to that of non-EU Serbia, which this weekend saw a simultaneous victory for another nationalist electoral authoritarian, President [Aleksandar Vučić](#), than it is to that of a democracy such as France or Portugal. Orbán and Vučić are close allies.

There were significant failings by the opposition. The six parties were not as united as they should have been, and the lead candidate obviously failed to

convince the electorate outside Budapest. Overall, the opposition actually lost votes, although it gained some single-member constituencies in the capital. But there is no way in which this was a fair election.

Wherever I went over the last five days, I saw streets and metro carriages plastered with government-funded posters showing an avuncular image of Viktor Orbán beside the slogan “Let’s protect Hungary’s peace and security”. Another ubiquitous poster showed a young mother and child with the slogan “Protect the children”. This advertised a government referendum conducted at the same time as the election, with questions such as “Do you support the promotion of sex reassignment therapy for underage children?” (The referendum did not reach the required 50% of valid votes.) State media relentlessly promoted a pro-Orbán narrative, as they have done for more than a decade, and even spent some time effectively blaming the war in Ukraine on the Ukrainians. Márki-Zay got just five minutes on state television to explain the opposition programme. Facebook was plastered with regime-supporting paid advertising, thus continuing the platform’s ignoble record of helping the enemies of liberal democracy in return for filthy lucre.

Yet having spent lavishly on tax and welfare handouts to win the election, the Orbán government needs EU funds to fill a big hole in its finances. Unless the EU is prepared simply to accept that it now has an authoritarian member state, it should at long last impose rigorous conditionality on the flows of European money that have long been one of the main founts of Orbán’s power. This means continuing to withhold post-Covid recovery grants and loans, since transparency cannot be guaranteed by a regime that is actually built on the corrupt use of EU money. It also means finally triggering the rule-of-law conditionality mechanism that could hold back significant chunks of funding from the EU’s regular budget. (And not being fooled into giving Hungary lots of money for Ukrainian refugees who have in fact already moved on to other countries.)

But here’s the problem. Faced with the latest evidence of the barbaric behaviour of Russian troops in Ukraine, Europe needs to step up its sanctions against Putin. When Orbán returned from back-to-back summits of Nato and the EU in Brussels last month, his government sent an email to all Hungarians who had signed up for a Covid vaccine saying that “proposals

were put on the agenda against which Hungary's interests had to be protected". His government would never allow weapons supplies to go through Hungary to Ukraine, nor sanctions to be imposed on the 85% of Hungary's gas and 64% of its oil that comes from Russia. In response to the Bucha atrocities, EU leaders such as French president Emmanuel Macron are now calling for more sanctions, including on Russian oil. Self-styled "realists" may argue that Brussels has to stay soft on Hungary in order to keep Orbán on board for a common front over Ukraine.

Europe should now get tough on both the Russian enemy without and the Hungarian enemy within. But can it and will it do both at once? Here is another dilemma this dark, depressing weekend has presented to a deeply shaken Europe.

- Timothy Garton Ash is a historian, political writer and Guardian columnist
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OpinionDivorce

There's no such thing as 'no-fault' divorce – the phrase they're looking for is 'everybody's fault'

[Zoe Williams](#)



I'm all for making break-ups less traumatic. But the new divorce law can't strip out all the emotion



‘No-fault divorce’ feels like a magic bullet, yet fails at the level of language.’ Photograph: fizkes/Getty Images/iStockphoto

Tue 5 Apr 2022 02.00 EDT

On Wednesday, the [“no-fault divorce” law](#) comes into effect in England and Wales, the result of years of campaigning by lawyers and family rights groups, to take the acrimony out of separation. The law until now was peculiar in ways that you probably wouldn’t realise until you were at the point of getting divorced – tethered to old-world values about the sanctity of marriage, with workarounds to reflect the modern understanding that, sometimes, shit happens.

So if you wanted a divorce and hadn’t been deserted or gone through the process of separation, you had to sue your spouse for either adultery or unreasonable behaviour. In the first case, obviously that had to be brought by the “adulteree” rather than the adulterer, which was kind of rum, that one party would get cheated on *and* made to carry the burden of legal admin. As for what’s unreasonable, the bar was set incredibly low, and unless you said: “He has this way of breathing where it always sounds the same,” a judge would be unlikely to refuse you. It sounds easy, but it set the tone: two people scrabbling through the mud of the marriage to find the worst bits in

it, which intensified the adversarialism. Even couples who managed to keep it “round the table” (a mediated separation) rather than head to head (with a family court involved) would nonetheless often be embarking on their journey as co-parents with a whole list of charges and counter-charges, burning away at their brains, offending their natural sense of justice.

So “no-fault” feels like a magic bullet, yet fails at the level of language. It makes it sound like an entirely neutral event, containing neither intention nor emotion – it could be two drivers, innocently colliding as they both try to change lanes; or two robots, accidentally chasing each other off a cliff, after a motherboard malfunction. That’s not how most people feel about their divorce. It’s not always the letter of the law and the processes of the court forcing couples into hostile positions; often people can only make sense of what has happened with a painstaking analysis of its many unfortunate events. The phrase they’re looking for, if they want to take the sting out of the process, while still reflecting on its reality, is an “everybody’s-fault divorce”.

- Zoe Williams is a Guardian columnist
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[Darfur](#)

Sudan militia leader denies war crimes at landmark ICC Darfur trial

Ali Muhammad Ali Abd-al-Rahman is accused of 31 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity



Ali Muhammad Ali Abd-al-Rahman in the dock at The Hague on Tuesday.
Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

[Jason Burke](#) Africa correspondent

Tue 5 Apr 2022 08.15 EDTFirst published on Tue 5 Apr 2022 05.22 EDT

A former militia leader in [Sudan](#) has denied committing war crimes and crimes against humanity as his landmark hearing opened at the international criminal court.

Ali Muhammad Ali Abd-al-Rahman [is accused](#) of leading thousands of pro-government fighters on a systematic campaign of murder, rape and torture

during the height of violence in the Darfur region of Sudan between 2003 and 2004.

The 72-year-old is alleged to have been a “feared and revered” commander of the Janjaweed militia deployed alongside Sudanese government forces to carry out a brutal counter-insurgency campaign after a rebellion against Khartoum by some local communities.

The conflict left 300,000 people dead and displaced 2.5 million, according to the UN.

“I am innocent of all of these charges,” Abd-al-Rahman, who faces life imprisonment, told judges The Hague after the charges were read out at the start of his case on Tuesday.

The trial is the first at the international criminal court to deal with the Darfur conflict, and [campaigners have said](#) it shows that no impunity exists even for crimes committed nearly two decades ago.

“[Tuesday] is a momentous day for victims and survivors in Darfur who never stopped fighting to see the day the cycle of impunity is broken,” said Mossaad Mohamed Ali, a Sudanese human rights lawyer with the African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies.

Prosecutors allege that Abd-al-Rahman was a “a willing and knowing participant in crimes” and “one of the key senior Janjaweed militia leaders” who worked “hand-in-glove” with the Sudanese government in efforts to crush rebels in the [Darfur](#).

“You will see that he took pride in the power that he thought he exerted and the authority that he had … and … strange glee in a feared reputation. You’ll hear evidence … that his forces and himself rampaged across different parts of Darfur,” the prosecutor Karim Khan said.

The charges detail attacks led by Abd-al-Rahman across a vast area that resulted in “a large number of victims, including thousands of civilians forcibly displaced, hundreds murdered and many raped”.

Witness statements collected by prosecutors detail how Abd-al-Rahman killed people with an axe and told his men to leave no survivors from raids. They describe civilians shot as they fled raids, a baby thrown in the air, women raped in front of family members, and villages burned to force inhabitants into the desert.

Abd-al-Rahman voluntarily surrendered to the court in June 2020 to avoid prosecution in Sudan, where he faced the death penalty if convicted.

During earlier court appearances he and his lawyer argued he was a victim of mistaken identity and that he was not educated enough to understand that the orders he carried out could result in war crimes.

The then ruler of Sudan, Omar al-Bashir, who ordered the campaign of violence in Darfur, has been in prison in Khartoum since his fall from power in 2019 and faces ICC charges of genocide related to the conflict.

Two other suspects sought by the ICC are Abdel-Rahim Mohammed Hussein, the interior and defence minister at the time of the worst of the violence, and Ahmed Haroun, a former security chief who was the leader of Bashir's ruling party. Haroun is [believed to be in custody](#) in Sudan, but the whereabouts of Hussein are unknown.

Sudan's transitional government, which took office in 2019 after Bashir fell, approved the transfer of the three wanted men to the ICC as part of a broader move towards democracy and reintegration into the world community.

However, after a military takeover last year, many of those now occupying positions of power in Sudan are themselves implicated in the violence in Darfur and are unlikely to hand over the fugitives, analysts believe.

Elise Keppler, an associate international justice director at Human Rights Watch, said that "in the face of steep odds and no other credible options, the ICC is serving as the crucial court of last resort for Darfuris," and she called on Sudanese authorities to send other Darfur suspects including Bashir to the ICC to face justice.

The trial comes amid a surge in what humanitarian groups say is intercommunal violence in Darfur since the end of the United Nations and African Union mission there. Decades after the worst of the fighting, 1.6 million people are still internally displaced in the region, the UN estimates.

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North Korea

North Korea would ‘annihilate’ South if provoked, warns Kim Jong-un’s sister

Warning points to a rise in tensions on the peninsula after the North conducted its first intercontinental ballistic missile test in five years



Kim Yo-jong, the influential sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, seen here in 2018 speaking to former South Korean president Moon Jae-in. Kim berated Seoul for the second time in days. Photograph: Bae Jae-man/AP

[Justin McCurry](#) in Tokyo and agencies

Tue 5 Apr 2022 00.17 EDT Last modified on Tue 5 Apr 2022 05.11 EDT

The influential sister of North Korea’s leader, [Kim Jong-un](#), has said the country’s nuclear forces would “annihilate” the South Korean military if it launched a pre-emptive strike against the regime.

Kim Yo-jong, who holds several senior positions in the government and ruling party, said the North had no intention of starting a second Korean war, but would respond if provoked and leave the South's military in a state of “total destruction and ruin”.

Her comments after South Korea's defence minister, Suh Wook, publicly discussed Seoul's ability to “accurately and quickly hit any target in North Korea” with a range of weapons, as international unease grows over the North's recent resumption of long-range missile tests. In another statement directed toward Suh on Sunday, she called him a “scum-like guy”.

Kim Yo-jong's warning, while not unusual in its vivid use of language, points to a rise in tensions on the peninsula after the North last month conducted its first test of an intercontinental ballistic missile for five years, and amid speculation that the regime could be preparing to carry out a nuclear test later this month.

In her second statement in the space of a few days, Kim said Pyongyang opposed war and did not view South Korea as its principal enemy. “In other words, it means that unless the South Korean army takes military action against our state, it will not be regarded as a target,” she said.

“But if South Korea, for any reason – whether or not it is blinded by misjudgment – opts for such military action as ‘preemptive strike’ touted by (Suh Wook), the situation will change. In that case, South Korea itself will become a target.”

The South, she added, could avoid that fate by abandoning its “fantastic daydream” of launching an attack on the North, a nuclear-armed state whose arsenal could include nuclear-capable short-range weapons targeting South Korean conventional forces and 28,500 US troops based in the country.

North Korea has attempted to increase pressure on Seoul just weeks before South Korea's new president, the conservative Yoon Suk-yeol, replaces the liberal Moon Jae-in, who has little to show for his attempts at rapprochement with Pyongyang.

Moon met Kim Jong-un three times in 2018 and lobbied hard to set up the North Korean leader's [first summit](#) with Donald Trump in June that year.

A second Trump-Kim summit in 2019 [ended in failure](#) due to disagreements on sanctions relief, and the Biden administration has shown little interest in reviving denuclearisation talks unless they result in the verifiable dismantling of the North's nuclear and ballistic missile programmes.

Yoon, who will be sworn in 9 May, has vowed to strengthen the South's defences against North Korean missile attacks but has not ruled out a return to dialogue with Kim.

Yoon's foreign policy and security advisers are in the US to discuss an early summit with [Joe Biden](#) amid concern in Seoul that the US president's focus is exclusively on the war in Ukraine.

Some analysts believe the North will [continue to increase pressure](#) on Washington in the coming months, possibly by [test-flying missiles over Japan](#) or resuming nuclear tests. A major provocation could come on or about 15 April, the 110th anniversary of the birth of North Korea's founder – and Kim Jong-un's grandfather – Kim Il-sung.

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Maryland

Ever Forward ship still stuck in Chesapeake Bay after three weeks

Officials opt for new approach to moving vessel belonging to owners of Ever Given, which blocked Suez canal for a week



The US Coast Guard uses tugboats on 29 March to attempt to free the container ship Ever Forward. Photograph: Jim Lo Scalzo/EPA

Guardian staff and agencies

Mon 4 Apr 2022 19.40 EDT Last modified on Wed 6 Apr 2022 06.47 EDT

A cargo ship has been stuck in the Chesapeake Bay for more than three weeks, and after two unsuccessful attempts to free it, officials are pivoting to a new approach.

On Monday, the US coast guard announced that containers would be removed from the Ever Forward to lighten the load before another try.

The Ever Forward is owned by the same company that owns [the Ever Given](#), which famously ran aground and blocked the Suez canal for a week, disrupting the global supply chain.

The ship ran into its own troubles on 13 March when it became lodged just north of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge. It is reportedly [the largest ship](#) to ever get stuck in the bay and its removal has proved a lengthy challenge.

Salvage experts determined they wouldn't be able to overcome the ground force of the more than 1,000ft (305-meter) vessel, loaded with nearly 5,000 containers, according to a news release. Unloading the ship offered the best chance to refloat it, officials said.

Officials said dredging would continue to a depth of 43ft, but as soon as two crane barges were installed, containers would be removed and taken back to Baltimore's Seagirt marine terminal. Then, tugs and pull barges will try again to refloat the ship. The shipping channel would remain open to one-way traffic during the operation, which was expected to take about two weeks.

Officials have said there were no reports of injuries, damage or pollution.

The coastguard has said it hasn't determined what caused the Ever Forward to run aground. The ship is outside the shipping channel and has not been blocking navigation, unlike last year's high-profile grounding of the Ever Given, which is also owned by Evergreen Marine Corporation.

For one woman, however, the blockage has become personal. A Bloomberg reporter [recently told](#) NBC Washington that nearly everything she owned was packed into a shipping container now trapped aboard the Ever Forward.

"We are at the whims of the tide and the salvage crew of the Ever Forward," Tracy Alloway, who is relocating from Hong Kong to New York, told NBC. "The entire contents of our apartment, all of our furniture, lots of books, things of sentimental value are all in a container stuck in the Chesapeake Bay."

This article was amended on 6 April 2022 to remove an incorrect reference to the Ever Forward and Ever Given being “sister ships”, a term related to technical specifications rather than ownership.

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[Florida](#)

‘Loud. Proud. Still allowed’: New York’s mayor urges LGBTQ+ Floridians to move to city

Eric Adams launches Florida ad campaign denouncing state’s ‘don’t say gay’ legislation



The Tampa Pride parade on 26 March, held after the passage of Florida’s ‘don’t say gay’ bill. Photograph: Octavio Jones/Getty Images

[Maya Yang in New York](#)

Tue 5 Apr 2022 00.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 5 Apr 2022 00.01 EDT

The mayor of New York City, Eric Adams, has launched a digital campaign designed to persuade members of Florida’s LGBTQ+ community to move to the Big Apple, after their state passed a so-called “[don’t say gay](#)” education law.

On Monday, Adams announced the launch in five [Florida](#) cities of digital billboards and creative ads denouncing the legislation, which bans the discussion of sexual orientation and gender identity from kindergarten through third grade.

“I am the mayor of New York City but I have a message for Florida’s LGBTQ+ community,” [said](#) Adams, a Democrat. “Come to a city where you can say and be whoever you want.

“Florida’s ‘don’t say gay’ bill is the latest shameful, extremist culture war targeting the LGBTQ+ community. Today, we say to the families living in fear of this state-sponsored discrimination that you will always have a home in [New York](#) City.”

One [slogan](#) on the new billboards reads: “People say a lot of ridiculous things in New York. ‘Don’t say gay’ isn’t one of them.”

Another says: “When other states show their true colors, we show ours.” The second half of the slogan is written in rainbow colors.

Another sign says: “Loud. Proud. Still allowed.” Another: “New York City is alive. And so is free speech.”

The digital campaign will run from 4 April to 29 May in Fort Lauderdale, Jacksonville, Orlando, Tampa and West Palm Beach. New York officials said the campaign would deliver an estimated 5m impressions.

The Florida bill, signed into law by the Republican governor, Ron DeSantis, requires the implementation of “procedures to reinforce the fundamental right of parents to make decisions regarding upbringing and control of their children”.

It allows parents to launch legal action against school boards if they believe policies overstep that “fundamental right”.

On Monday, the chancellor of the New York City education department, David C Bank, said: “Educators work every day to make New York City public schools safe and supportive environments for LGBTQ+ youth.

“From what we teach, to how we care for young people, we create schools that affirm and lift up the students and honor who they are. Children bring the totality of who they are into our classrooms, and the cruel actions being taken across this country to attack LGBTQ+ children is contrary to everything we believe in as educators.”

Daniel Dromm, a former chair of the city council’s finance committee, said: “As a New York City public school teacher for 25 years, I have news for Florida: students are already saying ‘gay’. They see us on the news and on television shows. They know that LGBTQ+ people are their family, friends, and neighbors.

“These ads will reaffirm New York City’s commitment to creating an inclusive school environment, in sharp contrast to the discriminatory policies of Governor DeSantis.”

The Florida law has generated backlash from LGBTQ+ communities and from the corporate world.

Last month, Disney employees staged [walkouts](#) over the bill after the chief executive of the entertainment giant, Bob Chapek, did not publicly condemn the bill.

Disney, which employs more than 75,000 people in Florida, later said it would pause all political donations in the state.

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New Zealand

‘Aurora of the sea’: luminous plankton light up New Zealand shores

Rare phenomenon of bioluminescence is caused by blooms of plankton which glow to evade or distract predators



Bioluminescence plankton light up the waves in Napier, New Zealand. The phenomenon is also known as the ‘aurora of the sea’. Photograph: Sajith Muraleedharan

Tess McClure in Auckland

@tessairini

Mon 4 Apr 2022 22.26 EDT Last modified on Mon 4 Apr 2022 22.27 EDT

On the shorelines of New Zealand’s north island, shores have been lit up by the glowing “aurora of the sea”: blooms of plankton that glow blue-green after nightfall.

The elusive, beautiful phenomenon that sometimes sweeps into the coasts was witnessed by local “biohunter” enthusiasts who scour the shorelines for bioluminescence.

“It’s also called the aurora of the sea – like the Aurora Australis you see in the sky,” says Sajith Muraleedharan, a photographer who captured the phenomenon in Napier.

The light is activated by movement: cresting waves begin to glow, splashes sparkle, footprints glimmer blue in the wet sand, and swimming fish can leave sparkling trails. “Every time a wave comes in, you can see this beautiful phenomenon. It’s amazing – a lot of people were there, a lot of people with families, some of them were swimming,” Muraleedharan said. “It is indeed a great thing to witness.”



The luminous waves are unpredictable but according to Sajith Muraleedharan are common on warm nights and sometimes after heavy rain.
Photograph: Sajith Muraleedharan

The phenomenon is caused by blooms of plankton and phytoplankton species, some of which use the “luminescence” adaptation to evade or distract predators.

“Dinoflagellates produce this light when disturbed, and will give a light flash lasting a fraction of a second – disturbing the predator trying to consume them,” said Karl Safi, algal ecologist at the National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research.



‘Biohunting’ groups have sprung up around New Zealand’s shores, with enthusiasts alerting one another to the luminous blooms. Photograph: Sajith Muraleedharan

The glowing waves are unpredictable, but Safi said they were “common on warm nights and may also occur after days of heavy rain”. The phenomenon only occurs at night, Safi said, as the creatures have an inbuilt biological clock, and do not glow during the daytime – even if put into a dark space or container.

Microbiologist Siouxsie Wiles uses bioluminescence to track the growth of infectious disease in a laboratory setting – but says she is also an enthusiast, and has gone hunting to see the creatures lighting up in the wild.

Around New Zealand’s shorelines, amateur “biohunting” groups have sprung up, where watchers alert one another if they’ve seen the phenomenon occurring, and sometimes travel up the coast to try to witness it. “People post if they’ve seen anything and it’s been quite quiet this year, so it was

really great to see that one,” Wiles said of the Napier sighting. She has been “hunting” twice to see the waves lighting up.

“The more people who see it, the better I think,” Wiles says. “It’s just this beautiful – magical really – kind of amazing phenomenon.”

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