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European Union

Trade war threats will not wash with voters, Frost tells EU as row deepens

UK considering unilaterally extending grace periods under Northern Ireland protocol

European Commission vice-president Maros Sefčovič, centre, arrives in London to lead the negotiations from Brussels' side. Photograph: Tolga Akmen/AFP/Getty Images

European Commission vice-president Maros Sefčovič, centre, arrives in London to lead the negotiations from Brussels' side. Photograph: Tolga Akmen/AFP/Getty Images

Lisa O'Carroll and *Aubrey Allegretti*
Tue 8 Jun 2021 17.29 EDT

The row between the UK and the EU over checks on sausages and other chilled foods sent from Britain to Northern Ireland has deepened, with the

Brexit minister telling Brussels that trade war threats will not wash with voters.

As a major meeting on Wednesday approached, Lord Frost said: “Further threats of legal action and trade retaliation from the EU won’t make life any easier for the shopper in Strabane who can’t buy their favourite product. Nor will it benefit the small business in Ballymena struggling to source produce from their supplier in Birmingham.”

His comments came hours after the former French European affairs minister Nathalie Loiseau, now an MEP, warned that the EU had the power to impose quotas on British exports if it continued to make unilateral decisions on how the Northern Ireland protocol was implemented.

Frost was due to dine with his European Commission counterpart, Maroš Šefčovič, in London on Tuesday night before two key meetings between the UK and the EU about Northern Ireland and other Brexit issues at 8am on Wednesday.

The tenor of Frost’s statement underlines the fading hope for any breakthrough agreement on the checks, which are opposed by unionists and led to violence in Northern Ireland at Easter.

The UK government is reportedly considering unilaterally extending the grace periods under the protocol that give businesses in Northern Ireland time to adapt to new rules – including for the import of chilled meats such as sausages, chicken nuggets and mince from Great Britain.

The grace periods are due to expire at the end of June but, according to the Telegraph, Johnson is contemplating extending them in the face of a lack of progress towards a new agreement on about 30 issues relating to checks on animals, goods and medicines.

“When I meet Maroš Šefčovič later today my message will be clear: time is short and practical solutions are needed now to make the protocol work,” said Frost.

Šefčovič warned on Tuesday that the EU would act "swiftly, firmly and resolutely to ensure that the UK abides by its international law obligations" if the UK decided to delay checks on chilled meats on 30 June.

Loiseau told BBC Radio 4 that if the UK continues to breach the protocol, then tariffs and quotas designed to regulate the import of goods into the EU by upping the price and putting a cap on numbers could be necessary.

"We don't want to reach that," she added. "But we are warning – you signed an agreement, you have to implement it, otherwise there are measures we can take that will protect our single market … The international reputation of the UK is at stake."

George Eustice, the environment secretary, described the threat of an "outright ban" on chicken nuggets and sausages being sent from GB to NI as "bonkers".

One EU source said Loiseau's comments regarding the threat of trade quotas being imposed on the EU reflected the fact that the Brexit relationship was now "weaponised", with a range of remedies and penalties at the EU's disposal that were not there in January when the withdrawal agreement involving the Northern Ireland protocol and citizens' rights was signed and ratified by both sides.

"We now have the principle of good faith in a legal agreement and if there are any problems in the trade and cooperation agreement we have legal instruments at our disposal including trade sanctions," the source said.

Northern Irish businesses are calling on both sides to stop a Brexit "blame game" and deliver urgent solutions to end growing tensions over the checks on food and goods crossing the Irish Sea into the region.

The protocol has been hugely controversial in Northern Ireland, contributing to violence over Easter and fissures in the Democratic Unionist party, which is officially campaigning to have it scrapped.

Brexit

Boris Johnson urged to axe deadline for EU citizens to apply to stay in UK

More than 40 government-funded charities write to PM to call for lifting of ‘arbitrary’ 30 June cut-off date

Home Office app for EU citizens to apply for UK settled status. The deadline to apply is 30 June. Photograph: Katharina Brandt/Alamy Stock Photo/Alamy Stock Photo

Home Office app for EU citizens to apply for UK settled status. The deadline to apply is 30 June. Photograph: Katharina Brandt/Alamy Stock Photo/Alamy Stock Photo

Lisa O'Carroll Brexit correspondent
@lisaocarroll
Tue 8 Jun 2021 19.01 EDT

More than 40 government-funded charities have written to Boris Johnson urging him to lift the 30 June deadline for EU citizens to apply to retain their rights to remain in the UK following Brexit.

The charities are all funded by the Home Office to provide support to vulnerable EU citizens including children and elderly people in care, victims of domestic abuse and trafficking, Roma communities and homeless people.

Matthew Evans, director of Advice on Individual Rights in Europe (Aire), said it was "unacceptable" that EU citizens who had built their lives in the UK could be left undocumented by "an arbitrary deadline".

The letter to the prime minister acknowledges new laws introduced last October to allow late applications if there were "reasonable grounds" – for instance, a child in care who turned 18 and discovered the local authority had not made the application to the Home Office for settled or pre-settled status.

Stop Brexit 'blame game', Northern Ireland business leaders tell UK and EU
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But they told Johnson they were sceptical about the Home Office approach.

"Historically the Home Office has taken a very stringent approach toward reasonable grounds and outlines in this guidance [on late applications] that the approach towards late applications will become stricter with time, which raises serious concerns about how this 'benefit of the doubt' will actually be applied to vulnerable people," they said in the letter.

Charities fear that those who lose their right to remain in the UK even temporarily mean they are at risk of detention and deportation creating "huge and potentially life-ruining risks".

The signatories to the letter include Coram children's legal centre, Citizens Advice bureaux from all over the UK from Cornwall to Liverpool, Father Hudson's Care, a network of Catholic communities centres, the East European Resource Centre, the Simon Community Scotland, Rights of Women and the Peterborough Asylum & Refugee Community Association.

Concerns have been repeatedly raised about the legal status of those who have not applied by 30 June even though they have the right to remain if they lived in the UK before 31 December last year.

Although 5.4m applications have been received by the Home Office – about 2mhigher than estimates, data has never been captured the number of EU citizens or nationals from the European Economic Area in the country because there has never been a registration system, unlike many other EU countries.

The charities are urging Johnson to lift the deadline completely and not impose another until they can demonstrate that all eligible EU citizens and non-EU family members have secured status.

“If even 1% of the millions of EU citizens resident in the UK are unable to apply, that would leave tens of thousands of EEA+ citizens undocumented, vulnerable to exploitation and facing hostile environment policies including detention and removal,” they said.

“We know this is not something anybody wants. Yet it is the people our organisations support … who are most likely to slip through the cracks,” they told the prime minister.

Marianne Lagrue, policy manager at Coram, said it was “positive” that the Home Office had funded the charities but “that funding could never reach everyone” with just weeks to go.

“If anything, it has demonstrated to us as grant-funded organisations the high level of need that still exists with barely weeks to go,” she said.

Jackie Murphy, CEO of TGP Cymru, which provides support to Roma communities, urged Johnson to take account of the “huge disruption” to “face to face” support programmes caused by Covid-19 in addition to a backlog of appointments at embassies for those who need to renew ID cards for their applications.

The Home Office has been approached for comment.

European Union

Europeans' confidence in EU hit by coronavirus response

Survey shows many consider project 'broken' although still back membership and more cooperation

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The report from the European Council on Foreign Relations said that many felt the bloc had 'missed an opportunity to prove its worth' during the pandemic. Photograph: Kenzo Tribouillard/AFP/Getty Images

The report from the European Council on Foreign Relations said that many felt the bloc had 'missed an opportunity to prove its worth' during the pandemic. Photograph: Kenzo Tribouillard/AFP/Getty Images

Jon Henley Europe correspondent
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Wed 9 Jun 2021 01.00 EDT

Confidence in the EU's ability to handle crises has taken a hit from Covid-19, a major survey shows, but dissatisfaction with national political systems is even higher and most people still support EU membership and want a stronger, more cooperative bloc.

The report's authors suggested the polling should be a wake-up call for Brussels, warning that while public support for the broader European project remained high in many countries, it was fragile and would not easily survive more disappointment.

Europeans were "making a distinction between the need for cooperation and solidarity at a European level, and their confidence in the EU to deliver", they said, and were unhappy the bloc had "missed an opportunity to prove its worth".

The polling also suggested Brexit had changed Europeans' views of the UK, with the prevailing view now seeing Britain – like the US – as a "necessary partner" to be "strategically cooperated with" rather than an ally, and one in four Germans and one in five French and Spanish respondents considering it as a rival or adversary.

The report, published by the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) on Wednesday, suggested the bloc's poor early response to the pandemic and slow initial vaccine rollout had dealt a heavy blow to confidence in its capabilities.

In half the states surveyed, most respondents had little confidence in the EU or said their confidence had deteriorated, with majorities in France (62%), Italy (57%), Germany (55%), Spain (52%) and Austria (51%) saying the EU project was "broken".

However, disillusionment with national politics was even higher, with 80% of respondents in Italy and Spain, 66% in France, 60% in Portugal, 55% in Poland and 54% in Hungary saying their own domestic political system was "broken".

Moreover, in all of the states bar one, a majority of respondents still felt membership of the EU was “a good thing” for their country (the exception was France, where the largest number of respondents said membership was “neither good nor bad”).

The survey revealed a broad sentiment that the 27 members should cooperate more, with majorities in all of the 12 countries surveyed except France and Germany – where there were significant minorities of 47% and 45% respectively – saying the coronavirus pandemic showed a need for greater collaboration.

And despite their frustrations, respondents in eight out of the 12 countries still saw the EU as key to their country’s recovery from the coronavirus crisis.

In every country polled, a majority of respondents – headed by Portugal at 91%, Spain on 80%, Italy at 77% and Poland with 68% – said they would like to see the EU adopt a more unified response in future towards global crises and challenges.

A plurality also said they wanted to see the EU playing a more assertive role on the world stage, for example by championing human rights and the rule of law when they are violated in countries such as Turkey and China, while prioritising democratic values and the rule of law within the bloc.

The report’s authors, ECFR senior policy fellows Susi Dennison and Jana Puglierin, said there remained broad public consensus for greater European cooperation and collaboration on major international challenges, but it was fragile.

“The fact that two of the EU’s largest and most influential states – France and Germany – are the least convinced about the need for European cooperation underlines the urgency with which the EU needs to up its game,” the authors wrote.

“Both countries have important national elections coming up in the next year, which may present a challenge for the EU’s leaders. Our polling data indicates that the EU has used up its second chances.”

They said EU leaders had an opportunity at this summer's G7, Nato and EU-US summits to "reboot the permissive consensus for the European project", but must avoid "institutional over-reach or over-promise".

Instead, they said, they should focus on "playing a role where they can genuinely enhance national governments' efforts, and in which the European public want to see them engaged", such as human rights, the rule of law and democratic values.

Post-pandemic recovery would be critical, they said. "The commission cannot afford to make the same mistakes as it orchestrates the bloc's economic revival," Dennison said. "The recovery fund, by ushering in green, inclusive growth, could be the EU's next success story."

Puglierin added that the data showed Europeans wanted "decisive leadership that prioritises multilateralism, and which advocates and defends their values and interests on the global stage. Senior EU figures would do well to listen and act accordingly. They may not get another chance."

Wednesday briefing: Delay to ‘freedom day’?

Smoking

Raise age for sale of cigarettes to 21 and stop ‘tobacco epidemic’, say UK MPs

Making it illegal for more young people to buy cigarettes would help meet the government’s target of ending smoking by 2030, MPs say

Raising the age of sale of cigarettes to 21 would help the government to end smoking by 2030, MPs say. Photograph: Matt Cardy/Getty Images

Raising the age of sale of cigarettes to 21 would help the government to end smoking by 2030, MPs say. Photograph: Matt Cardy/Getty Images

Press Association
Wed 9 Jun 2021 01.51 EDT

MPs have called for a consultation on raising the age for the sale of cigarettes to 21 from 18 in order to end the “tobacco epidemic” by 2030.

The all-party parliamentary group on smoking and health has recommended raising the age of sale from 18 to 21 as part of tougher tobacco regulations to protect children and young people from becoming smokers and help smokers quit.

The recommendations, backed by health charities and medical organisations, also include a "polluter pays" amendment to the health and social care bill to secure funding for a tobacco control programme, forcing manufacturers to pay to deliver the end of smoking.

Number of smokers has reached all-time high of 1.1 billion, study finds
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The cross-party group of MPs and peers has warned the government that it can only build back "better and fairer" from the pandemic by making smoking obsolete and must commit now to the actions needed to secure its vision of a Smokefree 2030.

The report notes that more people are likely to have died last year and this year from smoking than Covid-19.

It also calls for targeted investment to provide additional support to help smokers quit in regions and communities where smoking does the most damage, including those who are in routine and manual jobs, unemployed, living in social housing, or who have a mental health condition or are pregnant.

The report suggests widespread public support for the recommendations, with more than three quarters (76%) of the public supporting the Government's Smokefree 2030 ambition.

Some 77% support making tobacco manufacturers pay a levy or licence fee to government for measures to help smokers quit and prevent young people from taking up smoking, while 63% support increasing the age of sale from 18 to 21.

The all-party committee chairman, Bob Blackman, said: "Our report sets out measures which will put us on track to achieve the government's ambition to

end smoking by 2030, but they can't be delivered without funding.

"Tobacco manufacturers make extreme profits selling highly addictive, lethal products, while government coffers are bare because of Covid-19. The manufacturers have the money, they should be made to pay to end the epidemic."

Deborah Arnott, chief executive of Athe anti-smoking group ASH, said: "We all applauded when the government announced its ambition for a smokefree 2030. But that was two years ago, the time has now come to deliver.

"Currently smoking rates are not declining nearly fast enough. If, as called for by the APPG, the recommendations in its report are implemented by 2022 we can get on track to make smoking obsolete by 2030."

Alison Cook, director of external affairs at Asthma UK and the British Lung Foundation, said: "Smoking still accounts for 35% of all respiratory deaths in England each year and it is still the leading cause of preventable lung diseases such as lung cancer and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). We welcome the recommendations in this report, which include targeted support for people to successfully quit this deadly addiction.

"If the government is serious about reaching its own target of becoming smoke-free by 2030, it needs to do much more by urgently providing sustainable funding for the delivery of stop smoking services across the NHS and in the community, as a broad offer is highly effective in supporting people to quit.

"Without action now, we will continue to see thousands of people die every year as a result of preventable lung diseases linked to smoking."

University of Oxford

President of Oxford college defends students' right to remove Queen's photo

Gavin Williamson had earlier called the move by postgraduates at Magdalen College 'absurd'

The middle common room at Magdalen College had bought the image of the Queen in 2013, its president said. Photograph: Adrian Dennis/AFP/Getty Images

The middle common room at Magdalen College had bought the image of the Queen in 2013, its president said. Photograph: Adrian Dennis/AFP/Getty Images

Richard Adams and *Nadeem Badshah*
Tue 8 Jun 2021 19.15 EDT

The president of Magdalen College, Oxford, has strongly defended her graduate students' right to remove a photograph of the Queen from their

common room after the education secretary, Gavin Williamson, called the move "absurd".

Members of the college's middle common room (MCR), which is restricted to students taking postgraduate degrees, voted to take down the print, with minutes of the meeting noting that "for some students depictions of the monarch and the British monarchy represent recent colonial history".

Williamson tweeted: "Oxford university students removing a picture of the Queen is simply absurd. She is the head of state and a symbol of what is best about the UK. During her long reign she has worked tirelessly to promote British values of tolerance, inclusivity and respect around the world."

Ex-students complain of sexism and racism at UCL architecture school
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But Dinah Rose, the president of Magdalen College, swiftly responded: "Here are some facts about Magdalen College and HM the Queen. The Middle Common Room is an organisation of graduate students. They don't represent the College. A few years ago, in about 2013, they bought a print of a photo of the Queen to decorate their common room.

"They recently voted to take it down. Both of these decisions are their own to take, not the College's. Magdalen strongly supports free speech and political debate, and the MCR'S right to autonomy. Maybe they'll vote to put it up again, maybe they won't. Meanwhile, the photo will be safely stored."

Rose added: "Being a student is about more than studying. It's about exploring and debating ideas. It's sometimes about provoking the older generation. Looks like that isn't so hard to do these days."

Williamson's intervention comes as the government has put pressure on universities to defend access to campuses for controversial speakers. Last month it proposed new freedom of speech legislation that would bring student unions under the surveillance of the higher education regulator, the Office for Students, and appoint a "free speech champion" to its board.

The bill would allow academics, students or visiting speakers to seek compensation through the courts if they suffered loss from a university's policies.

Matthew Katzman, Magdalen's MCR president, told the Daily Telegraph: "It has been taken down. It was decided to leave the common room neutral. That was what this was about. The college will have plenty of depictions of various things, but the common room is meant to be a space for all to feel welcome."

Coronavirus

Sunak could accept four-week delay to ending Covid restrictions in England

Guardian understands chancellor not fixated on 21 June date for enacting final stage of roadmap

- Coronavirus – latest updates
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Rishi Sunak at a meeting of G7 finance ministers last week. Photograph: Reuters

Rishi Sunak at a meeting of G7 finance ministers last week. Photograph: Reuters

Heather Stewart and *Jessica Elgot*
Tue 8 Jun 2021 14.25 EDT

Rishi Sunak is willing to accept a delay of up to four weeks to the final stage of England's reopening roadmap, the Guardian understands, as the government considers extending restrictions beyond 21 June.

Ministers will continue to scrutinise data on cases and hospitalisations over the coming days, with a final decision set to be announced by the prime minister on Monday. From 21 June nightclubs are due to reopen, with the cap on wedding numbers, large-scale events and indoor mixing lifted and guidance on working from home and mask-wearing dropped.

A delay in all these changes would infuriate many Conservative backbenchers. On Tuesday the former Tory minister Steve Baker pressed for the date dubbed "freedom day" to go ahead, calling it the "last chance" to save industries such as hospitality, which is calling for the 2-metre distancing rule to be scrapped.

Sunak, the chancellor, has in the past been regarded as more keen to lift lockdown constraints than some cabinet colleagues. But a Whitehall source said he was not fixated on the 21 June date and was more concerned that when restrictions are lifted, the move can be permanent. "The Treasury's main thing is that freedoms are irreversible and businesses have clarity," the source said.

Economic support measures including the furlough scheme are set to taper off gradually, helping to cushion the impact of any delay. "This is exactly why we went long," the source said.

The Treasury is understood to prefer a clean delay to the 21 June reopening rather than a confusing "halfway house" where some measures are lifted but others kept in place. A two-week delay is also thought to be under consideration.

A delay of up to four weeks would allow second vaccine doses for all over-50s to have been administered and taken effect before reopening, under government plans. It would also coincide with the end of the school summer term, reducing the extent to which outbreaks can be fuelled by children passing the virus on to one another in the classroom. One government source

pointed out that many cases of the Delta variant have been among children, who are not yet being vaccinated.

More than 6,000 people were reported on Tuesday to have tested positive for coronavirus, with 126 people admitted to hospital.

Nearly 500,000 jabs were booked in a "Glastonbury-style" rush after the vaccine rollout was expanded to 25 to 29-year-olds in England, the NHS said. NHS England said the National Booking Service had seen 493,000 appointments reserved by midday on Tuesday, five hours after eligibility was widened to the over-25s.

Key scientific modelling committees Spi-B and Spi-M are expected to provide fresh analysis in the coming days about the potential impact of the rapid spread of the Delta variant, which was identified in India.

Matt Hancock, the health secretary, said earlier this week that of 12,383 cases of the Delta variant as of 3 June, 126 were admitted to hospital. Of those, 83 were unvaccinated, 28 had had one dose of vaccine and only three had both doses.

At a cabinet meeting on Tuesday, Johnson told colleagues: "While the relationship between cases and hospitalisations has changed, we must continue to look at the data carefully ahead of making a decision on step four."

The government's chief scientific adviser, Patrick Vallance, and the chief medical officer, Chris Whitty, briefed cabinet ministers about the latest data earlier this week. One person with knowledge of the meeting said the pair were "at the optimistic end of Sage". Some members of the advisory committee have publicly cautioned against further reopening. The source added that Whitty and Vallance had "reserved judgment" and suggested more critical data would be available by the weekend.

Tory backbenchers will put intense pressure on the prime minister to go ahead with the final stage of reopening, despite the rise in cases. Baker, vice-chair of the Covid Recovery Group of backbench MPs, said 21 June represented a "last chance" for industries including hospitality and tourism,

that “make life worth living”, and it was time to allow the public to “reconnect with family and friends and regain our mental health”.

He claimed that by that date, all over-50s and vulnerable younger adults should have been given the opportunity to receive two doses of Covid vaccine.

“These groups represent about 99% of Covid deaths and about 80% of hospitalisations,” he said. “As of today, according to announcements made by the government, these groups should all have been offered a chance to have had a second dose. It would be helpful for the government to clarify that this has been achieved.

“If this brilliant milestone isn’t enough to convince ministers that we need to lift all remaining restrictions – especially social distancing requirements – on 21 June, nothing will ever get us out of this.”

Ministers have been encouraged by progress in Bolton, a hotspot for the Delta variant. Surge testing and a rapid vaccine push were put in place four weeks ago, and cases have begun to flatten off. Hancock announced on Tuesday that a similar approach will now be taken across Greater Manchester and Lancashire, with local people also advised to take extra care.

Nursing

NHS trusts hiring non-nurses for nursing roles, union warns

Royal College of Nursing says recruiting people without right qualifications puts patients at risk

The RCN said the employment of non-nurses to work as nurses in hospitals and mental health facilities ‘should set alarm bells ringing with ministers’. Photograph: Photofusion/REX/Photofusion/Rex

The RCN said the employment of non-nurses to work as nurses in hospitals and mental health facilities ‘should set alarm bells ringing with ministers’. Photograph: Photofusion/REX/Photofusion/Rex

Denis Campbell Health policy editor
Tue 8 Jun 2021 19.01 EDT

NHS trusts are recruiting people without the right qualifications to act as registered nurses, despite the risk to patients, the Royal College of Nursing

(RCN) has warned.

It criticised what it claims is a worrying trend driven by the widespread shortage of nurses in England, where there are almost 35,000 unfilled NHS nursing posts.

The RCN said the employment of non-nurses to work as nurses in hospitals and mental health facilities "should set alarm bells ringing with ministers" and would lead to worse care.

Spat at, abused, attacked: healthcare staff face rising violence during Covid
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It published examples of advertisements posted by NHS trusts looking to fill nursing roles, including some senior positions, even if the candidate was not qualified as a nurse. One trust advertised for a matron – a managerial role usually filled by a senior nurse – to work in acute medicine but said that a qualification in nursing was not necessary.

Another trust recently sought to recruit a matron who would be responsible for older people's mental health and learning disability services. It said that the post was open to a "registered professional clinician with demonstrable evidence of working at senior level". However, it did not specify that the successful applicant had to be registered with the Nursing and Midwifery Council, which regulates both professions, clearing the way for non-nurses to apply.

Pat Cullen, the RCN's acting general secretary, warned that the "growing practice" of non-nurses filling registered nursing roles "leaves patients without professional nursing care and compromises safety".

Inquiries and reviews into inadequate care, including the Mid Staffordshire scandal in the 2000s, have shown that a lack of properly qualified nurses can damage patient care, she added.

A third advert, for a staff nurse on the NHS band five pay scale, said that the post-holder should be "RGN/RN or equivalent allied health professional",

which meant that applications from physiotherapists and occupational therapists would be considered.

Gloucestershire Health and Care NHS trust invited applications for a nursing role in a psychiatric intensive care unit dealing with people with serious mental health problems. However, it stressed that the recruit could be a staff nurse, nursing associate – a new role being expanded to help plug the shortfall of registered nurses – or healthcare assistant.

‘I’ve given all I can’: NHS staff on why they might quit
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Peter Walsh, chief executive of the patient safety charity Action against Medical Accidents, said that while multidisciplinary team working is an important part of care, “it is worrying for patient safety if there is this trend of recruiting people to what should be nursing roles who are not qualified nurses. There has been no consultation about this as far as I am aware, least of all with the people most affected – patients and their families.”

NHS England defended trusts’ recruitment practices. “Patient care has always been delivered by teams of professionals working together, and with the emergence of more integrated roles we expect providers to examine the expertise and skills required from a range of professional backgrounds, which ultimately is better for patients,” said Ruth May, its chief nurse.

Business live
Business

UK’s CMA launches action against BA and Ryanair over refunds; China inflation rises – business live

Benefits

Benefits claimants suffering under end-of-life DWP rule

Terminally ill people in UK spending final weeks struggling to get social security help as six-month rule demands ‘proof’ of life expectancy

The actor Jim Carter and others handing a petition to Downing Street in 2019 urging a law change to enable more terminally ill people to get quicker access to benefits. Photograph: Mark Thomas/Rex/Shutterstock

The actor Jim Carter and others handing a petition to Downing Street in 2019 urging a law change to enable more terminally ill people to get quicker access to benefits. Photograph: Mark Thomas/Rex/Shutterstock

Patrick Butler Social policy editor
Wed 9 Jun 2021 01.01 EDT

More than 100 terminally ill people are each month being rejected for benefits despite having less than six months to live, and many are spending

their final weeks fighting in vain for social security support, say campaigners.

The Marie Curie and the Motor Neurone Disease Association charities have called for an urgent review of Department for Work and Pensions rules after official data revealed that in an 18-month period 1,860 people in the UK died within six months of their claim for disability benefits being turned down.

The charities said the government had to scrap the restrictive "six-month rule" under which people must prove they have six months or less to live to access fast-track benefits support.

The charities said data, collected between April 2018 and October 2019, raised "serious concerns" about the DWP's ability to recognise when a claimant was approaching the end of life. They said they wanted to see rapid access to benefits kicking in as soon as terminal illness medical diagnoses were made.

In July 2019 Amber Rudd, as the UK work and pensions secretary, announced a "fresh and honest" DWP evaluation of the way the benefits system supported terminally ill patients. The charities say that although the review she commissioned had been completed the findings were "being withheld".

Mark Jackson, policy and public affairs manager at Marie Curie, said: "The current law plunges dying people into uncertainty – they know they are dying but because they do not know how long they have left they can't access financial support quickly."

Helena Reynolds, 60, from Essex was visited by a DWP assessor in her home when she was moved from one benefit, disability living allowance (DLA), to its replacement, personal independence payment. Despite being terminally ill, and with a doctor's letter to prove it, she had her benefits cut.

She said: "The assessor didn't recognise that I was terminally ill. He didn't want to see the doctor's letters, the consultant's letter or the letter from the

hospice. He didn’t want to know. I have Crohn’s disease, osteoporosis, brittle bone disease and intestinal failure.

“I have been receiving end-of-life support from a hospice but had to cancel my other care after the review as I couldn’t afford to pay for it. I was forced to appeal and only then did I receive a higher rate.

“Terminally ill people shouldn’t be judged by these assessors who aren’t medically trained. My doctors should be listened to and trusted – they’re not though, and people like me suffer as a result.”

A government spokesperson said: “Terminal illness is devastating, and our priority is dealing with people’s claims quickly and compassionately, which we’ve continued to do throughout the pandemic.

“We are grateful to charities and stakeholders who have worked with us, including Marie Curie, for their invaluable insight and are working across government on proposals including changing the six-month rule and raising awareness of the support available.”

North Korea

Kim Jong-un: apparent weight loss prompts speculation over North Korean leader's health

Kim looks noticeably slimmer in his first public appearance for a month, highlighting possible health issues over weight and lifestyle

Justin McCurry in Tokyo
Wed 9 Jun 2021 00.15 EDT

The North Korean leader, Kim Jong-un, has prompted more speculation about his health after recent photographs suggested he had lost weight.

Kim, whose heavy frame has drawn global interest since he became the country's leader almost a decade ago, looked noticeably trimmer in images released by state media on Saturday, according to South Korea's Yonhap news agency.

NK News, which analysed photos of Kim addressing a ruling party politburo meeting late last week – his first public appearance for a month – said he appeared to have lost a "significant amount of weight".

On Tuesday the Seoul-based website published enlarged images suggesting that Kim, who is believed to be 37, had tightened the strap on his favourite watch, reportedly worth $12,000.

North Korea says propaganda leaflets sent from South could carry coronavirus
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The photos appear to show that his left wrist is considerably thinner than in similar images taken in November 2020 and March this year.

Kim, a heavy smoker whose father, Kim Jong-il, died from a suspected heart attack in December 2011, has struggled with health conditions observers attribute to his weight and lifestyle.

South Korea's national intelligence service told MPs last year it believed Kim weighed 140kg (22st) and had gained an average of 6-7kg a year since coming to power in late 2011, NK News said.

It was not clear from the website's report if Kim's altered appearance was the result of illness or a conscious decision to lose weight.

One analyst told NK News the leader may have decided to lose weight to improve his standing at home. The country is battling food shortages and an economic crisis triggered by a dramatic fall in trade with China during the coronavirus pandemic, a series of natural disasters and international sanctions imposed in response to the regime's nuclear and ballistic missile programmes.

North Korea faces economic ruin amid food and medicine shortages
Read more

Kim's health is a frequent source of speculation. In 2014, he dropped out of sight for nearly six weeks before reappearing with a walking stick. Days later, South Korea's spy agency claimed he had undergone surgery to remove a cyst from his ankle.

A three-week absence last spring sparked rumours that he had fallen seriously ill after undergoing heart surgery, with some reports suggesting he had died. A more plausible theory – that he had simply been isolating with his family as a precaution during the pandemic – emerged after Kim reappeared, apparently in good health.

North Korea continues to insist that it has not found a single case of the virus after sealing its borders with China and Russia, and halting air travel.

Auckland

World’s most liveable city: Auckland wins as Covid shakes up rankings

Previous first-place holder Vienna fell out of the top 10 as cities in New Zealand, Australia and Japan fared best in rankings

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A view of Auckland from the Sky Tower. The Economist Intelligence Unit has named the New Zealand city the world’s most liveable. Photograph: Ian Dagnall/Alamy

A view of Auckland from the Sky Tower. The Economist Intelligence Unit has named the New Zealand city the world’s most liveable. Photograph: Ian Dagnall/Alamy

Reuters
Tue 8 Jun 2021 21.04 EDT

The Covid-19 pandemic has shaken up the Economist Intelligence Unit's annual ranking of most liveable cities, propelling Auckland to top spot in place of Vienna, which crashed out of the top 10 altogether as the island nations of New Zealand, Australia and Japan fared best.

The Austrian capital had led the list since 2018 and for years ran neck and neck with Melbourne at the top of the survey of 140 urban centres. New Zealand's elimination of Covid-19 within its borders, through lockdown measures helped by its geographic isolation, gave its cities a big boost.

"New Zealand's tough lockdown allowed their society to reopen and enabled citizens of cities like Auckland and Wellington to enjoy a lifestyle that looked similar to pre-pandemic life," the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) said in a statement.

'No roadmap': New Zealand mulls reopening options after a year of closed borders
Read more

The EIU generally does not make the full ranking public. The last time Auckland was in the top 10 was in 2017, when it came eighth, a position Melbourne shared with Geneva this year. Vienna fell to 12th.

Top 10 cities

Illustrating New Zealand's advantage this year, Wellington also entered the top 10. It came fourth behind Osaka, which rose two spots to second place, and Adelaide, which leapfrogged its compatriots Sydney and Melbourne to third place from 10th.

The latest ranking is from 2019 as last year's was cancelled.

"The Covid-19 pandemic has taken a heavy toll on global liveability," the EIU said.

Bottom 10 cities

"Cities across the world are now much less liveable than they were before the pandemic began, and we've seen that regions such as Europe have been

hit particularly hard.“

The European Union struggled to get its vaccination campaign off the ground and many member states, including Austria, imposed more lockdowns than they had hoped to, hurting their cities’ scores in the measure of culture and environment. The four other categories assessed are stability, healthcare, education and infrastructure.

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Coronavirus

What could a delay to the 21 June lockdown easing mean for England?

Analysis: with ministers said to be considering England's 21 June easing, how delay could affect vaccinations and virus spread

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Some people wearing masks as they walk down busy Oxford Street, London. Photograph: Luciana Guerra/PA

Some people wearing masks as they walk down busy Oxford Street, London. Photograph: Luciana Guerra/PA

Nicola Davis *Science correspondent*
@NicolaKSDavis
Tue 8 Jun 2021 11.35 EDT

Ministers are said to be considering delaying the easing of lockdown in England on 21 June for somewhere between two weeks and a month. We look at what a delay could mean, and how long it may need to last.

Why delay?

Scientist have said a delay may be necessary, largely as a result of the Delta variant that was first identified in India, also known as B.1.617.2. This variant is now dominant in the UK and has been linked to a rise in cases, particularly in certain areas such as the north-west of England, although partial easing of lockdown measures in May may also be contributing to the situation.

The Delta variant is believed to spread more easily than the Alpha variant, B.1.1.7, that was first detected in Kent – with Matt Hancock recently putting the figure at 40% more transmissible. It also appears to be somewhat more resistant to Covid vaccines, particularly after just one dose, and may be associated with a greater risk of hospitalisation.

In May results from modelling by researchers at the University of Warwick suggested that, despite the vaccination programme, a variant 40% more transmissible than the Alpha variant could result in a peak of about 6,000 hospital admissions a day, assuming full relaxation went ahead – a figure exceeding that of previous peaks. Should the 21 June easing be cancelled this year, the modelling suggested that daily hospital admissions could still end up close to those seen at the peak of the first wave.

Speaking to the Guardian in a personal capacity, Nicholas Grassly, professor in vaccine epidemiology at Imperial College London and a member of the Scientific Pandemic Influenza Group on Modelling (SPI-M) said the fact that infection rates are already increasing " means we will very likely have a third wave of infection even if the lifting of restrictions on 21 June is postponed".

But, he said, delaying the full easing will reduce the size of the wave.

"The priority now should be to vaccinate as many people as possible and to keep being careful about mask wearing indoors, physical distancing etc," he

said. “As well as preventing infection, vaccination will reduce the likelihood that any breakthrough infections lead to severe disease that requires hospital or [intensive care] admission, shrinking the impact of a third wave of infection.”

What would a delay mean for vaccinations?

According to the UK Covid dashboard statistics, the seven-day average for first dose vaccinations, as of 3 June, was 153,789 vaccinations per day, and at 340,303 per day for second doses.

Assuming those rates remain steady, in a two-week period more than 2.15 million people will receive a first jab and 4.76million will get a second jab, with about 4.3 million people receiving their first jab and around 9.5 million people getting their second jab over a four-week period.

“Importantly [a delay] will give a second dose to many people who have so far received only one dose of vaccine and need two doses to have a good level of protection against Covid-19, especially that caused by the Delta variant,” said Grassly.

What about the spread of the virus?

The R value is the average number of people one infected person transmits the virus to – and this depends on multiple factors including how contagious the virus is, and how many contacts people have. If R is above 1, it means an epidemic could grow exponentially, if it is below 1 it means it will eventually fizzle out.

“The R number for the Delta variant is already above 1 and the virus is spreading,” said Grassly. “However, a delay would prevent a further increase in R and limit the size of a third wave.”

But, Grassly suggested, even tougher action may be needed.

“To bring the R number below 1, some restrictions that have already been lifted may need to be reimposed,” he said, adding that vaccinations will also help as they offer some protection against infection, particularly after two doses.

How big a delay is needed?

That is a tough question. The situation is complex and there are many unknowns. That means it may be necessary to change tack as the situation develops.

“When we open up depends to a large degree on how quickly we can vaccinate people,” said Dr Kit Yates, co-director of the Centre for Mathematical Biology at the University of Bath and a member of the Independent Sage group of experts, adding that information about vaccine supply is not in the public domain.

“I’m afraid it really is a matter of sticking to data and not dates, looking at infection rates, hospitalisations and vaccination data in order to determine we’ve reasserted control over this,” he said.

Prof Rowland Kao of the University of Edinburgh and a Spi-M member, agreed.

With R currently around 1.2, and about 40% of the UK population double vaccinated, 40% unvaccinated, and 20% only half vaccinated, “roughly another 10% of the population need to go from unvaccinated to fully vaccinated with two doses in order to get R below 1 under current restrictions, much less easing them,” he said, adding while the additional vaccinations over two weeks may be able to achieve this, it is “cutting it fairly fine.”.

“For a two-week timeframe to be sure, we would need to increase vaccination rates substantially and that would be a big logistic problem,” he said. “So any two-week delay should also be accompanied by a review of those restrictions in another two weeks’ time.”

Yates added that it is important to employ measures beyond vaccination: “Fixing the broken test-and-trace system, improving ventilation in workplaces and schools and supporting people with positive tests to isolate are all measures which will make it easier to stay on top of the situation.”

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Coronavirus

Do not delay England's Covid unlocking, says leading Tory lockdown sceptic

Steve Baker, vice-chair of Covid Recovery Group of MPs, adds to pressure on PM to stick to roadmap

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Ministers at Westminster have come under pressure from their own backbenchers to proceed with plans to end the remaining Covid restrictions in England on 21 June. Photograph: Tolga Akmen/AFP/Getty Images

Ministers at Westminster have come under pressure from their own backbenchers to proceed with plans to end the remaining Covid restrictions in England on 21 June. Photograph: Tolga Akmen/AFP/Getty Images

Heather Stewart Political editor
Tue 8 Jun 2021 11.35 EDT

Conservative backbencher Steve Baker has urged the government to press ahead with lifting England's remaining Covid restrictions on 21 June despite a sharp rise in cases.

The health secretary, Matt Hancock, said in the House of Commons that ministers faced a "challenging decision" about whether to proceed as planned with the final stage of the government's roadmap.

The latest official UK data shows 35,796 people have tested positive for the virus over the past week, up 52.9% on a week earlier. Deaths were up just 1.7% over the week, however, at 59.

Baker, vice-chair of the Covid Recovery Group of backbench MPs, said 21 June represented a "last chance" for industries including hospitality and tourism, that "make life worth living," and it was time to allow the public to "reconnect with family and friends and regain our mental health".

He claimed that by that date, all over-50s and vulnerable younger adults should have been given the opportunity to receive two doses of Covid vaccine.

"These groups represent about 99% of Covid deaths and about 80% of hospitalisations," he said. "As of today, according to announcements made by the government, these groups should all have been offered a chance to have had a second dose. It would be helpful for the government to clarify that this has been achieved.

"If this brilliant milestone isn't enough to convince ministers that we need to lift all remaining restrictions – especially social distancing requirements – on 21 June, nothing will ever get us out of this."

Baker's intervention underlines the pressure the prime minister faces from colleagues as he weighs up whether to delay the final lifting of restrictions until more people can be protected.

The government has previously said it intends all adults to have been offered two doses of the vaccine by the end of July.

Hancock has warned that the Delta variant of the virus, which originated in India, appears to be around 40% more transmissible than the previous strain.

Some experts have warned that despite vaccination offering good protection against the variant, particularly after two doses, hospitalisations could still increase dramatically, in a way that could eventually threaten NHS capacity.

The decision about whether to go ahead with the final stage of reopening is not expected to be announced until next Monday, after Boris Johnson has hosted world leaders for the G7 summit in Cornwall over the weekend.

When the roadmap to reopening was first announced in February, Johnson set out four criteria for going ahead as planned, with one of those being "our assessment of the risks is not fundamentally changed by new variants of concern".

But Tory backbenchers have dubbed 21 June "freedom day," and will put intense pressure on the prime minister to go ahead with the final stage of reopening, despite the rise in cases.

Johnson told colleagues at Tuesday's cabinet meeting: "While the relationship between cases and hospitalisations has changed, we must continue to look at the data carefully ahead of making a decision on step 4."

Andrew Lloyd Webber

Lloyd Webber says he will risk arrest to reopen his theatres on 21 June

Impresario is determined his production of Cinderella will start this month in London as planned

Andrew Lloyd Webber says he may have to sell his West End theatres if venues are forced to operate at reduced capacities. Photograph: UPI/Alamy

Andrew Lloyd Webber says he may have to sell his West End theatres if venues are forced to operate at reduced capacities. Photograph: UPI/Alamy

PA Media
Tue 8 Jun 2021 18.38 EDT

Andrew Lloyd Webber has said he is determined to open his theatres on 21 June regardless of whether rules are relaxed, and is prepared to be arrested if authorities try to intervene.

The composer said he may have to sell his six West End venues if the government does not remove restrictions that have forced venues to run with reduced capacities.

Speaking to the Daily Telegraph, Lord Lloyd-Webber also revealed he had remortgaged his London home, as the live entertainment industry struggles with the pandemic's catastrophic financial impact.

Many theatres have remained closed despite the easing of Covid-19 restrictions as it still is not financially viable for them to open with smaller audiences.

Whiskers, claws and applause: Andrew Lloyd Webber's Cats – in pictures
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Lloyd Webber is preparing for a production of Cinderella, which is scheduled to open for previews on 25 June ahead of its world premiere in July. "We are going to open, come hell or high water," Lord Lloyd-Webber told the Telegraph.

Asked what he would do if the government postponed lifting lockdown, he said: "We will say: 'come to the theatre and arrest us.'"

The 21 June date for full relaxation of rules in the government's Covid unlocking roadmap is in doubt due to concerns over the impact of Covid-19 variants and rising cases.

Lloyd Webber claimed scientific evidence showed theatres are "completely safe" and do not cause outbreaks. He added: "If the government ignore their own science, we have the mother of all legal cases against them. If Cinderella couldn't open, we'd go, 'Look, either we go to law about it or you'll have to compensate us.'"

This is not the first time Lloyd Webber, 73, has criticised those calling for a delay in reopening. Last week he told the Daily Mail he may take legal action if his theatres are not allowed to welcome back crowds at full capacity.

Vaccines and immunisation

‘Glastonbury-style’ rush for Covid vaccine by 25- to 29-year-olds in England

Nearly 500,000 appointments were booked by midday on Tuesday after eligibility was expanded

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Some young people reported difficulties getting through to the NHS website to make a jab appointment. Photograph: Dan Kitwood/Getty Images

Some young people reported difficulties getting through to the NHS website to make a jab appointment. Photograph: Dan Kitwood/Getty Images

Nadeem Badshah and agency
Tue 8 Jun 2021 14.36 EDT

Nearly 500,000 vaccine appointments were booked by midday on Tuesday in a “Glastonbury-style” rush after the rollout was expanded to 25- to 29-year-olds in England, the NHS said.

The National Booking Service experienced 493,000 slots being reserved, five hours after eligibility was widened to the over-24s.

It is more than double the number booked the previous day and equates to about 100,000 bookings an hour.

Sir Simon Stevens, the chief executive of NHS England, said: “This encouraging Glastonbury-style rush for appointments has already now seen hundreds of thousands of people between 25 and 29 book in for their NHS Covid jabs, as more vaccine supplies continue to come on line.

Can we vaccinate the world against Covid by the end of 2022?
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“Pleasingly, this suggests strong enthusiasm for vaccination among people in their 20s, following hard on the heels of the millions of others who’ve already taken up our offer.”

The health secretary, Matt Hancock, said: “I am absolutely thrilled young people have come forward for the jab in full force today. We have one of the highest vaccine uptake rates in the world and these latest booking figures are testament to this.”

However, many young people reported problems with the booking website this morning, with some posting screenshots to social media showing an error message telling them that they are “not currently eligible to book through this service”.

It directs them to call the 119 helpline to try to book a vaccination. Others reported being told they were in a queue of thousands.

A spokesperson for NHS Digital said: “Large numbers of people are currently booking their vaccine appointments through the NHS website, which means you may need to wait in a queue.

“We know that some people have been receiving an ineligible message when trying to book, which is being fixed now, so please retry.”

The vaccine booking website has suffered glitches previously, including crashing in April after appointments were being opened up to the 45s and over.

Elsewhere, Andy Burnham, the mayor of Greater Manchester, urged the government to speed up vaccine supplies to his region to allow it to run a “surge vaccination programme”.

He spoke after the government announced that surge testing will be extended in Greater Manchester and Lancashire in response to the rise in Covid cases in those areas.

Coronavirus live
Coronavirus

Coronavirus live: UK minister warns against making wedding plans as cases rise; Malaysia's ICU beds 'all full'

Charities

Millions spent on consultants for Covid scheme ‘not justified’, MPs say

Cross-party report says ministers offered ‘no clear rationale’ for £2m spent on assessment of charity applications

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Public accounts committee chair, Meg Hillier MP, said it was not the first time during the pandemic ‘worrying smoke’ had been thrown up around Covid funding decisions. Photograph: Isabel Infantes/EMPICS Entertainment

Public accounts committee chair, Meg Hillier MP, said it was not the first time during the pandemic ‘worrying smoke’ had been thrown up around Covid funding decisions. Photograph: Isabel Infantes/EMPICS Entertainment

Patrick Butler *Social policy editor*
Wed 9 Jun 2021 00.01 EDT

Ministers could not justify spending millions of pounds of taxpayers' money hiring consultants to assess applicants for its £500m Covid emergency support package for charities, despite clear bid processes already existing, according to cross-party MPs.

Ministers were also unable to explain why a team of political special advisers was given an unusually central role in deciding which charities would receive funding, or why some charities received cash even though their bids initially received low scores.

The public accounts committee (PAC) said there was a "notable opaqueness" surrounding decisions on how funds were distributed to charities, with little clarity about how the cash was shared regionally, or what impact it had.

Greater Manchester and Lancashire to receive emergency Covid support
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MPs were examining the £513m allocated to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) last year to provide financial support for charities to help them meet increased demand during the pandemic. An additional £200m went to hospice charities via the Department of Health and Social Care.

The PAC chair, Meg Hillier, said that it was not the first time during the pandemic "worrying smoke" had been thrown up by ministers around Covid support funding decisions, with "growing instances of the official processes overridden without adequate explanations".

"Exorbitant funds" having been spent by consultants without the impact being measured was a recurring pandemic theme, she added. "I fear one clear impact is the steady erosion of taxpayers' trust that their money is being well spent in this national emergency."

The committee highlighted £2m paid to consultants PricewaterhouseCoopers to double-check £200m in awards to charities made by the national lottery community fund. There was "no clear rationale" behind using the consultants, MPs said.

The DCMS said the support from PwC was needed "due to the fast-paced and pressured environment it was operating in" but could not say if the extra checks had added value. The process "had not been set up in the best possible way to start with," it admitted.

MPs said five unnamed special advisers were present at the meeting to discuss funding bids. "We remarked that the level of influence exerted by special advisers and their involvement at the point of decision-making appeared to go beyond anything we had previously witnessed as members of this committee."

It said officials had ranked 53 funding bids put forward by government departments to support charities in their sector on the basis of "additional urgent need" due to Covid. However, at the meeting, nine of the 13 bids which scored lowest were among the 42 eventually chosen.

Global economy set for fastest recovery for more than 80 years
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Similarly, of 35 bids for the DCMS match-funding scheme, all four of the lowest-ranked bids made it into the final list of 20 organisations after discussions with ministers about "their views and preferences," including three bids "where officials were unsure if they [the bids] were eligible".

The DCMS insisted that the processes followed were "appropriate" as new information became available. However, the PAC said the department was "unable to elaborate further on what new information came to light that led to the lowest-scoring applications receiving funding".

Poor data meant it was not yet clear how different regions of the UK had benefited from the charity support fund, the PAC said. "To the extent that information is available, analysis showed that London had received the most funding (£47m) and the north-east the least (£14m)."

The PAC said it was concerned frontline charities supporting vulnerable individuals received less Covid financial support than other sectors. “While we recognised that government funding was not intended to support or save every charity, we remain concerned about the long-term financial health and resilience of the sector as the pandemic continues.”

Tom Collinge, policy manager at charity analysts NPC, said the government had misunderstood that frontline charities could not furlough staff who were out tackling the crisis. “So while charities were reporting incomes dropping, demand was rising and government support was less than for other sectors.”

Tokyo Olympic Games 2020

Team GB steps up Covid jab programme amid fears Japan will put UK on red list

- BOA says 86% of athletes have had at least one vaccination
- Quarantine periods may be extended before Tokyo Olympics

Tokyo’s Olympic venues are preparing for action but the city is still under a state of emergency and less than 10% of the people in Japan have had even one vaccination. Photograph: Eugene Hoshiko/AP

Tokyo’s Olympic venues are preparing for action but the city is still under a state of emergency and less than 10% of the people in Japan have had even one vaccination. Photograph: Eugene Hoshiko/AP

Sean Ingle
@seaningle
Tue 8 Jun 2021 16.53 EDT

The British Olympic Association has reacted to speculation that Japan could place the UK on its red list by revealing that 86% of Team GB has already had at least one Covid vaccine – and pledging to do everything possible to keep the local population in Tokyo safe.

In a letter to the head of the Tokyo organising committee, Seiko Hashimoto, the BOA chair, Hugh Robertson, said Team GB athletes and staff were "doing everything possible to minimise any risk to the people of Japan" in the lead-up to the Olympic Games. He also promised the hosts that the BOA would "do everything we can to get the entire team fully vaccinated before we depart for Japan".

GB Gymnastics accused of 'sinister warning' after dropping Downie for Olympics
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The letter comes amid concerns that some countries with dangerous Covid variants may face longer quarantine periods in Japan before the Olympics begin. There also remains considerable unease in Japan about the staging of the Games, with Tokyo still under a state of emergency and less than 10% of the population having been vaccinated at all.

On Tuesday Hashimoto warned that media covering the Games would be closely monitored to ensure they did not leave pre-registered areas such as hotels and sports venues. But the BOA's chief executive, Andy Anson, promised that Team GB would "go over and above the requirements of organisers" with testing and isolation protocols.

"It's our priority to protect not only the health of our athletes and wider delegation, but our hosts in Tokyo," he added. "Everyone will undergo a PCR test 14 days prior to travel and regular lateral flow tests thereafter, as we also shield ourselves for the final build-up to the Games. That will mean avoiding close contacts, or going to crowded or indoor spaces.

"We'll then take two PCR tests within 96 hours of travel, before a final test on the day of departure. We're doing all we can, and more than we need to, to ensure our delegation is Covid free upon arrival in Japan."

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2021.06.09 - Spotlight

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Meghan, the Duchess of Sussex

Lilibet Diana: the baby name that represents a royal rift – and audacious hope

Diana, Princess of Wales, and the Queen in 1982. Photograph: Tim Graham Photo Library/Getty Images

Diana, Princess of Wales, and the Queen in 1982. Photograph: Tim Graham Photo Library/Getty Images

By combining the names of the Queen and the Princess of Wales, Harry and Meghan have highlighted two very different approaches to the monarchy. But which will define the future?

Zoe Williams
@zoesqwilliams
Wed 9 Jun 2021 01.00 EDT

The joyful delivery of a baby girl to Prince Harry and Meghan is lovely news. But it has been lost, ever so slightly, in the couple's naming choice: Lilibet Diana Mountbatten-Windsor.

I don't think they had any say in the surname, so let's stick with the forenames. Lilibet is, of course, the Queen's nickname; not, as you might suppose, a contraction of Elizabeth that only posh people use, but rather what she called herself when she was too young to pronounce her own name. Only George VI, the Queen Mother, Princess Margaret and Prince Philip used it. "Lilibet is my pride. Margaret is my joy," the king was quoted as saying, evidently having not caught up with the parenting manual that says you are really supposed to keep the identity of your favourite child to yourself. When Prince Philip died, the nickname died with him.

So, was it sensitive or insensitive for Harry to revivify it so soon? This is the question that is occupying the royal watchers, along with: is this an olive branch to the family, a reminder that underneath all the feuding lie real, human relationships? Or is it a defiant statement: you can't evict me from

the family, because it is not a house, or even a collection of gigantic houses; it is a family. Or is it somehow a combination of the two – and is that even possible?

Reticence, stoicism, duty ... the Queen at Trooping the Colour in 2007. Photograph: Tim Graham Photo Library/Getty Images

But what is a royal watcher, anyway? Their expertise is the weapons-grade fawning; the watching, any of us could do. What if they are asking the wrong questions? Because there are two parts to this name: yes, there is Lilibet, but there is also Diana. Plainly, the couple have chosen the two most different members of the family, each embodying a diametrically opposite culture, and named their daughter after both of them. It could be that they are trying out something quite inventive, a monarchical third way.

The Queen is synonymous with a powerful sense of duty. “If you look up the number of engagements she’s missed, over 70 years, it’s unbelievable. It’s three,” says Amy Jenkins, one of the writers on The Crown. Duty is an outcome rather than an input, but it is possible to infer character from it – rigidity, obedience, reticence, self-effacement, an absolute horror at showing emotion. “It’s that British thing, isn’t it? ‘I challenge you to feel something,’” Jenkins says. “That’s like British bullying. We do it properly and we don’t feel things.”

Diana, Princess of Wales, meanwhile, was emphatically not rule-bound; really, her only duty as the wife to the heir of the throne was to produce young and stay married, and she flamed out spectacularly on the second.

What was much more discomfiting within the royals and to the public, though, was that she wasn't emotionless. Even before the Martin Bashir interview – and we will park for now the question of whether we need to torch the BBC, a 100-year-old institution of unmatched global importance, for an interview that is a more than 25 years old and most of us remember only for the eyeliner – you could see the feelings running riot all over her face, from the beseeching eyes to the wistfulness. There were glimpses of mirth, sorrow, boredom. Has any royal's face ever been so damn legible?

It was never clear whether these feelings were genuine or part of a complicated PR long-game – but they certainly weren't hidden. It caused a lot of rancour, since she accrued the world's attention that way – after all, it is much more interesting to look at a person who is feeling a thing than someone who is not – and was cast within the family as an attention-seeker. Attention-seekers are annoying in any family, but they are poison to a family whose operating model is "we didn't ask for any of this, we're just doing our duty".

But Diana also called attention to the fragility of the Queen's way of doing things. "That reticence wouldn't hold, and one of the reasons it wouldn't hold was because people have feelings," says Jenkins. "But the royal family don't recognise that. Which means they make mistakes all the time, because they're reckoning without being human." Having Diana around, with those great pools of emotion she called eyes, was an unsettling reminder that people, even under all that pomp, might still act like people.

‘You could see the feelings running riot all over her face’ ... Diana in 1992. Photograph: Shutterstock

In the end, whatever a royal was thinking or feeling back then, their prospects for self-expression were heavily circumscribed, limited effectively to the charities they supported. The Queen’s list of patronages is exactly as you would expect, although you might raise an eyebrow at how much she likes rugby (union *and* league?). It is studiously uncontroversial; her interests centre on children, animals and august institutions.

Between the charity work and the tacit demands of her office – that she remain neutral in the face of every issue, like a BBC journalist without the questions – it is very hard to say what she actually cares about. Dogs and horses, certainly; she is passionate about the Commonwealth, although it is unclear what about the Commonwealth inspires her passion (the memories of dominion? The beaches? The many cuisines?). People project views and behaviours on to the Queen, sometimes strategically – recall the Sun claiming her as an ardent Brexiter – and sometimes just to fill the void. There is no record of the Queen having any political or intellectual agenda, Jenkins says. “In that sense, The Crown is a complete and utter fantasy. The idea that she’s subtly manipulating matters of state behind the scenes, that she’s this wise force of whatever … no.”

Diana, conversely, was not just overtly political, but also radical in her choice of causes. Her work with the Halo Trust, the anti-landmine charity, started in Angola in January 1997, only months before her death. It was a spur-of-the-moment decision to walk across the minefield – "very characteristic of her", says the charity's CEO, James Cowan. "She knew her personal capacity to make a difference was extraordinary."

What sounds from this distance like an uncontroversial cause – who would oppose a ban on weapons that continue to kill children years after a conflict has ended? – was in fact the opposite. "The British at that time were pretty committed to keeping landmines as part of their military armour," Cowan says. "She'd been called a loose cannon by a minister."

Diana walks down a safety corridor of a minefield in Huambo, Angola, in January 1997. Photograph: Juda Ngwenya/Reuters

The impact of that photo was more or less immediate: in the autumn of that year, the international mine ban treaty came into force and has been signed by hundreds of countries that previously would have opposed it, not least the UK. It is the kind of impact that an individual makes only as a maverick, a thorn in the establishment's side. If Diana had been swimming with the current, she would have been one voice in many. So, did it make her a pioneer or a narcissist? Maybe all pioneers are narcissists.

Yet it was her work with HIV and Aids patients – which started in 1987 with the photo of her shaking hands, gloveless, with the patient Ivan Cohen and continued until her death – that flagged how truly unusual she was.

There is a semi-satirical Diana fandom from a left perspective. Alex, 26, who runs a Twitter account called Princess Diana Is in All of Us, says: "My journey is going from ironic Diana lover to genuinely having a spiritual connection with her." For Alex (who is using his first name only because he works in activism and direct action), Diana's HIV work was a jumping-off point. "As a gay man, I found what she did really quite moving," he says of the Cohen photo. "When she held the hands of Aids patients, I genuinely believe she was doing a spectacle of direct action. She was trying to construct a dramatic image that would advance social change.

> The Queen embodies the values of an age before her own. Diana stood for a complicated modernity

"She was conscious of the fact that she was conceptualised as a Christ-like angel, and she then goes out of her way to hold the hands of people who are considered to be disgusting and contaminated. I use 'Christ-like' intentionally. It was a direct reference to Christ cleaning the feet of leprosy patients."

Alex says her landmine and HIV action "created an image that shakes the foundations of the discourse" and posed a direct challenge to the values associated with the royals as personified by the Queen – reticence and stoicism. Peter Hitchens has highlighted the difference between Winston Churchill's funeral and Diana's – ultimate restraint versus the "outpouring of grief", a phrase that became the motto of Diana's legacy. The Queen seems very much of Churchill's vintage, yet plainly she is not. Nonetheless, she embodies the values of an age before her own. Her daughter-in-law, on the other hand, stood for a complicated modernity, self-involved but extremely public, the self as a brand to be strategically deployed.

In their everyday lives – how they parented, the formality of their bearing – Lilibet and Diana offer contrasts that are a little melancholy. There is a video of the Queen arriving home from a long trip abroad, in which an absolutely

tiny Prince Charles approaches and shakes her hand; to modern eyes, at least, it conveys worlds of distance and loneliness. It is understood that she bucked the aristocratic norm of outsourcing motherhood by the time it came to Prince Andrew, and that he was her favourite, but it is not possible to point to real-world evidence of this. Plus, he still went to boarding school. In any case, it doesn't seem to have turned out a more rounded human being.

The Queen and Prince Philip at Windsor Castle with their children – *(from left)* Edward, Anne, Andrew and Charles – in 1968. Photograph: Mirrorpix/Getty Images

Diana was what the psychologist John Bowlby might call a much more "attached" mother, but she was powerfully unhappy even by the time she was pregnant with Prince William, so there was never any sense that she was living the perfect-family dream. She rebelled against petty expectations – kicking off her shoes in the hair salon, wearing red cashmere maternity dresses – but she did not manage to find an alternative way of being royal that made the business any less draining.

In the end, it is impossible to adjudicate on whose way of being makes more sense. We cannot know what kind of royal would make the institution more durable, more bearable, more coherent. All you can say is that they were as different as they could have been, and that this schism has been the gift that

keeps on giving, a pinball of conflict that pings between the rest of the family with perpetual energy.

The putative feud between William and Harry, if it is really as bad as people say, can be read as a rerun of this clash – cold against hot, doing one's duty versus questing for fulfilment. The obvious solution is for Harry and Meghan to become Diana ultras in the US while William stays in Britain and channels the Queen, but that amounts to the rift lasting for ever.

Maybe the newest family member's name is an audacious act of hope – what if someone came along who was a bit of both? Who was capable of putting herself second to her role without losing her identity? Who could harness her star power for good? She might be a bit like Daenerys Targaryen without the dragons. Or maybe she is just a baby – and that is fine, too.

Culture

Bennifer rebooted! Why is Ben Affleck and Jennifer Lopez's reunion so cheering?

A larger-than-life love … Lopez and Affleck in 2003's Gigli. Photograph: Allstar/Columbia/Sportsphoto

A larger-than-life love … Lopez and Affleck in 2003's Gigli. Photograph: Allstar/Columbia/Sportsphoto

They were a tabloid dream, the super-cool fly girl and the eyeliner-wearing Caped Crusader. Now, 17 years on, Ben and Jen are together again. But what do the ultimate 00s couple mean to the TikTok age?

Benjamin Svetkey
Wed 9 Jun 2021 01.00 EDT

Brangelina. Kimye. Tomkat. Gyllenspoon. Each pairing is yet another note in the long, sad dirge of failed Hollywood romances. Blending famous

monikers has been a showbiz tradition for decades, even if most of these fusions fizzle out quicker than you can say “Vaughniston” (you remember: Vince Vaughn dated Jennifer Aniston for about a minute after her breakup with Brad Pitt). But back in the early 2000s, there was one couple whose tumultuous affair and melded nickname towered above the rest, all but consuming the tabloid press for three whole years, until their abrupt, dramatic breakup just days before their planned wedding. And now, 17 years later, in a plot twist worthy of a Nancy Meyers romcom, those same not-so-young-any-more lovers have shocked the world and delighted the media by getting back together.

That’s right: like the cicadas, Bennifer has risen anew. The details of the Ben Affleck-Jennifer Lopez reunion are still a bit sketchy. There was a New York Post item in April reporting that the two had been observed entering the restaurant at the Pendry hotel in West Hollywood with “arms wrapped around each other”. A few days later, Affleck was spotted making an early-morning departure from Lopez’s LA home (“with a smirk” on his face, the Page Six article noted). A month after that, multiple outlets broke the news that the couple had spent a weekend at a resort in Montana. Then celebrity mag Us Weekly made it semi-official with a quote from an anonymous source: “Jen and Ben are both very happy with each [other] and excited to see where the relationship goes.”

Moving in for the kiss … the Jenny from the Block music video

It's hard to overstate just how big a deal Affleck and Lopez's relationship was the first time around. Virtually every aspect of their original whirlwind courtship – how they met in 2001 on the set of Gigli, the mobster comedy that ended up being one of the decade's most notorious bombs; how Lopez broke up her marriage to her second husband, dancer Cris Judd, over the affair; how Affleck dropped $2.5m at Harry Winston for a six-carat pink diamond engagement ring – was afforded the sort of wall-to-wall news coverage usually reserved for hurricanes or ground invasions.

> The world is craving pop culture comfort food – and this is a great big grilled cheese sandwich

"We didn't *try* to have a public relationship," Lopez said about the romance in a 2016 People interview. "We just happened to be together at the birth of the tabloids." But that wasn't entirely true. They were hardly hiding from the cameras when Affleck did that cameo in Lopez's 2002 music video Jenny from the Block, sunbathing with her on a yacht and planting a gigantic, tabloid-teasing smooch on her bikinied derriere. And her timing was also a bit off: it wasn't the *birth* of the tabloids – it was their crowning peak.

Back in those days, with celebrity culture at its zenith, magazine covers were the glossy currency of the realm. People and Us Weekly still had massive circulations and raked in hundreds of millions of dollars in advertising. Indeed, it was nearly impossible to become famous in America without appearing in their pages. And in this world, at that moment in time, Affleck and Lopez were the tabloid prom's king and queen. They virtually guaranteed killer newsstand sales.

Today, the gossip industry isn't what it used to be. There are fewer paparazzi dangling out of palm trees snapping million-dollar photos of canoodling stars; not as many power-crazed Hollywood publicists turning every interview request into the Oslo peace accords. Indeed, the very concept of fame – of larger-than-life personalities living larger-than-life lives and having larger-than-life love affairs – has been all but obliterated by social media, which ironically started right around the time Affleck and Lopez

broke up (with Facebook launching in 2004). Internet "influencers" have ushered in a shaggier, more democratic and much more accessible form of celebrity. In 2021, the stars have become their own paparazzi. It's called Instagram.

Celebrity fusions … Gyllenspoon, Tomkat and Kimye. Composite: Getty Images, EPA, Reuters

Which is why the hoopla over Bennifer 2.0 is a little mystifying. How come, in this day and age, so many folks are so fascinated by such an old-school romance, the re-pairing of a 48-year-old former Batman and a 51-year-old one-time Fly Girl? And not just fascinated, but cheering them on in ways they didn't always do during the couple's first go-around. Remember all the crap Affleck took just because he started wearing eyeliner in public around the time he and Lopez began dating? It nearly destroyed his career.

Part of the answer may just be normal cyclical nostalgia. Every 20 years or so, a new decade gets chosen for celebration, and right now it's the 2000s' turn: the Friends reunion; Mean Girls being made into a Broadway show; the rehabilitation of Britney Spears as a music industry martyr; and teen queen Billie Eilish even sampling The Office in one of her songs. Everywhere you turn, there are echoes of the 00s – and it's hard to think of anything that conjures them up more palpably than tabloid headlines about Bennifer.

Scratch a little deeper, though, and it's possible there's something more meaningful going on here than just wistful pining. After the last five years of political insanity and general cultural nastiness – not to mention the last 15 months of social distancing and masking up – the world is clearly hankering for some normality. It's craving pop culture comfort food. And by reuniting after all this time, Affleck and Lopez are serving up a great big grilled cheese sandwich of reassurance and familiarity. Who wouldn't want to take a bite out of that?

Of course, this being Hollywood, one can't completely overlook the fact that getting back together has also been a savvy career move for both stars. Affleck's had some professional triumphs in the years since the breakup (like winning best picture Oscar for 2012's Argo) as well as some flops (his turn as the Caped Crusader was widely panned). But his post-Bennifer public image took a bunch of hits thanks to a decidedly rocky private life. He hooked up with his Daredevil costar Jennifer Garner in 2004, got married, had three kids with her, got separated and then got caught messing around with the nanny, developed a drinking problem and was divorced from Garner in 2018.

Back in the headlines … Lopez performs at the Vax Live concert at SoFi Stadium, California, last month. Photograph: Jason Armond/Los Angeles Times/Rex/Shutterstock

Lopez, meanwhile, has spent the last 17 years bouncing between mediocre romcoms (occasionally landing better material, such as Hustlers), doing a stint as a judge on American Idol, launching beauty and clothing lines, and slogging through a wobbly series of doomed relationships. Shortly after her affair with Affleck blew up, she married singer Marc Anthony (noting later that she "knew very quickly that [the marriage] wasn't the right thing"), had two kids with him, divorced after 10 years, embarked on a fling with a backup dancer, then another with Drake, until she met Alex Rodriguez, the retired baseball star she nearly married before their breakup earlier this year.

Britney Spears: another pop princess trapped in a man-made fairytale
Read more

On their own, Affleck and Lopez are each scaled-down versions of the stars they used to be, which is true of pretty much every boldfaced name of the 2000s. In the TikTok world of today, where iPhone screens matter more than the ones in movie theatres, that's just the way it is. But by reuniting as a couple, they've become bigger than the sum of their parts. Together, they're getting a taste of the old-fashioned, high-grade fame they once gorged on. That's something that hasn't been lost on some of their showbiz compatriots, including a few ex-lovers. Lopez's former flame Diddy – she dated the rapper in the late 1990s – recently posted a throwback photo of the two of them holding hands. Gwyneth Paltrow's Goop website, meanwhile, posted a shot of her with Affleck back when they dated in the 1990s. Everybody, it seems, wants a pinch of Bennifer's media pixie dust.

But there is one other explanation for why Affleck and Lopez's second-time-around love affair is creating so many gushing headlines, and it may be the most compelling of all. Even in a place as cynical and jaded as Hollywood, there's something undeniably sweet about their reunion. What are the chances that two A-list ex-lovers of the 2000s, who spent the better part of the last two decades struggling with their own separate demons, divorces and career reversals, would end up emerging in 2021 as single and available at exactly the same moment? And that they'd fall in love with each other all over again? It's just the sort of over-the-top high-concept romantic hokum Hollywood has always found irresistible.

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Music

From New Order to Chris Kamara: England's best and worst tournament songs

England football songs have run the gamut of emotions from misty-eyed hope to the musical expression of deep psychological malaise

Ian Broudie from the Lightening Seeds (left to right) with Frank Skinner and David Baddiel ahead of France 98, the second outing for Three Lions. Photograph: PA

Ian Broudie from the Lightening Seeds (left to right) with Frank Skinner and David Baddiel ahead of France 98, the second outing for Three Lions. Photograph: PA

Ben Beaumont-Thomas
@ben_bt
Wed 9 Jun 2021 01.00 EDT

Some of the best…

Baddiel, Skinner & the Lightning Seeds – Three Lions

Mundial-reading hipsters will make a compelling case for New Order's World in Motion being the greatest England football song, but any pub argument will always finish up around Three Lions. Major tournaments always require a certain cognitive dissonance on the part of England fans, and Three Lions' brilliance is in admitting that, acknowledging frailty while shamelessly stoking hope in a misty-eyed "what if" of a song.

New Order – World in Motion

Well, maybe the hipsters have a point. Released for Italia 90, New Order took the gooey, face-touching high of ecstasy that had been powering the UK rave scene for the previous couple of years and parlayed it into love for one's country instead. It's one of the best songs of the early 90s in any arena:

the band's tendency towards paranoia melts away under the floodlights and John Barnes' rap is hugely endearing.

Fat Les – Vindaloo

Some may think this belongs in the "worst" category below: its martial drum beat and proud "we're from Eng-er-land" pronouncements could suggest the country at its arrogant, violent worst. But the perfect chanted melody, and the joyous simplicity of "we're going to score one more than you", stops you overthinking it. It's essentially the evil child of 1970's rousing Back Home, and the video, a piss-take of the Verve's Bittersweet Symphony, was wittily done.

Spice Girls feat England United – How Does It Feel (To Be On Top of the World)

By France 98, Britpop's energy was curdling into the stodgy whey culture that bred Travis, Starsailor and more, and this track with Echo and the Bunnymen, Ocean Colour Scene and Space was in danger of doing the same. But this is a breezy, well-balanced anthem, co-written by Johnny Marr: just as Ian McCulloch's downward-turning verses seem to admit defeat, the spirited Spice Girls chorus tells him to stop being such a killjoy. The half-time England mood in song.

England Football Team – All the Way

Just as World in Motion evoked the loosened up rave era, All the Way is the epitome of pre-rave uncool: Stock Aitken Waterman's synths are are rigid as a starched shirt, and the players' nervous reluctance to be in the video really lunges out of the screen, despite Lineker, Beardsley and Mabbutt gamely mugging around a microphone. It got to No 64 in the charts. And yet! The central melody has the kind of happy innocence that defines the childhood excitement around the start of every tournament, soon to be extinguished by lived experience, and is charming for it.

… and the worst

Shout for England, Dizzee Rascal and James Corden – Shout

This is not so much a case of too many cooks as an entire culinary school, its benefactors, architects and landowners being brought to bear on a very wobbly souffle. To sample Blackstreet's No Diggity, Tears for Fears' Shout and the entreaty "come and have a go if you think you're hard enough" is already way too rich, even before you consider that the Corden-sung chorus to Shout is an expression of deep psychological malaise. Along with Dizzee's castigation regarding Wags and champagne, it became a demotivational anthem for the 2010 World Cup.

Ant & Dec – We're on the Ball

There's a queasy lurch of nostalgia on hearing Dec lauding Sven Göran-Eriksson, the "super Swede", and the line about "the cup of eastern promise in the land of the rising sun" would have had Edward Said tearing his hair out. The jaunty ska backing also sounds like it was made in a hurry.

Chris Kamara – Sing 4 England

Helmed by one-man banter vector Chris Kamara, this 2012 effort had promise on paper – but the lyrics sound like they've been generated by an underfunded AI that's been fed all the above songs ("let's cheer the winning goal"), Kammy's voice is game but reedy, and it has about five half-chance choruses rather than one proper shot on goal.

Television

‘It’s a new time’: Krept and Konan make a football anthem for modern England

BBC Three documentary follows the south London rappers as they grapple with writing a song for England’s Euro campaign – and a changing nation

The programme follows south London rappers Krept and Konan in the run-up to the Uefa European Football Championship this summer. Photograph: Andy Hall/The Observer

The programme follows south London rappers Krept and Konan in the run-up to the Uefa European Football Championship this summer. Photograph: Andy Hall/The Observer

Lucy Campbell
Wed 9 Jun 2021 01.00 EDT

Does rap music belong on an England football song? John Barnes would probably say yes given his success on 1990's World in Motion by New Order. Since there's been a distinct lack of football rap, but all that is changing with a new anthem for this summer's Euro championships. Duo Krept and Konan took on the challenge of creating a song for the England team, and their journey has been recorded in a BBC Three documentary.

June's tournament is one of the summer's most eagerly awaited sporting events, with the final scheduled for 11 July at Wembley, and the programme follows the south London rappers in the run-up to the competition.

Following in the footsteps of the likes of comedians David Baddiel and Frank Skinner, who sang 1996's Three Lions alongside The Lightning Seeds, Krept and Konan's challenge is to find a sound that represents a more diverse England, which involves Krept and Konan exploring what Englishness means in 2021 through a black British lens.

Times have changed since the release of Three Lions, and the programme shows the artists' struggle with the pressures of the deeper significance of writing a song for one of the youngest and most racially diverse squads in English football history.

Krept and Konan, with Manchester rapper Aitch. Photograph: Ryan Samuda/BBC/Acme Films

The pair seek advice from England's manager, Gareth Southgate, Premier League footballers Dominic Calvert-Lewin, Declan Rice and Tyrone Mings, and fellow musicians Aitch and Big Zuu to create the track.

Southgate, when asked his advice, reassures Krept and Konan: "You shouldn't worry about what's been important in the past. To be English now is different, I think." Describing how the diversity and youthfulness of the team have connected with the country, and how he sees this reflected in the fans at England's matches, he added: "What will appeal to the audience you're seeking is different to what it was back then, so do what you believe represents the team now."

How we made Three Lions: David Baddiel and Ian Broudie on England's Euro 96 anthem
Read more

Listening to previous anthems, including Dizzee Rascal's collaboration with James Corden for 2010's Shout for England, the pair discuss the pressures they feel as two black rappers writing a song for modern England that will be different from anything that has gone before.

There are jokes from Big Zuu about whether they will also have a white singer on the track "to balance it out", as well as recognition of how much has changed since the release of previous football anthems, from the haircuts to the vibes, including John Barnes' small rap on 1990's World in Motion amid the other white singers, which they speculate was more palatable at the time.

The rappers embark on a journey to bring together different aspects of England. They take in country views in the Peak District, learn Mancunian slang from rapper Aitch and hear from Calvert-Lewin about what it means to be a proud Englishman playing for his country.

Conscious that this track would be out of their comfort zone, Krept and Konan also explore the history of racism in English football culture, with

abuse such as chants being a persistent feature. They hear from Aston Villa's Mings about how his England debut was overshadowed by racism and also the positive response when he took the knee in support of the Black Lives Matter movement last year.

Konan, Gareth Southgate, and Krept at St George's Park. Photograph: Andy Hall/The Observer

Emboldened by the belief that things can only get better for the next generation, Krept and Konan tussle with the difficulties of a society that only likes to claim the "lit" aspects of black British culture, such as black players scoring for England, and also unpack the will of those with non-white heritage to identify with their civic Englishness and their roots.

Former England striker Eniola Aluko tells them: "For a long time, we had to be one or the other, but I'm alright with saying I'm both … I've struggled with that for a long time because people question that you're not fully English … But we're multidimensional." She adds that there is a connection between music and sport, and players probably listen to the duo's music, as evidenced when they play a snippet for a fan – West Ham's Declan Rice.

What does this fusion mean for a modern English anthem? "A reflection of where we are now in terms of the multicultural, diverse feeling within

England … full representation," Aluko says, highlighting that Krept and Konan are the ones making the song. "Once upon a time that would not have happened," she claps.

Throughout the documentary, Konan feels sure that love will outweigh any less positive reactions they may receive: "No matter who you are or where you're from, we're supporting England and the song should unite that as well." Krept adds: "It's a new time and they've just got to accept that it's new times now. And if they don't like it, their kids will."

It started on stageVictoria Wood

‘Explosively funny’: Victoria Wood’s song-filled slog to comedy glory

Theatre of dreams … Victoria Wood in 1979, a year after she and Julie Walters found success with sketch show In at the Death. Photograph: ANL/Rex/Shutterstock

Theatre of dreams … Victoria Wood in 1979, a year after she and Julie Walters found success with sketch show In at the Death. Photograph: ANL/Rex/Shutterstock

Joyce Grenfell inspired her, she wrote her own musical at school and a fringe theatre show with Julie Walters paved the way to TV fame. As Victoria Wood’s Talent returns, we revisit her early stage years

Rachael Healy
Wed 9 Jun 2021 01.00 EDT

Anyone who has watched her in Dinnerladies or receiving a standing ovation at the Royal Albert Hall might doubt it, but Victoria Wood was quite shy. “One of her defences against being shy was to be funny,” says theatre colleague Peter James. “She always felt safe when performing.”

That’s fortunate: her path to stardom was an on-stage slog, facing tough audiences at university auditions, folk clubs and noisy pubs. “She didn’t always get a great response,” says Robert Howie, a friend of Wood’s at Birmingham University. “Yet she had this inner conviction that one day people would get it.”

Five years after her death, Wood remains one of Britain’s most lauded comedians. Her sketches are frequently cited by the likes of Rachel Parris, Katy Brand, Ellie Taylor and Rhod Gilbert. She always dreamed of fame, says Jasper Rees, author of her biography Let’s Do It. Aged eight, Wood saw Joyce Grenfell’s one-woman show in Buxton: “I didn’t know you could be on stage just all by yourself,” she said. “That was what set me off.”

When Wood was 15, her sister persuaded her to attend Rochdale Youth Theatre Workshop and she learned about lighting, costume, speech and

script from industry experts. In 1969, James gave the teenagers a directing course and extended an open invitation to Liverpool's Everyman theatre, which he co-founded. He met Wood when she showed up asking for a tour: "She was shy, but very direct."

The Wood and Walters TV show in 1980. Photograph: ITV/Rex/Shutterstock

Wood began writing. Rees found her earliest script in a school exercise book: "A lot of it is quite crude. It's a 16-year-old's spritely knock-off of a Joe Orton play. But it is really funny."

While this wasn't performed, she did stage a musical, a pantomime and a short play at school. An adept pianist, Wood composed original songs. The musical had a fictional sponsor, Cupid's Kiss Cornplasters, with advertisements sung on stage: "With Cupid's Kiss Cornplaster / You'll have feet of alabaster / Be a missus, not a miss / With a Cupid's Kiss."

The workshop emboldened her to apply for drama courses and she got into Birmingham. Students had "impromptu cabaret evenings" in the department's theatre, says Howie, where Wood played self-penned songs.

Many Wednesday afternoons, he and Wood would watch matinees. One featured the actor and singer John Hanson in "bright orange makeup and a

terrible jet-black toupee. We were in stitches.” Hanson was later referenced in Acorn Antiques.

University wasn’t easy for Wood, though. She was “treated appallingly”, Howie says, something that filtered into her sketches and plays. When the department staged Orton’s Loot in 1973, she’d hoped for the only female role, but was overlooked. Asked to play hymns, she rebelled, playing her own songs – including Going Home Again, about “middle-class students pretending to have proletarian roots”, Rees says. (“Put back your accent where you found it / And climb into the train / You’ve got to pass / As middle class / You’re going home again.”)

Victoria Wood on Morecambe Pier in 1980. Photograph: Radio Times/Getty Images

“The music is very sweet and cute, but the song is pure acid,” Rees says. “It’s in embryo what Victoria would do throughout her career.”

Her show-stealing songs started a chain reaction, leading to radio and TV appearances including on New Faces. She was also singing in local pubs and folk clubs – including supporting Jasper Carrott. Pub chatter often drowned out her funny lyrics. “She hadn’t found a way of coming out of her shell on stage yet,” Rees says.

TV appearances hadn't brought the big break she'd hoped for. "It was a long time of struggling with no money," Howie says.

In 1978, Wood's salvation came in unassuming form: a topical sketch show called In at the Death, staged at the Bush theatre in London. In rehearsals, she had a flashback to Manchester Polytechnic, where a hilarious student had given Wood a tour as she clutched a sick bucket (audition nerves). The student was Julie Walters – now, here she was again! They clicked and formed an alliance against the show's men.

Wood was hired as a songwriter, but when one man failed to submit a sketch, she grabbed the chance and wrote one called Sex. Set in a library, Walters played a naive woman who, post a one-night stand, thinks she might be pregnant. Another character asks Walters: "Where are you in the menstrual cycle?" She replies: "Taurus."

"She wrote this gag that was explosively funny – proved every night when the Bush theatre detonated," says Rees. It gave her comedy confidence and marked the start of a fruitful partnership with Walters.

David Leland, then associate director of the Crucible theatre in Sheffield, heard about Wood from one of the show's writers. The Crucible was making enough money hosting snooker to commission new plays. Leland asked Wood for a script idea, on the condition she act and play piano in it. "Later that evening, I heard the letterbox go," says Leland. "There was a brown envelope, written on the back was the plot of Talent."

1979’s Talent, which is back on stage this month. Photograph: ITV/Rex/Shutterstock

It followed Maureen and Julie, two friends experiencing the seediness of a talent competition. She wrote Julie for Walters. Although Wood was new to this, Leland thought the script was “terrific”. James, by then the Crucible’s artistic director, agreed: “She clearly knew what she was doing comically.”

Audiences loved it too. “When we transferred to the ICA, it was a deadly winter, but people were queueing in sub-zero temperatures for returns,” says Leland. The play returns to the Crucible this month, in a revival directed by Paul Foster.

Wood began working on another play for the Crucible, which became Good Fun (1980), about a community arts centre. It drew on personalities from university. Simultaneously, her standup was blossoming. She and then-husband Geoffrey Durham worked on a persona – the patter she’d struggled with between the effortless songs. Durham told Rees they plotted to make her “the first female standup comic”.

Rees says Wood’s grounding in theatre shaped her varied career: “She grew up steeped in the knowledge of what it was to be in an audience. But what she learned on stage in theatres was how each audience needs to be read,

understood, worked and played. I don’t think any standup understood that better, and she took that knowledge with her into the TV studio.”

- Talent is at the Crucible, Sheffield, 30 June-24 July. Let’s Do It: The Authorised Biography of Victoria Wood by Jasper Rees is published by Orion Books.

Tax havens

How the UK lost its leading role in the global fight against corruption

The UK last hosted the G7 in 2013 but progress on David Cameron’s grand plans has been woeful

David Cameron pictured with Barack Obama and Vladimir Putin at the G8 summit at Lough Erne in 2013. Photograph: Matt Cardy/Getty Images

David Cameron pictured with Barack Obama and Vladimir Putin at the G8 summit at Lough Erne in 2013. Photograph: Matt Cardy/Getty Images

Patrick Wintour Diplomatic Editor
Wed 9 Jun 2021 00.00 EDT

The last time the UK chaired a summit of the G7, or the G8 as it was in 2013, David Cameron was in an ebullient mood as he held a closing press conference in glorious late afternoon sunshine by Lough Erne in Northern Ireland. He sensed he had pulled off a diplomatic triumph by putting a new subject at the forefront of world leaders' agenda: the global fight against corruption.

"These are really strong commitments that have never been written down in this sort of way and then signed," Cameron said. "These are words on a page that the G8 is going to be judged on year after year after year."

Once obscure issues such as the need for public registers of beneficial share ownership, the automatic exchange of tax information and curbs on profit shifting by multinationals were finally in the spotlight. Fighting corruption had become Britain's surprising new international calling card – and Cameron's personal mission, strange as it may now seem given his tenacious lobbying career after leaving politics.

There was some real progress after the G8 meeting, especially on the idea that public registers of beneficial share ownership – making clear who the

real owners of companies are – could leave the money launderers with fewer places to hide. In 2019 it was estimated tax avoidance cost developing countries as much as £180bn a year.

But nearly a decade after the promises in Northern Ireland, the UK has lost its leadership role. The British Virgin Islands, arguably the biggest tax haven in the world, is still setting the UK preconditions before it will set up a publicly accessible registry of share ownership. This is three years after legislation was passed by MPs intended to require all UK overseas territories to set up registries by 2020.

The British Virgin Islands Photograph: Mark Lewis/Alamy

Unexplained Wealth Orders, once billed as the magic bullet to force the autocratic elite to hand over ill-gotten wealth, lie largely unused, and badly mauled in the British courts. The expectation was 20 orders would be issued in the first two years. Only four have been, and in one case the judge ordered the UK to pay the daughter of one of Kazakhstan's political elite millions in compensation for wrongful seizure of her property.

The Serious Fraud Office remains badly underfunded, and the City of London – with its army of accountants, lawyers, property and art dealers, bankers and PR firms – still protects the funds of the world's kleptocracy.

Plans for a public registry of foreign firms owning property in the UK, first unveiled by Cameron in 2015 and consulted upon in 2018, have still not been implemented and did not feature in the latest Queen's speech.

Similarly plans to reform Companies House so that its officials can police, as well as administrate, the registry of companies, remain stuck. Inside Whitehall, no coherent structure exists to fight corruption. There is still an anti-corruption champion – John Penrose MP – but the role has been downgraded from cabinet status.

Ten different government departments have a role in fighting corruption, and even more for money laundering. If everyone has responsibility for driving an agenda, no one has.

In giving evidence to the US Congress' foreign affairs committee last month, Ed Lucas, senior fellow at the Centre for European Policy Analysis, ended his devastating testimony by reflecting on the "dismally ineffective approach of the UK". He counselled Congress: "I hope that US officials and elected representatives will underline forcefully their dissatisfaction with Britain's progress. It should be a source of national shame that London remains the money-laundering capital of the world."

World flags, including the flag of Cornwall (right), decorate the Cornish Arms in St Ives, Cornwall, before the G7 summit. Photograph: Aaron Chown/PA

Corruption is once again a live issue and Britain's failure to maintain its leadership position is becoming obvious. Boris Johnson at his G7 summit in Cornwall this week will make much of the fight to defeat authoritarianism in Russia and China, but in doing so he will have to gloss over the role of the City, overseas territories and the London property market in facilitating the Russian kleptocracy. His hostility towards the recommendations from the long-delayed report by parliament's intelligence and security committee on Russian influence is impossible to overlook. Tom Keatinge, director of the centre for financial studies at the British defence thinktank Royal United Services Institute, warns that "when the tide goes out you find out who is swimming naked. For Boris Johnson and illicit finance that embarrassing moment is about to arrive."

Britain's recent inertia is likely to be seen as more than a minor domestic broken promise. Corruption is rapidly surging back up the global agenda, largely thanks to America. Joe Biden has said the competition between autocracy and democracy is the great generational challenge, and he plans "to rally our allies to combat corruption and kleptocracy". Tackling global corruption is not a distraction from dealing with China, Russia and other strategic competitors, but central to it. On Thursday, Biden announced that fighting corruption is a "core national security interest, and essential to the preservation of our democracy".

Inside the US national security council, Samantha Power, the head of USAID, has been pressing the issue hard, arguing the common thread that animates so many demonstrations from Jakarta to Pretoria is anger with corruption. Meanwhile, the minimum 15% corporate tax rate, agreed by the G7 at the weekend and made possible by Donald Trump's defeat, means that more ways must be found to stop firms hiding their profits in tax havens.

The UN general assembly last week held a three-day conference on fighting corruption, its first such summit. The role of "enablers", by which they meant London lawyers as much as anyone, was one of the main targets of the assembly's 17-page communique.

So quite how Cameron's G8 ambitions dissipated is not just another reminder of how fleeting the fads can be at these summits, or how all summit declarations are "here today, binned tomorrow".

Armed by his G8 success in 2013, Cameron in May 2016 went one stage further, bringing together world leaders for a one-day conference at Lancaster House on fighting corruption, the first of its kind. Most still recall the event for Cameron being overhead at a reception saying he had invited the leaders of some of the "most fantastically corrupt countries". But it brought together 43 world leaders and between them they generated 648 commitments, 17% of which were on the topic of beneficial ownership of shares, widely seen as the golden key to unlock corruption.

"It seemed a global moment when the world seemed to be coming together to take this issue seriously," recalls Liz David-Barrett, director for the study of corruption at Sussex University. Robert Barrington, then chief executive of Transparency International, recalls he never knew a moment when an NGO worked so closely with the top of government in the 30-year anti-corruption movement. "The closer we got into the process, there was not a diminishing hunger for ideas from No 10, but an increase. It showed that you could have a global anti-corruption moment that does not have to be mired in the UN."

But then two months later, the Brexit vote happened, Cameron departed and summit organisers now admit Whitehall collectively dropped the ball on the issue. The senior Cabinet Office civil servant coordinating the anti-corruption summit in Whitehall, Creon Butler, recalls: "It was not as if Theresa May had any problem fighting corruption, but with Brexit, she had other priorities and it was not right at the top of the list in the way it had been with Cameron."

In May's defence, she took the issue to the G20 summit in Brisbane in 2016 where 10 principles on beneficial ownership were adopted. But Butler admits leaders have only so much bandwidth, and cannot take five different issues to a summit. Her priority was modern slavery. "If we had the follow up, we would have got a lot more through. That is where we fell down," Butler recalls.

Barrington argues the UK did not just fall behind solely due to the distraction of Brexit. He points out: "In 2008 in the wake of the financial crash, the UK introduced its golden visa regime. 60% of these visas – unchecked, no real diligence – went to citizens of Russia and China. That was a deliberate policy, not to promote corruption, but to get inward investment at a time when the economy was in trouble. The truth is post-Covid, post-Brexit, the UK economy is going to have a pretty rough ride. The government might not want to close off avenues that bring inward investment to the UK or allow exports to new markets where levels of corruption are pretty high. The government will never explicitly say that, but there is a realpolitik to this."

There are now tentative recent signs that the Foreign Office, never central to Cameron's more Cabinet Office-based initiative, is willing to pick up the fumbled ball, and show leadership. This year's integrated defence and foreign policy review, for instance, addressed some issues around illicit finance and insecurity.

At the UK's instigation, the G7 put out a supportive if general statement for the UN general assembly event last week. The UK foreign secretary, Dominic Raab, spoke at the assembly, largely defending the government's record. He said a G7 meeting would address the issue later this year.

In April, Raab followed the US in introducing Magnitsky-style sanctions – visa bans and asset freezes – for corruption as well as for human rights abuses. It took him much longer than he predicted to get this architecture in place, and in a sense such sanctions only deal with the symptoms of corruption, but they are an advance. So far they have been used against 22 people. The chancellor, Rishi Sunak, is reportedly shortly to propose powers to block listings on the London Stock Exchange on security grounds.

But UK pressure on its overseas territories and crown dependencies to prepare public registers of beneficial ownership is at best sporadic. Also, the EU needs to improve access to its registers.

In the end it is about leadership from the top. In January, Vladimir Ashurkov, a London-based colleague of the Russian opposition figure Alexei Navalny, released a list of eight influential Russians with assets in

the UK who Navalny has said should face sanctions. Navalny called on Downing Street to go after “the people with the money”, arguing that “nothing less will make an impact on the behaviour of the Russian authorities”. Johnson seems unable to make this point.

Ministers may well reply that the UK’s unhappy experience with Wealth Orders shows that it is not possible to expropriate someone’s wealth simply because they are said to be connected with an authoritarian leader.

But Biden has given his government 200 days to report to him how the west will up its game to make global corruption a priority. Johnson has in effect been given his orders, and he could start by revisiting what Cameron, his great Conservative rival, proposed all those years ago.

TV reviewTelevision & radio

Loki review – tedious time-hopping with Tom Hiddleston

The actor reprises his role as the Marvel villain in this zany new Disney+ series. But the first episodes lack polish – and it desperately needs to pick up the pace

Clearly having a whale of a time ... Owen Wilson and Tom Hiddleston in Loki. Photograph: Disney

Clearly having a whale of a time ... Owen Wilson and Tom Hiddleston in Loki. Photograph: Disney

Lucy Mangan
@LucyMangan
Wed 9 Jun 2021 01.00 EDT

The long-awaited series Loki has arrived on Disney+, with Tom Hiddleston reprising his role as the god of mischief and mayhem, the adored MCU villain he has played in six Marvel movies. In Avengers: Infinity War, however – spoiler alert – Loki died, nobly sacrificing himself in the first five minutes and finally becoming a true hero of Asgard and a credit to Jotunheim. But! For an MCU figure, nothing lasts for ever except the franchise, and so Loki has been restored to us.

This has been managed by the simple act of time-branching. In Avengers: Endgame, the heroes who survived the Infinity War go back in time to the immediate aftermath of 2012's Avengers Assemble to grab the two Infinity Stones Loki had in his possession at the time, in order to rewrite the future. Loki (the real one, but now alive because, hello, 2012 again) took advantage of the time heist chaos, as Lokis will, to grab the portal-creating Tesseract and port the hell outta there. This created a Loki variant, and it is this Loki we follow in this series. I trust that's all clear.

So, Loki variant (hereafter known as Loki, because argh) pitches up elsewhere in time and space and is promptly captured by the Time Variance Authority, the organisation in charge of protecting the Sacred Timeline. The what? The Sacred Timeline, the real timeline as created by three Timekeepers, who are working to smooth past, present and future out so that one day we may all live peaceably. Or something.

The mechanics of it can be stress-tested by more vigorous and deeply invested minds than mine. I'm sure it makes perfect sense that Loki is recruited to help them track down a variant – of himself, they reckon – who is murdering and kidnapping TVA members on their time-travel missions (the TVA's job is to go back and reset the timeline whenever someone does something they are not supposed to do and starts off a new, unapproved timeline). The MCU makers know their cosmological business.

Usually, they know every other aspect of their business, too. The Marvel films are precision-engineered blockbusters, blending action and emotion, set pieces and backstories, in pretty much perfect proportions, and the first foray into television with WandaVision was a fantastically sophisticated success. The first two episodes of Loki (which were all that was made available for review – there are six in total), however, felt flat. The opener was a lengthy, exposition-heavy setup that felt very static, and the second spent its first half going over much the same ground.

Loki is put under the supervision of Agent Mobius M Mobius (Owen Wilson), who may just know Loki better than he knows himself. He pushes and prods at Loki's psyche, unsettling and wrongfooting him. Wilson is at the top of his game – the unassailable confidence and light comic touch that are his specialties given a full run-out – and his chemistry with Hiddleston (as fleet and funny as ever, in such contrast to his earnest-actor vibe offscreen) in their extensive scenes is a joy to behold. Together they are even better than they are separately, and evidently having a whale of a time playing off each other. Perhaps it is this that encouraged so much privileging of dialogue between them rather than action elsewhere. Whether their alchemy will be enough to leaven the burden that comes with turning an ensemble character (best-suited to dropping in on the MCU, detonating a chaos bomb then hoofing it) into a main protagonist, we will have to see.

The series obviously intends to ask questions about identity (what is Loki without his powers, which do not work in TVA-land? What happens if he is forced to do endless good under Mobius's ever-watchful eye?), free will (aren't the Timekeepers making everyone their slaves by working out the timeline for all?) and other such profound issues. But for the first two episodes the characters feel as if they are nothing more than vessels for that, rather than the questions arising organically out of their stories.

Still, things do perk up by the very end of the second episode. If Loki leans more enthusiastically into the time-hopping adventure aspect, as it surely must, I'm sure viewers will begin to have almost as good a time as Hiddleston and Wilson clearly are.

Rock’n’roll and the civil rights struggle: African American life in the south – in pictures

‘Those were the superstars’ ... a prom at Manassas high school, 1961. Photograph: The Ernest C Withers Family Trust; courtesy of Fahey/Klein Gallery, Los Angeles

Refugees

The short life and long journey of Artin, found dead on Norway beach

Friend of 15-month-old's family reveals details of Channel smuggling trade that led to their deaths

Artin, aged 18 months. Photograph: Bruno Libbrecht/Allemaal Mensen/via Reuters

Artin, aged 18 months. Photograph: Bruno Libbrecht/Allemaal Mensen/via Reuters

Diane Taylor
Tue 8 Jun 2021 15.14 EDT

The authorities in Norway did not have much to go on when they found the body on the shore on New Year's Day. But the baby boy was wearing a jacket – navy blue with white stitching.

And that helped them solve the mystery of what had happened to 15-month-old Artin Iran Nezhad, who had last been seen weeks before and hundreds of miles away.

The toddler had been photographed wearing the same coat in a refugee camp in Calais, not long before he and his family boarded an overcrowded boat to cross the Channel that then capsized.

Body found in Norway of 15-month-old boy who died crossing Channel Read more

All five members of Artin's Kurdish Iranian family were lost in the incident on 27 October 2020 – his mother, Shiva Mohammad Panahi, his father, Rasul Iran Nezhad, his sister, Anita, nine, and brother, Armin, six.

But while the bodies of the others were recovered quite soon, Artin was not found. He was listed as missing, until a formal identification followed on Monday this week.

The announcement by Norwegian police was the final chapter in a short life that had been marked by many long and difficult journeys – trips he had taken oblivious to government restrictions at borders and hostile environments for refugees across Europe.

Artin seen here with the family friend who spoke to the Guardian, an asylum seeker now in the UK who has been pixelated to maintain his anonymity. Photograph: Supplied

After crossing the Iranian border on 7 August 2020, from their home in Sardasht, the family moved through Turkey then went by boat to Italy before reaching the refugee camp in Calais.

Tens of thousands of other refugees make similar high-risk journeys every year underlining the enormous risks people take to save their lives.

An asylum seeker who crossed the Channel from Calais just a few weeks ago and is now accommodated in a hotel in London by the Home Office told the Guardian he knew the family well. He said he had lived alongside them in Calais in the days before they attempted the fateful crossing. He told how the family had come under extraordinary pressure from smugglers to cross the Channel.

Had the family had money to pay a more expensive smuggler, he believes they might all still be alive today. “If you don’t have money you cannot save your life. You must die,” he said.

Iranian family's journey

The asylum seeker said that he had bonded with Artin and spent a lot of time with him in the camp. “I played with him every day. He was so sweet and lovely and playful. He particularly loved playing with a drinking water fountain in the camp and always wanted to go there so he could play with the water.”

He said the family lived in poverty in Iran, where Kurds are a persecuted minority. Rasul Iran Nezhad sometimes worked carrying goods such as household appliances on his back across the mountainous border area where many Iranian Kurds live. The work was difficult and high risk. Those who are caught can face severe penalties.

The family decided to leave in the hope of finding safety for themselves and their children. “They had a lot of hope about making a new life in the UK.

Shiva had many beautiful dreams for the children," he said. "She wanted them to get a good education at schools in the UK and then go on to university. Anita wanted to become an actress and had already passed some acting screen tests. Of course Artin did not understand about crossing the Channel and reaching the UK, but the two older children did."

The friend added: "They understood that since they had left their home city of Sardasht travelling through Turkey, Italy and France they had become homeless. They believed that if they could reach the UK they would no longer be in that situation."

He explained that the smugglers in northern France used different systems. He said that in Calais the majority of the smugglers were Kurdish Iranian, in nearby Dunkirk many were Kurdish Iraqi.

Asylum seekers with greater financial resources can deposit their money in an informal, clandestine, money "exchange", sometimes in a supermarket or small shop. It works as a kind of underground international money transfer system.

If people arrive successfully to the UK they call the exchange and ask for money to be transferred to the smuggler organising the crossing. If the crossing fails the money is not transferred.

Those with no money at all are forced to work for the smugglers, helping them with between three and 10 crossings before they have "earned" free passage in a flimsy boat.

Those with some money but not enough for the "exchange" pay low-ranking smugglers slightly less money than the going rate to travel in a relatively good boat with a new engine motor that is not dangerously overcrowded.

Four Iranians who died crossing Channel were part of same family
Read more

According to the asylum seeker, Artin's family had originally approached a smuggler offering a relatively safe passage but that person had rejected them because they could not afford to pay him what he wanted.

“They had very little money,” said the asylum seeker. “They begged family and friends to sell their gold so they could pay the smuggler and managed to raise €5,000 to pay for the whole family to cross. But the smuggler said this was not enough.”

He said he had kept a voice message from Shiva saying the smuggler had rejected them for lack of funds. “The smugglers are very dishonest. They did not take us … They took some of our friends who had paid more money,” Shiva said in a flat, despairing tone in the voicemail message.

“Shiva was hopeless and disappointed and they gave the money to another smuggler who was charging less,” said the asylum seeker. “But he forced them to cross when the weather was bad, in an overcrowded boat. He said the family needed to cross to help him because he was in debt to another smuggler he needed to repay.”

He said some of the asylum seekers had a rule that they would not attempt to cross the Channel if the waves were higher than 10 to 20cm. “That night the waves were 70cm. Many smugglers were not doing crossings then because the weather was too bad.”

He said the family was faced with an impossible choice. “The smuggler said to them, ‘if you don’t cross tonight just go away, you will not get your money back’.”

The BBC reported that Shiva had sent a text shortly before their fateful final journey saying: “If we want to go with a lorry we might need more money that we don’t have.”

The asylum seeker said a demand by the home secretary, Priti Patel, telling social media companies to remove online posts from smugglers about crossings, was pointless. With or without smugglers posting on social media desperate asylum seekers would contact them to cross the Channel.

“If we as asylum seekers have no legal way to reach safety we have no choice but to use the illegal way. That is what the family who drowned were forced to do. I wish they can rest in peace in the next world.”

Though Artin's body was discovered on 1 January near Karmøy, in south-west Norway, it took the Norweigan authorities more than five months from that date to confirm his identity. The identification was made through retrieving and matching DNA, with the help of specialists from Oslo University hospital.

"We didn't have a missing baby reported in Norway, and no family had contacted the police," said Camilla Tjelle Waage, the head of police investigations. "The blue overall wasn't a Norwegian brand either [and] that indicated the baby was not from Norway."

Artin's remaining family have reportedly been notified and his remains are to be flown back to Iran to be buried.

2021.06.09 - Opinion

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OpinionAid

The big question about British foreign aid is always missed: what is it supporting?

Aisha Dodwell

When it’s done right, aid can save countless lives. But too often it merely props up existing global inequalities

Boris Johnson and Dominic Raab arriving at the G7 summit in London, 5 May. Photograph: Reuters

Boris Johnson and Dominic Raab arriving at the G7 summit in London, 5 May. Photograph: Reuters

Wed 9 Jun 2021 01.00 EDT

Attempts by Tory rebels to push through a vote on the aid budget were thwarted by the Speaker, Lindsay Hoyle, after he ruled their proposed

amendment to the research and invention bill was out of the scope of the legislation.

This means the debate over what percentage of national income should be spent on overseas aid will rumble on. But for too long, disproportionate attention has been placed on the narrow question of *how much* is spent, at the expense of discussing what aid is being spent on and, crucially, why we spend it at all. While it is important to defend the commitment to spend 0.7% of national income on aid, we must not lose sight of the broader issues at stake in relation to the aid budget.

When spent well, aid can transform lives and, in humanitarian crises, quite literally save lives. Spending aid to bolster public health and education provision, or funding grassroots women's rights groups to advocate for gender equality, are examples of how aid can be spent meaningfully.

But the full potential of aid spending has not always been realised: despite being legally obliged to spend aid on tackling poverty overseas, successive governments have often pursued projects based on an ideological belief in free-market and trickle-down economics. Aid-funded projects such as the controversial prosperity fund, which aims to open markets in middle-income countries, have struggled to show how they reduce poverty. The One campaign found that the government wastes millions each year on similarly ineffective programmes with questionable impacts on poverty reduction. Meanwhile, aid-backed projects such as the opaque conflict, stability and security Fund have been used to bolster Britain's security interests by supporting security services overseas, including some with worrying human rights records.

Speaker rejects Tory rebels' foreign aid amendment
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What's missing from recent debates surrounding aid are open and honest conversations about the deep-rooted causes which are embedded in the unjust structures of the global economic order that trap billions in poverty. We still have a global economy that continues to be rigged in favour of wealthy nations and corporations.

As the UK increasingly reckons with its own past thanks to the Black Lives Matter movement, now is the time to reassess Britain's long and complex relationship with the countries receiving aid. Most of the world's poorest countries are former colonies whose people and resources were exploited by imperial powers such as Britain, the legacy of which remains deeply imprinted on the (unequal) way the world works today.

This is a point clearly articulated by Pope Francis, who has called for an overhaul of the perverse global economic system, which is based on an unfounded belief in the "magic theories" of the free market and a "crude and naive trust in the goodness of those wielding power." This system, he argues, is what "keeps the poor on the margins."

We see this in the way current global trade rules, overseen by the World Trade Organization, often work against poorer nations. Consider the refusal by Britain to waive Covid vaccine patents – despite giving aid to help distribute vaccines across the global south, the government is upholding trading rules preventing countries from developing their own vaccines affordably. The benefit of British aid for vaccines is undermined by broader government policy, all in order to protect the profits of pharmaceutical companies.

Then there's the issue of corporate tax avoidance, which drains low-income countries of vital resources. Despite last week's G7 announcement of a new minimum corporate tax rate, the Tax Justice Network shows that this move primarily benefits the G7 nations themselves. Although the move recognises the need to improve corporate taxation, it is far from the desperately needed overhaul of the global tax system, and fails to limit the damaging use of tax havens – which are estimated to cost low-income countries $200bn each year. To put that in perspective, the combined amount of aid given by all wealthy nations in 2019 was $153bn.

Meanwhile, the growing debt crisis in many global south countries is crippling their economies as they struggle to repay high-interest loans, a situation that has been compounded by the pandemic. Even before Covid hit, countries such as Zambia were spending more on debt repayments than on healthcare. The amount low-income countries owe in debt payments often dwarfs the amount received in foreign aid. Sudan, for example, owes Britain

nearly £900m, 80% of which was accrued through interest, meanwhile the country will receive £44m in British aid this year – raising the question of who is actually aiding whom here.

Poverty is political – a result of manmade decisions, and aid can only ever play a small, albeit important, part in tackling it. When seen in this light, the recent arguments made in defence of the aid budget are conspicuous in their limitations. The current rebellion against the government's cuts has been dominated by two stories. On the one hand, aid is championed as an act of charitable benevolence that saves lives, and maintaining the 0.7% spending target is seen as a sign of Britain's upstanding moral character. On the other, aid is presented as a tool of soft power that will improve Britain's national and security interests, strengthen our international standing in the world and counter the influence of so-called "hostile states". As the Conservative MP Tobias Elwood recently said: "Britain needs to use its power and influence wisely. We can make great gains with our soft power – a key part of which is … aid."

But if aid is to meaningfully tackle poverty, then we need to reframe its very purpose. It can't just be about charity, and shouldn't be about self-interest. Instead, it should be about tackling the root causes of poverty, redistributing the world's resources and strengthening those organisations and individuals across the global south who are on the front lines of the fight against poverty and injustice. Aid, crucially, needs to be part of a broader commitment to dismantling the power structures that maintain global poverty and inequality.

Underlying our approach to aid must be an awareness of the colonial roots of today's world order – a point often made by citizens of the global south but too rarely heard here. In a letter to Boris Johnson last year, Zambian bishop the Rev George Cosmas Zumaire Lungu reminded Boris Johnson that Britain became wealthy thanks to the extraction of resources from countries such as his own. In pointing out the historical and unequal relationship between the two nations, he urged Johnson not to slash the aid budget.

Mr Lungu was right. Aid is not a favour or a charitable gift, but one part of the duty that Britain owes to the world.

Aisha Dodwell is head of campaigns at the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development, and a former political adviser to the shadow secretary of state for international development

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OpinionHonours system

Why I turned down an MBE for services to homeless people

Gill Taylor

My work has had an impact in spite of the state, not because of it – and it's certainly had nothing to do with the British empire

'If you're vulnerable and marginalised in this country, the chances you will become homeless are higher.' A homeless person outside Westminster underground station, London. Photograph: Peter Summers/Getty Images

'If you're vulnerable and marginalised in this country, the chances you will become homeless are higher.' A homeless person outside Westminster underground station, London. Photograph: Peter Summers/Getty Images

Wed 9 Jun 2021 03.00 EDT

The day I found out I was to be awarded an MBE started like most other Mondays. I began work at 7.30am, facing an inbox with 48 new emails in it.

These included everything from the bureaucratic – a funding application– to the worrying, several about a young man sleeping rough in a local park, for whom all attempts to offer support have thus far failed. Among them was an email from the Cabinet Office, requesting my acceptance or rejection of an MBE. I laughed at first. “It must be a hoax”, I thought. But when I read it again, I realised it was too official for that.

I forgot about the email for a while. The young man my colleagues were worried about and the funding application took precedence; and, as happens most days, it was 5pm before I looked up from my laptop. When I finally reread it, I felt a surge of embarrassment at first that quickly turned to frustration and finally settled into an all-too-familiar sadness. Yet again, the powers-that-be had missed the point.

I’ve worked in homelessness services for almost 18 years – in hostels, youth services, women’s projects and for local government and charities. I’ve celebrated jubilantly each time someone has secured stable housing, and I weep every time someone loses their life on the streets. I have never once stopped caring intensely about what I do, never stopped wanting to learn and do a better job, and never once stopped believing that people affected by homelessness deserve infinitely better than what I have been able to offer them.

Official statistics paint a picture of inequality and exclusion: rough sleeping has increased by at least 52% since 2010, and premature deaths affecting those same people have increased by 61% since 2013. That these trends coincide with the onset of austerity and its impact on working-class and disabled people is no coincidence.

We also know that around 50% of people who find themselves newly on the streets in London are non-UK nationals, and that up to 24% of homeless young people are LGBTQ+. If you’re vulnerable and marginalised in this country, the chances you will become homeless are higher. The fact that this inequality stems from the continuing legacy of the British empire and its brutal impacts on black, brown and LGBTQ+ people made accepting an MBE impossible. A potent example of this legacy is the Windrush scandal, which pushed people who have lived, worked and raised families in my borough for decades into homelessness and poverty in an instant.

Another example is the effect of our border regime on LGBTQ+ people seeking asylum on the grounds of violent repression and abuse in the country they were born. In the last year alone, we've supported numerous queer people who are rough sleeping to avoid deportation and the certainty of violence in immigration detention centres. The homophobic and transphobic laws in their countries of origin were originally implemented under British rule, showing how the legacy of empire asserts itself today. That trans people face some of the worst violence and abuse on our streets only adds insult to historical injury. As a queer person, how could I accept an award from the same institutions that fail to protect the LGBTQ+ community from the violent and repressive laws Britain has left littered across the globe?

The truth is, my job shouldn't exist. Despite working 50-plus hours a week every week for nearly two decades, my efforts – and those of thousands of other dedicated practitioners and volunteers – have had almost no tangible positive effect on homelessness in this country. In the world I want to live in, housing is a right not a privilege. I imagine some people reading this will say that I'm an idealist, or that doing this would come at a cost the British economy simply can't afford.

But anyone who has worked in homelessness during the Covid-19 pandemic will know this just isn't the case. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has invested more than £105m into providing accommodation and support for people affected by homelessness in the last 15 months. In my borough alone, this vital funding, and the contribution from our own limited resources, have enabled us to provide accommodation, food and specialist support to more than 1,100 additional people since the start of the pandemic. The money is available to end homelessness if there is the political will to do so.

The good work that I am being celebrated for has largely been in spite of the state, rather than in service to it. It was humbling for me to learn that my peers and colleagues wanted my work to be recognised at a national level, but for me the honour is in my community. I feel incredibly fortunate to live and work in a borough that has been one of the boldest and most vocal in our commitment to protect people affected by homelessness, and to tackle the harm done by currrent policy. Any successes have been achieved because of

the strong relationships between grassroots organisations, charities and people with experience of homelessness.

The last 15 months have been some of the toughest many of us have lived through, hammering home the effects of social injustice in this country, not least for those with nowhere to live. But through it all, we have also had an opportunity to see another way: homelessness can be ended for everyone; we can do away with arbitrary eligibility criteria that keep people on the streets for years; we can abolish no recourse to public funds conditions, and we can ensure rapid, free and equitable access to healthcare for everyone. That would be the only honour I will ever need.

Gill Taylor is strategic lead for homelessness and rough sleeping for a north London borough

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Opinion

What are friends for? Not self-advancement, that's for sure

Arwa Mahdawi

There are certain qualities that should make you drop a friend – but obesity and depression don't come into it

‘If you have any friend who talks about a “curatorial approach” to friendship, ghost them immediately.’ Photograph: Posed by models/Superb Images/Getty

‘If you have any friend who talks about a “curatorial approach” to friendship, ghost them immediately.’ Photograph: Posed by models/Superb Images/Getty

Wed 9 Jun 2021 02.00 EDT

Have you done an audit of your friendship group lately? Have you measured the return on investment of each of your acquaintances? Have you used a pandemic that has killed millions of people as an opportunity to “prune” your social network and drop any pals who might have an unacceptably high BMI or experience depression? No? Well, in that case, you may be doing friendship all wrong.

That’s according to a viral piece in the New York Times, anyway. Titled How to Rearrange Your Post-Pandemic ‘Friendscape’, the article argues that we ought to think about friendship in terms of self-advancement. “Evolutionary anthropologists say it behooves us to take a more curatorial approach when it comes to our friends because who you hang out with determines who you are,” the article noted. It went on to explain that: “Depressed friends make it more likely you’ll be depressed, obese friends

make it more likely you'll become obese, and friends who smoke or drink a lot make it more likely you'll do the same." Yikes. Yikes. Yikes. Unsurprisingly, there was an outcry about this paragraph and the Times removed it.

You know what else the NYT ought to have removed? The reference to "post-pandemic" life. Things may be returning to normal in western countries, but much of the world is still a long way away from getting a vaccine: according to one study, it will take most developing countries until 2024 to achieve mass Covid-19 immunisation. We have the resources to vaccinate the globe, but a "post-pandemic" world is still some way in the distance. And you know why that is? Because of greed and capitalism. Because we live in a world where some people's lives matter more than others. We live in a world where everything is a transaction: even friendship, it would seem.

But I don't want to hate on that article too much, because it has a point. There are certain qualities that should make you drop a friend, and quickly. For example, if you have any friend who talks about a "curatorial approach" to friendship, ghost them immediately. If you don't, you may slowly find yourself talking like a LinkedIn Influencer, too. One day you'll wake up and find yourself saying the word "gamechanging" in an un-ironic way and, by then, it'll probably be too late for you. I say that kindly, as a friend.

- Arwa Mahdawi is a Guardian columnist

First Dog on the MoonInequality

Sadly there is too much hate in the world. Why not save yours for the ultrawealthy!

First Dog on the Moon

Thanks for nothing billionaires!

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Wed 9 Jun 2021 02.33 EDT

First Dog on ... billionaires!

The politics sketchPolitics

Steve Barclay banks three hours of scolding over aid cuts

John Crace

The chief secretary to the Treasury seemingly got the short straw and had to defend the indefensible

Visibly sulking, Steve Barclay didn't even try to put up much of a coherent defence. Photograph: UK Parliament/Jessica Taylor/PA

Visibly sulking, Steve Barclay didn't even try to put up much of a coherent defence. Photograph: UK Parliament/Jessica Taylor/PA

Tue 8 Jun 2021 14.12 EDT

Beggars can't be choosers. This wasn't the reckoning that some Tory MPs – 45 or so ordinary men and women with the crazy idea that the government should be accountable to parliament for breaking a manifesto commitment – had had in mind. But once the Speaker had, the previous day, snuffed out an attempt to force a meaningful vote on plans to reduce the UK's overseas aid by 28%, from 0.7% to 0.5% of gross national income, they had been left with little other choice. An emergency debate with a token vote at the end – if anyone could be bothered – would have to do.

If Andrew Mitchell, the former secretary of state for international development and nominal leader of the rebel alliance, was disappointed at the downgrade to yesterday's story, he didn't let it show. There again, it's not every day a politician gets to grab the moral high ground. He began by praising the speaker for one of the "strongest statements from the chair" that he had ever heard the previous day.

How quickly John Bercow gets forgotten. The former Speaker would have had a field day with the government ducking out of its commitments. In fact it's odds on he would have allowed a meaningful vote the previous day regardless of whether he felt the proposed amendment was in the scope of the original bill. Just for the hell of it. He never could resist the chance to put himself centre stage and cause a bit of trouble.

Mitchell then declared that he wouldn't be putting the debate to a vote. Why bother to put everyone through the hassle when it didn't count for anything? Instead he just set out to embarrass the government by observing that on this matter it was the rebel. Everyone in the house had been elected on a manifesto of maintaining an overseas aid budget of 0.7% and it had been Boris Johnson and the chancellor that had effectively reneged on the promise. They were the ones who would have to explain to the electorate why they were happy for ten of thousands of people in the poorest countries to die.

Tory Bernard Jenkin briefly interrupted to say he was unconvinced by Mitchell's argument and that there were lots of other things we were doing round the world to help make up the difference. It was just that he couldn't think of any concrete examples off the top of his head. Mitchell merely invited Jenkin to stay for the rest of the three-hour debate to better inform himself. Within 15 minutes Bernie had left the chamber. He clearly has an aversion to self-improvement.

Mitchell ended by linking the cut to Johnson seeking popularity among "red wall" voters who didn't like the idea of spending money overseas. This was deeply patronising, he said. Because repeated surveys had shown that red wall voters were consistently among the first to respond to global humanitarian disasters. Not for the first time the prime minister was in danger of misjudging the mood of the nation. Nor was it a great display of global leadership to be the only G7 country to cut aid during the pandemic. Especially when we were hosting the summit in Cornwall at the weekend.

It was left to Steve Barclay, chief secretary to the Treasury, to reply on the government's behalf. Fair to say, he looked thoroughly miserable and pissed off throughout. Clearly several ministers had drawn lots to see who would get the gig and Barclay had picked out the short straw.

Visibly sulking, Barclay didn't even try to put up much of a coherent defence. The best he could come up with was that the government had found more than £250bn to bail out the UK during the pandemic and something had to give. And that something was the £4bn difference between 0.5 and 0.7%. That was the tipping point between the country making a full recovery and everyone in the UK being completely broke. Faced with the choice of letting some people in the UK get a bit peckish and a bunch of foreigners dying of malnutrition and disease, it was the foreigners every time.

It rapidly got worse for Barclay. First he couldn't remember how much an extra 1p on income tax would raise and he then began to contradict himself. Thanks to the government's superb handling of the crisis, the UK was on course to bounce back within a year and to not bounce back enough to restore the commitment to 0.7% anytime soon. He also just ignored Mitchell's olive branch of writing the whole thing off as a moment's aberration if overseas aid was restored to its legal limit the following year, which rather suggested that everything he had said about the pandemic was nonsense and that the cut was long-term government policy.

That wasn't the end of Barclay's pain though. Just as humiliating as making a fool of himself was having to listen to MP after MP from both sides of the house express their disgust at the UK being the only major developed country to cut spending during the global crisis. Unlike Bernie, he couldn't run away. He was obliged to suck up the shame for the full three hours of the debate. The things he did for the little people …

OpinionJoe Biden

Joe Biden’s mission at the G7 summit: to recruit allies for the next cold war

Rafael Behr

The US risks being superseded by China as the prime global power within decades. For Washington, the idea is appalling

Joe Biden’s manners should not be mistaken for mildness of purpose; the modest style is deployed in service of a tough message.’ Biden with first lady, Jill Biden, at Dover air force base, Delaware. Photograph: Andrew Harnik/AP

Joe Biden’s manners should not be mistaken for mildness of purpose; the modest style is deployed in service of a tough message.’ Biden with first lady, Jill Biden, at Dover air force base, Delaware. Photograph: Andrew Harnik/AP

Tue 8 Jun 2021 12.14 EDT

Joe Biden crosses the Atlantic this week on a tide of goodwill. After four years of Donald Trump, European leaders are grateful for the mere fact of a US president who believes in democracy and understands diplomacy.

Trump had no concept of historical alliance, strategic partnership or mutual interest. He saw multilateral institutions as conspiracies against US power, which he could not distinguish from his own ego. He heard European talk of a rules-based international order as the contemptible bleating of weakling nations.

Biden’s stated purpose is bolstering that order. In an article published in the Washington Post on the eve of his trip, the president talks about “renewed”

and “unwavering” commitment to a transatlantic relationship based on “shared democratic values”.

The itinerary starts in Cornwall with a gathering of G7 leaders. Then comes Brussels for a Nato summit, plus meetings with presidents of the European Council and Commission. Biden intends to orchestrate a surge of western solidarity as mood music ahead of a final stop in Geneva, where he sits down with Vladimir Putin. On that front, a stable chilling of relations will count as progress after the downright weirdness of Trump’s willing bamboozlement by the Kremlin strongman.

A re-enactment of cold war choreography would suit Putin by flattering his pretence that Russia is still a superpower. In reality, Washington sees Moscow as a declining force that compensates for its shrunken influence by lashing out where it can, causing mischief and sowing discord. Putin is seen as an irritant, not a rival.

That is in marked contrast to the view of China – an actual superpower and the eastern pole that Biden has in mind when he talks about reviving an alliance of western democracies. In that respect, the repudiation of Trumpian wrecking-ball rhetoric can be misleading. It sounds to European ears as if the new White House administration is hoping to set the clock back to a calmer, less combative epoch. In reality, Biden is coming to tell Europe to get its act together in the coming race for global supremacy with Beijing.

By Europe, in this context, the president also means Britain. Boris Johnson might imagine himself a world leader of continental stature, but a US president is not required to indulge that fantasy.

Biden takes a dim view of Brexit, seeing it as a pointless sabotage of European unity. The White House preferred Britain as a pro-US voice wielding influence inside the EU. Since that function is lost, Brexit’s only utility is in making it easier for the UK to embrace economic and strategic vassalage to the US. That means toeing a hawkish line on China.

European nations should not really have to pause for long if the choice is alignment with Washington or Beijing. It is easy to muster resentment of US global swagger and point out hypocrisies in its claim to be a beacon of

political freedom. But the alternative is an expansionist totalitarian state that militates against democracy and is currently engaged in a genocide against the Uyghurs.

If China were a poorer country, Biden's mission would be easier. But the economic gap between the established superpower and the challenger is closing. Per capita, Americans are still much better off, but China could overtake the US in gross domestic product by the end of this decade. With that heft comes world-leading technological capability with crossover military application that keeps the Pentagon up at night.

During the cold war, the Kremlin maintained a credible military rivalry with the west but was not an economic competitor for long. The collapse of the Soviet model seemed to prove that political freedom and prosperity came as a package. There could be no enterprise without markets, no markets without fair rules, and no enforceable rules without democracy. The Chinese Communist party's hybrid model of authoritarian capitalism appears to have disproved that theory.

When the G7 was conceived in the 1970s, its combined membership – the US, Canada, Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Japan – comfortably represented a commanding share of global wealth. There was a natural association of liberal democratic institutions and economic success. Today, those seven nations' combined GDP is down to 40% of the world total. The west is still rich, but it is no longer the world's envied super league.

Chinese money gives Europe commercial incentives that compete with its high-minded rhetoric on democratic values. China is Germany's biggest export market. Smaller EU members have welcomed Chinese investment in infrastructure and businesses, although qualms are steadily growing about built-in political strings and security trapdoors. A huge Brussels-Beijing trade deal, signed last year (much to Washington's dismay), is currently frozen as part of a tit-for-tat dispute over European criticism of Chinese human rights abuses.

But EU governments simply don't feel US levels of urgency to contain China. Geography is a factor – the US has a Pacific coast and strategic commitments to Taiwan, where Britain and France, for all their naval

bravado, are little more than spectators. There is a conceptual difference too. As one diplomat puts it, Europe doesn't like what China *does*, but the US doesn't like what China *is*. The idea of the US being superseded as the paramount global power within the current century is existentially appalling for Washington.

The Trump phenomenon compounds that anxiety for the current White House administration. It was a near-death experience for America's constitutional order; an intimation of mortality for a political and economic model that looked insuperable at the dawn of the 21st century. The US president urges fellow western leaders to show strength in solidarity because the prospect of division, decline and the discrediting of democracy is more real than at any time in his five-decade Washington career.

During that time, Biden has succeeded by patience, diplomacy and soft-spoken understatement. That style earns him a grateful audience in Europe, but the president's manners should not be mistaken for mildness of purpose; the modest style is deployed in service of a tough message. He is not flying across the Atlantic to wallow in nostalgia for the alliances that won the first cold war. He is drumming up recruits for the second one.

- Rafael Behr is a Guardian columnist

2021.06.09 - Around the world

- Super-rich 25 Americans reportedly paid ‘true tax rate’ of 3.4% as wealth rocketed
- Reproductive rights End all legal barriers to abortion, say leading European politicians
- Jupiter Nasa spacecraft captures first closeups of largest moon in decades
- Spain Barcelona street sellers take on Nike with own-brand trainers
- Uganda ID scheme excludes nearly a third from healthcare, says report
- 'Win the 21st century' US Senate approves $50bn boost for computer chip and AI technology to counter China
- Ratko Mladić ‘Butcher of Bosnia’ loses appeal against genocide conviction
- Germany Berlin urged to speed up resettlement of Afghans who worked for military
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- France Emmanuel Macron slapped in the face during walkabout

Business

Richest 25 Americans reportedly paid ‘true tax rate’ of 3.4% as wealth rocketed

ProPublica investigation shows how little US super-rich, including Jeff Bezos and Elon Musk, reportedly paid between 2014 and 2018

Elon Musk, who Forbes estimates is worth $151bn. ProPublica reported that Musk paid 3.27% over the four-year period. Photograph: Alexander Becher/EPA

Elon Musk, who Forbes estimates is worth $151bn. ProPublica reported that Musk paid 3.27% over the four-year period. Photograph: Alexander Becher/EPA

Adam Gabbatt in New York
@adamgabbatt
Tue 8 Jun 2021 14.52 EDT

The 25 richest Americans, including Jeff Bezos, Warren Buffett and Elon Musk, paid a "true tax rate" of just 3.4% between 2014 and 2018, according to an investigation by ProPublica, despite their collective net worth rising by more than $400bn in the same period.

Global economy set for fastest recovery for more than 80 years
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The report by the non-profit news organization exposes the US tax system as income and wealth inequality continues to widen.

ProPublica used Internal Revenue Service data to dive into the tax returns of some of America's wealthiest and most prominent people. It found that in 2007 Bezos, the founder of Amazon and already a billionaire, paid no federal taxes. In 2011, when he had a net worth of $18bn, he was again able to pay no federal taxes – and even received a $4,000 tax credit for his children.

Last year, Bezos's net worth topped $200bn.

ProPublica created what it called a "true tax rate" for the wealthiest 25 Americans by comparing federal income tax paid between 2014 and 2018 to how their net worth increased on Forbes' well-regarded rich list over the same period.

"The results are stark," ProPublica wrote. "According to Forbes, those 25 people saw their worth rise a collective $401bn from 2014 to 2018.

"They paid a total of $13.6bn in federal income taxes in those five years, the IRS data shows. That's a staggering sum, but it amounts to a true tax rate of only 3.4%."

By contrast, the median American household paid 14% in federal taxes, ProPublica reported. The top income tax rate is 37% on incomes over $523,600 for single filers, having been reduced from 39.6% under Donald Trump.

ProPublica found that Buffett, founder of the investment firm Berkshire Hathaway, paid $23.7m in taxes from 2014 to 2018, on a total reported income of $125m. But Buffett's wealth grew by $24.3bn, meaning he had a "true tax rate" of 0.1%.

Bezos's wealth grew by $99bn over the four-year period, but he paid a true tax rate of 0.98%, according to ProPublica. Musk and Michael Bloomberg paid 3.27% and 1.3% respectively.

The billionaires are not accused of illegal activity. But the rates expose the failures of America's tax laws to levy increases in wealth derived from assets in the way wages – the prime source of income for most Americans – are taxed.

"America's billionaires avail themselves of tax-avoidance strategies beyond the reach of ordinary people," ProPublica reported. "Their wealth derives from the skyrocketing value of their assets, like stock and property. Those gains are not defined by US laws as taxable income unless and until the billionaires sell."

ProPublica did not not disclose how it had obtained the IRS information. It said reporters had spent months analyzing the data and would release more reports.

Bezos, the richest person in the world, "declined to receive questions", ProPublica said.

Musk, who Forbes estimates is worth $151bn, had first replied to a query "with a lone punctuation mark: '?'", ProPublica said, adding that he had not replied to further queries.

Bloomberg, who according to Forbes has a net worth of $59bn, told ProPublica he had paid the taxes he owed. A spokesman cited the billionaire's philanthropic giving. "Taken together, what Mike gives to charity and pays in taxes amounts to approximately 75% of his annual income," the spokesman said.

ProPublica said Buffett had defended his practices in an email.

“I continue to believe that the tax code should be changed substantially,” Buffett told ProPublica. He said that “huge dynastic wealth is not desirable for our society”.

Buffett, worth $96bn, has said 99% of his wealth will go to philanthropy “during my lifetime or at death”. In 2020, he donated about $2.9bn in Berkshire Hathaway stock to five charities, CNBC reported.

“I believe the money will be of more use to society if disbursed philanthropically than if it is used to slightly reduce an ever-increasing US debt,” Buffett said.

Joe Biden has proposed raising the top rate of income tax and increasing capital gains tax, though that would probably have little effect on the true tax rate paid by billionaires. Senators Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders have pushed a “wealth tax” that would introduce a 3% tax on the net worth of the ultra rich. There seems little hope it will pass into law.

At least some of America’s richest people want to better tax wealth. Patriotic Millionaires, a group campaigning to increase taxes on the rich, said the ProPublica report demonstrated “how the richest 400 Americans end up owning more wealth than the bottom 150 million Americans combined”.

“The ultra-wealthy get to pick and choose when and how they’re taxed,” Patriotic Millionaires said. “This is exactly why we need a strong, unavoidable wealth tax now.”

Reproductive rights

End all legal barriers to abortion, say leading European politicians

Belgium's prime minister among signatories to open letter backing global right to safe abortions and reopening of clinics closed in pandemic

The message from pro-choice demonstrators who protested against the Munich March for Life organised by radical Christian groups earlier this year. Photograph: Sachelle Babbar/Zuma/Rex/Shutterstock

The message from pro-choice demonstrators who protested against the Munich March for Life organised by radical Christian groups earlier this year. Photograph: Sachelle Babbar/Zuma/Rex/Shutterstock

About this content

Liz Ford
@lizfordguardian

Wed 9 Jun 2021 01.30 EDT

Government ministers from five European countries, including Belgium's prime minister, Alexander de Croo, are among 29 politicians, healthcare and women's rights activists who have signed an open letter calling for the removal of all legal barriers to abortion.

The letter, signed by gender and equality ministers from France, Canada and Norway, and international development ministers from Sweden and the Netherlands, states that women's right to safe, legal abortion is being eroded by misinformation and attacks on services. It calls for the reopening of abortion clinics closed during the pandemic.

The signatories say abortion should be regarded as an essential healthcare service and call for a global campaign "of factual and unbiased information" so women and girls know their rights and understand their options.

'A gift to feminists': how Trump's 'gag rule' inspired a worldwide movement
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Published by the SheDecides movement on Wednesday, the letter calls for an end to mandatory counselling for abortion, the implementation of forthcoming revised World Health Organization guidelines, and for mifepristone, the abortion-inducing drug, to be approved for use in countries where it is not yet available.

“No woman should be forced to carry an unwanted pregnancy to term; and no woman should die due to pregnancy or childbirth. The foundation of a fair and equal world for women and girls in all their diversity is the right to decide about their own bodies. Every woman everywhere has the right to safe, legal abortion, maternal and obstetric healthcare, comprehensive sexuality education and contraception,” reads the letter.

“But right now, across the world, women and girls are routinely denied full access to their sexual and reproductive rights and freedoms. The disproportionate impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly on women’s economic empowerment, and increased sexual and gender-based violence, makes the need to secure gender equality more pressing than ever.”

Anti-abortion drives are often “spearheaded by well-funded, well-organised lobby groups” around the world, the letter continues.

“Their most visible vanguard are the protesters who stand outside clinics, intimidating and harassing women and girls seeking essential healthcare services. But they operate behind the scenes, too, working with anti-abortion groups and politicians to spread disinformation and force a chilling effect on women’s rights.”

The letter adds: “By campaigning for the lifting of legal barriers, and protecting abortion as an essential healthcare service we can prevent unsafe abortions, save women’s lives and move a step closer to achieving gender equality.”

The SheDecides movement was launched in 2017 by Lilianne Ploumen, former Netherlands trade minister and signatory to the letter, in response to the Trump administration’s reproductive health services cuts.

In the UK, call the national domestic abuse helpline on 0808 2000 247, or visit Women's Aid. Other international helplines may be found via www.befrienders.org

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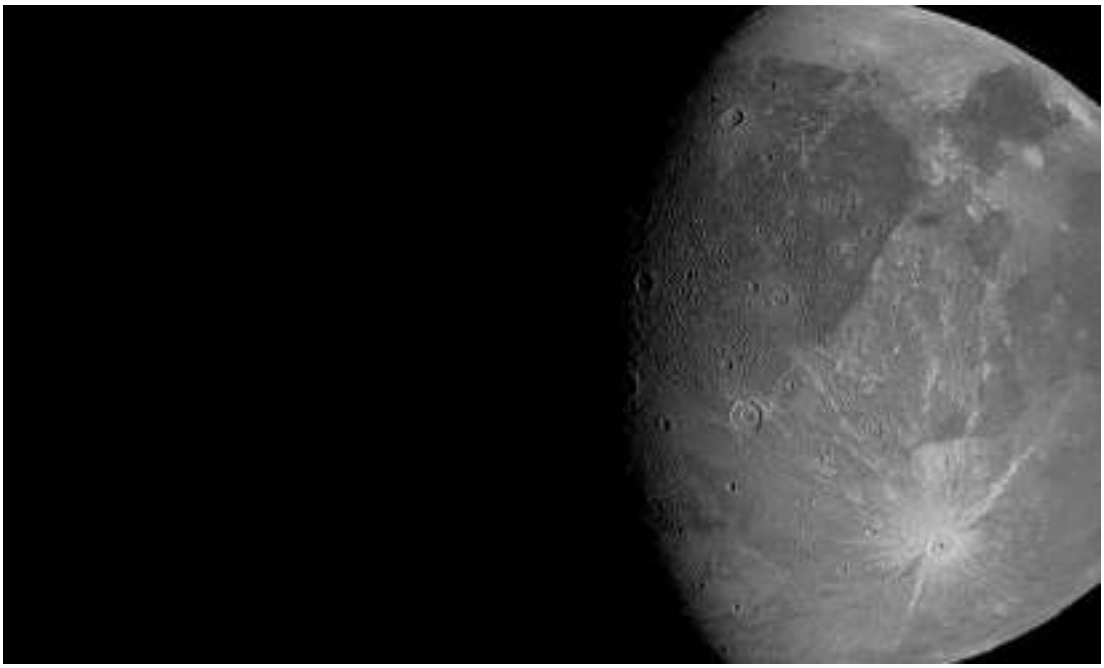
Jupiter

Nasa spacecraft captures first closeups of Jupiter's largest moon in decades

Juno passed within 645 miles of Ganymede, the closest any spacecraft has come to the moon since 2000



The Jovian moon Ganymede as the Juno spacecraft flies by. Photograph: AP

The Jovian moon Ganymede as the Juno spacecraft flies by. Photograph: AP

Associated Press
Tue 8 Jun 2021 18.39 EDT

Nasa's Juno spacecraft has provided the first closeups of Jupiter's largest moon in two decades.

Juno zoomed past icy Ganymede on Monday, passing within 645 miles (1,038km). The last time a spacecraft came that close was in 2000 when Nasa's Galileo spacecraft swept past our solar system's biggest moon.

Astronomers capture new images of Jupiter using 'lucky' technique
Read more

Nasa released Juno's first two pictures on Tuesday, highlighting Ganymede's craters and long, narrow features possibly related to tectonic faults. One shows the moon's far side, opposite the sun.

A Nasa image shows the dark side of Ganymede as the Juno spacecraft flies by. Photograph: AP

"This is the closest any spacecraft has come to this mammoth moon in a generation," said Juno's lead scientist, Scott Bolton of the Southwest Research Institute in San Antonio. "We are going to take our time before we draw any scientific conclusions, but until then we can simply marvel at this celestial wonder – the only moon in our solar system bigger than the planet Mercury."

Ganymede is one of 79 known moons around Jupiter, a gas giant. The Italian astronomer Galileo Galilei discovered Ganymede in 1610, along with Jupiter's three next-biggest moons.

Launched a decade ago, Juno has been orbiting Jupiter for five years.

Global development

Barcelona street sellers take on Nike with own-brand trainers

Ethical streetwear co-operative Top Manta says profits will help migrant vendors ‘become legal and work for a decent wage’

Yacine Diop, of the Top Manta co-operative, at the launch of the *Ande Dem* trainers. Photograph: Pau Coll

Yacine Diop, of the Top Manta co-operative, at the launch of the *Ande Dem* trainers. Photograph: Pau Coll

Global development is supported by

About this content

Stephen Burgen *in Barcelona*

Wed 9 Jun 2021 02.01 EDT

After years of selling cheap copies of designer shoes and handbags, Barcelona's street vendors have set up a co-operative and launched a line of trainers under the brand name Top Manta.

Unlike an earlier attempt to establish a brand in 2017 by sticking a logo on shoes imported from China, the trainers are made in Alicante in Spain and Porto in Portugal.

"We have always been criticised and persecuted for selling copies, but now we have our own brand," Lamine Sarr, a Top Manta spokesman, told the Guardian.

The co-operative's spectacular launch presented the *Ande Dem* trainers, which means "walking together" in Wolof, the language spoken by most *manteros* (vendors), who are mainly from Senegal.

The name Top Manta comes from the blanket (*manta*) vendors lay their wares on. The logo is of a blanket, but also represents waves to reflect the

fact that most manteros arrived in Spain after making the hazardous journey by sea in small inflatable boats.

The colours of the shoes recall Africa, Sarr said, while the rugged soles make them more suitable for working on the land or a building site than for jogging.

Members of the Top Manta collective at the launch. Photograph: Pau Coll

The shoes were designed by a group of manteros with the help of a local architect and designer, Sara González de Ubieta, and a graphic designer, Helga Juárez.

Unlike big brands that mass produce trainers in low-income countries, Top Manta says it has opted for responsible production with the aim of reviving the artisanal shoe industry.

They have produced 400 pairs so far, retailing at €115 (£100). They can be bought from the co-operative's shop in Barcelona or online. All profits go towards building the brand and helping manteros and their families.

The co-operative has produced a promotional video to be screened on its website and on social media.

“We’re very happy that we’ve got the Ande Dem shoes. It’s a dream come true,” said Abdou Lahat Wade, who will soon be selling them.

“We’re showing those people who always said we weren’t capable of making our own shoes that we can.

“We’re like a brotherhood and that gives us strength and the perseverance to cope with the present and create a future for ourselves.”

The pandemic has been a disaster for street vendors, whose already precarious working lives were curtailed by lockdowns and the absence of tourists, their main customers.

Chariots of steel: Barcelona's hidden army of scrap recyclers
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“It’s been really difficult during the pandemic,” Sarr said. “These are people who can’t claim unemployment benefit and there’s been no government support. We established a food bank and we set up sewing machines and people came here to the shop to work on a voluntary basis sewing shoes and clothes.”

Spain’s laws condemn illegal immigrants to a marginal existence. To obtain legal residency, non-EU immigrants must live in the country for three years, prove they have had a fixed address for at least a year, show they are learning the language and have a work contract for a minimum of one year. For many, perhaps most, these conditions are impossible to meet and they remain in a stateless limbo.

By creating jobs manufacturing and marketing shoes, Top Manta has succeeded in getting 120 manteros legal residency and has found jobs for 25 of its members. It also offers training in textiles and screen-printing as well as language classes.

Asked why anyone would choose Top Manta trainers over Nike, New Balance or Adidas, Sarr said: “Instead of supporting a multinational that exploits desperate people in the developing world, you are helping a

community that is discriminated against in every way. You are helping people to become legal and work for a decent wage.”

Global development

Uganda’s ID scheme excludes nearly a third from healthcare, says report

Vital services including grants financed by UK unavailable without identity cards, with women and the elderly worst affected

People queue to validate their ID cards. At least 50,000 people over 80 have mistakes on their cards that can impede access to services, according to the report. Photograph: Handout

People queue to validate their ID cards. At least 50,000 people over 80 have mistakes on their cards that can impede access to services, according to the report. Photograph: Handout

Global development is supported by

About this content

Samuel Okiror *in Kampala*

Wed 9 Jun 2021 03.01 EDT

Up to a third of adults in Uganda have been excluded from vital healthcare and social services because they do not have national ID cards, according to a report.

Women and elderly people have been particularly affected by the introduction of the digital identity cards, which are required to access government and private sector healthcare, to claim social benefits, to vote and to open bank accounts or buy sim cards.

Many services that require IDs are funded by donors, including the UK and Ireland, which finance grants for older people, and the World Bank, which supports birth registrations.

The report, published by three human rights organisations, estimates that between 23% and 33% of Uganda's adult population do not have ID cards, which were introduced by the National Identification and Registration Authority (Nira) in 2015.

Many of the cards issued include errors, said the report. Correcting mistakes or replacing lost or stolen cards costs at least 50,000 Ugandan shillings (£10). More than 40% of Uganda's population live on less than £1.30 a day.

One of the nurses interviewed said ID cards should not prevent access to healthcare, which was "a matter of life and death".

The report called on the government to stop requiring ID cards to access essential services. Its authors also called on the World Bank, UN agencies and donors to urge the Ugandan government to "do everything in its power to prevent further wholesale exclusion and related human rights violations" that result from the mandatory use of the cards, referred to as "Ndaga Muntu".

Angella Nabwowe, of the Initiative for Social and Economic Rights, one of the organisations that produced the report, said: "Government has to go back to the drawing table and rethink the use of Ndaga Muntu, especially when it comes to tagging it to service delivery, because many people are being left out."

The report details how women and older people had been particularly affected by the ID scheme.

'Gamechanger': Uganda launches drone delivering HIV drugs to remote islands
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"Without an ID […], no treatment," said a woman from Amudat, in northern Uganda. "Many people fall sick and stay home and die."

"I was chased [for ID] two times. When they chased me, I just went back home. What could I do? I came [back] home and used herbs," said a mother from Kayunga, in central Uganda, recalling a time she tried to access health services. "But if they chase you and you go back in a critical condition, they will say you are lying and that you were never there before."

A pregnant mother told researchers: "The nurse asked me for a national ID and I said I didn't have one. She [the nurse] threw the book at me and said

she will not attend to me."

Researchers found errors on ID cards have left thousands of people aged 80 and over unable to receive monthly grants of 25,000 Ugandan shillings (£5), under the Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment (Sage) programme, which is supported by the UK government.

Okye, an 88-year-old man from Namayingo, eastern Uganda, told researchers that his card stated his age as 79. "This has made me miss out on the Sage benefits because as per the National ID, I am yet to clock 80 years," he said.

According to the report, at least 50,000 people over 80 have similar mistakes on their ID cards or do not have a national ID at all, making them ineligible for government assistance.

A man has his ID checked at a polling station in Kampala, Uganda. Digital identity cards are required for healthcare, government services and to vote and open bank accounts. Photograph: Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP/Getty

The report was also critical of the Nira's failure to register births and deaths. Recent estimates show that only 13% of children under one had their births registered.

“Among other things, this means that as Uganda’s young population reaches adulthood and becomes eligible to register for Ndaga Muntu, a majority of them will be unable to prove their identity and age because they have no birth certificate,” said the report.

“It is quite absurd to invest in registering the adult population for a national ID and forget about the next generation. It is as if Nira’s left hand does not know, and does not care, what its right hand is doing,” said Dorothy Mukasa of Unwanted Witness, which co-authored the report.

Rosemary Kisembo, Nira’s executive director, told the Guardian: “The management and staff of Nira are deeply saddened by the pain our clients are experiencing in accessing our services and enjoying their statutory rights.

“We acknowledge the urgent need for improvement. In the next six months, we will create mobile teams to reach the rural areas at parish and sub-county levels and in the urban congested areas. These mobile units will prioritise the elderly and disabled.

“We shall train health practitioners at health facilities, duty bearers and village health teams to help rural populations register birth and death in communities or during immunisation or hospital visits,” she said.

US news

US Senate approves $50bn boost for computer chip and AI technology to counter China

Legislation shows deeply divided parties are united on confronting China in the ‘race for technologies of the future’

A robotic arm moves wood bricks at a factory in Ganzhou in China. US senators have backed more funds to develop the US tech industry. Photograph: China News Service/Getty Images

A robotic arm moves wood bricks at a factory in Ganzhou in China. US senators have backed more funds to develop the US tech industry. Photograph: China News Service/Getty Images

Agencies
Tue 8 Jun 2021 20.10 EDT

The US Senate has overwhelmingly approved a bill to boost American semiconductor production and the development of artificial intelligence and other technology in the face of growing international competition, most notably from China.

The 68-32 vote for the bill on Tuesday demonstrates how confronting China economically is an issue that unites both parties in Congress. It is a rare unifying issue in an era of division as pressure grows on Democrats to change Senate rules to push past Republican opposition and gridlock.

The centerpiece of the bill is a $50bn emergency allotment to the US commerce department to boost semiconductor development and manufacturing through research and incentive programs previously authorised by Congress. Overall, the bill would increase spending by about $250bn, with most of the spending occurring in the first five years.

Chips with everything: how one Taiwanese company drives the world economy
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The bill now heads to the House of Representatives, which earlier passed a different version. The two will have to be reconciled into a single bill before it is sent to the White House for the president's signature.

Joe Biden said he was "encouraged" by the Senate's passage of the United States Innovation and Competition Act.

"We are in a competition to win the 21st century, and the starting gun has gone off," Biden said.

"As other countries continue to invest in their own research and development, we cannot risk falling behind. America must maintain its position as the most innovative and productive nation on Earth."

Supporters described the bill as the biggest investment in scientific research that the country has seen in decades. It comes as the nation's share of semiconductor manufacturing globally has steadily eroded from 37% in

1990 to about 12% now, and as a chip shortage has exposed vulnerabilities in the US supply chain.

“The premise is simple, if we want American workers and American companies to keep leading the world, the federal government must invest in science, basic research and innovation, just as we did decades after the second world war,” said Senate majority leader, Chuck Schumer.

“Whoever wins the race to the technologies of the future is going to be the global economic leader, with profound consequences for foreign policy and national security as well.

“If we do nothing, our days as the dominant superpower may be ending. We don’t mean to let those days end on our watch. We don’t mean to see America become a middling nation in this century.”

The bill has a number of other China-related provisions, including prohibiting the social media app TikTok from being downloaded on government devices, and would block the purchase of drones manufactured and sold by companies backed by the Chinese government.

It would also allow diplomats and Taiwanese military to display their flag and wear their uniforms while in the US on official businesses, and creates broad new mandatory sanctions on Chinese entities engaged in US cyberattacks or theft of US intellectual property from US firms. It provides for a review of export controls on items that could be used to support human rights abuses.

The Senate minority leader, Mitch McConnell, backed the bill but said it was incomplete because it did not incorporate more Republican-sponsored amendments.

“Needless to say, final passage of this legislation cannot be the Senate’s final word on our competition with China,” he said. “It certainly won’t be mine.”

Senators slogged through days of debates and amendments leading up to Tuesday’s final vote. Schumer’s office said 18 Republican amendments will have received votes as part of passage of the bill. It also said the Senate this

year has already held as many roll call votes on amendments than it did in the last Congress, when the Senate was under Republican control.

While the bill enjoys bipartisan support, a core group of Republican senators has reservations about its costs.

China to overtake US as world's biggest economy by 2028, report predicts
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One of the bill's provisions would create a new directorate focused on artificial intelligence and quantum science with the National Science Foundation. The bill would authorize up to $29bn over five years for the new branch within the foundation, with an additional $52bn for its programs.

Rand Paul, a Republican senator for Kentucky, said Congress should be cutting the foundation's budget, not increasing it. He called the agency "the king of wasteful spending". The agency finances about a quarter of all federally supported research conducted by America's colleges and universities.

The lead Republican on the committee also weighed in to support the bill.

"This is an opportunity for the United States to strike a blow on behalf of answering the unfair competition that we are seeing from communist China," said Roger Wicker.

Senators have tried to strike a balance when calling attention to China's growing influence. They want to avoid fanning divisive anti-Asian rhetoric when hate crimes against Asian Americans have spiked during the coronavirus pandemic.

Senators added provisions that reflect shifting attitudes toward China's handling of the Covid-19 outbreak. One would prevent federal money for the Wuhan Institute of Virology as fresh investigations proceed into the origins of the virus and possible connections to the lab's research. The city registered some of the first coronavirus cases.

- *The Associated Press, Reuters and Agence France-Presse contributed to this report*

Ratko Mladić

Ratko Mladić, ‘butcher of Bosnia’, loses appeal against genocide conviction

Judgment means 78-year-old former Bosnian Serb military chief will spend the rest of his life in prison

- Analysis: Ratko Mladić – life in prison is as close to justice as his victims will get

Ratko Mladic in the dock on Tuesday during his appeal against his genocide conviction over the 1995 Srebrenica massacre. Photograph: Peter de Jong/AFP/Getty

Ratko Mladic in the dock on Tuesday during his appeal against his genocide conviction over the 1995 Srebrenica massacre. Photograph: Peter de Jong/AFP/Getty

Daniel Boffey in The Hague and Julian Borger
Tue 8 Jun 2021 12.55 EDT

Ratko Mladić, the former Bosnian Serb commander nicknamed the "butcher of Bosnia", will spend the rest of his life in prison after a UN court dismissed his final appeal against convictions for genocide and crimes against humanity, in a judgment hailed as "historic" by the White House.

Unlike previous appearances at the international criminal tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague, the 78-year-old showed little emotion as an hour-long reading of the judgment finally put an end to attempts to quash the charges against him.

Wearing a black suit and a sky blue tie, Mladić scowled, sat back in his chair and rested his chin on his hand as he listened to the rejection of each of his appeals against 10 convictions involving extermination, forcible transfers, terror, hostage-taking and unlawful attacks on civilians. He was the only person in court not wearing a mask.

For the final comments of the presiding judge, Prisca Matimba Nyambe, Mladić stood and bowed his head, flanked by two guards. The appeal had been dismissed "in its entirety" and his life sentence was affirmed, she told him.

Mladić's only words during the hearing were to respond "Yes, I can" when asked whether he was able to follow the proceedings. There was the odd shake of the head, but Mladić's behaviour stood in sharp contrast to his final appearance during the original 2017 conviction, where he had shouted "this is all lies" and "I'll fuck your mother", while gesticulating at the relatives of his victims.

Shortly after the judgment was delivered, Joe Biden described it as a moment of hope.

"This historic judgment shows that those who commit horrific crimes will be held accountable," the US president said. "It also reinforces our shared resolve to prevent future atrocities from occurring anywhere in the world.

"My thoughts today are with all the surviving families of the many victims of Mladić's atrocities. We can never erase the tragedy of their deaths, but I hope today's judgment provides some solace to all those who are grieving."

Dominic Raab, the UK's foreign secretary, said the judgment "helped puncture impunity for the worst international crimes imaginable".

Mladić will now join his one-time political master, the former Bosnian Serb president Radovan Karadžić, in serving a life sentence as a key architect of the ethnic cleansing and civil war that followed the break-up of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s.

The appeal chamber's judgment was marred for the survivors and relatives of victims gathered outside the court only by the decision of Nyambe, a judge from Zambia, to dissent from the majority decision of the chamber's five judges to reject a range of Mladić's claims for dismissal.

Munira Subašić's husband, Hilmo, and 17-year-old son, Nermin, were killed in the Srebrenica genocide. She lost 22 members of her extended family and is now the head of the organisation Mothers of Srebrenica.

"Personally, I believe that justice has won, although as victims of course we are never completely satisfied," Subašić said after the ruling. "This victory is not only for us but for all the mothers of Bosnia and Herzegovina whether they be Serb, Bosniak [Bosnian Muslims] or Croatian. Every mother suffers."

Asked about Nyambe's dissents, she said: "I simply believe that women are here to give birth, to create and to make the world a better place. But today, I witnessed the words of a woman – I don't know whether she's a mother or not – who had so many dissenting opinions, despite the fact that the whole world knows what happened there. So, I felt a bit antagonistic, asking myself whether it was possible for a woman to show that lack of understanding."

The court rejected the prosecution's attempt to add a second conviction of genocide to Mladić's crimes relating to alleged offences in specific municipalities of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where there was said to be reasonable doubt over intent.

The judgment was final, however, that the former Serb commander, who had been on the run for over a decade before justice caught up with him in 2011,

did play a leading role in the attempts to permanently remove Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Croats from Bosnia and Herzegovina between May 1992 and November 1995 by spreading terror among the civilian population through sniping and shelling.

He was part of a criminal enterprise that sought to eliminate Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica, in Europe's first genocide since the second world war, the court said. Between 11 July 1995 and "at least" October 1995, his intention had been to kill men and boys and forcibly remove the women, young children and some elderly men.

Some 8,000 people died, most of them having been taken away in buses, lined up and shot, with their bodies dumped in mass graves. During the original trial, the prosecution had shown video footage of Mladić at the scene while men and boys were separated from their families. It was under Mladić's command that UN personnel were taken hostage and put in strategic military locations to prevent Nato from launching airstrikes, the appeals chamber added.

"It's a final judgment and of course it is extremely important, because he really symbolises more than everyone else, the war crimes committed, the hatred, the human suffering," said Serge Brammertz, the former chief prosecutor at The Hague war crimes tribunal, who oversaw the capture of Mladić after 14 years on the run, and his prosecution. "It is definitely a very important moment for the tribunal for my team, but even more for survivors and victims."

Brammertz, now chief prosecutor at the UN's International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals, said he had expected Judge Nyambe's dissenting opinions given her views expressed in earlier cases. But he added: "What is important today is that the large majority of judges upheld all convictions of the first instance and rejected in its entirety, the appeal by the defence."

Mladić's name "should be consigned to the list of history's most depraved and barbarous figures", he said.

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Germany

Berlin urged to speed up resettlement of Afghans who worked for military

Government urged to act amid fears that lives of people who have worked with armed forces are at risk

A German soldier keeps watch during a patrol near Taloqan, the capital of Takhar province, Afghanistan, in 2012. Photograph: Johannes Eisele/AFP/Getty Images

A German soldier keeps watch during a patrol near Taloqan, the capital of Takhar province, Afghanistan, in 2012. Photograph: Johannes Eisele/AFP/Getty Images

Kate Connolly in Berlin
Wed 9 Jun 2021 00.00 EDT

The German government is under pressure to accelerate the process by which hundreds of Afghans who worked for the military are able to resettle

in Germany amid fears for their lives if they stay in their home country.

High-ranking representatives from the military, politics, development aid and the diplomatic corps have joined an appeal to the German government stressing the urgency of acting ahead of the withdrawal of international troops next month.

“While the troops have long been preparing for their return, under increased security measures, the fears of the Afghans hired locally are growing,” states the letter, which was organised by the director of the Berlin-based independent thinktank Afghanistan Analysts Network, Thomas Rutter.

An estimated 520 Afghans who are currently working or who have worked closely with the German military, the Bundeswehr, in Afghanistan over the past two years, as well as close family members, are potentially eligible for resettlement, if they can prove in their applications that they have been threatened by the Taliban because of their association. They have typically worked as interpreters, drivers, security staff and administrators.

But campaigners argue the eligibility time-frame has to go further back than just the past two years and that applicants should not have to offer their own individual proof that they have been threatened, as the government is currently demanding.

Germany has been involved in military operations in Afghanistan since 2001 and has just over 1,000 troops stationed there.

Government sources cited by German media, have said that all 520 have submitted “endangered notices” to government authorities in Afghanistan and it has set up contact centres in both Mazar-i-Sharif and Kabul, where Afghans who have worked with Germans can submit a visa application. The location of the centres has not been made public for security reasons, which supporters of the applicants say, serves to stress the potential danger in which the Afghans find themselves.

Signatories to the letter include two former German ambassadors to Afghanistan, the former inspector general of the Bundeswehr, leading aid workers and Marcus Grotian, a captain in the German military who served in

Afghanistan and is chair of the Patronage network of the Afghani Local Workforce. He told German TV channel ARD: “This is not about whether someone is being shortchanged, but about whether he faces death.”

The group has also criticised the government’s insistence that those affected should arrange and pay for their own travel and recommended instead that the Afghans are flown out of the country on specially arranged flights under military protection ahead of its withdrawal.

A German relocation policy has been in place to relocate Afghan workers since 2013, after it was decided that the Bundeswehr would withdraw from Kundus in the north of the country. The government brought about 800 local workers to safety in Germany, but faced criticism that it had failed to help many hundreds of others.

The German government has also been keen to stress the importance of Afghans staying in their homeland wherever possible, to help with its development, for which it is providing grants for employment training and education.

Angela Merkel, the German chancellor, last week stressed the government’s commitment to supporting the military’s former local workers. A spokesperson said: “The government takes the concerns of Afghan local hire very seriously,” and said applications were being processed as “speedily and flexibly” as possible. In the case of an individual proved to be in danger, “it will be made possible for the local workers and their core families to be given a quick admittance to Germany”.

The Taliban have widely branded Afghans who have been in the pay of foreign military “traitors” and “unbelievers”, or as “slaves of the invaders” or “collaborators” of the west. Many of those who have stayed in the country have complained of regular threats faced by them and their families and killings and torture of former employees have been well documented.

The Taliban on Monday issued a statement urging people who had worked with foreign forces to stay in Afghanistan following the departure of Nato troops. It said that those who had supported non-Afghan military over the past two decades would “not be in any danger” as long as they were

“remorseful” and would “not engage in such activities in the future”. It urged those with skills to offer, to stay and “serve” their country.

The group added: “If they are using the danger as an excuse to bolster their fake asylum case, then that is their own problem.”

The German government is wary of giving too much publicity to the relocation scheme, not least because of political sensitivities surrounding its deportation programme of Afghans who have arrived in Germany as refugees but who face deportation after their asylum applications have been turned down, sometimes because they have been involved in criminal activity.

It is cautious about not wanting to undermine its own argument that it is now safe to return to Afghanistan. The latest group was due to be returned to Kabul on Tuesday amid fierce protests from human rights groups.

Barack Obama

Barack Obama warns Republicans will kill US democracy in ‘series of steps’

Former president warned in CNN interview ‘the path towards an undemocratic America’ will come ‘in a series of steps’

- US politics – live coverage

‘My hope is that the tides will turn. But that does require each of us to understand that this experiment in democracy is not self-executing,’ Obama said. Photograph: Elijah Nouvelage/AFP/Getty Images

‘My hope is that the tides will turn. But that does require each of us to understand that this experiment in democracy is not self-executing,’ Obama said. Photograph: Elijah Nouvelage/AFP/Getty Images

Martin Pengelly in New York
@MartinPengelly
Tue 8 Jun 2021 13.08 EDT

Americans should be worried that the Republican party “is willing to embrace a way of thinking about our democracy that would be unrecognisable and unacceptable even five years ago”, Barack Obama said on Monday.

Joe Manchin’s hard no on voting bill leaves Democrats seeking new path
Read more

The former president warned Americans “to recognise that the path towards an undemocratic America is not gonna happen in just one bang” but will

instead come “in a series of steps”, as seen under authoritarian leaders in Hungary and Poland.

Obama was speaking to CNN the night before two Senate committees released a report on the deadly attack on the US Capitol on 6 January.

Five people died after supporters of Donald Trump stormed the building in service of Trump’s lie that his conclusive defeat by Joe Biden in the electoral college and the popular vote was caused by electoral fraud.

Trump was impeached a second time, with support from 10 House Republicans. But Republicans in the Senate acquitted him of inciting an insurrection. He remains free to run for office and has returned to public speaking and hinted about plans for running for the White House again in 2024.

Last month, Republicans blocked the formation of a 9/11-style commission to investigate the Capitol attack. The Senate report released on Tuesday did not address political questions.

Away from Washington, in states including Texas, Florida and Georgia, Republicans are pursuing laws to restrict ballot access in constituencies likely to vote Democratic, and to make it easier to overturn election results.

In Washington, opposition from centrist Democrats such as the West Virginia senator Joe Manchin is blocking federal voting rights protections.

Obama told CNN “large portions of an elected Congress [are] going along with the falsehood that there were problems with the election”.

Some Republicans did speak up against Trump’s lie after 6 January, Obama said, praising officials like Brad Raffensperger, the Republican Georgia secretary of state who resisted pressure to overturn Biden’s win there, as “very brave”.

But then, Obama said, “poof, suddenly everybody was back in line. Now, the reason for that is because the base believed it and the base believed it because this had been told to them not just by the president, but by the media that they watch.

“My hope is that the tides will turn. But that does require each of us to understand that this experiment in democracy is not self-executing. It doesn’t happen just automatically.”

Obama, the first black president, has considered his impact on the American right at length, particularly in his memoir, A Promised Land, which was published after the 2020 election.

He told CNN the rightwing media, most prominently Fox News, was a particular driver of deepening division. Republicans and Democrats, he said, “occupy different worlds. And it becomes that much more difficult for us to hear each other, see each other.

Trump feared Democrats would replace Biden with Michelle Obama, book claims
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“We have more economic stratification and segregation. You combine that with racial stratification and the siloing of the media, so you don’t have just Walter Cronkite delivering the news, but you have 1,000 different venues. All that has contributed to that sense that we don’t have anything in common.”

Asking “how do we start once again being able to tell a common story about where this country goes?”, Obama said Americans on either side of the divide needed to meet and talk more often.

“The question now becomes how do we create … meeting places,” he said. “Because right now, we don’t have them and we’re seeing the consequences of that.”

Emmanuel Macron

Emmanuel Macron slapped in the face during walkabout

Two arrested after man shouted ‘down with Macronism’ before assaulting French president

00:15

Emmanuel Macron slapped in the face during walkabout – video

Kim Willsher
Tue 8 Jun 2021 10.34 EDT

Emmanuel Macron was slapped in the face by a man during a walkabout in southern France.

The president’s security detail immediately pulled the man to the ground and moved Macron away from the crowd, though the president appeared unhurt and determined to continue meeting the public.

Afterwards, the French leader said the assault was “an isolated act” that should be “put into perspective”.

“We mustn’t let ultra-violent individuals take over the public debate … There can be no violence, no hatred, not in speech or action. Otherwise it’s democracy itself that is threatened.”

A video of the incident showed the president, in a white shirt and tie, approach onlookers waiting behind metal barriers at Tain-l’Hermitage in the Drôme department.

Macron, wearing a mask, is seen reaching out to shake hands with a man in a green T-shirt wearing glasses and a mask.

Reuters reported the man was heard shouting "*à bas la Macronie*" (down with Macronism) before he grabbed the president's right arm and delivered a slap to the left side of his face. He was also reported to have shouted "*Montjoie Saint Denis*", the battle cry of the French armies when the country was a monarchy.

Two people have been arrested in connection with the assault, according to reports, and are being held for "deliberate violence against a person of public authority".

Talking to the local newspaper, the Dauphiné Libéré, later, Macron said: "We must not let this overshadow the other issues that are so important to the lives of so many."

Asked if he felt the political climate was deteriorating, the president replied: "No, I don't want isolated individuals or those who go to extremes to somehow make people forget the rest. The French people are a republican people. The overwhelming majority of French people are interested in the fundamental problems.

"Let's not let isolated events, the kind of ultra-violent individuals we also see in some demonstrations, take over the public debate. They don't deserve it."

Macron said it would not stop him meeting ordinary people on his visits and he had "no apprehensions at all".

"In fact, I went on and greeted the people present who were next to the man and I took photos with them. I carried on and I will carry on. Nothing will stop me," he said.

The French prime minister, Jean Castex, said the incident was an affront to democracy.

"Politics can never be about violence, verbal aggression, and even less about physical aggression. I call for a republican awakening, we are all concerned, the foundations of our democracy are at stake," Castex told the Assemblée Nationale.

Last week, Macron began a six-week political tour de France aimed at "taking the pulse" of the country as it emerges from the coronavirus crisis. In the run-up to regional elections this month and, more importantly, the presidential battle next year, the French leader will make two regional visits a week until mid-July.

He was in the Drôme to meet local restaurant owners and students to talk about how their lives are slowly returning to normal as Covid restrictions are lifted. Macron was accompanied by Guillaume Gomez, a former chef at the Élysée who was named the president's "special adviser on French gastronomy".

Alex Perrin, a public prosecutor in nearby Valence, told the Dauphiné Libéré that two local men aged 28 had been arrested.

"They are not known to police. One is accused of having hit the president of the Republic, the other was accompanying him," Perrin said, adding the investigation was being conducted by the Drôme gendarmes. The person accused of violence faces a €750 fine if convicted.

The Élysée confirmed the video of the incident was genuine, but refused to comment further.

The far-right leader Marine Le Pen also condemned the assault.

"I say this with absolutely firmness: it is unacceptable to physically attack the president of the republic or political representatives but especially the president. I am Emmanuel Macron's main rival, but he is the president of the republic and, as such, we can beat him politically but we cannot accept the slightest violence towards him. I consider this behaviour unacceptable and deeply deplorable in a democracy," Le Pen told BFMTV.

The former Socialist president François Hollande tweeted: "Attacking the president of the republic is an unacceptable and intolerable blow to our institutions. In the face of this indescribable act, the whole nation must show solidarity with the head of state. In these circumstances, I send my full support to @EmmanuelMacron."

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Headlines monday 7 june 2021

- **Aid Tory rebels face setback in bid to force vote on UK foreign aid cut**
- **Live UK politics: Tory rebellion over aid spending likely thwarted as Speaker is advised against allowing vote**
- **Aid UK foreign aid cuts are immoral, says David Davis**
- **Explained How are Tory rebels plotting to defeat foreign aid cuts?**

Foreign policy

Tory rebels await Speaker's decision on bid to restore aid pledge

MPs say they received advice amendment was in scope of bill amid claims it has been deemed not relevant

Planned Commons rebellion follows announcement last year that the overseas aid budget would be cut from 0.7% of gross national income to 0.5%. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

Planned Commons rebellion follows announcement last year that the overseas aid budget would be cut from 0.7% of gross national income to 0.5%. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

Jessica Elgot and *Aubrey Allegretti*
Mon 7 Jun 2021 06.34 EDT

Conservative rebels planning to stop Boris Johnson's planned cuts to aid spending could be thwarted if the Speaker rules their amendment to restore

the 0.7% pledge is out of scope of the bill.

Leaders of the rebellion said they had received expert advice that their amendment was in scope but Tory sources said Commons clerks had told the Speaker that the amendment to the advanced research and invention bill was not relevant to the matters contained in the bill. The Speaker has declined to comment until he speaks to the house.

The planned rebellion, backed by at least 30 Conservative MPs including the former prime minister Theresa May and led by the ex-international development secretary Andrew Mitchell, follows the announcement last year that the amount of money spent on overseas aid would be cut from 0.7% of gross national income to 0.5%, amounting to a reduction of about £4bn.

Ministers said this was necessary as a temporary measure – though they did not say for how long it would be in place – because of the economic damage from the coronavirus pandemic.

Supporters of the amendment include the former ministers Jeremy Hunt, Karen Bradley, Tobias Ellwood, Johnny Mercer and David Davis, senior backbenchers including Bob Neill and Bob Blackman, and the 2019 intake member Anthony Mangnall. One rebel said they believed it was still "game on" until the Speaker made his final call.

While 30 MPs are not enough to defeat the government, with support from opposition parties, the rebels were confident they could get at least 40 names.

One former minister backing the bid said rebels would bring their amendment "at the next possible opportunity" if the amendment was rejected. "All this does is delay the inevitable. They know we have the numbers," the MP said.

Another rebel Conservative said they would be bitterly disappointed if the amendment was rejected. "Clearly it was drafted to be in scope and we took advice from the clerks to draft it," the MP said.

“My view is parliament has set in law 0.7% and parliament needs to have a say on the reduction to 0.5%. The government has been reluctant to test the will of parliament on this issue – arguably they are acting outside the law.”

Mitchell said his amendment was a “totally in order new clause that reaffirms the promise that we all made just 18 months, every single one of us elected to the House of Commons, the promise we made not to cut aid”.

He said: “Throughout all these seven months, the government has not been willing to bring a vote to the House of Commons, because they’re frightened they’re going to lose it, and I think they’re right, I think they’re very likely to lose it because those of us who made the solemn promise are not going to allow the books in Britain to be balanced on the backs of the poorest people in the world.”

Johnson’s spokesman refused to say what personal lobbying of prospective rebels he was doing behind the scenes, only saying the government was waiting to see if the Speaker selected the amendment. He added ministers were committed to returning to 0.7% spending levels “as soon as the fiscal situation allows”.

A Tory insider said the government chief whip, Mark Spencer, and Commons leader, Jacob Rees-Mogg, were applying “pressure” to suggest the amendment wasn’t in scope but were “not leaving it to chance” and remained “worried”. They said multiple undecided MPs were still getting personal calls from Johnson and Spencer, asking what it would take for them to support the government.

Politics live with Andrew Sparrow
Politics

Speaker says MPs should get binding vote on cuts to aid budget – as it happened

Foreign policy

UK foreign aid cuts are immoral, says David Davis

Former Brexit secretary denounces plan and says 42% budget cut risks killing thousands of people

00:57

David Davis: ‘morally devastating’ UK foreign aid cuts will kill thousands – video

Kevin Rawlinson
Mon 7 Jun 2021 03.32 EDT

Proposed foreign aid cuts are immoral, unlawful and ministers tried to push them through without a vote in the Commons because they knew they would lose, the former Brexit secretary and Conservative backbench MP David Davis has said.

Davis told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme that the UK was unique among the G7 in planning the 42% cut, and said it would kill thousands of people. He cited legal advice given to Tory backbenchers by Ken Macdonald in which he denounced the planned cuts.

“The government, if it wanted to do this, should have brought it to the House of Commons and said: ‘This is in our manifesto but the duress we’re facing now means we have to do this’ and so ask the house to approve it. It didn’t.

“The reason it didn’t was because the majority of the house doesn’t agree with it. That’s what we’re going see today if we get the vote. And I’m afraid that that’s frankly, in my judgment, a morally poor position for the government.”

David Davis: ‘A morally poor position.’ Composite: PA

Ministers have been warned that the proposals, which call for about £4bn in cuts, would leave about 70,000 people in the world’s largest refugee settlement without health services. About 100,000 refugees in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh, would also be without water before the deadly cyclone season, aid agencies said.

In the run-up to a possible Commons vote on Monday, a group of those working in the area wrote to the Foreign Office minister for Asia, Nigel Adams. They warned that the cuts would “significantly undermine efforts to address humanitarian needs” in the camp.

On Monday, the former prime minister Gordon Brown said now was not the time for the cuts. He told BBC Breakfast: “It’s a life-and-death issue, we’re actually deciding who lives and who dies, particularly at this point where if we withdraw the money for vaccination it’s the equivalent of pulling away the needle from a kid or from an adult who is sick who needs the vaccination, a 90% cut, for example, in support for polio vaccination.”

He added: “We’re about to get a huge payment from the International Monetary Fund of $23bn, that covers this cut six times over, so it makes absolutely no economic sense. But particularly no moral sense. And it’s in

our self-interest, of course, to see the others vaccinated because nobody is safe until everybody is safe.”

Boris Johnson has persisted with the plan, believing it to be politically popular despite a rebellion by his own MPs, including the former international development secretary Andrew Mitchell and the former prime minister Theresa May.

The government has insisted the reduction of foreign aid from 0.7% of national income to 0.5%, which breaches the Tory manifesto, would be temporary.

The solicitor general, Lucy Frazer, told Sky News on Monday: “Even without the 0.7% this year, we will be investing £10bn and that is really important, but we are in the middle of a pandemic.

“What we’ve said is of course international aid needs to be spent but we’re going to temporarily cease the 0.7% and bring it back when fiscal circumstances allow.”

Davis said: “If you are a small child and you then suddenly get dirty water, you get an infection from it and you die, temporary doesn’t mean much.”

Foreign policy

Will Tory rebels get another chance to vote on foreign aid cuts?

Rejection of amendment saves PM from possible Commons defeat, but there could yet be a non-binding vote

Theresa May is a signatory, and every other living ex-prime minister – John Major, Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and David Cameron – also opposes the aid cut. Photograph: Jessica Taylor/AFP/Getty Images

Theresa May is a signatory, and every other living ex-prime minister – John Major, Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and David Cameron – also opposes the aid cut. Photograph: Jessica Taylor/AFP/Getty Images

Peter Walker Political correspondent
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Mon 7 Jun 2021 11.06 EDT

Boris Johnson has been saved from a possible first Commons defeat since the Conservatives won an 80-seat majority in 2019, after an amendment on overseas aid cuts was rejected on Monday. But he could still face another vote on the issue – even as early as Tuesday.

What is the rebellion about?

It follows the announcement last year that the amount of money spent on overseas aid would be cut from 0.7% of gross national income to 0.5%, amounting to a reduction of about £4bn. Ministers said this was necessary as a temporary measure – though they did not say how long – because of the economic damage from Covid.

What are the objections?

The 0.7% figure is established in law and was part of the 2019 Conservative manifesto, and so opponents believe it is a broken promise. They also stress the enormous effect the cuts will have on some of the world's most vulnerable people, amid the continued impact of Covid. For example, UK aid to Yemen and Syria will halve, and funding for girls' education will be cut by 40% on average. Aid agencies have said the cuts will leave 100,000 people without water in Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh, the world's largest refugee settlement. They argue the cuts will also greatly reduce the UK's diplomatic influence in the post-Brexit world.

What happened on Monday?

Opponents had expected a direct vote on the aid cut, as the 0.7% figure is in law. But the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, which took over aid responsibilities after it absorbed the Department for International Development last year, has argued that as the cut is temporary it is in the scope of the existing legislation, and so no vote is needed. Tory rebels had been searching for an alternative parliamentary vehicle, and tabled an amendment to a bill being considered on Monday about the creation of the Advanced Research and Invention Agency, a Dominic Cummings-inspired research body. The Speaker, Lindsay Hoyle took the advice of clerks that the

amendment was not within the scope of the main bill, and so was not allowed.

But Hoyle said that because the 0.7% target is set out in law, ministers "should find a way" for a Commons debate and vote on the issue, and he could grant an emergency debate on Tuesday. If such a debate does take place on Tuesday, it would be under so-called standing order 24 (SO24) rules, as seen at the peak of the Brexit debates under Theresa May. Motions passed under SO24 debates are not binding on the government.

Is it a victory for the government?

Yes and no. The rejection of the amendment will please ministers, but the danger has not gone, with a vote via another means seemingly inevitable, possibly before Johnson hosts fellow members of the G7 club of nations in Cornwall this weekend. In a point of order in the Commons, the lead rebel, Andrew Mitchell, said they were very confident of winning a vote on the issue, by up to 20 votes. Johnson could just ignore the result of an SO24 vote, but this would not be straightforward.

Who are the rebels?

Thirty Tories are among MPs to formally back the now defunct amendment, and they are a very mixed bag, ranging from former ministers such as Mitchell, Jeremy Hunt, Tobias Ellwood, Johnny Mercer and David Davis, to senior backbenchers including Bob Neill and Bob Blackman and even a 2019 intake member, Anthony Mangnall. Theresa May is a signatory, and all other living ex-prime ministers – John Major, Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and David Cameron – also oppose the aid cut.

Why is the government doing this?

Mainly, it seems, because it thinks it will be popular. Polling has shown about two-thirds of voters back the move, and there is a particular focus on voters in newer Conservative seats in places such as the north of England and Midlands, who are viewed as more likely to want to focus spending on the UK.

2021.06.07 - Coronavirus

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Coronavirus

Children are ‘vulnerable host’ for Covid as cases recede, US expert warns

- Cases plummet but children under 12 not yet eligible for shots
- Mississippi governor defends low state vaccination rate

A 14-year-old vaccinated against Covid-19 holds up a sticker at a pop-up vaccination site in Queens, in New York City. Photograph: Scott Heins/Getty Images

A 14-year-old vaccinated against Covid-19 holds up a sticker at a pop-up vaccination site in Queens, in New York City. Photograph: Scott Heins/Getty Images

Guardian staff and agencies
Mon 7 Jun 2021 02.00 EDT

A US public health expert has warned that though cases of Covid-19 are at their lowest rates for months and much of the country is returning to normal life, young Americans are still "a vulnerable host" for the coronavirus.

Post-lockdown summer: Americans out for fun and with money to spend
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Dr Richina Bicette, associate medical director at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, told CNN children were now accounting for nearly 25% of US cases.

"As adults get vaccinated and become more protected and immune," she said, "the virus is still in the community looking for a vulnerable host, and pediatric patients fit that description."

Children aged 12 and above are eligible to receive the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, one of three in US use. Federal authorities will this week debate extending vaccines to children aged 11 and under.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) data shows that 52% of the US population over the age of 12 has had at least one vaccine dose and 42% is fully protected.

The Biden administration wants 70% of US adults to have received at least one shot by 4 July. A range of incentives are being offered.

Deaths in the US have slowed drastically, the toll a little under 590,000. But with virus variants causing problems as other countries reopen, experts have voiced concern over slowing rates of vaccination, particularly in Republican states.

On Sunday the Republican governor of Mississippi, Tate Reeves, appeared on CNN's State of the Union.

Mississippi is 50th and last among states in vaccinations, with 30% of residents fully protected and 40.5% aged 12 and older having received at least one dose, according to the CDC. The states with the highest

vaccination rates are Vermont (80.6% – with a Republican governor, Phil Scott), Hawaii (78.6%) and Massachusetts (76.8%).

“I believe the vaccine works,” Reeves said. “I believe it’s safe. I believe it’s effective. I took my first dose in January, as did my wife, on TV live, and I have encouraged Mississippians to do the same.

“But I also want to point out that President Biden’s goals for 4 July or otherwise are arbitrary to say the least.”

Reeves said his focus was on providing “quality care” for people with Covid-19 – and trumpeted a steep decline in hospitalisations.

“At our peak, we had 1,444 individuals in the hospital,” he said. “Today, we have 131. We’re down 90%. At our peak, we had 2,400 cases per day over a seven-day period. Over the last seven days, we have had barely 800 cases in total.

“And so, for that entire year period, the goalpost was, let’s reduce the number of cases. And we have been successful at doing that. The question is, why?

“We have had a million Mississippians that have gotten the vaccine, but we have also had 320,000 Mississippians that have tested positive for the virus. Many people believe that somewhere between four and five times more people have gotten the virus that have not tested [positive].

Get the vax, win a shotgun: US states get creative to encourage vaccination
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“And so we have got probably a million or so Mississippians that have natural immunity. And because of that, there is very, very, very little virus in our state. But we’re still working to get the vaccine distributed, and hope we will continue to do so.”

Asked if he was worried unvaccinated Mississippians could be “sitting ducks” to any surge involving a virus variant, Reeves avoided the question, complaining instead about political clashes with Biden officials.

Host Jake Tapper changed tack, saying: “You seem to be arguing everybody should get vaccinated, and yet it’s not that big a deal that not everybody’s getting vaccinated. And those seem to be in conflict.”

He then asked if Reeves would agree that Mississippians should go get vaccinated.

“I would absolutely agree,” Reeves said. “I think that all Mississippians and all Americans should go get vaccinated, because I think it’s safe, I think it’s effective and I think it’s one way to continue to drive down the numbers.”

Boris Johnson

End of lockdown poses Boris Johnson one of his toughest decisions

Analysis: prime minister faces a backlash from his own MPs if he delays lifting the last of England's restrictions

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Boris Johnson receives his second dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine on Thursday. The last restrictions in England are due to be lifted on 21 June. Photograph: WPA/Getty Images

Boris Johnson receives his second dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine on Thursday. The last restrictions in England are due to be lifted on 21 June. Photograph: WPA/Getty Images

Peter Walker and *Aubrey Allegretti*
Sun 6 Jun 2021 19.00 EDT

At some point towards the end of next week Boris Johnson will make one of the trickier decisions even of this pandemic period: whether to lift the final tranche of Covid rules. Some of those watching the closest will be his own MPs.

The PM and his aides will be mindful of both the more vocal lockdown dissenters centred on the Covid Recovery Group, and also for any signs that a wider group of Tory backbenchers could be setting themselves against delay.

Conservative MPs' views about whether to shed the bulk of restrictions in England as planned on 21 June remain distinctly mixed, and there are those who say they could imagine selling the idea of a brief delay to constituents, particularly given the threat of high-transmissible Covid variants.

"If they say it's going to be 28 June, we can take that. But protecting July and August is the main thing," one said. Another accepted it might take time to limit the spread of the Delta variant: "If we need to take until 28 June or 1 July, I'm not going to die in a ditch on that."

But others sound notably less flexible and, as MPs return to Westminster following the week-long recess, Downing Street will be keenly aware of the likelihood of a backlash if they ultimately decide to slow down or limit the reopening process.

One backbencher who is not among the vocal anti-lockdown contingent said he believed most colleagues would see any slippage of the 21 June date as "unacceptable".

"Once you've vaccinated all vulnerable people you can't delay everything because of variants – viruses will continue to mutate and we have to get on with things," he said. "I don't think the PM has much political room not to release restrictions. Many of the scientists clearly will never say it is safe to reopen."

There was, the MP said, considerable mistrust of scientific advisers "who are always on the media demanding constant lockdown", and a worry that

the goalposts for safe unlocking were being moved: “And the PM knows all of this.”

Another MP said the issue had become something of a “sleeping dog” during recess, but that Johnson should not confuse a lack of noise for acquiescence to any delay. “No 10 would be silly to underestimate the strength of feeling,” they said.

Ministers have promised to provide a week’s notice of the changes, and with 14 June falling on a Monday, that leaves next week as the final opportunity for Johnson as his team to study data and solicit advice.

Some backbenchers argue that Thursday’s decision to further limit international travel because of new variants is a sign of Downing Street trying to prepare the ground as best as possible for what some newspapers have termed “freedom day”.

Another said: “If all the evidence suggests very few people are going to hospital then that will encourage the libertarian instincts of the PM. Now is the time to reap the rewards of the vaccine dividend.”

Even by normal Covid standards, both Downing Street and the health department are being notably coy about what might happen, repeatedly stressing that while nothing has happened to definitively knock the timetable off course, no decision has been made.

One MP raised the possibility of ministers going against the current England-wide approach to lift restrictions everywhere except a handful of areas where the Delta variant is most prevalent. “A small group of ultra-libertarians would oppose this, of course, but most colleagues would accept it.”

That is a balance of backbench opinion which Johnson and his team would happily accept. Whether they will achieve it remains to be seen.

IWG

Office space provider IWG says new Covid variants will push profits lower

Company hopes popularity of flexible working will help improve its profitability next year

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IWG operates 3,300 offices around the world, including these in Hong Kong. Photograph: IWG/Reuters

IWG operates 3,300 offices around the world, including these in Hong Kong. Photograph: IWG/Reuters

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Mon 7 Jun 2021 05.48 EDT

IWG, the world's largest flexible space provider, has said lockdowns and new Covid variants will push profits this year well below 2020 levels.

The company, formerly known as Regus, reported a £620m annual loss for 2020, when its finances were hit by social distancing rules, and working from home resulted in empty offices.

The UK-listed company, which is headquartered in Switzerland and operates more than 3,000 workspaces worldwide, reported strong recovery in some markets including the US. However, occupancy levels across the whole group were lower than expected because of "the prolonged impact of Covid-19, including continuing lockdown restrictions and the emergence of new variants of the virus in some markets".

"Accordingly, this will delay the anticipated recovery in our business and, given the operational gearing of the group, is expected to have a significant impact on the group's results for 2021," IWG said, adding that underlying earnings would come in "well below the level in 2020".

The news sent IWG shares fell 10% to 329p on Monday, the biggest faller in the FTSE 250 index.

IWG is banking on the increased popularity of hybrid working, as a growing list of companies allow their employees to split the week between their home and an office desk, but not necessarily inside their corporate headquarters.

The company said it was seeing "unprecedented demand" for flexible working packages, and was finalising a string of agreements. "We have an increasing pipeline of corporate customers on network-wide deals and service revenues are starting to improve," it said.

The workspace provider has signed a global deal with London-headquartered bank Standard Chartered that will allow its 95,000 workers to access IWG's 3,300 global offices, which may be closer to their homes than the lender's own sites.

Two-thirds of IWG's offices are located in suburbs and smaller towns, and one-third in bigger cities.

The firm also reached an agreement with the UK government in April that will give civil servants the chance to drop in to private office space in IWG buildings in 10 cities.

IWG, which has 300 UK offices, forecast that the easing of lockdown restrictions and the unprecedented demand for hybrid working would help improve profitability and cash generation from 2022.

2021.06.07 - Spotlight

- **‘Alice the rat was so special’ Readers on their brilliant, beloved pet tattoos**
- **David Olusoga on race and reality ‘My job is to be a historian. It’s not to make people feel good’**
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- **The pig whisperer The Dutch farmer who wants to end factory farming**

‘Alice the rat was so special’: readers on their brilliant, beloved pet tattoos

The G2 interviewDavid Olusoga

David Olusoga on race and reality: ‘My job is to be a historian. It’s not to make people feel good’

‘I care deeply about people who were mistreated in the past’ ... David Olusoga in Bristol. Photograph: Olumedia/The Guardian

‘I care deeply about people who were mistreated in the past’ ... David Olusoga in Bristol. Photograph: Olumedia/The Guardian

The professor and broadcaster discusses writing black Britishness back into history, the backlash this provokes – and why he’s so proud of his heritage

Aamna Mohdin
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Mon 7 Jun 2021 05.30 EDT

History's purpose isn't to comfort us, says David Olusoga, although many in the UK seem to think it is. "History doesn't exist to make us feel good, special, exceptional or magical. History is just history. It is not there as a place of greater safety."

As a historian and broadcaster, Olusoga has been battling this misconception for almost two decades, as the producer or presenter of TV series including Civilisations, The World's War, A House Through Time and the Bafta-winning Britain's Forgotten Slave Owners. His scholarship has been widely recognised: in 2019, he was awarded an OBE and made a professor at the University of Manchester. (He is also on the board of the Scott Trust, which owns Guardian Media Group.) Yet apologists for empire, in particular, like to dismiss him as a "woke historian" in an attempt to politicise his work or flatly deny the realities that he points out.

Now he can expect more flak, thanks to the new edition of his book Black and British: A Forgotten History.

First published in 2016, and made into a TV series the same year, the book charts black British history from the first meeting between the people of Britain and the people of Africa during the Roman period, to the racism Olusoga encountered during his own childhood, via Britain's role in the slave trade and the scramble for Africa. It is a story that some of Olusoga's critics would prefer was forgotten.

Hostility to his work has grown since the Brexit vote, shooting up "profoundly since last summer", he says, speaking over Zoom from his office in Bristol. "It has now got to the point where some of the statements being made are so easily refutable, so verifiably and unquestionably false, that you have to presume that the people writing them know that. And that must lead you to another assumption, which is that they know that this is not true, but they have decided that these national myths are so important to them and their political projects, or their sense of who they are, that they don't really care about the historical truths behind them.

"They have been able to convince people that their own history, being explored by their own historians and being investigated by their own children and grandchildren, is a threat to them."

'You have to have a real tenure in the country to play your ancestors' ... a recreation of the Empire Windrush at the opening ceremony of the London

Olympics in 2012. Photograph: Lee Jin-man/AP

For Olusoga, 51, this hostility can in part be explained by ignorance. “If you were taught a history that the first black person to put his foot on English soil was stepping off the Windrush in 1948, then this can seem like a conspiracy,” he says.

But there is a deeper issue at play. “If you have been told a version of your history and that is part of your identity, it’s very difficult when people like me come along and say: ‘There are these chapters [that you need to know about].’ People feel – wrongly in my view – that their history is being undermined by my history. But my history isn’t a threat to your history. My history is part of your history.”

When the book was published in 2016, it ended on a hopeful note. Olusoga was writing just a few years after the London Olympics, in which a tantalising view of Britain emerged – a country at ease with its multiculturalism, nodding with pride to the arrival of the Windrush generation in 1948. Black Londoners dressed up as their ancestors for the opening ceremony, “with long, baggy suits, holding their suitcases”, says Olusoga. “You have to have a real tenure in the country to play your ancestors.” That moment, he says, was profoundly beautiful.

But that upbeat note has begun to feel inaccurate – an artefact of a more optimistic time. In the new edition of Black and British, which includes a chapter on the Windrush scandal and last year’s Black Lives Matter protests, Olusoga describes that moment in 2012 as a mirage. The summer afterwards, vans bearing the message “Go home or face arrest” were driven around London as part of Theresa May’s notorious “hostile environment” strategy, aiming to make the UK inhospitable for undocumented migrants. Thousands of people who had lived legally in the UK for decades, often people who had arrived from the Caribbean as children, were suddenly targeted for deportation.

> I’m really frightened about the future of this country

In 2020, protesters in more than 260 British towns and cities took part in BLM protests, thought to be the most widespread anti-racist movement since the abolition of the slave trade. A statue of the slave trader Edward Colston was toppled in Bristol; a Guardian analysis suggests about 70 monuments to slavers and colonialists have been removed, or are in the process of being removed, across the UK.

But this movement for racial justice has been met with a severe backlash. In January, Robert Jenrick, the secretary of state for housing, communities and local government, said he would introduce laws to protect statues from what he called "baying mobs". The government's recent review on racial equality concluded controversially that there was no institutional racism in areas including policing, health and education, despite all the evidence to the contrary.

"I'm really frightened about the future of this country, and frightened about people using forces of race and racism for electoral reasons and not being cognisant about how difficult it is to control those forces after elections have been counted," says Olusoga. "I'm really frightened about the extent to which people are able to entirely dehumanise people who they deem to be their enemies in this culture war."

Olusoga was born in Lagos in 1970, to a white British mother and a Nigerian father, moving to his mother's home town, Gateshead, at an early age. As one of a handful of mixed-race families on the council estate where they lived, they were regularly terrorised by the far right. The violence culminated in a brick being thrown into the family's home, wrapped in a note demanding they be sent "back". He was 14. Eventually, the family had to be rehoused.

His early experience of education was also distressing. "I experienced racism from teachers in ways that are shocking if I tell them to young people at school now," says Olusoga. He was dyslexic, but the school refused to get him tested until he did his GCSEs: "It was the easier story to believe that this kid was stupid because all black kids are stupid." When he finally got his diagnosis and support – thanks in large part to his mother's fierce

determination – Olusoga went to study history at the University of Liverpool, followed by a master's degree at Leicester.

Olusoga was confident about having two identities, despite the prejudice he had encountered. He was proud of being a black Nigerian of Yoruba heritage and was perfectly happy being part of his mother's white working-class geordie tradition. But he has always had a third identity.

'I don't feel challenged in my right to be proud to be British' ... a statue of Edward Colston in Bristol is toppled during Black Lives Matter protests in 2020. Photograph: Keir Gravil/Reuters

"I'm also black British – and that had no history, no recognition. It was presented as impossible – a dualism that couldn't exist, because whiteness and Britishness were the same thing when I was growing up. So, to discover that there was a history of being black and British, independent from being half white working-class and being half black Nigerian, that was what was critically important to me," he says. His book does its best to uncover that history, exploring the considerable presence of black people in Britain in the age of slavery, as well as the part played by black Britons in both world wars.

He says that some of the aggression shown towards black historians who write honestly about Britain's past comes from people who think "this history is important because it gives black people the right to be here". They hold on to the belief that the UK was a "white country" until the past few decades and refuse to accept evidence that shows the presence of black people goes back centuries. But this is to fundamentally misunderstand what drives him and also why this history is important for black people.

"I don't feel challenged in my right to be proud to be British," he says. "I'm perfectly comfortable in my identity. I've looked at this history because it's just exciting to be part of a long story. This comes out of wanting to enrich life, not seeking some sort of needy validation of who I am."

He found it refreshing to see the UK's history of empire and colonialism acknowledged in last summer's anti-racist placards, with one popular slogan stating "The UK is not innocent". "A generation has emerged that doesn't need history to perform that role of comfort that its parents and grandparents did," he says.

As for black people's experiences in Britain, he says, there is a "hysterical" level of anger if you point out that many have lived in some form of slavery or unfreedom. Recently, historians have uncovered notices of runaway enslaved people or advertisements for their sale. This adds to the evidence that thousands of black people were brought to Britain, enslaved as well as free.

"It brings slavery to Britain and therefore undermines the idea that it doesn't really matter because it happened 'over there'," says Olusoga. "It short-circuits an idea of British exceptionalism. And there are a lot of people for whom that idea of exceptionalism is a part of how they see themselves. I'm really sorry that the stuff I do and that other people do is a challenge to that, but my job is to be a historian. It's not to make people feel good."

‘Go home or face arrest’ ... a van in London in 2013, part of Theresa May’s ‘hostile environment’ strategy. Photograph: Home Office/PA

Olusoga is often accused of pursuing a political agenda. He is asked, for instance, why he doesn’t speak about the Barbary slave trade of the 16th to 18th centuries, in which Europeans were captured and traded by north African pirates. He has a simple response: that he has been trying to get a programme made about it for his entire career and it is finally happening.

He gives another example: “I have been accused literally hundreds of times of ignoring the slavery suppression squadron that the Royal Navy created after 1807.” Its task was to suppress the Atlantic slave trade by patrolling the coast of west Africa. “I think the chapter in Black and British about that is 30,000 words, which is as long as some books.”

What his more extreme critics fail to understand, he adds, is that he is loyal to history and not a political agent. He remains committed to one goal: to uncover the stories of those who have long been deemed unimportant. When he wrote his first book on the 1904-08 Namibian genocide, he went to mass graves where he saw bones sticking out of the ground. “We promised the victims of that genocide that we would be their voice, we would fight for them and we would tell their story – and we use every skill we have to do that.

“I care deeply about people who were mistreated in the past. I care about the names on slave ledgers, I care about the bones of people in Africa, in mass graves in the first world war and in riverbeds in Namibia. I care about them. I think about them when I read the letters, when I look at their photographs and their faces. No one gave a damn about them. That’s my job – to care about them. And I will be ruthless in fighting for them.”

An updated edition of Black and British: A Forgotten History, with a new chapter, is published on 10 June (Picador, £12.99). To support the Guardian, order your copy at guardianbookshop.com. Delivery charges may apply.

Bob Odenkirk: ‘Soon people won’t remember Breaking Bad’

Animals farmedFarming

The pig whisperer: the Dutch farmer who wants to end factory farming

Kees Scheepens and his two favourite pigs: Borough, left, and Oma. Photograph: Judith Jockel/The Guardian

Kees Scheepens and his two favourite pigs: Borough, left, and Oma. Photograph: Judith Jockel/The Guardian

A unique ‘pig toilet’ and a diet of organic leftovers are part of former vet Kees Scheepens’ plans to put animal welfare and sustainability first

Animals farmed is supported by

About this content

Senay Boztas

Mon 7 Jun 2021 01.30 EDT

“Oma, hoi! Hier! Hallooo,” Dr Kees Scheepens, a Dutch farmer known as the “pig whisperer”, is calling his two oldest pigs for some apricot snacks.

Oma or “granny”, a seven-year-old sow, lives with a Berkshire boar called Borough, who’s nine, off a quiet lane in the town of Oirschot, in the south of the Netherlands, on a farm called Hemelrijken – Dutch for “the realms of heaven”.

Scheepens, 61, says he is the 19th generation of farmers in his family, and that after years practising as a vet, he is driven by an unusual set of ambitions: “emancipating” farm animals, putting animal welfare first, and eating far less, far happier meat.

Kees Scheepens feeds pigs with leftovers from the local organic supermarket. Photograph: Judith Jockel/The Guardian

“Borough and Oma are here to stay,” he says, squelching to his farthest field, where the two 400kg-plus animals squeeze into their shed. “I’ve given them a name and when you give a name to a pig, I cannot butcher it any more. I had three boars, David, Att and Borough. David and Att are already in heaven but ‘Bro’ is still here.”

As he walks around feeding and talking a little French to his 28 sows (according to Scheepens, “*neuf*”, is their grunt of confirmation, and “*huit*, *huit*” is them asking for more) the place seems idyllic. The pigs are fed on produce being thrown away by organic supermarket Ekoplaza: boxes of white cabbages, slightly wilted beans, veggie-balls, 500kg of Canadian lentils, overripe mangoes from Burkina Faso, hundreds of tubs of peach mango soy yoghurt, and boxes of apricots. A couple of cats and dogs wander around. Meanwhile, in a forested nature reserve area, 45 Angus cows have just calved.

Scheepens primarily raises a breed he calls the “Duke of Berkshire”, a cross of the hairy Berkshire pig and white sow, named with a nod to his years working in England. Although he raises them for meat, he is passionate

about animal welfare. “Am I rich in money? No, but I’m primarily motivated by emancipating farm animals.”

He started his pig project almost a decade ago, aiming to help bring open-air farming back to the muddy Netherlands, and pioneer a new type of barn farming.

‘Pigs are the most hygienic animals we have on the farm,’ says Scheepens, seen here explaining his system for encouraging pigs to separate their urine and poo to reduce ammonia production. Photograph: Judith Jockel/The Guardian

“Factory farming of pigs in the Netherlands is a dead end,” he says. “We now know that a pig is not a thing: it is a sentient being with a high level of intelligence, comparable with the intelligence of a child. What I see worldwide is that many pig farmers don’t know any more what pigs are about. They just don’t have the skills to know what’s right and what’s wrong.”

What’s wrong, he believes, is factory farming where cannibalistic “vices” such as tail biting replace normal pig behaviour such as rooting around for food. This leads to widespread “tail docking” in many parts of Europe to stop animals eating each other’s tails, even though the practice is banned.

Instead, Scheepens argues, pigs need a more natural environment, to be able to root around in beds of straw or wood chips and have outdoor access, with a special toilet replacing slatted floors (where urine and faeces fall through and mix).

“I would say pigs are the most hygienic animals we have on the farm,” he says. “They will not poo or pee in their nest. Pooing always goes well: their noses are so sensitive, they recognise the smell.”

> Meat has become a throwaway product, where the true value is not seen any more
>
> *Kees Scheepens*

To encourage them to urinate separately, he has created a reward system: a machine delivering lemon sour candies when their urine goes through a special floor membrane in an outside “toilet” area.

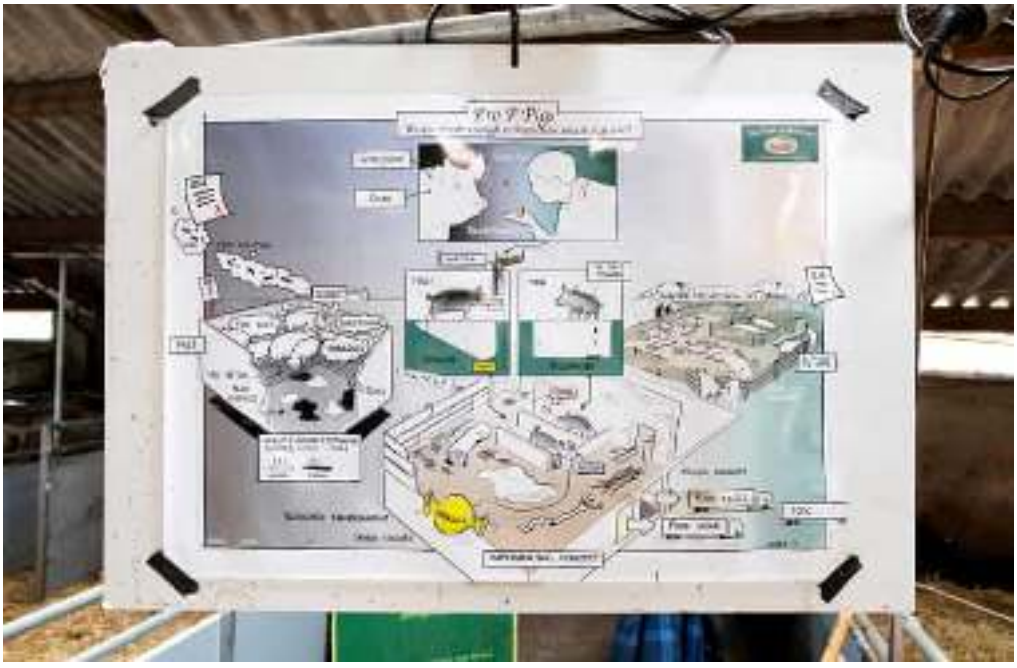
Why is peeing important for sustainable farming? “When I reward them for correct urinating, there will not be the contact between a nitrogen compound found in urine and an enzyme in the manure: that creates ammonia, and that’s one of the main factors in the [excess] nitrogen discussions [taking place] in the Netherlands.”

A pig eats a treat after urinating in the correct place. The pigs are encouraged to urinate on the dark patch in the corner of the pen. Photograph: Judith Jockel/The Guardian

Scheepens believes animal cruelty at abattoirs and intensive farms cannot last; his own turning point came after the swine flu epidemic of 1997–98, when he was forced to euthanise about 10,000 newborn piglets.

“At the time I just did my job. But later on, I developed very serious epileptic seizures. I said to myself: ‘You have euthanised healthy pigs. As a vet you are trained to cure animals that are sick or to keep animals healthy, not to butcher piglets.’”

Returning from a period working in England, during which he was diagnosed with epilepsy, he decided he wanted to be a farmer like his forebears. “I think when you want to work with animals and have them play a role in agriculture, it has to be sustainable,” he says.



A poster explaining how the ‘pig toilet’ works by preventing contact between the nitrogen compound found in urine and the enzyme urease in the manure. Photograph: Judith Jockel/The Guardian

“Meat has become a throwaway product, where the true value is not seen any more. Wouldn’t it be nice if farmers were offered an income with the

same farm and half of the animals? Sustainability can only be there in my perception when you take care of animal welfare first.”

'I feel worthless': workers tell of gruelling life in Dutch meat plants
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The Netherlands is a densely populated country, and the land is often poorly drained. So as well as outdoor farming, Scheepens wants to revolutionise animal barns so smells and emissions are reduced, and pigs can laze, eat, root and wallow as nature intended.

Happy pigs at Kees Scheepens’ farm. ‘We now know that a pig is not a thing but a sentient being with a high level of intelligence,’ he says. Photograph: Judith Jockel/The Guardian

“The last three to four generations have started using fertilisers, pesticides and going from big, bigger to biggest,” he says. “That was the societal trend in agriculture, but I think we have to become smartest. I don’t want to have a grandchild saying to me: ‘you broke that tradition of farming because you destroyed the Earth.’”

He thinks there’s no need for pig farming to stink: “I always say to farmers, you can just ignore what we gained in knowledge on animal welfare because

your barn needs to be paid off. But the mental and emotional reasons to change are huge. In every farmer, there's also a heart."

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2021.06.07 - Opinion

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- **How was my pub quiz? It reminded me of therapy – and what it feels like to lose**
- **Do aliens exist? I think we have enough on our plate already**
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OpinionNaomi Osaka

Are there limits to using celebrities to discuss race and mental health?

Nesrine Malik

Those wishing to discredit these causes point to wealth and success as incongruent with suffering

Naomi Osaka withdrew from the French Open last month because of mental health issues. Photograph: Christian Hartmann/Reuters

Naomi Osaka withdrew from the French Open last month because of mental health issues. Photograph: Christian Hartmann/Reuters

Mon 7 Jun 2021 01.00 EDT

Naomi Osaka's withdrawal from the French Open, after the tennis player was threatened with suspension for refusing to attend press conferences for the sake of her mental health, is the most recent example of the war playing

out between celebrities and the establishment, through which the public justify their own grievances.

These incidents may seem like confected media culture war events – flaring up just as quickly as they die down, and fuelled by the cheap kindling of social media, then doused by our low attention spans. But there is something more substantive about them in that they define, or give shape to, a much more significant clash between two value systems.

In one corner, there are those who ask or demand that their personal experiences and identity be respected, that they are treated better, that first and foremost, they are *believed*. In the opposing corner stand those who chafe against this new world in which people's feelings are indulged at the expense of established institutions, processes and practices – be it press conferences, university curriculums or royal protocol.

Osaka personifies two contested issues: race and mental health. Equal rights between races and the validity of mental health issues are universally accepted principles. There is no shortage of high-profile figures willing to talk about their own mental health struggles.

But still we argue over the most basic ways of showing support for these causes, such as taking the knee, or about whether we believe people's mental health claims. What is becoming clear is that there is broad consensus that racism is bad and that we need to care about mental health, but very little appetite for actually doing anything to make the world fairer or more accommodating.

Generational divides, political ideology, general ignorance and straightforward prejudice underlie this resistance to change. But there is also something in how these causes are expressed and supported that fails them. Celebrities, high-profile figures and influencers have a contradictory impact – they have a wide reach, but their wealth seems to be incongruent with the pain they are trying to highlight. You couldn't, if you tried, find less sympathetic ambassadors for the pain caused by racism or poor mental health than pop stars, royalty and the world's elite athletes. It becomes easy, then, to cast their complaints as tantrums rather than cries for help. There is no doubt a cost to being bound by the rules of a competitive world that

fetishises individual attainment and stigmatises failure. But this pain, compared with that of struggling with racism and mental health issues with no resources at all, is a difficult sell.

But this is the catch: the suffering of those without a profile or platform is also unpopular, so we are dependent on high-profile figures in order to have these debates in the first place. The centrality of celebrity is the result of a media landscape in which it is harder and harder to make money without delivering content hooked on to high-traffic individuals and lifestyles. This sugarcoating of bitter problems means we can no longer approach these issues without leavening them with glamour. As we trivialise them, we invite scepticism from audiences, exacerbating the conflict between the believers and deniers.

There is a glut of first person testimony about both racism and mental health issues, but little of that is on, for example, the barbaric treatment of ethnic-minority refugees and asylum seekers in detention; or the angst of those stuck on inhumanely long NHS waiting lists; or how the deprivations of both racism and mental health are disproportionately visited on those on lower incomes. There is a pressure, particularly on women and people of colour, to perform trauma and package it nicely for consumption and virality. The result is that we don't see that race and mental health crises are messy, intractable and tied to insoluble socioeconomic factors.

Tory MP to boycott England games in row over taking the knee
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Liberal goodwill towards causes and general cluelessness about structural remedies mean we live in a climate where we seem to be talking about these issues all the time, creating the impression of a society saturated with sympathy and solidarity, but really quite hostile to change. We are encouraged to practise self-care, but are limited in how we cater to ourselves without engaging with a system that heals us little, and harms others plenty. Our diversions, meals and shopping are delivered by those on less than minimum wage, by others on zero-hours contracts, on behalf of companies leveraging those exploitations for profit. These companies, in a sort of marketing ouroboros (in which a snake or dragon eats its own tail),

successfully co-opt the rhetoric of anti-racism or mental health awareness, while little is done to address systemic issues to which they contribute.

The gap between the focus on race and mental health and lack of action, means that if people are still vocal about tackling injustice, it is easy to paint them as whiners**.** Their critics can then position themselves as realists, leaning not on personal experience but facts, exasperatedly pointing to all the (useless) ways in which we revere and enshrine the rights of others. This is not a fair setup. Osaka's detractors may be exhibiting unfathomable cruelty, but she, and all the other victims, are also failed by those very parties that claim to support them.

- Nesrine Malik is a Guardian columnist

OpinionPubs

How was my pub quiz? It reminded me of therapy – and what it feels like to lose

Zoe Williams

We were one of only five teams fighting for four prize spots. Needless to say, it went exactly as I expected

‘Whole rounds went by where we didn’t know anything.’ (Posed by models.) Photograph: Veryan Dale/Alamy

‘Whole rounds went by where we didn’t know anything.’ (Posed by models.) Photograph: Veryan Dale/Alamy

Mon 7 Jun 2021 02.00 EDT

I am terrible at pub quizzes. But while I was waiting for one to start on Tuesday (I got the pub’s QR code mixed up with the track and trace one and spent 20 minutes trying to order a pint off the NHS), it struck me that I’m newly terrible at pubs. But there was no time for that. There was a quiz on the way.

Some people know a lot and some people know very little, while some people know almost nothing but are possessed of such miraculous confidence that they lead the rest of the team to the wrong answer, like a magnet deflecting a compass. I am that person.

Mr Z is bestowed of a huge well of obscure knowledge, but has such a depth of ignorance about useful things – sport, Eurovision, Harry Potter, DJs – that he is more of an archaic curiosity than a team member, like taking a lathe to a gun fight. Ideally, if you want the pair of us involved, and on the same team, you need substantial numbers: four people to know regular things, two

people to drown me out, and Mr Z to tell you which Welsh counties abut Powys to the west.

Instead, there were just the two of us in our team. The quizmaster had not had a gig in 14 months. There were only five teams in all, and the first 20 minutes was wiped out by a sudden-death round because two of them wanted to call themselves Nerd Immunity. I am making them sound like the losers, whereas we, in fact, had already lost. When the quizzer came over to get our name, I drew a complete blank and Mr Z said: "Don't look at me." We were thereafter known as Don't Look at Me, which, read out several times with a slightly different inflection, made us sound a bit aloof.

> 'Who, in the nursery rhyme, sat on the wall and had a great fall?' 'This is not art, or literature!' Mr Z whispered

We rattled efficiently through the issues of the day. Which band won Eurovision? Which footballer scored a large amount of goals recently? "This isn't current affairs!" Mr Z railed very quietly. "This is meaningless." Whole rounds went by where we didn't know anything. Where we did know an answer, it was because it was so easy that we could have outsourced it to one of our doughnut children. "Who, in the nursery rhyme, sat on the wall and had a great fall?" "This is not art, or literature!" Mr Z whispered with great energy. "In the musical Oklahoma, what line follows 'Oh what a beautiful morning'?" "This is not music!"

The quizzer started laughing. "Because there are so few teams," he explained, "there's only one table that isn't going to win a prize." That was when he explained his elaborate awards system: the winners would get a bottle of wine, or 20 quid, whichever they preferred. The second team would get whichever the first didn't want. The runners up would get a tenner. The losers would get the inexplicable booby prize of £6. So it was just fourth place that would go unrewarded – and there was no way we were in contention for that. "Maybe I should split the booby prize, just to be fair, and give fourth place a fiver and the losers a quid," he said. This is when I started to worry about his margins. We had each paid £2 to take part, we were 16 in total, so, whichever way you cut it, this poor guy, denied his calling for over a year, stood to make a loss.

[In lockdown, I've learned there's no substitute for a real pub quiz | Eleanor Salter]
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A couple of years ago, I started seeing a therapist. He was very heavily into metaphor, which was much more helpful than it sounds. I still refer back to it sometimes ("Think of yourselves as a chain of enzymes," he said once, when I was complaining about my family. "That explosive reaction can only happen if your enzyme locks on to their enzyme." I don't even know if that is true. Do enzymes explode? But I appreciated the principle). Anyway, midway through our therapeutic journey, he got kicked out of his consulting room and started taking clients in a high-end serviced office in central London.

I began to fixate on his margins. I was paying £60 an hour. But how much was this place charging? Had it cut him a deal? It was all I could think about. Another friend, in long-term Jungian analysis, said: "That's quite interesting: you should tell him that's what you're thinking." I said: "I could literally never have that conversation with him; I would rather self-immolate," and he said: "I'm not sure you're in the right therapeutic relationship, in that case," and then I gave it up.

In any event, by this point I didn't care who was the first US president to be impeached. I didn't even care when the only thing I actually knew – that "medieval" and "middle ages" were synonymous – was capsized by some incredibly tenacious idiot who found a page on Google claiming "dark ages", in fact, also meant the same thing. I only cared about the quizmaster's overheads. I wanted to draw him aside and say: "You know, in many quizzes, they don't do a cash prize *at all*." I bottled it, of course, and just gave him back our prize, with a kind look. It was a quid.

Zoe Williams is a Guardian columnist

OpinionUFOs

Do aliens exist? I think we have enough on our plate already

Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett

A Pentagon report on UFOs is almost here, but I'd rather not consider another looming disaster

A photograph released by the National Archives apparently showing a UFO by Stonehenge. Photograph: The National Archives/PA

A photograph released by the National Archives apparently showing a UFO by Stonehenge. Photograph: The National Archives/PA

Mon 7 Jun 2021 03.00 EDT

As a child, I loved unsolved mysteries, and I'm not talking about detective novels. I'm talking about those big, fat, cheaply printed volumes you could buy from Woolworths which anthologised everything from the Mary Celeste and the Loch Ness monster, to Kaspar Hauser to the Enfield poltergeist, throwing in the Yeti and the Moberly–Jourdain incident for good measure. I gobbled them up, as well as being an avid reader of Fortean Times and an avid watcher of the paranormal series Strange but True? – 90s television introduced me to things that a small child really has no business knowing about, such as spontaneous human combustion. The black and white image of a burned-out armchair where a person used to be, with only their charred legs remaining, will probably never leave me.

Second only to ghosts was my fascination with UFOs and aliens. The 90s was big on aliens: Alien Autopsy came out in 1995, and we children all thought it was real (it seemed as though quite a few adults did, too). And perhaps partly owing to that film, as well as Independence Day in 1996,

causing such a stir, aliens were everywhere: on TV, on T-shirts and in the playground, in the form of eggs containing goo aliens which, fevered rumours said, could actually reproduce (this has since been proved false, to almost no one's surprise).

So it's fitting that, at the same time that the 90s are fashionable again, aliens are also back in the news, with a Pentagon report on UFOs due to be released some time later this month, looking at sightings by military personnel. Some of these videos, such as the 2004 sighting by a navy pilot of a Tic Tac shaped object near San Diego, are already available online. I've watched them – because really, what else is the internet for? – but they didn't give me the same sense of wonder or excitement that I used to have as a kid. If the truth is out there, I'm not sure I'm all that bothered about hearing it.

Don't misunderstand me, I am not an incurious person, and in a way I am right in the target market for this sort of story: sort of agnostic, a bit hippy-dippy, kind of believe in ghosts in the sense that I'm likely to end any argument about their existence by saying, "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy", even though no one else seems to regard it as the trump card that I do, especially now that Cern has essentially disproved their existence.

'From hearsay to hard evidence': are UFOs about to go mainstream?
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But there's a scientific basis for aliens, which somehow makes them less exciting to the 90s child inside me. That's not to say that I don't want them to exist: like David Kestenbaum – whose contribution to the Fermi's Paradox episode of This American Life is a must listen – I get sad when I think about the prospect of all that cold, dark, empty space. And not "because we want deliverance", as the writer Sarah Jones speculated recently (I'm not convinced any alien lifeform could sort out the plague-ridden binfire that is our planet at the moment), but because the thought of human beings as the most intelligent lifeforms in the universe is very depressing, especially in 2021.

Though really we have enough to deal with at the moment, without a

potential alien invasion. The past year has been a lot: we don't need another looming disaster in the mix. Also, for a couple of years now I have had the eerie, uncanny feeling that we are in the future, and this has only been exacerbated by the dystopian feelings wreaked by the pandemic. When Elon Musk's Starlink satellites passed over London recently, appearing in the sky like a bright dotted line of stars, it felt like it was here. With technology like that in existence, strange aerial phenomena seem even more likely to have a scientific explanation these days, and while optical illusion or secret military technology are less captivating explanations, I guess that's a part of growing up.

And yet, the child who used to lie in bed, kept awake by the terrifying thought of alien abductions, wants the mystery to live on. I want the Loch Ness monster to possibly be a plesiosaur that somehow survived, and the curse of Tutankhamun to maybe exist, and ghosts to almost definitely be roaming the corridors of creepy old inns across the land.

Yet in this world of fake news and conspiracy theory, I realise my desire for mystery is no longer so innocent. It's as important to cling to rational, scientific evidence as ever. And an answer isn't always a letdown. The 1911 Moberly-Jourdain incident, which involved two British women who, while walking in the gardens at Versailles, claimed to have seen the gardens as they would have been in the 18th century, complete with the ghost of Marie Antoinette and others, seems to have a plausible explanation. Hilariously, it seems that these ladies may have stumbled upon a massive gay fancy dress party. Marie Antoinette may well have been the flamboyant aristocrat poet Robert de Montesquiou, in drag.

So sometimes, even if a paranormal-obsessed child would not agree, the logical explanation is sometimes even more pleasing than the mystery itself.

- Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett is a Guardian columnist

OpinionGlobal development

The Nobel committee should resign over the atrocities in Tigray

Kjetil Tronvoll

Members of the body that awarded the 2019 peace prize to Ethiopia's premier, Abiy Ahmed, should all depart in protest

Ethiopia's prime minister and 2019 Nobel peace prize laureate Abiy Ahmed, second from left, with members of the Norwegian awarding committee at the ceremony in 2018 in Oslo. Photograph: Erik Valestrand/Getty

Ethiopia's prime minister and 2019 Nobel peace prize laureate Abiy Ahmed, second from left, with members of the Norwegian awarding committee at the ceremony in 2018 in Oslo. Photograph: Erik Valestrand/Getty

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About this content
Mon 7 Jun 2021 04.15 EDT

The war on Tigray in Ethiopia has been going on for months. Thousands of people have been killed and wounded, women and girls have been raped by military forces, and more than 2 million citizens have been forced out of their homes. Prime minister and Nobel peace prize laureate Abiy Ahmed stated that a nation on its way to "prosperity" would experience a few "rough patches" that would create "blisters". This is how he rationalised what is alleged to be a genocide.

Nobel committee members have individual responsibility for awarding the 2019 peace prize to Abiy Ahmed, accused of waging the war in Tigray. The members should thus collectively resign their honourable positions at the Nobel committee in protest and defiance.

The committee justified awarding the Nobel to Ethiopia's premier for his "efforts to achieve peace and international cooperation, and in particular for his decisive initiative to resolve the border conflict with neighbouring Eritrea". Today, Eritrean forces, along with Ethiopia's federal and Amhara regional state forces are accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity in what Abiy characterises as a "law enforcement operation" in Tigray.

> Numerous massacres of civilians have been revealed, and rape of women and girls has been systematically carried out

The war began last November, when federal soldiers entered Tigray alongside Eritrean forces, claiming the objective was to arrest the elected regional government and leaders of the Tigray People's Liberation Front party (TPLF) for rebellion. The Tigray leadership withdrew from the regional capital, Mekelle, into the mountains, with thousands of combat-ready troops. It was clear from the outset that war was inevitable, as Tigrayans would not submit to the centralising policies of Abiy, which they believe undermine their constitutionally enshrined autonomy.

The campaign has become increasingly repugnant. The US has criticised Abiy for ethnic cleansing. Numerous massacres of civilians have been revealed, and rape of women and girls has been systematically carried out to "cleanse the blood line", as soldiers have reportedly said, and break spirits. Civil infrastructure, such as hospitals, water facilities, schools and universities have been direct targets of bombings and looting, with the aim to destroy capacity to govern.

Even worse is the humanitarian consequence. Today, 5.2 million Tigrayans, about 85% of the region's population, need aid to survive, but it is not reaching them. Food and emergency assistance from the UN and international organisations is obstructed by federal red tape and Ethiopian and Eritrean soldiers. Hundreds of thousands are in danger of dying from starvation this summer. We may soon again see images of mass death in Tigray, similar to those from the famine that took place during the Ethiopian civil war and inspired the Live Aid concert in 1985.

Human rights experts believe there is reason to declare genocide in Tigray, when analysing the political intentions behind the systematic mass murders of civilians, sexual violence and more. The patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox church has said that the government is carrying out a genocide. The final legal conclusion must however be for a future international criminal tribunal.

What then is the responsibility of the Nobel committee towards someone who uses the prize to legitimise genocidal warfare against his own people? Did they undertake a comprehensive risk assessment before giving the prize to an incumbent prime minister who was not democratically elected in a country that has always been an authoritarian state? Or is this, in hindsight, something the committee could not have foreseen?

> Last year, the Nobel committee came out in defence of the laureate, reasserting its position on the prize

Already, in early 2019, the reforms in Ethiopia and the peace process with Eritrea were known to have lost momentum. Liberal political reforms in the country were backsliding. Some also warned that the peace prize itself could destabilise rather than consolidate the region.

After the war began, I had a call from a high-ranking Ethiopian official: "I will always hold the Nobel committee responsible for destroying our country," he said. "After Abiy received the peace prize, he viewed this as a recognition of his politics and would no longer listen to objections or the dangers of recentralised power in Ethiopia."

Ethiopia's leader must answer for the high cost of hidden war in Tigray
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There is international criticism of Abiy's candidature and the committee's "non-stance" on any crimes against humanity by military forces under the command of a Nobel laureate. But the committee has stayed silent, carrying on a century's tradition of refusing to discuss the judging process. Last year, in reaction to Abiy's decision to postpone the 2020 elections indefinitely, the Nobel committee came out in defence of the laureate, reasserting its position on the prize. Now, after the outbreak of war, members of the committee remain disinclined to discuss their original assessment.

Initiatives by Ethiopian diaspora organisations to hold the Nobel committee legally liable for the award's consequences have further damaged the reputation of the Nobel prize.

On the guidelines enshrined in Nobel rules is that once a prize is awarded, it cannot be withdrawn. So how could the committee express its condemnation of the war and the politics of Abiy should it wish to? All members have an individual responsibility – it is not officially known whether any voted against. They should therefore acknowledge this, collectively resign, and let the Norwegian parliament appoint a new committee.

As a collective action, it would be perceived as taking responsibility for the error – and as a protest against the war.

At the same time, the Nobel Institute should upgrade its expertise, undertake comprehensive risk assessments and analyse relevant conflicts and contexts on which awards are based. It seems clear that procedures failed in awarding Abiy the prize.

In appointing a new committee, Norway's political parties must drop the tradition to nominate retired politicians. This would provide the much-needed arm's length between the prize and the Norwegian political elite. International members should be brought in, with expertise in what the prize is actually about: war and peace, international law, human rights. The Nobel name carries international weight and a committee with world-class capabilities should protect it.

- Kjetil Tronvoll is professor of peace and conflict studies at Norway's Bjørknes University College, Oslo

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Economics viewpointG7

G7 deal is as much about balance of power as global tax reform

Richard Partington

The real story includes the reconciling of domestic interests with international demands

Representatives for the G7 finance ministers' meeting, including the UK chancellor, Rishi Sunak (centre), at Lancaster House, London. Photograph: Henry Nicholls/AFP/Getty Images

Representatives for the G7 finance ministers' meeting, including the UK chancellor, Rishi Sunak (centre), at Lancaster House, London. Photograph: Henry Nicholls/AFP/Getty Images

Sun 6 Jun 2021 11.10 EDT

A historic agreement has been reached. For decades, multinational corporations have abused gaps in an international tax system that has barely changed since agreements made at the League of Nations in the 1920s.

After meetings in London at the weekend, the message from the G7 group of wealthy nations is clear: time is up on tax havens. In a landmark move, a global minimum rate of corporation tax has been agreed, alongside measures forcing large firms and online tech giants such as Facebook, Apple and Google to pay more tax in the markets where they make their money regardless of physical presence.

Much remains to be hammered out – in a process likely to take several years before a single extra pound, dollar, euro or yen has been handed over – but a clear direction of travel has been set.

Despite the historic milestone, the London agreement is about far more than just tax. That will become clearer when Boris Johnson, Joe Biden and the other heads of G7 governments meet at Carbis Bay in Cornwall later this week.

> For Rishi Sunak, it was about sending a message that post-Brexit Britain still holds sway in the world

As with most global negotiations, the real story is about who holds the balance of power and the reconciling of domestic interests with international demands. For the G7 – made up of the US, Canada, UK, Germany, France, Italy and Japan – it is no different.

For Rishi Sunak, hosting the meeting of finance ministers as the UK holds the rotating G7 presidency, it was about sending a message that post-Brexit Britain still holds sway in the world. Sources close to the talks said initial UK reluctance to back the Biden plan for a global minimum tax rate centred on dragging Washington closer to trade talks. There were concerns within the Tory party to manage over-sacrificing tax sovereignty, while the chancellor wanted to haggle better terms to raise more tax for Britain from big US tech companies.

Despite attempting to drive a hard bargain, it is unclear what, if anything, Sunak managed to extract beyond headlines suggesting Britain is an awkward ally. Washington had also made it clear exactly where the balance of power lies: threatening to impose punitive tariffs on the UK and EU countries if they didn't drop their unilateral digital services taxes.

Britain, France and several other countries have used these digital taxes on US tech firms as a stopgap measure until a global deal is implemented, raising hundreds of millions for their national exchequers. Although Washington had demanded their immediate removal – in a likely sticking point for future progress – a specific agreement for a global minimum rate of "at least" 15% shows that such hurdles can be overcome.

For Biden, a global minimum tax is core to his economic agenda as he attempts to raise more revenue to fund a $1.9tn (£1.3tn) Covid recovery

plan. The president is likely to face stiff opposition from Republicans in Congress, which could derail further progress. Reaching a deal between the world's most powerful economies helps to strengthen his bargaining power.

For the EU nations – Germany, France and Italy – it was about a display of unity to the rest of the bloc. Ironic for a deal agreed in London six months from Brexit, this was a moment to forge closer EU integration.

The fragile European project is incomplete without closer coordination on tax, as the sovereign debt crisis of a decade ago brutally exposed. Several member states apply corporate tax rates below 15%, including Ireland, Hungary and Cyprus. The bloc's biggest powers view such tax dumping as incompatible with EU ideals.

Brussels requires unanimity on tax changes, making this a key issue for the tax reform becoming a reality. But in reaching a deal in London, the EU's finance ministers hope they can build unstoppable momentum.

Several other key details remain to be overcome. There are concerns that a stitch-up between the G7 will benefit the western powers most, at the expense of lower-income countries in the global south. Talks will progress to the G20 in Italy next month when other big nations – including Russia, China, India and Brazil – will join negotiations, before haggling between 135 nations at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, with an aim to reach a global deal by October.

It is for this reason that the G7 agreement is a point on the road rather than the final destination. It will be several years before a deal is implemented. However, issuing a unanimous agreement is designed to build enough momentum to bulldoze the rest of the world into line after years of stalling progress.

There were also wider political and economic motives. After the chaos of the Trump years, a message is being sent to China, Russia and the rest of the world that the west is back in business. G7 finance ministers fear Beijing wants to do away with the old rules of the global economy dating back to Bretton Woods, seeking to replace it with a system benefiting China.

Reaching a deal in London is designed to signal that the western powers are once more willing and able to dictate the rules in the 21st century.

Guardian business email sign-up

In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, and after decades of neoliberal politics lining the pockets of the few rather than the many, the underlying message of the G7 deal is also about reasserting the power of government over big business. Sources close to the talks said there was broad agreement that, for now at least, soaring budget deficits incurred during the pandemic matter far less than a sustainable recovery – raising the prospect that big state economics will be a lasting legacy of the pandemic.

Tears are being shed on the neoliberal right that the western powers are killing-off vital competition between nations by agreeing a minimum tax rate. The free-market Adam Smith Institute argues the Americans fought a revolution to ensure their tax rates weren't set in Westminster without representation. They awaken now in horror to find the British have agreed, on their own turf, to have their tax rates set by Washington.

This might sound like the last kick of a dying ideology that has held sway for four decades, but it is an argument likely to stir low-tax Tories.

However, public opinion after the pandemic has shifted to the point where these concerns are irreconcilable. Long before Covid-19 no one could understand why the biggest companies paid less tax because of loopholes in the system of international tax – a system built on neoliberal ideals.

Before the crisis it was difficult to understand; after the crisis it is impossible to accept.

2021.06.07 - Around the world

- Exclusive Global G7 deal may let Amazon off hook on tax, say experts
- Pakistan train crash Dozens killed as express services collide
- ‘Hero of Auschwitz’ David Dushman, last surviving liberator of death camp, dies aged 98
- China Banks urged to divest from firms linked to deforestation
- Supermarkets Tesco and Carrefour to end three-year alliance

Amazon

Global G7 deal may let Amazon off hook on tax, say experts

Exclusive: communique from ministers suggests deal only applies to ‘profit exceeding a 10% margin’, which could rule out Amazon

Finance ministers in London from the G7 group of wealthy nations on Saturday agreed a deal aimed at making the biggest companies such as Apple, Microsoft, Google and Facebook pay more tax. Photograph: David Becker/AFP/Getty Images

Finance ministers in London from the G7 group of wealthy nations on Saturday agreed a deal aimed at making the biggest companies such as Apple, Microsoft, Google and Facebook pay more tax. Photograph: David Becker/AFP/Getty Images

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Sun 6 Jun 2021 16.23 EDT

Experts have raised concerns that Amazon may escape paying significantly more tax in some of its biggest markets unless world leaders close a large loophole in a historic global deal.

Finance ministers in London from the G7 group of wealthy nations, including representatives of the UK, US and EU, on Saturday agreed the landmark deal aimed at making the biggest companies such as Apple, Microsoft, Google and Facebook pay more tax.

The two "pillars" of the deal would make companies pay a percentage of their profits in markets where they make large sales despite minimal corporate presence, as well as setting an unprecedented global minimum corporation tax.

However, a communique from G7 ministers said that they envisaged pillar one would only apply on "profit exceeding a 10% margin for the largest and most profitable multinational enterprises", a restriction that could rule out Amazon.

Amazon is one of the largest businesses in the world, with a market value of $1.6tn (£1.1tn) and sales of $386bn in 2020. A Luxembourg subsidiary paid zero corporation tax in 2020 on sales income from across Europe of €44bn (£38bn), making Amazon a prominent target for politicians campaigning for changes to the global tax system.

However, its profit margin in 2020 was only 6.3%. It runs its online retail business at very low profit margins, partly because it reinvests heavily, and partly to gain market share.

Richard Murphy, visiting professor of accounting at the Sheffield University management school, said the 10% profits threshold was "inappropriate" because of different business models for different companies. He added that current approaches to reporting profits in each country were "easily gamed".

"This could turn out to be a false hope unless they get the detail right," he said.

The G7 deal aimed to give momentum to talks at the larger G20 group of nations, followed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), a club of mainly wealthy nations that has led tax negotiations for a decade. Campaigners said they hoped the later negotiations would include an approach known as "segmentation", meaning profitable parts of businesses would pay tax in their own right.

"Based on the communique Amazon is not captured," said Paul Monaghan, chief executive of the Fair Tax Foundation, which accredits businesses that do not avoid tax. "If there's another layer of detail that suggest Amazon will be captured that's great, but it hasn't emerged yet."

Janet Yellen, the US Treasury secretary, on Saturday told the Reuters news agency that she expected Facebook and Amazon to be covered by the proposal.

"It will include large profitable firms and those firms, I believe, will qualify by almost any definition," she said.

A segmentation approach would mean a company like Amazon would pay tax in countries such as the UK on profits of subsidiaries such as Amazon Web Services, its lucrative web hosting arm. AWS made a margin of 30% in 2020, according to the Fair Tax Foundation.

The US tech firm ended 2020 with more than $13.5bn in annual operating profits from annual AWS revenue of $45.4bn, up nearly 30% year on year.

Sources said that while the G7 sealed an over-arching agreement, details about how to carve up the revenues of big corporations into their constituent parts for tax purposes had yet to be agreed.

It is possible that some businesses will be able to rejig their operations to offset profits against loss-making units to remain under the 10% threshold, unless tough rules are in place.

Alex Cobham, chief executive of Tax Justice Network, said: "If the OECD cannot ensure Amazon is in scope, not only will it fail to meet the public

demand for fairness here, it will also offer a blueprint for other major multinationals to escape this element of the reform."

Guardian business email sign-up

Work is under way by the OECD under the banner of its inclusive framework to resolve how companies should be taxed ahead of a meeting by the G20 groups of countries in July that is expected to ratify the G7 deal.

It is expected that 135 countries that have signed up to the OECD scheme will benefit from extra tax revenues from large corporations.

George Turner, director of TaxWatch UK, a thinktank, said it would be vital to ascertain whether tech companies would pay more UK tax overall, after the UK and other nations including France conceded that they will remove unilateral digital services taxes that aimed to target big tech.

"It could be taking with one hand and giving with the other," Turner said.

Facebook, the social network company, on Saturday said it believed it will pay more tax. However, Amazon was unable to say whether it expected to pay more tax.

An Amazon spokesperson said: "We believe an OECD-led process that creates a multilateral solution will help bring stability to the international tax system. The agreement by the G7 marks a welcome step forward in the effort to achieve this goal. We hope to see discussions continue to advance with the broader G20 and Inclusive Framework alliance."

Pakistan

Pakistan train crash: dozens killed as express services collide

At least 45 people killed and up to 100 passengers injured after derailing of Millat Express

00:52

Dozens killed after two trains collide in Pakistan – video report

Associated Press in Multan
Mon 7 Jun 2021 11.27 EDT

At least 45 people have been killed and more than 100 injured in a pre-dawn crash between two express trains in Pakistan, as rescuers and villagers worked throughout the day to pull survivors and the dead from the crumpled carriages.

Cries for help pierced the night as passengers climbed out of overturned or crushed rail cars and local people rushed to the scene in the district of Ghotki, in the southern province of Sindh. Heavy machinery arrived around 15 hours after the crash to cut open carriages to rescue people still believed to be trapped, though hopes were fading for survivors. The military deployed troops and helicopters to assist.

The Millat Express train had derailed at about 3.30am and the Sir Syed Express train hit it minutes later, said Usman Abdullah, a deputy commissioner of Ghotki. It wasn't immediately clear what had caused the derailment, and the driver of the second train said he had braked when he had seen the derailed train but had not had time to avoid the collision.

"The challenge for us is to quickly rescue those passengers who are still trapped in the wreckage," said Umar Tufail, a police chief in the district. The

death toll steadily rose through the day, reaching at least 45, according to Abdullah.

He said the chances of finding survivors was diminishing but lighting had been brought in to allow rescuers to work into the night if needed.

Officials said more than 100 passengers were injured, and those with critical injuries would be brought by helicopter to a nearby city's hospital. According to railway officials, about 1,100 passengers were onboard the two trains.

map

Azam Swati, the minister for railways, said engineers and other experts were trying to determine what had caused the collision, and all aspects would be examined, including the possibility of sabotage.

According to local media, some of the passengers were travelling on the Millat Express to attend a wedding party. It was unclear whether they were among the dead or injured.

TV footage showed ambulances taking passengers to hospital. According to Pakistani TV stations, heavy machinery had not reached the scene about four hours after the crash.

Pakistan's prime minister expressed sorrow over the tragedy. Imran Khan tweeted that he had asked the railway minister to supervise the rescue work and also ordered an investigation.

Aijaz Ahmed, the driver of the Sir Syed Express, told Geo News TV that he had tried his best to avoid the derailed train by braking but his attempts failed.

Overturned carriages at the scene of the crash. Photograph: AP

Mohammad Amin, one of the passengers on the Millat Express being treated in hospital for minor injuries, said that before the train had departed from the southern port city of Karachi, he and his brother, who was also on the train, had seen railway mechanics working on one of the coaches.

That led them to believe there was something wrong with it but they were reassured all was fine. The train car that was being worked on was the one that later derailed, Amin claimed.

Habibur Rehman Gilani, the chairman of Pakistan Railways, told Geo News TV that the section of track where the collision had taken place was old and needed replacing. He did not elaborate.

Train accidents are common in Pakistan, where successive governments have paid little attention to improving the poorly maintained signal system and ageing tracks.

In 1990, a packed passenger train struck a standing freight train in the south, killing 210 people in the worst rail disaster in the country’s history.

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Germany

‘Hero of Auschwitz’ David Dushman, last surviving liberator of death camp, dies aged 98

Red Army soldier David Dushman used his T-34 Soviet tank to mow down the electric fence of the Nazi death camp

As a young Red Army soldier, David Dushman, seen here aged 92, flattened the forbidding fence around the notorious Nazi death camp with his tank on 27 January, 1945. Photograph: Markus Schreiber/AP

As a young Red Army soldier, David Dushman, seen here aged 92, flattened the forbidding fence around the notorious Nazi death camp with his tank on 27 January, 1945. Photograph: Markus Schreiber/AP

Agence France-presse
Sun 6 Jun 2021 20.47 EDT

David Dushman, the last surviving soldier who took part in the liberation of the Nazi death camp at Auschwitz in 1945, has died at the age of 98.

He died in a Munich clinic on Friday night, the city's Jewish IKG cultural community said on Sunday, describing him as a liberating "hero of Auschwitz".

Dushman, a Red Army soldier who later became an international fencer, used his T-34 Soviet tank to mow down the electric fence of Auschwitz in Nazi-occupied Poland on 27 January, 1945, helping to set prisoners in the death camp free.

First-hand stories shed new light on Nazi death marches
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"We hardly knew anything about Auschwitz," he said, recounting that day in an interview in 2015 with Sueddeutsche daily. But he saw "skeletons everywhere".

"They staggered out of the barracks, sat and lay among the dead. Terrible. We threw them all our canned food and immediately went on to hunt down the fascists," he said.

Only after the end of the war did he learn about the scale of the atrocities in the camp.

Of the six million Jews killed in the Holocaust, more than a million were murdered at Auschwitz-Birkenau, most in its notorious gas chambers, along with tens of thousands of others including homosexual people, Roma and Soviet prisoners of war.

Dushman was one of 69 soldiers in his division who survived the war, but he suffered serious injuries.

Nevertheless, he went on to become a top fencer in the Soviet Union and later one of the world's greatest fencing coaches, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) said in a brief statement.

IOC chief Thomas Bach voiced sadness about Dushman's death. "When we met in 1970, he immediately offered me friendship and counsel, despite Mr Dushman's personal experience with world war two and Auschwitz, and he being a man of Jewish origin," said Bach, who is German.

"This was such a deep human gesture that I will never, ever forget it," added the IOC president.

Up to four years ago, he was still going almost daily to his fencing club there to give lessons, the IOC said.

China

Chinese banks urged to divest from firms linked to deforestation

China funnelling billions into harmful production of beef, soy and palm oil, says campaign group

A durian plantation in Malaysia where forest has been cleared to meet soaring demand from China. Photograph: Mohd Rasfan/AFP/Getty

A durian plantation in Malaysia where forest has been cleared to meet soaring demand from China. Photograph: Mohd Rasfan/AFP/Getty

Vincent Ni China affairs correspondent
Mon 7 Jun 2021 02.54 EDT

Campaigners have called on Chinese banks to stop funding overseas agribusinesses that accelerate deforestation and biodiversity loss and have a negative impact on regional water cycles and climate.

In a report, the campaign group Global Witness said Chinese banks were funnelling billions into global agribusinesses, becoming some of the biggest global financiers of deforestation.

The report found that, between January 2013 and April 2020, Chinese financial institutions provided more than $22.5bn to major companies that produce and trade commodities at high risk of driving deforestation. They include beef, soy, palm oil, paper, pulp, rubber and timber.

Five of China's biggest commercial banks have provided $10.25bn, according to the report. The research shows they constitute 45% of all the financing provided by China's financial institutions. Global Witness has urged Chinese financiers to undertake more rigorous checks on companies they engage with overseas.

The analysis is based on publicly available data produced by Forests & Finance, a coalition of non-governmental organisations. In April, the consortium wrote in a separate report that since the Paris Agreement, from January 2016 to April 2020, Chinese banks have become the second largest financier of commodities related to tropical rainforest deforestation.

Chart

Global Witness has previously exposed how big European and American banks finance some of the world's most harmful agribusinesses linked to global deforestation. But as China is in the process of revising its law for commercial banks amid its growing demand for commodities, the campaign group has seized on the opportunity to call for change.

"If the revised law was to take note of the problems we have exposed, and include mandatory requirements to ensure Chinese banks are not financing environmentally or socially harmful businesses, it would be a real game-changer in addressing China's links to global deforestation, biodiversity loss and climate change," said Yin Beibei, the group's senior forest campaigner.

China is one of the world's largest consumers of agricultural commodities. In Brazil, for example, Beijing's huge demand for beef and soy has resulted in it being Brasília's largest consumer of both commodities.

After tracking 10 major soy traders and meatpackers using satellite imagery, the environment group Mighty Earth found that the five companies that received most financing from Chinese banks for both commodities were linked to deforestation and land clearance.

Last month, the Guardian reported that three of the world's biggest food businesses have been accused of buying soy from a farmer linked to illegal deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon. Scientists have been alarmed by the scale of the degradation.

Some point to the loosening of regulations in host countries and say it increases the need for Chinese banks to do their own due diligence. In Brazil, for example, President Jair Bolsonaro has been accused of undertaking an unprecedented dismantling of environmental protection policies.

"Chinese and other international investors cannot rely on Brazilian authorities to protect their exposure to the deforestation risks associated with Brazilian agribusiness finance, along with the risks this carries to their reputations," said Robert Soutar, the managing editor of Diálogo Chino, a specialist environment issue publication focusing on China and Latin America.

"Since the government is not adequately protecting the environment in Brazil, private players should take the lead," he added.

Chart

According to Global Witness, Chinese banks have also provided $31.8m of financing to two US agribusiness companies for their palm oil operations. Last year, the campaign group found that both companies sourced from Indonesian palm oil mills that have been accused of violating local community land rights and contributing to environmental degradation.

Recent reports highlighting the role of Chinese banks came amid president Xi Jinping's push to show China's leadership in tackling climate change. Beijing has pledged for its emission to peak by 2030, and to be carbon neutral by 2060. Campaigners urge Beijing to match its rhetoric with action.

“With President Xi’s bold commitment on climate, China needs to put its money where its mouth is by ensuring that Chinese banks are not financing agribusiness that fuels deforestation, the climate crisis and biodiversity loss,” said Yin.

Additional reporting by Jason Lu

Tesco

Supermarket groups Tesco and Carrefour to end three-year alliance

UK retailer denies Brexit influenced the decision to scrap link-up, which was intended to cut costs

Tesco struck its alliance with French counterpart Carrefour in 2018. Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

Tesco struck its alliance with French counterpart Carrefour in 2018. Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

Kalyeena Makortoff
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Mon 7 Jun 2021 03.53 EDT

Tesco and the French supermarket group Carrefour have announced the end of a three-year alliance that was meant to lead to greater choice and lower prices for customers.

The purchasing agreement between the two retail powerhouses, struck in 2018, was expected to strengthen relationships with suppliers, expand ranges of their own-label products and cut prices for certain products by pooling their buying power. However, the decision to part ways suggests the alliance did not offer strong enough savings to warrant an extension beyond 31 December.

In a statement released on Monday, the two supermarket groups said they had "benefited from a number of joint buying opportunities". However, "both companies have agreed that they will continue this work independently and focus on their own opportunities, building on the experience and the progress made during the alliance period".

While concerns have been raised about the rising cost of food imports because of Brexit, a spokesperson for Tesco denied that the UK's departure from the EU had influenced the decision to scrap the partnership.

Tesco's shares were trading higher by 0.5% at 226p on Monday morning.

Clive Black, a retail analyst at Shore Capital, said the statement suggested there was little to gain from Tesco and Carrefour's partnership. "For whatever reason, regulatory, cultural, and operational, there would appear to be little notable benefit from the alliance on an ongoing basis," he said.

Black added that the move was not a great surprise, given that other attempts to pool buying power had delivered minimal gains. "In truth, the outcome is far from clear or impressive for major players; apart from bananas, it was not especially evident in food for Asda in the UK being part of Walmart, never mind other buying groups," he said.

But despite the failed alliance, Black said Carrefour and Tesco could eventually benefit from a formal merger, if executives were willing to take the plunge. "Their respective categories and geographies remain very complementary, especially given Tesco's retrenchment over the past decade, with the British Isles remaining an efficient and substantial market of approaching 70 million shoppers," he said.

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