

The Guardian

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Headlines tuesday 6 december 2022

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Deal reached over onshore windfarms and new SNP leader in Westminster named – as it happened

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Rail strikes

Union leader Mick Lynch defends UK rail strikes over Christmas

Government ‘coordinating attack on working people’ and seeking to ‘ratchet up dispute’, says RMT

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



Commuters at Waterloo station in London. The RMT has announced additional strike dates and rebuffed a pay offer from Network Rail after talks broke down. Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

[Jessica Elgot](#) and [Helen Pidd](#)

Tue 6 Dec 2022 04.56 ESTFirst published on Tue 6 Dec 2022 04.10 EST

The RMT general secretary has defended rail strikes across the UK over Christmas and said unions have a “duty to coordinate what they do”, saying

the government is sending a message that pay rises will only come with worse terms for workers.

Mick Lynch said the government was “coordinating … an attack on working people” by changing working conditions and offering below-inflation pay rises.

“It would be foolish of unions not to coordinate themselves in response to those attacks,” he told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme on Tuesday.

Lynch said the strikes over Christmas would “not largely affect passenger services” but would have an impact on engineering works between 24 and 27 December.

On Monday night, the union announced the additional strike dates and rebuffed a pay offer from Network Rail shortly before the industry’s deadline.

The RMT said it would put the offer to its members in an electronic referendum this week but recommend that they reject it. It affirmed that two 48-hour strikes that would stop much of the railway next week would go ahead in any case.

Public strikes calendar

Lynch said all passenger trains on Christmas Eve would run until the evening, but strikes would then begin to affect services. “It is a change of plan because the companies have changed their plans,” he said.

He said the timing of the strikes was “unfortunate, but we have to respond to what the companies are doing, and they’re doing that very deliberately. They’re seeking to ratchet up the dispute.” He said train companies had threatened to impose changes to operations, including potential job losses in the future.

“If we do not respond, then those changes will go through without a response from us and our members will have to suffer the consequences including job losses and changes to their working lives that are unacceptable

to them. One of those things are more unsocial hours or more weekend working.”

The schools minister, Nick Gibb, said the strikes would “hold the country to ransom” over the festive period. He told GB News: “It’s a very disappointing decision by the RMT. They were offered a very good pay deal by the employers, 8% over two years, which is in line with the kind of pay deals that are taking place outside the public sector.

“We would urge the unions to talk to employers, to keep negotiating and not to hold the country to ransom, particularly in December as we get nearer to Christmas.”

Labour’s deputy leader, Angela Rayner, told BBC Breakfast that rail workers would not have taken the decision to strike lightly. “These people who are going on strike are going to lose pay, they will lose their pay at a time when they will need it most. They are not doing it at a drop of a hat,” she said.

“This is a militant government that is not dealing with the issues and not resolving this strike action, and it’s frustrating. The system is absolutely crumbling without the strikes. Anyone who gets on a train now in the north knows that you’re praying if you’re going to get to where you need to get to.”

The row over the rail strikes came as the UK Statistics Authority, which provides independent regulation of all official statistics produced in the UK, said it was investigating how train cancellation statistics were reported, following a series of Guardian stories.

Some train companies – with TransPennine Express (TPE) the worst offender – are taking advantage of a loophole that means cancellations do not “count” in official statistics if they are announced by 10pm the night before. They use something called a p-code, originally designed to allow companies to cancel trains for reasons beyond the operators’ control, for example after a landslide.

But the P-code is open for operators to interpret, meaning some only use it for circumstances that are not their fault, while others, such as TPE, use it when they simply do not have enough staff. The result is misleading data that only includes on-the-day cancellations. TPE cancelled about 20% of services last month but will only have to report on-the-day cancellations of about 6%.

The latest strikes will take place from 6pm on Christmas Eve until 7am on 27 December, curtailing some of the last passenger trains before Christmas and potentially disrupting a wide programme of engineering works on the railway. Most trains do not run on 25 or 26 December.

Apart from the Christmas bank holiday weekend, strike days were already planned for 13-14 and 16-17 December, then on 3-4 and 6-7 January, with widespread disruption expected on the days after the strikes.

However, the RMT has called off industrial action short of a strike at Network Rail, including an overtime ban that insiders said could have caused even more widespread disruption. Some had feared that parts of the rail network would have been left almost as stretched during its planned work-to-rule period as on the [eight days](#) its members are scheduled to strike.

The RMT's national executive committee met on Monday afternoon to consider an improved offer from Network Rail that raised pay for 2022 – backdated to January – by 5%, with a further 4% at the start of 2023.

The smaller TSSA union said it was calling off strike action in December while it balloted its members at Network Rail on the improved offer.

This article was amended on 6 December 2022 to make clear that the RMT halted an overtime ban only for Network Rail members.

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Strep A

Children at risk of strep A in England could be given preventive antibiotics

‘Rare’ blanket measure may be used at primary schools after at least nine UK deaths from bacterial infection



The UK Health Security Agency said prescribing antibiotics to children in a school or nursery exposed to non-invasive strep A was rare. Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

[Jamie Grierson](#) and [Kevin Rawlinson](#)

Tue 6 Dec 2022 10.37 ESTFirst published on Tue 6 Dec 2022 03.36 EST

Primary schoolchildren at risk from a severe form of strep A could be given preventive antibiotics as a blanket measure, in a move described as “rare” by health officials.

At least nine children have died due to complications from strep A bacterial infections since September, with one senior health official suggesting the

early start to the strep A season in the UK could be a knock-on effect to immunity levels caused by Covid measures, although others have downplayed the impact lockdowns may have had.

Most strep A infections are mild, with a sore throat or a skin infection that can be treated easily with antibiotics the most common characteristics, and deaths are rare.

In extreme cases, strep A can develop into an invasive group A streptococcal infection (iGAS), which can be fatal. Officials have noticed an increase in iGAS cases this year, particularly in children under 10.

On Tuesday, the schools minister, Nick Gibb, told GB News preventive antibiotics could be given to children in England at schools affected by strep A infections.

He said: “Lord Markham said in the House of Lords yesterday that the UK Health Security Agency are monitoring the position and are considering those kind of issues in those schools where there is an infection.

“This is an ongoing situation, the UKHSA are involved very closely with those schools and they will be providing further advice later on. But that may well be an option for those particular schools where there is an infection.”

The plan was floated by the health minister Nick Markham in the Lords on Monday.

The Conservative peer said: “We have given instructions to doctors that where necessary they should be proactively prescribing penicillin as the best line of defence on this, and also where there is a spread in primary schools, which we know is the primary vector for this, whether they should be working with local health protection teams, and sometimes actually look at the use of antibiotics on a prophylactic basis.”

On Tuesday, a primary school in Belfast said a five-year-old girl had died after a severe case of strep A, the ninth child to die from the infection in the UK in recent weeks.

Tributes were paid to Stella-Lily McCorkindale, with Black Mountain primary school calling her a “very bright and talented little girl, and very popular with both staff and children, and will be greatly missed by everyone at school”. A statement released by the school spoke of its “tragic loss” and said “the thoughts of the entire school are with the pupil’s family and friends at this difficult time”.

It added: “To assist in supporting our pupils and staff at this sad time, additional trained staff from the Education Authority critical incident response team have been engaged and will be providing support to the school.

“We recognise that this news may cause worry amongst our school community and we want to reassure parents that we continue to work closely with the Public Health Agency at this time.”

GPs generally avoid mass prescription of antibiotics as it can build up resistance to serious infections in the population.

The UKHSA said the measure of prescribing antibiotics to children in a school or nursery exposed to non-invasive strep A was rare.

The agency added the move was considered only in “exceptional circumstances” by the outbreak control team (OCT) on a “case-by-case basis”.

“There is no good evidence of (antibiotics’) effectiveness in routine outbreak control in this setting (involving children who have been contacts of non-invasive strep A),” the UKHSA said.

“It can be considered in exceptional circumstances by the OCT, for example when there are reports of severe outcomes, or hospitalisations. In school and nursery settings, antibiotic chemoprophylaxis is not routinely recommended for contacts of non-invasive (group A streptococcus) GAS infection.”

A pupil at Morelands primary school in Waterlooville, Hampshire, became the eighth child known to have died with the invasive form of strep A. On Tuesday, it was reported a ninth child had died, in Northern Ireland.

Adam Finn, a professor of paediatrics at the University of Bristol, told Times Radio it was important to “get the balance right”.

“On the one hand not alarm people whose children are mildly ill, and there are a lot of mildly ill children around at the moment, and at the same time help people and support people to seek care and attention when their children become seriously ill – relentlessly sicker and sicker as the hours go by. Those are the children that need to be urgently seen.”

He said children with “run of the mill” viral infections could feel unwell and then better again, and “things go up and down”, and they continue to eat and drink.

“Children who have got invasive bacterial infection, they don’t have those episodes of feeling better – they just get worse and worse,” he said.

Illnesses caused by the group A strep bacteria include the skin infection impetigo, scarlet fever and strep throat.

There has been a big increase in scarlet fever cases. There were 851 reported from 14-20 November, compared with an average of 186 for the same timeframe in previous years.

Symptoms of scarlet fever include sore throat, headache and fever, along with a fine, pinkish or red body rash with a sandpaper feel.

On Tuesday, Scotland’s health secretary, Humza Yousaf, said the number of strep A infections in the country has increased, but there have been no deaths from the condition.

In Ireland, an investigation was launched into the death of a child to see if it was linked to strep A infection. Dr Éamonn O’Moore, director for national health protection at the HSE and the Health Protection Surveillance Centre, confirmed that strep A could be linked to the four-year-old child’s death.

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Ukraine war liveRussia

Russia claims Ukraine shelling Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant – as it happened

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[Russia](#)

Drone attack hits oil storage tank at airfield in Russia's Kursk region

No casualties reported as facility set on fire, one day after Russia blames Ukraine for two other drone strikes

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

Russia: drone attack sets oil storage tank alight on Kursk airfield – video

Peter Beaumont in Kyiv

[*@petersbeaumont1*](#)

Tue 6 Dec 2022 04.42 EST Last modified on Tue 6 Dec 2022 07.42 EST

A drone attack has set an oil storage tank on fire at an airfield in Kursk, the Russian region's governor has said, a day after [Ukraine appeared to launch audacious drone attacks](#) on two military airfields deep inside Russian territory.

Roman Starovoyt, the governor of the Kursk region bordering [Ukraine](#), said on the Telegram messaging app there were no casualties from the attack and the fire was “localised”.

Video footage posted on social media showed a large explosion lighting up the night sky followed by a substantial fire at the airfield 175 miles (280km) from the Ukrainian border. At daybreak a large column of black smoke was still visible above the site.

Oil depot on fire after drone attack on airfield in Russia's Kursk

Governor Romam Starovoit reported about this at 5:21 AM <https://t.co/NHL65ZKnbr> <pic.twitter.com/eOjAcsSkfr>

— Euromaidan Press (@EuromaidanPress) [December 6, 2022](#)

Fuel reservoir caught fire after suspected drone attack at Kursk airfield
<https://t.co/vdOkAAoJtC> pic.twitter.com/tgR3DgeX0y

— Liveuamap (@Liveuamap) [December 6, 2022](#)

There was no immediate comment from Kyiv or Moscow.

Russian officials blamed Monday's attacks on modified Strizh drones, which were first produced in the 1970s in the Soviet era and intended for use as target practice.

Ukrainian attacks on Russian military targets have become increasingly bold in recent weeks as Kyiv has sought to bring Vladimir Putin's war against Ukraine to the home front.

[Map of drone attacks in Russia](#)

Russia's defence ministry said on Monday that Ukrainian drones had attacked two airbases at Ryazan and Saratov in south-central Russia, killing three servicemen and wounding four, and damaging two aircraft.

Ukraine did not directly claim responsibility for any of the attacks. However, a senior Ukrainian official, quoted by the New York Times, said the drones involved in Monday's attacks were launched from Ukrainian territory and at least one of the strikes was made with the help of special forces close to the base.

The Israeli satellite imaging company ImageSat International shared images it said showed burn marks and objects near a Tu-22M aircraft at Dyagilevo airbase in Ryazan.



Satellite image showing aftermath of explosion at the Dyagilevo airbase on 5 December. Photograph: ImageSat International

Russia's defence ministry said Monday's attacks were acts of terrorism intended to disable long-range aircraft, and that the low-flying drones used were shot down.

Saratov is at least 370 miles from the nearest Ukrainian territory. Russian commentators said on social media that if Ukraine could strike that far inside Russia, it may also be capable of hitting Moscow.

The Ukrainian military analyst Serhiy Zgurets said the air force bases hit on Monday were the only facilities in Russia that could fully service bombers used to launch attacks on Ukraine.

“It is still too early to say what is at issue here, but the ability of the armed forces of Ukraine to reach military targets deep in the territory of the Russian Federation has a very symbolic and important meaning,” he wrote on the website of Ukraine’s Espresso TV.

The latest drone attack came as a Russian official appeared to reject recent claims that Moscow may be nearing a deal with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to pull back from the [Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant](#).

“Russian withdrawal from Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant or transferring control over it to some ‘third party’ is out of the question,” said the Russian foreign ministry spokesperson, Maria Zakharova.

The IAEA director general, Rafael Grossi, had said last week he hoped to reach an agreement with Russia and Ukraine on protecting the nuclear plant, which is occupied by Russia, by the end of the year.

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2022.12.06 - Spotlight

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[Christmas food and drink](#)

‘Which bit of the turkey is this supposed to be?!’ I ate 12 Christmas dinners in 12 days – here are the best and worst!



It's a cracker ... Rich Pelley eating (yet another) Christmas dinner.
Photograph: Linda Nylind/The Guardian

I could eat a Christmas dinner every day – and so I did, all in the name of research. But from Wetherspoon's to Beefeater and Toby Carvery, which chain had the perfect roasties, the best brussels and the poshest pigs in blankets?



[Rich Pelley](#)

Tue 6 Dec 2022 01.00 EST Last modified on Tue 6 Dec 2022 13.41 EST

When we hear Roy Wood singing about how he wishes it could be Christmas every day, most of us don't think of disappointing presents, endless ads for the DFS Boxing Day sale or passing out, sherry in hand, in front of a Bond film. No, we think about the nice bits – time spent with friends, family, peace to all men and, of course, the food.

I love a traditional turkey dinner so much I'll eat one at every opportunity. It might not be good for me, but, after 40-plus years of doing it, I think I've worked out how to keep the damage to a minimum. The average person is said to scoff more than double the recommended calories on 25 December, but that's surely more down to snacking than what amounts to a souped-up version of meat and two veg. The secret, then, is not to gorge yourself stupid

on vol-au-vents, mini sausages on cocktail sticks, mince pies and Quality Street, and concentrate on the main event.

I should be in heaven right now as we enter the festive period. Despite all the [warnings about a poultry shortage](#), almost every lower-budget, carvery-style restaurant has a traditional turkey dinner on the menu. But how good are they – and could I really eat a Christmas dinner day in, day out? I spent the best part of two weeks finding out. Read on to find who does the best roasties and most succulent turkey.

Day one: Wetherspoons

Sliced turkey breast and winter vegetables



Rich Pelley with his Wetherspoon's dinner. Photograph: Rich Pelley

Four slices of turkey breast; pork, apricot and cranberry stuffing; roasted chantenay carrots and parsnips; maris piper mash; two pigs in blankets; peas; cranberry sauce; gravy. 997 kcal. £10.69 (with soft drink), £11.99 (alcoholic)

Where better to attempt to be the first man in the UK to eat a Christmas dinner than midday, mid-November, at my local Wetherspoons? There are plenty of other punters to toast. This is actually OK, until you realise it's served with *mashed* potato. This is such a heinous Christmas-dinner crime that (like William Wallace) whoever was responsible should be hauled to the Tower of London, stripped, tied to a hurdle, dragged through the streets by horses, hanged, drawn, quartered, and his bowels incinerated before him. And don't get me started on the total non-existence of sprouts.

Score: One sprout out of five

We dined at: The Holland Tringham, 107-109 Streatham High Rd, SW16 1HJ

Day two: Brewers Fayre

Festive turkey



Brewers Fayre.

Roast potatoes; yorkshire pudding; stuffing; pig in blanket; root vegetable mash; honey-roasted parsnips; carrots; garden peas; brussels sprouts; red-wine gravy. 1,400 kcal. £13.49 (two courses); £16.49 (three)

At least this one's got six (yes!) sprouts and proper roasties (albeit rubbish, that I suspect were frozen). But at 1,400 kcal, it's so stodgy it leaves me seriously considering checking into the attached Premier Inn to sleep it off.

Score: 1/5

We indulged at: Haywain, Dorking Rd, Epsom KT18 7LB



Beefeater.

Day three: Beefeater

Turkey with all the trimmings

Turkey slices; roast potatoes; honey-glazed parsnips; brussels sprouts; peas; carrots; stuffing; pig in blanket; yorkshire pudding; red-wine gravy; cranberry sauce. 1,284 kcal. £19.95 (two courses); £22.95 (three)

Traipsing up another A-road, I feel like a prize turkey for failing to realise many of these chain pubs are attached to Premier Inns in the middle of nowhere. It occurs to me I could be hacked to death outside this Beefeater and not be found for weeks, which might be preferable to its Christmas dinner, which comes with cardboard yorkshire pud, boring boiled carrots, what look like Aunt Bessie frozen roasties and turkey roll seemingly

processed by the ghost of Bernard Matthews.

Score: 2/5

We ate at: Coombe Lodge, 104 Coombe Rd, Croydon CR0 5RB



Frankie & Benny's.

Day four: Frankie & Benny's

Yuletide stuffed turkey

Stuffed turkey breast with apple and cranberries; carrot batons; broccolini; spring onion mash; parsnip; gravy; crispy bacon. 780 kcal. £16.90 (one course); £18.99 (two); £22.99 (three)

After three days of hefty eating, at 780 kcal, this feels like the Weight Watchers of Christmas dinners including – uniquely – broccolini. But it just doesn't seem Christmassy enough, with underwhelming stuffing, bacon (huh?) with – do I hear the sound of the bowel-incinerators I mentioned at Wetherspoons being sharpened? – mashed potato instead of roasted.

Score: 2/5

We gorged at: Frankie & Benny's, 355-357 Strand, WC2R 0HR

Day five: Mum's house

There's no place like home



Mrs Pelley's traditional turkey roast.

Turkey (assume Waitrose); roast potatoes; roasted carrots; broccoli; cauliflower; broccoli and cauliflower cheese; peas; red cabbage; brussels sprouts; buttered mushrooms; leeks; pigs in blankets; cranberry sauce; gravy. Kcal unknown. £ free.

“Isn’t it about time you got a proper job?” scolds my mum when I call in the mother of all favours – a full Christmas dinner, “for work”. But every experiment needs a control, and this is it. Expertly sliced turkey (by Dad), a plethora of veg and a choice of steamed *or cheesed* broccoli and cauliflower, although it seems harsh to deduct marks just because “there wasn’t time” to prepare the usual signature stuffing. Mrs Pelley’s secret to the perfect roast potato? Dripping and semolina. I’d give this 10 out of 5 if I was allowed. Pub chains, take note.

Score: 5/5

We treated the place like a hotel at: Mr and Mrs Pelley's, Bristol

Day six: Hungry Horse

Traditional Christmas dinner



Thanks, but no thanks ... Christmas dinner at Hungry Horse.

Turkey breast; sage and onion stuffing; pig in blanket; yorkshire pudding; roast potatoes; seasonal veg; cranberry sauce; gravy. 1,034 kcal. £15.99 (two courses); £18.99 (three)



Cranberry and stuffing missing in action ... Hungry Horse.

A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a decent Christmas dinner. They say the first bite of any meal is with the eye – so what in the name of all things festive is *this*? Where's the green? Which bit of the turkey is that supposed to be – its biceps? The advertised cranberry sauce and stuffing are awol and the gravy tastes of petrol. I wouldn't feed this last turkey in the shop of a Christmas dinner to my dog, but, in the interests of journalism, I eat it anyway.

Score: 0/5

We lunched at: Kiss Me Hardy, 131 High Street, Colliers Wood SW19 2PP

Day seven: Slug & Lettuce

Very Merry burger



Burger and chips, but make it festive ...

Beef burger, streaky bacon, melted cheese slice, pork, cranberry and fig stuffing, cranberry sauce; pigs in blankets; skinny fries; maple and Bourbon BBQ dip. 1,549 kcal. £14.49

“Supply issues” means turkey is off the menu today, so I’m forced into ordering the Very Merry burger that clocks in at double the suspiciously low-calorie all-the-trimmings turkey dinner (749 kcal) I was hoping to sample. The Christmas pizzazz arrives courtesy of the pork, fig and cranberry stuffing, of which – so long, ketchup – I’m an instant fan. The chips could use some gravy but my taste buds are so acclimatised to the stuff that I believe my cornflakes could use some gravy.

Score: 4/5

We troughed at: Slug & Lettuce, Riverside House, Richmond TW9 1TJ



The Guardian's Stuart Heritage joins Rich Pelley in Ashford.

Day eight: Harvester

Christmas dinner

Turkey; sage and onion-seasoned roast potatoes; Cumberland pig in blanket; green beans; garden peas; red cabbage; sprouts; pork and sage stuffing ball; yorkshire pudding; cranberry sauce; gravy. 1,027 kcal. £16.99 (two courses); £19.99 (three). Booking required

I'm so sick of dining alone, it's absolutely, definitely, totally worth a 120-mile, five-hour round trip just so fellow Guardian journalist Stuart Heritage can guest-review this one instead.



Succulent turkey at Harvester.

Stuart Heritage: Pelley seems to have unfortunately succumbed to what doctors refer to as “turkey madness”, boring me through a mind-numbingly tedious slideshow of near-identical Christmas dinner photos on his phone. Fortunately, unlike the company, lunch is good. Succulent turkey, expertly judged potatoes, plus my veg comes with half a stray chip from someone else’s order. It’s a Christmas miracle!

Score: 4/5

We wolfed at: The Bybrook Barn, Canterbury Road, Ashford TN24 8QQ

Day nine: Greene King

Hunters turkey



Sizzling ... Greene King's platter.

Flattened, flame-grilled turkey breast, smoked streaky bacon, chopped pigs in blanket, melted cheese, BBQ, cranberry sauce; clementine and sage roasties, sprouts, tomato, peas, fried onions, served on sizzling skillet. 1,172 kcal. £16.99 (two courses); £19.99 (three). Booking required



Dr Ramsay visits Greene King.

I'm beginning to worry how my one-meal-a-day, binge-roast diet is affecting my health, and so consult my GP, Dr Bob Ramsay. "Such an intense calorie intake puts strain on every organ," he says over his third roast potato. "You risk gallstones, blood vessel disease, kidney, liver and heart failure, impotence, blindness, amputation and possibly a stroke. Nor have I ever been served anything other than a curry on a cast-iron sizzling skillet. And why is there no gravy?"

Score: 3/5

We tucked in at: The Greyfisher, Ayleswade Rd, Salisbury SP2 8DW

Day 10: Toby Carvery

Festive yorkie calzone



If in doubt, fold it into a giant yorkshire pudding.

Turkey breast, pigs in blankets, stuffing and camembert cheese folded into a giant yorkshire pudding; roast potatoes. 1,095 kcal. £12.49 (two courses Mon – Fri), £15.99 (three). £13.49 (two courses Sat), £16.99 (three). £16.49 (two courses Sun), £19.99 (three).

To yorkshire, or not to yorkshire, that is the question. Turns out, an entire Christmas dinner stuffed inside a giant, rolled yorkshire pudding is so utterly delicious, I begin to worry that if my mum doesn't serve this on Christmas Day, she may lose my custom for ever.

Score: 5/5

We scoffed at: Toby Carvery, 415 Brighton Rd, Croydon CR2 6AN

Day 11: All Bar One

Roast turkey



Christmas dinner perfection ...

Paupiette of turkey rolled in streaky bacon with pork, cranberry and sage stuffing; sage and onion crispy potatoes; stem broccoli; roasted carrot; parsnips; butternut squash; pig in blanket; cranberry sauce; red wine jus. 1,000 kcal. £27.50 (three courses Sun – Tue); £30.50 (Wed – Sat). Booking required

I had no idea what a paupiette was, until now. Forget twizzlers and dinosaurs: paupiette is the most luxurious form of turkey *ever*. The pigs are minus their blanket and the extremely friendly staff clearly think I'm a

mystery diner or a serial killer, but other than that – roasties included – this is Christmas dinner perfection.

Score: 5/5

We ate our body weight at: All Bar One, 32-38 Northcote Rd SW11 1NZ



Youngs ... ‘the best potatoes since Mrs Pelley.’

Day 12: Youngs

Crown of English turkey

Turkey; pig in blanket; goose-fat roast potatoes; crushed winter roots; creamed leeks; brussels sprouts; maple roast parsnip; cranberry sauce; gravy. 1,158 kcal. £35.00 (three courses). Booking required

That's it. I'm stuffed. A dozen days of Christmas dinners have nearly killed me. My clothes smell of roast, I wake up craving gravy, and I fear – as my mum always warned – one more bite and I'll turn into a turkey. This is the pièce de résistance of traditional Christmas din-dins: al dente sprouts; a pig in blanket so posh it probably went to Eton; the best potatoes since Mrs Pelley’s *and* a cracker. I’ll quit while I’m ahead. I’m going cold turkey and

am never eating a Christmas dinner again.

Score: 5/5

We nearly burst at: The Victoria, 28 Victoria Rd, Surbiton KT6 4JT

Day 13, 10am. Monday



Rich Pelley ... ‘one more bite and I’ll turn into a turkey.’ Photograph: Linda Nylind/The Guardian

Hmmm, I’m starving. Anyone fancy a Christmas dinner?

Total spent (on me): £215.47

Total calories: 11,349 (+ one Mrs Pelley dinner)

Doctor’s prognosis: “Put that man on a diet, pronto!”

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[World Cup 2022](#)

Jude Bellingham: England teenager with maverick gifts but a steely focus



Jude Bellingham poses on the pitch after his starring role in England's 3-0 win against Senegal. Photograph: Eddie Keogh/The FA/Getty Images

Rise from Birmingham City academy to World Cup ace is just the start for midfielder whose talent matches his temperament

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[*Jacob Steinberg*](#) in Doha

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Tue 6 Dec 2022 02.30 EST Last modified on Tue 6 Dec 2022 03.15 EST

The weird thing about Jude Bellingham, the teenage sensation establishing himself as one of the best footballers in the world, is that there was nothing surprising about the way he ran the game for [England when they demolished Senegal](#) in the last 16 of the World Cup on Sunday night.

There are no limits to the England midfielder's prodigious talent. The 19-year-old from Stourbridge has the cockiness of Paul Gascoigne at Italia 90, the audacity of Michael Owen at the 1998 [World Cup](#) and the explosiveness of an 18-year-old Wayne Rooney at Euro 2004. Resistance is futile, even for those around the Borussia Dortmund star. "I don't want to big up Jude Bellingham too much because he's still young, but he's one of the most gifted players I've ever seen," Phil Foden said, trying and failing to play it cool as he discussed his teammate after the win against Senegal. "He's going to be the best midfielder in the world."

Too much? Unlikely. Bellingham, who joined Birmingham City's academy when he was eight, has been destined for the top ever since he started playing football. His former coaches talk of a talent who was clearly head and shoulders above the other boys. "You'd see him playing and you'd say: 'Yeah, that kid's definitely got it,'" Phil Wooldridge told the BBC last month. "Since then he's absolutely blossomed."

Quick Guide

Qatar: beyond the football

Show



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

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

Photograph: Caspar Benson

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Bellingham was four when he was introduced to Wooldridge, who ran a company called PSI Sports. He joined in during children's games run by Wooldridge and, so the story goes, ended up on the winning side most of the time. "He just excelled," Wooldridge said.

It was clear that bigger tests were required. Bellingham's father, Mark, a sergeant with West Midlands police and a prolific striker at amateur level, worked with Wooldridge on creating a youth team called Stourbridge

Juniors. The progress was rapid. At Birmingham an academy coach, Mike Dodds, told Bellingham that he could be a new type of midfielder: a No 22. Why? “You can be a No 4, a No 8 and No 10,” Dodds said. “Someone who can do it all.”

Birmingham knew something special was happening. Bellingham became the club’s youngest player when he made his debut aged 16 years and 38 days, breaking a record held for 49 years by Trevor Francis. He played 44 times during his first year as a professional and did not look out of place. Bigger clubs came calling. Manchester United wanted Bellingham, but he was intrigued by the thought of joining Dortmund. Plenty of young English talents had thrived after moving to Germany. It was the perfect breeding ground, particularly as Bellingham had already seen Jadon Sancho flourish after swapping Manchester City for Dortmund.



Jude Bellingham battles Senegal’s captain, Kalidou Koulibaly, for the ball.
Photograph: Tom Jenkins/The Guardian

“The way they integrate young players into the first-team squad is next level,” [Bellingham told the Guardian](#) after joining Dortmund for an initial £25m in the summer of 2020.

Bellingham was soon taking the Bundesliga by storm. The bemusement that greeted Birmingham's decision to retire the No 22 shirt has faded. Chelsea, Liverpool, Manchester City and Real Madrid will try to sign Bellingham in the summer. Europe's elite have all seen him dominate Champions League games for Dortmund, who know that an asking price of more than £100m is unlikely to deter suitors.

Whoever signs Bellingham will be getting a player with an elite mentality. He is possessed with eerie levels of self-belief. The Dortmund manager, Edin Terzic, calls Bellingham "the oldest 19-year-old I have ever seen". England's head coach, Gareth Southgate, talks about a kid who wants to start every game, take all the corners and captain the side.

It was not enough for Bellingham to become the youngest player of any nationality to feature during a European Championship when, aged 17 years and 349 days, he came off the bench during [England's victory over Croatia](#) at Euro 2020.

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Since then he has established himself as a key starter for Southgate's side. He was outstanding when [England beat Iran](#) in their first game at the World Cup, opening the scoring with a beautiful header, but he was even better against Senegal. It was Bellingham who carried England when they went through a rocky period during the first half against the African champions. He whipped up the fans, urging them to make more noise. He won back possession. Eventually Bellingham drove through the Senegal defence and calmed England's nerves by setting up the opening goal for Jordan Henderson.

Jude Bellingham

It was ridiculous. At one stage Bellingham picked up Harry Kane and told the England captain to put a missed chance behind him. This is not normal teenage behaviour. English football loves its mavericks but Bellingham does not really fall into that category. He is on the path to superstardom but there is no sign of the fame going to his head. It is rare to see him lose his cool on the pitch. He focuses on making the team better and lets his talent create the headlines.

Pressure is something to embrace. Bellingham does not even accept the notion that it will be him versus the [brilliant France forward Kylian Mbappé](#) when England meet the world champions in the quarter-finals on Saturday. “I don’t know if it’s just me and him going toe-to-toe,” Bellingham said. “It’s just about playing my role in the team and trying to win the game.”

He makes it look and sound so simple.

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2022.12.06 - Opinion

- If it's unions against these infantile ministers, I know who will win
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If it's unions against these infantile ministers, I know who will win

[Polly Toynbee](#)



The UK government's amateur grandstanding will end in humiliation. It should sit down with the grownups instead



Members of the Communication Workers Union (CWU) outside Belfast Town Hall, August 2022. Photograph: Niall Carson/PA

Tue 6 Dec 2022 01.00 EST Last modified on Thu 8 Dec 2022 03.15 EST

“Spoiling for a fight.” That, Labour and the unions fear, is the mindset of ministers. This cabinet is so incompetent, pig-headed and inexperienced that they charge headfirst, eyes tight shut, into a mighty confrontation with the public workforce. Lost in dreams of Margaret Thatcher’s glory days, they imagine there is something called “victory” to be had in screwing down public wages. Unless they back off, they will fail and look very foolish indeed.

Talk to trade union leaders, a worldly wise cadre of often female negotiators, and it’s clear who the grownups are. They warn and educate employers, public and private, in the basic facts about pay deals in an era of galloping inflation and acute labour shortages. Employees will either strike or walk off the job for better pay elsewhere. For all its harrumphing belligerence, the government has no armoury for this “fight” with nurses, ambulance workers, border guards, train drivers and others in their wake.

Ministers patrol TV studios to call pay rises “unaffordable” and say they risk triggering a vicious wage-price spiral. The Tory party chairman, Nadhim

Zahawi, [tells nurses](#) they play into the hands of Vladimir Putin, boasting that the army will see off strikers. There are always old colonels itching for the chance: GB News found a retired colonel, Richard Kemp, to praise strike-breaking soldiers: “The beauty of our armed forces is that whatever they’re told to do, they go and do it and they don’t worry about these sorts of things.” So far just 600 soldiers are being readied to fill in for hundreds of thousands of ambulance workers, border guards and firefighters.

This infantile posturing ignores settlements made in the private sector where Unite, the GMB, the Communication Workers Union (CWU) and others are winning agreements far in excess of the 2.2% average for the public workforce. Other employers closely watched BT’s first national strike for 35 years, involving 40,000 of its workers. Karen Rose, the CWU’s president, describes how BT refused talks even when its workforce voted to strike. Its engineers are in great demand in the labour market. Any pay rise over 5% was deemed “unaffordable” by BT’s CEO Philip Jansen, the union said. As the gloves came off the union pointed out that 60% of BT’s profits went to shareholders, claiming only 5-6% of profits went to wage increases.

Jansen’s [32% pay increase](#) was contrasted publicly with the food banks set up for staff at EE’s north-east call centres (EE is part of the BT group); BT says this is a “community pantry” for shift workers with no time to nip to the shops.

Jansen caved in and emerged badly bruised from the onslaught. The final deal gave workers an average 10% rise. Victory? Only partly. The company has a backlog of work, strikers each lost about £1,000 in wages for strike days, and that 10% still doesn’t restore pay to its real value three years ago. Other employers seem less eager to copy BT’s fight, reckoning everyone gains more from civilised settlements. Harrods, owned by the Qatari state, may not have got the message: it has sent in agency workers this month to cover for Unite’s striking CCTV and security staff. But in over 450 recent disputes, Unite claims an 80% win, the GMB likewise.

The government hasn’t got the message. Ben Zaranko, of the Institute for Fiscal Studies, says it would cost the Treasury £13bn to increase its present 2.2% public sector pay rise to the inflation rate of 11.1%. Tax Justice UK says that equalising the tax on unearned capital gains and income tax could

theoretically raise up to [£14bn a year](#). Zaranko points out that a public sector pay rise doesn't cause a direct wage-price spiral. Putting up public sector wages isn't like putting up the price of bread: it doesn't raise the rate of inflation, although it injects more demand into the economy. And, unfairly, the official consumer prices index used to calculate the inflation rate doesn't include rising housing costs, which the less commonly used retail prices index does.

Wages stagnated or fell for well over a decade when inflation was low, yet that wasn't the right time to rebalance pay and profits. Now inflation is high but it's not the right time either. Share and property values soared for years, but those asset price rises were never damned as "inflationary". CEO pay leaps up but the Bank of England doesn't decry inflationary boardroom behaviour and nor does it protest about the abolition of a cap on bankers' bonuses, confining its warnings to [ordinary wage rises](#).

Britain needs a pay rise is the TUC's mantra. But let's suppose the Treasury's fears of a wage-price spiral are sincere. How might it persuade workers to abate their demands? Start by reining in top pay and make it clear we're "all in it together". Pledge to put pay before profits when growth is restored. Adopt Labour's policies: fair pay agreements across every sector, an end to zero-hours contracts and fire-and-rehire cuts and a legal right for unions to recruit in every workplace. Andy Prendergast, the GMB's national secretary, says everyone can now see the "union premium" – the cash value of joining a union.

From Liverpool docks to the cardboard packaging industry, G4S cash services to transport and refuse companies, employers are settling. These settlements are compromises, almost all well below the actual inflationary rate. One union leader tells me he has never won the rates he originally demanded. For instance, Scottish nurses just settled for an average pay rise of 7.5% – much more than the original £2,205 uplift they were offered, but still less than what they originally asked for.

In England, the health secretary, Steve Barclay, refuses to discuss his 3% pay offer to workers, [posturing as the tough guy](#) while ignoring public opinion. Forget talk of union "militants" and consider instead the decades of

remarkable union passivity during real pay cuts. The RMT leader, Mick Lynch, emerges as a voice of good sense, with wide public support.

This is less a test of union strength than of incompetent employers blundering into needless disputes. Royal Mail and the railways are prime case studies in long-term managerial failure. But the government tops that league table. Its amateur grandstanding is destined to end in one humiliating climbdown after another. Instead of a winter conflagration, it could sit down quietly and talk to the grownups experienced in industrial relations.

If not, there will be fewer in the public workforce to talk to. Telegraph writers have urged strong-arm Thatcherite tactics. Yet Thatcher took on miners only after stockpiling coal; these idiots take on a public workforce whose walk-away power gives them the upper hand. A government fearing the next election with voters abandoning its regime of chaos has few cards to play. It's almost painful to watch it play those cards so exceptionally badly.

This article was amended on 6 and 7 December 2022. An earlier version referred to “ambulance drivers” when it should have said “ambulance workers”. And a reference to analysis by Tax Justice UK that said “equalising the tax on unearned capital gains and income tax would raise £14bn a year” has been amended to “... could raise up to £14bn a year” to reflect the hypothetical nature of such a calculation.

- Polly Toynbee is a Guardian columnist
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[Opinion](#)[World Cup 2022](#)

Watching people watch the World Cup is a nightmare

[Zoe Williams](#)



It's great to see England progress through the tournament – but supporting loved ones who care deeply about the results is much less fun



'I like it when they run about all pleased' ... England's Bukayo Saka (right) celebrates with Harry Kane (centre) and Phil Foden after scoring a goal during the match against Senegal. Photograph: Manu Fernández/AP

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Tue 6 Dec 2022 02.00 EST Last modified on Tue 6 Dec 2022 05.28 EST

It's a beautiful thing to watch a football team, particularly such a young, fresh, united one, from your very own nation, winning a match. I like it when they hug, I like it when they run about all pleased – if someone established a branch of mime or contemporary dance based on football players and their physical expression of joy, I would instantly prefer that to all existing mime.

At the same time, if you don't care especially about the football yet the people around you do, and very deeply – let's call them your sons or daughters, your spouses, friends, those you like the look of on social media platforms – getting to this point in an [international tournament](#) is a bloody nightmare. You can get in all the Doritos you want, and nothing will change the outcome. You spent all that time hoping they would reach the quarter-finals up against someone rubbish, and it was wasted. It was illogical. Rubbish teams get knocked out!

You will almost be able to taste the disappointment if England loses against France next weekend; you can map its awful progress, the grey pall it will cast over everyone in the house, even the ones who were just waiting for the TV to be free so they could watch [Wednesday](#). Somewhere in the back of your mind, there's a voice saying: hang on, don't we *always* lose against France? But is that old 90s intel? It's too stressful to Google. Then, if they/we win, it's even worse, because we have to go through the whole thing again, only now the stakes are higher, the potential disappointment even keener, the team presumably better – isn't that how these things work? And, then, if we were to win that, but lose the one after, there's a good chance it will ruin Christmas.

Psychotherapy, I'm sure, would have something useful to say about this; something about not trying to micromanage other people's emotions, letting them sit with their impotent rage without seeking to minimise or dispel it. This is probably a useful skill to take into life post-World Cup: a bit more compassion, a bit less empathy, resilience in the face of other people's disappointment. Sure, fine, whatever. I don't want emotional learnings. I just want a team I've only recently been able to recognise to win everything.

- Zoe Williams is a Guardian columnist
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OpinionJust Stop Oil

Just Stop Oil's message to Suella Braverman: threaten us all you like – we're not listening

[Indigo Rumbelow](#)

Ministers have shattered the legal system and are failing to tackle the climate crisis. Now they are making protesters their scapegoats

- Indigo Rumbelow is an activist with Just Stop Oil



‘As ordinary citizens, we have a duty to resist injustice.’ Photograph: Just Stop Oil/PA

Tue 6 Dec 2022 03.00 ESTLast modified on Tue 6 Dec 2022 07.27 EST

It’s a strange paradox. The tougher that Tory home secretaries talk, the faster law and order seems to break down. Whoever’s in the role – Grant Shapps,

Priti Patel, Suella Braverman – the same rhetoric grinds on, day after day: cracking down, clamping down, demanding tougher action. Now the prime minister, [Rishi Sunak](#), has joined in, reportedly launching “Operation Get Tough” and demanding the police use all the new powers available to them through the latest sweep of anti-protest laws.

Who’s listening? Certainly not us. Just Stop Oil knows first-hand that the legal system is collapsing. Some of our supporters’ cases can’t even be heard until 2024. Many of my friends will spend this Christmas in prison, most held without a trial, on remand. Jan Goodey, the first person to be convicted under the government’s new Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, was [sentenced](#) to six months in prison just last week, the first of many protesters who will probably be criminalised for caring. Instead of facing up to the challenge of ending new oil and gas, the government would prefer to silence the alarm bells.

Braverman talks tough to hide the reality of the collapsing justice system. After 12 years of tough talk on law and order, we have less of it than ever. About 75% of prisoners reoffend within nine years of release, and prisons are so full that some male inmates have been [held in police cells](#). Meanwhile, women and people of colour are at risk from the very law enforcers who are supposed to keep them safe.



The home secretary, Suella Braverman, chairs a meeting of the National Policing Board at the Home Office in London on 30 November. Photograph: James Manning/PA

The faster law and order breaks down, the more Braverman ramps up the rhetoric, desperate to hide the cracks in case anyone notices. Well, Suella, we've all noticed. We've noticed you haven't cut crime; instead you've filled prisons close to breaking point. You can't clamp down on floods and you can't arrest your way out of wildfires. The only way for ordinary people to salvage any hope of a stable, ordered society is to break the spell of the rhetoric and expose the decay this government is trying to hide.

When a kind, peaceful, brave man like Jan Goodey is sentenced to six months in prison for taking part in a Just Stop Oil action, the violence, thuggery and corruption of our government is exposed for all to see. The rightwing press might try to prop up this con, celebrating an eco-loon getting what he deserves, but this fiction looks increasingly weak and desperate. The reality of climate breakdown is inescapable, and something that most people in Britain are [worried about](#).

So what can we do? As ordinary citizens, we have a duty to resist injustice. Sometimes this may involve breaking the law in order to expose the rot at the core of the system. In Britain we're immensely privileged to have a legal

profession that is able to speak out and join us in rescuing the rule of law from chaos and collapse. This autumn, more than 170 lawyers [signed a powerful open letter](#) stating that breaching the Paris Agreement will directly threaten law and order. “A stable climate is the foundation for a stable civilisation and the rule of law,” they wrote. “Breaching the 1.5C Paris temperature goal thus threatens disorder and the end of the rule of law.”

So it is an absurdity for Braverman and Sunak to rant about law and order while they issue licences for new fossil-fuel exploration. That’s why no one is paying attention. There’s absolutely no alignment between what they say and what is really happening. They use words the way an amateur magician uses misdirection, trying and failing to distract us from the government’s core purpose: to pursue short-term power and profit, no matter what the cost.

Let them posture away. Once you’ve seen through the show, the words are easy to ignore. For us, the tougher the rhetoric, the more encouraged we feel. We know it’s a direct reflection of how hard the government needs to work to cover up its betrayal of the public. And as ordinary citizens witness the betrayal, they’re increasingly taking matters into their own hands. The result is a resurgence of justice itself – taking place before our very eyes as the government rants on in the background, ignored, failing and desperate.

So join a [Just Stop Oil](#) talk online or in your area and stand up to injustice with us. The time is now.

- Indigo Rumbelow is an activist with Just Stop Oil
- *Do you have an opinion on the issues raised in this article? If you would like to submit a response of up to 300 words by email to be considered for publication in our [letters](#) section, please [click here](#).*

OpinionAustralia news

After watching how Brittany Higgins has suffered, how many women will be silenced?

[Jennifer Robinson](#)

I cried for Brittany – we must ensure better protection for women when they speak out

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Brittany Higgins outside the supreme court in Canberra in October 2022.
Photograph: Mick Tsikas/AAP

Mon 5 Dec 2022 22.25 EST

Brittany Higgins faced endless victim-blaming attitudes from men in power and in the media. She faced torrents of online abuse, rape and death threats – and was hospitalised due to stress.

Yet she was steadfast in her attempt to obtain justice for her alleged rape.

It has been almost two years since Brittany Higgins first made her rape allegation and complained about her treatment by the police and by the Liberal party after reporting what she said had happened in Parliament House that night.

Her decision to speak out – along with other women before and after her – helped spark the March 4 Justice protests and prompted reforms that will better protect women. It was followed by the ACT Department of Public Prosecution’s decision to prosecute Bruce Lehrmann.

Lehrmann pleaded not guilty to one count of sexual intercourse without consent and maintains his innocence, denying any sexual activity occurred at all.

The decision to prosecute Lehrmann meant our contempt laws – designed to protect his important right to be presumed innocent – kicked in.

It meant Brittany had to remain silent. And the media was warned to be silent too. It also meant we redacted everything about her story from our book.

In October, Brittany endured a 12-day trial.

It was described as “the Higgins trial” by much of the Australian media – at least until people rightly pointed out that it was Lehrmann on trial, not Brittany. The description was wrong in principle but, as Brittany herself would later say, it accurately described her lived experience: it had felt to her like she was on trial, not him.

The media coverage of the trial and online discussions were filled with all the male-centric myths about sexual violence which so often silence women

and deny them justice in our courts.

After the jury was discharged, meaning there would have to be a retrial, a clearly anguished Brittany walked out and gave an impassioned speech outside court, broadcast live. She spoke about her experience of the justice system and the indignity of the gruelling cross-examination she had faced while the accused was able to exercise his right to silence. She spoke of the odds being stacked against sexual assault complainants and sent her message out to them: “I believe you. You were with me every day I walked into that court and faced him.”

Her words and sentiments echoed those Keina Yoshida and I had heard from women around the world we had interviewed for our book – of the silencing, of the failure of the criminal justice system, of the re-traumatisation women face when they report their abuse, and the many reasons why women choose not to report.

As I sat listening to Brittany speak, a text message popped up on my phone. It was from a friend who had confided to me about being raped. She was also watching the news, and wrote me a simple, devastating message: “This is exactly why I never reported.”

These words hit me hard.

I cried. And I know I’m not the only woman in Australia who did.

We cried seeing Brittany’s anguish. And we cried for every woman who, like my friend, felt they couldn’t report their abuse. We cried for every woman who had just watched Brittany’s experience confirm why they would never report. How many more women will be silenced because of what we have just seen happen in this case?

Soon after Brittany’s speech that day, it was announced that Lehrmann’s lawyers had referred her comments to the police and the court for contempt, showing how women cannot speak freely about their experience or the failures of the criminal justice system. It also gave rise to the ironic possibility that a woman who has made a rape allegation could face a

criminal conviction for speaking about it, while the man she accused might not face trial.

Last week, Shane Drumgold, the ACT Director of Public Prosecutions, announced that there would be no retrial. Drumgold explained that the charges were dropped and Lehrmann would not face trial owing to the “significant and unacceptable risk to the life of the complainant”. Drumgold added that Brittany had “faced a level of personal attack that I have not seen in over 20 years of doing this work.” It has since been confirmed that Brittany is currently – again – receiving treatment in hospital.

Speaking out and reporting her allegations has come at a massive cost for Brittany. It cost her the job she loved in politics, and her health. Her truth, her integrity, her character and her conduct were all put on trial. We must not let this case pass by without ensuring better protection for women when they speak out, including from legal threats and online abuse.

The fact that the prosecution has not been pursued and Lehrmann has not been convicted does not mean that Brittany lied.

Defamation claims around the world about allegations of rape and domestic violence are chilling public interest conversations about violence against women, and silencing women from speaking about their abuse. We cannot act if we do not know.

Brittany’s courage in speaking out helped spark a movement. As the Global Institute for Women’s Leadership said, “her advocacy has been instrumental in driving rapid and instrumental change, as the catalyst for reforms in Parliamentary workplaces, as well as addressing workplace harassment more generally in Australia”.

But after watching how Brittany has suffered throughout this process, how many women will want to speak out? How many more women will be silenced because of what we have just seen?

This must change. We have to support Brittany Higgins and not let one more woman suffer as she has.

- Jennifer Robinson is a barrister and co-author of How Many More Women? Exposing how the law silences women. A new edition of the book will soon be released, in unredacted form, now the Lehrmann prosecution has been abandoned
 - *Information and support for anyone affected by rape or sexual abuse issues is available from the following organisations. In Australia, support is available at [1800Respect](#) (1800 737 732). In the UK, [Rape Crisis](#) offers support on 0808 802 9999. In the US, [Rainn](#) offers support on 800-656-4673. Other international helplines can be found at [ibiblio.org/rcip/internl.html](#)*
 - *In Australia, mental health support is available at [Beyond Blue](#) on 1300 22 4636 and [Lifeline](#) on 13 11 14. In the UK, the charity [Mind](#) is available on 0300 123 3393 and [Childline](#) on 0800 1111. In the US, [Mental Health America](#) is available on 800-273-8255*
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2022.12.06 - Around the world

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[Indonesia](#)

Indonesia passes legislation banning sex outside marriage

Rights groups say amended criminal code underscores shift towards fundamentalism



People protest against the new criminal code in Jakarta on Monday.
Photograph: Willy Kurniawan/Reuters

[Lorcan Lovett](#) in Bangkok and [Oliver Holmes](#)

Tue 6 Dec 2022 09.17 ESTFirst published on Mon 5 Dec 2022 23.59 EST

Indonesia's parliament has overhauled the country's criminal code to [outlaw sex outside marriage](#) and curtail free speech, in a dramatic setback to freedoms in the world's third-largest democracy.

Passed with support from all political parties, the draconian legislation has shocked not only rights activists but also the country's booming tourism sector, which relies on a stream of visitors to its tropical islands.

Newspapers in Australia have labelled the legislation the “Bali bonk ban” as the law will apply to Indonesians and visiting foreigners. More than 1 million Australians visit [Indonesia](#) each year, with many heading to Bali for its yoga retreats, surfing and all-night beach parties.

Maulana Yusran, the deputy chief of Indonesia’s tourism industry board, said the code was “totally counterproductive” and introduced just as the country was trying to recover from the pandemic. “We deeply regret the government have closed their eyes,” he said.

The US ambassador to Indonesia, Sung Kim, warned the law could dampen international business interest. “Criminalising the personal decisions of individuals would loom large within the decision matrix of many companies determining whether to invest in Indonesia,” he said.

Rights groups have long protested against the code, which also outlaws unsanctioned public demonstrations and religious blasphemy.

“What we’re witnessing is a significant blow to Indonesia’s hard-won progress in protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms over more than two decades,” said Usman Hamid, Amnesty International’s Indonesia executive director, who described the criminal code as “appalling”.

“Outlawing sex outside marriage is a violation to the right to privacy protected under international law,” Hamid said. “Consensual sexual relationships should not be treated as a criminal offence or a violation of ‘morality’.”

Rights groups say the move underscores a growing shift towards fundamentalism in a majority-Muslim country long hailed for its religious tolerance, with secularism enshrined in its constitution.

However, legislators hailed the vote as a decades-long effort to replace Dutch colonial laws that remained a deep part of the country’s judicial system. Yasonna Laoly, the minister of law and human rights, told parliament: “We have tried our best to accommodate the important issues and different opinions which were debated. However, it is time for us to

make a historical decision on the penal code amendment and to leave the colonial criminal code we inherited behind.”



Yasonna Laoly, the Indonesian minister of law and human rights, receives the new criminal code report from Bambang Wuryanto, the head of the parliamentary commission overseeing the revision. Photograph: Willy Kurniawan/Reuters

Supporters of the new laws say that while sex outside marriage will be punishable by a year in jail and cohabitation by six months, charges can be based only on police reports lodged by a spouse, parents or children.

But Taufik Basari, a legislator of the NasDem party, said that if a tourist visiting Bali, for instance, had consensual sex with an Indonesian national, and it was reported to police by the Indonesian's parent or child, that tourist could be arrested.

“I know it will impact tourism, which is why we should explain to the public that reports to police should be limited to what the family feels is really important,” he said. “As a parliamentarian, I will try to find more limitations for the implementation of these articles.”

Andreas Harsono, a senior Indonesia researcher at Human Rights Watch, said the code could be selectively enforced because of its impracticality,

citing “millions” of cohabiting unmarried couples in Indonesia.

There are fears the rules could have a severe impact on LGBTQ+ communities in Indonesia, where gay marriage is not acknowledged.

A previous draft of the code was poised to be passed in 2019 but the [process was delayed](#) after tens of thousands of people took to the streets in nationwide protests.

But rallies on Tuesday were more muted, with only about a dozen protesters gathering and holding banners in downtown Jakarta.



Activists protesting against the new criminal code outside the parliament building in Jakarta. Photograph: Adek Berry/AFP/Getty Images

Citra Referandum, the director of the Indonesian Legal Aid Institute, joined a small protest outside the parliament building in Jakarta on Tuesday. She said she expected “people’s anger will mount”.

“Indonesian democracy is dead,” she said. “This is reflected in a process that is not transparent or participatory and the anti-democratic substance of the criminal code.”

Under the new code, the promotion of contraception is illegal. It also maintains abortion is a crime but adds exceptions for women with life-threatening medical conditions and for rape, provided that the foetus is less than 12 weeks old, in line with what is already regulated.

It restores a ban on insulting a sitting president and vice-president, state institutions and national ideology – an old law that Indonesia’s top court annulled in 2006. Insults to a sitting president must be reported by the president and can lead to up to three years in jail.

Sasmito Madrim, the chair of the Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI) Indonesia, said the code curbed the “basic work” of reporting. He highlighted 17 “problematic articles” that criminalised “spreading communism”, defamation of the dead, and criticism of public leaders, among other areas.

He added: “The new code has the potential to send journalists to prison.”

Reuters and Agence France-Presse contributed to this report

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[Los Angeles](#)

Man who shot Lady Gaga's dog walker and stole bulldogs sentenced to 21 years

In a deal, James Howard Jackson pleaded guilty to one count of attempted murder after he was accidentally released from custody



Lady Gaga had offered a \$500,000 reward for the return of her dogs.
Photograph: Emma McIntyre/Getty Images

[Dani Anguiano](#) in Los Angeles

[@dani_anguiano](#)

Mon 5 Dec 2022 21.47 ESTFirst published on Mon 5 Dec 2022 18.55 EST

The man who shot Lady Gaga's dog walker and stole her French bulldogs in [Los Angeles](#) last year has been sentenced to 21 years in prison for the high-profile robbery that saw the star offer a \$500,000 reward for the return of her pets.

James Howard Jackson, one of three men and two accomplices who participated in the violent robbery of dog walker Ryan Fischer, pleaded no contest to one count of attempted murder, the Los Angeles county district attorney's office said on Monday.

The agreement came months after US marshals launched a hunt for Jackson, who was mistakenly released from custody in April due to a clerical error.

"The plea agreement holds Mr Jackson accountable for perpetrating a cold-hearted violent act and provides justice for our victim," the DA's office said in a statement.

Fischer was seriously wounded in the attack and addressed the court on Monday to give an impact statement, which he posted on Instagram.

"It's hard to believe that it's nearing two years since I was taking Asia, Koji and Gustav out for an evening stroll when in an instant I suddenly found myself fighting with everything I had to protect those dogs from being stolen. But it wasn't enough: I was beaten, strangled, shot and left to die, bleeding out on a sidewalk and gasping for my life. And Koji and Gustav were gone."

Authorities have said that on 24 February 2021, Jackson, Jaylin White, 19, and Lafayette Whaley, 27, drove around Los Angeles "looking for French bulldogs", an expensive breed that can sell for thousands of dollars. They came across Fischer with the pop star's three dogs near Sunset Boulevard – detectives believe the group didn't know the pets belonged to [Lady Gaga](#).

The men rushed Fischer, yelling for him to "Give it up" as they grabbed at the animals' leashes, he told [Rolling Stone](#). The dog walker was swinging at them with a champagne bottle he was holding and still gripping two of the leashes when one of the men began choking him.

It was during the struggle that officials say Jackson shot him with a semi-automatic handgun, allowing the trio to take off with two of the dogs, Koji and Gustav, while a third, Miss Asia, stayed hidden under nearby bushes as

Fischer had told her to. Fischer was left bleeding on the pavement weighing the best way to get the dogs back.

“I was bleeding out and that was the thought that was going through my head,” he told the magazine. “What’s the best way to do this so the dogs can be found?”

Fischer could be heard on a recording from a nearby doorbell camera screaming “Oh, my God! I’ve been shot!” and “Help me!” and “I’m bleeding out from my chest!”

The dog walker could be seen cradling one of the dogs as he received treatment on the pavement for his injuries after the robbery. Fischer has called the attack a “very close call with death”. The bullet pierced his lung, which later collapsed several times and required doctors to remove more than a third of the organ, Rolling Stone reported. He was also left with several broken ribs and cuts on his arms and legs.

After the robbery, Lady Gaga offered a “\$500,000 [£353,000] to anyone who has her two dogs, no questions asked”. The dogs were returned several days later by a woman who was also charged in the crime.

Two months after the attack, five people were arrested in connection with the incident, including Jackson, whom authorities later inadvertently released.

Jackson also admitted to inflicting great bodily injury and to a prior strike, the DA’s office said on Monday. He was sentenced to 21 years in prison.

Lady Gaga’s representatives did not immediately return a request for comment.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/dec/05/man-shot-dog-walker-stole-lady-gaga-bulldogs-21-years-prison>

[**China**](#)

Hu Jintao reappears as China comes to standstill for late leader Jiang Zemin

Former leader who was removed from a key meeting in October attended the memorial where Xi Jinping urged country to ‘turn grief into strength’



China's national flag is flown at half-mast to mourn the death of Jiang Zemin at Tiananmen in Beijing. A memorial service is being held in the capital on Tuesday. Photograph: Xinhua/REX/Shutterstock

[Helen Davidson](#) and agencies

Tue 6 Dec 2022 00.02 ESTFirst published on Mon 5 Dec 2022 19.36 EST

China has paused to remember the late former leader, Jiang Zemin, with a rollcall of Beijing's political elite attending memorial services including the former leader Hu Jintao in his first public appearances since his [shocking removal](#) from a top Communist party meeting in October.

Sirens wailed across the country on Tuesday as the Communist party eulogised Jiang on a national day of mourning, hailing him as a patriot who “dedicated his life” to the country and weathered “political storms”.

The highly orchestrated mourning activities saw state and social media go black and white, and security services out in force to ensure there were no large gatherings on the streets after [rare anti-zero Covid protests in recent weeks](#).

Jiang died in Shanghai on Wednesday last week at the age of 96 and left a mixed legacy, taking power in the aftermath of the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown and leading [China](#) towards its emergence as a powerhouse on the global stage.

A public memorial service attended by China’s political elite began at 10am in Beijing’s Great Hall of the People, bedecked with a giant portrait of the late leader as well as slogans lauding him and a massive flower display. On one side of the auditorium hung a banner saying: “Jiang Zemin is immortal”. A central wreath said: “You will always live in our hearts”.



Xi Jinping and other CCP leaders pay their final respects to Jiang Zemin at the Chinese PLA General Hospital in Beijing, on Monday. Photograph: Xinhua/Rex/Shutterstock

President Xi Jinping told assembled party faithful at the hall: “He dedicated his whole life and energy to the Chinese people, dedicated his life to fighting for national independence, people’s liberation, national prosperity, and people’s happiness.

“In the late 1980s and early 1990s, serious political storms occurred at home and abroad, and world socialism experienced severe complications. Some western countries imposed so-called ‘sanctions’ on China,” Xi told the audience.

“The CPC [Chinese Communist party] Central Committee calls on the whole party, the army and the people of all ethnic groups in China to turn grief into strength,” Xi added.

Xi’s speech also contained references that perhaps spoke to those in China who protested last week. The rallies across major Chinese cities were primarily over the stringent zero-Covid restrictions but some – particularly in Shanghai – openly criticised the government and Xi.

“In 1989, when a serious political turmoil occurred in China, Comrade Jiang resolutely supported and implemented the Party Central Committee’s decision to take a clear stand against turmoil,” Xi said in his speech, referring to the Tiananmen protests which ended in the bloody massacre of demonstrators by soldiers – an unmentionable event in China.

“The decision to safeguard the fundamental interests of the people relies on the vast number of party members, cadres and the masses to effectively safeguard Shanghai’s stability,” he said, in apparent reference to Jiang’s leadership role in Shanghai at the time, but also a potential nod to those in the city who called for an end to Xi’s rule last week.

Looking frail and distraught, Jiang’s wife, Wang Yeping, sat in a wheelchair in the front row. A nationwide “three-minute silence” was held as sirens sounded.

Among the attendees was former CCP leader, Hu. The 79-year-old attended a tribute for Jiang Zemin at a military hospital in Beijing on Monday, and

the memorial event on Tuesday. The appearances were the first sightings of Hu since the concluding session of the 20th party congress, China's most important political meeting.

At the congress, Hu was escorted out of his seat next to Xi. He appeared confused and resistant as he was led out of the room in full view of international media. State media said he had been ill and needed to rest, but the incident sparked rampant speculation and was seen as highly symbolic of the political purging Xi led at that meeting, expelling potential opposition figures including all members of the Hu-led rival Communist Youth League faction.

Under the increasingly authoritarian rule of Xi, and with a backdrop of last week's extraordinary protests, security was on high alert across the country.

In Jiang's home town of Yangzhou, about 100 people gathered in front of his former residence to observe the silence after which they were swiftly dispersed by police.

Flags across the country were at half-mast as were those at Chinese government buildings overseas. Stock markets in Shanghai and Shenzhen suspended trading for three minutes, as did the Chinese Gold and Silver Exchange in Hong Kong.

Hong Kong's bourse suspended the display of data on external screens at its offices while senior executives observed the silence. And in the semi-autonomous city's harbour, hundreds of vessels honked for three minutes, while officials and government employees observed three minutes of silence.

Public entertainment in mainland China was also suspended on Tuesday, with some online games such as the popular League of Legends announcing a day's pause.

Jiang leaves a controversial legacy. State media has hailed him as a great communist revolutionary, highlighting his part in quelling "serious political turmoil". But his rule also saw the repression of political opposition and

religious minorities, as well as a tolerance for the widespread corruption that accompanied China's economic rise.

Jiang died of leukaemia and multiple organ failure after medical treatments failed, according to state media.

His body was cremated Monday in Beijing at a ceremony attended by President Xi and other top leaders, Xinhua said.

The anti-Covid lockdown protests that flared up in China last week were the most widespread public demonstrations in the country since rallies calling for political reform in 1989.

And despite Jiang's role in helping to crush the 1989 rallies, his death has prompted nostalgia among some Chinese for a time seen as more liberal and tolerant of dissent.



Mourners place flower bouquets outside the old home of former Chinese leader Jiang Zemin, in Yangzhou, in China's eastern Jiangsu province, on Monday. Photograph: Héctor Retamal/AFP/Getty Images

“The Jiang era, while not the most prosperous era, was a more tolerant one,” one user on the Twitter-like Weibo wrote after his death.

“I have heard many criticisms of him, but the fact that he allowed critical voices to exist shows how he is worthy of praise,” wrote another.

In retirement, Jiang had become the subject of lighthearted memes among millennial and Gen Z Chinese fans, who called themselves “toad worshippers” in reference to his frog-like countenance and quirky mannerisms.

More than half a million commenters flooded CCTV’s post announcing his death on Weibo within an hour, many referring to him as “Grandpa Jiang”.

After the announcement, the websites of state media and government-owned businesses turned black-and-white, as did apps such as Alipay, Taobao and even McDonald’s China.

With Agence France-Presse

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[China](#)

Chinese students protest as university locks down over one Covid case

Footage shows large protest at Nanjing Tech University, as rules persist despite steps to ease zero-Covid policy

- ['Now I see it's not just me who's angry': readers in China on wave of protests](#)



Students protesting at Nanjing Tech University. Photograph: Social Media/Reuters

[Verna Yu](#) and agencies

Tue 6 Dec 2022 08.31 ESTFirst published on Mon 5 Dec 2022 23.00 EST

Students at a university in eastern [China](#) have staged a protest against a Covid lockdown as many in the country remain under some form of restrictions despite government steps to ease its zero-Covid policy.

Videos posted on [Twitter](#) on Tuesday show large numbers of students protesting at Nanjing Tech University on Monday night, as they were placed under lockdown after one positive case was found. The Guardian phoned the university for confirmation but calls went unanswered. The posts had been geolocated by AFP and Reuters.

“[We want] to go home!”, “Leaders, step down!”, “Your power is given to you by students, not by yourselves,” the students shouted, apparently referring to the university management. Footage showed a police car arriving at the scene.

A student confirmed to AFP that the protest had taken place a day after the school announced it would seal off the campus for five days because of just one Covid case. She said her peers were unhappy about poor communication from the university and worried they would be blocked from travelling home for the winter holidays.

The protest came days after people took to the streets in a number of Chinese cities, including Beijing and Shanghai, demanding an end to lockdowns and restrictions under the zero-Covid policy. In a bold act, some even called for the Chinese Communist party and President Xi Jinping to step down.

The Chinese authorities ended the unrest with a two-pronged approach of arresting protesters and stepping up online censorship and surveillance, while at the same time rolling back mass testing and curbs in many cities.

On Tuesday, Beijing dropped the need for people to show negative PCR tests to enter supermarkets, offices and public transport, but negative tests were still required for entering many places, such as schools, hospitals, nursing homes, bars and other entertainment venues. Many internet users reported long queues for PCR tests in freezing weather and voiced fears that people might get cross-infected.

Other cities, including Shanghai, have dialled down mass testing mandates in recent days but negative Covid tests are still required for entering similar places.

In the southern city of Guangzhou, officials began telling people to stay home if they had symptoms – a sharp about-turn from the previous approach of dragging all positive cases to central quarantine facilities.

But analysts at the Japanese firm Nomura on Monday calculated that 53 cities – home to nearly one-third of China's population – still had some restrictions in place.

“Beijing readies itself for life again,” read a headline in the government-owned China Daily newspaper on Tuesday, adding that people were “gradually embracing” the slow return to normality.

Further loosening beckoned, after a [string of demonstrations](#) marked the biggest show of public discontent in mainland China since Xi Jinping became president in 2012.

“This might be the first step towards reopening from this pandemic,” said Beijing resident Hu Dongxu, 27, as he swiped his travel card to enter the subway, which has also dropped the need for tests.

In one inner-city area, some supermarkets had already removed signs from entrances demanding a health code. Most shops had reopened in one of the city’s biggest malls, which also required just a green health code to enter. The sudden change in restrictions meant few people were out and about just yet. A staff member at one restaurant said they were still offering only takeaway, despite dining-in now being allowed, because the short notice of reopening had left them understaffed and unprepared. However, they said they would probably restart on Wednesday.

Top officials have softened their tone on the severity of the virus, bringing China closer to what other countries have been saying for more than a year as they dropped restrictions and opted to live with Covid-19.

Tong Zhaohui, the director of the Beijing Institute of Respiratory Diseases, said the latest Omicron variant had caused fewer cases of severe illness than the 2009 global influenza outbreak, according to Chinese state television.

China could announce 10 new nationwide easing measures as early as Wednesday, two sources with knowledge of the matter told Reuters, as cities across the country began lifting localised lockdowns.

That has sparked optimism among investors for a broader reopening of the world's second-biggest economy that could boost global growth.

Despite reassurances from authorities, commuter traffic in major cities such as Beijing and Chongqing has remained at a fraction of previous levels.

Some people remain wary of catching the virus, especially elderly people, many of whom remain unvaccinated, while there is also concern about the strain the loosening could put on China's fragile health system.

China's management of the disease [may be downgraded](#) as soon as January, to the less strict category B from the current top-level category A of infectious disease.

"The most difficult period has passed," the official Xinhua news agency said in a commentary published late on Monday, citing the weakening pathogenicity of the virus and efforts to vaccinate 90% of the population.

Analysts predict China may reopen the economy and drop border controls sooner than expected next year, with some predicting it will fully open in spring.

But more than half of Chinese residents say they would put off travel abroad, for periods from several months to more than a year, even if borders reopened tomorrow, a study showed on Tuesday.

Fear of infection was the top concern among those saying they would postpone travel in a survey of 4,000 consumers in China by the consultancy Oliver Wyman.

China reported 5,235 Covid-related cases as of Monday. Some experts have warned that toll could rise above 1 million if the exit is too hasty.

With AFP and Reuters

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Headlines saturday 10 december 2022

- [Weather Met Office extends ice and snow warnings across much of UK](#)
- [Grant Wahl US football journalist dies while covering Qatar World Cup](#)
- [World Cup quarter-finals Gareth Southgate urges England to ‘step up mentally’ to France challenge](#)
- [‘It’s so tribal’ France-England game strains dual nationality families](#)
- [England v France A heavyweight contest to define the Southgate era](#)

UK weather

Ice and snow warnings across UK as Manchester airport closes one runway

Flights cancelled or diverted after Met Office says temperatures below 0C may cause travel disruption



A tractor clears snow from the taxi ways at Manchester airport on Saturday.
Photograph: Phil Noble/Reuters

[Harry Taylor](#)
[@harrytaylr](#)

Sat 10 Dec 2022 07.09 ESTFirst published on Sat 10 Dec 2022 04.06 EST

Manchester airport was forced to close both its runways because of heavy snow on Saturday morning, and large parts of the UK have been warned to expect severe weather over the weekend.

Passengers were told the runways had been temporarily closed and to contact their airlines for the latest information. However, airport managers

reopened one runway at 11.30am, allowing a limited number of services to resume, with work continuing to reopen the other.

The airport said eight outbound flights had been cancelled so far, while 13 planes due to land at the airport had been diverted, along with three inbound.

A spokesperson said earlier: “Health and safety will always be our top priority and operations will resume at the earliest opportunity.”

The Met Office said its forecast of temperatures as low as -10C (14F) in isolated areas on Saturday and Sunday could lead to travel disruption, especially going in to Monday morning.

Snow is forecast for Scotland and the south-east of England, with [a yellow warning](#) in place for much of Scotland until midday on Sunday.



A woman makes her way through a snow flurry in Cheshire. Photograph: Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

The Met Office said some rural communities could be cut off and there was a possibility of power cuts and mobile phone coverage being affected.

In Sheffield, energy regulator Ofgem has said it is “extremely concerned” about 200 vulnerable people who are still without gas heating or hot water, as an outage affecting 340 people has gone into its second week.

A burst water main sent hundreds of thousands of litres of water into the gas network affecting Stannington, in the west of the city. Snow is forecast for Saturday night.

On Saturday, the Met Office extended ice warnings in [Northern Ireland](#), Wales and south-west England to include snow until midday on Sunday.

On Sunday, a snow and ice warning begins at 9am for most of London and some of south-east [England](#) until 9am on Monday.

The Met Office chief meteorologist, Steve Willington, said: “It is staying cold with daytime temperatures remaining only a few degrees above freezing in many places over the coming days, and overnight temperatures dropping to -10C or lower in isolated spots.

“Although below average, these temperatures are not that unusual for this time of year.”



Dog walkers in Dunsden, Oxfordshire. Photograph: Geoffrey Swaine/Rex/Shutterstock

He said there was a risk of freezing fog in some places, particularly southern England, on Sunday and Monday mornings.

“There is also a small risk of a band of sleet or snow moving into the far south-east on Sunday. If this happens it could potentially bring some disruption, especially to rush hour on Monday.”

The UKHSA is advising people to look out for friends and family who are vulnerable in the cold and to ensure they have access to warm food and drinks, adding that people should maintain indoor temperatures of at least 18C (64F).

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Dr Agostinho Sousa, a consultant in public health medicine at the UKHSA, said: “Cold weather can have serious consequences for health, and older people and those with heart or lung conditions can be particularly at risk.

“If you have a pre-existing medical condition, you should heat your home to a temperature that is comfortable for you.”

Darren Clark, a severe weather resilience manager at National Highways, said gritters would be out to keep motorways and major A-roads open.



Rowers on the river Avon. Photograph: Jacob King/PA

The RAC motoring organisation said it had been “exceptionally busy” in recent days, receiving a quarter more breakdown reports than usual for this time of year.

More than 3,200 warm banks, run by local authorities and charities to provide warmth for those who cannot afford to heat their homes, are open across the UK, according to the Warm Welcome Campaign.

Becca Lyon, the head of child poverty at Save the Children UK, said: “Families should not be in a position where they are agonising over whether to put the heating on in sub-zero temperatures.”

“Parents have told us they will risk going into debt to keep their children warm.”

People on the lowest incomes in hundreds of affected postcode areas in England and [Wales](#) are to receive a £25 cold weather payment.

The government payments have been triggered for eligible households in areas where the average temperature has been recorded as, or is forecast to be, 0C or below over seven consecutive days.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/dec/10/met-office-extends-ice-and-snow-warnings-across-much-of-uk>

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The ObserverWorld Cup 2022

US soccer journalist Grant Wahl dies while covering Qatar World Cup

- Wahl collapsed during Argentina-Netherlands game
- 48-year-old was treated at stadium by medics



Grant Wahl was covering the World Cup quarter-final when he died.
Photograph: Doug Zimmerman/ISI Photos/Getty Images

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About this content

Bryan Armen Graham in New York and Sean Ingle in Doha

Fri 9 Dec 2022 21.51 EST Last modified on Sat 10 Dec 2022 17.06 EST

US soccer journalist Grant Wahl has died after suffering an apparent heart attack at Lusail Stadium, where he was covering the World Cup quarter-final between Argentina and the Netherlands on Friday night.

Wahl, who was a correspondent for CBS Sports and wrote a popular Substack column, was 48 years old.

“The entire US Soccer family is heartbroken to learn that we have lost Grant Wahl,” the US Soccer Federation said in a statement. “Here in the United States, Grant’s passion for soccer and commitment to elevating its profile across our sporting landscape played a major role in helping to drive interest in and respect for our beautiful game. As important, Grant’s belief in the power of the game to advance human rights was, and will remain, an inspiration to all.”

Wahl was seated in the press box in the upper-most tier of the stadium when he collapsed in extra time, prompting the journalists around him to remove chairs and call for medical assistance.

A team of medics arrived and began administering CPR for the next 20 minutes. After the match concluded, Wahl was taken away from the scene.

Wahl's wife, Dr Celine Gounder, an infectious disease epidemiologist who served on Joe Biden's coronavirus taskforce confirmed her husband's death in a statement on Twitter.

"I am so thankful for the support of my husband @GrantWahl's soccer family & of so many friends who've reached out tonight. I'm in complete shock," she wrote.

US state department spokesperson Ned Price [said in a tweet](#) that the United States is "engaged with senior Qatari officials to see to it that his family's wishes are fulfilled as expeditiously as possible".

U.S. Soccer Statement On The Passing Of Grant Wahl:
pic.twitter.com/CBp1mCK1mQ

— U.S. Soccer (@ussoccer) [December 10, 2022](#)

Wahl made headlines earlier in the tournament when he was detained by security staff at Qatar's Ahmad bin Ali Stadium [for wearing a rainbow shirt](#) to the United States' World Cup opener against Wales. He said he wore the shirt as a show of solidarity with the LGBTQ+ community. Homosexuality is illegal in Qatar.

Wahl wrote on Monday that he had visited a medical clinic in Qatar after feeling unwell.

"My body finally broke down on me. Three weeks of little sleep, high stress and lots of work can do that to you," Wahl wrote. "What had been a cold over the last 10 days turned into something more severe on the night of the USA-Netherlands game, and I could feel my upper chest take on a new level of pressure and discomfort. I didn't have Covid (I test regularly here), but I went into the medical clinic at the main media center today, and they said I probably have bronchitis. They gave me a course of antibiotics and some heavy-duty cough syrup, and I'm already feeling a bit better just a few hours later. But still: No bueno."

Wahl was perhaps the best known soccer journalist in the United States. He covered his first World Cup in 1994 and joined Sports Illustrated in 1996. He stayed at the magazine for more than two decades, charting the rise of soccer in the US and wrote a well received book on David Beckham's arrival in MLS. He also wrote the magazine's [first cover story on LeBron James](#), while the basketball player was a rising star in high school. Qatar was Wahl's eighth World Cup.



A tribute to Grant Wahl placed in the press box at Al Bayt Stadium on Saturday. Photograph: Clive Brunskill/Getty Images

“We were proud to call him a colleague and friend for two decades – no writer in the history of SI has been more passionate about the sport he loved and the stories he wanted to tell,” Sports Illustrated said in a statement on Friday night. “Our hearts go out to Celine and his family, as well as everyone who loved his work. He will always be part of the SI family.”

Other writers and journalists paid tribute to Wahl as news of his death emerged.

“Grant Wahl was my friend, one of the nicest, most truly decent people I have ever had the opportunity to work with. I am flattened,” tweeted Will Leitch, the founding editor of Deadspin.

Brendan Hunt, the writer and co-star of Ted Lasso, also paid tribute to Wahl on Twitter.

“Sitting here floored by the horrible news that Grant Wahl died today in Qatar,” wrote Hunt. “I have read his work for literally decades; just two months ago I had the pleasure of meeting him, and he was an absolute mensch. This is a tragic and devastating loss.”

Wahl was well known as a champion of women’s soccer. Former USWNT star Carli Lloyd described his death as “truly heartbreakin” on Twitter. She added: “Completely shocked. My heart goes out to his wife, family, friends and the soccer community.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2022/dec/09/grant-wahl-dies-qatar-world-cup-2022-heart-attack-soccer-journalist>

World Cup 2022

Gareth Southgate urges England to ‘step up mentally’ to France challenge

- Manager wants to see evidence of maturity gained since 2018
- Southgate: ‘We’ve got to nail this type of game now’



England's Jude Bellingham trains in the gym with his teammates at the Al Wakrah Stadium. Photograph: Eddie Keogh/The FA/Getty Images

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[About this content](#)

[Jacob Steinberg in Doha](#)

[@JacobSteinberg](#)

Fri 9 Dec 2022 17.45 EST Last modified on Fri 9 Dec 2022 18.08 EST

Gareth Southgate has urged his players to stand up and be counted when England play their World Cup quarter-final against France on Saturday night.

England, who have never won a knockout game against an elite-level nation at a major tournament away from home, face a huge test of their quality and mental strength when they take on the world champions at the Al Bayt Stadium. There will be no room for fear [against France](#), whose chief threat will come from Kylian Mbappé, and Southgate wants his side to show how much they have matured since reaching the semi-finals in 2018.

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Qatar: beyond the football

Show



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Photograph: Caspar Benson

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“The biggest thing is going to be our mentality,” England’s head coach said. “We’ll be tactically prepared. But on these nights you’ve got to have men that stand up and take on the challenge. That’s the bit we’ve got to prove. We’ve had some outstanding nights and the next game is always the most important. It’s against a good level of opponent, one we’re ready for.”

“One, if you’d asked me four years ago were we quite ready, I’m not sure. Now I feel differently and that’s because we’ve got evidence over a long period of results. Historically we have always talked well, but the evidence wasn’t there. Now we’ve got more evidence and we’ve got to nail this type of game now.”

England, boosted by Raheem Sterling returning to their base in Al Wakrah yesterday, have had near misses in their previous two tournaments. They relinquished early leads when they lost to Croatia in the last four of the 2018 [World Cup](#) and to Italy in the final of Euro 2020.

“We remind them of the hurdles they have overcome to get to this point,” Southgate said. “We have got players with big-match experience and I have no fear about the young ones because I think they are just going to go and play.

“There will be moments where [France](#) have bits of play and we have to accept that we are not going to stop them creating a chance. But we have to continue to be brave when those things happen.”

Quick Guide

England v France: probable teams

Show

England (4-3-3): Pickford; Walker, Stones, Maguire, Shaw; Rice, Henderson, Bellingham; Saka, Kane, Foden.

France (4-3-3): Lloris; Koundé, Upamecano, Varane, T Hernandez; Rabiot, Tchouaméni, Griezmann; Dembélé, Giroud, Mbappé.

Was this helpful?

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There has been speculation over whether Southgate intends to revert to a back five to counteract Mbappé, who has scored five goals in four games.

The 52-year-old revealed that he picked his team on Monday and is expected to stick with the 4-3-3 that helped England beat Senegal in the last 16.

“Usually if we change shape it’s for a tactical problem rather than an individual problem,” Southgate said. He stressed that England’s forwards were capable of hurting France and he backed Kyle Walker to cope with Mbappé’s speed, though he added that combatting the Paris Saint-Germain striker must be a collective effort.



Gareth Southgate looks on during a training session at Al Wakrah Stadium.
Photograph: Eddie Keogh/The FA/Getty Images

“You’ve got to have zonal coverage on players like that,” Southgate said. “We also can’t let Antoine Griezmann have the run of the park because he’s a pretty good player. You can’t, against a team of this level, just go out and play and not have any preparation for what they’re doing. But also we can’t overdo that. We’re playing well, we’ve got a lot of strengths and we want to keep accentuating those strengths to the players because they should go into the game in confident mood.”

Southgate hopes that Sterling will be able to be on the bench. The winger was back in training as England went through their final preparations, but he

missed the Senegal game after flying back to the United Kingdom following a robbery at his home and only returned to Qatar yesterday morning.

England trained with a full complement in mild conditions. The players have spoken with conviction this week and Southgate did not blink when he was asked whether he had become a better manager.

“If we don’t win, I know where the buck will stop,” he said. “But that’s fine. I have to take responsibility. I feel good about where I am on my decision-making and my energy and my excitement for the game.

“I’d be an idiot if I hadn’t learned over five years managing some of the biggest games in world football, managing some of the most high-profile players in Europe. I know people think I have a preference for a certain system, but if anything my preference has always been 4-3-3.

“But I don’t think it’s always been appropriate for us. The job is not just to have a philosophy, the job is to win matches. You can have a philosophy but if you’re going home at the start of the tournament then the philosophy doesn’t wash.”

It was pointed out to Southgate, whose deal runs until December 2024 and takes in that year’s European Championship, that defeat by France could see him leave his post. “I would think the sun will come up tomorrow and life will be the same whatever happens,” he said. “It is not the point where we are thinking of going home. I have got confidence in the players. We are in a good place. We have got to step up mentally.”

Southgate ended on a positive note, laughing and saying that he was unlikely to celebrate goals by dancing like Brazil’s manager Tite, but he admitted his stance could change if England win the World Cup.

“That might be different,” he said. “I am quite happy to embarrass myself at that point. But not beforehand.”

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World Cup 2022

‘It’s so tribal’: France-England game strains dual nationality families

Loyalties of Anglo-French football fans tested as national sides meet for first time in competitive match for a decade



James Parry, supporting France, with his wife Marjan, supporting England, have decided their son Leo will cheer on the winning team from tomorrow's game. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

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About this content

Rachel Hall and Mabel Banfield-Nwachi

Sat 10 Dec 2022 02.00 EST

Saturday night will be a tense evening in James Parry's house – he is a lifelong France supporter, but his wife will be rooting for England – not just because they want to see their team reach the semi-finals of the World Cup, but because the match will decide who their three-month-old baby will support for the rest of his life.

“With the birth of my son, my wife’s family think he should support England, which is a point of contention for me because I would like him to support the same team. This [game] means a lot because it’s been suggested that whoever wins on Saturday should be the team he supports – that’s probably higher stakes than the actual match,” he says.

Parry’s family in London is just one of the many dual nationality households across the UK that will see their loyalties tested when the neighbouring countries face-off for the first time in a high-profile tournament for a decade.

Parry, 38, is half-French, half-English, but his Gallic allegiances were cemented when he watched France win the World Cup on home turf in 1998.

The team have performed better than England since, including winning the last World Cup. “I’ve been really lucky to watch an era where they’ve won a lot,” he says.

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Laurent Derioz, 52, credits Eric Cantona and Thierry Henry with making it ‘cool to be French’. Photograph: Laurent Derioz

The strength of France’s national team has proven a pull for Laurent Derioz, 52, who is also half-French and half-English. After a childhood of being teased over his nationality, he credits Eric Cantona and Thierry Henry with making it “cool to be French”.

But although emotionally he wants France to win on Saturday, intellectually he thinks it's [England](#) that really needs the boost. "The lift the '98 World Cup win gave to France was amazing. I was there at the time, a lot was said about this multiracial team that helped bring some unity of identity to the country.

"The English team could do with a lift because since Brexit there's no good news – it's been a nightmare since 2016."

May, 35, and Jordan, 39, say that football is always an area of contention for them: May, from England, supports Manchester United while Jordan, who is French, supports Arsenal. But with two competitive and skilled national teams facing off, the stakes are even higher.



May, 35, and her partner Jordan, 39, say football is always an area of contention. Photograph: May

"I think the safest plan on Saturday will be for us to watch it separately, because it might strain the relationship. Though maybe we should watch it together as a test. I think we'll have to agree on how we should behave ahead of the match because we're both competitive," says May.

The pair are based in their home countries but visit each other regularly.

Jordan is in London for this match, but worries about receiving abuse unless he finds a pub for French fans. “British fans the world over do have a bad reputation for losing badly,” notes May.

She adds that they each support the other’s teams when they’re not competing. “We have a lot of respect for each other’s cultures and we love so many elements, but when it comes to football it’s so tribal, I would never dream of [supporting France].”



Jordan worries about receiving abuse unless he finds a pub for French fans.
Photograph: Jordan

Jo Ortlieb, 55, agrees that sports matches between France and England can get “very tense” in her family, because she and her two sons support England, but her husband is loyal to France, where he is from.

“We’re quite grown up about it all but I think my husband probably doesn’t appreciate the fact that my boys support England, especially as they grew up in France,” she says.

Her eldest son, who is a big football fan and goes to university in the UK, will be supporting whoever is in the lead during the quarter-final on Saturday. “He plans to swap shirts based on whoever is winning, which is a

bit shocking really.”

Ortlieb says she always feels a little bit alone watching games because she is outnumbered by French fans. “We may go to an Australian pub or our rugby club, which is going to be showing [the match], but I’m just going to be feeling a bit lonely,” she says.

“Someone said to me this morning: ‘You’re going to win whatever on Saturday.’ I said: ‘I’m sorry, but I’m not. My heart is still for England.’

“It’s still a lovely atmosphere, the chanting, it’s great. It’s nice to see people together again, even if there is a bit of friendly rivalry.”

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[World Cup 2022](#)

England v France: a heavyweight contest to define the Southgate era



England and France have a collection of players who can switch between two speeds and make the most of key moments. Composite: Guardian

Design

World Cup knockout games are devastatingly brutal in their finality but at least this showdown looks intriguingly poised

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[About this content](#)



[Jonathan Liew in Doha](#)

Fri 9 Dec 2022 16.00 ESTLast modified on Fri 9 Dec 2022 18.52 EST

Darkness falls quickly in Qatar. The night steals in like a kidnapper, wrapping its shroud around the desert like a bag over the head. Sunsets barely last long enough to choose an Instagram filter. On Saturday evening, either [England](#) or France will also discover that in these parts, oblivion descends with a devastating brutality.

Come 10pm local time, what has gone before will cease to matter. To the loser, the ruthless and often scintillating football that brought them to this quarter-final will be of no consolation at all. One of Harry Kane or Kylian Mbappé is a fraud. One of Didier Deschamps or Gareth Southgate is a moron. One of Declan Rice or Aurélien Tchouaméni is about to be “painfully exposed at this level”. Either the Football Association needs to take a long hard look at its [French counterpart](#), or vice versa. Two hours of football decides the lot. Sorry, that’s just the way it goes.

That we all willingly buy into this quasi-fiction is what lends World Cup knockout football its maniacal power. A microscopic VAR call; an act of unrepeatable brilliance; a lucky deflection off the backside of Olivier Giroud; a penalty kick. On these slippery wheels are broken the work of four years. And for all the inevitable pre-match prophecy and post-match autopsy, [England v France](#) feels impossible to call with any confidence.

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Photograph: Caspar Benson

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Tempo is one reason for this. Unlike Spain or Argentina, [France](#) and England lack a recognisable motif, a single consistent energy. This is both blessing and curse. Few teams rival France's ability to accelerate through the gears, to turn patience to impatience, ice to fire, verse to chorus.

They sit, they settle, they absorb, they go quiet. Then they attack with sudden and concussive speed, a sensory overload that short-circuits a defence in seconds. But the rest of the time they give you a chance.

England have also played this tournament at two speeds. For 30 minutes against Wales and Senegal, and for 90 minutes against the United States, they looked bereft and maladroit: a team of spoons in a world of pork chops. But in their moments of clarity, when the wingers dovetail and the midfielders storm the keep, few teams can withstand them. Southgate's substitutions have often been dazzlingly effective.

Mbappé and Kane personify this dichotomy. Mbappé will consciously harness his efforts during a game, saving his legs for the eight or nine full-gas sprints that will capture his evening. He barely defends. He will not come back at set pieces. Incredibly, he has not touched the ball in France's defensive third all tournament. But he has had 42 touches in the opposition penalty area: more than Kane, Phil Foden, Jude Bellingham and Bukayo Saka combined.



Kylian Mbappé saves his sprints for when they will be most effective in each match. Photograph: François Nel/Getty Images

Kane's extremes manifest differently. Few strikers are better at disrupting the balance of a defence: holding the ball up, dropping deep, releasing swanky diagonal passes for Saka and Foden. But when he quietens, England fumble a little. Opponents push up the pitch, squeeze the space, force England to punt up the flanks. If [Kyle Walker's supervision of Mbappé](#) is

the most important duel on the pitch, then Tchouaméni against Kane is a close second.

Here the roles of Bellingham and [Antoine Griezmann](#) will be vital: sniffing out space, creating supremacies out wide, making dangerous runs beyond the backline, snuffing out counterattacks at source. With Giroud and Kane in retreat, and assuming an unchanged England 4-3-3, the midfield essentially comprises two diamonds. Kane and Bellingham will try to overload Tchouaméni; Griezmann and Giroud will do the same with Rice. Jordan Henderson and Adrien Rabiot will merrily slap each other around all night.

A tight, structured game probably suits England; if it stretches, France can usually be trusted to score one goal more than you.

Where France hold the clear advantage is in pedigree, pacing, knowing how these games are won. They have faced teams as good as England; Southgate's England have never faced a team as good as this France. France know how to defend a lead and they know how to chase one. Their squad, many of whom won in Russia in 2018, drips with big-game panache. Ten Champions League medals to England's three tells a story; when it comes to losing finals, meanwhile, England lead 10 to six.

Have England learned from their mistakes? All three of their tournament exits ([Croatia 2018](#), [Netherlands 2019](#), [Italy 2021](#)) came after peaking too soon, mislaying the balance between aggression and caution. Here, the very opposite has been true: stay in the game, build the layers, identify the problems before you solve them. Really this has been the story of Southgate's England: a journey of refinement, machine learning, fitful growth. Talent has been added. Talent has been discarded. Systems have been trialled and juked. But every misstep has toughened them a little.

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And look, it takes time to crack this thing. Spain went through cycles of underachievement before striking perfection. Joachim Löw's Germany lost two semi-finals and a final before winning in 2014. Deschamps' side evolved over three tournaments: a promising run snuffed out by savvier opponents (Germany 2014), followed by an agonising defeat on home soil (Portugal 2016) and finally the triumph of 2018. Anyone reducing this elephantine process to the crude binary of "handbrake on, handbrake off" has probably never won a thing in their lives.

Nonetheless, there is a kind of boss-level finality here. Win or lose, this game is likely to define the Southgate era. More so because it is a purer footballing test, stripped of the emotional heft of a Wembley final, the blithe naivety of 2018, the historical baggage of England v Germany.

Toxic nationalism is mercifully sparse in this fixture, even if politically the rivalry dates back much further. England fans do not crow about the hundred years war or sing about "Ten French Archers". Indeed the role of the crowd should be minimal. Whatever fate befalls England here does so on their terms.

For Deschamps the stakes are equally high. Two early exits in succession would likely mark the end of his decade in charge and his [replacement by Zinedine Zidane](#). It would bring down the curtain on that golden class of 2018: Giroud, Hugo Lloris, Paul Pogba, perhaps even Griezmann and N'Golo Kanté. Questions would be asked over the reliance on Mbappé, the culpability of the national federation, perhaps even French football itself, which is battling numerous off-field scandals and an increasingly strained relationship with the public.

All this and more on the line. This is the tournament's penultimate weekend, but only now does the end feel within touching distance. From Croydon to Créteil, from Doha to Douala, the world will pause for this genuine

heavyweight bout. And as any seasoned heavyweight will tell you, the end often comes a little quicker than you think.

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- Litvinenko David Tennant’s accent in this crime drama is so bad, it’s unwatchable
- Guess who? Val McDermid, Ian Rankin, Sophie Hannah and other crime writers reveal their favourite detectives

Jessica Chastain: ‘I will never be angry at a woman for doing what she has to do to survive’

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[Blind date](#)[Relationships](#)

Blind date: ‘She suggested cycling back together – a lovely, unexpected ending’



Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

Leanne, 43, an occupational therapist, meets Josh, 39, a curator and creative producer

Sat 10 Dec 2022 01.00 EST



Leanne on Josh

What were you hoping for?

To meet a lovely Guardian reader for a fun evening. To not want to leave before the starters arrived. To not feel mortified reading his review of my rusty dating skills.

First impressions?

I was thrilled that Josh wasn't engrossed in his phone when I arrived. He was warm, friendly and made a slightly surreal situation comfortable.

What did you talk about?

Belize. Smartphones. Work. Festivals. Not being natural campers. London cycling. Tattoos.

Most awkward moments?

I was probably a bit eager to find out more about him. I hope this was seen as curiosity rather than interrogation.

Good table manners?

We were too busy talking to notice. But we shared a dessert.

Best thing about Josh?

He lives his values and cultural interests, and this gives him a really positive energy.

Would you introduce Josh to your friends?

He'd get on with most people, and my friends are awesome, so it would work.

Describe Josh in three words.

Creative, driven, friendly.

What do you think Josh made of you?

I think it was positive? Sweary, cycling, child-free London lover?

Did you go on somewhere?

He kindly walked me to my bike.

And ... did you kiss?

No.

If you could change one thing about the evening what would it be?

Nothing, I had a really enjoyable time: great food at one of my favourite restaurants, with fabulous and interesting company.

Marks out of 10?

A very strong 8.

Would you meet again?

We agreed a second date as I was typing this :)



Josh and Leanne 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.



Josh on Leanne

What were you hoping for?

To meet someone great via a public-facing, possibly romantic, social experiment ... and enjoy a free meal.

First impressions?

Cute, cool tattoos, possibly more extroverted and communicative than I am, which is brilliant!

What did you talk about?

So many things. We've both travelled around Belize and Mexico recently. Our love of music festivals. How we aren't glued to our smartphones like most people.

Most awkward moment?

An initial few seconds of nervousness.

Good table manners?

Our personalities are such that we aren't shy about sharing our food, or opinions!

Best thing about Leanne?

She's an excellent communicator, very considerate and articulate.

Would you introduce Leanne to your friends?

I would. They'd think she is quite the character.

Describe Leanne in three words.

Quirky, talkative, charismatic.

What do you think Leanne made of you?

That I'm social, passionate about the arts – and have a cool job.

Did you go on somewhere?

No.

And ... did you kiss?

A gentleman never tells, but we didn't.

If you could change one thing about the evening, what would it be?

I might have cycled there. Leanne suggested cycling back to east London together, which would've been a lovely, unexpected ending.

Marks out of 10?

8.

Would you meet again?

We plan to.

*Josh and Leanne ate at [Mildreds Soho](#), London W1. Fancy a blind date?
Email blind.date@theguardian.com*

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[The watcher](#)[Television & radio](#)

Litvinenko: David Tennant's accent in this crime drama is so bad, it's unwatchable

The real-life source material about a poisoned spy is fantastic. Shame about the tedious plotting and the actor doing a voice that weirdly channels a certain celebrity...



David Tennant as the ex Russian spy Alexander Litvinenko in the new four part ITVX drama. Photograph: ITVX/ITV Studios

[Joel Golby](#)

Sat 10 Dec 2022 04.00 EST

I'm going to say something now that is going to ruin the series Litvinenko for you, rendering it essentially unwatchable, so be forewarned. I'll do a few sentences for you now so you can really make your mind up. Do you think

you, or anyone you love, might want to watch Litvinenko (Thursday 15 December, ITVX)? Then I would suggest you abort this whimsical weekly column right now. The thing I'm going to say about Litvinenko that will ruin it will take up the entire second paragraph and once you read it – once you absorb all the truth inherent to it – you will not be able to enjoy the series Litvinenko, even for one second. Do you understand that? Do you? Are you sure? All right, fine:

David Tennant isn't doing a Russian accent in Litvinenko. He is just doing José Mourinho's voice.

Ah, well. That's done it. You can't enjoy the show now. Every time you see Tennant do his accent – every great actor is waiting for the role that means they have to shave their head, aren't they? This is Tennant's – all you can think is he's just lost a last-16 Champions League tie with a lacklustre Manchester United and is making excuses about how it's all somehow Luke Shaw's fault, rather than being an ex-FSB operative dying of a dose of poison scraped out of the core of a nuclear reactor. It really does take the edge off the drama, I have to say.

Sadly, what also takes the edge off Litvinenko is that it isn't very good, which takes some doing. First, there's the cast, which includes some of my personal favourite actors – Neil Maskell! Mark Bonnar! You've never been mad to see Daniel Ryan turn up, have you! – all playing various levels of gor-blimey London rozzer. Then you've got the source material, which is ghoulishly fascinating. One of my working theories is that everyone has one friend who knows way too much about the Litvinenko murder, and once you get them three drinks deep in the pub you start to learn a lot about what was buried in Sir Robert Owen's 329-page inquiry. The fact that there was a previous attempt to poison Litvinenko a couple of weeks before, a night that ended with the two assassins striking out at a Mayfair members' club where they were trying (and failing) to pick up women. That a lethal towel used by the killers to mop up polonium at the hotel they were staying at was found wedged in a laundry chute two months after Litvinenko's death. Also, the Piccadilly branch of Itsu where Litvinenko ate put up James Bond-inspired hoarding while the police tested the site for radiation poisoning. All of this is lost in this plodding, endless, four-hour police procedural.

I guess I do understand the decision not to dramatise the actual moment Litvinenko got poisoned – it's a bit tacky, fairly insensitive, not to mention grotesque – as well as the bizarre convoluted journey the fateful dose of polonium-210 took across Europe and the UK before making its way to a teapot. But without it, a lot of Litvinenko is just Tennant looking really tired while making the same statement twice in José Mourinho's press conference voice. What follows is policework, more policework, then policework again: I lost track of how many times I watched Mark Bonnar get into or out of a car, how many "Sarge? Yeah. All right, understood" phone calls Neil Maskell took, how many snippets of background news reports I had to overhear to get story beats (you know it's 2006 because there's a radio bulletin about Tom Cruise marrying Katie Holmes, which is about the only fun anyone has with any dialogue here at all). There is so much grisly depth to the Litvinenko case that has been wasted on yet another show where detectives in an office stare at a whiteboard, eat lunch at their computer, and get home late while their wife is already asleep. We get it! They won't rest until the case is solved! But show me something good in between actors pretending to have realisations!

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Far more interesting – and, crucially, three hours shorter – is the companion documentary, *Litvinenko: The Mayfair Poisonings*, which tells the story of the murder with CCTV footage, old news roll, interviews with police and doctors close to the case and, for some reason, a lot of clips of David Tennant creaking around a hospital. A little weird in form, yes, but it does better service to the source material – ie it actually tells you the story of Litvinenko, rather than the police who did the press conferences after his

murder – than the drama it is attached to. Plus, less of that Mourinho voice. Honestly it's worth watching the first 10 minutes of the opening episode just to see how right I am about that.

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[Crime fiction](#)

Guess who? Val McDermid, Ian Rankin, Sophie Hannah and other crime writers reveal their favourite detectives



Illustration: Martin O'Neill/The Guardian

At the end of a year when murder mysteries rode high in the charts, we ask crime writers to celebrate the best fictional detectives

[John Banville](#), [Ian Rankin](#), [Natalie Haynes](#), [Saima Mir](#), [Mark Billingham](#), [Dreda Say Mitchell](#), [Ann Cleeves](#), [Kate Mosse](#), Alyssa Cole, [Val McDermid](#), [Stella Duffy](#), [Sophie Hannah](#), Jean Kwok, [Sara Paretsky](#), David Baldacci,

Sat 10 Dec 2022 04.00 EST

John Banville

I first saw the literary possibilities of the “crime novel” when I was in my middle teens, and my older brother gave me a copy of [Raymond Chandler's The Big Sleep](#). Until then I had mostly known the jigsaw puzzles of Agatha Christie or the barely bearable Wimseycalities of [Dorothy L Sayers](#). Here, in Chandler, was style.

Philip Marlowe is, of course, his creator's dream version of himself: tough, but tender too, wised up but not cynical, a private eye who has read a book, and likes nothing better of a rainy California evening than to light a pipe and replay a few demonstration games by one of the great chess masters.

Though the novels display an unfortunate weakness for outlandish metaphors – the tarantula on the angel cake, that kind of thing – they can be subtle and witty, and even, on occasion, wise. The women, too, are attractive – tender and tough, like Phil himself – even though in every one of the novels the real murderer turns out to be female.

Yes, down those mean streets a literary original must go. And in the case histories of crime fiction, Marlowe is the original original.



Conflicted, driven and an alcoholic ... Matt Scudder played by Liam Neeson in *A Walk Among the Tombstones*. Photograph: Momentum Pictures/Sportsphoto/Allstar

Ian Rankin

I was a fairly late convert to crime fiction as a reader, and one of the first characters I remember falling for in a big way was Lawrence Block's **Matt Scudder**. Scudder is a private eye who is an ex-cop. He's conflicted, driven and an alcoholic. His beat is contemporary New York and his friends include a brutal yet gracious villain called Mick Ballou. I'd say that the gangland boss Cafferty in my novels owes a large debt to Ballou and (especially in his early outings) my hero John Rebus shares DNA with Scudder.

The novels are all great, but my favourites include *When the Sacred Ginmill Closes* and *A Walk Among the Tombstones*. They are the perfect hardboiled mix of grit and poetry: cool jazz with surface noise.

Natalie Haynes

I have too many favourite literary detectives to pick one, so I'm going for **Jessica Fletcher** of the long-running US TV series *Murder, She Wrote*. A

fully rounded character from her first outing, when she solves the murder of a man dressed as Sherlock Holmes, JB Fletcher is my model of what it means to be a successful author: famous enough to be invited to everything, read by almost all policemen, present at the scene of multiple crimes yet suspected of none. Jessica solves murders from Cabot Cove to New York, with the occasional foray to London and Ireland, and once doubles up with Tom Selleck in a [crossover episode with Magnum, PI](#). I couldn't love her more.



The ultimate flawed detective ... Sherlock Holmes played by Benedict Cumberbatch. Photograph: Robert Viglasky/BBC

Saima Mir

Growing up, I prided myself on being able to solve the crimes before getting to the end of the book. I read the entire Nancy Drew series, the Hardy Boys, but, even at a young age, my favourite was always [Sherlock Holmes](#).

In secondary school, a teacher mentioned that the deduction techniques detailed in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's work had been so well crafted that they influenced the policing of the day. That fiction could change the world was a powerful idea, and one I wanted to be part of.

Back then, I thought the Holmes books were great yarns, full of intrigue and dapper people living in splendid surroundings, solving cases that verged on the supernatural but always ended with a logical conclusion. Today, as a crime writer, I see that the genius behind Conan Doyle's work was characterisation. Holmes is the ultimate flawed protagonist, and that's what makes him so fascinating. He's obsessive, logical and extremely intelligent, but also socially inept. His powers of deduction are his defining trait, but he's also a junkie. He's not a hero, but he's our hero.

Mark Billingham

The Maltese Falcon by Dashiell Hammett is widely regarded as the novel that kickstarted the American hardboiled movement, and its protagonist, **Sam Spade**, is certainly the archetypal hardboiled private eye. That said, he is no Chandlerian knight errant, and it is Spade himself who provides the novel's most enduring mystery. Pragmatist or chancer? Detached and taciturn or cold and calculating? To put it simply, are his motives honourable or not?

Dorothy Parker "mooned" over Spade for days after reading the novel, though later on she would be even more lovestruck by Philip Marlowe (fickle, that Algonquin mob). Spade appeared in only one novel and, while it is interesting to speculate whether Hammett would have brought him back in further stories had he continued to write, I like to believe that he would have resisted the temptation. We should be grateful that we were never given the chance to get inside the head of his most famous and compelling character.



Jack's on your side ... Tom Cruise as Jack Reacher. Photograph: Paramount Pictures/Sportsphoto/Allstar

Dreda Say Mitchell

Of all the detectives that crowd crime fiction, few have succeeded as completely as Lee Child's [**Jack Reacher**](#). There have been many attempts to explain Jack's popularity. Is his persona rooted in Greek myth, or is he a reinvention of the frontier cowboy? There's probably a simpler explanation. In an ambiguous, cynical and morally uncertain world, Jack is unashamedly with the good guy against the bad guy, whatever the odds, and especially when the bad guy is rich and powerful. Jack's on your side, and readers love him for it.

Ann Cleeves

I've enjoyed the recent crime fiction coming from Australia: books by Jane Harper, Chris Hammer and Hayley Scrivenor. My favourite of their detectives is Hammer's **Nell Buchanan**. She first appears in *Opal Country* as an inexperienced young investigator supporting homicide detective Ivan Lucic in the remote mining badlands. She comes into her own in *Dead*

Man's Creek, a richly textured novel in which events of the past play out in the present in the place where Nell grew up.

She's resilient, strong and complex, distant from her family because of her choice of career and her mother's obsessive anxiety. In the end, her family becomes the focus of the investigation, and Nell understands her relatives and herself with a new clarity. Both her past and the beautifully described landscape define her. I hope she returns in future books.



One of the great unsung heroines of literature ... Miss Marple, played by Julia McKenzie. Photograph: ITV/Shutterstock

Kate Mosse

It has to be **Miss Marple**. On a rainy summer holiday in Devon in the 1970s, when I was 13 or 14, I found a novel on the shelf of our rented cottage. Everything smelled of paraffin heater and damp, it was too wet to go out and I had read all the books I'd brought with me. It was an old Fontana paperback, blue and green, with just the author's name in block capitals and the title: The Body in the Library. Curled up on a window seat, I read it in one sitting.

The novel is set in a small village in England, with a clever, unique, uncompromising older woman sleuth. It was my first Christie, my first Miss Marple, and the first novel I ever discovered for myself. Best of all was looking at the front of the book and discovering that [Agatha Christie](#) had written one or two other novels.

It was the beginning of my lifelong love affair with Miss Marple. She is one of the great unsung heroines of literature: principled, resolute, courageous, a rare older woman in fiction who is there on her own terms, rather than as someone's mother or grandmother. She first appeared in a short story published in 1927, *The Tuesday Night Club*, and 12 full-length novels followed, including the brilliant *Sleeping Murder* – published posthumously, but written during the second world war and kept in a vault.

Jane Marple is shrewd and modest, with a twinkle in her eye, and although often overlooked by the official men of law around her, she always gets her man (or woman). A trailblazer.

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Alyssa Cole

My favourite fictional detective is **Charlotte Holmes** of Sherry Thomas's Lady Sherlock series, which reimagines Sherlock Holmes as merely a cover story for a brilliant young woman who has boldly escaped the strictures of aristocratic life. To support herself in her newfound freedom, she uses her keen intellect, unmatched powers of observation and out-of-the-box thinking

to solve crimes, with the ruse of an ailing and never-seen brother named Sherlock as a front for her business.

The series is delightfully witty, deftly juggling interesting mysteries, family matters and societal issues facing women then and now, and there's a slow-burn childhood-friends-to-lovers romance to boot. If you're a Sherlock fan, you'll surely enjoy this clever iteration of the famous sleuth.

Val McDermid

Josephine Tey's **Inspector Alan Grant** was one of the first police detectives to appear in British crime fiction. Scotland Yard's man at the centre of *The Daughter of Time* – voted the best crime novel of all time by the Crime Writers' Association – bucked the trend when it came to fictional policemen. He was intelligent, cultivated, ironic and empathic. He never bullied witnesses or suspects. His interviewing style was sometimes based more on intuition than evidence, but always rooted in observation.

At a time when ideas about gender and sexuality were firmly entrenched, Tey gave us subtle hints that Grant was different. Here is Tey describing a potential love interest through Grant's eyes: "She was more like an adolescent boy than a prospective dowager. She was wearing very elegant trousers and a disreputable old lumber jacket and he remarked ... that she was one of the few women who looked really well in trousers." But what proves far more seductive is his previous encounter with a dead man on the Caledonian sleeper with "tumbled black hair and ... reckless eyebrows". I love Alan Grant because he's so far from straightforward: he can signify whatever we need him to.

Stella Duffy

I was probably about eight when I first picked up my older sister's secondhand **Trixie Belden** book. It was a hard-cover, much-read copy of *Trixie Belden and the Mystery of the Emeralds*. In it, Trixie dives into a mystery, supported by half a dozen other young teenagers, a group of friends

and siblings. She leads the gang into and out of trouble and, along the way, learns about the American civil war and the Underground Railroad.

For the next few years I read every Trixie Belden book I could find. She didn't hand over leadership to the boys like Enid Blyton's girls in the Secret Seven and Famous Five; she wasn't wealthy or pretty like Nancy Drew. Her girlfriends were easily as important as the boys in the gang, and she was almost always fierce and brave, confronting what she saw as injustice. She was a glorious antidote to the largely pathetic girl roles I saw around me in the early 1970s and, I'm now sure, the queer role model I didn't yet know I needed.



He has a deep understanding of the dark side of human nature ... Hercule Poirot played by David Suchet. Photograph: Avalon/Getty

Sophie Hannah

I love the way [Agatha Christie](#)'s **Hercule Poirot** combines brilliant intellectual deduction and a deep understanding of the dark side of human nature with a strong desire to make life as jolly as possible. He appreciates the finer things: his *sirops*, his wonderful moustaches, well-tailored clothes, beautiful things and places. I can also strongly relate to his obsessively tidy

streak and his desire to matchmake in the romantic arena. He is excellent at persuading people that the person they're madly in love with is a moral vacuum, and to consider the much nicer and more reliable alternative romantic prospect instead. Last but not least, I love his showmanship: gathering all the suspects together and delivering an amazing performance as he shares the solution to the mystery.

Jean Kwok –

I have loved [Tana French](#)'s **Cassie Maddox** from the moment I met her, as seen through the eyes of her partner, the narrator of *In the Woods*: “Barely medium height, with a cap of dark curls and a boyish, slim, square-shouldered build ... There was something about her: maybe the way she stood, weight on one hip, straight and easy as a gymnast; maybe just the mystery.”

I was delighted to hear Cassie speak for herself as the narrator of *The Likeness*, which takes place after the dramatic events of *In the Woods*. In this suspenseful thriller, she goes undercover to pose as a murder victim who looked exactly like her.

Fearless and honest, Cassie is as tough as any classic hardboiled detective, yet remains insightful and kind without veering into sentimentality. When there's a standoff at gunpoint, she wants the antagonist to keep the gun pointed at her because she knows there are innocents in the room. Her hand on her own weapon never wavers. And yet, afterwards, she feels grief and guilt. She is strong not despite her emotional vulnerability, but because of it.

Sara Paretsky

Whenever I'm stuck for a title to a work-in-progress, my brain automatically tosses up VI Warshawski and the Baseball Team From Mars – a riff on one of the books in my favourite series, the adventures of **Freddy the Pig**.

Walter R Brooks, who created Mister Ed, the talking horse, wrote 26 books about Freddy and the other animals on the Bean family farm. Humans own

the farm, but the animals help with both farmwork and housework. Imagine fluffy bunnies as dustcloths.

In the third book in the series, *Freddy the Detective*, Freddy models himself on Sherlock Holmes. Mrs Wiggins, one of the cows, is his Watson, but all the animals help – they shadow human bank thieves, they stop the rats from stealing Mr Bean's grain, and they find out who took the Bean children's toy train.

As a self-taught detective, Freddy makes some ludicrous missteps, but it's part of his charm that he can laugh at himself. In the book's climactic scene, a trial in the barn with the rooster as judge, Freddy gets the cat off a murder rap with some impressive deductions, and crucial evidence that the mice help gather.

Some of the books reach deeper into fantasy and sci-fi than I like, including *Freddy and the Baseball Team From Mars*. However, as a child, I loved *Freddy and Mrs Wiggins* in a way that I never loved Nancy Drew: her life is so perfect that I couldn't see myself in her. As a chubby child who was ridiculed in the playground, I found a pig detective a perfect companion.



Staying human in an inhumane world ... Lew Archer became Lew Harper in the film starring Paul Newman. Photograph: Album/Alamy

David Baldacci

Lew Archer was the brainchild of Ross Macdonald (the nom de plume of Kenneth Millar). Archer was a private eye who walked the mean streets of Los Angeles for decades, and saw an unwieldy evolution of humanity with every stride. He could not have existed without Sam Spade and Philip Marlowe before him. Spade had the callous unpredictability, Marlowe the snarky wit; Archer brought to the table a heart and a soul, and a way of making sense of the world that was deeply, viscerally connected to the reader.

A private detective is keenly positioned to observe humankind in the most dire circumstances – no one needs a PI when times are good. Millar was never unduly preachy: he was too smart for that. He allowed his PI to observe, interact, help, fight, swear off, drink up, and, ultimately, capitulate to the demands of merely being human in an inhumane world. We feel every blow he takes, we smile at every crackling witticism, and we sense the emotional pain of a man in a fragile world, as the tightly packed story sails through uncharted waters.

No one who came before did it better. Nor has anyone done it better since.

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2022.12.10 - Opinion

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OpinionHouse of Commons

Why doesn't the UK government want us to know if ministers have taken gifts and freebies?

[Chris Bryant](#)



MPs are being held to a much higher transparency standard than those who wield the most power. This is bonkers

- Chris Bryant is the Labour MP for Rhondda and chair of the standards committee



The government frontbench at Rishi Sunak's first prime minister's questions in the House of Commons, London, October 2022. Photograph: Jessica Taylor/AFP/Getty Images

Sat 10 Dec 2022 03.00 EST Last modified on Sat 10 Dec 2022 05.09 EST

This parliament is proving to be a shocker. Since the general election in December 2019, 18 MPs have been suspended from the House of Commons for a day or more or jumped before they were pushed – and the parliament could run for another two years yet. That beats every other parliament in history into a cocked hat. True, that is in part because for the first time ever we are not brushing bullying, harassment and sexual misconduct under the lurid [Pugin](#) carpet.

Such matters used to be kept from the prying eyes of the public but, thank goodness, our expectations have changed. There is now a fully independent and confidential body, the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme, which [investigates complaints](#), and an independent expert panel chaired by the former high court judge Sir Stephen Irwin, which adjudicates on individual cases.

But that's not all. Three MPs have been convicted in a court of law of criminal offences in this parliament, and another has just been suspended

from the Conservative party pending an investigation by the Metropolitan police. That means the so-called “independent” group of MPs, which consists of those who have had the whip suspended by their party – either because of an infraction or pending an investigation – now consists of 15 MPs. That’s more than the total number of Lib Dem MPs. In addition, [one unnamed MP](#) has been told to stay away from parliament while the Met investigates extremely serious allegations.

At the other end of the scale, Jo Cox and Sir David Amess have been murdered, Rosie Cooper was subject to a [far-right murder conspiracy](#), and many other MPs have to report death threats to the police on a horribly regular basis. These are parlous, difficult times.

It’s only a year since the bizarre debacle over [Owen Paterson](#), when the government threw everything it had at changing the rules to protect a named individual at the very last moment of a disciplinary process – which in my book is the polar opposite of due process.

Since then, the standards committee has produced a new [draft code of conduct](#), which will tighten the rules on paid lobbying, close the loophole Paterson tried to exploit and ban MPs from taking paid work as a parliamentary adviser, consultant or strategist. The good news is that the government agrees on all those points. We also recommended that MPs who take on an outside role should be required to have a contract that specifies they cannot lobby ministers or officials on behalf of their employer. You would have thought this was the bare minimum needed to clean up the problems of paid lobbying, but the government opposed it until this week. It now agrees.

What I find difficult to believe is that the government is still holding out on another change we have recommended, which would significantly improve transparency. As things stand, MPs are required to register any outside financial interests including travel, gifts and hospitality worth more than £300, with full details, within 28 days. Parliament then publishes those details within a fortnight or so. But since 2015 ministers have benefited from an exemption, meaning they don’t register anything they receive “in their ministerial capacity”.

Such interests are meant to be published in the government's "[transparency returns](#)", which include no details, appear roughly every three months and are often late and incomplete. This is bonkers. It means there is less transparency for ministers than for other MPs. Several ministers have told me they would much prefer to have a single place for everything to be declared, namely parliament, and it must surely be in the public interest that all MPs are treated equally and that all financial interests are accessible in a timely fashion and in a single place online. Moreover, the ministerial code used to require ministers to register hospitality in their capacity as a minister in the house if it was "on a scale or from a source which might reasonably be thought likely to influence ministerial action".

The commissioner for standards, the Institute for Government thinktank and the 1922 Committee all agree. But oh no, the government is holding out. Penny Mordaunt promises she will do "something" about this as leader of the house "by next summer". But that won't include ending the ministerial exemption as she seemingly insists on treating ministers differently.

It perplexes me that the government thinks it can afford another row over parliamentary standards. I don't think that is in parliament's interests, let alone the government's. Traditionally, the rules of the [House of Commons](#) are not a partisan matter. MPs are meant to be able to vote freely with their conscience on Commons business.

In recent years the government has whipped every scintilla of parliamentary business, but I hope the whips will stay out of it on Monday when the Commons debates and votes on the new code of conduct. Otherwise it will feel like Owen Paterson all over again. And voters may conclude that the government has learned nothing at all. Far better to have a unanimous decision by the whole Commons without a vote to tighten the rules and put our house in order.

- Chris Bryant is the Labour MP for Rhondda and chair of the standards committee
- *Do you have an opinion on the issues raised in this article? If you would like to submit a response of up to 300 words by email to be*

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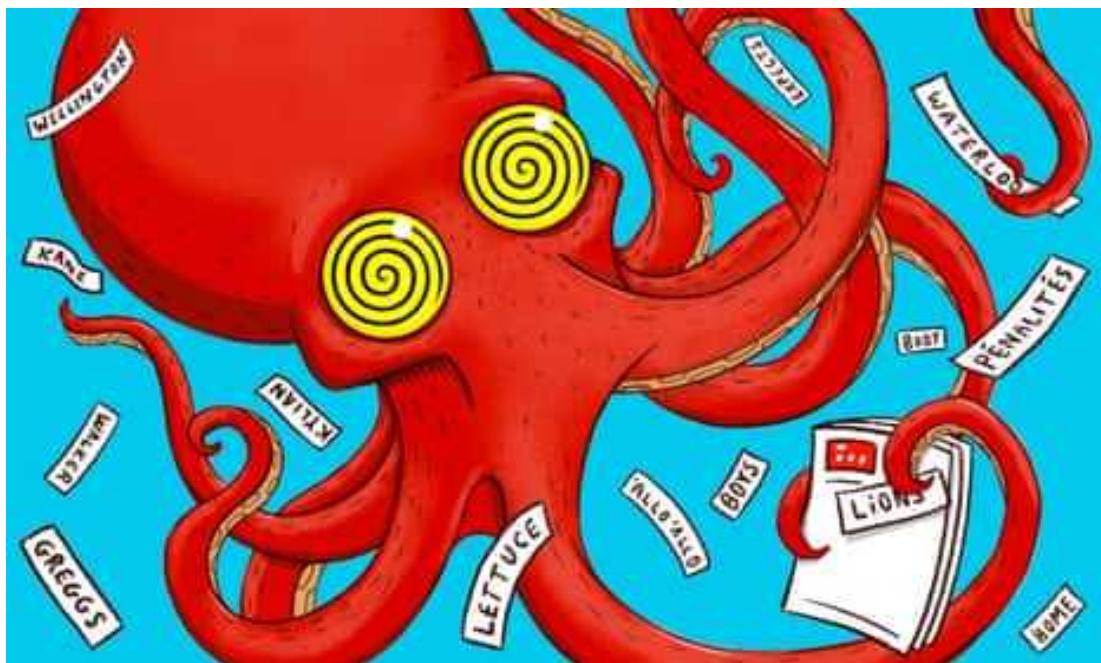
[Sportblog](#)[World Cup 2022](#)

The psychic alpaca has spoken: World Cup madness has arrived for England

[Marina Hyde](#)



Alongside the various animal attempts to people-please before the quarter-final against France are an increasingly deranged series of stunts from the tabloids



'Rabio the octopus was the Japan-based mollusc oracle who accurately forecast every Japan result in the group stages of the 2018 World Cup.'

Illustration: Nathan Daniels

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Fri 9 Dec 2022 13.03 EST Last modified on Fri 9 Dec 2022 13.41 EST

England face France in the World Cup quarter-final on Saturday and the dwindling band of psychic animals has spoken. In the early stages of any World Cup, of course, you cannot move for obliging creatures predicting match results. However, as the tournament progresses, several of this global menagerie will have a shocker, effectively knocking them out of further opportunities to have their random movements anthropomorphised by pushy human keepers/people who reckon there might be two hundred quid in it from a tabloid. As we near the business end of Qatar 2022, though, a [psychic alpaca from Chipping Norton](#) is still in it, along with a lion in Thailand. Inauspiciously, both have wandered vaguely in one direction in their enclosure/predicted a France win on Saturday night, which I assume has led to accusations of talking England down, and a slew of credible death threats.

Not that a perfect record insulates any creature from meeting a sticky end themselves. Rabio the octopus was the Japan-based mollusc oracle who accurately forecast every Japan result in the group stages of the 2018 World Cup, yet he was reported by a local news outlet to have been [chopped up and eaten before the round of 16](#). (Which certainly puts the [BBC not renewing Mark Lawrenson's contract](#) into perspective. Though not, perhaps, for Mark.)

Still, a nation awaits, and we are where we somehow always are at this stage of things: waiting it out against a backdrop of mid-level English madness. Alongside the various animal attempts to people-please are an increasingly deranged series of stunts from the tabloids, who in days of yore would hit some national pulse with this sort of stuff, but now come across as having only recently learned human from a textbook.

Quick Guide

Qatar: beyond the football

Show



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

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

Photograph: Caspar Benson

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Thank you for your feedback.

What's brought it all on? Rupert Murdoch was recently said to be incensed that the Daily Star's can-this-lettuce-outlast-Liz-Truss stunt went around the world, believing it to be classic Sun territory into which the paper had somehow failed to plant its flag. Perhaps consequently, readers are inflicted with near daily attempts to chase that dream. These have tipped into the advanced stages of something or other, if Friday's headline "["Walker's Got Mbappé In Pocket"](#)" is anything to go by. On closer clinical inspection, this turned out to be a reference to a pair of jeans the Sun has had specially made

up, which bear a leather label reading “KYLE WALKER JEANS CO” and which feature a printed image of Kylian Mbappé peeking out of the back pocket. I mean … guys? Is everyone involved in this idea OK?

While that question remains tantalisingly unanswered, the signs don’t look good, considering the Sun’s self-styled “jean-ius” stunt incredibly contrives to be even worse than Thursday’s high-concept coverage, which involved finding a 16-year-old kid in Leicester whose name is also Kylian Mbappé, and who said he reckoned [England](#) would beat the French. According to the report, this teenager also said “all my friends are Three Lions-mad”, and told the paper: “I’d pick a sausage roll over a croque monsieur any day.” And yet, did he? Did he really? Did a Leicester teen honestly fix the Sun’s reporter with a discerning metaphorical eye and go: “I’d pick a sausage roll over a croque monsieur any day”? I somehow find it impossible to hear those words without also hearing the words; “No boss, I didn’t tape it but I’ve got a contemporaneous note”.



France’s World Cup-winning coach Didier Deschamps and striker Kylian Mbappé (right) stand in England’s path in Saturday’s World Cup quarter-final. Photograph: Peter Byrne/PA

The only saving grace at this familiarly ominous stage of a tournament is that politicians have largely stayed out of the football – though we have to

countenance the possibility that might not continue should England defy the all-seeing animals and beat France. Rishi Sunak's speech at the annual parliamentary lobby drinks at Downing Street on Thursday night was reportedly full of football jokes, which confirms that a) he didn't write it and b) there could be worse to come. The prime minister certainly posted a sensationally tone-deaf tweet before last weekend's Senegal game, chirping: "Hats off to Qatar for hosting an incredible [World Cup](#) so far." This fell comfortably into the you-had-one-job category, though may simply be based on his assessment that weapons will soon be our last remaining export.

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In general, though, England's tournament has been greatly enhanced by ministers not feeling the need to define themselves by Having A View on it all. This state of affairs reached a hideous nadir during the Boris Johnson administration, which had lost twice to Marcus Rashford on free school meals, and appeared horribly sore about it. The Euros last year were marred by any number of senior ministers failing to condemn the [boiling of players for taking the knee](#) before games. In fact, some even appeared to support it, and barely a day went by without one or other secretary of state who was utterly failing in their job feeling the need to pontificate at players doing rather better in theirs – right up until the racist abuse suffered by black stars in the wake of England's final loss made it perfectly clear why many felt the need for the gesture.

This England side itself may have rather less chance of advancing to the final than they did in summer 2021. But the absence of ministers feeling the need to muscle in on every moment of it all has felt like welcome progress of a different sort, and a bizarrely overdue reminder that these major

tournaments can actually happen with precisely zero input from people no one wishes to hear from on footballing matters, and who have rather more pressing things to do with their time than be wrong about how others choose to use theirs. Let's hope this period of silence continues; otherwise it might be time to set the psychic animals on to election polling predictions.

Marina Hyde's World Cup Week will appear each Friday during the tournament

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Coup attempts in Germany and the US confirm it: the key terror threat is the far right

[Jonathan Freedland](#)



The danger of violent jihadism persists, but the growing menace is from racist extremists – even if some in the UK government can't admit it



‘The far right is much looser and entirely leaderless, radicalising its followers chiefly by means of memes and online content.’ Heinrich XIII, Prince of Reuß arrested in Frankfurt, Germany, 7 December 2022.
Photograph: Boris Roessler/AP

Fri 9 Dec 2022 13.11 EST Last modified on Fri 9 Dec 2022 16.00 EST

Perhaps it was the tweed jacket and cravat. Or maybe the medieval title: [Heinrich XIII, Prince of Reuß](#). Either way, the man at the head of a suspected plot to overthrow the German government, exposed in a series of raids on Wednesday, was easy to dismiss as a joke. The country’s late night [TV talkshows](#) went right ahead, mocking the 71-year-old aristocrat and his deluded dreams, along with his wardrobe.

A week earlier, the sartorial derision was aimed at Ye, the rapper formerly known as Kanye West, his face entirely obscured by a ski mask, [praising Hitler](#) and the Nazis on the set of Infowars as a guest of the [bankrupted](#) conspiracy theorist Alex Jones.

Some of Ye’s rantings were too much even for Jones’s stomach, prompting an online chuckle – not least because a few days earlier Ye had [dined with Donald Trump](#), along with the Holocaust-denying white supremacist Nick Fuentes. What crosses the line for Jones was apparently just fine for Trump.

But none of this is a joke. Instead, both events – a disrupted terror plot by armed would-be “citizens of the Reich” and the legitimising of extreme racism by the de-facto leader of one of the US’s two governing parties – point to a rising global threat, one that is too often regarded as either too ridiculous or too marginal to be menacing. That threat lives almost entirely on the internet, its regular foot soldiers neither European nobility nor rap superstars but, says one who monitors it closely, “young, white, anti-immigrant neo-Nazis, networked in an online subculture that glorifies and generates terror”.

The danger may incubate on screens, but it doesn’t stay there. That much has been clear for a while. Recall the massacre of [92 mostly young Norwegians](#) in 2011. Or the slaughter of 49 at two [mosques in Christchurch](#), New Zealand, in 2019. Or the mass killing at the [Tree of Life synagogue](#) in Pittsburgh six months earlier. Or the gunning down of 10 Black shoppers and workers in a [supermarket in Buffalo](#) by a white teenager [May](#) this year.

These horrors follow a pattern in which the killer seeks not only to murder but to livestream his butchery, accompanying it with the release of a supposed manifesto, a long screed identifying all the same enemies: Black people, LGBT people, Jewish people.

In October, a Slovakian teenager followed the familiar template when he opened fire [on a gay bar](#) in Bratislava, killing two. Hours before, he had posted a 65-page text setting out, yet again, the case that there is a worldwide conspiracy to degenerate and destroy the white race, with racial diversity and gay rights the conspirators’ chosen weapons. And who might be behind this wickedness? The document opens: “It’s the Jews. It’s the Jews. It’s the Jews.”

For two decades after 9/11, any talk of global extremism or a “war on terror” meant only one thing: confronting violent jihadism. Make no mistake, that threat has not gone away, even if analysts believe it has receded in the UK in the past two or three years. But when it comes to international terror, jihadism no longer has the stage to itself.

That requires a shift. This week, Australia’s home affairs minister warned that counter-terror laws would have to change if the country was to [tackle](#)

[the surging threat](#) of far-right violence. In Germany, after the identification of some 52 suspected coup plotters, the [governing party declared](#), “Rightwing terrorism is still the biggest threat to German democracy.”

In Britain, those operationally involved in fighting this danger have got the message. Where once MI5 brass were privately liable to dismiss the far right as no more than a bunch of “football hooligans, louts and drunks”, they now pay them serious time and attention. A turning point was the [murder of Jo Cox](#) in 2016, and the attack on Finsbury Park mosque the following year.

Police now describe the extremist right as the [fastest growing terror threat](#) in the UK, with 41% of counter-terrorism arrests in 2021 involving far-right suspects. Three in four advanced plots disrupted by police [involved extremists](#) of the far right.

This shift demands a change in policing but also in our thinking. For one thing, while jihadists dreamed of establishing their own government somewhere – the Islamic State vision of a new caliphate – those arrested in Germany this week, like the insurrectionists who stormed Capitol Hill on 6 January 2021, aim to topple existing governments in the west and install themselves. (And they are encouraged when [Trump calls](#) for the suspension of the US constitution to restore him to power, as he did this week.)

The content is different, but so too is the form. Yes, jihadism was always a broad category, but there was at least an organisational infrastructure that could be proscribed and targeted: IS even published a magazine out of Raqqa, offering tips on how best to stab someone. The far right is much looser and entirely leaderless, radicalising its followers chiefly by means of memes and online content. Its home comprises platforms such as [4chan](#) or the “Terrorgram” network of channels on Telegram, where recent mass murderers are venerated – the killers of Christchurch and Pittsburgh are depicted as “saints”, complete with haloes – and where footage of their acts of slaughter is presented in the manner of a first-person shooter game, complete with scores awarded for each “kill”.

“I’ve been doing this for 30 years and I’ve never seen stuff like this,” Nick Lowles, who runs the anti-racist campaign group [Hope Not Hate](#), tells me. In these forums they egg each other on, sinking to ever more nihilistic

depths: fantasising about rape and the sexual abuse of children and more. Those seeing this material are getting ever younger. The Metropolitan police reports that of the 20 people under 18 arrested last year for terrorism offences, all but one were linked to the ideology of the extreme right. The [youngest arrested](#) was 13.

Action is possible, starting with the companies who provide web-support services for the likes of 4chan. “They’re the security guards on the door while the terrorists are inside,” says Dave Rich of the [Community Security Trust](#), which monitors and combats antisemitism.

But that takes political will. And while the counter-terrorism agencies seem to be in the right place, the same cannot be said of their political masters. Lowles detects an “ideological backlash” in the Home Office and in Michael Gove’s levelling-up department, “actively pushing for a change in strategy away from the far right”.

Note the [leaked extracts](#) of William Shawcross’s review into the Prevent counter-terrorism programme, complaining that there’s been too much focus on the racist right and not enough on jihadism. It seems a corner of the political right was jolted when last year, for the first time, the number of referrals to Prevent relating to the far right [outstripped those](#) for Islamist extremism.

You can see why some are more comfortable chasing Muslim extremists than extreme haters of Muslims (and of every other minority), perhaps fearing a definition that might encompass anti-Muslim rhetoric found on the mainstream right. But ideology cannot be allowed to intrude here, not when the danger is so grave. Our protectors have to fight those bent on wreaking deadly havoc wherever they appear – and whoever they are.

- Jonathan Freedland is a Guardian columnist

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[Opinion](#)[Industrial action](#)

Britain is braced for a winter of strikes – yet a public backlash just hasn't happened

[Gaby Hinsliff](#)



Support for public sector workers shows that most people realise the government's in the wrong, not exhausted nurses



Firefighters march to the Houses of Parliament, London, on Wednesday, as a ballot for strike action gets underway. Photograph: Tayfun Salci/ZUMA Press Wire/REX/Shutterstock

Fri 9 Dec 2022 12.02 EST Last modified on Sat 10 Dec 2022 00.21 EST

Winter is suddenly here, and with it a chill descending. This Arctic snap brings with it the season of falls on icy pavements, breathing difficulties aggravated by the cold, cars skidding off frozen roads and drunken Christmas party casualties. The worst time of year, you might think, for the first [ambulance strike](#) since the 1980s and the first [national nurses' strike](#) in more than a century, especially as the NHS is grappling with a rush of parents understandably panicking about an outbreak of strep A.

The armed forces may be drafted in to cover, somewhat ironically given that they, too, are public sector workers who spent the pandemic building hospitals and shipping PPE in return for a less than bumper payrise. But it's still no time to be old and frail, worrying about what might happen if you slip on the stairs, or to be a family without a car, wondering how you'd get a child to hospital in the middle of the night.

Then again, a winter of strikes is no time to be a lot of things. It's no time to be a pub or restaurant owner who barely survived lockdown and is now

facing yet another round of [cancelled bookings](#), thanks to train strikes leaving office partygoers fearful of getting stranded. It's no time to be a child who struggled with home schooling and is now missing lessons once again, thanks to a [teachers' strike in Scotland](#).

A wave of industrial action affecting everything from the Christmas post to new year getaways, with border officials at some of the country's busiest airports [due to walk out](#) later this month, means everyday life is about to get more difficult for most of us, and actively frightening for some. But, to put it bluntly, that's the point of strikes. They're *designed* to make life miserable; to jolt us into realising how quickly life would fall apart if it wasn't for whoever is withdrawing their labour, and thinking again about how much that labour is worth to us. Which makes it all the more interesting that half of the respondents to a [YouGov poll](#) this week backed paramedics and 999 call-handlers striking, despite the potentially frightening consequences, and 48% [opposed government proposals](#) to ban them from doing so.

That groundswell of support could, of course, change if (and God forbid) something tragic happens as a result of strike action. But for now, it seems there is still an awful lot of goodwill in the bank for [NHS](#) workers. We know they were there for us when it counted and we know, too, how agonising many will find it to leave patients in the lurch. If even they are at the end of their tether, something has gone very badly wrong.



A rally organised by the Communication Workers Union (CWU) in support of striking Royal Mail postal workers, Parliament Square, London, 9 December 2022. Photograph: Daniel Leal/AFP/Getty Images

It's not that Britain has suddenly fallen in love with organised labour. (If anything, the reverse is true, with negative views of unions [up nine points](#) this month, according to YouGov's regular tracker poll; there's still [broad opposition](#) to train strikes, too, possibly because of the wearying regularity with which they come round.) But nurses explaining they're so broke that they have to rely on food banks can't credibly be portrayed as greedy, and threatening to withdraw emergency workers' right to strike simply isn't a serious response. If people at breaking point lose their right to walk out in protest, then the only choice left is to walk away for good, and that's the last thing an already understaffed NHS needs. This isn't 1979, when Margaret Thatcher rose to power vowing to crush the unions. As an incumbent now facing his own winter of discontent, Rishi Sunak arguably has more in common with a weakened [James Callaghan](#), struggling to show he can get a grip on a country spiralling out of control.

Strikes have long been seen as most toxic for the Labour party, forcing it into a wretched choice between disowning the unions and enraging a suffering public. But in the current climate, the charge that Keir Starmer is "in hock to his union baron paymasters propping up the Labour party's

coffers” (as the Conservative party chairman, Nadhim Zahawi, [put it](#)) may not have the power it once did to wound.

For a start, the public is split on whether closeness to the unions is damaging Labour’s chances of winning the next election, [according to research](#) from Deltapoll, commissioned by the public affairs agency Millbank Communications, with a high proportion of “don’t knows” potentially open to changing their mind. (Leave voters were, however, markedly more anti-union, which may explain Starmer’s determination to distance himself from the picket lines).

But more telling, perhaps, is that after Liz Truss’s disastrous mini-budget, only [14% of voters](#) now regard the Conservatives as broadly competent. If a winter of strike-induced chaos merges in the public mind with a broader sense that the government no longer seems to know what it’s doing, then even voters who don’t think a 15% pay rise is affordable right now may be less inclined to blame exhausted nurses for trying – and more inclined to blame ministers for failing – to cut a deal.

After weeks of the government insisting it wasn’t their place to intervene, Sunak seems to have recognised that he can’t afford to sit these strikes out. That, at least, is progress. But for the sake of all those feeling vulnerable this winter, he’ll have to bring more to the table than cliches and empty threats.

- Gaby Hinsliff is a Guardian columnist
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2022.12.10 - Around the world

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Hong Kong

Hong Kong media owner Jimmy Lai jailed for fraud

Apple Daily founder, who recently completed sentence over territory's pro-democracy protests, convicted in contract dispute involving newspaper offices



Jimmy Lai (centre), shown leaving a Hong Kong court in February 2021, has received a further jail sentence of five years and nine months after being found guilty of fraud in a contractual dispute. Photograph: Kin Cheung/AP

Agence France-Presse in Hong Kong

Sat 10 Dec 2022 01.11 EST

Hong Kong pro-democracy media owner Jimmy Lai received a fresh jail sentence of five years and nine months on Saturday after being found guilty of fraud in a contractual dispute.

Lai, the 75-year-old founder of the now-shuttered Apple Daily newspaper, had recently completed a 20-month jail term resulting from multiple convictions for his part in protests and unauthorised assemblies.

He also faces a possible life sentence at his coming trial on national security charges.

While the earlier convictions were related to his role in the huge democracy protests that swept Hong Kong in 2019, the latest case involved one of his companies violating the terms of the lease on his newspaper's offices.

Lai and former Apple Daily executive Wong Wai-keung were both found guilty of fraud in October in what district judge Stanley Chan described as a “planned, organised and years-long” scheme.

Prosecutors said that a consultancy firm Lai operated for his personal use had taken up office space that Apple Daily had rented for the purposes of publication and printing.

This was in breach of the terms of the lease Apple Daily signed with a government company and amounted to fraud, prosecutors said.

Defence lawyers previously argued the case should have been a civil suit instead of a criminal prosecution, adding that the square footage involved was minimal.

In addition to his jail term, Lai was fined HK\$2m (\$257,000) and banned from managing companies for eight years.

Co-defendant Wong, 61, was jailed for 21 months, with the judge comparing him to “the getaway driver for a robbery”.

The judge said the sentence was in response to a “simple case of fraud” that dated back to the 1990s when the lease first came into effect.

He criticised Apple Daily for abusing its reputation as a well-known media company as a “protective shield”, which he claimed discouraged the landlord from taking action against the breach of lease terms.

But he said the case had nothing to do with politics or press freedom.

“Don’t draw any connection to politics,” Chan said.

One of Hong Kong’s best-known pro-democracy activists, Lai has long been openly loathed by Beijing.

For years, Apple Daily was scathing in its criticism of China’s Communist party and openly supportive of democracy.

It collapsed last year after its funds were frozen and many of its senior staff were charged alongside Lai under the sweeping national security law Beijing imposed on Hong Kong, primarily over their campaign for international sanctions against China.

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Donald Trump

Trump was fresh and new during his 2016 campaign. Has his fame fizzled?

The failed ‘red wave’ during the midterm elections marked the beginning of a downward spiral of losses and lost support



Donald Trump’s Mar-a-Lago speech announcing his presidential campaign lacked his usual bombast and was widely derided as a damp squib.
Photograph: Andrew Harnik/AP

[David Smith](#)

[@smithinamerica](#)

Sat 10 Dec 2022 03.00 EST Last modified on Sat 10 Dec 2022 03.02 EST

Instead of taking off like a rocket over the past three weeks, Donald Trump’s bid to win back the White House appears, so far at least, to be [blowing up on the launchpad](#).

The swagger of 2016 has given way to somnolence in 2022. Opinion polls are grim. Legal setbacks are piling up. A run of dismal results in the midterm elections, culminating in another Republican loss [in Georgia this week](#), have punctured his aura of invincibility within the party.

And Trump has performed astonishing acts of self-sabotage, from dining with antisemites to calling for the constitution to be shredded. He has eschewed a widely-anticipated spree of public rallies, instead remaining largely out of the public gaze.

For any conventional candidate, such a list would be career-ending. For Trump, who has long defied political gravity, the fallout remains uncertain. But even the most ardent propagandist would be hard pushed to describe it as a flying start.

“It couldn’t be going any worse,” said [Allan Lichtman](#), a history professor at American University in Washington. “And it’s not because Donald Trump is making mistakes. It’s because Donald Trump is being Donald Trump.

“He was something new and fresh and interesting back in 2016. He has presided over three disastrous election cycles for Republicans in 2018, 2020 and 2022 and he’s the same old [Donald Trump](#), caring only about himself, wrapped up in his own grievances and his own whining. It’s just not playing anymore for the American people.”

It was not meant to be like this. When Trump first set the date for his campaign launch at his Mar-a-Lago club in Florida for 15 November, it was based on the premise that Republicans would enjoy a “[red wave](#)” in the midterm elections, putting wind in his sails for the coming months.

Instead the midterms were a nightmare as most of his handpicked candidates, including election deniers, were wiped out in swing states. This week’s defeat of former American football star Herschel Walker by incumbent Raphael Warnock in a Senate runoff in Georgia seemed to confirm that Trump has become ballot box poison, [prompting a headline](#) on

the once loyal Fox News website: “Herschel Walker just wrote Donald Trump’s political obituary”.

Gallingly, one of the biggest winners in the midterms was [Ron DeSantis](#), re-elected as governor of Florida by nearly 20 percentage points, cementing his status as the biggest threat to Trump. A Yahoo News/YouGov poll conducted from 1 to 5 December found DeSantis leading the former president by five percentage points in the race for the 2024 Republican nomination.

So it was that Trump’s Mar-a-Lago speech was [widely derided as a damp squib](#), lacking his usual bombast and brio and even his daughter, Ivanka, has decided to sit this one out. Since then, the campaign has been running on autopilot and little has been seen of the former president hunkered down in Florida, venturing out only to play golf.

Trump’s rambunctious [campaign rallies](#), expected to give early momentum to his third consecutive run for president, have mysteriously failed to materialise. In June 2015, by contrast, he declared his candidacy after riding down an escalator in New York and held his first rally in Iowa just 10 hours later, moving on to New Hampshire a day later.

Yet Trump is still making plenty of news from Mar-a-Lago. He [dined with two antisemites](#): Ye, the rapper formerly known as Kanye West, and white supremacist Nick Fuentes (Ye subsequently expressed his admiration for Adolf Hitler). Still harping on the 2020 election, which he falsely claims was stolen, Trump mused about the “termination” of the constitution that he once swore to preserve, protect and defend. He also posed for photos with a reporter supporter of the QAnon and “Pizzagate” conspiracy theories.

Such antics have shaken even the faithful. Larry Kudlow, who was Trump’s economic adviser in the White House, shared his concerns with Trump’s former counselor Kellyanne Conway during his Fox Business show. “I don’t understand what our former boss is doing,” [Kudlow said](#). “I love the guy, but I do not understand Kanye West, hanging out with white nationalists, hanging out with antisemitic people, talking about ending the constitution or postponing the constitution.”

He added: “I don’t get it, I don’t understand why he’s saying it, and if he says it why hasn’t he apologised for it or corrected the record or something, because he’s losing support left and right. I hear it everywhere.”

Then there are the legal headaches, another contrast from the carefree days of 2016. Trump’s business was this week [found guilty on all 17 counts](#) in a tax fraud case in New York. The Trump Organization – which operates hotels, golf courses and other global assets – faces up to \$1.6m in fines, denting his carefully constructed image as a businessman with the golden touch.

Last month attorney general Merrick Garland [appointed Jack Smith](#) special counsel for two justice department investigations. One is focusing on Trump for retaining government records, including some marked as classified, after leaving office. On 1 December Trump suffered yet another defeat when an appeals court reversed a judge’s appointment of an independent arbiter to vet documents seized by the FBI from Mar-a-Lago, clearing the way for all the records to be used in a criminal investigation of the former president.

The other concerns of the far reaching effort to overturn Trump’s loss in the 2020 election; Smith this week issued grand jury subpoenas to local election officials in Arizona, Michigan and Wisconsin. Separately, a prosecutor in Georgia is pursuing Trump’s alleged efforts to influence that state’s 2020 election results. And the House of Representatives panel investigating the January 6 attack on the US Capitol is expected to make criminal referrals to the justice department.

Lichtman added: “Trump’s companies have been operating as a criminal enterprise. That’s now established in court: 17 counts. And of course he still could be indicted on a host of different charges: mishandling classified documents, meddling in the Georgia election, inciting a riot, interfering with Congress, tax fraud. There are any number of potential violations.”

Many regard Trump’s early campaign launch as blatant attempt to head off such a prospect. He characterises the investigations as politically motivated “witch hunts” reminiscent of the Russian collusion “hoax”. His gamble is

that the justice department will be reluctant to prosecute an active candidate lest it be accused of interfering in an election.

Kurt Bardella, a Democratic strategist, said: “It seems like it’s not really a campaign but more of an effort to use the illusion of a campaign to try and manage his legal situation. The Trump legal strategy is directly tied to the Trump 2024 strategy. They’re one and the same.”

Garland’s actions so far suggest that the bid for legal immunity has failed. Trump’s effort to clear the Republican field, intimidating and chasing away potential challengers in 2024, has been equally futile, serving only to expose his vulnerabilities.

DeSantis, former vice-president Mike Pence, former secretary of state Mike Pompeo, former UN ambassador Nikki Haley, former New Jersey governor Chris Christie, Virginia governor Glenn Youngkin and Senator Tim Scott have left a trail of clues about their intentions. Big money donors and Rupert Murdoch’s media empire have indicated that they are ready for an alternative.

And yet, if these candidates divide the anti-Trump vote, his shrinking but hardening Maga base may help him prevail in a Republican primary just as in 2016. Loyalty to the former president runs deep in county and state parties. Even after his latest transgressions, the number of senior Republicans speaking out against Trump has been striking but so too has the number mincing their words or staying silent.

Michael Steele, former chairman of the Republican National Committee, said: “Show me the evidence where his grip on the party is breaking. The only thing we’ve heard from the party leadership is there’s no place for antisemitism in the Republican party. We haven’t heard anybody call for Donald Trump to be removed as a potential nominee of the party.

“Ron DeSantis has said nothing about the Mar-a-Lago dinner. He is absolutely silent, so the idea that he’s going to be a leader is a joke because that was the moment to lead and he quivered in the corner because he was afraid of getting smacked by Donald Trump.”

He added: “Trump still is the thing that animates and controls outcomes inside the Republican party for as long as the political leadership allows the tail to wag the dog. If you’re afraid of your own shadow, you’re not going to get out much.”

There is no doubt that Trump’s political obituary has been prepared a thousand times, only to be torn up when the Republican party capitulates once more. Is there something different in the air this time? Bob Shrum, a Democratic strategist who worked on Al Gore and John Kerry’s presidential campaigns, said: “The problem is we’ve said it so many times and it hasn’t been true. On the other hand, some time it will be true.”

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Global development

Afghan refugee freed in Greece after two years of wrongful imprisonment

Campaigners hope overturning of Akif Rasuli's 50-year sentence will be 'first victory' for criminalised migrants in Greek jails



Amir Zahiri and Akif Rasuli at an earlier appearance at the appeals court on Lesbos this year. Photograph: Helena Smith/The Guardian

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[About this content](#)

[Helena Smith](#) in Athens

Sat 10 Dec 2022 00.00 EST

An imprisoned Afghan refugee wrongfully accused of smuggling people into [Greece](#) has been told he can walk free in a trial that activists hope will set a precedent for thousands of others in similar situations.

After a marathon day of proceedings, an appeals court sitting on the Aegean island of Lesbos ruled that Akif Rasuli could be released more than two years after he began serving a 50-year sentence for the crime of “facilitating the illegal entry” of undocumented migrants into the country. The three-member tribunal overturned the conviction citing lack of evidence.

“I always said I was innocent and they finally believed me,” an emotional Rasuli said after the verdict late Thursday. “I am very happy, very but right now my thoughts are with all the others, so many people like me, who are also in prison in Greece.”

Amir Zahiri, an Afghan also serving a 50-year jail term for the same offence, who had sat handcuffed to Rasuli at the back of the court for nearly seven

hours before being called to the bench, saw his sentence reduced to eight years although he, too, is expected to be allowed to walk free imminently.

The men, both in their 20s, had been on the same vessel when it was abandoned by smugglers in September 2020 as it crossed the Aegean from Turkey. Amir, however, had been travelling with his young daughter and heavily pregnant wife.

MEPS and human rights lawyers who had flown in to Lesbos to attend the hearing described the verdicts as a “first victory” in the battle to address the plight of asylum seekers being falsely accused of human smuggling. [Fair trial concerns have increasingly been voiced](#).

“We will be raising this case as an example of what is happening to thousands of other innocent migrants cruelly languishing in prison,” said Clare Daly, an Irish MEP with the [Independents 4 Change](#) party. “And we will use it to highlight the ludicrous situation that is prevailing in Greece as a result of the manner in which the EU Facilitators package [of directives] is being enacted.”

Although the legislation had been drafted to deal with “the insidious practice of smuggling”, in Greece, Daly said, it was frequently misinterpreted by law enforcers randomly singling out migrant “offenders” on boats deserted by real smugglers.

“This ambiguity, long highlighted by the European parliament, cannot continue. The [EU] commission cannot continue to stand idly by while Greece implements it in this way.”

The short but often perilous sea crossing from Turkey has long been a popular entry point into Europe for people fleeing war, poverty and persecution in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. In 2014, shortly before an estimated [870,000 Syrians landed on the Aegean isles en route to Europe](#), Athens sought to crack down on human smuggling rings along the Turkish coast with draconian legislation. People smugglers were handed unprecedentedly harsh sentences, with penalties ranging from 10 years for

each smuggled person on board to life imprisonment if deaths occurred on the journey.

More than 20% of the Mediterranean nation's prison population has either been convicted or charged with human smuggling, according to statistics recently published by the pro-government Kathimerini newspaper.

"If, like Amir, you admit even touching the helm of a boat, even if it's abandoned by smugglers, the sentence is very tough," said Alexandros Georgoulis, a lawyer who specialises in assisting refugees and had represented Zahiri. "It's so unfair when all you have done is try to help your family and it is very probable that others [passengers not singled out] have been at the helm too. But the law, as it stands, is problematic and that is why our jails now are so full of these people."

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Incidents of asylum seekers being convicted of piloting boats across the Aegean have risen noticeably in recent years.

"The criminalisation of migrants in these cases is an extension of the same violent border policies that we have seen in the practice of pushbacks," said Lorraine Leete, a US lawyer coordinating the Legal Centre Lesvos, referring to the forcible eviction of asylum seekers before they can lodge claims. "These two men are never going to get back the years they have spent in prison. Their entire lives will be affected by this miscarriage of justice. We hope this judgment will serve as an example to prevent such injustices occurring in the future."

In January, Hanad Abdi Mohammad, a Somali currently incarcerated on the adjacent island of Chios, will appeal his staggering 146-year sentence in what campaigners hope will shine further light on the issue.

The 29-year-old, who had also sought to reach Greece in a dinghy from Turkey, maintains he was forced by a smuggler at the point of a gun “to drive” the vessel before it nearly capsized and two of its passengers drowned. Despite the loss of life the Somali is credited with helping save 33 other migrants on board.

“International solidarity for these people must not wane,” said Stelios Kouloglou, an MEP with the main opposition leftist Syriza who had flown to Lesbos to testify before the court. “Thousands of refugees have been unjustly handed what amount to extermination sentences because they clearly have not been given fair trials. Europe should be ashamed at the way its laws are being implemented and interpreted by Greece.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/dec/10/afghan-refugee-freed-in-greece-after-two-years-of-wrongful-imprisonment>

[US military](#)

Joseph Kittinger: highest skydiver for 52 years dies aged 94

US airman almost died in first attempt from 14.5 miles up, eventually jumped from 19 miles and said later ‘there’s no way you can visualise the speed’



Joe Kittinger after his skydive from 19.5 miles above sea level in 1960. The retired air force colonel, whose record jump stood for 52 years, has died of lung cancer aged 94. Photograph: KeystoneUSA-ZUMA/Rex Features

Associated Press in Fort Lauderdale, Florida

Fri 9 Dec 2022 23.32 EST Last modified on Fri 9 Dec 2022 23.39 EST

The retired US air force colonel Joseph Kittinger, whose 1960 parachute jump from almost 20 miles (32km) above Earth stood as a world record for more than 50 years, has died in Florida aged 94.

His death on Friday was announced by the former US congressman John Mica and other friends. The cause was lung cancer.

Kittinger, then an air force captain and pilot, gained worldwide fame when he completed three jumps over 10 months from a gondola that was hoisted into the stratosphere by large helium balloons. Project Excelsior was aimed at helping design ejection systems for military pilots flying high-altitude missions.

Wearing a pressure suit and 60 pounds (27kg) of equipment, Kittinger almost died during the project's first jump in November 1959 when his gear malfunctioned after he jumped from 14.5 miles. He lost consciousness as he went into a spin that was 22 times the force of gravity. He was saved when his automatic chute opened.



Joseph Kittinger in a balloon gondola for his first test jump in New Mexico, 1959. Photograph: AP

Four weeks later, Kittinger made his second jump from just over 14 miles above the surface. This time, there were no problems.

Kittinger's record jump came on 16 August 1960 in the New Mexico desert. His pressure suit malfunctioned as he rose, failing to seal off his right hand,

which swelled to twice normal size before he jumped from 102,800 feet – more than 19 miles above the surface.

Freefalling in the thin atmosphere, the Florida airman exceeded 600mph (965km/h) before the gradually thickening air slowed his fall to about 150 mph when his parachute deployed at 18,000 feet (5.5km).

“There’s no way you can visualise the speed,” Kittinger told Florida Trend magazine in 2011. “There’s nothing you can see to see how fast you’re going. You have no depth perception. If you’re in a car driving down the road and you close your eyes, you have no idea what your speed is. It’s the same thing if you’re free falling from space. There are no signposts.

“You know you are going very fast, but you don’t feel it. You don’t have a 614mph wind blowing on you. I could only hear myself breathing in the helmet.”

His record stood until 2012, when Austrian Felix Baumgartner jumped from 24 miles (38.6km) above the New Mexico desert, reaching the supersonic speed of 844mph (1,360km/h). Kittinger served as an adviser.

Kittinger stayed in the air force after his jumps, serving three tours of duty during the Vietnam war. He was shot down over North Vietnam in May 1972, but ejected. He was captured and spent 11 months in a Hanoi prisoner-of-war camp, undergoing torture.

He retired from the air force in 1978 and settled in the Orlando area, where he became a local icon. A park there is named after him.

He is survived by his wife, Sherri.

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[Paris](#)

Notre Dame's uncovered tombs start to reveal their secrets

Two sarcophaguses unearthed in reconstruction work after 2019 fire identified as elite canon of cathedral and young cavalier



A 14th-century lead sarcophagus discovered in the floor of Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

[Kim Willsher](#) in Paris

Fri 9 Dec 2022 13.25 EST Last modified on Fri 9 Dec 2022 13.43 EST

Two lead sarcophaguses discovered buried under the nave at Notre Dame Cathedral in what was described as an "[extraordinary and emotional](#)" find have begun giving up their secrets, French scientists announced on Friday.

The first contains the remains of a high priest who died in 1710 after what experts say appeared to be a sedentary life. The occupant of the second has not yet been identified – and may never be – but is believed to be a young,

wealthy and privileged noble who could have lived as far back as the 14th century.

The tombs were uncovered as part of a cache of statues, sculptures and fragments of the cathedral's original 13th-century rood screen buried under the floor of the transept crossing at the heart of the cathedral [that was ravaged by fire in April 2019](#).

The burial sites were described as of “remarkable scientific quality” and were found after a preventive dig under the floor where heavy scaffolding is to be erected to install the cathedral’s new spire.

While most of the treasures were discovered barely 20cm (8in) under the cathedral floor, a body-shaped lead sarcophagus was buried one metre deep.

Once opened by specialists in Toulouse, it was found to contain what was left of a man, probably in his 30s, who researchers have named “Le Cavalier”, as his pelvic bones suggest he was an experienced horseman.

There was no name plaque on the coffin, which was moulded around the shape of the body, and holes in the lead around the head meant the remains had been exposed to the air and severe deterioration.



Archaeologists excavate the floor of Notre Dame Cathedral. Photograph: Julien de Rosa/AFP/Getty Images

Scientists are continuing to examine fragments of cloth and plant material found inside the coffin and say he was embalmed – a rare practice in the middle ages – and appears to have been buried with a crown of flowers.

A brass plaque on the second lead sarcophagus, also exposed to the air and water infiltration from the historic flooding of the Seine in 1910, confirmed that it contained the remains of Antoine de la Porte, the canon of [Notre Dame](#) Cathedral who died on Christmas Eve 1710 aged 83.

Eric Crubézy, professor of biological anthropology at the University of Toulouse III, who oversaw the cutting open of the coffins, said the two men were clearly important in their respective eras to have been buried in such prestigious tombs at the heart of the cathedral.

The unknown cavalier would have been a member of “the elite” at the time of his death to have been interred at the foot of the large cross on the since-destroyed rood screen, an ornate partition between the chancel and the nave that separated the clergy and choir from the congregation. Most rood screens were removed from France’s Catholic churches during the Counter-Reformation in the 16th and 17th centuries.

The young man had suffered a “chronic disease” that had destroyed most of his teeth by the time he died, Crubézy told journalists. “He would have had a difficult end of life.” The dead aristocrat also had a deformation of the skull caused by wearing a headdress or headband as a baby.



France's culture minister, Roselyne Bachelot, visits the research site in the cathedral. Photograph: Julien de Rosa/AFP/Getty Images

Christophe Besnier, who headed the scientific team for the dig carried out by France's national archaeological institute, Inrap, told a press conference: "If the date of his death was around the second half of the 16th century or early 17th century, we may be able to identify him in the death register that we have. If it's earlier than that, we probably won't ever know who he was."

Unlike the cavalier, de la Porte had "extraordinarily good teeth", Crubézy said. "They were remarkable for his age. We see this very rarely, but he clearly cleaned his teeth and took care of them."

De la Porte was rich, influential and not only commissioned several works of art that are now in the Louvre, including [a painting by Jean Jouvenet entitled The Mass of Canon Antoine de la Porte](#), but paid 10,000 livres – a small fortune at the time – for the renovation of the choir of Notre Dame Cathedral. Part of the destroyed rood screen was used in constructing his tomb.

After fire swept through the 850-year-old cathedral, one of Paris's most symbolic and visited monuments, in April 2019, [almost destroying the entire](#)

edifice, President Emmanuel Macron pledged to have it rebuilt and open for mass in five years.

The Inrap team was called in to carry out a “preventive dig” under a section of the cathedral floor between February and April before a 30 metre-high, 600-tonne scaffold was built to reconstruct the monument’s spire. The archaeologists were given a strict timeframe and only a specific area in which to carry out the excavation.

Dominique Garcia, president of Inrap, reiterated that the human remains were not “archaeological objects” and would be treated “with respect from beginning to end” of the research before being returned to Paris for the culture ministry to decide what would happen to them.

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Sir John Vickers, architect of post-2008 banking reforms, says plans put UK financial stability at risk

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The 'Edinburgh reforms' range from plans to consult on a new central bank digital currency to changing tax rules for investment trusts. Photograph: Henry Nicholls/Reuters

*[Kalyeena Makortoff](#) Banking correspondent
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Fri 9 Dec 2022 12.19 ESTFirst published on Fri 9 Dec 2022 03.05 EST

The chancellor is making a great mistake and may be taking the UK down an "extremely dangerous and wrong path" by repealing City regulations

meant to avoid another financial crisis, a key architect of post-crash banking reforms has warned.

Sir John Vickers, a senior economist who led the [independent commission reviewing the UK banking industry after the 2007-08 crisis](#), said key elements of [a deregulation package unveiled by Jeremy Hunt](#) on Friday could put Britain's financial stability at risk.

Vickers said he was particularly concerned about plans to [roll back ringfencing rules](#) that George Osborne introduced as chancellor after the crash, and were intended to protect everyday customers by separating their deposits from riskier investment banking operations.

Those rules, which only came into force in 2019, were the “bedrock of how we regulate banks in the UK”, Vickers said.

“If they’re saying: ‘Look, we’re 10 years on, we could make some adjustments, but it remains part of the bedrock,’ then I would say: ‘Fine’. If, on the other hand, they’re saying: ‘Maybe it’s time to roll back on this,’ then I think that would be an extremely dangerous and wrong path for us to follow,” he told the Guardian.

The changes to the ringfencing rules, which will go to consultation in 2023, could take years to implement, but could free a number of smaller banks – including TSB, Santander UK and Virgin Money – from having to follow the regulations.

However, they could also result in larger banks such as NatWest and Lloyds facing fewer restrictions on how they fund their operations, and allow them to sell more complex products to customers within their ringfenced bank.

Hunt’s deregulation plans, [called the “Edinburgh reforms”](#) after being launched in the Scottish capital on Friday, will also prompt consultations about the senior managers regime that holds bosses personally and financially responsible for problems that occur on their watch. The package, which includes more than 30 changes, also includes plans for a central bank

digital currency and changes to the rules on short-selling – where investors bet that the price of an asset will drop.

That is on top of introducing new targets for City regulators that will force them to consider how their rules could increase competition and UK growth, including by boosting venture capital funding for growing companies; unlocking funding for infrastructure projects; and helping first-time buyers access the housing market.

But Vickers, who previously sat on the Bank of England's interest rate-setting monetary policy committee, said it was a mistake to give banks and insurers special treatment by rowing back on such a wide range of regulations, even in the name of growth.

“We want safe and sound institutions we want well-functioning financial markets,” Vickers said. “What I think would be a great mistake would be to put the financial services sector on some kind of pedestal, warranting kind of special light touch regulatory treatment, when we all need that sector to be safe and sound for the competitiveness of the economy as a whole.

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“So I’m sure there are lots of good competitiveness, and productivity reforms, but let us think in a ‘whole economy’ way, not with undue concentration and focus on this sector, important though it is.”

However, Hunt defended the plans on Friday, telling a Financial Times conference his package of changes would not increase risk across the financial sector.

“This is a very considered and balanced package. I mean, we have to make sure that we don’t unlearn the lessons of 2008. But at the same time, recognise that banks today have much stronger balance sheets, [and] we have a much more developed resolution system if things do go wrong.”

“And in that context, it is perfectly sensible to make pragmatic changes such as the ones that we’re announcing today. But we’re doing so very, very carefully to make sure that the UK is competitive, exciting, the place to be the place to invest, but also that we don’t lose the guardrails that were put in place after 2008,” he added.

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UK weather

Snow warning for south-east England as icy snap likely to trigger cold weather payments

Fuel poverty charity urges government to provide more support for ‘those at greatest peril’



A woman walks her dog through overnight snow near the Terris Novalis sculpture in Consett, County Durham. Photograph: Owen Humphreys/PA

[Jamie Grierson](#)

[@JamieGrierson](#)

Fri 9 Dec 2022 10.11 ESTFirst published on Fri 9 Dec 2022 03.30 EST

A snow and ice warning has been issued for London and the south-east of [England](#) as freezing temperatures are expected to trigger cold weather payments for people on the lowest incomes.

Eligible households in England and Wales will receive a government payment of £25 when the average temperature has been recorded as, or is forecast to be, 0C or below for seven consecutive days.

The UK Health Security Agency has issued a level 3 cold weather alert covering England until Monday, and the Met Office has issued several yellow weather warnings for snow and ice in parts of the UK over the coming days.

On Friday, the Met Office issued a yellow snow and ice warning for London and south-east England on Sunday and Monday, following identical warnings in other parts of the country.

The new warning, which lasts for 24 hours, says 2cm to 5cm of snow could fall quite widely and it could be up to 10cm deep in places.

It says there is a chance of travel delays on roads, trains and planes, power cuts, injuries from slips on ice, and communities being “cut off”.

A Met Office spokesperson, Grahame Madge, said: “The outlook for the UK remains cold at least for the next seven days, with the potential for this to continue even longer.

“Along with the cold air there are a number of weather-related hazards, including freezing fog, especially for Sunday and Monday mornings in the south of England. Overnight temperatures are likely to dip widely below 0C with some more sheltered spots dropping to -10C.

“Our forecasters are looking at the possibility of snow affecting the south-east of England on Sunday night and into Monday morning. If this happens it could bring some disruption to Monday’s rush hour.”

National Energy Action has urged the government to provide more support for “those at greatest peril” as the freezing conditions take hold.

Adam Scorer, the charity’s chief executive, said more must be done, adding: “Millions will have been dreading the onset of winter. Impossibly high

prices and now cold weather will leave millions struggling to stay warm and safe at home.

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“Our figures show that 6.7 million UK households are fuel poor after energy prices have almost doubled in a year. We hear daily from people who are forced to turn their heating off when they need it the most.

“The vicious choice is either huge debt or an unheated home, with dreadful consequences either way. We will now start to see just how bleak this winter is going to be. Despite the current programme of support, the government must step in with more help for those at greatest peril this winter.”

A Department for Work and Pensions spokesperson said: “Cold weather payments can be triggered right through to the end of March, giving people facing disproportionately cold weather that extra reassurance over the chillier months.

“We are committed to protecting the most vulnerable in our society and this additional help comes on top of wider government support, including £1,200 in direct payments already issued to millions of low-income households this year.

“Alongside this, we are providing households with £400 towards their energy bills this winter, with our energy price guarantee saving the typical household another £900 on top of this.”

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Foreign policy

UK will sanction human rights abusers rather than ‘commentate’, says Cleverly

Foreign secretary criticises UK’s lack of robust approach at taking action against perpetrators around the world



Cleverly said the new approach against offenders would aim sanctions at individuals instead of punishing entire countries. Photograph: James Manning/PA

*[Jessica Elgot](#) Deputy political editor
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British diplomats have too often acted as “commentators” rather than using leverage against human rights abusers, according to the foreign secretary, who said the culture of his department would shift so that dictators would “pay the price”.

The UK is set to announce a raft of sanctions against individuals in 11 countries, including Iran, Russia, Mali and Nicaragua, targeting those responsible for acts of torture, sexual violence and the repression of protests.

Writing for the Guardian, James Cleverly hit out at the lack of a more robust UK approach and said he would not shirk from using the clout of UK sanctions to wield influence on world events.

“I hope you will not hear me utter the well-worn phrases: ‘I am concerned by...’, or ‘I am gravely concerned by ...’ or, worst of all, ‘I am deeply concerned by...,’ without also saying what I am doing,” Cleverly said.

“Our diplomats are not commentators offering thoughts and analysis; they are players on the pitch. Britain has agency and leverage and we are using it to shape the course of events.”

He said that diplomats must now be more robust in advancing British interests abroad and protecting the UK’s values. “As foreign secretary, I should not be telling you about my feelings; I should be telling you about my actions to protect and advance British interests and values,” he wrote.

The announcement comes as the Guardian reveals Iranian security forces are targeting women at anti-regime protests with shotgun fire to their faces, breasts and genitals, according to interviews with medics across the country.

Cleverly also said the UK would take a particularly tough line on those perpetrating or condoning sexual violence in conflict.

Last week, Ukraine’s first lady, Olena Zelenska, addressed the UK parliament and accused invading Russian forces of sexual violence and rape, including of children as young as four and an 85-year-old woman.

“Imposing a cost on people behind horrific sexual offences is a central part of our strategy to eradicate these crimes. We are right to express our horror and revulsion, but our words will always count for more when they are backed by action,” Cleverly said. “I will ensure this remains the theme of

British diplomacy. We are not passive observers and we should not merely voice our feelings: we will use our country's leverage to make a difference."

Cleverly said there were historic objections to sanctions including "blanket punishment of entire countries, inflicting hardship and resentment but seldom bringing change, but the real picture is very different".

He said the approach would now target "carefully selected individuals in order to exact a price for malign behaviour" as well as state-owned entities and companies, which would mean they would do as much as possible to avoid harm to ordinary people.

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Cleverly said an example of a new approach was the sanctioning earlier this year of Myanmar's military ruler, Min Aung Hlaing, who Cleverly said had "robbed 55 million people of their freedom and blighted the future of his country" through the military coup last year.

"I am realistic enough to know that they will not, on their own, reverse the military takeover or restore Myanmar's elected government," he said. "But we have ensured that the general has paid a price for his actions.

"I hope that any other coup-plotter anywhere else will ask: do I want to place my financial interests and those of my family in the crosshairs of some of the richest countries in the world?"

He said the sanctions were made doubly effective by targeting the company , [Myanmar Economic Holdings](#), which he chairs and controls scores of

subsidiaries.

The UK has also sanctioned companies owned by his son and daughter that were involved in financing “clearance operations” of Rohingya people, which have been denounced as genocide.

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Human rights

Watchdog criticises UK ministers’ ‘antagonism’ towards human rights

Council of Europe report finds government’s attitude is weakening protections for the public



A ‘kill the bill’ protest in Westminster before the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act was passed. Photograph: Martin Pope/Getty Images

[Rajeev Syal](#) Home affairs editor

Thu 8 Dec 2022 18.00 EST Last modified on Thu 8 Dec 2022 18.10 EST

The UK government has “an increasingly antagonistic attitude” towards human rights that is weakening instead of strengthening protections for the public, a European inquiry has found.

Inflammatory language used by MPs and officials to describe lawyers could put their safety at risk, according to the Council of Europe’s commissioner for human rights, Dunja Mijatović.

She said the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts (PCSC) Act would have a chilling effect on the right to peaceful assembly, which would be worsened if the public order bill is adopted.

Plans to repeal the Human Rights Act and replace it with a bill of rights would weaken the rights of individuals in the UK, Mijatović said.

The findings have been released in a 47-page report after a four-day visit to the UK in June and July by Mijatović's team.

They come as Downing Street and the home secretary, Suella Braverman, draw up plans to ban people who come from designated countries from claiming asylum in the UK, and amid reports that No 10 could shelve the justice secretary Dominic Raab's bill of rights because of timetabling constraints.

The Council of Europe report examined legislative proposals in the UK and concluded that the changes were “difficult to disconnect from a marked political focus on so-called ‘culture wars’ issues”.

It found that professionals who support human rights cases were characterised by government officials and MPs as “politically motivated” or “activist lawyers”.

“While physical attacks on human rights professionals are thankfully rare in the UK, there are concerns that inflammatory language against lawyers may put them at risk,” the report says.

It also says:

- Provisions in the PCSC Act that de facto criminalise Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities leading a nomadic lifestyle must be rescinded.
- There is “a high level of anxiety among stakeholders” about human rights protection in the UK, in view of the significant impact of recent and proposed legislation.

- The UK's policies towards refugees, asylum seekers and migrants are eroding their rights. Proposals criticised in the report include newly introduced inadmissibility rules for asylum claims, the possibility of removing persons to Rwanda, and the criminalisation of asylum seekers arriving irregularly.
- The emergence of a harsh political and public discourse against trans people in the UK has a negative impact on their rights.
- The UK government should consider withdrawing the legacy bill, which offers a conditional amnesty to people accused of killings and other Troubles-related crimes.

Mijatović and her team met four ministers on their UK visit: Raab, the Foreign Office minister Tariq Ahmad, Tom Pursglove, then an immigration minister, and the Northern Ireland minister Jonathan Caine.

The public order bill, which is at committee stage in parliament, has recently drawn criticism from MPs and activists. The government has introduced the bill to tackle disruptive protests, which in recent months have escalated and have been said to place a strain on police resources.

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Braverman is understood to be drawing up legislation for the new year to make it easier to reject and remove asylum seekers who come from Albania. More than 12,000 have arrived from the Balkan country via small boats this year, making up about a quarter of all Channel crossings.

Raab's proposed bill of rights has been criticised by lawyers and former judges who have said it will undermine the UK's status as a legal centre and risk causing friction with the European court of human rights in Strasbourg.

Last month Raab told MPs: "I think we have a great bill here."

Reports have claimed that the bill could be held back because Rishi Sunak wishes to concentrate on pushing through legislation on small boat arrivals. One Whitehall source said: "There is some concern over bandwidth, and so it might be held for that reason."

A government spokesperson said: "The government is committed to protecting human rights and will continue to champion them internationally and at home.

"The bill of rights will strengthen human rights such as freedom of expression, while the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act improves the balance between the right to protest and the rights of others to go about their business."

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2022.12.09 - Spotlight

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[England](#)

‘It’s not about him’: how Gareth Southgate won England’s culture war

Manager has learned from other sports and his formula of fun, accountability and responsibility marks a break from the past



Gareth Southgate during an England training session in Doha this week, as his side prepare to face France in the World Cup quarter-finals. Photograph: Eddie Keogh/The FA/Getty Images

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Fri 9 Dec 2022 02.30 EST Last modified on Fri 9 Dec 2022 04.30 EST

When England's footballers arrived back at their World Cup base camp in Doha after [beating Senegal](#), they were [greeted by dozens of dancing hotel workers](#), who waved St George flags, threw confetti and looked genuinely

pleased to be seeing them at 3am. The feeling was clearly mutual. Soon Jack Grealish, Luke Shaw and Kyle Walker were pogoing blissfully alongside them. And, as their heads bopped up and down, it was hard to escape the sense of this being a very different England setup.

Earlier, in a seemingly throwaway remark, John Stones gave a further insight into the team's culture. "We spoke in our meeting about not letting any standards drop," the defender said. "Whether it might be putting out socks the right way for the kit men – we get on at each other for things like that because we have created those standards."

Fun, accountability, responsibility. This is not a formula England have typically leaned on at World Cups – and certainly not when the gruff Italian Fabio Capello and the equally gruff Englishman Roy Hodgson were in charge.

Quick Guide

Qatar: beyond the football

Show



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

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Photograph: Caspar Benson

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But since taking over in 2016, [Gareth Southgate](#) has not only established a very different culture – he has done so by radically sidestepping out of football’s comfort zone, too. Performance coaches from New Zealand, England rugby experts, and the best of Team GB’s Olympic talent have all informed his thinking.

It speaks volumes that Southgate was the first football manager to go on UK Sport’s three-year elite coaching programme, where he exchanged ideas and philosophies with top coaches from multiple Olympic sports. Notably, when he graduated in 2019, he called the course “not only a privilege but a great opportunity” and stressed that the challenges facing top coaches were the same, whatever the sport.

The good impressions went both ways. “He was a bit of a sponge, always wanting to learn from people and getting fresh perspectives,” says a source in the Olympic sporting ecosystem. “That is rare among football people. There is often a sense in football that: ‘We know best, we know everything, and we have worked out how to create a winning culture.’”

Southgate bucked that trend early by employing Dave Reddin, a core member of Sir Clive Woodward’s team that won the 2003 Rugby World Cup and the head of performance for Team GB at the 2012 Olympic Games.



John Stones (right) spoke of the ‘standards’ this England squad adhere to, which go right down to ‘putting out socks the right way for the kit men’. Photograph: Catherine Ivill/Getty Images

Another key member of Southgate’s setup has been the New Zealander performance coach Owen Eastwood, who has also worked with South Africa’s cricketers, his homeland’s rugby team and Team GB. Eastwood emphasises the concept of *Whakapapa* – the Māori way of explaining your place in any tribe or family. Applied to sport, it places the emphasis on creating pride in the shirt and leaving a legacy for others to follow.

Since 2019, whenever an [England](#) player earns their first cap they get a “legacy number” stitched into the crest – which gives them a numerical place in the history of the shirt. Robert Barker, England’s goalkeeper in football’s first international in 1872, is No 1; the team’s first black footballer, Viv Anderson, is No 936. The achievements of those who blazed a trail, such as Anderson, are emphasised to Southgate’s diverse squad.

Eastwood also stresses that trust and openness matter. “People thrive when there’s consistency and composure around the environment,” he says. “One of the things about Gareth’s leadership is he genuinely sees it as a players’ game. He is there to facilitate them achieving what their potential might be. It’s not about him. He’s not the hero of it – the players are the heroes of it.”

It is a philosophy similar to that of Danny Kerry, who guided the GB women's hockey team to gold at the Rio 2016 Olympics and has also spoken to Southgate. One of the team's stars, Georgie Twigg, says that there are clear parallels with what the hockey team did and what she sees with England's players in Doha.

"We worked very closely with psychologists on what we, as a team, wanted our culture to look like: how we wanted to behave and hold each other to account," she says. "We had to because we were a group of 30 girls training day in, day out, with massively different personalities and ages."

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Can something as small as turning your socks the right way make a difference? Twigg thinks so. "Some of us would never have been best friends outside the sporting world," she adds. "But creating a culture where you are all working towards one collective goal, and you do these small behaviours that generate respect between each other, is really powerful. And it can lead to huge knock-on effects on the field."

Southgate did not come to these ideas cold. As early as 2014 he was behind the launch of "the England DNA", a plan to establish a way of playing and create a history and heritage for the national team from junior to senior levels. His time as manager of England Under-21s also helped put his ideas of developing young players into practice.

Nearly a decade on he presides over an England setup that his players genuinely appear to enjoy. It is certainly a far cry from the "golden generation" of the early noughties, during which players from rival clubs

such as David Beckham, Wayne Rooney, Steven Gerrard and John Terry often treated their England colleagues with suspicion, and underperformed as a result.

Of course winning matches has helped Southgate. But much of this change is down to leadership. It is noticeable that he doesn't ask his players to do anything he wouldn't do himself, and that he has never shied away from taking responsibility – whether over [taking the knee](#), going to Qatar, or anything else.

You can smell the team spirit at England's Al Wakrah training base. Now, as Saturday's quarter-final against France looms, a nation hopes they can once again entertain us.

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Infectious diseases

Race to control ‘tripledemic’ as cases of RSV in children sweep US and Europe

Spike in respiratory syncytial virus as well as Covid and flu pushing many hospitals close to brink



Paediatric intensive care units in Germany have been struggling to cope with a sharp rise in RSV cases. Photograph: Filip Singer/EPA

[Linda Geddes](#) Science correspondent

Fri 9 Dec 2022 07.21 ESTFirst published on Fri 9 Dec 2022 00.00 EST

Before Covid, few people had heard of respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). Increasingly, though, this common cause of pneumonia and bronchiolitis (airway inflammation) is filling up hospital beds across [Europe](#) and the Americas. Combined with rising admissions for other respiratory infections, including influenza and Covid, it is pushing some healthcare systems close to the brink of collapse.

In its latest report, the [European Centre for Disease Prevention](#) and Control (ECDC) said a number of countries had been experiencing unusually early increases in RSV detections, with rising paediatric hospital admissions in France, Ireland, Spain, Sweden and the US.

“With the continued impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the circulation and health impact of other respiratory pathogens, it is challenging to predict how the new winter period will develop,” a joint statement by the ECDC, European Commission and World Health Organization said.

The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) issued a similar statement last month, as the virus burdens healthcare systems across Canada, Mexico, Brazil, Uruguay, and the US, with children and infants under the age of one particularly affected. “The rise of a single respiratory infection is a cause for concern. When two or three start impacting a population concurrently, this should put us all on alert,” said the PAHO director, Dr Carissa F Etienne.

A [“tripledemic” of Covid, RSV and flu](#) is bad news for adult hospital wards: even in a normal year, an estimated 60,000 to 120,000 older adults are hospitalised and 6,000 to 10,000 of them die from RSV in the US alone.

However, the bigger threat is to children’s health. RSV is a common respiratory virus that usually causes mild cold-like symptoms but it is a leading cause of pneumonia and bronchiolitis in young infants. Worldwide, it is responsible for about [3.6 million hospital admissions](#) and more than 100,000 deaths in under-fives each year.



The wave of respiratory viruses ‘should put us all on alert’, said Dr Carissa Etienne, the director of the Pan American Health Organization. Photograph: Saul Loeb/AFP/Getty

Even in wealthy countries, [one in 56 babies](#) who are born on time and are otherwise healthy will be hospitalised with RSV during their first year of life. There are no drugs but those with severe infections may be supported with supplemental oxygen, intravenous fluids, or mechanical ventilation until they get better. Having sufficient intensive care beds is therefore essential.

Before the arrival of Covid, RSV followed a predictable pattern, with low rates during summer and a sharp increase in infections in winter. Paediatric wards would be stretched but because they could plan for these annual peaks they were rarely overwhelmed.

However, since Covid restrictions were lifted, that ability to plan has largely evaporated. For instance, between July 2021 and February 2022, the US experienced consistently high RSV infections, followed by a further spike during July and August 2022. Now, they are soaring again, with RSV hospitalisation rates for newborns [seven times](#) higher than they were in 2018, the last full season before the pandemic.

RSV detections in Europe graphic

In European countries, the usual pattern has been disrupted. “In previous years, we had a system where if there was not enough capacity in the Netherlands, children would go to Germany or Belgium because those countries had already had their RSV season, or it was still to come,” said Prof Louis Bont, a paediatric infectious diseases specialist at the Wilhelmina children’s hospital in Utrecht, the Netherlands.

“Now, at the moment we are reaching our peak, Germany is also transferring children to the Netherlands. It seems that several neighbouring countries may have reached the peak of their epidemics at the same time.”

Combined with influenza, and human metapneumovirus infections – another common respiratory virus that can cause breathing difficulties in young children – the coming weeks and months could be difficult.

“Usually, these viruses follow each other, so first you have one virus, then the other, then the other, but now they all seem to be coming at the same time,” Bont said.

“RSV is the most problematic but the pressure on paediatric wards, and in particular intensive care units, is really making it difficult to have enough capacity to take care of life-threateningly ill children.”



An RSV-infected child receiving treatment. Photograph: Heiko Becker/Reuters

Last week, intensive care doctors in [Germany](#) reported paediatric units were [stretched to breaking point](#) after an increase in RSV cases and a shortage of nurses.

Sebastian Brenner, the head of the paediatric intensive care unit at University hospital, Dresden, told the German news channel n-tv: “If the forecasts are right, then things will get significantly more acute in the coming days and week.

“We see this in France, for example, and in Switzerland. If that happens, then there will be bottlenecks when it comes to treatment.”

Precisely why RSV is behaving in this way is unclear but a leading theory is that protective measures introduced during the pandemic, such as lockdowns and social distancing, interrupted RSV transmission, resulting in a cohort of young children who had never been exposed to it and developed any immunity. Now those restrictions have been lifted, there is a bigger pool of susceptible individuals.

Whether the rise in European countries and the US will translate into a significant increase in child deaths is also uncertain. However, in countries

with less developed healthcare systems, unpredictable spikes in RSV could be deadlier.

Steve Cunningham, a professor of paediatric respiratory medicine at the University of Edinburgh, said “In areas of east Africa, where there is a lot of famine concern at the moment, it wouldn’t take much to cause a major outbreak of RSV. We’re seeing it out of season, so they may well see it out of season.”

Yet, survival is not the only consideration. “Even when kids survive a bout with RSV, they can experience lasting effects,” said Keith Klugman, the director of pneumonia at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

For instance, studies have suggested that infants who are hospitalised with severe RSV may be more susceptible to pneumonia or asthma in later life, although these links are still being investigated.



A near-empty cold and flu medicine section at a pharmacy in Burbank. Southern California has been hit by a wave of the flu, Covid and RSV. Photograph: Mario Tama/Getty

Having a baby admitted to intensive care can also take a psychological toll. “Parents have said that, even a year afterwards, their family is not the same as it was before,” Bont said.

The good news is that the current unusual situation is unlikely to continue for ever. “Unless something new happens, probably within 12 months we will go back to normal,” Bont said.

There is also a raft of drugs and vaccines against RSV in late-stage clinical trials, including an antibody-based drug called nirsevimab, which was recently approved by the European Commission, and which is designed to protect babies during their first RSV season, when they are most vulnerable. A [trial](#) to establish the cost-effectiveness of the drug is recruiting babies across the UK, France and Germany.

Pfizer also recently announced top-line results from a phase 3 trial of its [RSV vaccine candidate](#), which is designed to be given to pregnant women, suggesting an efficacy of 69% against hospitalisation with RSV during a baby’s first six months of life.

Even once RSV returns to its normal seasonal pattern, it remains the second largest killer of infants, behind malaria. So, if these drugs and vaccines are approved and funded, it would be a significant achievement. Until then, prevention remains the best strategy, which means practising good hygiene and limiting contact with other people, if you suspect you or your child is infected.

Cunningham also emphasised the need for vigilance. “If parents, in particular, are aware of RSV, then that’s great, because if what seems like a pretty bad cold gets a lot worse and their child’s feeding is affected, and their breathing becomes more laboured, then they need to seek medical review.”

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‘All that hyperventilating makes you dizzy’: Brendan Fraser and Darren Aronofsky on The Whale

[Ryan Gilbey](#)



'I don't think you should have to see yourself reflected in another human being to have empathy' ... Darren Aronofsky, Brendan Fraser and Samuel D Hunter. Photograph: Amir Hamja/The Guardian

The actor and director are joined by screenwriter Samuel D Hunter to discuss career comebacks, the hazards of Hollywood and the importance of human connection

Fri 9 Dec 2022 01.00 EST Last modified on Fri 9 Dec 2022 08.33 EST

The last time I met Brendan Fraser, he was bouncing off the walls of a Los Angeles hotel suite and looking every bit as popeyed, elastic-limbed and cartoonish as his animated co-stars in Looney Tunes: Back in Action. This was 2008. He was promoting the third Mummy film, Tomb of the Dragon Emperor, and not merely answering questions but turning the replies into zany skits or wackadoodle monologues. A jangling desperation, though, lurked just below the surface. It was never more apparent than when he recounted what he had said to a businessman who buttonholed him about the prospect of another Mummy sequel: "I don't know! Leave me alone!"

Now we know why. Injuries sustained on that third Mummy picture led to seven years of hospital visits; there were operations on his back, a partial knee replacement and surgery on his vocal cords. In 2009, he and the mother

of his three sons divorced. Then, in a 2018 interview headlined “[Whatever happened to Brendan Fraser?](#)”, he alleged that he had been groped in 2003 by Philip Berk, a former president of the Hollywood Foreign Press Association, which is responsible for the Golden Globes. (Berk apologised but denies any wrongdoing.)

Small wonder, then, that the figure who sits before me today in a London hotel room is unrecognisable as the human tornado I met back then. The square-shouldered 54-year-old, dressed in a dark suit, is sitting on a sofa looking as stiff as a bookend. He has a wary, spooked look in his eyes, as though bracing himself for calamity. Once the pin-up star of George of the Jungle and California Man, Fraser has put those goofball antics behind him after his period of trauma. A new phase of his career flickered into life last year with a minor role in Steven Soderbergh’s No Sudden Move, and will continue next spring when he appears alongside Leonardo DiCaprio and Robert De Niro in Martin Scorsese’s Killers of the Flower Moon.



‘It took four hours to get into my makeup in the morning’ ... Brendan Fraser in The Whale. Photograph: Courtesy of A24

First though, there is his performance in Darren Aronofsky’s The Whale as Charlie, an expository writing teacher whose morbid obesity has left him

confined to his Idaho flat. (The title refers to a passage from Moby Dick that surfaces repeatedly in the film in the form of an essay written by a student.) There is a certain synchronicity between actor and character: both have suffered from depression, as well as other people's scepticism and preconceptions. For Fraser, the part looks like a comeback. Does it feel that way to him? He leans in conspiratorially, placing the back of his hand to his mouth as though preparing to share a great confidence. "I was never that far away," he whispers.

He has trotted the line out before, but it still prompts affectionate laughter from the two colleagues who are here with him. In a sense, they all have something to prove. The 53-year-old Aronofsky, seated in an armchair to Fraser's right, is coming off a divisive flop, the surreal, nightmarish [Mother!](#), which starred his former girlfriend Jennifer Lawrence. Perched at the other end of Fraser's sofa is the playwright [Samuel D Hunter](#), whose theatre work, including *The Whale*, earned him a \$625,000 MacArthur Fellowship (known as the "genius grant") in 2014 but who is only now, at 41, making his debut as a screenwriter.

There's never any guarantee that what works on stage will transfer to the big screen but *The Whale* went down a storm at the Venice film festival; footage of Fraser weeping appreciatively during a lengthy standing ovation has found its way online. He is also the current favourite to win next year's best actor Oscar. (Aronofsky has form in rehabilitating fallen stars: he guided Mickey Rourke to a devastating performance, and an Oscar nomination, in [The Wrestler](#).) How times change. After my 2008 meeting with Fraser, I noted that he had starred in several Oscar-approved films (*Crash*, *Gods and Monsters*, *The Quiet American*) but "has never had so much as a wink from the Academy. He probably never will. He's not that sort of actor." Call me Nostradamus.



‘All I ever wanted to be was a working actor’ ... Fraser in School Ties.
Photograph: Paramount Pictures/Allstar

Festivals and awards are one thing; the public is quite another. A movie about a dying man stuck in a flat would not be an easy sell at the best of times, let alone during a period in which cinema-going habits are yet to bounce back from Covid. The Whale isn’t a one-man show by any means: Charlie is visited by his ex-wife ([Samantha Morton](#)); their teenage daughter (Sadie Sink), who is still raging at her father for leaving the family in favour of his boyfriend; a sparky nurse (Hong Chau), and a young religious evangelist (Ty Simpkins) hoping to save Charlie’s soul. It may take a while, though, to warm to Charlie himself, who is first seen masturbating so furiously to online pornography that he almost gives himself a heart attack.

Fraser wears a sweaty 300lb body-suit, with some minor CGI augmentation. Is the film daring us to care about this woebegone fellow who at first seems so repellent? Hunter looks aghast at the idea. “No!” he exclaims. “I wasn’t concerned with whether an audience member would identify with him. I bristle at the idea of likability because that’s inherently ...” He recalibrates. “These are human beings. I don’t think you should have to see yourself reflected in another human being to have empathy.”

That introductory scene, though, is hardly a warm and welcoming hug. “I guess,” he concedes. “But human beings are human beings.” Aronofsky and Fraser keep stumm while Hunter presses on: “When I wrote the play, I was teaching expository writing myself, and was having a hard time connecting to my students. I wanted to write about a teacher, and eventually I started putting personal stuff on the line. I’m a gay man from Idaho who grew up in the town where Charlie lives, and for a long time I was self-medicating with food, so it’s not hard for me to understand him. As a writer, I didn’t want to make any apologies.”

Why cast Fraser? It was clear there was this inner light in him and it hadn’t been harnessed in a long time

Darren Aronofsky

It was never an option to open out the action of the film, which is confined (as the play is) to a dingy flat over the course of a single week. “The room was part of what attracted me to it, and what made Charlie this unique character,” says Aronofsky. “He’s a shut-in.” Fraser is nodding along. “He has ambulatory limitations,” the actor says. “Even getting out of his chair requires herculean effort.” The director gives a scoffing laugh: “Yeah, what are we gonna do? Take him to the mall?”

Even taking a few steps to the front door to collect a pizza delivery becomes as monumental as a moon walk. “During those moments, I told Brendan, ‘Take a breath,’” the director recalls. As he says this, he reaches over and pats Fraser’s hand reassuringly. “Brendan took this kind of half-breath, and I thought: ‘Yeah, that’s probably all Charlie could manage.’” The physical demands on the actor were immense. “It took four hours to get into my makeup in the morning,” he recalls, “and an hour-plus change at the end of the day. All that hyperventilating, simulating a cardiac event, gets you feeling dizzy, too.”

Why cast Fraser? “It was clear there was this inner light in him and it hadn’t been harnessed in a long time,” says Aronofsky. “When I met him, he was a gentleman. It was also clear he wanted to work. I knew it was going to be very difficult emotionally and technically, and I needed an actor who was 100% game to do that. Brendan was.”

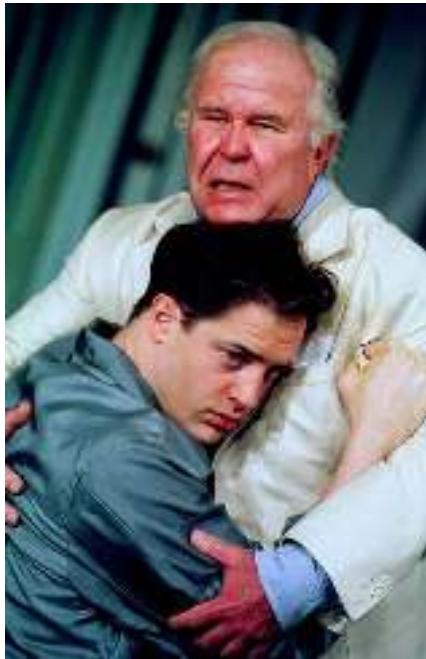


'I bristle at the idea of likability' ... Samuel D Hunter, Brendan Fraser and Darren Aronofsky. Photograph: Amir Hamja/The Guardian

Though slapstick comedies and special-effects extravaganzas made Fraser a star, he had already proven his range. One of his earliest roles was as a Jewish student targeted by antisemitic bullies (including a young Matt Damon) in *School Ties*. He acted opposite Viggo Mortensen in Philip Ridley's heady gothic fable *The Passion of Darkly Noon*, and played Brick on stage in the West End in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* in 2001. Was there a conflict between the sort of work that made him famous, and the range he knew he possessed? "All I ever wanted to be was a working actor," he says. "As a teenager, I idolised the third and fourth-billed names; they're the backbone of a project. I wanted to be among them. I've always felt drawn to a sense of diversity in my choices."

In this age of debate over authentic casting, there have been objections to Fraser playing Charlie when he is, in fact, neither gay nor obese in real life. Did Hunter anticipate this reaction? "All that matters is knowing that the actor can bring tenderness and generosity amid Charlie's pain and suffering," the playwright says. "That bright light in the darkness." Does this mean Hunter has no opinion on like-for-like casting? "I have nothing to say about the discourse." Would it be fair to say he is neutral on the subject? He looks exasperated. "I don't know. I guess. What's important is that I felt that

authenticity from Brendan.” Fraser pipes up from the other end of the sofa: “I was just there to give the most honest performance I could,” he says, his voice no louder than a squeak.



Proven range ... Fraser and Ned Beatty in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* in 2001.
Photograph: Tristram Kenton/The Guardian

For Aronofsky, *The Whale* couldn’t feel timelier. “I think we’ve all been in Charlie’s position in the last few years,” he says. “We’ve lost so much human connection, and this film is about people who are isolated but trying to connect.” He optioned the play a decade ago, and might not have got around to filming it were it not for the pandemic. “*After Mother!*, there were many opportunities but the world had shifted. I didn’t feel it was appropriate to make a big movie. I thought it was dangerous. People were still dying. Five actors in a room was a landscape that seemed controllable.”

That also resonates with his earlier work. From the obsessive mathematician in his 1998 debut, *Pi*, to the boxed-in addicts of *Requiem for a Dream* and the febrile ballet company of *Black Swan*, Aronofsky thrives on claustrophobia and confinement. “There are a lot of similarities between Max in *Pi* and Charlie in *The Whale*,” he agrees. “They’re both stuck in a room. You could say I started in a room and now I’m ending in one.” Well, hopefully not ending, I say. “In the same place, then,” he laughs.

Albeit a brighter one. Whereas Pi was a brilliant but punishing watch, The Whale nails its life-affirming colours to the mast. “People can’t help caring,” says Charlie in one scene. “People are amazing.” The three men, whose film shows hope enduring in the bleakest of circumstances, seem united on this. “The harder and most complicated choice is having faith in people and the world despite the pain and suffering that can be inflicted on you,” says Hunter.

Fraser concurs. “I just came from a fan convention in New York,” he says. “Every 10th person told me: ‘You were part of my childhood.’ Even: ‘You *were* my childhood.’” How did that feel? “It’s heartwarming. We all stared at each other and had this moment. It was like: ‘Look at us. We’re here. And we’re all grown up now.’” Spoken like a true survivor.

The Whale is released in the UK on 3 February

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You be the judge: should my best friend stop wearing winter coats all year round?



Illustration: Joren Joshua/The Guardian

Samantha wears puffer jackets and fleeces come rain or shine. Her mate thinks she looks ridiculous. We ask you to be the fashion police

- [Find out how to get a disagreement settled or become a You be the judge juror](#)



*Interviews by [Georgina Lawton](#)
[@georginalawton](#)*

Fri 9 Dec 2022 03.00 EST Last modified on Fri 9 Dec 2022 20.57 EST

The prosecution: Halina

Samantha will wear a big fleece to go for ice-cream in the summer. She makes us all look ridiculous

My best friend, Samantha, seems unable to dress for the weather. Even in the hot summer we had this year, she always walked around in a heavy coat. She has a vast collection – big designer puffer jackets, long vintage leather coats

and sheepskin fleeces. I think they're quite cool, but she wears them when they're not necessary.

This year she put on a giant puffer when she was coming to meet me in the height of summer. Another time, she had on this huge fleece while we were getting ice-cream from a van.

This year she put on a giant puffer when she was coming to meet me in the height of summer

Samantha's jackets are just incongruous to her surroundings. She doesn't have a "transitional" wardrobe. It's winter jackets most of the year, then, when it's really hot, she will forgo a jacket or wear one of these tiny cropped jumpers. There's no in-between.

We've been friends for five years and I have noticed this quirk a bit more this past year. I tell Samantha that she needs to buy a denim jacket or some kind of spring wardrobe, but she's adamant that her winter jackets are suitable for most of the year. Friends always comments on how weird this is.

When we were out as a group this year, we looked a bit ridiculous as Samantha was dressed for Baltic conditions when there wasn't a cloud in the sky. In my opinion, unless you're in the depths of winter, you don't need a huge padded jacket or heavy fleece.

When Samantha and I met up this autumn, she was wearing thermals, which I thought a bit mad. We were having brunch and it was 17C. Samantha arrived in her giant padded puffer jacket. I said: "When does ski season start?" Samantha's response was: "Well it will get cold later."

Samantha should make a few changes to her wardrobe so that when we go out, she doesn't look like something's wrong with her. When you see someone wearing a coat that's too heavy for the weather, you think they must be sick, or a tourist. People should dress for the season. It just makes sense.

The defence: Samantha

I'd rather be too hot than too cold, so I always go out in big coats. Halina should leave me be

People love to come for me for wearing jackets that are too heavy, but I don't think it's that big a deal. Who wants to be caught short in the British weather?

I have a selection of big fleeces and puffer jackets that I wear pretty much all year round and I don't think there's anything wrong with that. My favourite is my Moncler padded jacket, which was really expensive, and another beige fleece that was a charity shop find and is really warm. I must have seven or eight big winter coats that I alternate all year round.

Halina will ask me whether I'm looking for a polar bear, or working a ski season

It doesn't make sense to buy what Halina calls "a transitional wardrobe", because for the most part wearing a heavy coat when it's a little too hot is only a minor inconvenience for a couple of hours. Usually it pays off later when the sun goes down or the weather becomes unpredictable. Or if it doesn't, I'll take the coat off when I arrive at wherever I need to go.

The way Halina talks, it's as if I'm sitting in a restaurant with my hood up – which is not the case. Those coats aren't an inconvenience to me, but the opposite. Even in summer I can't leave the house without a heavy coat: I just feel naked. Buying some lighter jackets, like Halina suggests, is just a waste of money because I either wear one of my heavy coats on top, or nothing at all.

I suppose my love of heavy coats has become something of a running joke to my friends, but I don't really care. I'll arrive to brunch and there'll be jokes. Halina will ask me whether I'm looking for a polar bear, or working a ski season. I just laugh and say: "Whatever, guys. I'm cosy." The irony is that I've seen Halina in beer gardens shivering at the end of a night out, because she hasn't properly prepared her own outerwear.

I'd rather be a little too hot than too cold for hours, so I'll always leave the house with one of my big coats unless it's a heatwave. I can't see that changing, so my friends, including Halina, will just have to get used to it.

It's not like I'm making them wear the jacket themselves, so why are they so bothered?

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The jury of Guardian readers

Should Samantha buy some more lightweight jackets?

If Samantha wants to pay dry-cleaning bills and fork out for cloakrooms when she goes to a club that's her prerogative! Halina and her other mates should chill out. Samantha's coat selection sounds quite chic, and at the end of the day it's harmless.

Nancy, 23

Samantha is an adult and capable of making her own decisions about what to wear and what she finds comfortable. Friends who "rip into" each other for their clothing choices are not the sort of friends I'd want to have.

Carly, 37

Samantha should go to Italy, where some still wear fur coats in 25C heat. Halina needs to keep her nose out of others' business. What Samantha wears is up to her. At least it's better than the ridiculous habit of going out when

it's freezing without any outer garment.

Glenn, 59

Does Samantha frequently complain about being too hot? Does Samantha make Halina carry these coats around for her? Are these coats so big they invade Halina's personal space? It doesn't seem like it. It does seem like Samantha could do with friends who care less about it looking like there's "something wrong with her".

Rachel, 29

Not guilty. Halina sounds really overbearing. Samantha sounds like a stylish girl in need of some new mates. Who cares what she wears so long as she is happy?

Matt, 32

Now you be the judge

In our online poll below, tell us: should Samantha rethink her attire?

Last week's result

We asked whether Martha should tidy up her collection of [reusable bags](#), as it annoys her granddaughter Roberta.

42% of you said yes – Martha is guilty

58% of you said no – Martha is not guilty

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2022.12.09 - Opinion

- Britain is not a passive observer on the world stage. We want oligarchs and dictators to fear us
- The fading Tories are stealing ideas from Labour – a transition has already begun
- Somalia is not just a story of violence and state failure. Focus on our strengths
- For Ukrainians, poetry isn't a luxury, it's a necessity during war

[**Opinion**](#)[**Foreign policy**](#)

Britain is not a passive observer on the world stage. We want oligarchs and dictators to fear us

[James Cleverly](#)

I will ensure this country uses its power and influence to advance its interests and values

- James Cleverly is the foreign secretary



‘We are using new post-Brexit powers to impose personal sanctions on Myanmar’s military dictator, General Min Aung Hlaing.’ Photograph: Stringer ./Reuters

Fri 9 Dec 2022 01.00 EST Last modified on Fri 9 Dec 2022 10.15 EST

You may not have heard of General Min Aung Hlaing, but [this military dictator](#) has robbed 55 million people of their freedom and blighted the future of his country.

Last year, [he seized power](#) in Myanmar, overturning the result of a free election which a military-backed party had lost by a huge margin.

The UK denounced this outrage at the time, but I'm acutely conscious that words alone are not enough. So we followed this up by using new post-Brexit powers to impose personal sanctions on the dictator, banning him from entering the UK and freezing any assets he holds here.

We've targeted a company that he chairs, Myanmar Economic Holdings Ltd, which in turn controls scores of subsidiaries – all of which are now, by extension, [under sanctions](#). The UK has also sanctioned companies, owned by his son and daughter, which were involved in financing the Rohingya clearance operations.

We've acted in concert with our partners around the world – particularly the US, Canada and the European Union – to maximise the effect of these measures.

I am realistic enough to know that they will not, on their own, reverse the military takeover or restore Myanmar's elected government. But we have ensured that the general has paid a price for his actions.

I hope that any other coup-plotter anywhere else will ask: do I want to place my financial interests and those of my family in the crosshairs of some of the richest countries in the world?

Backing words with action is exactly the kind of diplomacy that I want to lead. I hope you will not hear me utter the well-worn phrases: “I am concerned by ...”, or “I am gravely concerned by ...” or, worst of all, “I am deeply concerned by ...”, without also saying what I am doing.

As foreign secretary, I should not be telling you about my feelings; I should be telling you about my actions to protect and advance British interests and

values. Our diplomats are not commentators offering thoughts and analysis; they are players on the pitch. Britain has agency and leverage and we are using it to shape the course of events.

Sanctions are one of the most important tools in our hands. By leaving the EU, the UK regained the power to impose independent national sanctions. My predecessors and I have taken the opportunity to construct a new approach towards using this vital instrument.

There is an historic association of sanctions with general embargos and the blanket punishment of entire countries, inflicting hardship and resentment but seldom bringing change, but the real picture is very different.

Today, the UK imposes sanctions on carefully selected individuals in order to exact a price for malign behaviour. We also target particular entities and companies – often state-owned – to deter destructive activity while doing all we can to avoid harm to ordinary people.

One of my first acts as foreign secretary was to [sanction three Iranian military commanders](#) and one company for supplying Russia with the armed drones that are killing innocent civilians in Ukraine.

Now that we have sovereign control over UK sanctions, we can act swiftly and robustly. Today, the UK is enforcing national sanctions against over 2,000 individuals and 400 entities across the world.

In 2020, my predecessor, Dominic Raab, created a UK system of “[Magnitsky sanctions](#)” named after Sergei Magnitsky, a Russian lawyer who was murdered in prison in 2009 after uncovering massive tax fraud. We reserve these measures for people involved in human rights violations or corruption; so far we have used them against 107 individuals.

We have also exacted a price for egregious acts of state policy. After Vladimir Putin launched his latest onslaught against [Ukraine](#) in February, the UK put together the biggest package of sanctions ever enacted against a major economy.

So far we have targeted over 1,200 Russian individuals, including at least 100 oligarchs and their families, with a net worth exceeding £140bn.

We've hit whole sectors of the Russian economy, immobilising Russian central bank reserves, preventing Russian companies from raising funds in the City of London, and placing UK financial services beyond the Kremlin's reach. Together with allies, our sanctions have undermined Russia's ability to wage war.

Today, I will announce new sanctions on individuals in 11 countries, including Iran, Russia, Mali and Nicaragua, targeting those responsible for acts of torture, sexual violence and the repression of protests.

Imposing a cost on people behind horrific sexual offences is a central part of our strategy to eradicate these crimes. We are right to express our horror and revulsion, but our words will always count for more when they are backed by action.

I will ensure this remains the theme of British diplomacy. We are not passive observers and we should not merely voice our feelings: we will use our country's leverage to make a difference. As the likes of General Min Aung Hlaing have found to their cost.

- James Cleverly is the Conservative MP for Braintree and the foreign secretary
- *Do you have an opinion on the issues raised in this article? If you would like to submit a response of up to 300 words by email to be considered for publication in our letters section, please [click here](#).*

[OpinionLabour](#)

The fading Tories are stealing ideas from Labour – a transition has already begun

[Andy Beckett](#)



Blurred lines between one government and the next happen quite often, but that doesn't mean Starmer's fight is over



Keir Starmer speaks at the Labour business conference at Canary Wharf, London, Thursday 8 December 2022. Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA

Fri 9 Dec 2022 03.00 ESTLast modified on Fri 9 Dec 2022 05.47 EST

The British political system likes to present itself as one where power shifts decisively from one party to another. The removal van arrives in Downing Street, and a very different government replaces the defeated one. These quick, dramatic switches are meant to be one of the good points of our system: the electorate's wishes clearly enacted, in compensation for being kept at a distance from centralised Westminster the rest of the time.

It's in the interests of the two big parties sustained by this system to say they offer a stark choice. And sometimes that's true: Jeremy Corbyn's loose socialism against Theresa May's stern Conservatism; Keir Starmer's self-conscious competence against Boris Johnson's showy chaos. Since 2015 the gap between Labour and the Tories – in style, ideology and policies – has often been larger than ever.

Yet recently, without being widely noticed, the gap has been closing. In some striking ways, Starmer and [Rishi Sunak](#) are similar politicians. Both are relatively inexperienced, elected as MPs only in 2015. Both are better at

paperwork and preparation than spontaneous communication. And both present themselves as realists, clearing up after unrealistic predecessors.

More disorienting still for anyone who takes the rhetorical battles between the parties at face value, the Conservatives are increasingly adopting Labour policies: an [energy price cap](#), a [windfall tax on energy companies](#), and [raising state benefits](#) in line with inflation. This week, the Tories made a policy announcement that copied a Labour proposal almost word for word: promising to “[make the right to request flexible working a day-one right](#)” for all employees. Labour called for “the right to flexible working for all workers … from day one” back in [July 2021](#).

During this year’s first Tory leadership contest, Sunak pledged: “I will govern as a Thatcherite.” Yet now he leads a government that raises taxes, emphasises how “compassionate” it is, and has hired the former senior New Labour figures [Patricia Hewitt and Michael Barber](#) as advisers. In the rightwing press, and on the right of the Tory party, there is disbelief, and loud grumbling, that Sunak is governing like Gordon Brown. In some ways, you could argue, the transition to a Labour government has already begun.

This blurring of the lines between the two parties should not be a surprise. Gradual transitions between a fading government and its likely replacement actually happen quite often in Britain. In the 1970s, Jim Callaghan’s [Labour](#) administration adopted monetarist economic policies before Margaret Thatcher did. In the 1990s, John Major’s optimistic talk of “a classless society” anticipated Tony Blair’s attempt to make Britain into a meritocracy. In 2010, Brown’s chancellor, Alistair Darling, proposed “tough” cuts in public spending that prefigured George Osborne’s austerity.

This trade in ideas, language and political tone between parliamentary enemies is neither straightforward nor often openly acknowledged, nor necessarily even conscious. As well as simply stealing policies from the opposition in a bid to change just enough to blunt its criticisms, placate enough voters and thereby cling to power – which is the strategy Sunak seems to be following – old governments can also be groping for ways to reflect new times. The rightwing papers may still believe Britain can be saved by market forces, but to be a Tory minister now is to be faced with endless market failures. Sunak is one of the biggest enthusiasts for

capitalism in his party, yet even he conceded in a lecture this year that “the market has limits”.

The problem with such ideological retreats, from a government point of view, is that they can be an unintended admission that a change of regime is required – or even a sign that some in the ruling party are starting to give up. The silences and absences on the Conservative benches in the Commons under Sunak suggest the latter.

Government retreats can also normalise the opposition’s policies and rhetoric. Starmer can talk about price caps, new taxes and creating “an economy that works for working people” with a degree of boldness that Brown and Blair never dared – despite their greater confidence in other areas – partly because Sunak is the fourth Tory premier in a row to acknowledge that our economic model is in trouble.

In theory, this normalisation of concerns about capitalism could enable Starmer to move further leftwards. Now that both main parties agree on intervention against profiteering energy companies, Labour could advocate action against other businesses that have greedily increased their margins. A recent analysis by the trade union Unite found that “profit margins for the UK’s biggest listed companies were [73% higher](#) in 2021 than … in 2019”, and that this surge has continued into 2022. Given that most Britons are getting poorer in the cost of living crisis, to which this profiteering has substantially contributed, further windfall taxes or price caps might be socially and economically beneficial, and highly popular.

But Starmer and the shadow chancellor, Rachel Reeves, are instinctively cautious. A more likely consequence of the Tories’ shameless pilfering of their policies is that these policies will be thoroughly tested in practice well before Labour gets into government. A Tory government acting as a laboratory for a Labour one: after all the decades of Labour accepting Tory policies, that would be a pleasing irony.

Labour supporters shouldn’t get too carried away, though. Under Starmer, the policy trade between the two parties has not just been one-way. On Brexit, Ukraine, defence and anything else deemed “patriotic”, Labour remains deferential to the Tories: largely accepting their positions and their

definitions of what matters. If Starmer wins the election, his acceptance of reckless Tory stances, for example on Brexit, may undermine his government, just as New Labour was ultimately undermined during the financial crisis by its acceptance of the oversized City of London that Thatcherism had created. Ideas inherited from other parties can be poison pills.

That said, we should not overestimate Starmer's common ground with Sunak. On probity in public life, [private schools](#), poverty and wealth, whom the economy should prioritise, social values and the environment, Labour and the Tories remain miles apart. The period until the next election, and the election itself, are likely to be acrimonious as a result. When fading governments steal ideas from their opponents, it's usually a sign that their diehards will do anything to stay in power.

- Andy Beckett is a Guardian columnist
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[**Crisis Somalia**](#)[**Global development**](#)

Somalia is not just a story of violence and state failure. Focus on our strengths

President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud

The country can overcome multiple urgent challenges to achieve sustainable development for and with the people



Somalia's President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud at the presidential palace in Mogadishu on 28 May. Photograph: Feisal Omar/Reuters

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About this content

Fri 9 Dec 2022 01.00 EST Last modified on Fri 9 Dec 2022 04.37 EST

Development is complex, but in complexity there is an opportunity for innovation if the right partnerships are formed.

In Somalia, [where the needs are extreme, multiple and urgent](#), there is no shortage of development projects, but more often than not, this dominates the global view of Somalia. However, this is not the full story.

Last week, Somalia held its first [International Investment Conference](#). The day before I opened this historic gathering, there was a cowardly terrorist attack on a hotel near the presidential offices, which sadly claimed innocent lives and injured many more. I could hear the fighting from my offices and residence throughout the night and the attack continued as the conference opened, coming to an end towards the early afternoon, thanks to the efforts of Somalia's brave security forces.

So, why did I still open a conference on this day? Because we refuse to succumb to the terrorists' intimidation tactics and [Somalia](#) is not a single narrative of violence and state failure. There is not just one story but many,

running concurrently to diverse stakeholders, all of whom we must keep on board.

Our situation today is one of hope, of finally overcoming the darkness of the past, which victimised and held down our entire society. Unfortunately, this story of success against the odds is not well told in the international development narratives that are still dominated by the current stark challenges and the perceptions of a crumbled Somalia. This is neither helpful to our national development nor a prudent basis from which to allocate and utilise much-needed donor financing.

This does not mean that Somalia does not have challenges that are hurting our people, challenges that are interwoven and cross-cutting as they are socioeconomic, about the climate, and security.

Today, we are in the midst of one of the worst droughts in history and, tragically, many of the most vulnerable are losing their lives and livelihoods. Our government is desperately trying to respond adequately with appropriate climate mitigation and adaptation measures alongside affected communities and the international community. The meagre resources that are available do not match the enormous need on the ground.

Somalia is threatened by al-Shabaab, the group linked to al-Qaida, who have made it their business to kill, maim and extort the Somali people for the past 15 years. This group once pretended to represent the peaceful religion of Islam but this charade has been exposed by their cruel and systematic violence against innocent people.

While al-Shabaab remains a clear threat in Somalia and the wider region, the government, people and international partners have mobilised in unison to confront them. This collective effort is bearing fruit in terms of the number of newly liberated territories and defeated terrorists who traumatised communities.

The liberation of people from terrorism, the strong grassroots-led uprising against al-Shabaab and the international partnership helping to facilitate the success of the war on terrorism are the real strengths that must be complemented with stabilisation assistance to ensure these historic gains

become permanent. In Somalia, or anywhere else, we cannot allow terrorists to make us lose our development focus.

Throughout decades of governance challenges, the Somali people have proved their resilience, ingenuity and moral courage

We are recovering from almost 30 years of devastating civil strife which destroyed the fabric of our society. The pain and loss from this period scars our nation and we are working hard to rebuild trust across different communities. Genuine national reconciliation is a must but it is not instant. In the same way, development is fraught with complexity and will not miraculously appear out of thin air.

So, what is the real solution? Our experience teaches us to focus on the strengths of the people and invest in available natural resources, including livestock, agriculture, the blue economy and digitalisation to achieve sustainable development for and with the people. These must be coupled with genuine commitment to inclusive politics and good governance, as we are in Somalia.

Throughout three decades of governance challenges – sometimes even without a functioning government – the Somali people have proved their resilience, ingenuity and moral courage to survive what would have destroyed many others in the world today. Somali people are the real drivers here and now they are ready to play an even bigger role.

Their priorities and contributions must lead the development agenda for all international partners. As we rebuild Somalia and its institutions, we know we want to be an inclusive, progressive and prosperous society anchored on strong democratic process with accountability and transparency as key pillars.

In post-conflict fragile states like Somalia, development is a slow marathon which is not about winning the race but getting people to run alongside. Every society is complex and unique. There are no perfect conditions for development implementation and we must deliver results to people who are suffering today.

Somalia will not be fixed by the next development project deadline. The issues we are dealing with are historic, deep and intergenerational. If we are able to focus on Somalia's strengths and look forward with optimism, the possibility for achieving sustainable development will be much greater.

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OpinionUkraine

For Ukrainians, poetry isn't a luxury, it's a necessity during war

Charlotte Higgins



Poetry is fulfilling a very human need – to make sense of the senseless and tell their stories



Illustration: Nate Kitch/The Guardian

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“There is so much poetry coming out of Ukraine now that I’m barely keeping up with it,” the Ukrainian translator and scholar Oksana Maksymchuk tells me. It is hardly the first thing that one would expect of a country at war. But poetry’s ability to, as she says, “crystallise a particular moment in time, or an emotion that is fleeting”, has led to an outpouring of poems – not so much emotion recollected in tranquillity, as the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings. Often these poems are posted by their authors on social media; the literary journal [Chytomo](#) has been gathering up and publishing examples, some by established poets, many by those new to the form, including soldiers. There is even a [Ukrainian government website](#) that encourages members of the public to upload their work. “Every poem, every line, every word is part of Ukrainian history,” the site says. “We know for sure that wars end, but poetry does not.” At the time of writing, more than 24,000 poems had been added to the site.

It is true that when Russia’s full-scale invasion started on 24 February, literature was the last thing on people’s minds – “you could not protect your family from a rifle with your poems”, as the writer Oleksandr Mykhed put it. But as the conflict has continued, the power of writing to record, to testify and to witness has seemed more and more important. Many Ukrainians

started to keep diaries, the “first responder”, perhaps, among literary genres, able to gather experience and emotion in its rawest form. But in surprising numbers, Ukrainians are also turning to poetry, while setting aside for the time being that time-greedy literary form, the novel. “It’s the condensation, the density of it, the way that you can arrange words so that they carry a lot,” explains Max Rosochinsky who, with Maksymchuk, is co-editor of an anthology of Ukrainian poems, [Words for War](#), born from the conflict that began in 2014 with Russian annexations in the Donbas and Crimea.

Some poets, during the current full-scale invasion, have found themselves harnessing their words to song, attracted to the direct catchiness of lyrics. [Lyuba Yakimchuk](#), for example, has collaborated on an album called Ukrainian Songs of Love and Hate – a collection of sarcastic, pitch-dark pop songs, one of them titled, uncompromisingly, [I Have a Dream \(Moscow's Burning\)](#). Another leading Ukrainian poet, [Serhiy Zhadan](#), was posting poems on his Facebook page right up until the invasion in February; lately, though, his most prominent output has been with his ska band Zhadan i Sobaky (Zhadan and the Dogs), including a song, [Metro](#), that reflects the experience of spending nights sheltering from missile attacks in a Kharkiv underground station.



Ukrainian poet Serhiy Zhadan performs in a bomb shelter in Kharkiv, eastern Ukraine, in April 2022. Photograph: Sergey Bobok/AFP/Getty Images

Daryna Gladun, a poet based in Bucha before the invasion, has written that the work she is producing at the moment “sits at the boundary between literature and journalism. It is poetry in uniform. I set aside metaphors to speak about the war in clear words.” It interests me that she uses metaphor to describe this process at the same time as apparently eschewing it: in the end, metaphor will out. If war involves a fracturing of language, it is poetry that will eventually creep in to fill the gaps.

One poet, Lesyk Panasiuk, has produced a poem ([translated into English](#) by Ilya Kaminsky and Katie Farris) that embodies the idea of the rupture of language through the physical collapse of signs and lettering on buildings hit by missiles. In the Hospital Rooms of My Country refers to “sentences that are blown by the mines in the avenues, stories/ shelled by multiple rocket launches”.

The novelist Victoria Amelina has turned for the moment from fiction to poems because the time is not right for novels, yet; as she writes in one poem, the new “war reality” is “devouring plot coherence”. Titled No [Poetry](#), it expresses anxiety about its own status as literature, when there are more urgent tasks at hand than writing poems. “As if shells hit language/ the debris from language/ may look like poems/ But they are not/ This is no poetry too/ Poetry is in Kharkiv/ volunteering for the army.”

The rupture of language – inextricable from the violent rupture of “normality” for Ukrainians – has one starting point in war’s euphemisms and lies. According to Vladimir Putin, for example, the invasion is not really an invasion, but a “special military operation”. When explosions are reported in the Russian media, they are often referred to as “claps”, like the innocuous clapping of hands. But for a slight difference in pronunciation, the Russian word for clap, *chlopok*, is identical to the Russian word for cotton. The Ukrainians have started facetiously using their own word for cotton, [bavovna](#), for such explosions; at the same time, a cloud of fluffy cotton fibre might remind you of smoke from a missile strike. That kind of wordplay is

already on a path towards the poetic; one of Yakimchuk and co's songs, indeed, is a dark [lullaby](#) based on that very slippage of meaning.

Poets, word-watchers par excellence, are watching meaning shifting its ground daily during this invasion. Yakimchuk, when we met in a Kyiv cafe, told me how in this time of war, she has watched the old symbolic systems no longer functioning, the usual cliches failing. You can't say something's "going nuclear" when nuclear missiles are an actual possibility, she says. Simple, everyday words suddenly come with a different weight. Take the word "light", for example. "I used to think of light as something that brought clarity. Then, after the invasion, we had to dim our lights at night, we masked our light," she says – she is speaking of urban blackouts. Now, though, "we have a totally different situation with electricity and attacks on energy infrastructure. Light has become more precious and valuable." Light – and all its attendant metaphors – has indeed become something that might be extinguished without warning.

Ostap Slyvynsky, a poet and translator based in Lviv, describes how Ukrainians have found themselves reaching back into history to find words capable of describing their situation. *Gauleiter*, the word for the German officials who governed conquered areas during the second world war, has sprung back into use to describe those administering Russian-occupied areas of [Ukraine](#).

At the beginning of the war, Slyvynsky eschewed writing in favour of volunteering at Lviv railway station. Handing out hot drinks and food to those fleeing from the east, though, he soon discovered that the refugees had another human need: to tell their stories. Their tales of loss, dislocation and escape often turned on the way a once familiar word had transformed its significance. He began working on what he calls a [Dictionary of War](#), charting these metamorphoses through short stories or vignettes. "It is pure documentary," he says. "There is nothing imagined, nothing fictionalised, nothing created by me in this text, but there came a moment when I understood that this was also poetry." Ukrainian writers often tell me that now is not the time for literary experimentation, but rather for directness and documentary. What is clear, though, is that they are experimenting almost despite themselves, as they edge towards the impossible task of expressing the inexpressible.

Charlotte Higgins is the Guardian's chief culture writer

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[Russia](#)

Brittney Griner freed from Russian prison in exchange for Viktor Bout

Basketball star released as US agrees to free convicted arms dealer in dramatic prisoner swap

'On her way home': Brittney Griner freed from Russian jail in prisoner swap – video report

[Richard Luscombe](#) and [Andrew Roth](#)

Fri 9 Dec 2022 05.19 ESTFirst published on Thu 8 Dec 2022 08.20 EST

Russia has freed the jailed US basketball star [Brittney Griner](#) in a dramatic high-level prisoner exchange for the notorious arms dealer [Viktor Bout](#), the so-called “Merchant of Death” who had been held in a US prison for 12 years.

Joe Biden, who had made Griner’s release a top priority after she spent almost 10 months in jail on drug charges, said in an address from the White House he found her “in good spirits” when speaking after the swap in Abu Dhabi.

“She’s safe, she’s on a plane, she’s on her way home after months of being unjustly detained in [Russia](#), held under intolerable circumstances,” he said. “Brittney will soon be back in the arms of her loved ones, and she should have been there all along.”

But the president expressed regret the deal did not include Paul Whelan, a Michigan corporate security executive jailed since December 2018 on espionage charges that his family and the US government deny.

Biden said: “Sadly, for totally illegitimate reasons, Russia is treating Paul’s case differently than Brittney’s. And while we have not yet succeeded in securing Paul’s release, we are not giving up. We will never give up.”

Griner’s wife, Cherelle, stood with Biden and the vice-president, Kamala Harris, and said she was “overwhelmed with emotion”.

“The most important emotion that I have right now is just sincere gratitude for President Biden and his entire administration. He just mentioned this work is not easy, and it has not been,” she said.

“Today my family is whole, but as you all are aware, there’s so many other families who are not whole. [Brittney] is not here to say this but I will gladly speak on her behalf and say that BG and I will remain committed to the work of getting every American home, including Paul, whose family is in our hearts today.”

The second such exchange in eight months, [following the freeing of Trevor Reed in April](#), procured the release of the most prominent American detained abroad.

The Russian foreign ministry confirmed to state media that Griner had been exchanged for Bout in a secret swap in Abu Dhabi but did not give more details.

Later [footage emerged](#) of the exchange of Griner for Bout on the grounds of Abu Dhabi’s airport; the Financial Times reported it was shot by Russia’s FSB security service.

Griner is a two-time Olympic gold medalist whose imprisonment on drug charges brought unprecedented attention to the population of wrongful detainees. She was arrested in February, convicted in August and [sentenced to nine years](#) in a Russian penal colony.

Biden’s authorization to release Bout underscored the pressure his administration faced to get Griner home. But it came at a price with the exclusion of Whelan, also classified as wrongfully detained. He was sentenced in 2020 to 16 years in prison.

Whelan's family welcomed the Griner exchange but said they were "devastated" he was not freed. "US government officials let us know in advance that Paul would be left behind," said his brother, David Whelan. "That early warning meant that our family has been able to mentally prepare for what is now a public disappointment for us. And a catastrophe for Paul."

Whelan himself spoke to CNN from Russia. "I don't understand why I'm still sitting here," he said. "I am greatly disappointed more has not been done to secure my release, especially as the four-year anniversary of my arrest is coming up."

He said he was aware the Russians treated him differently from Griner because he was convicted of espionage, and urged Biden to elevate efforts for his release "regardless of the price they might have to pay".

Brittney Griner and Viktor Bout exchanged on UAE airport tarmac – video

Antony Blinken, the US secretary of state, said the charges against Whelan were "a sham".

"This was not a choice of which American to bring home, the choice was one or none," he said at a lunchtime briefing. "I wholeheartedly wish that we could have brought Paul home today on the same plane as Brittney ... but we will stay at it."

After months of negotiations, Biden said in November he was hopeful. A top Russian official said last week a deal was possible before the end of the year. Even so, that the deal was a one-for-one swap was a surprise given US officials had for months expressed determination to bring home Griner and Whelan.

Bout is a former Soviet lieutenant colonel who the US justice department once described as one of the world's most prolific arms dealers. He was serving a 25-year sentence for conspiring to sell tens of millions of dollars in weapons US officials said were to be used against Americans.

But the detention of one of the greatest players in WNBA history contributed to a swirl of unprecedented public attention for an individual

dettainee case.

Griner's status as an openly gay Black woman, locked up in a country where authorities have been hostile to the LBGTQ+ community, infused racial, gender and social dynamics into her legal saga.

Her case emerged as a major inflection point in US-Russia diplomacy at a time of deteriorating relations prompted by Moscow's war against Ukraine, yielding the highest-level known contact between Washington and Moscow – a call between Blinken and the Russian foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov – in more than five months.

Blinken revealed publicly in July that the US had made a “substantial proposal” for Griner and Whelan. People familiar with it said the US offered Bout. Such a public overture drew a rebuke from the Russians and risked weakening the US hand. But the announcement was meant to communicate that Biden was doing what he could.

The release followed months of negotiations involving Bill Richardson, the former US ambassador to the United Nations, and his top deputy, Mickey Bergman. Joint mediation between United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia also played a role, the countries said on Thursday.

[Brittney Griner: jailed US basketball star's court appeal rejected by Russian court – video](#)

Griner was arrested at the Sheremetyevo airport in Moscow when officials said they found vape canisters with cannabis oil in her luggage. She pleaded guilty in July. She said in court she had no criminal intent and the canisters' presence in her luggage was due to hasty packing.

Before being sentenced on 4 August and receiving a punishment her lawyers said was out of line for the offense, Griner apologized “for my mistake that I made and the embarrassment that I brought”. She added: “I hope in your ruling it does not end my life.”

In May, the US state department designated her as unlawfully detained. A separate trade, the marines veteran Reed for Konstantin Yaroshenko, a

Russian pilot convicted in a cocaine-trafficking conspiracy, spurred hope of more exchanges.

The Associated Press contributed reporting

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[**France**](#)

Macron announces free condoms for 18-to 25-year-olds in France

President hails ‘revolution for contraception’ as government seeks to curb STIs and unwanted pregnancies



Emmanuel Macron announced the move during a health debate with young people in Fontaine-le-Comte. Photograph: Florion Goga/Reuters

Agence France-Presse in Fontaine-le-Comte

Fri 9 Dec 2022 03.48 EST Last modified on Fri 9 Dec 2022 11.39 EST

The French president has said condoms will be made available for free in pharmacies for 18- to 25-year-olds in an attempt to reduce unwanted pregnancies among young people.

“It’s a small revolution for contraception,” [**Emmanuel Macron**](#) announced during a health debate with young people in Fontaine-le-Comte, a suburb of Poitiers in western France.

The move comes after the government began offering [free birth control for all women under 25](#) this year, expanding a scheme targeting under-18s to ensure young women do not stop taking contraception because they cannot afford it.

Condoms are already reimbursed by the national healthcare system if prescribed by a doctor or midwife, a measure intended to fight the spread of Aids and other sexually transmitted infections.

On sexual education overall, the president said: “We are not very good on this subject. The reality is very, very different from the theory. It’s an area where we need to much better educate our teachers.”

Macron wore a face mask at the conference, saying he was following health ministry guidelines, as the government weighed its response to a rise in Covid cases in the run-up to Christmas, though so far no mask mandates had been reintroduced.

“Faced with the new spread of the epidemic ... I think it’s good to set an example because we don’t necessarily want to return to overall mandates,” he said.

Officials are urging people to wear masks in crowded venues and to get Covid vaccine booster shots as winter approaches.

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[Pakistan](#)

Pakistani journalist's killing in Kenya 'a pre-meditated murder'

Fact-finding team sent by Pakistani government finds contradictions in reports on Arshad Sharif's death



Members of a Shia Muslim religious-political organisation light candles for Arshad Sharif in Karachi after his death. Photograph: Rizwan Tabassum/AFP/Getty Images

Reuters in Islamabad

Fri 9 Dec 2022 04.00 EST Last modified on Fri 9 Dec 2022 06.54 EST

A team set up by the Pakistani government to investigate the killing of a well-known Pakistani journalist in Nairobi said it found several contradictions in the version given by Kenyan authorities, and believes it was a case of pre-meditated murder.

The TV journalist Arshad Sharif, who had fled Pakistan citing threats to his life, was shot dead in Nairobi in October. Kenyan officials [said it was a case of mistaken identity](#) and that police hunting car thieves opened fire on his vehicle as it drove through a roadblock without stopping.

A two-member fact-finding team from Pakistan that travelled to [Kenya](#) and conducted a number of interviews, examined and reconstructed the crime scene and trawled the deceased's phones and computers, said in a 600-page report that Sharif's killing was a pre-planned murder.

"Both the members of the [fact-finding team] have a considered understanding that it is a case of planned targeted assassination with transnational characters rather than a case of mistaken identity," said the report, copies of which were submitted to Pakistan's supreme court.

"It is more probable that the firing was done, after taking proper aim, at a stationary vehicle," it said.

Kenyan authorities declined to comment on the specifics of the report.

"The investigation into the matter is still ongoing, so there is not much I can tell," said Resila Onyango, a spokesperson for the Kenya National Police Service.

He said a multi-agency team was conducting the investigation, and would inform the authorities when it was completed.

Anne Makori, the chair of the Kenyan police watchdog, the Independent Police Oversight Authority, told Reuters investigations were ongoing.

Pakistan's interior minister, Rana Sanaullah, had said before the release of the report that [Sharif's body had bruises and torture marks](#), suggesting it was a targeted killing.

The fact-finding team highlighted one wound in particular on Sharif's back, saying it appeared to have been inflicted from relatively close range. The report noted there was no corresponding penetration mark of a bullet in the

seat on which Sharif was sitting when the shooting purportedly took place, calling it a “ballistic impossibility”.

“The injury had to have been caused either before the journalist got into the vehicle, or the shot was fired from a relatively close range, possibly from inside the vehicle, and almost certainly not a moving vehicle,” the report said.

Sharif had fled Pakistan citing threats to his life after the government registered several treason cases against him.

One of the cases stemmed from reporting Sharif did that led to an accusation that he had spread a call from an official in a previous government, led by Imran Khan, for members of the armed forces to mutiny. Sharif and the official denied inciting mutiny.

Khan said Sharif had been murdered for his journalistic work. He and his successor as prime minister, Shehbaz Sharif, had called for a judicial investigation.

The fact-finding team’s report also pointed out apparent contradictions between the autopsy reports in Kenya and Pakistan. The one in Pakistan identified 12 injuries on Sharif’s body whereas the Kenyan report identified just two injuries pertaining to gunshot wounds.

The fact-finding team report said doctors believed the injuries may have been the result of torture or a struggle, but it could not be established until verified by the doctor who conducted the post-mortem examination in Kenya.

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[New Zealand](#)

New Zealand ‘Baby W’ case: boy has surgery after court gives doctors guardianship

Six-month-old said to be doing well after court lets doctors perform heart surgery against wishes of parents who wanted only ‘unvaccinated’ blood used



The mother and father of ‘Baby W’ did not want the urgent surgery he needs to include use of ‘vaccinated’ blood. Photograph: Michael Craig/AP

Eva Corlett in Wellington

@evacorlett

Fri 9 Dec 2022 01.31 EST Last modified on Fri 9 Dec 2022 01.34 EST

A baby who was placed in his doctors’ care because his [parents refused to consent to a transfusion of “vaccinated blood” for the operation](#), has had life-saving surgery, the parents’ lawyer has said.

Sue Grey confirmed to broadcaster RNZ on Friday afternoon that the boy, identified only as “Baby W”, had had the procedure and was doing well.

On Wednesday this week, a [New Zealand high court judge ruled in favour of health authorities](#) who sought guardianship of the baby boy so his open-heart operation could proceed at Auckland’s Starship hospital. The six-month-old would not survive without urgent surgery for a congenital heart defect. His parents said they were unwilling to proceed unless they were given a guarantee he would receive blood only from unvaccinated donors.

The high court decision placed the boy in the guardianship of his paediatric heart surgeon and cardiologist so the surgery could proceed. The guardianship will last through his post-operative recovery – likely to be January 2023 at the latest. The parents retain guardianship in all other matters.

On Thursday morning the parents said, via lawyer Grey, that they would not appeal against the decision, and would prioritise a “peaceful time with their baby until the operation, and to support him through the operation”.

But later that day, Justice Ian Gault was forced to [issue a minute](#) ordering the parents to allow the doctors’ to make preparations for the surgery, after the health service reported they were obstructing staff taking blood tests, performing a chest X-ray and performing an anaesthetic assessment.

Gault pointed out that the issue of the surgery itself had not been in question in the original matter, but now the parents “evidently do not consent to the surgery or pre-operative checks” and he would therefore need to make further orders to enable the surgery to proceed.

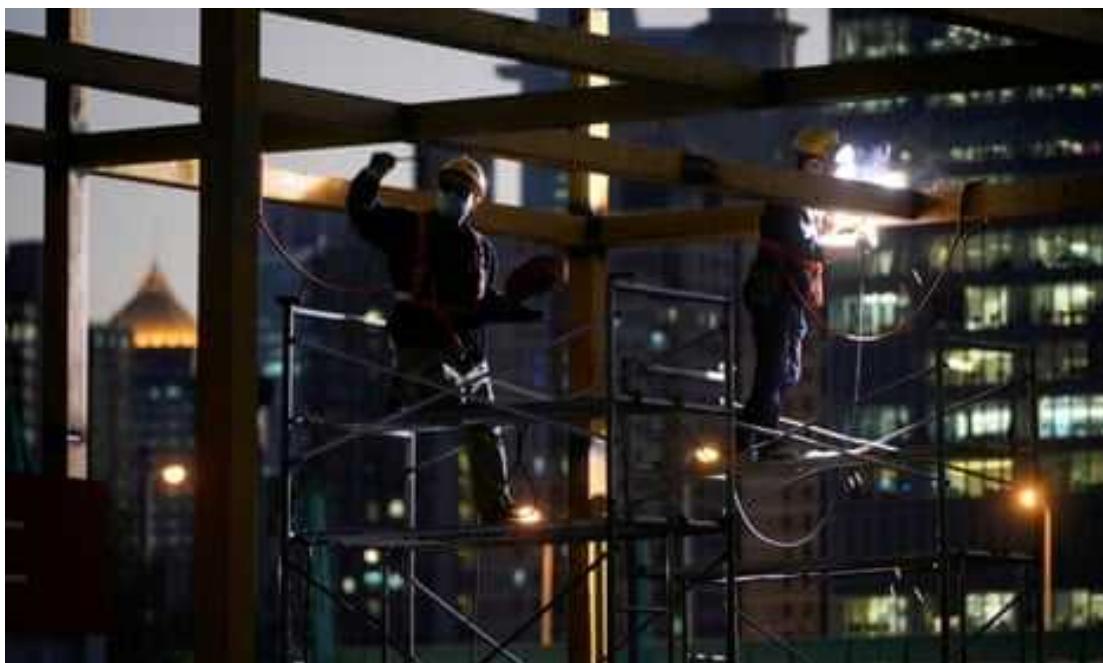
The [landmark case](#) is expected to have wide-ranging ramifications, drawing global attention and becoming a focus of protests for the anti-vaxxer movement. On Friday morning, a few dozen anti-vaccination protesters and supporters of the parents gathered outside the hospital.

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[**China**](#)

Markets optimistic as China eases Covid rules, but experts warn of danger ahead

Amid signs that supply chain woes are improving, economists remain uncertain that China is ready to live with Covid



There are hopes that a relaxation of zero-Covid rules will help spur growth in China. Photograph: Aly Song/Reuters

[Jonathan Yerushalmy](#) and agencies

Thu 8 Dec 2022 21.56 EST Last modified on Fri 9 Dec 2022 08.34 EST

Global shares and the price of some key commodities have risen on hopes that the easing of China's strict zero-Covid measures would help to bring down inflation, even as some experts warned that the country was not prepared to live with the disease.

China's government on Wednesday announced [a significant shift towards living with the virus](#). People with Covid-19 who have mild or no symptoms can quarantine at home, while officials have been instructed to stop launching temporary lockdowns. Testing will no longer be required for "cross-regional migrants".

China's economic growth will keep picking up pace with the implementation of the newly announced anti-Covid adjustment measures, the premier, Li Keqiang, was quoted by state media as saying on Thursday.

US-listed shares of Chinese companies rose, while Hong Kong's Hang Seng stock market index gained more than 3% on Thursday. The price of copper climbed on the promise of increased demand from China, its biggest consumer. Analysts hope that the easing of Covid measures will help restore global supply chains and, in turn, curb inflation.

"The realisation that China is going to be back online and producing product will help bring down inflation and that's a good thing. If inflation can come down, the Fed can step aside and pause," said Tim Ghriskey, chief investment strategist at Inverness Counsel in New York, referring to the US Federal Reserve's [recent run of interest rate hikes](#).

In signs that global supply bottlenecks have already begun to ease, the cost of shipping fell dramatically over recent months. In January, the cost of sending a single container from China to the US was \$20,000. In December that cost was around \$2,000.

The improvement in global supply chains was helped by a reduction in global demand. US spending on manufactured goods fell over the last three quarters, according to the US commerce department, likely due to the higher borrowing rates initiated by the US Federal Reserve.

US inflation fell from a peak of 9.1% in June to 7.7% in October, but remained far above the Fed's target of 2%.

As supply bottlenecks improve, the US might be able to avoid a recession, the US treasury secretary, Janet Yellen, said on Thursday.

Worldwide reduction in demand for goods, coupled with China's strict Covid policies, had a severe effect on Chinese manufacturing in November.

The value of the country's exports fell 8.7%, compared with the same time last year. Experts said restrictions, such as those which disrupted work at the [world's biggest iPhone factory in Zhengzhou last month](#), were responsible for much of the decline in China's exports.

China faces a "very complex problem" in adjusting its Covid policies, which have caused growth to slow, Yellen said. A positive change in China's Covid situation could lead to a "pickup" in growth, she added.

The lifting of some Covid restrictions has revived [demand for travel and some other services](#) in China, but economists warned that the promise of economic recovery next year is not certain, with the country's [fragile healthcare system and low vaccination rates](#) leaving it ill-prepared for a big wave of infections, which could spark labour shortages and make consumers even more skittish.

"Compared with other developed countries, medical resources in China are somewhat insufficient," said Nie Wen, a Shanghai-based economist at Hwabao Trust, who has cut his China growth forecast for the first quarter of 2023 to 3.5-4%, from 5% previously.

He cited a particular risk of Covid outbreaks when China celebrates the lunar new year holiday in January, a popular time for travel among the country's 1.4 billion people.

Economists and analysts were confident that overall, the reopening was more positive for growth.

"Lockdowns mean people can't travel, people can't consume, can't work," said Rich Nuzum, global chief investment strategist at Mercer.

"It's not humane to say it that way, but the GDP impact of lockdowns is a lot bigger than the GDP impact of letting the virus run."

Some experts warned that reopening could bring about a surge in inflation, which could hit the global economy as well as China itself.

“The potential reopening could bring inflationary challenges to China,” said Bruce Pang, chief economist at Jones Lang Lasalle.

As cases rise, “a surge in demand, especially the accelerating household consumption, and short-term disruption to labour supply, production and supply chains”, could drive inflation, Pang said.

Reuters and Associated Press contributed to this report

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- Live Keir Starmer says he does not think rejoining single market would boost economic growth ‘at this stage’
- Brexit Rejoining single market would not help UK economy, says Keir Starmer
- Constitutional reform Plan will end ‘sticking plaster politics’, says Starmer
- Labour Party unveils plan to overhaul constitution and replace the Lords

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Labour

Reversing Brexit now would not help UK economy, says Keir Starmer

Rejoining single market would create even more uncertainty, says Labour leader, who instead wants a ‘better Brexit’

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

Rejoining the EU will not help growth, says Keir Starmer – video

Peter Walker Political correspondent
[@peterwalker99](#)

Mon 5 Dec 2022 04.08 EST Last modified on Mon 5 Dec 2022 05.12 EST

Rejoining the EU’s single market would not boost UK economic growth, [Keir Starmer](#) has argued, saying it would create “years of uncertainty” for UK businesses, which would be worse than the closer trade links that would come.

In another sign of Labour’s [extreme reluctance](#) to be portrayed as seeking to dismantle or reverse Brexit, Starmer said that as prime minister he would instead seek to improve the post-departure deal agreed by Boris Johnson.

Asked if he thought single market membership would benefit UK growth, the Labour leader told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme on Monday: “No, at this stage I don’t think it would, and there’s no case for going back to the EU or going back into the single market. I do think there’s a case for a better [Brexit](#). I do think there’s a very good case for making Brexit work.”

Pressed on why he believed this when so many UK firms have said they are suffering because of the significant extra difficulties of exporting to and

importing from the EU, Starmer said the single market was not the solution.

“Trade has gone down because the deal we have got is not a very good deal,” he said. “I think we could move from getting Brexit done, which is all that we have managed at the moment, to making Brexit work. And I do think there is a better deal.

“But do I think that going back into years of wrangling, years of uncertainty, is going to help our economy? No, I don’t. I spent many years post-2016 talking to businesses who said to me over and over again, the thing that’s hardest for us is all the uncertainty. That really, for many years, held us back, and I don’t want to go back to that.

“But I do think that we can move forward to a better deal, because I do not think this one is working.”

Starmer insisted he would not revisit the idea even if, in the future, it appeared that trade barriers with the EU were harming growth.

“I understand, and will absolutely improve on the deal that we’ve got,” he said. “But let’s just recognise that the low growth in our economy has been going on for 12 years. It preceded Brexit, it preceded Covid and it preceded Ukraine. There is something fundamental about the way our economy works.”

Starmer’s stance is arguably more uncompromising than that of Jeremy Hunt, the chancellor, who was asked the same question by Today last month.

Asked if single market membership would boost growth, Hunt said “unfettered trade with our neighbours and countries all over the world is very beneficial to growth”, but that being in the single market was politically impossible as it would require the free movement of people.

Labour

Labour plan to reform constitution will end ‘sticking plaster politics’, says Starmer

Proposals, including abolishing House of Lords, aimed at moving power away from London

'New, smaller, democratically elected': Starmer shares plan to replace House of Lords – video

[Peter Walker](#), [Jessica Elgot](#) and [Severin Carrell](#)

Mon 5 Dec 2022 13.49 ESTFirst published on Mon 5 Dec 2022 03.54 EST

Keir Starmer has vowed to undertake a root-and-branch reform of the UK constitution, moving political power out of London, banning second jobs for MPs and abolishing the [House of Lords](#).

The plans are a victory for the former prime minister [Gordon Brown](#), who has pushed for Labour to set out a bold strategy that would hand new powers to local and regional government, including over transport and infrastructure, development funding, housing, training and jobcentres.

Starmer said political reforms such as the abolition of the Lords were fundamental to the redrawing of the British economy. “The driving force of the report is this sense that politics is broken and the economy is broken and we need to fix both parts,” he said.

At the centre of the proposals, set out in a 155-page document, is an overarching commitment to decentralisation, including a new constitutional commitment for Westminster to respect the autonomy of local and regional government.

[The report](#), put together by a commission headed by Brown, lists 40 recommendations, including new proposals to clean up Westminster, replacing the Lords with a small elected second chamber of nations and regions, and a ban on most second jobs for MPs.

Launching the plan in Leeds alongside Brown and Tracy Brabin, the [Labour](#) mayor of West Yorkshire, Starmer said too many places were being “held back by a system that hoards power in Westminster”.

“I don’t see it as handing power away. I see it as putting power where it should be,” the Labour leader said.

Despite the breadth of the report, Starmer has faced a backlash from supporters of proportional representation for rejecting that as part of the democratic reforms, as well as accusations of hypocrisy over his stance on a second referendum for Scottish independence.

The progressive thinktank Compass, a key driver behind a campaign by Labour members for electoral reform, said the report lacked the depth and breadth needed to tackle the UK’s “democratic disillusionment”, and failed to involve citizens in designing “a new democracy from the start”.

Starmer dismissed Nicola Sturgeon’s claims that the next general election will be fought in Scotland as a “de facto referendum” on independence, saying issues at a national poll cannot “be reduced by somebody else into a completely different constitutional question”.

But he said Labour would have a mandate to implement its constitutional reforms, including abolishing the Lords, if it won the general election.

Sturgeon’s spokesperson said Starmer’s claims were “bizarre” and “hypocritical”, adding: “They will claim a mandate for their constitutional proposals regardless of whether or not voters in Scotland endorse them, and yet they will simultaneously stand shoulder to shoulder with the Tories in blocking the cast-iron democratic mandate which exists for an independence referendum.”

Starmer said that while he had not backed Brexit and did not support Scottish independence, he could sympathise with the underlying idea of people wanting “more control over their lives, more control over their country”, and feeling dissatisfied with remote Westminster politics.

He dismissed questions about whether it was self-indulgent or out of touch to discuss broader constitutional and devolution issues rather than focusing on immediate crises such as the cost of living, saying UK politics had been cursed for too long by short-term thinking.

“Whenever any politician sets out on the answer to the underlying issue, the medium and long term, every journalist says: ‘But I want an answer to what’s going to happen the next few weeks,’ and we go on and on.”

Such an approach would be going on “with a sticking plaster approach forever”, Starmer said. “We’ve been doing it for 12 years. It’s one of the reasons we haven’t got anywhere.”

Other recommendations in Brown’s commission on the UK’s future include “place-based, innovation-led R&D [research and development] programmes” to create new clusters of economic activity, and transferring 50,000 civil service jobs out of London.

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Local government would be given more power to generate its own revenue, while the devolved governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland would be granted more say.

On political reform, as well as replacing the Lords with an elected “assembly of the nations and regions”, there would be a crackdown on MPs’ outside earnings, and laws “to eliminate foreign and corrupt money from UK politics”, enforced by a new anti-corruption commissioner.

Sources within Labour said Brown had categorically won arguments within the party, up to the 11th hour, which meant the reforms were on the boldest end of the spectrum of what was proposed. Even the night before the launch, Labour was cautious about promising full-scale Lords abolition, but in public on Monday Starmer was unequivocal.

He said the aim was to have as much possible ready before an election. These were, he said, “recommendations capable of being implemented within the first five years of a Labour government”.

In his introduction, Brown said half of the UK population lived in areas that were poorer than parts of eastern Europe, while polling showed there was a lack of trust in politicians to change anything.

“The United Kingdom that built the modern world was not a trickle-down nation, it was a country where innovation and growth rose up from ports, factories and warehouses across every part of the land,” the former prime minister wrote.

“To succeed in the modern world and to realise the United Kingdom’s vast potential, we must once again harness the talents, skills and resource of every nation, region, town and city in the land.”

Speaking at the launch event, Brown said the report was calling for “the biggest transfer of power out of Westminster and Whitehall to the localities and the biggest transfer of power that our country has seen”.

The overall aim was “ditching a century of centralisation”, and “ending the long era of the man in Whitehall somehow knowing best”, he added.

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Labour

Labour unveils plan to overhaul constitution and replace the Lords

Gordon Brown's Commission on the UK's Future also aims to curb influence of wealth and foreign money



All 40 of Gordon Brown's recommendations will now be subject to consultation. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

[Rowena Mason](#) and [Libby Brooks](#)

Sun 4 Dec 2022 17.30 EST Last modified on Mon 5 Dec 2022 11.14 EST

Labour will consult on replacing what the party calls the “indefensible” [House of Lords](#) with an elected chamber as part of a 40-point plan written by Gordon Brown to overhaul the constitution, but stopped short of committing to its abolition in the manifesto.

Keir Starmer will on Monday join Brown for the launch of the former prime minister’s Commission on the UK’s Future, which makes recommendations

on Lords reform, devolution of power and the future of the union.

The party said its centrepiece would involve mass transfer of power from Westminster to the people and their local areas, with Starmer saying “the centre hasn’t delivered”.

Brown recommends cultivating “300 emerging clusters of the new economy” and eliminating “Westminster and Whitehall bias and giving everywhere a fair share of our future prosperity”.

Labour said one of Brown’s recommendations would be [the abolition of the Lords](#), as well as new rules to “end the undue influence of wealth and foreign money, and prevent MPs part-timing the job”.

Brown also recommends “tighter enforcement of the rules, with the public directly represented in a new integrity commission” for politicians and public life.

All 40 of Brown’s recommendations will now be subject to consultation, with the conclusions of that further process ending up in Labour’s manifesto.

Abolishing the House of Lords would shake up a centuries-old constitutional model and would be likely to face resistance from existing peers. Lord McFall, the Lord Speaker and a former Labour MP, is due to give a speech on Wednesday arguing for consensus-based reform of the Lords.

In comments released ahead of the Brown report, Starmer made no mention of the House of Lords, instead concentrating on how Labour would bring about “real economic empowerment for our devolved government, the mayors, and local authorities”.

This would include new powers over transport and infrastructure, development and housing, such as compulsory purchase orders on vacant sites, and measures to stimulate growth.

“We have an unbalanced economy, which makes too little use of the talents of too few people in too few places,” he will say on Monday. “We will have

higher standards in public life, a wider spread of power and opportunity, and better economic growth that benefits everyone, wherever they are. By setting our sights higher, wider, better, we can build a better future together.”

Bridget Phillipson, the shadow education secretary, said on Sunday that Labour will make sure there is an elected second chamber, and the plan is for it to be done in the first term. “We will be consulting ahead of the manifesto around how we make that happen,” she added.

In an interview with the Sunday Times, Starmer said there were “questions of implementation”, telling the newspaper: “The answer is that this is the bit of the discussion that comes after Monday, because that’s testing the propositions, refining them, and then crucially answering, thinking when and how this is implemented.

“What will require legislation, what won’t require legislation, whether we want to do each of the steps. The purpose of that is to craft a manifesto that says, ‘This is the overall project, these are the bits we intend to do in the five years, this is the delivery you can expect to see.’”

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Brown is believed to be keener on abolition of the Lords than some other senior party figures, who fear that a lengthy public debate over constitutional reform could overshadow more important priorities in a first-term Labour government.

The former prime minister gave a separate briefing on Scotland on Sunday in which he made the case for a new council of the UK chaired by prime

minister, which would also meet as a council of the nations and regions to examine common issues.

“We are going to of course abolish the House of Lords and replace it with a reformed second chamber in which there will be enhanced Scottish representation and it would have a constitutional role to protect the devolution settlement,” he said.

In an early draft of the report [leaked to the Guardian in September](#), Brown recommended that the House of Lords would be reformed as an assembly of regions and nations, with a remit of safeguarding the constitution and with power to refer the government to the supreme court.

In his presentation, Brown insisted there is support for radical change from voters across the UK, but in Scotland “middle Scotland” – the group Brown has previously identified as those who feel more Scottish but have not written the British dimension out of their lives – believe by margin of 50% to 10% that a serious plan to change Britain could be more attractive than independence.

His report also recommends that the civil service and agencies should be dispersed from London to Scotland, and an enhanced role for Scotland internationally, with new powers for Scottish government to enter into international agreements and bodies such as Erasmus, Unesco and the Nordic Council.

This article was amended on 4 December 2022. An earlier version said that Lord McFall had been a Conservative MP; he was, in fact, a Labour MP from 1987 to 2010.

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The 20 best songs of 2022

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‘I come in peace to make love!’ Vanessa Feltz on the culture wars, quitting the BBC and life as tabloid fodder

[Chris Godfrey](#)



'I'm enjoying the freedom to, if something strikes me as utterly ridiculous, straight away to call it out' ... Vanessa Feltz at home in London.
Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

The radio and TV presenter has left the corporation after the best part of two decades. She talks about dealing with ageism, racism, misogyny and 'fattism', joining TalkTV, and her pioneering meltdown on Celebrity Big Brother



Mon 5 Dec 2022 01.00 ESTLast modified on Mon 5 Dec 2022 05.20 EST

‘Come round and let me see your face,’ orders [Vanessa Feltz](#), as I wander into a tidy kitchen of pink counters and framed newspaper front pages, where she is sitting with a couple of makeup artists. ‘You look young and handsome, delightful, naive!’ she tells me. ‘You don’t look like a seasoned hater who’s been doing this for years.’ Rapid small talk ensues, covering everything from why she’d be terrible on I’m a Celebrity (she says she has turned them down multiple times, yet they keep offering more money) to questions about my ‘romantic status’.

To call this a charm offensive would be to imply that Feltz cares deeply about the resulting write-up. Really, she says, she couldn’t care less.

“I did have cause, after all these years, to really consider just what is the point of these interviews. What are they for? Why does anyone read them? Why does anyone write them? Is the idea that the person comes in and somehow dismantles your facade?”

I’m under no illusion I’ll break down any facade, I tell her.

“Well, you might well do! Have a good bash at it. Who knows?”

It's all go at Feltz's home, a converted chapel in St John's Wood in north-west London, where she lives with her partner, the singer and actor Ben Ofoedu. There's a steady flurry of activity at the front door: a photographer, a representative from her [new employer, News UK's TalkTV](#), a courier dropping off yet more tickets to an award show ("I've got five invitations to this and they keep sending me more!") and a UPS driver delivering a new mattress. Our conversation is no less busy. It feels like the quintessential Feltz experience: loud, camp, slightly combative but extremely entertaining. There's a hurricane of anecdote and gossip until you're not quite sure how you ended up talking about the time Feltz went on a date with a famous boxer who didn't ask her a single question about herself (no, she won't say who).

And there's a lot of ground to cover. For the best part of two decades, Feltz was one of the BBC's flagship presenters, carving out a reputation as one of the hardest-working women in broadcasting with her 4am starts on Radio 2's This Morning, followed immediately by Radio London's Breakfast Show at 7am. In July, [she announced through tears that she'd be leaving both](#). She joined TalkTV in September, replacing Jeremy Kyle on the network's three-hour drivetime slot.



Feltz and Ben Ofoedu after her final show for Radio 2. Photograph: James Manning/PA

The show is a mix of news bulletins, hot-topic discussions, expert panellists and plenty of what she always calls her “lovely listeners”. She is very much enjoying the fact it’s on TV and one day hopes her listeners will be able to video call in. “I want to see them – and if they’re naked and masturbating, so what?”

Feltz, 60, is also enjoying her new-found liberty. “I’m enjoying the freedom to be a bit more pissed-off than I normally could be,” she says. “I’m enjoying the freedom to, if something strikes me as utterly ridiculous, straight away to call it out.”

Since launching in April, TalkTV has earned a reputation for fuelling the culture wars. Its high-profile rightwing shock-jocks, Piers Morgan and Julia Hartley-Brewer, host such discussions as “Should wearing a poppy be compulsory?” or “Was Churchill racist?” Other recent targets include inclusive language, rail unions, trans rights, “virtue-signalling” footballers and, of course, cyclists. Did Feltz have any misgivings about joining Rupert Murdoch’s media empire?

“No, I was thrilled,” she says. “What, the home of the Times? My father used to read the Times. It was spoken of reverentially in our house. And as far as the channel is concerned, definitely I have been employed to be myself and to behave as I behave. I’ve been employed to essentially do what I’ve been doing for years and years on the [BBC](#), which is to *listen*. To listen to callers, and also to field different points of view.”

And she feels no pressure to join the culture wars?

“I have no interest in engaging in war of any kind,” she says. “I come in peace to make love and to try to do my best to understand, and pilot myself and other people through this ghastly cost of living crisis.”

The day before, her show’s guests included activists from [Just Stop Oil](#). She cites their eloquence as evidence that meaningful debate is still possible. “When they come on the show, they’re very, very good at explaining why [they do what they do]. And then you suddenly think: ‘Oh my gosh, do I want my great-grandchildren frying? I don’t really. Maybe I should go and glue myself to a bollard!’”

Her goal, she says, is simply to have a “good, spirited debate”, to make the news accessible. “Maybe I’m just naive,” she adds, “but I always hope that there is a point to it.”

Feltz is in no mood to talk about her early life, beyond stating that she had a delightful childhood in north London in a close Jewish family. But, after studying English literature at the University of Cambridge, she married a junior doctor, started a family (they had two daughters, who now have four children between them) and began writing columns for the Jewish Chronicle. She was invited on to a BBC Radio London (then GLR) show called Jewish London to discuss a column she’d written about Jewish mothers. It was a success and she returned many times until she was eventually asked to present the show in 1989.

I went to the BBC partly for the legitimacy of being part of the BBC, and was very, very badly let down

Years later, she sought out other opportunities in the BBC. “I said: ‘Please could I cross over? Do you think you might try me on a human show, rather than a Jewish show?’”

The reply, she says, was in effect: “‘Oh, I don’t think you’d cross over. You’re a Jew – just stay in your lane’.”

“I’d read English literature at Cambridge!” she says. “I hadn’t got a European Fiddler on the Roof type accent and also you couldn’t see me, so they couldn’t say I looked Jewish.”

Her “mainstream” appeal eventually became clear when her boss had a chance encounter with a barman who made him wait for a drink while he finished listening to “our Vanessa”. “This anonymous barman that I’ve never met and don’t know obviously showed that I had crossed over. So then I was allowed to have a late-night show.”

She continued to present her Sunday night slot on BBC London until 1994, when she was poached to host a new daytime talkshow on ITV. Vanessa, as the show was called, was one of the first in Britain to focus on the private

lives of the public, and Feltz was compared to Oprah Winfrey. “I thought it was ridiculous. She was an American institution; I was a complete unknown,” says Feltz. That said, she adds: “Everybody loved it.”

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Feltz in the Big Brother house in 2001. Photograph: PA

In 1999, Feltz, now a household name, returned to the BBC to make *The Vanessa Show*, which followed a similar format. But this was cancelled after just seven months when it emerged producers had paid actors to pose as guests. The affair still rankles. “I went to the BBC partly for the legitimacy of being part of the BBC and then obviously was very, very badly let down. Because the show was called *The Vanessa Show*, the person blamed was me.

I will take any blame I deserve – but I didn't deserve that because I hadn't booked any guests for the show."

The infamy was short-lived. Feltz rejoined BBC London as a presenter in 2001. Such was her profile that year that Richard Curtis asked her to enter the Celebrity Big Brother house. She spent just three days there, but that was long enough for a meltdown that secured her a place in the pantheon of great Big Brother contestants, as she ignored orders and scrawled words such as "incarcerated" and "restricted" on a chalkboard.

People still stop her in the street to talk about it. "My children always say I was the absolute pioneer of discombobulating on reality TV – sobbing, weeping and all that. Since I've done that, everyone's done it – but I was the first."

There are aspects of fame that she loves, such as walking through an airport and having fans ask her how her holiday was. "It's like, 'Bloody hell, my whole country is thrilled to see me. They love me here!'" she says. Others she is less keen on. "I don't like it when it's something like your mother dying of cancer and you're coming out of the hospital and there are a whole load of photographers," she says. "I didn't like it when my husband left [he divorced her in 2000] and it was completely heartbreakin, and paparazzi were jumping out from behind our rhododendron bushes and following me and the girls."

Then there is the media's fascination with her weight, with tabloid front pages and an endless stream of articles speculating about gains and, more recently, "miraculous losses". Looking back, she feels she was "vilified" and "violently criticised" and had to put up with a "real level of vituperative bile". But she stops short of calling it bullying – "an anachronism of a word".

She has had to deal with "racism, misogyny, fattism", she says. (In 2017 the Sunday Times was accused of antisemitism when it published a column that suggested her BBC salary was only high because she was Jewish.) "People don't like what they consider to be a mouthy woman, but what they really mean is a woman with an opinion or a view. They think women should just shut up."

Dealing with the intrusion and criticism hasn't got any easier. "It's absolutely horrible. And the idea that you develop some rhinoceros hide and you don't feel what any other person would feel ... *of course* I haven't got some superpower that means when someone says something horrible to me I'm not upset."

Why does she think the tabloids are so obsessed with her?

"I really don't know," she says. "But I do know that some people are on television every single day for years and they are not tabloid characters. And some people are tabloid fodder – and I've always been that person from day one."

Feltz describes her decision to leave the BBC this year as "hellish, absolutely terrible". So why did she do it? First, she was so exhausted she'd started turning up at the studio at 4am on the wrong day. "All the time my grandchildren have been alive – they're eight, seven, three and brand new – I've been jetlagged the whole time."



'Some people are tabloid fodder – and I've always been that person from day one.' Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

Then, with 18 months left on her contract, Feltz wasn't sure she had the standing within the organisation that she used to. She mistakenly booked a holiday during the Queen's platinum jubilee – not a luxury that star presenters would usually be afforded. "I said, 'Surely you don't want me to go away?' and they said, 'Oh no, it'll be fine – have a lovely, lovely time.'" The indifference was telling.

She also worried that her age might make her disposable. "I was aware of women over the age of 60 suddenly biting the dust," Feltz says. "I don't think that I would have been exempt from that at all." Many Radio 2 listeners have complained about the departure of Paul O'Grady and the loss of Steve Wright's afternoon show. "Who would ever not want *Paul O'Grady* to broadcast for them," she asks. "He's utterly unique as a radio voice!"

"It seems to be a casual culling and jettisoning of proper broadcasting adornments," she adds. "And it feels as if that casualness and that callousness is applying not just to the presenters but to the audience. It's like, 'Oh, we don't need you and we don't want you. You're too old, you're too staid, you're too middle-class, you're too middle-aged.'"

The corporation's "merciless chasing of younger audiences", she believes, results in it commissioning and tailoring programmes for an audience who aren't interested. She likens it to Marks & Spencer, "constantly targeting the Alexa Chung, Kate Moss audience".

And the decision to leave was hers alone?

"Yes." It's a rare one-word answer, followed by an even rarer pause. But she can't leave it at that, claiming that she got wind of the recently announced cuts to local broadcasting. "Have you seen what's happened to local radio? I had to leave, didn't I? I could feel it coming. It's a terrible, terrible mistake," she says. "I think it's absolutely heartbreakingly ... I just thought: 'I do not want to preside over the demise of this.' You might think I'm being overdramatic, but I honestly, genuinely, really cared about it."

I suspect there's a lot more Feltz wants to say about the BBC. But she is as interested in looking forward, excited about her TalkTV show's "whole new world" of "dynamism" and "can-do attitudes". Plus, she no longer feels self-

conscious about her age. “No one has referred to it at all,” she says, “I’m 60. I’m Jewish. I’ve got a gastric bypass. They haven’t said I have to be 23 with a certain leg length and a certain boobage. Nobody has said, ‘Put a veil over the camera and some Vaseline because Vanessa’s coming!’ And I didn’t feel the same at the BBC. So glory, glory to Rupert Murdoch and thank you, Mr Murdoch, very much indeed for having me.”

Watch or listen to Feltz’s new show from Monday to Friday, 4-7pm, on TalkTV and TalkRadio.

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Movies

Knits, tinsel and A Christmas Karen: the best and worst new festive films

Lindsay Lohan's comeback in Falling for Christmas puts Netflix in a strong position but there are countless hunks-in-plaid yuletide romcom options this year



Just one more knitted snowball ... Lindsay Lohan in Falling for Christmas.
Photograph: Scott Everett White/Netflix



[Stuart Heritage](#)

[@stuheritage](#)

Mon 5 Dec 2022 04.39 EST Last modified on Mon 5 Dec 2022 04.40 EST

Some say that Christmas is about goodwill to all men, but screw those guys. If you know even the slightest amount, then you know Christmas is all about being a hard-nosed, big-city gal who gets stranded in her rural home town and, while initially resistant to her surroundings, slowly falls for the charms of small-town America while developing a heady crush on a wholesome, plaid-clad local man.

This, after all, has been the exact plot of several hundred Christmas TV movies over the years. By this point it is an unbreakable blueprint, and this year is no exception. Sky Cinema, for example, is about to unveil *This is Christmas*; a film about an uptight city woman who slowly falls for the charms of a wholesome, knitwear-clad stranger who invites everyone on his commuter train to a Christmas party. Does it look good? Absolutely not. Will you watch it one rainy Saturday afternoon in December, slightly tipsy on mulled wine, and cry at the end? Very possibly.

But *This is Christmas* is just the start. Almost every single streaming service is heaving with formulaic new Christmas movies this year. Below are some

prime examples. But if it seems like a lot, just be thankful that you aren't American. A recent [EW feature listed 169 Christmas movies](#) that are being released this year alone in the US on a wealth of highly obscure channels. Movies such as Our Italian Christmas Memories (Hallmark Movies and Mysteries), Destined at Christmas (Great American Family), and Meeting Mr Christmas (Chicken Soup for the Soul, which I swear is a real channel). In comparison, the UK has far fewer films to sit through – although some would argue that it is still far too many.

Netflix

Falling for Christmas

Not only Netflix's big Christmas tentpole, but a [Lindsay Lohan](#) comeback vehicle at that. In Falling for Christmas, Lohan plays a selfish, big-city influencer who badly concusses herself on a mountain, loses her memory and identity and ends up falling for a wholesome plaid-clad small-town hunk. It isn't a good film, but it's nice to see Lohan back on the rails. Better yet, the plot of this movie makes it a spiritual successor to her 2007 film I Know Who Killed Me.

Christmas With You

In which a selfish, big-city pop star ends up in small-town America for reasons too confusing to explain, and ends up falling for a wholesome knitwear-clad widower, played by Freddie Prinze Jr.

The Noel Diary

Just to make sure that things don't become too formulaic, there is also The Noel Diary. Here, a selfish, big-city author (a man!) returns to small-town America when his mother dies, only to discover a wholesome knitwear-clad babe (a woman!) whose mother also just died.

Now TV

A Christmas Story Christmas

Remember A Christmas Story? The 1983 Christmas film that is beloved by Americans and only Americans, and has never had even a sniff of cultural

cachet over here. Well, now there's a sequel. Do with this information what you will.

Paramount+

A Christmas Masquerade

Paramount+ is the new kid on the block, streaming-wise, and has set itself apart from the pack by releasing a Christmas movie which contains exactly zero plaid-clad small-town hunks. Instead, this is the story of a woman who goes to a masked Christmas ball in her friend's place, and ends up falling in love with a suave millionaire. Meanwhile – and this is the big twist – the friend stays at home with the woman's daughter and realises that she was wrong to never want children of her own. Groundbreaking.

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Roku Channel

Another Christmas

In which a selfish, big-city baseball player returns to his small-town home town and realises that he is still in love with his wholesome childhood sweetheart, who is now a primary school teacher. This sounds absolutely generic, but one thing sets Another Christmas apart from the rest: it has Black people in it. If you know your Christmas television movies, you will know that Black people are even rarer than films without wholesome plaid-clad hunks, which is really saying something.

Disney+

The Hip Hop Nutcracker

This is less a generic Christmas romcom and more, to quote Disney itself, “a hip-hop reimagining of The Nutcracker ballet set in New York City”. On the plus side, it is only 44 minutes long. On the downside, it is starting to feel like Lin-Manuel Miranda should be made to sit on the naughty step for even indirectly influencing this.

Other

A Christmas Karen

OK, here’s the thing. None of the major streaming platforms are showing A Christmas Karen, and it seems to be especially hard to rent or buy anywhere. But, from [the premise and trailer alone](#), I am prepared to call it my favourite of this year’s festive output. It appears to be an update of A Christmas Carol except, rather than Scrooge, the main character is an uptight, entitled white woman who is visited by visions of Christmas Past, Present and Future. If the trailer is any indication, the film’s climax comes with Karen tearfully pleading with death, saying: “I promise to never ask for the manager ever again”. Please can Netflix snap this up as soon as possible?

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[The Observer](#)[Global development](#)

[Interview](#)

South Africa's 'black mermaid' on Disney, diversity and reclaiming the ocean for children of colour

[Tracy McVeigh](#)

Zandile Ndhlovu, the country's first black female freediving instructor, is on a mission to change long-held attitudes and teach young people to feel at home in the sea



Zandile Ndhlovu, South Africa's first black female freediving instructor, is changing perceptions of the ocean. Photograph: Zander Botha/Courtesy of Black Mermaid Foundation

Global development is supported by

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About this content

Mon 5 Dec 2022 01.30 EST Last modified on Mon 5 Dec 2022 05.00 EST

On the dive boats no one else looked like her. “People would say ‘are you really going to dive with all that hair?’ It’s funny until it’s not, sitting in that space and being very ‘other’,” says Zandile Ndhlovu, South Africa’s first black female freediving instructor.

“Even the wetsuits, they were not designed for a black woman. It fits your hips so you wear it, but the water is gushing in everywhere else. So all these challenges can’t help but remind you that you are the only one,” she says.

Now the 34-year-old – who was called the black mermaid at home long before the Disney [live action remake of the Little Mermaid](#) elated her by casting black actor Halle Bailey – has taken on the role of bringing more children into the water.

Born in Soweto, Johannesburg, Ndhlovu grew up far from the coast, and like many children in South [Africa](#), was raised on tales of why she should never go near deep water.

Ndhlovu first saw the ocean when she went to visit family in the Eastern Cape, aged about 12. “That was the first time seeing wild, gushing waters,

but everyone, black people, would say ‘why are you trying to kill yourself?’ if you went as much as up to your knees in water.”



Zandile Ndhlovu says she grew up being encouraged to stay away from the sea. Photograph: Zander Botha/Courtesy of Black Mermaid Foundation

“Then I went snorkelling when I was on a trip to Bali in 2016. I was 28, and had never seen anything that looked so beautiful. All these weird and wonderful animals coexisting at the bottom of the ocean, while on land the world is so banded, in identity, race, gender.”

How do we unbox the water from only being a white people’s space? I wanted to change the narrative

Zandi Ndhlovu

Despite a string of Olympic swimmers and about 2,800km (1,739 miles) of stunning coastline, [just 15%](#) of South Africans can swim – and most of those are white. During apartheid, white children would play in the private pools that remain a fixture of middle-class suburban homes, while few black children would even have seen a public swimming pool.

With up to four people drowning every day in South Africa’s lakes, dams, oceans and private pools, almost all of them black, that legacy remains.

Drowning is a hugely neglected public health risk in low-income and middle-income countries, especially across Africa, where the rates are high, opportunities to learn to swim are low and folk tales about the destructive power of the waves prevail. Racial disparity in swimming is prevalent across the world; in the US, for example, 64% of African American children cannot swim compared with 40% of white children.

There have been a few cases – before Disney – of cinema pushing back against the stereotypes, from the beautifully shot swimming lesson in 2017's [Oscar-winning Moonlight](#) to the underwater scenes of box office smash Black Panther: Wakanda Forever. Ndhlovu has her own [documentary](#) out on WaterBear, a free streaming platform, and her foundation, [the Black Mermaid](#), focuses on bringing about change.



Ndhlovu has set up a foundation to encourage more people into the ocean.
Photograph: Zander Botha/Courtesy of Black Mermaid Foundation

“In South Africa, black people are displaced from the ocean, it is a haunted place, and its history wraps around this narrative firmly, a place of the transatlantic slave trade.

“So how do we unbox the water from only being a white people’s space?” she says. “For me, I need to be in the ocean, it is where I feel peace. In 2020,

I qualified as a freedive instructor. I wanted to change the narrative around black people in water that was being thrown around so recklessly.

“And people have held on to that narrative, everybody absorbs it and it is where we find ourselves around water, today. My own grandmother would say ‘you shouldn’t be there. The ocean is not a place to play.’ Black people say to me all the time ‘why are you doing white things?’ My family was freaked out,” she says.

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“I started [the foundation](#) to challenge all that, to actively take part in hard conversations about the status quo, and what it would take to diversify the ocean. I might have to take 500 kids snorkelling to get one kid passionate, but it is worth it. Now, we are building in swimming lessons. So very many kids can’t swim.”

The environmental degradation of the ocean is something that concerns Ndhlovu greatly and she believes that connecting children with the underwater world helps raise their awareness.

“You see the corals bleaching,” she says. “You are seeing a lot of plastic pollution and this aspect is important for the kids to see. These worlds colliding.”

Change often occurs in tiny, gradual steps, she says. “I see the parents in shock, they say, ‘Never in my life did I think to see my kids under the ocean.’ It’s a generational thing but it gives them pride and equal status

because being in the ocean has been a very exclusive thing, even for people who live close by.”



Ndhlovu: ‘They feel empowered. It’s so important to get the kids in the water.’ Photograph: Zander Botha/Courtesy of Black Mermaid Foundation

Ndhlovu adds: “They feel empowered. Most of the kids are afraid, they jump out and cling on to the buoy screaming if they see a fish. You can feel the fear. But fear, sometimes we need to walk into it. It’s so important to get the kids in the water.”

A former industrial relations expert, Ndhlovu is now a full-time instructor and runs the foundation mainly out of her own pocket. But she hopes the idea of black African children reclaiming the sea will take hold in her country and beyond.

“That’s why to me, too, this Disney film is important,” she says. “When people see this, it explodes their idea of what a mermaid is. It allows a greater proportion of the world to be that mermaid – ‘Ariel looks like me’.”

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2022.12.05 - Opinion

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- My divorced parents are competing for the affection of their grandson – and everyone wins!
- The rightwing press will never back Keir Starmer – but he can win without them
- Hunger has taken hold across Africa. We need a new approach to tackling its causes

[**Opinion**](#)[**Public services policy**](#)

The Tories trashed racism and sexism as ‘woke’ concerns. Now our public services are paying the price

[**Nesrine Malik**](#)



Bullying and bigotry are rife in the fire service, NHS and police, estranging these institutions from the people they should serve



‘The Metropolitan police force was placed into special measures earlier this year for ‘systemic’ failings.’ Photograph: Amer Ghazzal/REX/Shutterstock

Mon 5 Dec 2022 01.00 EST Last modified on Mon 5 Dec 2022 02.37 EST

A crunch, building for years, is upon us. Everywhere you look, the story is the same: backlogs, unfilled jobs, overfilled beds. Nothing is working. Brexit, the pandemic, a decade of austerity and a broken governing party have crippled Britain’s institutions. One now approaches a variety of basic services, from healthcare to policing, braced for a sort of experience lottery. If you’re lucky, this might be the day that things go smoothly. If not, you’re in for a long wait to be seen – or, on the worst days, a frustrated return home with no help or answers.

But the crisis is not just one of resources, it is also one of culture. Our struggling institutions have also succumbed to a steep fall in internal standards that is directly linked to their failure to deliver. Reports, anecdotal and, more recently, official, tell of bullying, corruption and a lack of accountability. Take the NHS, for instance. The institution symbolises the symbiosis between bad resourcing and bad culture. Vacant jobs at NHS England stand at a staggering [10% of the workforce](#). Some of that is down to familiar [funding issues](#); unattractive pay, slashed subsidies for expensive nursing training, a limited number of university places to study medicine. Less well known is the fact that those vacancies have not been simply

generated to meet increased demand, as the [government claims](#), but also to fill the positions of those who have left because of [racism](#), bullying and lack of support from human resources. This is not to mention the record number of nurses [departing the NHS](#) due to stress after the pandemic.

Earlier this year, the British Medical Association released a damning [report](#) stating that racism is forcing ethnic minority doctors to leave jobs. Some 42% of black and 41% of Asian doctors have “considered leaving or have left work in the past two years”. Behind these shortages are not just poor pay or poor training, but poor treatment of staff, whose experiences suggest an institutional apathy and, in the worst cases, active discrimination.

For a more disastrous manifestation of what this internal malaise can produce, one needs only to look at the Metropolitan police. The force was placed into special measures earlier this year for “systemic” failings that resulted in [tens of thousands of crimes](#) going unrecorded. In the basic business of logging data and other routine areas, the Met seems to have simply ceased to function. Officers appear to decide what they care about based on their personal whims and prejudices. The result is a stomach-turning litany of failures: the murder of Sarah Everard by a serving Met officer, the strip-searching of innocent children, such as Child Q, and the messages [exchanged](#) between officers at Charing Cross police station who joked about rape, murdering women, child molestation, Muslims and disabled people. A review earlier in the year found that the Met seems [unable](#) to enforce the law even within its own ranks, as police officers suspected of criminal offences including sexual assault and domestic abuse have not only been allowed to escape justice, but have remained within the force.



Metropolitan police officers detain a woman during a vigil for Sarah Everard on Clapham Common in March 2021. Photograph: Hannah McKay/Reuters

The story is no less bleak at the London fire brigade. Inspectors in 2019 [found](#) that it was among the worst in the country, despite being adequately resourced, with staff who were slow and discouraged from using their discretion in a “worrying culture” that suggested absentee management and oversight. A couple of months before the inspection, the public inquiry into the [Grenfell Tower fire](#) found the brigade’s state of readiness was “[gravely inadequate](#)”, something that cost lives on the night of the tragedy. The full picture was revealed last week in a report by former chief prosecutor [Nazir Afzal](#). It makes for alarming reading. Anonymous accounts of more than 2,000 staff members told of abuse by co-workers in an environment that can only be described as anarchic. Accounts include those of a black firefighter who had a noose placed above his locker, a Muslim colleague who found bacon and sausages stuffed in his pockets, and female firefighters being beaten, sexually harassed and having their helmets filled with urine.

Again, everywhere you look the story is the same. Ethnic minorities forced to quit and women bullied into silent trauma, while unsupervised staff treat these crucial organisations as a sort of personal fiefdom. The response is alarm, followed by a report and then some worried head-scratching. The

same broad but vague descriptions keep cropping up, telling of toxic colleagues, systemic issues and “anything goes” cultures.

The policing inspectorate even referred to some of the Met’s failings – specifically the mistakes made in the investigation into the Stephen Port murders, but just as applicable to wider Met problems – as “seemingly incomprehensible”. The puzzlement appears to be almost wilful, because these failings are not only comprehensible, but predictable. When institutions are allowed to drift into racism, sexism and bullying, breakdown follows. That breakdown is not only manifested in the victimisation of those who work in these institutions, but also in the erosion of everyone’s ability to do their job and to develop trust and engagement with the communities they work in. As a result, organisations retreat into a state of introversion, where workplace dramas and hijinks trump the provision of public services. Resourcing is partly to blame, Afzal tells me. When funding is cut, the “two things that go first are training and community engagement”. The outcome is organisations disconnected from those they serve and those who staff them.

But there is a bigger problem: a government that has successfully trashed the very notion that any of these entrenched issues exist. The Tories, in pursuit of a divisive culture war that establishes their party as defender of an embattled populace besieged by political correctness, have impoverished our ability to think constructively about preventing bullying, misogyny and racism. The Conservative party has in recent years aggressively pursued the debunking of institutional racism, with the Sewell report, commissioned for political reasons, concluding that the existence of institutional racism in Britain “is not borne out by the evidence”.

Principles such as social and professional good conduct, respect for others, engagement with communities and enforcing appropriate standards of behaviour, are slammed as “wokeness” by the party and the rightwing press. Recently the home secretary, Suella Braverman, has actively undermined efforts to regain trust among alienated communities by accusing the police in England and Wales of wasting time on “symbolic gestures”, as if serious policing and community outreach were mutually exclusive rather than mutually reinforcing.

These sneering attitudes towards racial and gender equality have become so embedded in the public mind and concerns so associated with leftwing radicalism that there has been a secondary failure of leadership among the opposition. For Labour, anything that resembles advocacy or outreach to minorities is seen as potentially damaging to their political brand. So the crisis will grind on, the whistleblowers will continue to appeal, the reviews will continue to be commissioned, and we will be told that it's all seemingly incomprehensible.

- Nesrine Malik is a Guardian columnist
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OpinionFamily

My divorced parents are competing for the affection of their grandson – and everyone wins!

[Nell Frizzell](#)



Days out, presents, treats, and babysitting are all an excuse for one-upmanship



Anything you can do ... the delights of competitive grandparents.
Photograph: Image Source/Getty Images (posed by models)

Mon 5 Dec 2022 02.00 EST Last modified on Mon 5 Dec 2022 02.40 EST

Divorced parents make the best grandparents. Not because they have more time – they might not have it. Not because they have learned emotional maturity – they might not have done. But because divorced parents – however amicable the split and however long ago it was, are always *slightly* in competition.

This year, we all recorded versions of my son's favourite stories for him to listen to on his Yoto, an audio player designed for young kids. He was delighted. He spent the morning walking around the house, listening to my dad reading Winnie's Knickers on repeat. The boy was distracted, I was happy and my dad's effort – including a ukulele solo by way of a soundtrack – was rewarded.

A few hours later, my hilarious and generous mother went upstairs to record her own story, having had the technology explained to her – patiently and only slightly passive aggressively – by my husband. What story did she record? Why, Winnie's Knickers, of course. So now my son has two

recordings of the same story, to be played on the same machine, by his maternal grandparents.

I'm sure it was an accident: the book just happened to be on our table, they were both doing unpaid childcare, they're both excellent at reading stories and Winnie's Knickers is a banger. And yet even if it was a slip, it does feel like rather a Freudian one.

When your parents are no longer together, things like days out, presents, treats and babysitting can become not just an invaluable expression of affection but also a measure of their grandparenting. The same kind of rivalry can happen between maternal and paternal grandparents, with both unconsciously competing to be the favourites. In *The Man Who Died Twice*, [Richard Osman](#)'s character Ron buys his grandson two ice-creams just to outdo the used car salesman Grandad Keith. But when you add divorce into the mix, the scope for potential one-upmanship becomes even greater. And who benefits? Well, everyone.

Nell Frizzell is the author of [The Panic Years](#) and [Square One](#)

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Starmer's path to powerPolitics

The rightwing press will never back Keir Starmer – but he can win without them

[David Yelland](#)

Things have changed since Murdoch aided Blair's rise to power, and no Labour party leader should be in thrall to the tabloids

- David Yelland was editor of the Sun 1998-2003



'The press only has power if it has you in the first place.' Photograph: Aaron Chown/PA

Mon 5 Dec 2022 03.00 EST Last modified on Mon 5 Dec 2022 12.22 EST

At precisely this point in the electoral cycle that led to Tony Blair's first term as prime minister, the leader of the Labour party flew halfway around

the world to [meet Rupert Murdoch](#) on Hayman Island, off Australia's Queensland coast. Then, as now, Britain was two years away from an election the Labour party seemed destined to win. Then, as now, Labour had been out of power for a very long time indeed: 16 years then, 12 years now.

Hayman Island was a moment of history, acknowledged as such by Blair in private and subsequently in his memoirs: "I could feel [as we left Australia] we were in with a chance of winning the Sun's support." He was right. The tectonic plates moved fast inside News Corporation. [Andrew Knight](#), hugely influential on the board, played a primary role completing the switch, as did Murdoch's old friend [Irwin Stelzer](#), a young Rebekah Wade (now Brooks), [Les Hinton](#) – moved from the US to oversee a more civilised regime in London – and Peter Stothard, who as editor of the Times was the man who actually invited Blair to Hayman.

Murdoch also needed a left-of-the-aisle editor to steer the Sun away from two decades of Tory support. That new editor was me. I was then the 34-year-old deputy editor of his New York Post. One Monday morning my phone rang and I was told to get on Concorde.



Montage of front pages attacking Keir Starmer. Composite: Various

But that was then. What of now? How can [Keir Starmer](#) navigate the treacherous waters of the British press as he seeks to sail the Labour ship back to No 10? It won't be easy. Everything has changed but, in some senses, absolutely nothing has changed at all.

Let's look at what has changed. When Murdoch and Blair shook hands on Hayman, Google was still three years from startup; there was no mass internet, no smartphones; Mark Zuckerberg was 11 and would not set up Facebook until 2004; Twitter did not tweet until two years after that.

The influence Murdoch wielded was real, palpable and red in tooth and claw. His power was unmediated by social media; he could promise the earth and deliver the Sun – and everything else News Corp then controlled. And the papers were so much bigger. These days the Sun's paper sales figures are no longer published, but they are thought to be below the [Daily Mail's 805,000](#). Back then, the Sun's audited sales were at 3.8m copies and the Mail's at 2.3m: unbelievable power.

But other things haven't changed. Power in the British media is a strange thing and the press remains potent, critical to our body politic. Tabloids influence through social media, turning what was an existential threat into a disseminator – they hugely influence broadcast media. They influence because they are the loudest voices in the room and because what they shout is brilliantly crafted by brilliant people.

But Brexit has pushed the editorial teams at the Mail titles, the Sun, the Telegraph, the Express titles and elsewhere into a world far to the right of the one I occupied – and it is a world that will never, under any circumstances, back [Labour](#).



Tony Blair speaks to the former Sun editor Rebekah Wade (now Brooks) in 2004. Photograph: Fiona Hanson/PA Archive/Press Association Images

There is no point doing deals and no deals will be offered. If you control Fox News, as the Murdochs do, then doing a deal with Starmer is off-brand and so last century. But neither can Labour afford to ignore the press, or belittle it, or look down its nose at it.

Soon we may see encouragement from these papers towards Starmer – but he should not mistake that pragmatism for a change of heart. He has to be smart. He needs to see the Brexit press for what it is: a sworn enemy, a hostile force.

Remember the fate of Gordon Brown, who was first blessed by Murdoch and Jonathan Rothermere's Daily Mail and then attacked, bullied and finally ritually sacrificed by the Sun in September 2009, on the day of his speech at the Labour conference.

I will never forget that day. I helped Gordon prepare his speech in the morning – as a friend, not an adviser. By the evening my old paper had hijacked conference – shipping thousands of copies of the paper into its own News International drinks party – and humiliated him in a room full of members of cabinet and rival editors.

There are lessons here. The press only has power if it has you in the first place. Gordon was vulnerable because he had become close to Rupert, Les, Rebekah and before that myself – he was always decent and proper, he did not deserve his fate. The moment a Labour leader accepts the blessing of these papers he becomes their prisoner.

So should Starmer shun the editors?

Not at all. He still needs to go to see them, drink their warm wine, shake the hands, smile and ask after their families. Journalists remain great company and great people. It is necessary to know the media, have friends there, but it is important to remember who they are and who you are; it is important for there to be a separation of powers.

And that's the point really: separation of powers. Over the past 20 years the political and media elites have become so close, so intermingled that the lunatics took over the asylum. We had a journalist in No 10 and it was journalists who enabled Brexit. It did not end well.

But times are changing now. For Starmer, the British press will always be hostile. He is not paranoid, it really is out to get him. But there is a noble honesty in that conflict, so long as he retains a distance.

Indeed, the prize dangling in front of the Labour leader, almost within grasp, is not just to win power. It is to become the first prime minister to win power in the modern era without the endorsement of the great newspaper barons.

Imagine that? A Labour PM who has done no deals. A Labour PM who is free.

- David Yelland was editor of the Sun 1998-2003

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Hunger has taken hold across Africa. We need a new approach to tackling its causes

President Alassane Ouattara

This week's African Union summit in Ivory Coast is an opportunity to work towards a holistic food security strategy



Alassane Ouattara, president of Ivory Coast, at the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) summit in Accra, Ghana, July 2022. Photograph: Francis Kokoroko/Reuters

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Mon 5 Dec 2022 01.00 EST

Malnutrition looms large in Africa. Over a fifth of the continent's 1.3 billion people faced hunger last year, more than twice the level of any other continent.

Even before the war in Ukraine jeopardised supplies to many African countries of grain and fertiliser needed to feed their people or for growing crops, Covid-19 had disturbed food processing and supply chains, affecting world economies and provoking agricultural and food inflation.

Though the immediate threat of stocks running out has abated, the shock to food systems has forced urgent debate on the long-term dangers of malnutrition and how it must be addressed.

Especially in Africa, hunger and malnutrition threaten human life, accounting for between 20% and 40% of maternal deaths on the continent. Malnutrition is one of the leading killers of children under five in Africa.

It also affects the physical, mental, cognitive and physiological development of African children and prevents adolescents from reaching their full

potential, locking entire populations into vulnerability. It is therefore a human rights issue that extends far beyond the already volatile impact on public health.

It is time to take a hard look at how hunger and malnutrition have taken hold across Africa and must now be tackled.

The climate crisis, widespread political instability and, more recently, the pandemic and cost of living crisis all threaten to raise levels of malnutrition.

Too much time has already been lost in this battle; a fresh approach is required.

In April, 54 African countries signed the Malabo declaration calling for better nutrition. However, despite the best intentions, many are unlikely to achieve the declaration targets by 2025. Huge efforts will be needed to achieve those linked to sustainable development by 2030.

We, African countries, need to coordinate our efforts to identify, document, appropriate and broadcast the root causes of hunger in all its forms.

To do this, African states need to commit to creating and maintaining a sustainable institutional, political, legal and financial environment in terms of food security and nutrition, by coordinating efforts – at national, regional and continental levels.

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African countries working together are more likely to understand one another's challenges and share knowledge, leading to synergies in nutrition and food security

That's because improving food security and nutrition requires systemic change for healthy, sustainable and environmentally sensitive food systems, and resilient and strong universal health systems.

Inclusive drinking water and sanitation systems must be delivered through effective education and social protection systems, ensuring that no one is left behind, including the poorest and most nutritionally vulnerable.

It was a positive step forward when the African Union's February summit named 2022 the African Year of Nutrition under the theme of building resilience in nutrition and food security.

It is a theme I proposed to involve all actors in finding solutions to reinforce nutrition and food security resilience and deliver accelerated human, social and economic capital development.

Bringing together more than a dozen African government delegations, and international and continental organisations, the African Union summit on malnutrition and food security, to be held in Abidjan on 8 December, must allow us to move further along the road of food security.

This holistic approach was developed further in May at the UN Cop15 convention to combat desertification, hosted by Ivory Coast. There has been widespread recognition that African countries are employing farming methods that often destroy agricultural land and are using seed types unsuited to African soil.

New solutions in the form of innovations and skills can only happen when countries come together in a spirit of cooperation.

African countries working together are more likely to understand one another's challenges and share knowledge, leading to synergies in nutrition and food security. A combined effort in farming and food production could

also result in new and more diversified sources of food supply from different trading partners.

Engagement with international agencies and NGOs that have pursued inefficient strategies and failed to eradicate malnutrition might also improve with a joined-up approach by African countries.

Currently, there are many regional meetings and international forums taking place that address malnutrition, but they are often duplicated or work across each other's aims.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/commentisfree/2022/dec/05/africa-hunger-malnutrition-food-security-ivory-coast-summit>

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[Florida](#)

Florida man restrained by officers in jail died by strangulation, autopsy finds

Exclusive: private autopsy says Kevin Desir's death after struggle with six deputies was homicide, while official one said it was undetermined



A photo of Kevin Desir, center, with his two daughters and his parents.
Photograph: Bryan Cereijo/The Guardian

[Gloria Oladipo](#)

[@gaoladipo](#)

Mon 5 Dec 2022 02.00 EST Last modified on Mon 5 Dec 2022 14.38 EST

A newly obtained autopsy report has concluded that a 43-year-old [Florida](#) man's death after being violently restrained by jailers was a homicide by strangulation.

On 17 January last year, Kevin Desir became unresponsive after a struggle with six deputies at the North Broward Bureau facility, a jail operated by the

Broward county sheriff's office (BSO) in south Florida. The jail specifically detains arrestees who have mental and physical disabilities, as well as those with mental health problems.

During the incident, Desir was handcuffed, punched repeatedly, shot with a Taser and pepper-sprayed by officers, and lost consciousness after deputies attempted to strap him into a restraint chair.

One deputy interlocked hands on Desir's neck from behind, and used "his body weight to leverage Desir back into the chair", according to a memo from the Broward county state attorney's office.

Desir died in the hospital on 27 January. An official autopsy conducted by the Broward county medical examiner's office the day after found that Desir's cause and manner of death were undetermined.

However, a private autopsy was also conducted at about the same time, and its conclusion was very different, the Guardian can exclusively reveal.

In February this year, before the private autopsy report was complete, the state attorney's office announced it was declining to prosecute any of the six officers involved, announcing that Desir's death was justifiable.

Desir's family has been campaigning since for a measure of justice for their loved one.

They are fighting in court to have jail surveillance video of Kevin's forcible restraint, while he appeared to be suffering a mental health episode, released to the public.

Kevin's mother, 73-year-old Sercilia Desir, told the Guardian last week: "They [need] to release the tapes, so I can see how they killed my son."

The report from the private autopsy requested by the family has been obtained by the Guardian as part of a broader investigation. The report found that Desir died from "manual strangulation" and concluded that his death was a homicide after "neck and carotid arteries [were] compressed" during "[a] law enforcement restraint attempt".

The private autopsy report took almost 21 months to finalize after Desir's body was examined. The BSO refused requests for access to several of Desir's medical records, according to emails.

A family lawyer expressed skepticism.

"Any time you release half of them but you keep some [documents], that's an indication that there's something that they're hiding, some back-dealing going on," said attorney Jeremy McLymont, who is working with the Desir family to seek greater accountability from authorities and to secure the public release of the surveillance video.

The private autopsy, conducted on 31 January by Dr Daniel Schultz of Hillsborough county, Florida, whom the Desir family hired, included a review of the video footage, medical records and collected specimens.

Of finding that Kevin Desir's neck was pressed for more than three minutes, regardless of other use of force, the autopsy report concludes: "A completely healthy individual under no prerequisite stress could succumb to that."

Ryan Daniel and Jeremiah Howard, two sheriff's deputies working at the jail who had the greatest physical contact with Desir during the incident, were not charged or disciplined. They received glowing internal reviews from the BSO after the incident.

Although Daniel and Howard were recommended to receive extra training, they received only part of such training and not until more than a year after Desir's death.

"The idea that two medical examiners could come up with two completely different causes of death is mind-blowing," said McLymont.

In light of the private autopsy report, a Broward county state attorney office spokeswoman, Paula McMahon, told the Guardian last week that prosecutors would be "very willing to review" that autopsy's findings.

The Broward county medical examiner's office, which conducted the first, official, autopsy, did not comment on the differences between the two findings, but said that "every examination is separate and independent" from

law enforcement, and noted that Desir's official autopsy included a review of detailed records, including "review of the complete video".

BSO did not comment on the private autopsy findings, but told the Guardian they stand by Howard and Daniel's reviews and that the recommended training was "not an indication that the employees did anything wrong".

Mikeco Desir, Kevin's younger brother, said: "To have somebody snatched from you like this, it's something that will never sit well with me."

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Borat

Borat targets Trump, Ye and antisemitism at Kennedy Center Honors

Sacha Baron Cohen skit receives mixed response at ceremony for lifetime achievements in the arts



Sacha Baron Cohen attending the reception for the Kennedy Center honorees hosted by President Joe Biden at the White House. Photograph: Kevin Dietsch/Getty Images

[David Smith](#) in Washington

[@smithinamerica](#)

Mon 5 Dec 2022 04.47 EST Last modified on Tue 6 Dec 2022 00.09 EST

The British actor [Sacha Baron Cohen](#) reprised his character Borat and stole the show at the prestigious Kennedy Center Honors in the US on Sunday night, targeting the former president Donald Trump, the rapper Kanye West, now known as Ye, and antisemitism.

President Joe Biden smiled broadly and his wife, Jill, was in fits of laughter as Cohen told risque jokes in the comical accent of the Kazakh television journalist [Borat](#) Sagdiyev.

“I know the president of US and A is here,” Borat said to an audience including politicians and celebrities during a segment celebrating the [Irish rock group U2](#). “Where are you, Mr Trump?”

As the audience howled, Borat went on: “You don’t look so good. Where has your glorious big belly gone? And your pretty orange skin has become pale.” He then asked if the Russian leader, Vladimir Putin, and the nerve agent novichok were responsible.

Borat, the star of two hit satirical films, added: ‘But I see you have a new wife. Wawawoooah! She is very erotic. I must look away before I get a Bono.’”



President Joe Biden and the first lady, Jill Biden, with Biden’s son, Hunter, and his wife, Melissa Cohen at the Kennedy Center. Photograph: Saul Loeb/AFP/Getty Images

The comedian, who is Jewish, then turned his attention to antisemitism in the wake of Trump having dined at his Mar-a-Lago home with the Holocaust

denier Nick Fuentes and Ye, who subsequently [praised Adolf Hitler](#) and was banned from Twitter for posting an image of a swastika.

Borat said: “Before I proceed, I will say I am very upset about the antisemitism in US and A. It not fair. Kazakhstan is No 1 Jew-crushing nation. Stop stealing our hobby. Stop the steal! Stop the steal!” Some guests burst into laughter while others sat in uncomfortable silence.

He continued: “Your Kanye, he tried to move to Kazakhstan and even changed his name to Kazakhstanye West. But we said: No, he too antisemitic, even for us.”

Borat proceeded to sing a short parody of U2’s song [With or Without You](#) with the lyrics changed to “With or without Jews”. He broke off and asked: “What’s the problem? They loved this at Mar-a-Lago. They chose Without Jews.”

The Bidens appeared to enjoy Baron Cohen’s routine but it also came as a shock in typically staid and buttoned up Washington. Asked by the Guardian what she thought of it, Biden’s sister, [Valerie Biden Owens](#), said diplomatically: “I think I like U2,” while Roy Blunt, a Republican senator for Missouri, said: “Not much.”

[Glenn Youngkin](#), the governor of Virginia, said: “I was surprised to see him,” and sped away without elaborating.

Along with U2, the actor George Clooney, the singer-songwriter Amy Grant, the singer Gladys Knight and the composer Tania León were celebrated at the [45th Kennedy Center Honors](#), the most prestigious honours for lifetime achievements in the arts. There was also an appearance from Sesame Street’s Big Bird.



Sesame Street character Big Bird and CBS anchor Major Garrett arriving for the 45th Kennedy Center Honors. Photograph: Stefani Reynolds/AFP/Getty Images

One audience member from the political world also received a standing ovation. Paul Pelosi, the husband of the House of Representatives speaker, Nancy Pelosi, used the weekend's honors-related events to make his first public appearance since being [attacked in October](#) in their San Francisco home.

The Pelosis sat next to the vice-president, Kamala Harris, and her husband, Doug Emhoff, in a balcony. Paul Pelosi wore a black hat and a glove on his left hand.

The show highlighted the five artists' work, and represented a return to pre-coronavirus norms. There was no requirement for testing to attend and few guests wore masks. [Anthony Fauci](#), the chief medical adviser to the president, was among the guests.

Clooney, a double Oscar winner, was also praised for his engagement in political causes and spoke to reporters after attending [a White House reception](#).



George and Amal Clooney speaking to reporters at the gala. Photograph: Sarah Silbiger/Reuters

Asked how he thought Biden's presidency was going, Clooney replied: "Beautifully. I love him. He's a kind man with great intentions and he has some incredible legislation which kind of gets overlooked and they're not very good at bragging about right now. He's done a really good job and I'm very proud to be a supporter."

A follow-up question about whether Clooney, 61, would consider a career in politics prompted his wife, the barrister Amal Clooney, to smile and shake her head. The actor said in agreement: "Listen, we have a really nice life."

In a celebration at the state department on Saturday, Clooney told guests: "I've been lucky enough to meet millions of people, every country, literally 125 countries, and they all, without exception, agree and they'll come up to me and say specifically that, 'You sucked as Batman'. It's unified. We could solve world problems if we just all could agree on more than just that I suck as Batman."



Julia Roberts wearing her George Clooney tribute dress. Photograph: Greg Allen/Invision/AP

At Sunday's main event at the Kennedy Center, [Julia Roberts](#), who has co-starred in several films with Clooney, wore a floor-length gown with framed images of him on it and called him a "Renaissance man". The actors Don Cheadle, Matt Damon and Richard Kind also paid tribute, with Damon recalling how Clooney once stole the then-President Bill Clinton's stationery and wrote notes to fellow actors on it.

But the one who moved Clooney to tears was his 88-year-old father, Nick, a journalist and TV anchorman. He recalled that he was hosting a TV show in 1968 when Martin Luther King was assassinated in Memphis. His family came into the green room. "Seven-year-old George had a large paper bag in his hand. I asked him what in the world was in the bag.

"Well, he went to the coffee table, he turned the bag upside down. Out poured all of his toy guns landing with a clack. He said: 'Pop, I don't want these any more. None of them. Never.' Well, I tore up my speech. Nothing I would've written would have been nearly as eloquent as what George had just done and said."

Nick Clooney said he was often asked what he wanted people to know about his son. “Well, here it is: George’s best and most important work is still ahead of him.”



Nick Clooney, the father of George, at the White House reception.
Photograph: Rex/Shutterstock

Knight, who has won seven Grammy awards, is famous for hit songs including I Heard It Through the Grapevine and Midnight Train to Georgia as the lead singer of the Pips, which became Gladys Knight and the Pips in 1962. Singers including Garth Brooks and Patti LaBelle performed some of Knight's songs.



Kennedy Center honoree Gladys Knight on the red carpet. Photograph: Sarah Silbiger/Reuters

Grant rose to prominence as a contemporary Christian music singer who later crossed over to pop stardom, winning six Grammys. The singers Sheryl Crow, Brandi Carlile, CeCe Winans and BeBe Winans were among the artists who honored her.



Amy Grant at the White House reception. Photograph: Kevin Dietsch/Getty Images

Cuban-born León is a conductor as well as a composer, whose orchestral piece Stride won the 2021 Pulitzer prize in Music. The jazz pianist Jason Moran, the singer Alicia Hall Moran and the cellist Sterling Elliott played one of her creations, Oh Yemanja.



Honoree Tania León arriving for the ceremony. Photograph: Stefani Reynolds/AFP/Getty Images

The final tribute of the evening was to U2, which, with members Bono, The Edge, Adam Clayton and Larry Mullen Jr, has won 22 Grammys. Eddie Vedder performed Elevation and One, while the Ukrainian singer Jamala joined Carlile and others to perform Walk On. The actor Sean Penn described U2 as “four scrappy Dublin punks” who were also “great musical poets of the ages”.

Other guests at the event included the transportation secretary, Pete Buttigieg, the senators Amy Klobuchar, Patrick Leahy, Joe Manchin and Mitt Romney, and representatives James Clyburn and Steny Hoyer, the White House press secretary, Karine Jean-Pierre, and the British ambassador to the US, Dame Karen Pierce.



Honorees (L-R): U2 band members – Larry Mullen Jr, Adam Clayton, The Edge and Bono - George Clooney and Tania León inside the Kennedy Center. Photograph: Paul Morigi/Getty Images

Deborah Rutter, the president of the Kennedy Center, said: “This is probably the largest number of the administration and of Congress that we’ve ever had so that feels really great. People are ready to be back together fully and they want to see a good show.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2022/dec/05/borat-targets-trump-ye-and-antisemitism-at-kennedy-center-honors>

[Japan](#)

Nursery schoolteachers arrested in Japan over abuse allegations

Three women held by police on suspicion of assaulting children at nursery school in city of Susono



Police investigators carry boxes of documents out of Sakura nursery school in Susono city, Shizuoka prefecture, on Sunday. Photograph: 123617+0900/AP

Associated Press in Tokyo

Mon 5 Dec 2022 04.53 EST Last modified on Mon 5 Dec 2022 05.54 EST

Police have arrested three teachers at a nursery school in central Japan on suspicion they routinely abused toddlers, including hitting their heads, holding them upside down and locking them up in a bathroom, in a case that has triggered outrage and allegations of a cover-up.

Shizuoka prefectural police said they arrested three women on Sunday on suspicion of assaulting at least three children in June at a nursery school in the city of Susono, at the foot of Mount Fuji.

The mayor of Susono, Harukaze Murata, told reporters on Monday that he had also filed a criminal complaint against the school's director, Toshihiko Sakurai, for allegedly covering up the abuses. He urged police to widen their investigation.

In one case in June, one of the teachers is accused of holding a boy upside down. Another teacher pushed a girl in the face, according to police, and the third slapped the head of another boy.

Their arrests followed a search of the private school by police on Saturday in response to the city's revelation last week of 15 counts of alleged abuses between June and August.

Results of an internal investigation revealed the three teachers routinely abused toddlers in their care, including slapping their face and heads, forcing them to cry, threatening them with a cutter knife, verbally abusing the children by calling them "ugly" and "fat", locking them up inside a toilet or storage room, according to the city.

Murata accused the school director of "covering up" the abuses by getting other teachers to sign a paper requiring them to conceal the problem and delaying giving an explanation to the parents, calling his handling of the issue "heinous".



The mayor of Susono, Harukaze Murata (left), and the vice-mayor bow during a press conference in Susono on Monday. Photograph: AP

The three teachers, all in their 30s, reportedly told investigators that their treatment of the toddlers was “discipline”, while the director said he had the document signed only to protect privacy of those involved and denied trying to cover up the abuses.

The city has faced public criticism for sitting on the case for more than three months since a whistleblower first came forward to reveal “inappropriate” cases at the school in mid-August. Murata said he took the criticism seriously and would take a pay cut for two months while also punishing three senior officials.

Separate investigations into possible abuse are continuing in two other nursery schools.

In Sendai, northern Japan, officials are conducting an internal investigation following allegations that children had to strip down to their underwear during mealtimes so they did not dirty their clothes. At another school in the northern city of Toyama, police are investigating teachers on suspicion they locked up crying children in a storage facility or poked their backs with a stick to order them to move.

Experts say nursery teachers tend to be low paid and schools face chronic staff shortages and a harsh working environment.

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Pelé

Pelé is not under palliative care despite reports, says daughter

Flavia Nascimento insists Brazilian footballing great ‘is not saying goodbye right now’



Fans attend a vigil for Pelé in front of Albert Einstein hospital in São Paulo, Brazil, on Sunday. Photograph: Isaac Fontana/EPA

Reuters in Sao Paulo

Mon 5 Dec 2022 03.24 EST Last modified on Mon 5 Dec 2022 14.00 EST

The Brazilian footballing great Pelé has not been moved to palliative care, one of his daughters has said, downplaying [reports](#) that he was in end-of-life care after the 82-year-old was hospitalised last week to re-evaluate his treatment for colon cancer.

One of the greatest players of all time, [Pelé](#) had a tumour removed from his colon in September 2021 and has been receiving hospital care on a regular

basis.

The newspaper Folha de S.Paulo reported on Saturday that he was under palliative care after chemotherapy stopped having the expected results. Pelé's doctors have not confirmed that information and his daughter, Flavia Nascimento, said the report was wide of the mark.

"It's pretty unfair people saying that he is in terminal condition, that he is under palliative care. Believe us: that's not it," she said in an interview with Globo TV.

Nascimento said that from time to time they adjusted her father's medication as there was no complete remission of his cancer.

The latest report from medical staff at São Paulo's Albert Einstein hospital, released on Saturday afternoon, said Pelé was in a stable condition and had also responded well to treatment for a respiratory infection diagnosed after his hospitalisation.

Another of Pelé's daughters, Kely, said in the interview he had Covid-19 three weeks ago, which led to the respiratory infection.

"He is sick, he is old, but at the moment he is being treated for a respiratory infection and when he gets better he will be back home," she said. "He is not saying goodbye in a hospital right now."

Pelé played for Brazil and club sides Santos and New York Cosmos as a striker. He won the World Cup three times – in 1958, 1962 and 1970 – a feat no other player has achieved.

Santos fans gathered outside the hospital to hold a vigil on Sunday.

"We are emanating positive energies to our king, for everything he has done for soccer globally and everything he has done for Santos," said Jeferson Silvano, the head of a supporters' group.

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Donald Trump

Republican moderate refuses to disown Trump over constitution threat

Dave Joyce of Ohio, chair of the Republican Governance Group, says he will vote for Trump if he is nominee in 2024



Donald Trump announces he is running for president at Mar-a-Lago in Florida last month. Photograph: Andrew Harnik/AP

[Martin Pengelly](#) in New York

[@MartinPengelly](#)

Mon 5 Dec 2022 00.01 EST Last modified on Mon 5 Dec 2022 00.23 EST

A leader of moderate Republicans in the US House repeatedly refused to condemn Donald Trump on Sunday, even after the former president, running for re-election in 2024, said the US constitution should be “[terminated](#)” to allow him to return to power.

“Whoever the [Republicans](#) end up picking, I’ll fall in behind” them, Dave Joyce of Ohio told ABC’s This Week, adding that he thought Americans did not want to look back to the 2020 election, the subject of Trump’s lies about electoral fraud and demand for extra-constitutional action.

Joyce’s host, George Stephanopoulos, said: “I don’t see how you can move forward if your candidate is for suspending the constitution but thank you for your time.”

Trump maintains the lie that the 2020 election, which Joe Biden won by more than 7m votes and a clear margin in the electoral college, was subject to widespread voter fraud. In messages on his Truth Social account on Saturday, Trump [said](#) the constitution should therefore be “terminated”.

The former president was [condemned](#) by Biden, Democrats and political commentators. On CBS’s Face the Nation on Sunday another Ohio Republican, Mike Turner, said he “absolutely” did so too.

“There is a political process that has to go forward before anybody is a frontrunner or anybody is even the candidate for the party,” Turner said. “I believe people certainly are going to take into consideration a statement like this as they evaluate a candidate.”

Like Turner, Joyce was not among the [147 Republicans](#) who objected to results in key states in the 2020 election, even after Trump supporters mounted their deadly attack on the Capitol, seeking to stop certification. But Stephanopoulos could not persuade Joyce to say he would not vote for Trump four years later.

Joyce said: “Well, you know, when President Trump was in office, I didn’t make a habit of speaking out on his tweet du jour.

“I don’t know what came out on … whatever his new social platform is. But, you know, people were not interested in looking backwards. The people who gave us the majority [in the midterm elections last month] … they gave us an opportunity, and we need to perform.”

Ohioans, Joyce said, were more concerned about household budgets in a time of steep inflation.

Stephanopoulos said: “But [Donald Trump](#) was your nominee in 2016 and 2020. You voted for him in 2016 and 2020. Now he’s talking about suspending the constitution. Can you support a candidate in 2024 who’s for suspending the constitution?”

Joyce said: “Well, again, it’s early. I think there’s going to be a lot of people in the primary. I think, at the end of the day, whoever the Republicans end up picking, I’ll fall in behind because that’s – ”

Stephanopoulos said: “Even if it’s Donald Trump and he’s called for suspending the constitution?”

Joyce said: “Well, again, I think it’s going to be a big field. I don’t think Donald Trump’s going to clear out the field like he did in ’16.”

Stephanopoulos said: “That’s not what I’m asking. I’m asking you, ‘If he’s the nominee, will you support him?’”

Joyce said: “I will support whoever the Republican nominee is. And I just don’t think that at this point [Trump] will be able to get there because I think there’s a lot of other good quality candidates out there.”

To the host, that was “a remarkable statement. You’d support a candidate who’s come out for suspending the constitution?”

Joyce said: “Well, you know, [Trump] says a lot of things. You have to take him in context. And right now I have to worry about making sure the Republican Governance Group and the Republican majority make things work for the American people. And I can’t be really chasing every one of these crazy statements that come out … from any of these candidates.”

Stephanopoulos said: “But that’s an extraordinary statement. You can’t come out against someone who’s for suspending the constitution?”

Joyce said: “Well, first off, he has no ability to suspend the constitution. Secondly, I don’t –”

Stephanopoulos pointed out that Trump said he *wanted* to take that step.

Joyce said: “Well, you know, he says a lot of things but that doesn’t mean that it’s ever going to happen. So you’ve got to accept exact fact from fantasy. And fantasy is that we’re going to suspend the constitution and go backwards. We’re moving forward and we’re going to continue to move forward as a Republican majority and as a Republican conference.”

With that, Stephanopoulos closed the interview.

“Thank you for having me,” Joyce said.

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Headlines thursday 8 december 2022

- [Cost of living crisis Millions cannot afford to heat homes as UK faces Arctic snap](#)
- ['Real hardship' Archbishop urges people not to despair as Arctic air boosts demand for warm spaces](#)
- [Live Record 7.2m people now waiting for hospital treatment, NHS England says](#)
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Fuel poverty

Millions cannot afford to heat homes as UK faces Arctic snap

Joseph Rowntree Foundation urges government to increase basic rate of support to help cover essentials



A fifth of the country's 2.5 million low-income households are going without food and heating, data shows. Photograph: Tolga Akmen/EPA

[Matthew Weaver](#)

Thu 8 Dec 2022 03.05 ESTFirst published on Thu 8 Dec 2022 02.58 EST

More than 3 million low-income UK households cannot afford to heat their homes, according to research, as a "[dangerously cold](#)" weather front arrives from the Arctic.

The UK Health Security Agency has issued a cold weather alert recommending vulnerable people warm their homes to at least 18C, wear

extra layers and eat hot food to protect themselves from plummeting temperatures.

Ministers also confirmed that people in more than 300 postcode areas in England and Wales would receive cold weather payments in the coming days. The £25 payments are triggered when the average temperature is 0C or less for seven days in a row.

But about 710,000 households will still struggle to pay for warm clothing, heating and food, according to analysis by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

A fifth of the 2.5 million low-income households were going without food and heating, it estimated. The JRF survey, of 4,251 people in the bottom 40% of incomes, which was conducted last month, also estimated that about 4.3 million households had curbed their spending on heating before the cold spell.

More than 7 million households have gone without at least one of the essentials since June, the JRF will say when its full report is released next week.

About 2.4 million households have borrowed money or used credit to cover their bills so far this year. The current cold snap means households with vulnerable people face the impossible decision over whether to take on more debt to heat their home to the level recommended by health professionals.

Rachelle Earwaker, a senior economist at JRF, said: “The government must see that families will not be able to get through the winter on the current levels of support.

The women on a 'war footing' as the cost of living crisis deepens – video

“For hundreds of thousands of households it is not a choice between putting the heating on or not. Our research shows they cannot afford anything recommended to protect themselves from the effects of plummeting temperatures.

“We are still experiencing historically high inflation and the prices of essentials are still soaring. [Energy bills](#), while capped, are still almost double what they were last winter. Housing shortages, rising rents and mortgage payments are overburdening budgets across the country.

She said the dangerously cold weather was cause for concern. “People are being forced to wager their financial health and whether they can afford more debt, against their wellbeing without sufficient heat, clothing or hot food.”

The basic social security level was “woefully below” the level that would allow people to afford essentials, Earwalker added.

The foundation is urging the government to change universal credit and increase the basic rate of support.

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A government spokesperson said: “Our priority will always be to support the most vulnerable. We recognise that people are struggling with rising prices, which is why we are protecting millions of those most in need with at least £1,200 of direct payments and providing households with £400 towards energy costs.

“Our immediate support also includes our energy price guarantee, saving around £900 for a typical household over winter and our household support fund is helping people with essential costs. Meanwhile, the chancellor recently announced a further extensive cost of living package, ensuring those most in need are supported next year as well as this.”

The Met Office has issued a number of weather warnings for snow and ice in parts of Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales and the east coast and south-west of England over the coming days.

Its chief meteorologist, Steve Willington, said: “As an Arctic maritime air mass settles across the UK, temperatures will fall with widespread overnight frosts, severe in places, and daytime temperatures only a few degrees above freezing.

“Showers will turn more wintry with an increasing risk of snow as the week progresses, particularly in coastal areas or over higher ground. There will be widespread frosts with temperatures falling to as low as -10C overnight in isolated spots by the end of the week.”

Age UK advised people to maintain a supply of food and medicine to reduce the number of outdoor trips, and torches with spare batteries in case of a power cut.

Homeless people in London will be sheltered after the severe weather emergency protocol was activated for the first time this winter to provide emergency accommodation for rough sleepers.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/dec/08/uk-weather-millions-households-cannot-afford-heat-homes>

Communities

Arctic air to boost demand for warm spaces as archbishop urges people not to despair

Justin Welby says too many people face ‘real hardship and pain’ as temperatures fall and bills rise



A group of friends socialise in a theatre coffee shop, which has been offering its communal area as a ‘warm bank’. Photograph: Leon Neal/Getty Images

[Robert Booth](#) Social affairs correspondent

Thu 8 Dec 2022 02.17 ESTFirst published on Thu 8 Dec 2022 01.00 EST

A surge of Arctic air causing sub-zero temperatures across the UK is poised to send demand for warm spaces surging, and the archbishop of Canterbury has urged people not to despair in the face of “real hardship and pain”.

The weather system moving quickly south from Norway, nicknamed the Troll of Trondheim, will result in colder weather for at least a week, the Met Office has forecast, as a network of “warm hubs” said it had seen 80,000 people use its facilities in the last week.

Justin Welby – who is backing the Warm Welcome campaign, which involves thousands of faith groups, charities and businesses letting people in to keep warm as energy bills rise – said: “This huge surge of demand demonstrates the real need for warm spaces all across the country. Temperatures are dropping, bills are rising, and far too many of our friends and neighbours are facing real hardship and pain. This is a crisis, but we must not fall into despair. There is action we can take.”

A major incident was declared in Sheffield on Wednesday after temperatures plummeted in a suburb that has been without gas for five days. About 2,000 homes in the Stannington area were affected on Friday when a burst water main damaged a gas pipe.

The UK Health Security Agency has issued a cold weather alert saying that from Wednesday evening all regions of England will experience severe cold weather. It has warned of “serious consequences for health” and said older people and those with heart or lung conditions could be particularly at risk.

It said anyone with a pre-existing medical condition should try to heat the rooms they use most, such as the living and bedroom, to at least 18C and keep bedroom windows closed at night.

The Met Office expects temperatures across the UK to remain around or below zero well into next week.

The Warm Welcome campaign said it was providing more than 3,000 venues – including theatres, cathedrals, fire stations and sports clubs – where people could keep warm this month. Many venues are preparing Christmas meals and events for those struggling with the cost of living crisis. The campaign says every town and city now has a venue.

On Wednesday a dozen people attended the warm hub at the United Reformed church in Wooler, Northumberland, which has secured a £1,000 grant to heat a room to a “toasty” temperature for three hours, three times a week, and also offers soup.

“Mostly they are older members, 65-plus, but today we had a young family in with their toddler,” said Felicity Barker, a community minister at the church, who is staffing the hub with volunteers. “People start coming for the warmth but they enjoy the fellowship so much they come for the company.”

The volunteers had enjoyed “trying to outdo each other with the different soups” and the atmosphere had been “really lovely”, Barker said. “As people get colder and more worried about putting the heating on, demand will increase,” she said.

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The actor Michael Sheen, who is backing the campaign, said: “Across the country, it has been left to local community spaces, libraries, churches, cafes and halls to provide support to those who are struggling to heat their homes.

“Whilst it’s unacceptable that these spaces should be needed, I find great hope and encouragement to know that there are nearly 3,000 of them that have responded to make sure that no one is left out in the cold. It shows some of our community spirit and character at its best.”

This article was amended on 8 December 2022. An earlier version said that Public Health England has issued a cold weather alert. This organisation was replaced by the UK Health Security Agency in October 2021.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/dec/08/do-not-despair-says-archbishop-as-demand-grows-for-warm-spaces>

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The price of ‘sugar free’: are sweeteners as harmless as we thought?

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Childcare

‘The whole setup is diabolical’: parents’ fears over childcare costs

As fees are to rise by as much as 19% in the new year many families are considering cheaper options



Children playing with their teacher in a kindergarten in Sweden. Some parents in England are considering leaving the country for affordable childcare abroad. Photograph: Folio Images/Alamy



Sally Weale *Education correspondent*

Thu 8 Dec 2022 02.00 EST Last modified on Thu 8 Dec 2022 02.02 EST

Parents who are already struggling with soaring childcare costs have expressed horror after being told their fees are to go up again in the new year by as much as 19%, [as nurseries across the country try to cover their own rising costs](#).

Letters and emails have been sent out by childcare providers, informing parents of the latest price hikes. As a result, some are considering reducing their childcare, pulling their children out, [giving up work](#) or even leaving the country to find cheaper childcare abroad.

Parents who responded to a Guardian call-out said they were already spending more on nursery fees than on their mortgage. Others said their salary barely covers their childcare bill as inflationary pressures drive up providers' costs.

Katie, a charity sector worker in Bath, whose nursery fees for her two-year-old will go up 17.5% in January, with an increase of £10 a day to £67, said: "It's not unexpected but just adds to the already extremely high cost."

“At the moment the crisis in early years recruitment makes us grateful to even have a space.” Another nursery in the area has given notice to 23 families because of staff shortages, while another has reduced hours at short notice.

A father in Leicester said childcare costs for his daughter went up by 10% in April and will now be going up another 12% in January. “Our three-year-old is only two days in nursery, but is now costing more than £500 a month.”

Sarah, an office worker from Somerset, said: “It just makes me feel sick. Our electric bill has just ticked over in to a higher rate, already fuel and food bills are soaring, then the nursery fee goes up. I have no spare cash at the end of the month.

“My son is 15 months old. Before he was born I had a good paying job and was living comfortably. From when I started looking at nurseries to starting, the fee went up and four months later it’s gone up again. Where is the help for people that want to work?”



Rising childcare costs will make life even more difficult for families already struggling with the cost of living crisis. Photograph: Mike Abrahams/Alamy

Meanwhile, a father working in financial services in London said nursery costs for his one-year-old daughter, who is in full day care, would go up an

eye-watering 19% in January, increasing from £2,100 to £2,500 a month.

Most respondents who contacted the Guardian were sympathetic to childcare providers who are seeing their own costs rise with soaring inflation, and many blamed underfunding of the government's 30-hour childcare provision for three and four-year-olds which means nurseries have to cross-subsidise "free" hours by increasing their overall fees.

Heather, a solicitor in Leeds, said her two-year-old daughter had been going to a local private nursery for just over a year. "In that time there has been one price increase of 6% last January and we have just been informed that fees will go up again in the coming January by 10%.

"We were expecting it to be high because nurseries are experiencing the same cost increases as everyone else. The government is not increasing early years funding in line with inflation so no wonder nurseries are struggling.

"I had my baby fully expecting to pay good money for her to be educated and looked after while I go to work, so I'm not about to complain about fees going up. It's the best value for money purchase I make every month and worth every penny."

[Jeremy Hunt's autumn statement last month](#) made no mention of childcare, but as fees go up and childcare providers go under it is likely to become a key election issue.

Ashley Fryer from Kingston upon Thames, who is head of media at a national charity and has an 18-month-old and a four-year-old, will see her childcare bill go up £130 from January. "My husband and I have decent salaries but saving any money every month is impossible given our fees are over £2,600 a month – and that's before the increase."

Philippa Mullen, a part-time civil servant and mother of two nursery-aged children, said since her son started nursery in January 2019, fees have gone up four times – but she is yet to receive a pay rise. "The whole setup is diabolical. Working mums in particular are being forced out of work. I don't

have any disposable income whatsoever. The only reason I'm working is for my pension contribution and to keep a foot in the industry.”

A university administrator said his nursery has just announced price increases for the new year from £300 to £312 a week – the second increase in recent months. “It may get to the point where it actually becomes cheaper for one of us to quit their job and look after the child.

“We are also considering how feasible it would be to leave this country and move to another where childcare is free. It may actually be a more viable option than remaining in the UK, which is, frankly, depressing.”



Purnima Tanuku, chief executive of the National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA), said government had put early years providers in an ‘impossible situation by not paying its fair share’. Photograph: Tony Tallec/Alamy

Purnima Tanuku, chief executive of the National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA), said: “We know nurseries and childcare settings are working hard to keep fee increases down but the government has put early years providers in an impossible situation by not paying its fair share.”

A government spokesperson said the government had spent more than £20bn over the past five years to support families with the cost of childcare and had set out plans to help providers run their businesses more flexibly. “We know

many households and childcare providers are facing pressures from recession and high inflation. Improving the cost, choice and availability of high-quality childcare for working parents is important for this government,” they said.

CASE STUDIES

Irene Muma, from Grays in Essex, works full-time as an HR business partner, but is planning to reduce the number of days her two-year-old son is at nursery to cut costs.

“As a first-time mum I am feeling the impact of the extreme childcare costs. My son’s childcare costs more than my mortgage and half of my pay goes on childcare. The nursery fees went up in September 2022 from £54 a day to £60. I am at a stage where I will need to reduce my son’s days at nursery and cut down my hours to care for my son. This is not my choice, rather as a consequence of the costs of childcare. As a family we are unable to save sufficiently and we are seeing a reduced standard of living. I am in a constant state of anxiety and stress because my career is just as important as being a mum. I shouldn’t have to choose either or. The combination of high childcare costs and cost of living crisis is really impacting my mental health. And I know a lot of mothers are going through the same struggle.”

Amanda Sheriff, who owns Little Hubbers day nursery in North Shields, is putting up her fees by just over 8% next April in order to stay afloat.

“Yes, fees are going up! The national minimum wage increase alone means I have to find an additional £3000 a month, and that’s without national insurance contributions, tax increases, VAT payments, etc. The building mortgage has gone up £459 a month, food costs have gone up £480 a month, gas and electricity have increased by 40%. Absolutely everything has gone up by 12%-20% in the last six months, yet the government-funded hours have not increased in line with inflation since its implementation in 2017. Of course fees need to go up or we as a business will go under. I’ve got zero choice.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/money/2022/dec/08/the-whole-setup-is-diabolical-parents-fears-over-childcare-costs>

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[Coal](#)

Could Cumbria coalmine be stopped despite government green light?

Mine could affect Britain's climate commitments, which some believe could help get decision struck down



The former Marchon chemical works in Whitehaven, Cumbria, the site for West Cumbria Mining's application to open the UK's first new coal mine in decades. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

[Fiona Harvey](#) Environment editor

Thu 8 Dec 2022 01.00 EST Last modified on Fri 9 Dec 2022 04.26 EST

The government has given the green light to a [new coalmine in Cumbria](#), the first in the UK for more than 30 years, but already moves have begun to challenge the decision before construction work can start.

Climate campaigners are examining the decision with a view to a legal challenge, based on the UK's national and international legally binding

climate commitments.

The Guardian understands that lawyers working for NGOs will be looking for grounds to bring a high court claim against the planning permission. If such a claim were to succeed, the court could strike down the government's decision and send it back to ministers to redetermine.

Tony Bosworth, an energy campaigner at Friends of the Earth, said: "The evidence against this mine is huge. It will have a significant impact on UK climate targets, while the market for coal is already disappearing. The UK steel industry wants to move to greener production, like its counterparts in mainland Europe who are rapidly moving away from coal."

Another threat to the mine's future is the general election that must take place within the next two years. Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Green party have all made clear their opposition to the new mine.

Caroline Lucas, Green Party MP for Brighton Pavilion, vowed to keep fighting: "This government has backed a climate-busting, backward-looking, business-wrecking, stranded asset coalmine. This mine is a climate crime against humanity – and such a reckless desire to dig up our dirty fossil fuel past will be challenged every step of the way."

Protesters are also gearing up to take local action at the site of the mine, and any banks and investors that finance the mine will also be put under pressure in public campaigns.

All of this means that it is possible that the new mine will never be operational. The economic viability of the mine – which will cost £165m, create 500 new jobs and produce an estimated 2.8m tonnes of coking coal a year, for steel-making – is already in doubt. Two UK steel companies have said they will not need its coal, and most leading European steel-makers are adopting green production methods.

Ron Deelan, a former chief executive of British Steel, said: "This is a completely unnecessary step for the British steel industry, which is not waiting for more coal as there is enough on the free market available. The

British steel industry needs green investment in electric arc furnaces and hydrogen to protect jobs and make the UK competitive.”

The UK’s own steel industry must reach net zero emissions by 2035, according to the [government’s independent statutory advisers on climate](#), the Committee on Climate Change.

Philip Dunne, the Tory MP who is chair of the environmental audit committee in parliament, said: “Coal is the most polluting energy source, and is not consistent with the government’s net zero ambitions. It is not clear cut to suggest that having a coalmine producing coking coal for steelmaking on our doorstep will reduce steelmakers’ demand for imported coal. On the contrary, when our committee heard from steelmakers earlier this year, they argued that they have survived long enough without UK domestic coking coal and that any purchase of coking coal would be a commercial decision.”

For these reasons, about 83% of the coal produced is likely to be for export, but who the customers may be remains unknown. Steel produced using coal may soon face penalties in the EU, where moves are under way to bring in “carbon border adjustment mechanisms” (CBAMs), which operate as tariffs on high-carbon, favouring lower-carbon products instead, such as steel made with renewable energy.

Simon Nicholas, energy finance analyst at the Institute for [Energy](#) Economics and Financial Analysis, said: “The decision comes as the UK steel sector calls for government support to transition to low-carbon technology, in a bid to remain competitive with the European steel industry, which has seen an acceleration in its technology transition away from coal in 2022.”

Supporters of the mine point to the 500 to 530 jobs that are likely to be created. But environmental experts said many more jobs were likely in [green industries in future](#), such as windfarms, solar farms, [replacing gas for heating](#) with district heating networks and heat pumps, and [tree-planting and nature conservation](#).

Rebecca Willis, professor in energy and climate governance at the University of Lancaster, said: “There is no business case or scientific

justification for this mine, which has only been made possible by a quirk of our planning laws. It will harm the UK's climate credentials and do very little for communities in [Cumbria](#), where the focus should be on delivering long-term, secure and green jobs."

Reaction from climate campaigners in developing countries, which have for years been urged by the UK to move away from coal, has [also been critical](#).

Steve Maël Size, of the Care For Environment/CAN group in Cameroon, pointed out that the UK had [made coal a key issue in its presidency of the Cop26 climate summit](#) in Glasgow last year. "If a power like the UK, which was among the pioneers in the fight against coal, decides to reinvest to open [a coalmine], that would mean that it has long fought for nothing," he said.

This article was amended on 8 December 2022. A previous main image caption incorrectly described the site as "the former Woodhouse Colliery". That is the name of the proposed new mine; the site is the former Marchon chemical works.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/dec/08/government-approves-cumbria-coalmine-legal-challenge>

[**Coal**](#)

[Explainer](#)

What is the Cumbrian coalmine and why does it matter?

Some argue it's a low-carbon alternative to importing coal, but others say Woodhouse Colliery would damage UK's climate reputation



A view of Whitehaven in Cumbria, north-west England, near the site of the proposed new coalmine. Photograph: Jon Super/AP

[Fiona Harvey](#) Environment editor

Wed 7 Dec 2022 13.20 EST Last modified on Thu 8 Dec 2022 00.14 EST

What is the Cumbrian coalmine?

A new coalmine, the Woodhouse Colliery, has been proposed at a site near Whitehaven in [Cumbria](#), with £165m investment and a production capacity of about 2.8m tonnes of coal a year. The proposal has been mooted for more than two years.

Ministers at first [offered a green light](#), but [high-profile opposition to the proposal](#) as the UK prepared to take on the presidency of the [Cop26 UN climate summit in 2021](#) prompted a rethink.

After a [public inquiry](#), a decision was expected in the summer but was delayed by the Tory party leadership contest and then [put off](#) again until after the [Cop27 UN climate summit](#), which finished last month.

Haven't we stopped using coal?

The use of coal for electricity generation has been close to being [phased out in the UK](#), though [some use has been continued](#) due to gas shortage fears after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

However, the proposed minewould produce coking coal used for making steel, rather than thermal coal for electricity generation.

Supporters say coking coal is likely to be needed for some years, as green methods of making steel have yet to be widely adopted.

Would the coal be lower carbon than alternatives?

Some have argued that using Cumbrian coal would produce less carbon than importing coal for steel-making from other regions, such as Russia.

However, at least two UK steel-makers have ruled out using coal from the Cumbrian mine, and steel-makers across Europe are increasingly [turning to low-carbon steel-making techniques](#), such as electric arc furnaces with energy from windfarms and other renewable sources.

That means the market for such coal is [likely to be limited](#). The coal is also expected to be high in sulphur and therefore liable to be rejected even by steel-makers still using coal.

About 83% of the coal produced from the mine would be for export, according to estimates, which would add to global greenhouse gas emissions.

Would the new mine create jobs?

About 500 jobs would be associated with the mine, according to its proponents. Detractors point out that building onshore windfarms – until recently subject to a ban in England – would produce many times more jobs and an ongoing source of clean energy.

There are also moves to start other green technology businesses in the north of England, from hydrogen and carbon capture and storage to electric vehicles. Using ground source heat networks in the north-east could create 15,000 jobs, according to one study, and restoring nature could also produce as many as 16,000 jobs around the country, focusing on rural areas such as Cumbria.

How does a new mine fit with the UK's net zero targets?

The coalmine would increase emissions by about 400,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide a year, or the equivalent of 200,000 cars on the road.

The UK is legally committed to cutting greenhouse gas emissions to net zero – the point at which any remaining emissions are balanced out by the amount of carbon absorbed by the UK's trees and soils – by 2050.

The mine could be scheduled to shut down by 2049, and therefore still fall technically within the net zero goal.

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Who is in favour of the new mine?

The Tory MP for Workington, Mark Jenkinson, has described it as a way of reducing the UK's carbon footprint. "As Britain still needs coking coal for the foreseeable future to make our world-leading steel, it should come from here, not imported thousands of miles away – which will only increase our carbon footprint further," he told the Sun.

Some of his "[red wall](#)" [Tory colleagues](#) see it as part of the effort to level up deprived areas in the north of England. On the right wing of the Tory party, the [Net Zero Scrutiny Group](#) is against the net zero target, and some of those MPs want the mine to go ahead.

Who is against the new mine?

Alok Sharma was the cabinet minister who received widespread acclaim on the world stage when he led [the UK's successful presidency of the Cop26 UN climate summit](#) in Glasgow last year. Demoted to the backbenches by Rishi Sunak, he has taken his opportunity to speak out. [He told the Observer](#): "Over the past three years the UK has sought to persuade other nations to consign coal to history because we are fighting to limit global warming to 1.5C, and coal is the most polluting energy source. A decision to open a new coalmine would send completely the wrong message and be an own goal. This proposed new mine will have no impact on reducing energy bills or ensuring our energy security."

Lord Stern of Brentford, an acclaimed economist who has worked on the climate, development and public policy, added: "Opening a coalmine in the UK now is a serious mistake: economic, social, environmental, financial and political. Economically, it is investing in the technologies of the last century, not this, and that is the wrong path to growth. Socially, it is pursuing jobs in industries that are on the way out, creating future job insecurity. Environmentally, it is adding to world supply and thus consumption of coal and releasing greenhouse gases, when there is an urgent need to reduce

them. And politically, it is undermining the UK's authority on the most important global issue of our time.”

Will a new mine in the UK make any difference, when China is expanding its coal use?

China is the world’s biggest consumer of coal and is [still building new coal-fired power plants](#). However, experts say many of the new planned coal plants are unlikely to ever be built, and China is working on peaking its greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, with experts saying it could peak as soon as 2025.

A new coalmine in Cumbria would produce far less carbon than China’s planned expansion, but it would fuel criticism of the UK as a “hypocritical” developed country for advocating the phaseout of coal around the world while planning its expansion at home.

How will other countries react to a new coalmine in the UK?

Experts on the UN climate negotiations and activists in developing countries have said any decision to go ahead would be disastrous for the UK’s reputation on climate internationally. It could even put at risk global progress on cutting greenhouse gas emissions because laggard countries will be able to point to the UK’s hypocrisy as an excuse for their own inaction.

Tensions between the developed and developing world have already been high, as seen at the recent Cop27 summit where [rows over the failures of developed countries nearly derailed the talks](#). A new mine in the UK would inflame that situation further, to the detriment of climate hopes.

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Strengthen your heart, bones – and maybe even your brain: a beginner’s guide to weight training at any age



Strength training can reduce blood pressure, lower cholesterol and improve circulation. Photograph: RyanJLane/Getty Images

A resistance workout is not just about adding muscle: it can bring a host of other proven benefits as well. So what is stopping you?

Joel Snape

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‘I got obsessed with watching Olympic weightlifting during London 2012,’ says Fiona Clements, a software developer working in London. ‘I think it’s partly because the effort is so visible – you can see every flicker of doubt, pain and triumph on the athletes’ faces. I was 48 at the time. I thought I’d left it far too late to even consider trying it, but then I kept thinking about it. It took until September 2022, but I finally went for it.’ Now 58, Clements can deadlift 50kg and push 21kg overhead. She says she has never felt stronger.

Resistance training, to use the catch-all term for any sort of exercise where you’re working against weight, whether it’s using dumbbells, exercise bands or just your own body weight, has a lot to recommend it. It makes you stronger and more injury-resistant by increasing bone density and strengthening the muscles, ligaments and tendons around your joints. It mitigates the risk of everything from falls to osteoporosis as you age. It can burn calories and reduce body fat more efficiently than cardio, by keeping your metabolism elevated for days after each workout. Plus, it’s more effective for flexibility than certain styles of stretching.

Strength training can reduce blood pressure, lower cholesterol and improve circulation by strengthening the heart and blood vessels – and probably protects against heart disease. It improves mood, might help with your risk of depression and seems to have protective effects against dementia and cognitive decline. It also just makes life a bit easier: from moving a sofa when it’s time to do the vacuuming to wrangling your carry-on into an overhead locker, things are often simpler with just a bit of extra strength.

So why don't more people do it? A [survey](#) published in May suggests that, even though 67% of UK adults meet the current guidelines for aerobic activity, only 7.3% of men and 4.1% of women achieved the recommendations for strengthening activity. As the UK population ages, it should be a no-brainer, whether you're hoping to stave off osteoporosis or hoist your grandchildren aloft when they come to visit. But for many people, strength training comes with a few sticking points.



Joanna Blacker took up strength training at 53. Photograph: Ultimate Performance

"I just thought that it would be impossible to make a difference to my body as an older woman," says Joanna Blacker, a small business owner and recently qualified personal trainer from west London, who took up strength training at 53. "I'd been through the menopause, gained weight and felt awful. I certainly didn't think that weightlifting would be the way I would change my body – I thought I should be doing lots of class-based, aerobic style exercise. You think of gyms as full of muscled guys strutting around hogging all the weights. You wouldn't want to step in not know what you're doing."

This attitude isn't uncommon. Running, to take the nation's favourite cardio activity, is something you can do alone and unsupervised; lifting weights is

something that most people associate with going to a gym or working with a trainer. Running is simple, and the goals are clear: get a bit faster, do it for a bit longer without stopping, maybe do a 5k or (if you're keen) a marathon. Weights are intimidating and there's always a niggling feeling that if you push it too hard, you'll end up worse off than before you started.

Perhaps most importantly, running includes a single movement pattern that every human naturally understands; lifting has dozens, and it's not clear which ones you need to focus on. The fragmented nature of the fitness industry doesn't help: the qualifications you need to work as an entry-level personal trainer in the UK teach very little about practical strength training, focusing instead on machines or teaching classes.

So how do you get around these problems? First, by remembering that you do not need to join a gym. "It's a building with some fitness equipment, not some sort of holy ground where fitness must take place," says Andrew Tracey, fitness editor for Men's Health. "By not outsourcing your fitness to 'somewhere else' you'll save a fortune on gym membership, parking fees and fuel. You'll also remove all of those things as obstacles every time you think: 'I can't be bothered.' It's a lot harder to say 'no' when all you've got to do is walk into your garage or spare room."

Next up: realising that your body understands resistance as resistance – dumbbells and kettlebells (those cannonball-style weights with a handle at the top) are just one convenient form. "You can start by using your own body weight and objects around the house," says [Sally Moss](#), a strength coach who specialises in Olympic lifting. "For example, you can use your stairs to help you do a push up by putting your hands on a high step, or use a chair to do a step up."

If you're ready to invest in some equipment, you can go a long way with not very much. "The equipment you need is going to come down to your budget, goals and space – and the things you actually enjoy doing," says Tracey. "But you can go a long way with nothing but a pair of medium-weight dumbbells – that combined add up to 25% of your body weight – somewhere to do pull-ups or rows, and some resistance bands [like giant rubber bands of varying strengths]. If you want to lift serious weights but

you're on a budget, a sandbag is the most economical way to get strong – throw some sand in freezer bags, tape them shut to reduce the risk of leakage, then toss them all in an old rucksack and you've got the perfect adaptable training tool.”



Andrew Tracey.

As for the movements, this bit is simpler than it sounds. “It’s a good idea to start each session by picking a few exercises that work on your biggest-hitting ‘movement patterns’ – pushing, pulling, squatting and hip-hinging [a movement where you ‘hinge’ at the hips], as in deadlifts or kettlebell swings,” says Tracey.

“You can easily combine these to speed up your workout, while adding a little cardio element at the same time. Think press-ups going directly into a higher-rep [higher-repetition] set of squats. [See the FAQs if you’re confused by talk of sets and reps.] Mix these movements up from session to session and keep track of your reps and sets so you’ve got ‘high scores’ to beat. Once you’ve done the meat and potatoes, you can use your bands for ‘accessory movements’ if you want to – think biceps curls.”

If planning alone is still too intimidating, there’s always the option of getting some tuition. “Last Christmas, I got to the point where it was do or die and

signed up with the gym [Ultimate Performance](#),” says Blacker. “I thought I’d need a lot of motivation, but I actually didn’t – I saw results quite quickly and I just wanted to learn more about how to do things correctly.”

Clements signed up for a beginner’s class with Moss, and loved it from her first session. “My school was obsessed with team sports involving hand-eye coordination, and I came away thinking that anything with a coach wasn’t for me – but within five minutes of walking in the door of the gym, I thought: ‘Yes, these are my people.’”

Blacker can now bench-press 40kg for 10 reps and feels more than ready to tackle training alone. Clements, meanwhile, has already signed up with her local gym, for the days she’s not training with Moss. “I can feel these bands of hard muscle when I flex that I’m pretty sure weren’t there before,” she says. “But the best part is that I’m actually able to understand the sport I love. It still feels like magic when that bar goes overhead.”

Strength training from scratch

To get started with strength training, don’t overcomplicate it – get familiar with a handful of moves that hit the main movement patterns, then mix and match them according to how many times you’d like to train in a week. Here are a few to begin with:



Press-up. Photograph: Daniel Allan/Getty Images/Image Source

Horizontal push: press-up

The one move everyone knows is among the best for upper-body strength – as long as you do it properly. Perfect form is to start with your hands directly under your shoulders, keep your body in a plank-like position, tuck your elbows to your sides to reduce strain on your joints, and touch your chest to the floor at the bottom of each “rep” (repetition). If you can’t do a single rep, start with your hands on a step, sofa, or even a wall to make it easier. (Knee press-ups, which are often suggested as an alternative, reduce your core’s involvement, so they aren’t a great way of working up to the full version.)

Also try: dumbbell bench press, dips



Bent row. Photograph: Roijoy/Getty Images/iStockphoto

Horizontal pull: bent row

This is the most basic “pulling” move, and something you can do with any sort of improvised weight – or if you’re feeling fancy, a resistance band. Bend at the waist – your back should be straight and at about 45 degrees from vertical – and “row” the weight to your ribs by pulling your elbows behind you, keeping them tucked in. Keep the weight light enough to let you pause at the top of the movement.

Also try: pull-ups, inverted rows



Pull-up. Photograph: Goodboy Picture Company/Getty Images

Vertical pull: pull-up

If you've never done these before it's unlikely you'll manage one on your first go, but pulling moves are important for posture. Keeping a bar up in your house – there are lots that will clip securely on to a doorway – makes them a fun challenge. Start with "negatives" – use a little jump to get your chin higher than the bar, then lower yourself slowly to a near-hang, and repeat. A quick reminder: technically, in pull-ups your hands face away, while in chin-ups they face towards you. The former are better for your back, while the latter build your arms.

Also try: inverted rows



Dumbbell press. Photograph: kali9/Getty Images

Vertical push: dumbbell press

Your best bet for vertical pressing if you aren't up to handstand press-ups – dumbbell presses are shoulder-friendly and equally possible with kettlebells or soup cans. Start with the weights at your shoulders, brace your core and press straight overhead, letting your hands rotate naturally as you go through the movement. Slow and controlled is the winner here.

Also try: one-armed overhead press, push press



Kettlebell swing. Photograph: Westend61/Getty Images

Hip hinge: kettlebell swing

To get this one right, remember that it's a dynamic movement – in most moves, using momentum to complete the rep is verboten, but here it's a must. Swing a kettlebell or dumbbell back between your legs, bend your knees *slightly*, then straighten up and drive your hips forward to swing the bell up to roughly chest height. Don't squat and don't do a front raise.

Also try: jump squats



Weighted lunge. Photograph: Thomas Barwick/Getty Images

One-legged movement: reverse lunge

Often a little less wobbly than its forward variation, so a great place to start. From a standing start, take a big step backwards and bend your leading leg until your trailing knee just brushes the floor. Return to a standing position, then repeat on the other leg. You can weight this in lots of ways – a dumbbell in each hand, a rucksack full of books, or a “goblet” style hold as below – but master the weight-free version first.

Also try: lunges, walking lunges, step-ups



Goblet squat. Photograph: Thomas Barwick/Getty Images

Squat: goblet squat

One of the best forms of squat, as it's almost entirely self-correcting. Hold a dumbbell in front of you with both palms on end, as if you're holding a medieval goblet – then keep your weight on your heels as you squat, aiming to bring your elbows inside your knees. If you stray into the forward lean that plagues many barbell squatters, you'll lose control of the weight – and by pausing for a few seconds at the bottom of the movement, you'll build strength *and* mobility.

Also try: [bodyweight squats](#), [back squats](#), [front squats](#)



Suitcase carry. Photograph: Fly View Productions/Getty Images

Carry: suitcase carry

You can skip this one if you regularly carry your own shopping – but if your delivery guy gets more exercise than you, add it to your plan. Hold a heavy dumbbell, kettlebell or rucksack in one hand, walk for a few metres, then switch hands and walk back. Brace your core to keep yourself upright, and keep your other arm out for balance if you need to.

Also try: farmer's walk, waiter's walk

The workouts

These two short workouts use “supersets” – two moves, done without rest, to add a cardio element and make your training time go further. Add them to your weekly routine to make a simple start with strength training – if you’ve got time for more, just alternate between them.

Workout 1

1A Press-up Sets 3 Reps 8

1B Bent row Sets 3 Reps 8

2A Goblet squat Sets 3 Reps 12

2B Kettlebell swing Sets 3 Reps 15

Workout 2

1A Dumbbell press Sets 3 Reps 8

1B Pull-up Sets 3 Reps 3

2A Lunge Sets 3 Reps 8 each leg

2B Suitcase carry Sets 3 Distance: 10m on each side



Photograph: Image Source/Getty Images

FAQs

What are sets and reps?

Reps are simply repetitions – it's the number of times you do an exercise before you stop for a rest. Sets are simply groups of reps. So 10 press-ups, followed by a rest, followed by another 10 press-ups is two sets of 10 reps.

How much weight should I use?

Enough to make the moves feel challenging, but not so much that you're "grinding" out repetitions. As a rule of thumb, each rep should go at the same speed – once they start to slow down, stop. Pushing until you fail is useful if you want to build muscle bulk, but not for strength.

How many reps should I do?

The general rule is that using a weight that allows you to get through one to five reps builds pure strength, five to 12 helps with muscle, and anything over 12 builds muscular endurance – but there's a fair bit of crossover. If you're working with a light set of dumbbells or a band, there's nothing wrong with doing reps until the speed drops off (see above).



Photograph: Inti St Clair/Getty Images/Tetra images RF

How much should I rest?

Again, this depends on your goals: lifters aiming to do one or two reps with a near-maximal weight might rest for five minutes between sets, while if you're training for fat loss you should keep rests to less than a minute. For strength and/or muscle, the middle ground is ideal – think 90 to 120 seconds.

How do I pick a gym?

As you learn more movements you'll understand more about the kit you

need, but for most people, the important thing is to pick a gym close enough and empty enough to let you train regularly. The most important thing is squat racks, which allow you to load up and squat or press heavy barbells rather than getting them off the floor – as well as catching the bar if you fail. You don't want to queue for one, so make sure your gym has at least two.

OK, I'm hooked. How do I progress?

Add a book or two on training to your reading list – Easy Strength by Dan John and Pavel Tsatsouline is great – and start keeping track of your rep records in a few big movements. You'll soon be planning your weeks around your gym sessions.

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[Opinion](#)[Human rights](#)

Suella Braverman is spoiling for a fight on human rights – one that undermines this whole government

[Martin Kettle](#)



The home secretary's factionalism and refusal to toe the line are making Rishi Sunak look weaker by the day

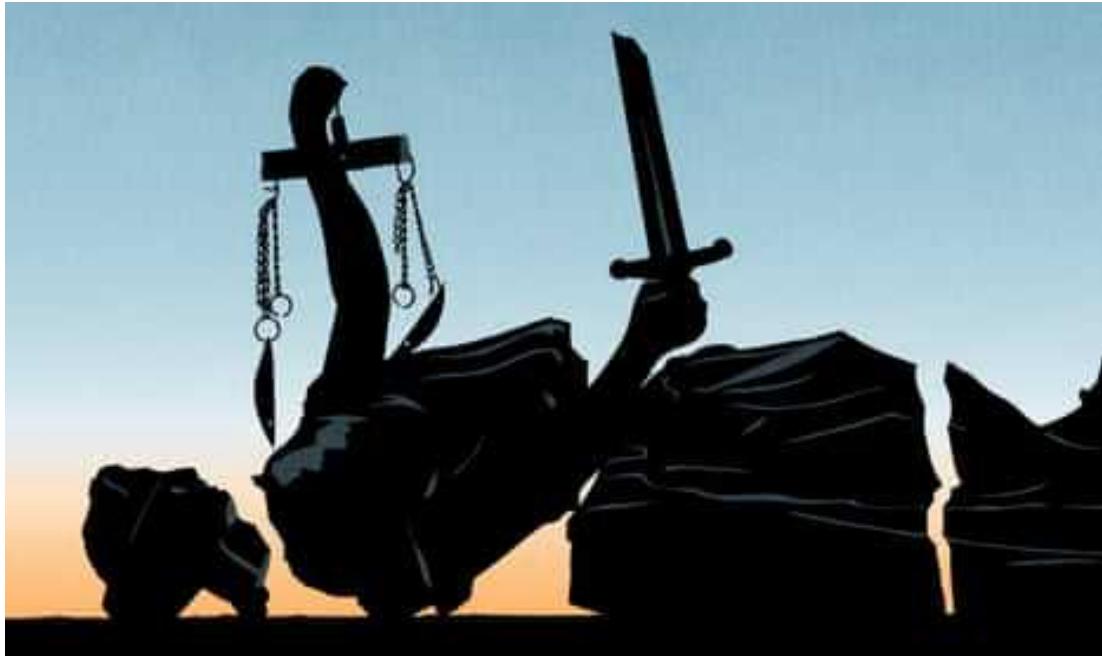


Illustration: Bill Bragg/The Guardian

Thu 8 Dec 2022 01.00 ESTLast modified on Thu 8 Dec 2022 05.50 EST

There is no mystery about Suella Braverman's views on the European convention on human rights. The home secretary wants Britain to withdraw from it. And she doesn't care who knows it, even if that means ignoring the evidence, trashing cabinet collective responsibility and breaching the ministerial code once again.

Withdrawal is what [Braverman advocated](#) when she ran to be leader of the Conservative party in the summer contest won by Liz Truss. It's what she advocated "personally" as home secretary at a Tory party conference fringe meeting in October, before she was forced to resign two weeks later for a separate breach of the ministerial code. And it's what she came super-close to repeating this week when, home secretary once more, [she endorsed](#) a Centre for Policy Studies (CPS) report on Channel migration crossings that calls for withdrawal as an option.

There is, though, a major political problem with Braverman's *idée fixe*, in and out of government, of withdrawal from the convention. Withdrawal from the European human rights process, of which Britain was a founder under the postwar premierships of Clement Attlee and Winston Churchill, is

not actually UK government policy – and Braverman is a senior member of that government.

Nor was withdrawal part of the Conservatives’ 2019 [election manifesto](#), which Rishi Sunak says he regards as his government’s mandate. It was not part of the remit of the [human rights review](#) – which had been promised in the manifesto – that was established by the Johnson government in 2020 under Sir Peter Gross. It formed no part of the 520-page report published by Gross the following year, which concluded that Britain’s human rights laws were “generally working well”.

Withdrawal is not part of the bill of rights that was [launched by Dominic Raab](#) during his first stint as justice secretary in June either. Under this far-reaching piece of human rights law reform – which flies in the face of the Gross review – Britain would nevertheless remain a party to the European convention and British citizens would retain the right, which they have had since 1966, to take cases to the Strasbourg court.

Raab’s plan remains paused in the Westminster legislative process. It was [halted by Liz Truss](#) in September amid reports that officials considered it “a complete mess”. It has not yet had its second reading in the Commons and it has yet to be considered by the House of Lords. But it is due to come back to parliament soon. As recently as 22 November, [Raab told MPs](#) that, when it does, “we are staying as a party to the ECHR”.



‘Suella Braverman breaks the rules and conventions of office to suit herself and her faction. So far, she has been able to get away with it.’ Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

Not if Braverman gets her way, however. Raab’s commitment is now the subject of an internal Tory party tug of war, in which the home secretary, under pressure over Channel migrant crossings, wants to break with the human rights convention altogether in order to fast-track plans to deport Channel migrants to Rwanda. Withdrawal has long been a goal of the Tory party’s most rightwing nationalists. Braverman is therefore placing herself at the head of a revolt with plenty of potential supporters.

Already this week, Sunak has backed down in the face of backbench attacks on [housing policy](#) and onshore wind turbines. Braverman’s decision to write a [supportive introduction](#) to the new CPS report, co-written by Theresa May’s former aide Nick Timothy, is thus a high-stakes move on another front. If she loses, it may be a resignation issue, which may cement her claims to be the leader of the party’s nationalist wing.

If she wins, Raab’s future would be the one in doubt. But there are bigger issues at stake in this argument than ministerial personalities. There are at least three of these.

The first is Sunak's diminishing authority over his government. Braverman has clearly interpreted her reappointment in October as proof of the [new prime minister's weakness](#). He has to balance the Tory party's many factions. She is driven by faction. He therefore needs her more than she needs him. So she breaks the rules and conventions of office – something Braverman did as attorney general too – to suit herself and her faction. So far, she has been able to get away with it.

This does not merely emphasise Sunak's weakness as a party manager. It also underlines how the Conservative party is struggling to stem the decline in political trust. Sunak has not yet tried to put his personal stamp on the ministerial code, and he has not appointed an ethics adviser. He badly needs to do both. Otherwise he is at risk of presiding over a period of sleaze scandals such as the PPE inquiry and resignation honours lists. The final months of Tory government will not improve the party's election chances if it is seen to be a factional free-for-all taking place in an ethical desert.

The second is the way an often chimerical argument about human rights laws encapsulates and stimulates the Tory party's haphazard retreat into a bubble of English exceptionalism. Whether it is expressed by Braverman or by Raab, the common threads of this are a bogus sense of British victimhood (exemplified by the delusion that Britain is uniquely affected by migration), a belief in greatness frustrated (exemplified by the lies of Brexit), and an impatience with conventional wisdom in favour of reckless contrarianism (exemplified both by Dominic Cummings and Liz Truss).

Frustratingly for the [Conservatives](#) who think this way, their doctrinaire belief in the nation as the sole arena of effective governance has developed at the same time as their own party has been consciously reducing the resources of the nation state over the past half-century. It means they long to create a country they have themselves done so much to destroy.

The weakening of the Conservative party's commitment to the rule of law is the final example. Margaret Thatcher used to invoke the rule of law at every turn. If she did that today, many in her party might be tempted to view her with suspicion. The former attorney general Dominic Grieve [pointed out](#) this week that today's ministers, unlike their forebears, display "a persistent,

almost endemic frustration with legal constraints". The government, said Grieve, was evolving "a novel constitutional principle: that governments enjoying the confidence of a parliamentary majority have essentially a popular mandate to do whatever they like and that obstruction of this is unacceptable".

This is where the crisis in the Channel meets the pathological victimhood of so much of the modern Tory party. The compulsion to deport migrants to Rwanda is the latest case in which ministers see the law as a hostile opponent. Braverman's attitude is indicative of a party at ease with the judges cast as "enemies of the people" and with human rights dismissed as the plaything of lefty lawyers. Raab's bill of rights, for which there is negligible demand outside earnest Tory thinktanks, embodies the same approach. A generation and more after Thatcher, it is now the Conservatives who chafe against the rule of law and Labour who seems more comfortable with it.

- Martin Kettle is a Guardian columnist
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OpinionThe White Lotus

If the White Lotus is supposed to be a hate-watch, why am I enjoying it so much?

Emma Brockes



The only thing more fun than tuning into the HBO show is debating which character you currently detest most



The White Lotus: ‘Rich people behaving badly in beautiful locations.’

Photograph: Fabio Lovino/HBO

Thu 8 Dec 2022 03.00 EST

One of the many pleasures of [The White Lotus](#), the HBO show in its second season that does that old-school thing – makes you impatient for the beginning of the week for the next episode to drop – is the grain of squeamish recognition that comes with the horror.

Mike White’s characters are grotesque, but they aren’t *grotesques*, and even in the worst-behaving characters it’s possible to see some shadow of impulses one sees in oneself. It’s been so long since TV this good came along, I’d forgotten how it went – harassing your friends, spouse, anyone who’ll listen: “Hurry and catch up so we can discuss.”

The wider joy of event TV is the event bit: watching the post-game analysis on social media. This week, so far, discussions have taken off asking why the characters always eat in the hotel restaurant, soliciting responses from those familiar with the area that, actually, the town and its restaurants are a hike from that hotel, so it’s not just a TV conceit; and who’s the grosser between Shane from season one and Cameron from this season? (Side

question: is it a failure of the drama that I can't remember anyone's name in this show, and had to look both of those up?)

Other pressing concerns: is Tom Hollander the best thing in everything he appears in? (Yes.) How has Mike White, who's from Pasadena, made that Essex lad so credible? Friends are in a semi-row over whether Ethan really did do something wrong; and every week the sands shift, forcing one to reconsider whom one hates the most.

It's a measure of the writing power that over the last few episodes I've moved between Portia, the whiny gen Z assistant to Jennifer Coolidge's monstrous billionaire, herself a contender for Most Awful in Show until this week, when honestly – minority opinion – I think it's Albie. Ugh, that guy.

Given that The White Lotus is about rich people behaving badly in beautiful locations, the entire show is supposed to be a hate-watch of sorts, but its sharpness means it doesn't seem to play out that way. It's not a guilty pleasure, either. During a radio interview this week, [Mike White](#) traced the show's influences back to a combination of 70s sitcoms, Laverne & Shirley, and The Love Boat – both childhood favourites of his – and the reality show, which he himself has appeared on, Survivor. The show has a lot of pretentious cutaways to baroque Italian paintings, but he's not out there punting it as Shakespeare, unlike most HBO showrunners.

Other questions to consider: does Belinda from season one remain the most shrewdly drawn character, to the extent that she's the only one whose name anyone remembers? Is there some way that those people who, after watching episode four this season, asked "Is that actually his nephew?" – among them the Daily Mail, [decrying](#) the "incestuous gay sex scene" – can be banned from watching? Why didn't Portia call an Uber after Essex boy passed out? Would the gays really betray Tanya?

My friend Tiff and I put at least 25 minutes this week into talking about where Mike White writes from – historically, the margins: he's a gay guy, but not in the mould of Ryan Murphy, say. For many of us, he will always be Mr Schneebly, the dorky substitute teacher he played in School of Rock – and he writes like someone who spent years on the outside looking in.

Anyway, onwards. Is it correct to love (checks character list) Valentina? The depiction of the sex-starved lesbian hotel manager is beautifully drawn, acted and observed, but why is the single lesbian in everything always depressing and sex starved? Is this one better than the first season? I could go on (and on).

Meanwhile, the anxiety of the thing ending next week is starting to bite. What will we think about after it's all over? And is it time, finally, to switch off for five minutes and actually consider reading a book?

Emma Brockes is a Guardian columnist

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OpinionMining

Have no doubt: opening a coalmine in Cumbria is a climate crime against humanity

[Caroline Lucas](#)



Locals desperate for lower bills, jobs and economic revival have been seduced by this plan, but they – and we – will suffer



The former Woodhouse colliery in Whitehaven, Cumbria is the site for West Cumbria Mining's plan to open a new coalmine. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

Wed 7 Dec 2022 13.59 EST Last modified on Wed 7 Dec 2022 15.18 EST

Today, the government has thrown its weight behind a climate-busting, [backward-looking coalmine](#) in Cumbria. The staggering hypocrisy of demanding other countries phase down coal, just when we're phasing it back in again, sends a truly terrible message to global south countries and marks this decision as a climate crime against humanity.

Given this, you'd be forgiven for wondering why a new coalmine appears to have garnered local support. Areas such as Whitehaven in west [Cumbria](#) have been told it will "level up" the community – bringing lower bills, more jobs and economic revival to areas that have severely lacked all three for generations. So when a private coal company turned up, the community, understandably nostalgic for its more prosperous past, bit their arm off.

This mine threatens to pump out [9m tonnes of CO2 emissions](#) each year – equivalent to the cities of Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast combined. [Tory backbenchers](#), [senior figures](#) and even the former Cop26 president, [Alok Sharma](#), have all begged the government not to open this mine. But now,

past climate pledges to reduce emissions and phase out coal have been conveniently forgotten, and current clamours have fallen on closed ears. Our oft-trumpeted claims of climate leadership bypassed; our credibility on the world stage in tatters.

It's equally false for ministers to claim now that, after the devastating war in Ukraine, we need to ensure that energy bills don't spiral further and rely on our own "[domestic resources](#)". Whitehaven will produce coking coal for the steel industry, not for power generation – it will make absolutely no difference to household energy bills, and will do nothing to improve domestic energy supply.

Yet even the steel industry itself neither wants nor needs this coal. [British Steel](#) (one of the UK's two major steel customers) has said it is unlikely to use the coal, owing to its high sulphur content. A [steel expert](#) states that the mine "would not displace a single tonne of Russian coking coal from the UK", since Russia also uses a different type of coking coal. As the [Climate Change Committee](#) notes, the site won't support the UK steel industry at all because 85% of the coal will be exported abroad.

Instead, the steel industry is looking to the future. "Green steel" uses electric arc furnaces (EAF) to produce steel from direct reduced iron (DRI). While early-stage green steel still uses [some gas](#), the process can become zero or very low carbon through the use of hydrogen, produced by electrolysis using renewable energy. So those coal jobs promised? They won't last long when the mine becomes an enormous stranded asset.

It's clear that this mine will be nothing more than a toxic, expensive and useless dump by circa 2030. But until there is a convincing, transformative plan for a greener future, no one will consider alternative solutions.

For example, one local [report](#) last year found that over the next 15 years, 9,000 green jobs could be created in Cumbria – of which 4,500 would be specifically in west Cumbria, where this coal will be dug up. That's nine times the numbers of jobs expected from the mine. From generating renewable electricity, to retrofitting buildings – these are high-skilled, high-quality, long-term jobs for the future.

Then there's economic revival. The only way to replace fossil fuels in the long term is ambitious investment in renewable energy. There is a greener route to the local prosperity that areas such as west Cumbria are craving. And it's happening right now, in places including Lewes, where Greens jointly run the council – by pooling resources with neighbouring areas, they're insulating [40,000 social homes](#) across the region, installing renewable energy, and keeping jobs required for those services within the local area.

While Whitehaven won't make any difference to fuel bills, the government could be doing things that will. When we have the leakiest homes in Europe, we need to insulate the nation with enough funding to make it work. The cheapest energy is the energy we don't use – so let's help people save rather than squander.

This is the kind of future that not only west Cumbrians could have – but one we could all have. Where people are warm in their homes, safe in a high-skilled job, paying affordable energy bills – and starting to address the climate crisis at the same time.

We mustn't keep yearning for the past, when there is so much potential for a bright future ahead. And that future starts by keeping this coal in the ground.

- Caroline Lucas is the Green MP for Brighton Pavilion
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OpinionSex

Sexual choking is now so common that many young people don't think it even requires consent. That's a problem

[Chanel Contos](#)

In a sexual landscape shaped by pornography, far too many incorrectly believe that choking is routine and risk-free



‘Ideally choking would involve conversations and research that allow people to take a calculated risk, but instead it has become mainstream to the point where it is too often assumed that consent is not necessary.’ Photograph: Himani Baisla/Getty Images/EyeEm

Wed 7 Dec 2022 18.28 EST Last modified on Wed 7 Dec 2022 23.47 EST

When I was 19 I was at a birthday event. We were playing a drinking game and one of the questions was “what’s the kinkiest thing you like to do during

sex?”. My friend, who was 17, replied: “It’s not really that kinky, but I guess choking”.

The conversation carried on as if nothing out of the ordinary had just been said. I remember feeling self-conscious about my sexuality, wondering if I was a “prude”, if the consensus was that choking was “not really that kinky”.

Choking during partnered sex is a form of sexual asphyxiation. Although it’s colloquially called “choking”, it’s actually a form of strangulation, as it is performed by pressing or squeezing the neck (medically, choking means an internal blockage of air passages). The pressure around the neck cuts off the flow of blood, resulting in blood congestion in the brain. The effect is lightheadedness due to the drop in oxygen levels and increase in carbon dioxide. For some this intensifies erotic pleasure.

This all sounds quite extreme when you spell it out like this, but in the moment all that is needed is a hand around the neck during an intimate moment. Other than the deprivation of oxygen to the brain, many women have told me that the gesture is erotic in itself, as it instantly adds an overt power dynamic into a sexual act.

In human sexuality, kinkiness is the use of non-conventional sexual practices, concepts or fantasies. Choking in sex is a kink. Yet it has somehow made its way under the mainstream umbrella of things that many young people assume are OK to do without consent – often the first time you’re sexually involved with them.

Experts have warned that there is [no safe way](#) to engage in this act. Humans take risks all the time. The concern does not lie with this kink, where ideally it would involve conversations and research that allow people to take a calculated risk, but instead with the fact that it has become mainstream to the point where it is too often assumed that consent is not necessary, and that it seems a standard part of sexual activity in young people.

Sexual choking has become increasingly prevalent in mixed-sex pornography and young men's sexual behaviour. [A national probability survey](#) in the US found that 21% of women reported having been choked during sex, and 20% of men reported that they have choked a partner during sex. In this study, adults ages 18 to 29 reported engaging in choking at higher rates than older adults, which suggests a cohort effect and exhibits the population shift in sexual behaviour.

[Another US study](#) found that 58% of female college students have been choked during sex, further suggesting that this "kink" is becoming increasingly common in younger age demographics. This study found that while many women enjoyed choking, others did it largely to please their sexual partner. This is the real kicker. The problem here is not only that women are being choked during sex without giving consent, but that a lot of the time they are "consenting" not because they derive their own sexual pleasure from it, but because they think it turns the guy on.

Separating true consent from the desire to give your male partner sexual satisfaction is difficult.

But I suggest that a good place to start is to equip young girls and women, who have grown up in an era where pornography has shaped every inch of their sexual landscape, with the capabilities to decide if it is an act they truly want to engage in.

Once I was kissing someone (quite casually I might add) and he put his hand around my neck and started to choke me. I moved his hand away from me and said "why are you doing that?" and he said "I dunno, I thought you'd like it". When I told him I didn't, he seemed genuinely surprised.

It made me sad to think about the amount of girls who would have just "gone along with it" in that moment – including myself a few years ago. I would have known myself well enough to know that being choked wasn't something that sexually turned me on, however I don't know if I would have been able to distinguish between enjoying a sexual encounter because the man I was with was enjoying it, or because I truly enjoyed it myself.

I worry about how many women are yet to make this distinction, and implore you to consider where the true source of your consent lies, because if it is with the desire to satisfy men who want to strangle you, it may be wrongly placed.

Chanel Contos is the Founder of Teach Us Consent, and the director of [The Australia Institute's Centre for Sex and Gender Equality](#). She is on the [BBC's list](#) of 100 influential and inspiring women of 2022 and her book on consent will be published by Pan MacMillan in 2023

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- Peru President removed from office and charged with ‘rebellion’ after alleged coup attempt
- Boeing Last 747 rolls off line after half a century of production
- South Korea Truth commission to investigate dozens of foreign adoptions
- New York Times Company poised for first mass staff walkout in 40 years
- Japan Lower house tightens religious donation rules amid Unification church controversy

[Peru](#)

Peru president removed from office and charged with ‘rebellion’ after alleged coup attempt

Pedro Castillo arrested for ‘breaching constitutional order’, says prosecutor, as new president Dina Boluarte sworn in

Peruvians take to streets as president charged and removed from office – video

Dan Collyns in Lima

@yachay_dc

Wed 7 Dec 2022 19.19 ESTFirst published on Wed 7 Dec 2022 15.14 EST

Peru’s president, [Pedro Castillo](#), has been removed from office and detained on charges of “rebellion” after he announced he would shutter congress and install a “government of exception” – just hours before he was due to face an impeachment vote.

The public prosecutor’s office [confirmed](#) late on Wednesday that Castillo had been arrested and charged with allegedly “breaching constitutional order”, after he was accused of an attempted coup and seen fleeing the presidential palace.

Earlier in the day, the country’s national police tweeted that “former president” Castillo had been detained, shortly after congress voted to remove him.

The vote came after Castillo ordered a night-time curfew and the reorganisation of the judiciary and prosecutor’s office, which is investigating

him for alleged corruption and influence trafficking – charges which he denies.

Castillo's vice-president, Dina Boluarte, described the move as a [coup attempt](#), and hours later was sworn in as the new president, becoming the first female head of state in Peru's history.

Boluarte called for a political truce and the installation of a national unity government. "What I ask for is a space, a time to rescue the country," she said.

The day of high drama put an end to Castillo's tumultuous 17 months in power, which has already seen five cabinets, more than 80 ministers, six criminal investigations and two failed attempts to impeach him.

In a televised speech, Castillo said he would temporarily shut down congress, launch a "government of exception" to rule by decree and called for new legislative elections.



Dina Boluarte is sworn in after Castillo's removal. Photograph: Sebastian Castañeda/Reuters

The move immediately prompted mass resignations from the cabinet, and accusations that Castillo had attempted to seize power illegally.

“I strongly condemn this coup d'état and call on the international community to assist in the democratic re-establishment of democracy in Peru,” [tweeted](#) the foreign minister, César Landa, as he announced his resignation. “Castillo took this decision without my knowledge or support.”

Castillo’s attempt to avoid an impeachment vote swiftly turned into an own goal as the armed forces and the police withdrew their support, saying, in a joint statement, that Castillo’s move was “contrary to the established constitutional order”.

Meanwhile, Peru’s constitutional court called Castillo’s decision to dissolve congress “a coup” and said the leader was no longer in charge of the country.

Castillo’s announcement prompted comparisons with the notorious “*autogolpe*” or self-coup of April 1992, in which then-president Alberto Fujimori dissolved congress and sent soldiers and tanks on to the streets of Lima.

“What has happened in Peru is a coup d'état,” said Fernando Tuesta, a political science professor at Lima’s Pontifical Catholic University. “Nothing announced by former president Pedro Castillo is allowed by the constitution.”

The US embassy in Lima condemned Castillo’s move. “The United States emphatically urges President Castillo to reverse his attempt to close Congress and allow democratic institutions in Peru to work according to the constitution,” the embassy said in a [tweet](#). “We encourage the Peruvian public to stay calm during this uncertain time.”

Mexico’s president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, called for “democratic stability for the benefit of the people”. In a string of tweets, the leftist leader said that an atmosphere of “confrontation and hostility” had led Castillo to take decisions that ultimately served his opponents, and led to his removal from office.

Luis Almagro, secretary general of the Organisation of American States, said the constitutional order had been disrupted in Peru and [tweeted](#) his

“support for “democracy, peace and institutionality in Peru and the urgent need to restore the democratic path in the country”.

Hundreds of protesters gathered outside Congress rejoicing Castillo’s fall, though most of the country has remained calm throughout the rapid succession of the day’s events.

Castillo became president winning by the narrowest of margins in June 2021, shaking up the country’s entrenched class system.

The former primary school teacher, farmer and union activist had no previous governing experience, and took office as an outsider, pledging to support poor Peruvians who had been left behind by the country’s stellar economic growth since the beginning of the century.

His win reflected massive disenchantment with the political elite after numerous corruption scandals.

But the novice president made numerous blunders, appointing barely qualified ministers and accumulating allegations of corruption and influence trafficking linked to his family and allies, which were investigated by the public prosecutor’s office.

“Castillo is a symptom of the crisis rather than the cause,” said Natalia Sobrevilla, professor of Latin American history at the University of Kent. Two of his predecessors faced two impeachment motions each: Pedro Pablo Kuczynski resigned rather than face impeachment and his successor, Martín Vizcarra, was ousted in November 2020 after dissolving congress a year before.

Despite his unpopularity, Castillo has consistently had higher approval ratings than congress. A survey by the Institute of Peruvian Studies last month found 86% disapproval of Congress, and only 10% approval, while Castillo’s negative ratings were 61% and 31% approved of his performance.

In his address on Tuesday, Castillo said: “Throughout the 17 months of my administration, a certain sector of congress has focused solely on removing

me from office, because they never accepted the results of an election that you, dear Peruvians, defined with your votes.”

Last month, an OAS delegation visited Peru at Castillo’s behest after he requested that the organisation activate its democratic charter, alleging that congress and the prosecutor’s office were attempting a coup against him.

Castillo’s opponents argued that he was the one attempting a coup by sidelining congress.

“Pedro Castillo was dictator for only two hours,” [tweeted](#) Iván Lanegra, secretary-general of the Peruvian NGO Transparencia.

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Boeing

Last Boeing 747 rolls off line after half a century of production

Cargo carrier Atlas Air will take ownership of final jumbo jet, after career that has seen plane used as a commercial carrier and presidential aircraft

'It changed aviation': final Boeing 747 rolls out of production line – video

Associated Press

Wed 7 Dec 2022 21.55 ESTLast modified on Thu 8 Dec 2022 05.07 EST

After more than half a century of production, the last [Boeing](#) 747 has rolled out of a US factory in Washington state.

The final customer was the cargo carrier Atlas Air, which ordered four 747-8 freighters early this year. The final plane was rolled out of Boeing's massive factory in Everett, Washington, on Tuesday night.

There she goes!

The last 747 has left our Everett factory ahead of delivery to Atlas Air in early 2023. [#QueenOfTheSkies](#)

Photos: Boeing/Paul Weatherman pic.twitter.com/duzgr6MzQl

— Boeing Airplanes (@BoeingAirplanes) [December 7, 2022](#)

The 747 jumbo jet has taken on numerous roles in its lifetime: a cargo plane, a commercial aircraft capable of carrying nearly 500 passengers, and even the Air Force One presidential aircraft.

When it was first produced in 1969 it was the largest commercial aircraft in the world and the first with two aisles. It still towers over most other planes.

The plane's design included a second deck extending from the cockpit back out over the front third of the plane, giving it a distinctive hump that made it instantly recognisable and inspired the nickname, the Whale.



Construction of one of the final Boeing 747's in Washington state.
Photograph: Jennifer Buchanan/AP

It took more than 50,000 Boeing employees 16 months to churn out the first 747. The company has completed 1,573 more since then.

But over the past two decades, Boeing and its European rival Airbus have turned to more fuel-efficient and profitable aircraft; widebody planes with two engines instead of the 747's four.

Delta was the last US airline to use the 747 for passenger flights – ending in 2017 – although some international carriers continue to fly it, including the German airline Lufthansa.

Boeing announced in May that it would move its headquarters from Chicago to Arlington, Virginia.

The move to the Washington DC area puts its executives closer to key federal government officials and the Federal Aviation Administration, which certifies Boeing passenger and cargo planes.

Boeing's relationship with the FAA has been strained since deadly crashes of its bestselling plane, the 737 Max, in 2018 and 2019. [The FAA took nearly two years](#) to approve design changes and allow the plane back in the air.

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South Korea

South Korea's truth commission to investigate dozens of foreign adoptions

Adoptees sent to Europe and the US say they were wrongly removed from their families as government in Seoul actively promoted adoption



Peter Møller, an adoptee who is leading calls for an investigation of South Korea's overseas adoptions, speaks outside the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Photograph: Lee Jin-man/AP

Associated Press
Wed 7 Dec 2022 23.31 EST

South Korea's Truth and Reconciliation Commission will investigate the cases of dozens of South Korean adoptees in Europe and the US who suspect their origins were falsified or obscured during a child export frenzy in the mid-to late 20th century.

Thursday's decision opens what could be South Korea's most far-reaching inquiry into foreign adoptions, as frustration over broken family connections grows, and now grown up children demand government attention.

The adopted South Koreans are believed to be the world's largest diaspora of adoptees. In the past six decades about 200,000 South Koreans – mostly girls – were adopted overseas. Most were placed with white parents in the US and Europe during the 1970s and 80s.

After a meeting Tuesday, the commission decided to investigate 34 adoptees who were sent to Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Germany, Belgium and the US from the 1960s to the early 1990s. The adoptees say they were wrongfully removed from their families through falsified documents and corrupt practices.

They were among the 51 adoptees who first submitted their applications to the commission in August through the Danish Korean Rights Group, led by adoptee attorney Peter Møller.

The applications filed by Møller's group have since grown to more than 300, and dozens of adoptees from Sweden and Australia are also expected to file applications on Friday, which is the commission's deadline for investigation requests, Møller said.

The investigation will probably expand over the next few months as the commission reviews whether to accept the applications submitted after August. Cases that are seen as similar will probably be fused to speed up the investigations, commission official Park Young-il said.

The applications cite a broad range of grievances that allege carelessness and a lack of due diligence in the removal of scores of children from their families amid loose government monitoring.

During much of the period in question, the country was ruled by a succession of military leaders who saw adoptions as a way to deepen ties with the democratic west while reducing the number of mouths to feed and removing the socially undesirable, including children of unwed mothers and

orphans. South Korea was a rare country that enforced laws aimed at promoting adoptions, which allowed profit-driven agencies to manipulate records and bypass proper child relinquishment.

Most of the South Korean adoptees sent abroad were registered by agencies as legal orphans found abandoned on the streets, a designation that made the adoption process quicker and easier. But many of the so-called orphans had relatives who could be easily identified and found.

Some of the adoptees say they discovered that the agencies had switched their identities to replace other children who died or got too sick to travel, which often made it impossible to trace their roots.

The adoptees called for the commission to broadly investigate agencies for records falsification and manipulation and for allegedly proceeding with adoptions without the proper consent of birth parents.

They want the commission to establish whether the government was responsible for the corrupt practices and whether adoptions were fueled by increasingly larger payments and donations from adoptive parents, which apparently motivated agencies to create their own supply.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/dec/08/south-koreas-truth-commission-to-investigate-dozens-of-foreign-adoptions>

[New York Times](#)

New York Times poised for first mass staff walkout in 40 years

Daylong action comes as union and management clash over wages and remote work



The New York Times is preparing for a 24-hour walkout on Thursday.
Photograph: Mark Lennihan/AP

Associated Press

Wed 7 Dec 2022 20.59 ESTFirst published on Wed 7 Dec 2022 19.28 EST

The [New York Times](#) is bracing for a 24-hour walkout on Thursday by hundreds of journalists and other employees, in what would be the first strike of its kind at the newspaper in more than 40 years.

Newsroom employees and other members of the NewsGuild of New York say they are fed up with bargaining that has dragged on since their last contract expired in March 2021. The union announced last week that more

than 1,100 employees would stage a 24-hour work stoppage starting at 12.01am on Thursday unless the two sides reached a contract deal.

Negotiations lasted for more than 12 hours into late Tuesday and continued on Wednesday, but the sides remained far apart on issues including wage increases and remote-work policies.

On Wednesday evening the union said via Twitter that a deal had not been reached and the walkout was happening. “We were ready to work for as long as it took to reach a fair deal,” it said, “but management walked away from the table with five hours to go.”

“We know what we’re worth,” the union added.

But New York Times spokesperson Danielle Rhoades Ha said in a statement that they were still in negotiations when they were told that the strike was happening.

“It is disappointing that they are taking such an extreme action when we are not at an impasse,” she said.

It was unclear how the day’s coverage would be affected, but the strike’s supporters include members of the fast-paced live-news desk, which covers breaking news for the digital paper. Employees are planning a rally for Thursday afternoon outside the newspaper’s offices near Times Square.

Barring a breakthrough, [@nytimes](#) staff will walk out from midnight to 11:59pm Thursday, Dec. 8.

We’re asking readers to stand with us on the digital picket line and not visit any NYT platforms tomorrow. Read local news. Make something from a cookbook. Break your Wordle streak. <https://t.co/KiUlHAtkuh>

— Maggie Astor (@MaggieAstor) [December 7, 2022](#)

Rhoades Ha told the Associated Press that the company had “solid plans in place” to continue producing content, which include relying on international

reporters and other journalists who are not union members.

“While we are disappointed that the NewsGuild is threatening to strike, we are prepared to ensure the Times continues to serve our readers without disruption,” Rhoades Ha said in separate statement.

In a note sent to Guild-represented staff on Tuesday night, the deputy managing editor Cliff Levy called the planned strike “puzzling” and “an unsettling moment in negotiations over a new contract”. He said it would be the first strike by the bargaining unit since 1981 and “comes despite intensifying efforts by the company to make progress”.

But in a letter signed by more than 1,000 employees, the NewsGuild said management had been “dragging its feet” bargaining for nearly two years and “time is running out to reach a fair contract” by the end of the year.

The NewsGuild also said the company told employees planning to strike they would not get paid for the duration of the walkout. Members were also asked to work extra hours get work done ahead of the strike, according to the union.

The New York Times has seen other, shorter walkouts in recent years, including a half-day protest in August by a new union representing technology workers who claimed unfair labor practices.

In one breakthrough that both sides called significant, the company backed off its proposal to replace the existing adjustable pension plan with an enhanced 401(k) retirement plan. The Times offered instead to let the union choose between the two. The company also agreed to expand fertility treatment benefits.

Levy said the company had also offered to raise wages by 5.5% upon ratification of the contract, followed by 3% increases in 2023 and 2024. That would be an increase from the 2.2% annual increases in the expired contract.

Stacy Cowley, a finance reporter and union representative, said the union was seeking 10% pay raises at ratification, which she said would make up for the pay raises not received over the past two years.

She also said the union wanted the contract to guarantee employees the option to work remotely some of the time, if their roles allow for it, but the company wanted the right to recall workers to the office full time. Cowley said the Times has required its staff to be in office three days a week but many have been showing up fewer days in an informal protest.

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[Japan](#)

Japan's lower house tightens religious donation rules amid Unification church controversy

Prime minister Fumio Kishida has seen approval ratings plummet since ties between LDP and the church were exposed



A person walks past the sign for the Unification Church in Tokyo, Japan.
Photograph: Kim Kyung-Hoon/Reuters

[Justin McCurry](#) in Tokyo

Thu 8 Dec 2022 02.02 EST Last modified on Thu 8 Dec 2022 02.25 EST

Japan's lower house of parliament has passed a law that will make it a crime for religious and other organisations to “maliciously” secure donations from members – a move seen as an attempt by the ruling party to defuse the controversy over its [ties to the Unification church](#).

The prime minister, Fumio Kishida, has seen his approval ratings plummet since widespread ties between his Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the church were exposed in the wake of the assassination this summer of Japan's former leader, Shinzo Abe.

The LDP has come under mounting pressure to address allegations that the group – whose members are colloquially known as [Moonies](#) – pressure followers into donating huge sums that have left them ruined financially.

The bill passed the lower house on Thursday with support from the LDP's junior coalition partner Komeito and some opposition parties. The less powerful upper house is expected to pass the legislation before the current parliamentary session ends on Saturday, media reports said.

Tetsuya Yamagami, the only suspect in Abe's 8 July [shooting](#), has told investigators that he targeted the politician because of his connections to the church, which he blamed for [bankrupting his family](#).

While not a member, Abe had sent a congratulatory video message to a meeting of a church affiliate last autumn in which he praised it for its commitment to traditional family values.

His grandfather, Nobusuke Kishi, was instrumental in helping the church, founded in South Korea in 1954, establish a presence in [Japan](#). Kishi, who served as prime minister in the late 1950s, viewed the group's conservative founder, Sun Myung Moon, as a key ally in his campaign to rid Japan of communist influences and crush trade unions.

Abe's death – and his alleged killer's motives – triggered a wave of revelations of ties between the church and a large number of LDP politicians, as well as a smaller number of MPs from other parties.

MPs had spoken at church events in Japan and overseas, while followers had helped campaign for LDP candidates. Critics believe the party's [opposition to same-sex marriage](#) and other progressive causes has been influenced by the church in Japan, where it claims to have between 50,000 and 70,000 followers.

Kishida's attempts to distance his party from the church – officially known as the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification – have failed to improve his political fortunes, with recent polls showing his approval ratings at their [lowest level since he took office](#) last October.

Criticism of the church has centred on its use of “spiritual sales” to raise money. Followers are typically told that buying items such as vases and other ornaments – at vastly inflated prices – will relieve their families of bad “ancestral karma”.

Yamagami reportedly said his mother had destroyed their family after paying the church more than ¥100m (£600,000) about 20 years ago.

The new law prohibits all organisations – not just those of a religious nature – from using scare tactics and gaslighting, as well as making “unreasonable” spiritual claims, to secure donations, the Kyodo news agency said.

Members of groups found to have unfairly solicited donations could face a prison sentence of up to one year or a maximum fine of ¥1m (£6000), according to Kyodo. It will also allow donors’ spouses and children to cancel financial contributions on their behalf, it added.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/dec/08/japans-lower-house-tightens-religious-donation-rules-amid-unification-church-controversy>.

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