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Labour set for huge election defeat in Hartlepool, internal polling suggests

Exclusive: Party's own figures show only 40% of previous supporters pledge to back its candidate this time



Labour leader Keir Starmer, left, with the party's candidate Paul Williams in Hartlepool on Saturday. Photograph: Ian Forsyth/PA

Labour leader Keir Starmer, left, with the party's candidate Paul Williams in Hartlepool on Saturday. Photograph: Ian Forsyth/PA

[Josh Halliday](#) *North of England correspondent*

Tue 4 May 2021 12.50 EDT

Fewer than half of recent [Labour](#) voters in Hartlepool say they will back the party in Thursday's crucial byelection, according to internal data based on the canvassing of more than 10,000 people, leading activists to fear a historic Conservative victory.

Labour insiders said polling from its ground campaign in the town showed only about 40% of the party's previous supporters had pledged to vote for its candidate, Paul Williams.

Such an outcome would deal a significant blow to Keir Starmer's leadership and a decisive Conservative win in a north-east England seat that has elected a Labour MP at every parliamentary election since 1964.

Labour sources said they were in "huge trouble" in Hartlepool and also in danger of losing control of Sunderland and Durham councils for the first time in half a century. Voters across England, Scotland and Wales will go to the polls on what has been dubbed "Super Thursday", in the biggest set of local and devolved parliament elections since 1973.

Hartlepool is the backdrop for the [first byelection](#) since Boris Johnson's landslide victory in December 2019. It is seen as a key test of Labour's appeal to its traditional heartlands, just over a year after Starmer became leader with a pledge to rebuild the "red wall".

The mood among some Labour figures in Hartlepool was "pretty desperate", sources said. Internal data from six weeks of campaigning shows that just over 40% of previous party supporters have said they will vote for the party again this week. The figure is what is known as a "promise rate" – who people say they will vote for – and is based on the canvassing of more than 10,000 people in the town, most of whom have recently voted Labour.

"If we were knocking on every single door and getting 40%, we could win it, depending on how it splits. But we're only getting about 40% of people who we think are Labour, so it's not great," said one insider.

Labour is defending a narrow 3,595-vote majority in a town it has held [since Harold Wilson was in Downing Street](#) nearly 60 years ago. In 2019, its candidate Mike Hill crept to victory after the Brexit party took 25% of the vote and split the pro-leave electorate. Hill is standing down over sexual harassment allegations, which he denies.

A generational shift in political allegiances has seen neighbouring constituencies fall one by one to the Conservatives – six in the last general

election alone – and post-industrial areas across England now form the bedrock of Johnson’s 80-seat majority in the Commons.

Williams, a local GP and former MP for neighbouring Stockton South, has sought to convince Hartlepudlians to give Labour another chance, arguing that the party is under new leadership both locally and nationally. He [told the Guardian](#) last month that its challenge was to convince people to trust Labour.

Labour’s ground campaign has been more visible than the Tories’ – Williams appears on billboards and posters throughout the town centre – but morale among some full-time activists has been subdued in part because many are being let go by the party after polling day.

It is understood that about 90 members of staff are due to leave the party after the elections. Most of those leaving are on two-year trainee contracts but they are the clipboard-carrying organisers that are crucial during election campaigns.

One Labour fixer said that about half of the Hartlepool ground team was due to leave following Thursday’s votes as a cost-saving measure. “It’s not great for morale,” she said. “We would’ve made money at party conference to pay for these elections but of course they were cancelled. We haven’t got the small donors that Corbyn brought and haven’t got the big donors that [Tony] Blair had. We’re trapped between the two worlds.”

Labour said it would not comment on staffing issues or canvassing data.

The Conservatives’ hopes of winning the seat were given a further boost on Tuesday when a new poll by Survation gave them a 17-point lead over Labour. However both parties played down the findings, pointing out that it was based on [telephone interviews](#), with only 301 people likely to vote once undecideds were removed.

The prime minister was in Hartlepool for a third time at the weekend in an attempt to rally support for its candidate, the low-key North Yorkshire farmer Jill Mortimer, who is odds-on favourite to win at the bookmakers.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/may/04/internal-polling-suggests-labour-heading-for-defeat-in-hartlepool-by-election>

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Local elections

Local elections: Labour must take advantage of changing demographics

Analysis: party allegiances are shifting all over England and Keir Starmer has to ensure he makes the most of favourable trends



While London is seen as a lost cause by Tories owing to Sadiq Khan's popularity, Labour under Keir Starmer is struggling to eat into the Conservatives' share in the north of England. Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA

While London is seen as a lost cause by Tories owing to Sadiq Khan's popularity, Labour under Keir Starmer is struggling to eat into the Conservatives' share in the north of England. Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA

[Jessica Elgot](#) *Deputy political editor*

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Tue 4 May 2021 14.59 EDT

Just five years ago, London was a key political battleground and County Durham was a Labour heartland. But since [Boris Johnson](#) swapped City Hall for Downing Street, those situations appear to have reversed, with the capital a key base for the party.

Labour's voters in London, however, could soon be leaving. And its hopes for long-term electoral gains hinge not just on winning back seats lost to the Conservatives in northern England, where the [party is likely to suffer even further](#) in Thursday's elections, but on appealing to new, younger voters in the south priced out of popular cities.

Starmer's office will be closely watching a number of southern races for signs of green shoots which, if absent, might indicate that [Labour](#) has a bigger problem – that it is failing to capitalise in areas where demographics are moving in its favour.

One key race is the West of England mayoralty, where there are hopes that former Labour MP Dan Norris can take the seat off the Tories, whose incumbent is retiring. If they do, it will be a promising sign that the strong Labour vote in [Bristol](#), a fairly recent resurgence, is growing still – as well as in its commuter towns.

“This is the race that is going to show that Labour have a chance of making this kind of shift happen,” said Chris Curtis, senior research manager at Opinium.

Labour will hope to regain its majority in Crawley after two councillors quit to put the West Sussex council into no overall control. Control of the jointly managed Adur and Worthing councils on the south coast is also in the balance and even modest Labour gains would be promising as part of a long-term south coast strategy. Key targets are East Worthing, Shoreham and Worthing West.

Even places where Labour will not win overall are being watched for signs they could be part of a national election strategy. One contest mentioned by Labour aides is the Devon and Cornwall police and crime commissioner race, where the party is hoping to see evidence it is gaining voters in that area.

London is now viewed by the [Conservatives](#) as essentially as a lost cause to Sadiq Khan's people's republic, an attitude that has irritated Tories in the capital who point out their party still managed decent results in the 2018 elections.

If Khan's dominance starts a trend, there are at least eight seats in [London](#) alone that Labour should hope to gain at the next election – including Johnson's seat in Uxbridge.

“There are short memories here,” one Tory MP said. “The dominance of Labour in London is not historic. The Tories literally held Brighton Kemptown until 2017. We have to keep an eye on the seats Blair managed to win – and the seats where he came close and where the demographics have kept on changing favourably for Labour. So seats in Hertfordshire like Welwyn and Stevenage.”

There are already concrete signs of a shift in the south, which Labour knows it must exploit. Portsmouth South, where Labour finished third even in 1997, it has now won twice, a change that has little to do with converting Conservatives and far more to do with the opening of a university campus.

One Labour adviser said: “Over the last two years, lots and lots of people have moved out of London. That will have been accelerated by Covid. We read a lot about the red wall. No one has gone to Wycombe to find out what is driving down Steve Baker's majority.”

[Labour's advance in national polls](#), which has recently been draining away, has never been at the expense of the Conservatives, instead coming almost exclusively from poaching the Liberal Democrat vote. In some areas, like St Albans, which the Lib Dems won in 2019, this could benefit the Conservatives. In others, it could start to see Labour challenge for seats in Somerset, Hampshire and Cornwall.

“The south-west has voters in quite a progressive, even radical tradition. They used to go Lib Dem,” one Tory MP observed. “Now they don't really have anyone to vote for. A Labour party who wants to win nationally has to take those votes. They have to run Jacob Rees-Mogg [in North West Somerset] close.”

None of this is a replacement for winning back northern English seats, but would have to be done in addition to that, as well as making significant gains from the SNP in Scotland. Overall, Labour aides are braced for a punishing night in Thursday's local and devolved elections, even beyond the totemic Hartlepool byelection where the media narrative has been focused.

Key councils like Bolton and Durham are likely to move from Labour to having no overall control. Labour will say that many of the most difficult results will come in councils like Sunderland where there have been no elections since 2016, an electoral lifetime ago in terms of political events, meaning the seats there have yet to shift definitively along with the national picture.

Curtis said Labour should not automatically view that result as an indication things are getting worse for the party: "There has been a significant realignment since those places last voted and many will just be catching up on that realignment.

"The next Labour party that wins a national election is not going to win back all of the red wall, it is not going to win back all of Scotland, or all the southern seats it could win, it will do a little bit of everything, and it will probably involve seats like Bournemouth and High Wycombe."

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Labour

Keir Starmer plays down Labour hopes for 6 May elections

Leader says he has a ‘mountain’ to climb after 2019 general election but will take ‘full responsibility’



Keir Starmer visits Seaton Carew in the Hartlepool constituency earlier this month. Photograph: Ian Forsyth/PA

Keir Starmer visits Seaton Carew in the Hartlepool constituency earlier this month. Photograph: Ian Forsyth/PA

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Tue 4 May 2021 05.49 EDT

Keir Starmer has sought to manage expectations ahead of what he admitted will be a “very important set of elections for [Labour]”, but promised he would take “full responsibility” for his party across the country.

The Labour leader is fighting to rebuild the party and prove that, just [over a year since taking over from Jeremy Corbyn](#), he is changing its profile with voters enough to switch from opposition to government at the next general election – in no more than three years' time.

On Thursday 6 May there will be elections for mayors, police and crime commissioners, and local councils across England, as well as national elections for the Scottish and Welsh parliaments, not to mention two MP byelections.

With many of the races delayed by a year due to the coronavirus pandemic, the bumper set of elections has proved tough for political parties to mobilise grassroots support and decide where to focus their energy.

Starmer said Labour's performance across the UK on Thursday would be a reflection on his leadership, and promised: "I take full responsibility for the results, just as I take full responsibility for everything that happens in the [Labour](#) party under my leadership."

He told BBC Radio 4's Today programme that ["I hope we don't lose" Hartlepool](#), which strongly backed Brexit and has been gradually slipping away from Labour for years. He said he had been in the constituency recently "fighting for every vote" in its byelection.

He added that he had a "mountain" to climb to restore Labour's standing with voters, following the party's performance at the 2019 general election under Corbyn.

"I don't think anybody realistically thought it was possible to turn the Labour party round from the worst general election result since 1935 to a position to win the next general election within a period of one year – it was always going to take longer than that," he said.

A new poll by Survation of 301 people likely to vote with undecideds removed has put the Conservatives on 50% in Hartlepool, with Labour trailing on 33%.

Although it was carried out from 23-29 April, meaning some respondents were quizzed before the [Electoral Commission announced it was launching a formal investigation over Boris Johnson's "cash for curtains" Downing Street flat funding row](#), the poll gave a further boost to Conservative hopes that their challenge to dismantle the "red wall" of Labour strongholds was not over.

Starmer said he had tried to lead a "constructive opposition" because people wanted to see political leaders "being prepared to have the confidence" to work together. But he insisted he had highlighted government sleaze and ministers' failure to distribute enough protective equipment to health and social care workers, as well as having been "highly critical" of the time taken to ramp up coronavirus testing.

Reflecting on his past year as leader, Starmer also said he was "frustrated" he had not been able to meet voters properly, shake their hands and deliver speeches to rallies packed with people, given Covid restrictions, but that he had a "burning desire to change our country for the better".

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London

Scrap Thames tunnel or lose our support, activists tell Sadiq Khan

Campaigners and Labour youth groups urge London mayor to shelve plan for £2bn Silvertown tunnel



An Extinction Rebellion protest in August 2020 against the planned Silvertown tunnel. Photograph: Tolga Akmen/AFP/Getty Images

An Extinction Rebellion protest in August 2020 against the planned Silvertown tunnel. Photograph: Tolga Akmen/AFP/Getty Images

[Matthew Taylor](#)

Wed 5 May 2021 01.00 EDT

Young people concerned about the climate crisis and air pollution are urging the London mayor, [Sadiq Khan](#), to abandon his plans for a new four-lane road tunnel under the Thames or risk losing their support.

Climate justice campaigners, anti-pollution activists and key youth [groups inside the Labour party](#) say Khan, who is standing for re-election on Thursday, is ignoring climate scientists, economists and [health experts](#) by pressing ahead with the £2bn Silvertown tunnel scheme in east London.

They warn that unless he cancels the plans he, and the Labour party, could lose the backing of a generation of young voters.

Anjali Raman-Middleton, a co-founder of the [Choked Up](#) anti-pollution campaign set up by a group who describe themselves as “black and brown teenagers from south London”, said: “It is becoming a real issue. The tunnel risks losing support from younger generations because it is us that will have to live with the consequences of this decision for years to come ... It makes us feel like we have no one to vote for who really gets this stuff and is prepared to act.

Gaya Sriskanthan, the co-chair of Momentum, the grassroots Labour campaign group, said the UK would struggle to meet its climate targets if “fossil fuel infrastructure” like the Silvertown tunnel went ahead.

“Over and over again we’ve seen politicians paying lip service to the climate emergency, signing up to targets on paper, but failing to act when it really counts,” she said. “Failures like this will make young voters lose hope in Labour when it should be the party leading on climate action.”

The tunnel would be built near the existing Blackwall tunnel in east London and would carry four lanes of traffic – two in either direction. Last year, [the Guardian revealed](#) the project could cost nearly £2bn over the next three decades if it goes ahead.

Khan’s administration has repeatedly defended the scheme, saying it is essential to improve river crossings in east [London](#) – particularly the Blackwall tunnel – that are “antiquated and worn out” and claims the tunnel would alleviate pollution.

The plans have faced opposition from a growing list of MPs, councillors, environmentalists, health experts and residents. They say it will increase pollution, drive up car use and increase emissions in one of the most

deprived and polluted parts of the capital for years to come – all as the climate crisis accelerates.

The shadow climate change minister, , whose Greenwich and Woolwich constituency would contain one end of the tunnel, [called on Khan to reverse the plan](#). Lyn Brown, the Labour MP for West Ham, where the other end of the tunnel would be, has also called for the [project to be scrapped](#).

At least eight constituency Labour party groups have also passed motions opposing the plans in recent months.

Izzy Hickmet, from Labour for a Green New Deal, who grew up near the site of the proposed tunnel, said it would “cancel out much of the good work Sadiq has done for the environment since becoming mayor”.

“There’s a clear choice here: between continued reliance on cars, and building the publicly owned, cheap, clean public transport we need to fight the climate emergency.”

Hickmet added: “Unfortunately, this is part of a wider picture of Labour toning down its policies on the environment. This has led a significant number of young voters to turn away from the party - something which will only get worse if Sadiq Khan continues to back the Silvertown tunnel, ignoring expert opinion and widespread opposition within our party.”

Last month, some of the UK’s leading climate scientists, economists and health experts [signed an open letter](#) calling for the scheme to be scrapped, saying it was incompatible with the UK’s legally binding climate targets and London’s own climate emergency declaration.

“It would be foolhardy to press ahead with an infrastructure project that can only contribute to the UK’s excessive greenhouse gas emissions – as well as skewing London’s transport system further towards roads, and exacerbating local air pollution problems,” they wrote.

A spokesperson for the Labour party defended the scheme, saying the existing Blackwall tunnel had “caused huge problems in central London for many years”.

“The Silvertown tunnel is a project Sadiq inherited and has improved on and it is the only viable alternative to reduce the poor air quality and massive congestion caused in the area by the Blackwall tunnel.”

They added the £2bn cost of the new tunnel would be met by charge a toll for using both the existing Blackwall and the new Silvertown tunnels.

However, campaigners argue the mayor could toll the Blackwall tunnel, reducing congestion and air pollution, with the money raised spent on public transport and improved walking and cycling infrastructure rather than a new four-lane tunnel.

Khan is ahead in the polls ahead of Thursday’s vote with his Conservative rival, Shaun Bailey, in second place.

The Labour spokesperson described it as a “two-horse race” adding: “If you want a green mayor in City Hall then you must lend your vote to Sadiq Khan [or risk] waking up with a Tory mayor.”

However, Raman-Middleton, from Choked-Up, warned Khan and Labour against taking young people for granted.

“I think the Labour party is getting quite complacent. It thinks it can count on the youth vote but it won’t be able to if it keeps pushing policies like this,” she said.

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Global development

Revealed: 2,000 refugee deaths linked to illegal EU pushbacks

A Guardian analysis finds EU countries used brutal tactics to stop nearly 40,000 asylum seekers crossing borders



Migrant rescue patrol in the Aegean Sea by the Turkish coastguard. A case has been filed against the Greek state that claims patrol boats towed migrants back to Turkish waters and abandoned them. Photograph: Erdem Şahin/EPA

Migrant rescue patrol in the Aegean Sea by the Turkish coastguard. A case has been filed against the Greek state that claims patrol boats towed migrants back to Turkish waters and abandoned them. Photograph: Erdem Şahin/EPA

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Wed 5 May 2021 01.00 EDT

EU member states have used illegal operations to push back at least 40,000 asylum seekers from Europe's borders during the pandemic, linked to the death of more than 2,000 people, the Guardian can reveal.

In one of the biggest mass expulsions in decades, European countries, supported by EU's border agency Frontex, systematically pushed back refugees, including children fleeing from wars, in their thousands, using illegal tactics ranging from assault to brutality during detention or transportation.

The Guardian's analysis is based on reports released by UN agencies, combined with a database of incidents collected by non-governmental organisations. According to charities, with the onset of Covid-19, the regularity and brutality of pushback practices has grown.

The findings come as the EU's anti-fraud watchdog, Olaf, has launched [an investigation into Frontex](#) over allegations of harassment, misconduct and

unlawful operations aimed at stopping asylum seekers from reaching EU shores.

[According to the International Organization for Migration](#), in 2020 almost 100,000 immigrants arrived in Europe by sea and by land compared with nearly 130,000 in 2019 and 190,000 in 2017.

Since January 2020, despite the drop in numbers, Italy, Malta, Greece, [Croatia](#) and Spain have accelerated their hardline migration agenda. Since the introduction of partial or complete border closures to halt the outbreak of coronavirus, these countries have paid non-EU states and enlisted private vessels to intercept boats in distress at sea and push back passengers into detention centres. There have been repeated reports of people being beaten, robbed, stripped naked at frontiers or left at sea.

In 2020 Croatia, whose police patrol the EU's longest external border, have intensified systemic violence and pushbacks of migrants to Bosnia. The Danish Refugee Council (DRC) recorded nearly 18,000 migrants pushed back by Croatia since the start of the pandemic. Over the last year and a half, the Guardian has collected testimonies of migrants who have allegedly been [whipped, robbed, sexually abused and stripped naked](#) by members of the Croatian police. Some [migrants said they were spray-painted with red crosses on their heads](#) by officers who said the treatment was the "cure against coronavirus".

[According to an annual report released on Tuesday](#), the Border Violence Monitoring Network (BVMN), a coalition of 13 NGOs documenting illegal pushbacks in the western Balkans, abuse and disproportionate force was present in nearly 90% of testimonies in 2020 collected from Croatia, a 10% increase on 2019.

In April, the Guardian revealed how [a woman from Afghanistan was allegedly sexually abused](#) and held at knifepoint by a Croatian border police officer during a search of migrants on the border with Bosnia.

"Despite the European Commission's engagement with Croatian authorities in recent months, we have seen virtually no progress, neither on investigations of the actual reports, nor on the development of independent

border monitoring mechanisms,” said Nicola Bay, DRC country director for Bosnia. “Every single pushback represents a violation of international and EU law – whether it involves violence or not.”

Since January 2020, [Greece](#) has pushed back about 6,230 asylum seekers from its shores, according to data from BVMN. The report stated that in 89% of the pushbacks, “BVMN has observed the disproportionate and excessive use of force. This alarming number shows that the use of force in an abusive, and therefore illicit, way has become a normality [...]

“Extremely cruel examples of police violence documented in 2020 included prolonged excessive beatings (often on naked bodies), water immersion, the physical abuse of women and children, the use of metal rods to inflict injury.”

In testimonies, people described how their hands were tied to the bars of cells and helmets put on their heads before beatings to avoid visible bruising.

[A lawsuit filed against the Greek state in April at the European court of human rights](#) accused Athens of abandoning dozens of migrants in life rafts at sea, after some had been beaten. The case claims that Greek patrol boats towed migrants back to Turkish waters and abandoned them at sea without food, water, lifejackets or any means to call for help.

BVMN said: “Whether it be using the Covid-19 pandemic and the national lockdown to serve as a cover for pushbacks, fashioning open-air prisons, or preventing boats from entering Greek waters by firing warning shots toward boats, the evidence indicates the persistent refusal to uphold democratic values, human rights and international and European law.”

According to UNHCR data, since the start of the pandemic, Libyan authorities – with Italian support since 2017, when [Rome ceded responsibility for overseeing Mediterranean rescue operations to Libya](#) – intercepted and pushed back to Tripoli about 15,500 asylum seekers. The controversial strategy has caused the forced return of thousands to Libyan detention centres where, according to first hand reports, they face torture. Hundreds have drowned when neither Libya nor Italy intervened.



SOS Méditerranée operates the Ocean Viking, one of the few remaining NGO rescue boats in the Mediterranean. Photograph: Flavio Gasperini/SOS Mediterranee

“In 2020 this practice continued, with an increasingly important role being played by Frontex planes, sighting boats at sea and communicating their position to the Libyan coastguard,” said Matteo de Bellis, migration researcher at Amnesty International. “So, while [Italy](#) at some point even used the pandemic as an excuse to declare that its ports were not safe for the disembarkation of people rescued at sea, it had no problem with the Libyan coastguard returning people to Tripoli. Even when this was under shelling or when hundreds were forcibly disappeared immediately after disembarkation.”

In April, [Italy and Libya were accused of deliberately ignoring a mayday call](#) from a migrant boat in distress in Libyan waters, as waves reached six metres. A few hours later, an NGO rescue boat [discovered dozens of bodies](#) floating in the waves. That day 130 migrants were lost at sea.

In April, in a joint investigation with the Italian Rai News and the newspaper Domani, the Guardian saw documents from Italian prosecutors detailing conversations between two commanders of the Libyan coastguard and an Italian coastguard officer in Rome. The transcripts appeared to expose the

[non-responsive behaviour of the Libyan officers and their struggling to answer the distress calls](#) which resulted in hundreds of deaths. At least five NGO boats remain blocked in Italian ports as authorities claim administrative reasons for holding them.

[UK accused of stranding vulnerable refugees after Brexit](#)
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Malta, which declared its ports closed early last year, citing the pandemic, has continued to push back hundreds of migrants using two strategies: enlisting private vessels to intercept asylum seekers and force them back to Libya or [turning them away with directions to Italy](#).

“Between 2014 and 2017, [Malta](#) was able to count on Italy to take responsibility for coordinating rescues and allowing disembarkations,” said De Bellis. “But when Italy and the EU withdrew their ships from the central Mediterranean, to leave it in Libya’s hands, they left [Malta](#) more exposed. In response, from early 2020 the Maltese government used tactics to avoid assisting refugees and migrants in danger at sea, including arranging unlawful pushbacks to Libya by private fishing boats, diverting boats rather than rescuing them, illegally detaining hundreds of people on ill-equipped ferries off Malta’s waters, and signing a new agreement with Libya to prevent people from reaching [Malta](#).”

Last May, [a series of voice messages obtained by the Guardian](#) confirmed the Maltese government’s strategy to use private vessels, acting at the behest of its armed forces, to intercept crossings and return refugees to Libyan detention centres.

In February 2020, the [European court of human rights was accused of “completely ignoring the reality”](#) after it ruled Spain did not violate the prohibition of collective expulsion, as asylum applications could be made at the official border crossing point. Relying on this judgment, Spain’s constitutional court upheld “border rejections” provided certain safeguards apply.

Last week, the [bodies of 24 migrants from sub-Saharan Africa were found by Spain’s maritime rescue](#). They are believed to have died of thirst and

hunger while attempting to reach the Canary Islands. In 2020, [according to the UNHCR, 788 migrants died](#) trying to reach Spain.

The Guardian has approached Frontex for comment. Previously the agency has said it will be “co-operating fully” with Olaf.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/may/05/revealed-2000-refugee-deaths-linked-to-eu-pushbacks>

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[Greenhouse gas emissions](#)

Pension funds urged to help UK reach net zero climate goals

Campaigners say many investments still high carbon and call on firms to sign green pensions charter



BP's oil refinery at Grangemouth, Scotland. Many pension investors are not aware where their funds are held. Photograph: Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

BP's oil refinery at Grangemouth, Scotland. Many pension investors are not aware where their funds are held. Photograph: Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

[Fiona Harvey](#) *Environment correspondent*

Wed 5 May 2021 01.00 EDT

Pension funds must set a target of net zero emissions for their investments if the UK is to meet its climate goals, influential figures in climate activism

have urged.

[Many people are unaware of whether their pensions funds](#) are invested in fossil fuels or high-carbon activities, and even companies that have publicly committed to reaching net zero emissions may have pension fund investments that are [still wedded to high-carbon businesses](#).

As the UK prepares to host the UN climate talks [Cop26](#) in Glasgow this November, several prominent climate campaigners have written to the Guardian to urge pensions companies to sign up to green investment principles. The signatories are: [Christiana Figueres](#), the former UN climate chief who oversaw the Paris agreement; Nigel Topping, the UK government's business champion for Cop26; [Richard Curtis, the film-maker](#) and co-founder of the campaign group Make My Money Matter; and Amanda Mackenzie, chief executive of the charity Business in the Community.

“[Cop26] is a unique opportunity for Britain to showcase how our financial system can be leveraged to tackle climate change on the global stage,” they wrote. “To achieve this, we must all commit to making our money matter, starting with our pensions.”

While an increasing number of companies are aligning their business activities with [the UK's target of reaching net zero emissions by 2050](#), pension investments are lagging behind. “Why is it that a company working hard to achieve net zero in their operations continues to invest millions into a pension which does the opposite?” the signatories asked.

They urged all companies to sign up to the [green pensions charter](#), which requires businesses to ensure their company pension scheme achieves net zero emissions by 2050, as well as setting short-term targets to halve the greenhouse gas emissions associated with their portfolios by 2030.

Emissions targets for the [next decade are crucial](#) to ensure that the [goals of the Paris agreement](#), of holding global temperature rises well below 2C above pre-industrial levels, with an aspiration to limit rises to 1.5C, can be met.

Some big pension funds have already committed to the green pensions charter principles, including Scottish Widows, Aviva, Nest, the BT pension scheme, and some local government pension schemes. About £400bn is now invested in 15 schemes that are aligned with the net zero and 2030 targets.

The UK pensions sector accounts for about £2.6tn in funds, so any shift towards investing in lower-carbon portfolios would have a strong effect in investment and business.

The signatories wrote: “If we want to deliver healthy returns for our retirements, as well as ensure a healthy world for our grandchildren, 2021 needs to be the year that we unleash the power of our pensions ... What’s the point in saving for retirement in a world on fire?”

Individuals can write to their pension scheme managers to ask whether their investment portfolios are exposed to climate risk, and shareholders can vote at company annual general meetings. Pension fund investors can wield substantial influence over the companies whose shares they hold, and their long-term outlook means that the risks of the climate crisis are having an increasing impact on their projections.

The UK government is considering [strengthening financial disclosure requirements](#) on publicly listed companies, that would require them to assess and publish details of the risks they face from climate breakdown.

[Finance and business](#) will be key to success at Cop26, and Topping is leading a [Race to Zero](#), by which companies commit to a mid-century net zero target and emissions limits for the next decade.

Mark Carney, the former governor of the Bank of England and a UN climate envoy, recently announced a new initiative called the [Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero](#), under which banks and financial institutions, including Barclays, HSBC and the insurer Axa, have signed up to similar commitments.

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[Pensions industry](#)

UK companies must commit to green pensions

Money invested in pensions should support a clean, sustainable transition to a net zero world, write **Christiana Figueres, Nigel Topping, Richard Curtis and Amanda Mackenzie**



David Attenborough at the launch of the Cop26 climate summit in February 2020. Photograph: Chris J Ratcliffe/Getty Images

David Attenborough at the launch of the Cop26 climate summit in February 2020. Photograph: Chris J Ratcliffe/Getty Images

Letters

Wed 5 May 2021 01.00 EDT

Across the country, many leading companies are tackling climate change by reducing emissions and setting ambitious net zero targets by joining the

[#RaceToZero](#), but too often they ignore one of the most powerful tools at their disposal – pensions.

This is a critical year for the UK as it hosts Cop26, the most [important global climate summit in decades](#). With consumer interest rising and green investments experiencing record growth, this is a unique opportunity for Britain to showcase how our financial system can be leveraged to tackle climate change on the global stage.

To achieve this, we must all commit to making our money matter, starting with our pensions. Each year, billions are invested through UK corporate pension schemes, but too often the investment goes against the wishes of savers and contrary to the values of the businesses whose money is being invested. Why is it that a company working hard to achieve net zero in its operations continues to invest millions into a pension scheme that does the opposite?

[Pension funds urged to help UK reach net zero climate goals](#)
[Read more](#)

This dichotomy means the hard work of businesses tackling climate change in their supply chains – or individual savers working hard to reduce their carbon footprint – may be undermined by the impact of their investments.

But it doesn't have to be this way. We believe that if all companies commit to green pensions, we can help to ensure the £2.6tn invested in UK pensions supports a clean, sustainable transition to a net zero world.

That's why we are calling on all businesses to sign up to the [green pensions charter](#). This commits signatories to making sure their company pension schemes achieve net zero emissions by 2050 at the latest – with a halving of emissions by 2030.

The UK pensions industry has reached a tipping point with major climate commitments coming from Scottish Widows, Aviva, Nest and the BT pension scheme, alongside powerful local government schemes, sparking a race to the top among providers determined to deliver the best outcomes for their members.

In fact, we have already seen 15 schemes make robust net zero commitments, meaning that almost £400bn of our pension money will now work towards building a better future. Ahead of Cop26, we want all schemes to follow suit and use their immense power to drive the green pension revolution.

So, if we want to deliver healthy returns for our retirement as well as ensure a healthy world for our grandchildren, 2021 needs to be the year that we unleash the power of our pensions. You can play a critical role in this by signing up to the charter and joining leading organisations committing to green pensions. After all, what's the point in saving for retirement in a world on fire?

Christiana Figueres *Former executive secretary, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*

Nigel Topping *UK high-level climate action champion, Cop26*

Richard Curtis *Co-founder, Make My Money Matter*

Amanda Mackenzie *CEO, Business in the Community*

Have an opinion on anything you've read in the Guardian today? Please [email](#) us your letter and it will be considered for publication.

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Co-operative Group

Co-op slashes the price of plant-based food in quest for net zero emissions

Group says plan will help with ‘unfair’ pricing of vegan food and bring products in line with meat equivalents



Eating plant-based food ‘shouldn’t cost you more money’ said Jo Whitfield, the Co-op Food chief executive. Photograph: Sam Mellish/Alamy Stock Photo

Eating plant-based food ‘shouldn’t cost you more money’ said Jo Whitfield, the Co-op Food chief executive. Photograph: Sam Mellish/Alamy Stock Photo

[Zoe Wood](#)

[@zoewoodguardian](#)

Wed 5 May 2021 01.01 EDT

[The Co-operative Group](#) is slashing the price of its plant-based burgers and sausages to push back against the “unfair” price of vegan food.

Consumers trying to reduce or give up meat often complain alt-meat is more expensive than buying the real thing.

To that end the Co-op is making a seven figure investment in its vegan range Gro with some products, including burgers and sausages, more than halving in price to bring them into line with the meat-based equivalent sold in its 2,600 stores.

Eating plant-based food “shouldn’t cost you more money” said Jo Whitfield, the Co-op Food chief executive, of the move which is part of its bigger plan to reach net zero emissions by 2040. “It’s an industry-wide standard that plant-based alternatives are usually priced higher than their meat and dairy counterparts ... this disparity is unfair to those following vegetarian, vegan and flexitarian diets.”

A recent survey found vegan products [14% more expensive than their non-vegan equivalent per serving](#). But this varied significantly with some vegan products costing nearly three times as much.

Despite concerns about the high prices charged, sales of plant-based foods broke through the £1bn sales barrier in 2020, with 13 million shoppers buying meat-free substitutes and alt-milk, according to the grocery market analysts Kantar. And despite the hardship of lockdown, nearly 600,000 people around the world attempted Veganuary, up from about 400,000 in 2020.

Britons spent £549m on alt-meat burgers and sausages last year, according to a recent report by the market research firm Mintel which predicts sales will increase by 50% over the next five years. Awareness of the environmental benefits of eating less meat had “shot up” among consumers however the alt-meat market was “marred by an overpriced and processed image”, according to the consumer poll.

The reductions in the Gro range include vegan sausages down from £3 to £1.45 and the price of meat-free burgers slashed from £3.00 to £1.35. Meat-

free mince is now £1.75 rather than £3.00. The reductions could save a family choosing vegan alternatives more than a hundred pounds a year, the Co-op said.

Lynne Elliot, the chief executive of the Vegetarian Society, said it supported any move that made plant-based food more accessible. “Eating a plant-based diet is one of the best things you can do to help reduce your carbon footprint,” she said.

The Co-op has promised to provide annual updates on its progress towards reaching net zero and has also linked Whitfield’s pay to carbon reduction targets. Other steps being taken include switching its 200-strong home delivery fleet to electric vehicles and an innovation fund to back carbon reduction research and development initiatives. It will also [stop selling plastic “bags for life”](#) because many shoppers use them only once, making plastic pollution worse.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/may/05/co-op-slashes-the-price-of-plant-based-food-in-quest-for-net-zero-emissions>

[Ikea](#)

Ikea UK to buy back unwanted furniture in recycling push

Group pledges to shift towards model where items for sale can be reused, recycled or rejigged



Good as new! Ikea's buy back scheme in store. Photograph: CPG Photography/Ikea/PA

Good as new! Ikea's buy back scheme in store. Photograph: CPG Photography/Ikea/PA

[Sarah Butler](#)

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Wed 5 May 2021 01.01 EDT

The UK's biggest furniture retailer, [Ikea](#), will launch a scheme to buy back unwanted furniture from customers to resell as part of the Swedish group's efforts to reduce its impact on the environment.

The group has pledged to shift towards a circular model of consumption where items it sells can be reused, recycled or rejigged rather than dumped.

Sideboards, bookcases, shelving, small tables, dining tables, office drawers, desks, chairs and stools without upholstery, all previously bought from Ikea, can be taken back after customers register a request online. Customers won't need to scramble for their screwdrivers – the recycled items will all be sold ready assembled.

Shoppers returning items will receive a refund card worth up to 50% of their original value to spend in store, with the value calculated according to the condition of the items returned. The used furniture will then be sold in special areas in Ikea stores and via Gumtree, the online marketplace.

Hege Sæbjørnsen, sustainability manager of Ikea UK & Ireland, said there was demand from shoppers in reuse as buying secondhand goes mainstream.

“All retailers have to take this movement seriously. We have to remain relevant. Companies that don't really follow this and work with customers and the movement will find themselves not providing the services or needs that customers are asking for. It is also the right thing to do,” she said.

“We are supporting a healthy sustainable lifestyle, working together to move away from the linear model [in which used items are thrown away].”

A rising interest in buying secondhand has recently seen Asda begin selling preloved clothing in 50 of its supermarkets and the likes of Asos, Selfridges and John Lewis selling vintage items. Music Magpie, the online specialist which trades in used phones CDs, books and DVDs, [recently launched on the London stock exchange](#).

Ikea's nationwide UK scheme, [delayed from a planned November](#) launch by the coronavirus lockdowns, has been tested in Australia and Portugal as well as stores in Scotland where 10,000 items were brought back in just under a month in the autumn.

Some children's products will also qualify for the scheme with those selling items being given the option to fill in a “pre-loved label” giving details

about the item's past.

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Peter Jelkeby, retail manager for Ikea UK & Ireland, said: "Through buyback we hope to make circular consumption mainstream; making it easier for customers to acquire, care for and pass on products in circular ways.

"As we move towards our goal of becoming fully circular and climate positive by 2030 we will continue to take bold steps ensuring that, by then, all products will be made from renewable, recyclable and/or recycled materials; and they will be designed to be re-used, refurbished, re-manufactured or recycled, following circular design principles."

He said that about 60% of global greenhouse gas emissions were connected to homes and so small actions taken could make a difference. "As one of the biggest brands in the world, we recognise our unique opportunity to help lead that change," he said.

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Archaeology.

Mary Rose ship had multi-ethnic crew, study shows

Analysis of remains of crew on Henry VIII's favourite warship sheds light on diversity in Tudor England



The remains of the Mary Rose in Portsmouth. Three of the eight crew members studied almost certainly grew up in more southern climes, say researchers. Photograph: Jonathan Brady/PA

The remains of the Mary Rose in Portsmouth. Three of the eight crew members studied almost certainly grew up in more southern climes, say researchers. Photograph: Jonathan Brady/PA

[Steven Morris](#)

[@stevenmorris20](#)

Wed 5 May 2021 01.00 EDT

One is thought to be an archer raised in the Atlas mountains in north [Africa](#), and another may have been a carpenter who grew up in south-west Spain. Others hailed from closer to home, possibly the bustling ports of the English west country or the Thames estuary.

The most in-depth study yet of a group of men who drowned when Henry VIII's favourite warship, [the Mary Rose](#), sank off Portsmouth has provided fresh insight into the makeup of the crew, and the diverse nature of society in Tudor England.

By combining evidence about where in the ship the men's remains were found when it was brought to the surface with state-of-the art analysis of their teeth, researchers have been able to peer into the lives of eight crew members who died almost five centuries ago.

Alexzandra Hildred, the head of research and curator of ordnance and human remains at the Mary Rose Trust, said the number of objects recovered from the ship that were not made in England had suggested that some of the crew were foreign.

"However, we never expected this diversity to be so rich," she said. "This study transforms our perceived ideas regarding the composition of the nascent English navy."

The Mary Rose sank on 19 July 1545 during the Battle of the Solent with the loss of most of its 415-strong crew.

In 1982 the ship was raised and the remains of at least 179 crew members were found, together with thousands of objects ranging from weaponry to tools and games.

The excellent preservation of the men's skeletal remains and knowing the precise time and circumstances of their deaths has given scientists the chance to dig into the backgrounds of the crew.



A oil painting of the Mary Rose. The ship sank in 1545. Photograph: Richard Willis/Getty Images/The Bridgeman Art L

For this latest study, researchers from Cardiff University, the Mary Rose Trust and the British Geological Survey used a technique called multi-isotope analysis on teeth to investigate where eight crew members spent their early years.

Four of them have been nicknamed the archer, the cook, the officer and the purser because of where in the ship they were found or objects found close to them. They and a fifth – known as the young mariner – were almost certainly from Britain.

The archer may have come from a port in south-west England, such as Plymouth in Devon or Fowey in Cornwall, and the cook is thought to have come from a West Country coastal area. The officer could have grown up in the southern end of the Midlands or Wiltshire, while the purser may have been raised on the banks of the Thames estuary.

As was revealed two years ago, the young mariner was also [from the West Country](#) and thought to have been of African heritage.

Mary Rose never ventured beyond British coastal waters but three of the eight crew members studied almost certainly grew up in more southern

climes.

One of the crew members is known as the gentleman because his remains were found close to a chest containing a carved bone panel similar to those produced in northern Italy in the 14th and 15th centuries. The researchers believe he may have come from the Mediterranean coast.

Objects found in the carpenters' cabin including Spanish coins and Spanish-style tools suggested at least one of them may have come from the Iberian peninsula. Analysis of remains of the seventh man, who was found near the cabin, suggest he came from inland south-west [Spain](#).

The eighth crew member is known as the royal archer because he had a leather wristguard bearing the symbol of a pomegranate, associated with Catherine of Aragon, Henry VIII's first wife. He is now believed to have come from the Atlas mountains or possibly Spain.

[Richard Madgwick](#), of Cardiff University's School of History, Archaeology and Religion, said: "We used five isotope methods in all to provide information on geology, coastal proximity, climate and diet. We already know quite a bit about these characters in terms of profession etc, so this study reconstructs biographies in unparalleled detail."

- Diversity aboard a Tudor warship: investigating the origins of the Mary Rose crew using multi-isotope analysis is published in the journal Royal Society Open Science

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Wednesday briefing: Hearts and minds at stake in Hartlepool

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[Scottish elections 2021](#)

Salmond supporters accused of ‘torrent of homophobic and transphobic abuse’

Patrick Harvie says attacks by Alba members against Scottish Greens have escalated during election campaign



Scottish Green party co-leaders Patrick Harvie and Lorna Slater on the campaign trail in Edinburgh on 4 May. Harvie said both had been subjected to smears on social media. Photograph: Andrew Milligan/PA

Scottish Green party co-leaders Patrick Harvie and Lorna Slater on the campaign trail in Edinburgh on 4 May. Harvie said both had been subjected to smears on social media. Photograph: Andrew Milligan/PA

[Severin Carrell](#) *Scotland editor*
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Wed 5 May 2021 02.00 EDT

Patrick Harvie, the Scottish Greens leader, has blamed supporters of Alex Salmond's nationalist Alba party for a "torrent" of homophobic and transphobic abuse during the election campaign.

Harvie said the abuse has included smears about paedophilia, abusive attacks on his sexuality and transphobic attacks on the gender identity of other Scottish Green party candidates, including the party's co-leader, Lorna Slater.

"I have honestly never seen anything like the torrent of homophobic and transphobic abuse, not just at me but directed at other less high-profile members of my party as well, and of other political parties too," Harvie said. "In the last year or so it has increased markedly and in the last few weeks it has been turned up to maximum volume, and it's deeply disturbing."

Scottish Green party officials said some tweets had been taken down after complaints to Twitter, but others, including homophobic slurs directed at Harvie, were still live on the platform.

[Scottish election 2021: a visual guide on what to expect](#)
[Read more](#)

Harvie said Salmond, the former first minister who [founded Alba](#) earlier this year, had also tolerated "some really dangerous conspiracy theories" from Alba candidates and supporters alleging, wrongly, that the Greens and leading gay rights groups endorsed cutting the age of consent to 10. "This is reminiscent of nothing more than the [QAnon conspiracies in the US](#). It is genuinely dangerous for that kind of thing to enter Scottish politics," Harvie said.

Similar homophobic and transphobic comments had been posted by supporters of George Galloway's anti-nationalist party All for Unity, which is also putting up list candidates in Thursday's elections, Harvie said. Galloway is standing on the South of Scotland list.

"A lot of it on social media has Alex Salmond's party logo," Harvie said. "And those in George Galloway's other ego-trip party who are spouting the same stuff. I'm someone who has been in elected politics for some time, but

if you're a young activist in your late teens or early 20s it's genuinely traumatic and dangerous."

Salmond said he did not accept that [Alba](#) activists and candidates were guilty of trans- or homophobia, but said intemperate language was widespread in contemporary politics.

"Candidates, activists, members, supporters go over the score on social media," he said. "I don't think they should do that. I deprecate that, and I think social media tends to engender an atmosphere where otherwise sensible people step out of line, and they shouldn't do it."

Those included a Scottish Green party candidate in the north-east who had allegedly threatened violence against Alba supporters in a clash online about transphobia, Salmond said.

[Scotland at the crossroads: the vote that will decide the fate of the union](#)
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In a statement, Alba denied its supporters, many of whom are openly critical of gender recognition legislation, were transphobes. "It is not reasonable to call people standing up for women's rights transphobic," the party said. "No amount of abusive slurs or physical intimidation will prevent Alba from continuing to stand up for the rights of women and girls as we have done in this election."

Galloway said he, too, had been subject to threatening abuse online, including one alleged threat against his life by a Scottish National party supporter which Galloway reported to the police and said led him to suspend campaigning on Monday.

"No member of A4U has given him or anyone homophobic abuse – if they had, they'd be an ex-member," Galloway said. "I was standing up for gay rights before he was born and have a 30-year-old Stonewall commendation to prove it."

The Scottish Greens, Alba and All for Unity are competing for 56 regional list seat at Holyrood, which use a form of proportional representation that is

influenced by votes cast for parties standing in constituencies.

Recent opinion polls suggest the pro-independence Greens could [double their seat count](#) at Holyrood to 10, with [Alba not polling enough](#) to guarantee any wins. Galloway's polling numbers are too low to register. The polling evidence also suggests Salmond's drive to get SNP voters to back Alba in regional votes has backfired; they are much more likely now to vote Green on the regional list.

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Sydney

Former Australian cricketer Stuart MacGill delayed reporting alleged kidnapping out of ‘significant fear’

Four men arrested after MacGill allegedly forced into vehicle on Sydney’s north shore and held for an hour last month



Former Australian Test cricketer Stuart MacGill, who was allegedly assaulted and threatened with a gun during an alleged kidnapping in Sydney last month. Photograph: William West/AFP/Getty Images

Former Australian Test cricketer Stuart MacGill, who was allegedly assaulted and threatened with a gun during an alleged kidnapping in Sydney last month. Photograph: William West/AFP/Getty Images

[Mike Hytner](#)

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Wed 5 May 2021 01.25 EDT

Former Australian Test cricketer Stuart MacGill was allegedly kidnapped and held against his will for an hour last month, but did not immediately go to police out of “significant fear” for his and his family’s safety.

NSW police said on Wednesday that four men, including a 46-year-old known to MacGill, have been arrested following an investigation into the incident on Sydney’s lower north shore on 14 April.

Detective acting superintendent Anthony Holton said NSW police believed MacGill may have been targeted for financial reasons, although no ransom demand was made.

“We think it [the motive] was purely financial – he was seen as someone they could get money from, although no money was paid prior to him being released,” Holton said.

MacGill, who played 44 Tests and took 208 wickets between 1998 and 2008, was allegedly confronted by a man in Cremorne around 8pm before two other men appeared and MacGill was forced into a vehicle.

He was then driven to a property at Bringelly, where the two men, plus another unknown man, allegedly assaulted him and threatened him with a firearm.

About an hour later, MacGill was driven to the Belmore area and released, police say.

“He has been assaulted and threatened with a firearm,” Holton said. “As a result of that, he didn’t sustain any serious injuries. He had minor injuries that didn’t need medical treatment.

“It would be a horribly traumatic experience to endure.”

The incident was reported to police six days later and detectives from the state crime command’s robbery and serious crime squad were notified.

Police say the delay in reporting the incident was due to “the significant fear” instilled in MacGill. .

“I think you would be pretty worried about your personal safety, the safety of your family and friends,” Holton said.

“It is hard to request how people respond to trauma, so I would say that he would be conscious of his own personal safety and making sure he’s in the best position to talk to the police.”

Asked if the four men were owed money, Holton said he could not comment.

“I can say that his kidnapping is not involved in any other back story that leads to him having a personal debt to other people that he had to pay back,” he said.

An investigation under Strike Force Cain led to Wednesday morning’s arrests during dawn raids.

Investigations are continuing, police said.

MacGill was a talented leg-spinner whose Test career was slightly stymied by virtue of him playing during the same period as the great Shane Warne.

He also played three one-day internationals for Australia during a cricket career spanning 19 years before his retirement from the sport in 2012.

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[Minneapolis](#)

Derek Chauvin: ex-officer convicted in George Floyd's murder asks for new trial

Attorney Eric Nelson alleges prosecutorial and jury misconduct and errors of law at trial and says the verdict was contrary to law



A memorial at what is now George Floyd Square in Minneapolis.
Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

A memorial at what is now George Floyd Square in Minneapolis.
Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Guardian staff and agency

Tue 4 May 2021 19.49 EDT

Derek Chauvin, the former Minneapolis police officer convicted of murdering [George Floyd](#), has asked a judge for a new trial, according to a

court document filed Tuesday.

Chauvin's attorney, Eric Nelson, said his client had been deprived of a fair trial, adding that there had been prosecutorial and jury misconduct and errors of law at trial and that the verdict was contrary to law.

[Juror says video of George Floyd's death was like attending a funeral every day.](#)

[Read more](#)

Nelson cited many reasons in his request for a new trial, including allegations of prosecutorial and jury misconduct.

Nelson also said judge Peter Cahill, who presided over the trial, had abused his discretion when he denied an earlier request for a new trial based on publicity during the proceedings, which Nelson said threatened the fairness of the trial.



Derek Chauvin, former Minneapolis police officer listens as the verdict is read in his trial. Photograph: AP

Nelson also took issue with Cahill's refusal to sequester the jury for the trial or admonish them to avoid all media, and with his refusal to allow a man who was with Floyd at the time of his arrest to testify.

The move comes two weeks after Chauvin was found guilty of second- and third-degree murder and manslaughter in Floyd's killing.

A 12-member jury swiftly and unanimously found Chauvin, 45, guilty on all three counts he faced, following three weeks of testimony from 45 witnesses, including bystanders, police officials and medical experts.

The rare verdict against a police officer is considered a milestone in the fraught racial history of the United States and a rebuke of law enforcement's treatment of Black Americans.

Ben Crump, an attorney for the Floyd family, [called the verdict](#) "a turning point in American history for accountability of law enforcement" at the time.

In a confrontation captured on video, Chauvin, a white veteran of the police force, pushed his knee into the neck of Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man, for more than nine minutes on 25 May 2020. Chauvin and three fellow officers were attempting to arrest Floyd, accused of using a fake \$20 bill to buy cigarettes at a grocery store.

Nelson also asked the judge for a hearing to impeach the verdict on the grounds that the jury committed misconduct, felt race-based pressure, felt intimidated or threatened, and/or failed to adhere to jury instructions, though the filing did not include details about that assertion. To impeach a verdict is to question its validity.

The brief did not mention recent reports that one of the jurors participated in a 28 August march in Washington DC to honor Martin Luther King Jr.

That juror, Brandon Mitchell, has defended his actions, saying the event was to commemorate the 1963 March on Washington and was not a protest over Floyd's death. Floyd's brother and sister, Philonise and Bridgett Floyd, and relatives of others who had been shot by police addressed the crowd at the march last summer.

A request for a new trial is routine following a guilty verdict and often mirrors issues that will be raised on appeal, said Mike Brandt, a [Minneapolis](#) defense attorney who has been closely following the case. If this request is

denied, it can add another layer of decisions for Nelson to appeal. Brandt and others have said Chauvin's convictions are unlikely to be overturned.

Brandt said Nelson will likely file more detailed written arguments on these issues. The purpose of holding a hearing to impeach the verdict would be to develop a factual record and present evidence that could determine whether the verdict was compromised. If a hearing is granted, it's likely Mitchell would be called in to answer questions, Brandt said.

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Tax avoidance

Tories lack public trust to tackle global tax avoidance, poll shows

Less than a third surveyed trust Boris Johnson and Rishi Sunak to crack down on issue despite government pledges



Boris Johnson and Rishi Sunak in the House of Commons. Photograph: Jessica Taylor/UK parliament/AFP/Getty

Boris Johnson and Rishi Sunak in the House of Commons. Photograph: Jessica Taylor/UK parliament/AFP/Getty

[Richard Partington](#) *Economics correspondent*
[@RJPartington](#)

Wed 5 May 2021 01.00 EDT

Boris Johnson's government lacks public trust to tackle global tax avoidance despite mounting pressure for reform, at a time when US technology

companies such as Amazon and Google have been reporting bumper profits during the Covid-19 pandemic.

A poll of more than 2,000 adults in the UK found less than a third trust the prime minister and the chancellor, [Rishi Sunak](#), to take on big business interests as part of a crackdown on tax avoidance.

The polling, by Yonder on behalf of the Co-operative party, the sister party of Labour, showed that three-quarters of UK adults wanted Johnson's government to play a leading global role to reform the tax system.

The lack of public faith comes as pressure mounts on world leaders to reform the global tax system to end decades of abuse by multinational firms, after a landmark intervention by Joe Biden last month.

In a marked shift in Washington, the Biden administration has put forward plans to limit the ability of large corporations to shift profits overseas, while taking steps to forge a landmark agreement on a worldwide minimum tax rate.

That move comes as part of talks taking place between 139 countries negotiating tax reforms at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, with an aim to reach an agreement by the middle of this year.

According to the Co-op party poll, as many as half of UK adults believe government failure to work with the US and other rich countries would damage the UK's position on the world stage.

Guardian business email sign-up

Sunak said on Tuesday that he wanted to reach a deal. Speaking at an event held by the Wall Street Journal, he said the UK was "open to having a package" that involved rules to end profit shifting and establishing a global minimum corporate tax.

But he also added: "The devil will be in the detail, and that's what we're working through now."

The UK led on global tax reforms through the [launch of a digital services tax last year](#), although Sunak has [faced criticism for a relatively muted response to the Biden plans](#) so far.

Anneliese Dodds, the shadow chancellor, said Biden's proposals offered a historic chance to force big companies to pay their fair share in tax. She said: "With just a month until we host the G7 summit in Cornwall, the chancellor should be stepping up and showing leadership to deliver a fairer tax system, not letting others do the running."

Raising pressure on countries to reach an agreement, the head of the International Monetary Fund, [Kristalina Georgieva](#), said the fallout from the Covid pandemic and looming climate catastrophe meant there was a need for rapid action.

"These urgent needs, combined with a renewed spirit of multilateralism, give us a unique opportunity to rethink and fix the international tax system – to create a system that is truly fit for the 21st century," she said.

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[Japan](#)

Japanese town spends Covid funds on huge squid statue

The town of Noto sought to boost tourism in the area where squid is a delicacy

- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)

00:45

Japanese town spends Covid funds on 13-metre squid statue – video

[Justin McCurry](#) in Tokyo

Tue 4 May 2021 23.43 EDT

A coastal town in [Japan](#) is facing criticism after it spent emergency funds intended for [coronavirus](#) measures on a giant statue of a squid to promote the local tourism industry.

Noto, located in Ishikawa prefecture on the [Japan](#) Sea coast, spent ¥25m (£164,000) on the 13-metre-long marine creature, according to the Chunichi Shimbun.

The local newspaper quoted officials as saying that the flying squid was part of a tourism drive to help the area's virus-hit economy. The pink-and-white creature features flared tentacles and an opening below its beak where people can pose for photographs.

[Japan nurses voice anger at call to volunteer for Tokyo Olympics amid Covid crisis](#)

[Read more](#)

Japan's regions have seen tourist numbers plummet since a controversial government-funded travel scheme was suspended at the end of last year over concerns that it was helping spread Covid-19 infections.

Noto, where squid is a delicacy, reportedly received ¥800m in grants from the national government to help see it through the pandemic, according to the Fuji News Network.

While town officials were not required to allocate the relief money directly to coronavirus measures, they have drawn criticism for spending such a large sum on the cephalopod attraction.

A local woman in her 60s told the Chunichi she could see how the statue could boost tourism in the long run, but thought the money would have been better spent on [medical workers](#) and nursing care services that are in desperate need of support.

Japan's tourism industry is unlikely to recover soon. Last month the prime minister, Yoshihide Suga, declared a state of emergency in Tokyo, Osaka and two other virus hotpots in a last-ditch attempt to check a surge in infections.

Japan's government is considering extending the [state of emergency](#) for Tokyo, Osaka, Hyogo and Kyoto prefectures, the Yomiuri Shimbun newspaper said on Wednesday.

The measures, which include requests for restaurants and large shops to close, are scheduled to end on 11 May, just over 70 days before the [summer Olympics](#) are due to open in Tokyo.

Hirofumi Yoshimura, the governor of Osaka prefecture, where hospital capacity for seriously ill patients exceeds 99%, has indicated he will ask the central government to extend the emergency measures as infections are not decreasing as quickly as hoped.

The country's [vaccine rollout](#) has barely begun, with less than 2% of the population inoculated, while hospitals are struggling to cope with record numbers of patients with severe Covid-19 symptoms.

Japan reported more than 4,100 new cases on Tuesday, bringing its total to more than [614,000](#), with 10,500 deaths.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/05/japanese-town-spends-covid-funds-on-huge-squid-statue>

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Queensland

Giant wood moth: ‘very heavy’ insect rarely seen by humans spotted at Australian school

Mammoth moth which can have 25cm wingspan found by builders working on Queensland primary school



A giant wood moth was found at Mount Cotton state school in Queensland by builders. While not uncommon they are rarely seen by humans in Australia. Photograph: Mount Cotton state school/Facebook

A giant wood moth was found at Mount Cotton state school in Queensland by builders. While not uncommon they are rarely seen by humans in Australia. Photograph: Mount Cotton state school/Facebook

[Lisa Cox](#)

Wed 5 May 2021 01.38 EDT

A giant moth with a wingspan measuring up to 25cm has been found at a [Queensland](#) school next to a rainforest.

Builders found the giant wood moth, the heaviest moth in the world, while constructing new classrooms at Mount Cotton state school.

Giant wood moths are found along the Queensland and New South Wales coast, according to the Queensland Museum. Females can weigh up to 30 grams and have a wingspan of up to 25cm. Males are half that size.

They have an extremely short life cycle with adults living only a matter of days. They die after mating and laying eggs.

[Scientists sound alarm about Australia's 26 most endangered butterflies](#)
[Read more](#)

The school's principal, Meagan Steward, said the moth was "an amazing find".

Steward said due to the school's location it was not unusual to find a range of animals on the grounds such as bush turkeys, wallabies, koalas, ducks, the occasional snake and once a turtle in the library. "A giant wood moth was not something we had seen before," she said on Wednesday.



Giant wood moths are found along the Queensland and NSW coast. Females can weigh up to 30 grams and have a wingspan of up to 25cm. Photograph: Mount Cotton state school/Facebook

The initial ABC news report and photos of the moth generated so much media interest the school was forced to direct questions about the moth to the Queensland education department.

Chris Lambkin, the curator of entomology at the Queensland Museum, said giant wood moths, or *Endoxyla cinera*, could be found from coastal Queensland down to southern NSW. While not uncommon they were rarely seen by humans, she said.

Lambkin said this was likely due to several factors including the adult moths' short life span and the fact most people lived in urban areas where the invertebrate was not found.

"The female moths also don't fly very well," she said.

"So most people, if they do see one, it has emerged as an adult and crawled up a tree trunk or a fence post and is waiting for the male to come along. Normally people don't see them with their wings spread out so you don't realise just how big they are but if you actually lift them up they're very heavy."

As small caterpillars, the invertebrates have purple and white banding and bore into the trunks of smooth-barked eucalypts in parks and gardens. They lose the banding as they grow into larger grubs.

['Certainly life-threatening': 80-year-old Australian survives 30-minute boat ride with tiger snake](#)

[Read more](#)

Lambkin said the adult female moths don't feed and live on fats stored as larvae while feeding inside the tree trunk.

"The first time we see them is when they're over 2.5cm long and thick as a lead pencil," she said.

The entomologist said little was known about the first year of the larval stage, which lasts for about three years. The adult female moths can be up to 15cm long.

There are about 60 species of wood moth in Australia, according to the Queensland Museum, but not all are as large as the giant wood moth and not all feed on eucalypts.

The builders took a photo of their find before returning the moth to the rainforest.

The year 4-5 class in the new building was asked to develop a creative writing concept after being shown a picture of the moth and decided to write about a moth invasion. “The students wrote some very creative, imaginative pieces of writing – including Mrs Wilson getting eaten by the giant wood moth,” Steward said.

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2021.05.05 - Coronavirus

- [Live Coronavirus: India accounted for one in four Covid deaths globally last week; Japan mulls longer lockdown – reports](#)
- [England No surge testing for India variants despite Hancock pledge](#)
- [Biden's new goal Get 70% of Americans vaccinated by 4 July](#)
- [Vaccines G7 scrambles to speed up supply to poorer countries](#)
- ['This will be lovely' Care home residents in England savour the return of freedom](#)
- [Inequality Red Cross calls for UK to protect vulnerable from next global emergency](#)
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[Coronavirus](#)

No surge testing for India variants despite Hancock pledge

Following health secretary's statement last month, Public Health England confirms it is carrying out 'targeted testing' instead

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People queue at a coronavirus surge testing site after cases of the South African variant were confirmed in south London. Photograph: James Veysey/Rex

People queue at a coronavirus surge testing site after cases of the South African variant were confirmed in south London. Photograph: James Veysey/Rex

[Nicola Davis](#)

[@NicolaKSDavis](#)

Tue 4 May 2021 15.18 EDT

Surge testing is not being carried out in England for coronavirus variants first detected in India, despite the government claiming it would be, the Guardian has learned.

The coronavirus [variant known as B.1.617](#) is a “variant under investigation” in the UK, together with its close relatives B.1.617.2 and B.1.617.3. All three are worrying scientists because they contain either one or two mutations in their spike protein that may help them evade the body’s immune responses and be more transmissible.

Should such worries be borne out, they may be designated “variants of concern”. The Guardian understands Public Health England will not surge test – where people within particular postcodes are asked to take a test – until the variants are given that designation. This is despite the health secretary, Matt Hancock, [stating on 19 April](#) that surge testing would be carried out for the India variant.

PHE told the Guardian that instead of doing this, it is employing “targeted testing”. This is more specific – for example testing the contacts of people known to have the India variants, or people who may have been in the same areas as someone with one of those variants.

Dr Susan Hopkins, Covid-19 strategic response director at PHE, said: “We are continuing to investigate clusters of linked cases across England. PHE health protection teams are implementing tailored public health actions to detect cases of the variant and mitigate the impact in local communities. Enhanced contact tracing and testing is the most effective way of limiting spread.

“This precautionary approach ensures that our public health response remains agile and targeted,” she added. “There is currently no evidence that the variant causes more severe disease or renders the vaccines currently deployed any less effective but more work is under way to understand that better.”



Matt Hancock. Photograph: Andrew Parsons/10 Downing Street/EPA

Paul Hunter, professor in medicine at the University of East Anglia, said that with some of the Indian variants spreading rapidly, much greater and faster action was needed.

“Looking at the most recent data, if surge testing has not yet already started then B.1.617.2 may already be spreading too widely for surge testing to be able to make a sufficient impact on reducing its further spread,” he said.

According to Prof Ravi Gupta of the University of Cambridge, [preliminary data](#) from his team suggests the two key spike mutations seen in B.1.617 means antibodies generated by one dose of the Pfizer vaccine have a four to sixfold lower ability to neutralise the variant compared with the pre-existing form of the virus, even when the mutations appeared together. This is lower than the 10-fold reduction produced by the E484K mutation seen in certain other variants, such as that first detected in South Africa.

[The team further added](#) that B.1.617 may be more transmissible than the pre-existing form of the virus.

According to data from the Covid-19 Genomics UK Consortium, 823 sequences of the India variants have been detected up to 28 April, including 260 of B.1.617 and 552 of B.1.617.2. This exceeds the 744 sequences of the

variant first detected in South Africa, which has been designated a “variant of concern”.

It is not clear whether the sequences in this dataset are primarily from travellers entering the country. But experts said data from the Wellcome Sanger Institute’s Covid-19 genomic surveillance paints a very worrying picture.

This dataset includes genomes sequenced for general surveillance but not from surge testing or travel-related testing, and suggests 10% of sequenced Covid cases in London now relate to B.1.617 or its close relatives.

Prof Christina Pagel, director of the clinical operational research unit at University College London, said the data was consistent with the most recent PHE variant report suggesting around 25% of cases of the India variants might be community cases. She added that the rapid rise in cases meant surge testing was more suitable than enhanced testing and tracing.

“They absolutely need to be surge testing for it because it does seem to be spreading fast in the community,” she said.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/04/no-surge-testing-for-india-variants-despite-hancock-pledge>

[Joe Biden](#)

Biden's new goal: get 70% of Americans vaccinated by Fourth of July

President urges Americans to get inoculated, saying US is 'ready to move' if Pfizer shot is approved for younger teens



Joe Biden takes questions after delivering remarks on the Covid-19 response and the vaccination program in the White House. Photograph: Alex Edelman/EPA

Joe Biden takes questions after delivering remarks on the Covid-19 response and the vaccination program in the White House. Photograph: Alex Edelman/EPA

[David Smith](#) in Washington
[@smithinamerica](#)

Tue 4 May 2021 16.58 EDT

Joe Biden has announced a goal of ensuring 70% of American adults receive at least one dose of the coronavirus vaccine by Independence Day on 4 July.

The US president urged people in their 20s and 30s in particular to get inoculated and said his administration was “ready to move immediately” if the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) authorised the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine for children aged 12 to 15.

“Our goal by July 4th is to have 70% of adult Americans with at least one shot and 160 million Americans fully vaccinated,” Biden said at the White House on Tuesday. “That means giving close to 100m shots – some first shots, others second shots – over the next 60 days.”

He added: “The light at the end of the tunnel is actually growing brighter and brighter.”

The president had [previously announced 4 July](#) as a target for when people can gather in small groups to signal a return to greater normality.

His latest remarks came as the administration faces a shift from a scarcity of vaccine supply to a scarcity of demand, with many people hesitant about the vaccine and so-called “herd immunity” still a distant prospect.

The US is administering first doses at a rate of about 965,000 a day – half the rate of three weeks ago. Some states have left more than half their [government-allocated](#) doses unordered.

Biden said: “Now that we have the vaccine supply, we’re focused on convincing even more Americans to show up and get the vaccine that is available to them. If we succeed in this effort ... then Americans will have taken a serious step towards a return to normal.”

A senior administration official told reporters that 105m people were fully vaccinated and more than 56% of adults, or 147 million people, have received at least one dose.

Biden acknowledged: “There are a lot of younger people, especially those in their 20s and 30s, who believe they don’t need it. Well, I want to be

absolutely clear: you do need to get vaccinated ... Even if your chance of getting seriously ill is low, why take the risk?”

Officials are also preparing to administer vaccines to adolescents once they are approved by the FDA, which is reviewing the data. Biden said: “Today, I want American parents to know that if that announcement comes, we are ready to move immediately – immediately move to make about 20,000 pharmacy sites across the country ready to vaccinate those adolescents as soon as the FDA grants its OK.”

Biden said vaccines would also be sent to pediatricians, enabling parents and children to discuss the issue with family doctors. Young athletes in sports team would be able to get their first shot in one place and their second elsewhere. “My hope is that if the vaccine is authorised, parents will take advantage of it and get their kids vaccinated.”

Biden also announced a website, vaccines.gov, and a phone number, 438829, to which people can send their zip code to find out the vaccination site closest to them. This week the administration will direct pharmacies to provide walk-in hours and phase out mass vaccination sites in favour of smaller locations closer to unvaccinated people, including in rural areas. “Now we’re going to have to bring the vaccine to people who are less eager,” Biden said.

Surveys have found a partisan split, with people in districts that voted for Donald Trump more reluctant to take the vaccine. Biden made a plea: “This is not a Democrat or a Republican issue. The science behind vaccines has been under development for decades ... While we may not always agree on everything, this is one thing people across the political spectrum can agree on.”

Questioned by reporters, Biden said he hoped that the coming public persuasion campaign would be easier than the massive logistical effort of vaccine distribution and administration in his first hundred days.

But he added: “We’re going to keep at it. At the end of the day, most people will be convinced by the fact that their failure to get a vaccine may cause other people to be sick and die.”

On a different note, Biden suggested that he would meet with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin during a trip next month to Europe. “That is my hope and expectation,” he said. “We’re working on it.”

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G7

G7 scrambles to speed up supply of vaccines to poorer countries

Wealthy nations aim to agree on commitments to export surplus doses and ramp up production

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Vaccines provided through the Covax initiative arriving in Mogadishu, Somalia, in March. Photograph: Farah Abdi Warsameh/AP

Vaccines provided through the Covax initiative arriving in Mogadishu, Somalia, in March. Photograph: Farah Abdi Warsameh/AP

[Patrick Wintour](#) *Diplomatic editor*

Tue 4 May 2021 15.17 EDT

The [G7](#) group of wealthy nations are scrambling to agree a package to speed up the supply of vaccines to poor and middle-income countries by making commitments to export surplus vaccines and by ramping up production.

At a meeting in London, the seven are also likely to agree in principle to step up the financing of the international Covax programme to distribute vaccines. The west is on course for more than 50% of adults to be vaccinated by the summer, compared with one in 100 in sub-Saharan Africa.

The US secretary of state, Antony Blinken, told the Financial Times: “Now that our population has full access to vaccines, we are in a place where, with some of the vaccines that we’ve contracted for, including the AstraZeneca vaccine, of which there are about 60m [doses], we’ll be able to move out and make those available.

“We’re putting in place a process for the vaccines we contracted for that can be made available, but also critically looking at ways that we can ramp up production with other countries around the world so that there is a constant and growing supply.”

The consensus inside the Biden administration has shifted towards a bold global initiative rather than simply storing up surplus vaccines to reassure domestic electorates. But UK officials stressed that the G7 foreign ministers’ meeting was not a pledging event.

There are also some signs of a shift in position in the US on patent waivers in the face of pharmaceutical companies reporting windfall profits from the pandemic. On Tuesday Pfizer said it expected [\\$26bn \(£19bn\) of revenue](#) from its Covid vaccine this year.

The US is predicted to be on course for a stockpile of 300m surplus vaccine doses by the summer, while the UK government has secured orders for more than 517m doses across the eight most promising vaccines.

In a letter sent on Tuesday night to the foreign secretary, Dominic Raab, the former prime minister and a UN envoy Gordon Brown pointed out that low-income countries accounted for less than 1% of the doses administered to date.

“The vaccine gap between the richer and poor parts of the world is growing by the day. Closing that gap is not just a moral imperative but an urgent medical necessity for combating Covid 19 and preventing it mutating and threatening every country, rich or poor,” Brown said.

He called for G7 to bring forward a plan by the time of the leaders’ summit in June. “We cannot tackle this through whip-rounds or treating this like a charity fundraiser,” he said.

Raab said the G7 summit represented a good opportunity for leaders to come up with positive answers to these questions, including on surplus vaccines.

Brown pointed out that the Covax facility was \$19bn underfunded this year and as much \$45bn would be needed next year.

World leaders set up the Covax accelerator specifically to ensure poor and middle-income countries secure vaccines, but Blinken has admitted the scheme faces supply difficulties. The Serum Institute of India has diverted as many as 20m of its AstraZeneca vaccines for use in India.

Diplomats concerned by the scenes in India and the high-profile supply of vaccines by China to Africa seem belatedly to be waking up to the damaging impression that could be left for western democracies if they are seen to be hoarding vaccines while the poor die. Schemes to be better prepared for future pandemics, while important, do not quite match the immediate politics.

Germany’s foreign minister, Heiko Maas, accused Russia and China of hypocritical vaccine diplomacy, but admitted the west “had to make better offers including a worldwide vaccination rollout for everyone”. The head of the World Health Organization, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, said the G7 leaders’ meeting in the summer was probably the most significant in the G7’s history.

The People’s Vaccine campaign highlighted polling within the G7 mainly conducted by YouGov showing near 70% support for a waiver in intellectual property rights, a proposal that has been rejected by the many development experts on the grounds that it will undermine research.

Anna Marriott, a health policy manager at Oxfam, said: “People are dying by the thousands in low- and middle-income countries while rich nations have jumped the vaccine queue. G7 leaders need to face up to reality. We don’t have enough vaccines for everyone and the biggest barrier to increasing supply is that a few profit-hungry pharmaceutical corporations keep the rights to produce them under lock and key.”

The G7 foreign ministers spent most of Tuesday debating how to build effective democratic alliances to meet the threat posed by Russia and China, with officials admitting there had been strong agreement on condemning China’s human rights abuses including in Xinjiang province, but less agreement on the value of economic coercion in changing China’s behaviour.

Blinken argued that the broader the economic alliance was against China, the more likely it was China would take notice.

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Older people

‘This will be lovely’: care home residents in England savour the return of freedom

Simple pleasures like a trip to the seafront or feeding swans are a joy after 14 months of confinement

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Phyllis Padgham enjoying a trip to the Scarborough seafront with her grandson Aaron on 4 May, the first day care home residents could get out since March 2020. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

Phyllis Padgham enjoying a trip to the Scarborough seafront with her grandson Aaron on 4 May, the first day care home residents could get out since March 2020. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian



[Robert Booth](#) *Social affairs correspondent*

Tue 4 May 2021 12.34 EDT

A minibus trip to Scarborough's blustery esplanade arranged by her grandson marked a first step to freedom for Phyllis Padgham after [a year confined to her care home](#).

The 94-year-old hadn't left St Cecilia's since the first lockdown. She hadn't seen her two-year-old great-granddaughter, Willow, since she learned to walk and in common with hundreds of thousands of other care home residents across the country, cherished trips to garden centres and churches have been off-limits.

"We used to have a good time together," she told her grandson Aaron, 30, on Tuesday as they finally prepared to set off in the direction of the sea. "It seems a long time ago. This will be lovely. I expect there will be people on the beach. People don't worry what the weather's like."

[Care homes in England: are you visiting relatives outdoors now the rules have changed?](#)

[Read more](#)

Padgham, a widowed mother of three, was one of the first care residents to take advantage of new government guidance, which came into effect on Tuesday, allowing residents to make accompanied visits outdoors without having to quarantine for 14 days.

“You can have as many phone calls and window visits as you like, but it’s incredibly tough to have been separated in this way,” said Aaron. “I am really glad there is some light at the end of the tunnel.”

There was also a coffee and a Twix for Phyllis although the terrible weather meant strolling along the seafront awaits another day.



Patrick Nelson, 93, on his first trip out of the Reigate Grange care home in Surrey since March 2020.

Another resident enjoying a first trip out was Patrick Nelson, 93, a retired advertising manager who lives at Reigate Grange care home in Surrey. He was taken by staff for a lakeside walk where he sat on a bench and fed crusts to swans. It was his first trip out for 14 months.

“It’s incredible,” he said. “There’s a sense of freedom. It was lovely.”

His next goal is to have lunch at a pub across the road from the care home that he could see every time he walked round the garden “but we couldn’t

get to it because we were locked in”.

Amid poor weather, other residents postponed outdoor plans that had been hastily hatched after the new freedoms were announced by Boris Johnson on Friday. But some families also found care operators were not yet ready to allow people out because of concerns they remain uninsured for Covid risks.

“You can’t just say, ‘today the doors are open’, said Nicola Richards, who runs a small chain of care homes in Sheffield, which is not yet facilitating visits out. “[The government] don’t consult with us and give us time to put adequate measures in place to make it safe.”

Some care homes fear being sued if visits reseed Covid. The National Care Association repeated calls for the government to back up its guidance by underwriting the risk to care home residents of visits out of homes, which many commercial insurers will not cover.

“They are being negligent in not responding to cries for help,” said Nadra Ahmed, executive chairman of the NCA, which represents independent providers.

Care minister Helen Whately said: “We recognise that every care home has a unique layout, physical environment and facilities, and residents have their own individual health and wellbeing needs, which is why care homes themselves are best placed to decide how to enable visiting safely.”

The Department of Health and Social Care added it is working across government, with care providers and the insurance industry, to understand the breadth and severity of insurance problems and whether there is any action the government should take.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/may/04/this-will-be-lovely-care-home-residents-in-england-savour-the-return-of-freedom>

[UK news](#)

Red Cross calls for UK to tackle inequalities exposed by Covid

Survey finds three-quarters of adults in Britain concerned about the impact of next health emergency



A Red Cross centre in east London. Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

A Red Cross centre in east London. Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

[*Diane Taylor*](#)

Tue 4 May 2021 19.01 EDT

Major changes are needed to protect the most vulnerable people from the next global emergency, according to a report from the Red Cross that says three-quarters of people in the UK are worried about the next potential pandemic.

A survey for the charity found that 75% of people were concerned about the global impact of a future health emergency such as a pandemic, 71% about the impact of a personal health crisis, and 61% that climate change would have an impact on their lives. Three-quarters (76%) said the UK must address underlying [inequalities exposed by Covid](#).

The Red Cross said the poll – the first to gauge people’s feelings about potential future events in light of the coronavirus emergency – offered a window of opportunity for changes to ensure British society was made more resilient and better able to withstand global crises.

It said the pandemic had exposed many inequalities in UK society. Its report contains a blueprint to tackle these inequalities before any future global emergency. Three urgent humanitarian issues – disasters and emergencies, health inequalities and displacement and migration – are the focus of the report.

The report calls for:

- Gaps in health and social care to be eliminated
- Key humanitarian needs to be met in emergencies.
- Local welfare assistance schemes to use a cash-first approach to help ensure people facing serious financial hardship can afford essentials such as food, toiletries and warm clothes.
- The provision of safe and legal routes for people seeking asylum and the right for all to a safe home and freedom from destitution.
- International law to be upheld, and principled humanitarian action. It says the UK should ensure that those most in need are put first.

The report is accompanied by a series of essays from writers across the political spectrum, describing what they see as the challenges and opportunities for policy change.

Contributors include Patricia Hewitt, the former Labour health secretary; Nimco Ali, a campaigner to end FGM; and Sir Iain Duncan Smith, the former Conservative work and pensions secretary. Their essays cover topics ranging from investing in young people's mental health and tackling loneliness, to global climate action, ending modern slavery and defining Britain's place on the world stage.

Mike Adamson, the chief executive at British Red Cross, said: "People are worried about big-picture challenges, including the prospect of another global health emergency and climate change, and the direct impact those events could have on their lives. As we look towards recovery, we are faced with a unique opportunity to learn and build towards a more resilient future, ensuring no one is left behind."

- Opinion carried out the research for the report, interviewing 2,003 UK adults aged 18 and over between 27 and 29 April 2021.

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[Coronavirus](#)

The US won't reach herd immunity this year. So how will we live with Covid?

Daily life will vary depending on where you live, and how local officials decide to implement – or ignore – public health measures



High levels of vaccine hesitancy and a still globally widespread Covid-19 mean the US won't reach herd immunity this year. Photograph: Jae C Hong/AP

High levels of vaccine hesitancy and a still globally widespread Covid-19 mean the US won't reach herd immunity this year. Photograph: Jae C Hong/AP

[*Jessica Glenza*](#)

[*@JessicaGlenza*](#)

Wed 5 May 2021 03.00 EDT

Sign up for the Guardian Today US newsletter

For many months, members of the public have equated a return to “normal life” with the phrase “herd immunity”: that threshold reached when the Covid-19 pandemic would be boxed in by immunization campaigns, find no new hosts and society would return to a 2019-style normal.

However, many scientists and experts have also warned for months that the US will not reach this threshold this year, or perhaps even next. That is because of a number of important factors including high levels of vaccine hesitancy in the US, and a still globally widespread Covid-19, which is leading to new variants.

Warnings about the inability to reach herd immunity have been especially pronounced since a major [slowdown in US daily vaccinations](#). This is what we know about what normal could look like if we don’t reach herd immunity before next fall and why we will live with the virus.

Why won’t we reach herd immunity?

Herd immunity rates change based on how contagious a given virus is, the efficacy of available vaccines, the number of people who receive the vaccine, and the propensity of the virus to evolve, among other factors. Measles is a good example.

Measles is one of the most contagious viruses known to humans, but also has a very safe and effective vaccine, which prevents 93% of cases. The infectiousness of measles means a very high proportion of the population needs to be vaccinated to prevent breakout infections – about 95%, according to the World [Health](#) Organization.

[New York, New Jersey and Connecticut to lift Covid restrictions on businesses](#)

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More than 90% of the US population is inoculated against measles, a high vaccination rate. But this still is not enough to prevent localized outbreaks in social groups with much lower vaccination rates. These outbreaks can then spill over into the larger community.

The virus that causes Covid-19, Sars-CoV-2, is subject to the same pressures as measles, but has distinct advantages. First, worldwide circulation of Covid-19 gives the virus millions of opportunities to mutate, evolve and evade vaccine conferred immunity. High vaccination rates have prevented this phenomenon in measles.

That is why experts often refer to the immunization campaign as a “race between vaccines and variants” – vaccines must be distributed quickly to tamp down on variants. Otherwise a vaccine becomes a static solution to a moving target.

Further, the coronavirus is still “novel”. Unlike measles, scientists are uncertain how long Covid immunity lasts, though for natural immunity it could be as short as a few months. Many experts believe people will need either boosters or variant-specific vaccines in the future.

Even before more contagious “escape variants” were identified, such as the B117 variant first discovered in the UK, the US was going to have a very difficult time reaching herd immunity because there is no vaccine available for roughly 20% of the population – children.

High levels of vaccine hesitancy and continued inequities in how the vaccines are distributed could also contribute to localized outbreaks in areas where inoculation rates are lower.

“One of the big concerns is that the result will be pockets of communities that are well protected, and pockets that are vulnerable,” Samuel Scarpino, a researcher studying infectious disease dynamics at Northeastern University, told the Guardian in [March](#).

Conservative states appear especially vulnerable

Conservative states have proved especially hesitant to get vaccinated. Among adults, 20% told surveyors with the [Kaiser Family Foundation](#) they will either “definitely not” (13%) get the vaccine or only do so “if required” (7%). Another 17% say they will “wait and see” whether to get the vaccine. Republicans are the most vaccine hesitant group.

Nearly one-third of people who identify as Republican (29%) said they would “definitely not” get vaccinated. Inequality will probably amplify the impacts of vaccine hesitancy. Some conservative regions with the highest rates of vaccine hesitancy also tend to have worse overall health, weaker public health infrastructure and higher overall levels of poverty and poor housing, which can make infectious disease spread worse.

“We have to help our conservative brothers and sisters,” Dr Peter Hotez, the dean of the National School of Tropical Medicine at Baylor College, [recently told the Guardian](#). Otherwise, Covid-19 could become a “red state” disease.

So that’s the good news. Now the bad news: look the bottom states in terms of vaccinations ID WY AL GA TN LA, across the nation a blue state vs red states vaccination divide is emerging. We need to fix this <https://t.co/zUq5aUOjUg>

— Prof Peter Hotez MD PhD (@PeterHotez) [May 3, 2021](#)

What does that mean for the future of the pandemic?

The “new normal” is going to depend on where you live, and how local officials have decided to implement or ignore public health measures.

Oregon is limiting indoor dining in [half the state](#) after Covid-19 cases grew for five weeks straight, to 123 new cases per 100,000. But in Michigan, where the per capita case rate is 3.5 times that of Oregon, the governor is avoiding new restrictions in favor of advertising reopening once vaccinations reach a certain level.

In another recent example, [Florida’s Republican governor, Ron DeSantis](#), just lifted all pandemic mitigation orders through executive order on Monday, and enacted a permanent law allowing state officials to overrule local health authorities at anytime. Florida is seeing 195 new Covid-19 cases per 100,000 residents.

All this means that even as the science of Covid-19 has not changed – social distancing, masking, testing, contact tracing and vaccination all limit new infections – how these measures are carried out has become distinctly local and political. Localized outbreaks will test leaders’ resolve and consumers’ patience as the US enters fall 2021.

As professor Ali Mokdad from the [Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation](#) (IHME) at the University of Washington told [the Guardian](#) in February: “We’re not going to reach herd immunity, simply, we’re not going to reach it. It’s going to be seasonal, and it’s going to be like the flu, and we’re going to need to be ready for it.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/05/us-herd-immunity-life-with-covid>

Coronavirus

As UK nears zero Covid deaths, there's good reason for optimism

Analysis: the vaccine strategy and staggered easing of restrictions have worked well. The next step is crucial

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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The national Covid memorial wall outside St Thomas' hospital, London, with hearts representing those who have died with Covid. Photograph: Guy Bell/Rex/Shutterstock

The national Covid memorial wall outside St Thomas' hospital, London, with hearts representing those who have died with Covid. Photograph: Guy Bell/Rex/Shutterstock

[Ian Sample](#) *Science editor*
[@iansample](#)

Tue 4 May 2021 12.54 EDT

The handling of the coronavirus crisis in the UK has provided few moments to celebrate, but the day we reach zero deaths from the disease will clearly be one to toast. That day may not be far off. On Tuesday, the UK reported four Covid deaths within 28 days of a positive test. On Monday it was only one. Months of painful lockdown, in the face of more transmissible variants, and the rapid rollout of effective vaccines, have proven their worth. We have good reason to feel optimistic for the months ahead.

No one will have forgotten the brutal winter. In January alone, the UK reported nearly 32,000 Covid deaths, an appalling tally directly linked to locking down too late. In April, the death toll fell to 753. This month, scientists advising the government expect deaths to fall further. It is worth remembering that it's been more than nine months since the UK last reported zero Covid deaths. We may see more in May, though people will continue to die of Covid, and the numbers might well rise again when restrictions are lifted on indoor mixing.

One day doesn't make for a meaningful milestone. More important is reaching consistently low daily death rates, a goal achieved through a combination of factors. At the start of the year, the lockdown broke chains of transmission and reduced R – the number of people an infected person passes the disease on to, on average. Once R fell below one, the epidemic started to shrink. For example, when R reached 0.8, every 100 cases passed the virus on to only 80 more people, and so the numbers fell. Fewer infections inevitably led to fewer deaths.

But as the vaccination programme swung into action, it took on an increasing share of the heavy lifting. First and foremost, these early shots gave the most vulnerable, and so those most likely to die from Covid, the immune defences to fend off the virus. Second, the shots hampered the spread of the disease, pushing R down even further. Even if vaccinated people become infected, and some can, the amount of virus in the respiratory system is lower, so they are less likely to pass it on.

[Death rate](#)

The NHS vaccination programme was designed to protect those most at risk as fast as possible. This decision was key, not least for its simplicity. Jabs went first to those in the top nine priority groups drawn up by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation. These included the clinically extremely vulnerable – people on drugs to suppress their immune systems, or those with underlying health conditions, for example – plus everyone aged 50 and over. Together, these 32 million people account for 99% of Covid deaths.

Before the vaccine rollout, public health authorities had only clinical trial data in their hands. They were unsure how effective the shots would be in the real world. The answer has now become clear thanks to a flurry of recent data. The first good news arrived in the form of vaccine uptake rates. At least 95% of those aged 50 and over have received at least one shot, far better than many scientists hope for.

Next came findings on the impressive impact of the vaccines. The [ONS found that only a fraction](#) of people in hospital with Covid were admitted more than three weeks after having the shot. It takes two to three weeks for the body to muster a good immune response. The findings came after work from Public Health Scotland showed that hospital admission rates [fell sharply](#) a month after a single dose. Further positive news came from Public Health England on the vaccine's ability to curb the spread of the disease. While unvaccinated people infect about 10% of people in their households, the agency estimates the risk is [nearly halved](#) when the original case is vaccinated.

Outbreak modelling submitted to the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage) in March shows that daily Covid deaths could be close to zero in much of May and June, but then rise again in July and August. By how much is up for grabs. The art is to suppress the rise in infections as restrictions ease, by vaccinating more of the population. So far, this balancing act appears to have worked: steps one and two of the roadmap appear to have caused cases to plateau rather than take off again.

The pressing question now is what happens after steps three and four of the roadmap, scheduled for 17 May and 21 June respectively. The mass vaccination of older and more vulnerable people will keep deaths down, but

not all will be protected because vaccines are never 100% effective. Many young people won't be fully vaccinated until later in the year, but it is crucial to get high coverage in these age groups, not only to reduce the chances of infections reaching more vulnerable people, but to spare the younger people themselves from the risk of severe disease or the debilitating impact of long Covid.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/04/uk-nears-zero-covid-deaths-good-reason-for-optimism>

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Times change but the Guardian's values don't: 200 years, and we've only just begun

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[Guardian 200](#)
[The Guardian](#)

The Guardian's first ever edition – annotated

Ads on the front page, news on the back, and a frankly unbelievable story about a ghost: the Manchester Guardian's first edition on 5 May 1821 is full of gems. We unearth them in this annotated version

Wed 5 May 2021 01.00 EDT Last modified on Wed 5 May 2021 01.02 EDT

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The age of extinctionTrees and forests

Secrets of the dead wood: ancient oaks hold key to new life

In Richmond Park, decaying logs and mangled old branches are no longer cleared away but valued as habitats for birds and insects



An ancient oak in Richmond Park. As hollows develop, species from owls to bats compete for them as nesting sites. Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

An ancient oak in Richmond Park. As hollows develop, species from owls to bats compete for them as nesting sites. Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

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Wed 5 May 2021 02.00 EDT

Oaks are the elders of London's Richmond Park. Some of them are 800 years old and have slumped, bulged and grown cavernous with age. By the time King Charles I visited in 1625 and turned a collection of medieval farms into the royal park we have today, they would have already been veteran trees. A disused medieval track is visible from the way the trees lean into a gentle gully, now grassed over. Richmond Park is something of an open-air museum, and among its most precious exhibits is its dead wood.



Simon Richards, manager of Richmond Park: ‘You’re planting trees thinking, what’s that tree going to be like in 400 years’ time?’ Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

Dead wood has many guises and starts forming on the inside of healthy standing trees. As they age, it expands, creating a rich habitat that we still know little about. “How many jobs involve managing assets that are 700 or 800 years old?” says Simon Richards, manager of the park. “You’re planting trees thinking, what’s that tree going to be like in 400 years’ time? That’s a real joy of the job – we’re just a footnote in history.”

England has [more ancient oaks](#) than all other European countries put together. This is largely thanks to the long-held obsession of royals and the aristocracy with creating medieval parks to hunt deer, as venison was considered a “noble” meat. Within these landscapes, oaks had space to flourish, and thanks to careful management, Richmond is one of the best places to see them.

But it is a difficult attraction to manage. This national nature reserve and site of special scientific interest (SSSI) is also a popular urban park. Modern London breathes people in – Lycra-clad cyclists, cars, babies in prams and dogs wearing coats. Herds of photographers surround herds of deer.

During the pandemic, visitor numbers swelled. “We’re the only show in town at the moment,” said Richards, shortly before the lockdown began to ease. Last June, staff and volunteers picked up [42 tonnes of litter](#) from the park, an increase of 650% from the previous June. “Don’t get me going on the doggy bags,” he says, not referring to the variety you put food in.



The number of visitors to Richmond Park grew hugely during lockdown, with 42 tonnes of rubbish left just in June. Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

Many feel the elders are not being treated with the respect they deserve. Arthritic old trees shed limbs that make perfect play frames, benches or backdrops for amateur photoshoots. Their gnarled caverns create amazing dens and their bulges give small children a convenient leg-up. Looking at the shiny bits of bark, you can see which parts are most clambered upon.

“Such a small act of picking up a bit of dead wood can destroy a habitat that’s been developing over a number of years. It’s a really difficult issue,” says Peter Lawrence, manager of the royal parks’ [Mission: Invertebrate](#) project. “It’s particularly difficult here because it’s such a massive tourist attraction – you’re not just talking to people from the local neighbourhood but to people from all over the world.”

The abundance of dead wood excites ecologists as much as children, and one of the reasons Richmond Park became an SSSI in 1992 is its saproxylic invertebrates (insects that require dead wood for part of their lifecycle). Park wardens changed their management practices and intentionally left out dead wood, letting limbs lie where they fell. In the 90s, Richards got a number of letters from the public complaining that he had “let the park go”, but now visitors have got used to it, he says.

There are 320 ancient oaks in the park, meaning they are more than 400 years old. These are the oldest of the park’s [1,300 veteran trees](#), which are of an undisclosed age, and starting to develop ancient characteristics, such as hollowing at the base, a smaller crown, and generally becoming wider and squatter. It may sound familiar.



One of Richmond Park’s ancient oaks. The trees appear squatter with age and begin to hollow out at the base. Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

Trees of this advanced age might look old and tired, but they have lived so long because of these features, not despite them. Dropping branches and hollowing makes them lighter and more stable. With trees that could pose a risk to the public, temporary fences are put around them, so they can drop limbs in peace – they may still have hundreds of years ahead of them.

As soon as hollows develop, parakeets, owls, nuthatches, bats and other wildlife compete for them. The fact we put up so many bird-boxes is a reminder that cavities – which are natural nesting sites – are [missing from our landscape](#).

Don't think of dead wood as bad or dangerous – all that deadness has a lot of life in it

Steven Falk, naturalist

As well as natural structures within veteran trees, the dead wood itself is full of life. There can be [280 invertebrates](#) in one large handful of rotten wood inside a tree. Richmond Park has more than 1,000 species of beetle, many of which rely on dead wood, including the nationally rare cardinal click beetle and stag beetle.

However, across the country, dead wood is still being cleared away as people try to make woods “tidy”, or because it’s “dead” and unsightly. In wild, natural woodland a quarter of wood is dead, but in most managed woodlands this is less than 10%, [according to the Wildlife Trusts](#).



Peter Lawrence, manager of the royal parks' [Mission: Invertebrate](#) project, points out holes created by invertebrate larvae on a bracket fungus, which would have been growing on a tree. Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

“To appreciate the different forms of dead wood, don’t think of it as bad or dangerous – all that deadness has a lot of life in it,” says the author and naturalist Steven Falk, who has written a [report](#) on saproxylic insects for the Woodland Trust. Falk’s study showed 320 saproxylic insects in the UK also pollinate flowers, 16% of the national total. Previously, it was not known that many saproxylic insects were also pollinators.

If land managers want to protect these insects, many of which are rare, they need to create light-rich habitats around veteran trees so that flowers can grow near them, meaning pollinators have everything they need to complete their life cycle.

Giving a tree space is a bit like providing it with a pension. It means it has enough light to develop large lateral spreading limbs and space for roots to penetrate deep. If an oak can grow old with grace it can provide value for wildlife in many hundreds of years time, not just the next 50. This will be useful information for those planting the next generation of veteran trees.

[‘Forests are not renewable’: the felling of Sweden’s ancient trees](#)
[Read more](#)

“We have a bit of a problem about what we perceive woodland to be,” says Emma Gilmartin, conservation adviser at the Woodland Trust, who specialises in ancient and veteran trees. “For a lot of people it’s quite a dark, shady environment, and certain species certainly require those dark shady spots. But veteran trees are refugia for other species that also require lots of light. Flowers are really light-dependent – to get maximum pollen and nectar sources, we need those open spaces within woodland.”



Dead wood and fallen limbs are now left in Richmond Park to help species such as saproxylic invertebrates. They also make handy seats. Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

Back in the park, Richards is examining an old tree surrounded by oaks planted about 10 metres away from it in the 50s and 60s, at a time when people did not yet appreciate the true value of old trees. He is considering whether to chop down competing branches to give the veteran tree the space it needs to age. Election pledges to plant millions of trees are “all meaningless if you don’t look after them”, he says.

Walking around the park, Richards inspects the health of trees like a doctor might examine human bodies, making note of their fragilities, and where they might need support. With each passing year, old trees become more valuable, entering new, richer phases of life that command more respect. Imperfections are assets.

“People are reluctant to accept the concept of death – we see it in all of us, we want to live for ever. So when you see an old tree, or a dead tree, it’s almost as if we have failed,” says Richards. “But it’s just a natural process, and I think that’s it – it’s not living, it’s dead, it’s evolved, and the habitat has evolved and is just continuing to recycle.”

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

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Stage

The case of the Covid-compliant murder: how *The Mousetrap* is snapping back to life

Agatha Christie's snowbound whodunnit is the world's longest-running play. Now it's leading the big reopening – with a double cast and no kissing



An invincible hit ... Mary Law in *The Mousetrap* in 1957. Photograph: Getty Images

An invincible hit ... Mary Law in *The Mousetrap* in 1957. Photograph: Getty Images



[Mark Lawson](#)

Wed 5 May 2021 01.00 EDT

The London [West End](#) is filled with ghost shows. Frontages still advertise productions that were frozen on 16 March last year, when the government advised against theatre-going. Some of the shows would have finished long ago, such as John Kani's *Kunene and the King*, starring Antony Sher, which was on a limited run. Others, including *Come from Away* and *Les Misérables*, might reasonably have been expected to survive a hiatus. Both are making plans to reopen.

But only one play was entitled to assume its survival until the end of quarantining: Agatha Christie's *The Mousetrap*, at St Martin's theatre. The whodunnit opened in 1952, and endured the cold war, IRA, al-Qaida and Islamic State terrorism to become the world's longest-running show. Due to Covid, its 69 years are no longer continuous, but the show is scheduled to resume, after a 15-month pandemic gap, on 17 May: British theatre's most invincible hit leading the return to work.



Seven decades on ... The Mousetrap in the 21st century

“It’s a symbol of the West End,” says Adam Spiegel, the play’s producer, sitting masked beside an open window in the St Martin’s bar. “So it needs to be at the front of theatre’s reopening. I don’t think there is another show or theatre that can so personify the defiance of the industry.” However – appropriately if alarmingly – there is suspense: “It won’t actually be confirmed until the 10th whether we can open on the 17th.” If that date is pushed back, that would surely be a shattering blow? “It would be an enormous inconvenience – an act of real vandalism against the industry. Our view is that 17 May can’t slip.”

Actors will be temperature-checked at the stage door then stay masked until they go on

Outside the theatre, a board lists in gold paint the names of the actors who were appearing in the show in March 2020, when it closed. This feature will be redesigned with a sliding panel that can be quickly changed, as this is a production in which every performer is also an understudy. Spiegel has employed two casts who will rehearse and work completely separately, and appear in alternating runs of three performances. If an actor were to test positive, the other cast – contracted to be available and in reach of the

theatre in their time off – will immediately take over for 10 days while the other group recuperates. Quarantine rules would prevent the usual theatre practice of one absentee being replaced by a stand-in.



You done it ... Richard Attenborough presents Agatha Christie with an award to mark the longevity of her play. Photograph: Bentley Archive/Popperfoto/Getty Images

“It doubles the costs,” says Spiegel, “but it’s the only way of doing it.” Duplicate actors are only plausible for small-cast shows, so the producer hopes there will be new Covid guidelines, published before theatres reopen, that will allow the business to function without losing a whole cast when someone has a positive or false positive test.

The capacity of St Martin’s is 550. Under social distancing, around half the seats can be occupied, although the exact figure depends on the pattern of bookings. “If you come on your own, you use up three seats. So I would ideally like people to come in groups of exactly six. Under the rule of six, that’s the magic number, but six is the least likely group of theatre-goers, which averages out at two point something or other.”

Spiegel expects to get around 250 in on an average night “which is financially unsustainable in the long term but I think is worth doing for a

shortish period.” The scattered audience will be watching action that is also socially distanced. Actors will be temperature-checked at the stage door, then stay masked until on stage. The blocking (positioning of people on the set) will keep the characters at least three metres apart. Actors pride themselves on hitting their marks on stage, but if they don’t in this production, they might be arrested. “A kiss was taken out,” says Derek Griffiths, who plays Major Metcalf in the resumed production. “And a few hugs,” adds Paul Hilliar, cast as Detective Sergeant Trotter.

Such precautions are crucial because producers cannot insure shows against loss. Spiegel says no underwriters will insure against a show closing down as a result of Covid cases among cast or crew, or a new government ruling: “What we want is insurance, underwritten by the government, that means producers and promoters will be reimbursed the costs of reopening if there is another lockdown.”



‘There’s a huge shakiness in the business’ ... Derek Griffiths. Photograph: Sarah Lee/The Guardian

This request has so far been refused. “Because of that, some producers aren’t reopening,” says Spiegel, but he has decided to “take the risk myself without insurance” on both the Christie and his revival of the musical *Hairspray* at

the [London](#) Coliseum, which is rehearsing for a 21 June opening. That's the government's target date for the earliest lifting of all restrictions.

Financial indemnity is a huge issue in showbiz's attempted comeback. "I was free to do this," says Griffiths, "because I lost a movie." After a five-decade career, from Play School on TV to Driving Miss Daisy on stage, the 74-year-old was due to shoot a low-budget film but, although the actor is double-vaccinated, "they couldn't afford to insure me so I had to pull out".

Hilliard is another stark example of the jeopardy many face in a profession where most are freelance so ineligible for furlough. He was first cast as DS Trotter 14 months ago and was due to perform from May last year. "I'm at the start of my career," he says, "and it's the biggest job I'd had. So there were several months of gut-wrenching pain." He was rehired for a planned reopening last October that was prevented by the second lockdown. "So this is the third contract I've had for The Mousetrap and never actually done the job yet." Financially, he says, "there was some help from Adam and the team. But they weren't getting any money in, so they couldn't fulfil the contract."

With restricted audiences, a full house will now be a half-full one, but Griffiths says: "I don't think that's a problem. In my career, I've played to audiences that all came in the same taxi! And I've known small audiences be more of a group, pushing the show on, than a big audience which can sit on its hands."

Spiegel's determination to bring back The Mousetrap feels apt because it has always been a producer-driven phenomenon, says Laura Thompson, author of an insightful biography, *Agatha Christie: A Mysterious Life*. "When people ask why the play is so popular," she says, "I'd probably answer, 'Peter Saunders.'" After opening the show in 1952, the impresario "made The Mousetrap the subject of one of the cleverest publicity campaigns of the 20th century, as Agatha herself recognised. 'Hell at the Savoy' was what she called the annual parties thrown to celebrate another year of the play's run. But she liked Saunders very much and fully acknowledged he was a genius in a particular field."



Gambling on a domestic audience ... The Mousetrap. Photograph: Neil Juggins/Stockimo/Alamy Stock Photo

Thompson points out an irony in the extraordinary longevity of this Christie tale: “The Mousetrap was never highly regarded by her agent.” He much preferred two other stage works, *The Hollow* and *Witness for the Prosecution*, written on either side of this snowbound house mystery. “He actually expressed a fear that *The Mousetrap* might damage her stage reputation in the US were it to be produced there.”

Christie was much more prolific as a novelist than as a dramatist, but Thompson sees a connection: “Her books are very theatrical in themselves – very little description, a lot of dialogue with scant interconnective tissue. That was the way in which her mind naturally worked. She had an instinctive theatrical sensibility.”

[Whodunnit? Did Agatha Christie ‘borrow’ the plot for acclaimed novel?](#)
[Read more](#)

The Mousetrap is generally regarded as a lure for tourists, of whom there will inevitably be fewer this summer, but Spiegel says: “That *The Mousetrap* is a tourist destination is a bit of a myth. Our analysis of the data is that a third of the audience is foreign tourists, a third domestic tourism, and a third

Londoners. One of the gambles the industry is taking is that – for the next 12 months – domestic tourism will take the place of international visitors.”

Griffiths is aware of other concerns. “I’ve had a lot of calls from actors saying, ‘I’m not sure I could do theatre any more – it’s been so long.’ There’s a huge shakiness in the business.” Hilliar, however, does not expect audiences to be nervous: “Going to the theatre in that brief period last year when they reopened, there was an amazing cathartic response from people at theatre being back. I hope and think that will happen again.”

[The Mousetrap is scheduled to reopen at St Martin’s Theatre, London, on 17 May.](#)

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Donald Trump

Donald Trump returns to social media with glorified blog

Ex-president unveils retro webpage featuring series of statements resembling blogposts ahead of Facebook oversight board's decision on his suspension



Donald Trump at the White House on 26 November 2020. Photograph: Erin Scott/Reuters

Donald Trump at the White House on 26 November 2020. Photograph: Erin Scott/Reuters



[David Smith](#) in Washington

[@smithinamerica](#)

Tue 4 May 2021 18.36 EDT

Banned by Facebook and Twitter, [Donald Trump](#) has gone back to the future with an online communication tool that might be described as a glorified blog.

His retro webpage, billed “From the Desk of Donald J Trump”, appears at [DonaldJTrump.com/desk](#) and features a small photo of the 45th president writing in a book on his desk.

[What’s Donald Trump up to these days? I tried to find out via Instagram](#)
[Read more](#)

A video includes archive material announcing Trump’s [ban from Twitter](#) and images of his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida and of a desktop, overlaid by captions: “In a time of silence and lies, a beacon of freedom arises. A place to speak freely and safely. Straight from the desk of Donald J Trump.”

Below the video are a series of Trump statements resembling blogposts, of which the most recent begins: “Heartwarming to read new polls on big-shot

warmonger Liz Cheney of the great State of Wyoming.”

Cheney is [under fire](#) from fellow Republicans loyal to Trump’s claims that he actually won the 2020 election, because she publicly calls out the lie and has strongly criticised the 6 January [insurrection](#) at the US Capitol by extremist Trump supporters.

Tabs on Trump’s new website allow users to like or share the posts on their own [Facebook](#) or Twitter accounts, but there is no option for them to reply.

Visitors are also invited to “sign up for alerts”, so that Trump’s musings can be beamed directly into their inboxes. Perhaps unsurprisingly, options to “shop” and “contribute” figure prominently.

A footnote says the tool is funded jointly by the ex-president’s Save America and Make America Great Again political action committees.

When the page was unveiled on Tuesday, social media erupted with comment – and mockery – suggesting that Trump’s long-awaited return to social media owed much to platforms such as [Blogger](#), launched in 1999.

But Jason Miller, a senior adviser to the former president, sought to provide a clarification – via [Twitter](#).

“President Trump’s website is a great resource to find his latest statements and highlights from his first term in office, but this is not a new social media platform,” [he wrote](#). “We’ll have additional information coming on that front in the very near future.”

Twitter announced it had banned Trump permanently after the US Capitol attack for breaking its “glorification of violence” rules.

Facebook also banned him, with its chief executive, Mark Zuckerberg, saying “the risks of allowing the President to continue to use our service during this period are simply too great”.

But Facebook’s independent oversight board [is expected to announce on Wednesday](#) whether it is overturning the suspension.

In the meantime Trump, exiled at his private Mar-a-Lago residence and club in Palm Beach after leaving office in defeat and disgrace, has been sending press releases to journalists.

They are often in a style reminiscent of his tweets, with capital letters, exclamation marks and misspellings. But they no longer drive the day's agenda or cable news chyrons as his presidential missives once did.

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Documentary films

‘It was truly an experiment’: how did we get to Sesame Street?



‘To me, it was clear that kids just adored the medium, so why not use it to teach them.’ Photograph: Stan Honda/AFP via Getty Images

‘To me, it was clear that kids just adored the medium, so why not use it to teach them.’ Photograph: Stan Honda/AFP via Getty Images

A new documentary, *Street Gang*, traces the early days, radical roots and creative energy of the groundbreaking childhood TV show

[Adrian Horton](#)

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Wed 5 May 2021 02.03 EDT

In 1970, cast members of [Sesame Street](#), still in its first season on public television, traveled the country to gauge interest in the iconoclastic new show and its strange, magnetic array of puppet characters. The program was, at the time, an experiment, both as a madcap mosaic of creative talent,

especially puppeteer Jim Henson and his cast of singularly endearing Muppets – and as a test of television’s potential as an educational medium, with eight expert-designed learning objectives measured in test groups of small children.

[Strings attached: why we’re still in love with puppet TV shows](#)
[Read more](#)

It was also wildly popular. Footage from the tour, collected in the new documentary *Street Gang: How We Got to Sesame Street*, could at first glance be mistaken for Woodstock. Performers, some black and some white (plus the 8ft tall Big Bird), hold court on an outdoor stage, mics in hand, revving up a crowd that screams with delight. The adoring fans are mostly children (accompanied by parents), who until *Sesame Street* viewed children’s programming, if they encountered it all, that talked down to them, or assumed the lowest denominator of entertainment. It’s easy to forget now, given the show’s 52-year ubiquity, that the original program was a shot in the dark – the first show aimed explicitly at childhood education, a combustible attempt to meld learning fundamentals with jingly bits and skits kids enjoyed to watch. The results, as evidenced by the tour, were electric, like “a swish of a hurricane coming in through a window”, Joan Ganz Cooney, the show’s co-creator, says in the film.

That hurricane became the longest-running, and arguably most recognizable children’s program in the country, with international co-productions assisted by the Sesame Workshop in 170 more. The show is now as much of a television institution as they come, and a deep well of nostalgia; the familiar voices and googly eyes of Bert and Ernie, Cookie Monster, and Oscar the Grouch, and the helium-aired vocals of its theme song – “sunny day, sweeping the clouds away” – are, for millions of American former children, a portal to a soup of early childhood memories soundtracked by the TV. But widespread fondness for the show, as well as its proliferation into a universe of toys, spin-offs, and other merchandise, can obscure the radicalness of its early mission and its roots in America’s civil rights movement.

As *Street Gang*, based on the 2008 book *Street Gang: The Complete History of Sesame Street* by Michael Davis, succinctly and richly recalls, the show

was designed by a felicitously timed collaboration of education researchers and committed creatives to address a double conundrum: the gaps of public education, especially in poor neighborhoods, and the proliferation of television sets. Sesame Street was “truly an experiment in teaching children using the new medium of television”, Ellen Crafts, a producer on Street Gang, told the Guardian. At a time when the oft-derided “boob tube” was reaching near-universality in American households, “these incredible people came together and were responding to a shared social consciousness, and were going to use television and creativity to ultimately try to change the world”.

Street Gang revisits the first 20 years of the program, which first aired in November 1969, through three of its most influential off-screen figures: Cooney, producer and director Jon Stone (who died at 64 in 1997; his daughters participate in the film), and Henson (who died at age 53, of bacterial pneumonia, in 1990, and whose widely attended funeral serves as the film’s endpoint). It was Cooney, a public affairs producer for New York’s Channel 13 in the 60s, who led the charge to use television as a tool in public, accessible education. “To me, it was clear that kids just adored the medium, so why not use it to teach them?” she recalls in the film. At the time of the show’s development in the late 60s, half of the nation’s school districts did not have kindergartens, according to Jill Lepore in a [New Yorker survey](#) of the show. But “more households have televisions than bathtubs, telephones, vacuum cleaners, toasters, or a regular daily newspaper”, wrote Cooney in a Carnegie-funded study called The Potential Uses of Television in Preschool Education which offered justification for Sesame’s eventual \$8m in mostly public funding.



Ernie, left, and Bert. Photograph: Everett Collection / Rex Features

The educational mission, numerous cast and crew recall in the film, was borne directly from the civil rights movement, an aim marketed to and underscored by early cast members such as Matt Robinson, who previously hosted the talk show *Opportunity in Philadelphia* aimed at African American audiences, and Emilio Delgado, who played the Spanish-speaking Latino character Luis. The program explicitly sought to reach black children in the “inner city” (then, as now, a euphemism for black poverty), and messaged racial equality through a diverse cast set in a urban neighborhood styled around the “New York energy” of an Urban Coalition commercial filmed on the streets of Harlem. The show retained outreach coordinators to bring the program to connect to elementary schools, YMCA centers, daycares, and community associations as possible, to reach children, particularly black and Latino children, disproportionately left behind in underfunded schools.

The reactions were a mixed, complicated bag; the show responded to criticism over lack of representation for Latino characters with the hiring of Delgado and, later, Sonia Manzano as Maria. It also abruptly phased out a Muppet who spoke in black vernacular named Roosevelt Franklin, designed by Robinson (who left the show shortly thereafter in 1972) after complaints from both white and black viewers. Mississippi Educational [Television](#), meanwhile, initially removed *Sesame Street*, with its cheerily diverse

neighborhood, off the air until public pressure and the demand forced the network to reverse course.

The fights over representation, tokenism, and designing universal programming for children growing up differently under systemic racism feels, watching *Street Gang*, depressingly familiar. “Right now, in the spring of 2021 feels very similar to the summer of 1969, when they were on the verge of launching this show,” director Marilyn Agrelo told the Guardian. “We’re still talking about race, the Black Lives Matter movement, all these things, it’s almost like the consciousness is raising again, and the awareness is raising. And maybe we’ve moved the needle, but I don’t know how far we have moved it. It’s almost like we’ve lost our way a bit.”



The show is now as much of a television institution as they come, and a deep well of nostalgia. Photograph: Richard Termine/AP

The film also delves deeply into the personal, all-consuming work environment within the burgeoning institution’s walls, from the riffing musical genius of Joe Raposo (composer of the Kermit the Frog classic “It’s Not That East Being Green,” a subtle ode to feeling marginalized) and Christopher Cerf to the puppeteers who pulled off masterful feats of performance day in and out. “This was so experimental – they were throwing things against the wall to see if they would work,” said Agrelo. “It

was a very loose time. These comic geniuses were allowed to just run with their creativity.”

Fifty-plus years on, Sesame Street remains a beloved cultural institution, even if its current arrangement differs from the egalitarian mission of 1968 to deliver a childhood educational program as a public good. In what Lepore called a “staggering betrayal of the spirit of the show’s founding philosophy”, Sesame Street’s 2019 fiftieth anniversary special aired on the paid subscription service HBO before public broadcasting; new episodes of the show now air on its streaming service HBO Max.

Street Gang reveals both the enduring resonance and infectious energy of that founding philosophy, one that expanded the imagination of entertainment’s scope, content and capacity for public service, especially in the face of under-valued, inequitable public education. “It’s a period that maybe people have forgotten a bit,” said Agrelo. “It gives us a lot of joy to show these magical little moments that were so daring and so out there.”

- Street Gang: How We Got To Sesame Street is now out in US cinemas and will be released digitally on 7 May with a UK date to be announced

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[Napoleon Bonaparte](#)

France still split over Napoleon as it marks bicentenary of death

President to tread fine line as he lays a wreath to ‘commemorate rather than celebrate’ anniversary



An 1843 painting by French artist Jean-Baptiste Mauzaisse depicts Napoleon Bonaparte on his death bed. Photograph: Thomas Coex/AFP/Getty Images

An 1843 painting by French artist Jean-Baptiste Mauzaisse depicts Napoleon Bonaparte on his death bed. Photograph: Thomas Coex/AFP/Getty Images

[Kim Willsher](#) in Paris

Wed 5 May 2021 00.00 EDT

On 5 May 1821, [Napoleon Bonaparte](#) died in a surprisingly small bed surrounded by his French coterie in exile in a damp and reportedly rat-

infested house on the British island of Saint Helena.

His last words, uttered shortly before he expired around 5.59pm local time were relayed back: “*La [France](#), l’armée, tête d’armée, Joséphine ...*” (France, the army, head of the army, Joséphine). He was 51.

Two hundred years on, the cause of his death remains an unresolved mystery and his career and life continue to bitterly divide. To some, the Corsican-born emperor was a brilliant military and political strategist, to others he was little more than a warmongering despot. To the right he is a national hero whose leadership and legacy put France on the map, while the left points out he was autocratic and supported the restoration of slavery.

[Élisabeth Moreno](#), the equality minister, admitted Napoleon was “a great figure in French history” but added he was also “one of the great misogynists”.



Napoleon Bonaparte’s tomb at Les Invalides in Paris, where Emmanuel Macron will lay a wreath on Wednesday. Photograph: Christophe Petit-Tesson/EPA

On Wednesday, the French president, [Emmanuel Macron](#), will attempt to walk a fine line through this political minefield when he marks the bicentenary of Napoleon’s death at the Institute of France with a group of

academics and high school students. He will speak after a presentation by French historian Jean Tulard, one of the country's leading experts on Bonaparte, and lay a wreath at the foot of his tomb at Les Invalides in Paris in what the Élysée insists is a "commemoration not a celebration".

The Élysée declared Macron was breaking with the cautious approach of his predecessors and "will not shy away" from the controversy surrounding Napoleon, who exercised power between 1799 and 1815, but added that his speech would be "neither hagiographic, nor a denial nor repentance" and that he would not be giving a "retrospective judgment 10 generations later".



The Élysée said Emmanuel Macron's speech marking the anniversary would be 'neither hagiographic, nor a denial nor repentance'. At least one historian has drawn parallels between the two men. Photograph: Getty Images

It is a position the centrist Macron is expert at with his famous mantra "*en même temps*" (at the same time), but for the historian Tulard, it is all about remembering.

"It's not a question of whether he was a genius or a monster, it's about remembering what he did, which led to France dominating [Europe](#) at one moment," Tulard said.

“This is our history and a nation that forgets or effaces its history is condemned to failure.”

After his defeat at Waterloo, Napoleon had hoped to be banished to America. Instead, after 10 weeks at sea on board HMS Northumberland, he found himself on a volcanic rock 10-miles long by six-miles wide in the middle of the South Atlantic.

On sighting Saint Helena from the sea when he arrived in October 1815, his first comment was reported to be: “It will not be a pleasant abode.”

[Cruel despot or wise reformer? Napoleon’s two faces go on view](#)
[Read more](#)

The Saint Helena governor, Sir Hudson Lowe, was not impressed with his unwelcome guest. Not only was his duty to ensure “Old Boney” did not escape, but he was also obliged to supply him and his retinue with weekly supplies, including brandy and wine. To Napoleon, Lowe was his jailer. And he set out to irritate him at every occasion. To Lowe, Napoleon was a petulant individual given to tantrums and a failure to recognise and accept his situation.

In his will Napoleon asked to be buried on the banks of the Seine in Paris, but Lowe insisted he be interred in the Sane Valley on Saint Helena, later known as the Valley of the Tomb. Even after death, Lowe was unmoved to compromise with his French guests. The French general Charles Tristan de Montholon asked for the tomb to be engraved with the single word “Napoleon”; Lowe insisted “Bonaparte” be added. The two could not agree and the grave was left unmarked.



Longwood House on Saint Helena, the final residence of Napoleon.
Photograph: Gianluigi Guercia/AFP via Getty Images

In October 1840 his body was exhumed, repatriated to France and later reburied at Les Invalides in Paris. In 1854 the French government bought the Valley of the Tomb and Longwood House, which remain in French possession to this day.

When the northern French town of Arras organised an exhibition to persuade the French to take a new look at Napoleon and his 20 years as the most feared and respected man in Europe, Frédéric Lacaille, the curator, lamented that he was in danger of being forgotten in France.

“It’s worse than being detested, he is ignored, and yet Bonaparte had a stunning history,” Lacaille [said at the time](#). “Many French see him as representing a warmongering, authoritarian regime and forget the many things we inherited from him, including his great administrative reorganisation.”

His [Napoleonic Code](#) defined civil law across large parts of the world, introduced higher education, tax, road and sewer systems and he set up the Banque de France.

In his 2014 biography, [Napoleon the Great](#), British historian Andrew Roberts pointed out a certain similarity between Macron and Napoleon: both young, well-read and highly intelligent who came to power defeating rightwing opponents, both with ambitions to reform France and place it at the heart of a unified [Europe](#) ... and both with one eye on Britain, with its constant demands for free trade with the continent and viewed with growing irritation.

Tulard is kinder about the British: “People in France said ‘Oh that perfidious Albion condemned Napoleon to exile on Saint Helena’, but in reality the British were very indulgent. Just before Waterloo, the Congress of Vienna had declared Napoleon an outlaw. In other circumstances, he’d have been shot by firing squad. Saint Helena was hard, but it wasn’t the worse that could have happened to him.”

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Russia

Kremlin bears down on Moscow bureau of US-funded radio station

RFE/RL faces threat of raids over refusal to pay fines for not attaching 'foreign agent' label to its content



Journalists work in the studio of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty broadcaster in Moscow. Photograph: Evgenia Novozhenina/Reuters

Journalists work in the studio of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty broadcaster in Moscow. Photograph: Evgenia Novozhenina/Reuters



[Andrew Roth](#) in Moscow

Wed 5 May 2021 00.00 EDT

In 1991, Boris Yeltsin gave [Radio](#) Liberty, the US government-funded broadcaster that had fought for decades to bypass Soviet jamming equipment, permission to open its own Moscow bureau. Now, 30 years later, the Kremlin looks close to shutting it down.

A deadline for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty to pay the first of an estimated \$2.4m (£1.7m) in fines will pass for the foreign broadcaster next week, threatening its bureau in Russia with potential police raids, blocked bank accounts, or the arrest of senior employees.

RFE/RL says it will not pay the fines, which have accrued for its refusal to brand all its digital and video content as the product of a “foreign agent”. Roskomnadzor, the Russian mass media regulator, has initiated 520 cases against the broadcaster so far, and that number appears likely to grow.

“They either want us to lose our physical presence in the country or neuter us, render us ineffective and not engaging with our audience,” said Jamie Fly, the broadcaster’s president. “That’s the choice they are trying to force on us.”

RFE/RL has aggressively grown its operation in Russia, investing heavily in digital media and in building out its network of freelancers and reporting in Russia's regions, including a [recent expose on the industrial-scale theft of oil](#) from the country's network of pipelines. It has also provided blanket coverage of the arrest of Alexei Navalny, covering his return from Germany and subsequent street protests among his supporters to demand his release from prison.

“We’ve been increasingly successful in television in the past few years, covering every Moscow protest, by covering the Belarus protest,” said Kiryl Sukhotski, RFE/RL’s regional director for Europe and TV production. “When Navalny was returning to Russia, we were in Berlin, we were on his plane, we streamed [his arrest] live and the following protests ... that was watched by 42 million across our platforms. This is what the Russian government probably sees as a threat.”

Anticipating a crackdown, RFE/RL has begun relocating some staff and equipment to its main newsroom in Prague and its bureau in Kyiv. The staff transfers, which were [first reported by the BBC Russian service](#), have been controversial. One employee told the Guardian the mood in the newsroom was “grim, some people are angry”, while a second said there was concern that the organisation was signalling it was giving in by moving staff employees abroad. Several others said they had been asked not to speak to press about the situation.

“We’ve made very clear to our team in Moscow that we want to keep the bureau open, we’re fighting to keep it open,” said Fly, who confirmed the transfer of some key personnel and equipment to “maintain continuity in programming” but declined to go into detail. “If the Russian authorities think that somehow they’re going to force us out without actually doing it themselves, that we will pre-emptively leave the country, then they’re sadly mistaken. We are going to stay in Moscow.”

The broadcaster is at the intersection of two Kremlin targets: the US, whom Vladimir Putin has accused of stirring up internal dissent, and critical media outlets caught in an accelerating crackdown.

RFE/RL and its affiliates were among the first Russian-language media to be branded “foreign agents” in 2017. Russian officials called it a “symmetrical response” to a requirement that RT, the state-funded news agency, register its US entity under the Foreign Agents Registration Act. RFE/RL has rejected the comparison between the two news agencies, saying they have greater editorial independence and that Russian state media are still able to broadcast on radio and cable television in the US and have less onerous labelling requirements. “There is no parity,” Fly argued.

Last year, the Russian government required all “foreign agent” media to affix a text, audio, or a 15-second video warning to all of its content, something that Sukhotski called a “significant escalation ... They are equal to introducing the Russian state into our editorial content. And we can’t allow that.”

In a major decision last week, Meduza, a leading Russian news site headquartered in Riga, was also declared a foreign agent. Unlike RFE/RL, the site quickly took precautionary measures, affixing a disclaimer to its online content and [even its tweets](#) (that content has been displayed in the Comic Sans font with several facepalm emojis).

.[@meduzaproject](#), an excellent independent Russian media outlet, was assigned the status of a "foreign agent", and needs by law to preface all its publications with this disclaimer... Look at the emojis on the disclaimer :) pic.twitter.com/iu0CiN5kli

— Christo Grozev (@christogrozev) [April 26, 2021](#)

But even if they are not fined for violations of the law, the site’s editors have warned that the decision will bankrupt the site, driving away its advertisers and convincing sources that they are collaborating with enemies of the state. They have launched a [crowdfunding campaign](#) to try to keep it open.

“No media outlet saddled with the ‘foreign agent’ label can practise full-fledged journalism,” wrote Ivan Kolpakov, the site’s editor-in-chief, [in a public statement](#). This designation destroys our business ... Make no mistake: the authorities’ goal is to kill Meduza.”

Dmitri Peskov, a Kremlin spokesman, said: “The current mass media market is such that a disappearance of any particular mass media outlet will not matter. Nobody would even feel that disappearance.”

Other journalists critical of the government have also been targeted by police in recent weeks. Police have raided the offices and detained journalists from the student publication Doga and also raided the offices and home of Roman Anin, a Russian investigative journalist, as part of a slander case related to his investigation into a top Putin ally’s wealth. Police have also arrested reporters who covered protests in support of Navalny, despite their being accredited journalists.

RFE/RL’s future in Russia remains unclear, but its executives argue that its network of journalists and modern technology will make it impossible for the Kremlin to cut off its reporting from the country altogether.

“Obviously in our early decades we mostly operated outside the countries we broadcast to and we did that effectively,” said Fly, noting closed markets such as Iran and Turkmenistan, as well as expulsions from Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan in the past. “That’s part of our DNA ... If anything, we will double down and expand our efforts to reach the Russian audience.”

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2021.05.05 - Opinion

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Looking at India from afar, I'm furious at Modi's wilful neglect of my homeland

[Natalie Grover](#)

If the government had faced reality and acted earlier, Covid might have been held at bay. But the rot runs deeper



People wait to refill oxygen cylinders in Delhi. Photograph: Prakash Singh/AFP/Getty Images

People wait to refill oxygen cylinders in Delhi. Photograph: Prakash Singh/AFP/Getty Images

Tue 4 May 2021 12.13 EDT

There was an air of inevitability about India's unfolding Covid disaster. Watching from afar in London, I had long feared the worst for the country of my birth. Since [India](#) has decades of underfunded health infrastructure and no cohesive national strategy, I often discussed with family and friends back

home that the virus would hit its 1.4 billion people harder when the inevitable second wave came round, even with its young population and available vaccines.

By late last year, my loved ones were going about their daily lives believing the pandemic had been conquered, alongside many others who attended cricket matches, weddings and religious festivals. India's road to Covid hell was paved with delusions of grandeur – a fanciful idea that the virus had been vanquished by sheer might of will, superhuman immunity, faith in an almighty God, and piecemeal restrictions. By January, India's prime minister, Narendra Modi, had declared [India had defeated the virus](#). In the months that followed, the government – and by extension citizens – acted as if it had. Between January and mid-April 2021, India's national scientific taskforce on Covid-19 [did not hold a single meeting](#).

Meanwhile, as Europe buckled under its own second wave, I received commiserations from family in Delhi about the UK's latest lockdown. Now, as my home city disintegrates into chaos, my Indian heart breaks as my British husband asks why. Why my social media is replete with desperate pleas for supplies, but the government is unabashedly [censoring public criticism of its culpability](#). Why election rallies spearheaded by the Hindu-nationalist party in power and a [Hindu religious gathering](#) attended by millions was permitted in recent months – but a Muslim missionary movement in March 2020 was [vilified for fanning the flames of the pandemic](#). Why there isn't a national lockdown in place.

[How many more images of Covid disaster does it take to jolt rich countries into action? | Nesrine Malik](#)

[Read more](#)

There are few simple answers. Protracted lockdowns aren't feasible when large swathes of the country don't know where their next meal is coming from. Social distancing is a privilege that millions who dwell in slums just cannot afford. India spends roughly [1% of GDP on health](#), among the lowest for any major economy – so regardless of the gross mismanagement of the ruling BJP, the patchwork healthcare system would probably have been strained with even a relatively small rise in cases. It has long been difficult to carry out any actions that benefit the public as a whole – we may take

pride in our homes being immaculate, but our roads and historical buildings are stained with the stench of litter and negligence.

I explain to my husband that although the country is democratic on paper, its media ecosystem is not free from the tentacles of government. When I make desperate attempts to get family to pay attention to news reports that offer a glimpse of reality, that advice takes a back seat to WhatsApp groups that regurgitate misinformation. Everyday Indians haven't been able to avail themselves of coherent regular briefings by public health experts on the dire situation.

Indians understand that they must beg, borrow and steal to get by in crisis – because the central government isn't equipped to help and local administrations scramble to survive the onslaught. Just days ago, Modi practically confirmed it was each man for himself in his first national broadcast to address the second wave, urging people to create [small taskforces within their communities](#) to ensure Covid discipline so that his government does not have to impose a national lockdown. It may seem hard to fathom that people are hoarding oxygen cylinders in their homes, but when you know there's no chance the national government will step in to help – when no government really has in your lifetime – you take care of your own. If my loved ones were gasping for breath, I'd be in alleyways selling family jewellery for oxygen.

Yes, the BJP has sleepwalked through this pandemic. By actively undermining public health to secure its political future, it is in large part responsible for the horrific surge of cases and deaths. But the country elected this prime minister – twice – largely on the promise of economic prosperity above all else. Indians have not only empowered this party, but rewarded it with blind faith in the face of gross incompetence at best and atrocious authoritarianism at worst. Still, the BJP is a symptom of an existing disease in Indian politics. We have a house of parliament in which close to [half the elected members](#) have faced criminal cases, and a trifling political opposition that has barely whimpered in the face of the BJP's egregious breaches of constitutional rights.

Some Indians abroad have expressed [survivor's guilt about the hopelessness](#) of it all. I am devastated, but I am equally enraged. Enraged by the slow,

brutal, formulaic predictability of it all. When it's time to vote again in 2024, and the smoke of the Covid pyres fades into memory, I wouldn't be surprised if the air is thick again with murmurs that the BJP is the lesser of two evils. And the government of wilful neglect gets another chance.

Natalie Grover is a Guardian science correspondent

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[OpinionLabour](#)

The idea that Labour lacks patriotism is nearly as old as the party itself

[James Stafford](#)

Labour needs to present a generous vision for Britain's future – or it will remain trapped by these same old accusations



‘To the wider public, Labour’s endless discussions of patriotism suggest a fatal lack of confidence and self-belief.’ Labour leader Keir Starmer campaigning in Hartlepool. Photograph: Ian Forsyth/Getty Images

‘To the wider public, Labour’s endless discussions of patriotism suggest a fatal lack of confidence and self-belief.’ Labour leader Keir Starmer campaigning in Hartlepool. Photograph: Ian Forsyth/Getty Images

Tue 4 May 2021 10.25 EDT

The Labour party’s endless debates about “patriotism” have a Groundhog Day quality to them. From Blair to Brown, Miliband, Corbyn and now

Starmer, it's [hard to remember a time](#) when the party wasn't earnestly interrogating itself about its supposedly antagonistic relationship to questions of British – latterly English – identity.

[This discourse](#) has barely changed since Blair's third term, and has often exhibited the worst and most self-defeating qualities of a party in decline: inward-looking, exclusively focused on Labour and its alleged failings, and largely neglectful of the political context in which the party operates. To the wider public, Labour's endless discussions of patriotism suggest a fatal lack of confidence and self-belief, in sharp contrast to the Conservatives' unshakeable, breezy entitlement.

Accusations that Labour lacks a sense of “patriotism” are [nearly as old as the party itself](#). The revisionist history told by many commentators, that Labour was regarded as irreproachably “patriotic” by all and sundry until Jeremy Corbyn came along, is a laughable invention. In the 1930s and 1980s, Conservative governments succeeded in portraying the organised industrial working class – inflationary, uncouth and potentially seditious – as standing outside a “true” British nation characterised by the “vigorous virtues” of bourgeois thrift and propriety. Now, it is the urban precariat and even many salaried, university-educated professionals who have suddenly found that their interests and values aren't included within the Conservatives' definition of national politics.

Because gig economy workers, renters and urban professionals don't conform to many people's idea of a traditional Labour supporter – and because some people who look and sound like versions of the latter have switched allegiance to the Tories – it can be hard to identify the structural similarity between these people and Labour's core constituencies in earlier periods of electoral defeat. Yet the similarities are there. The economy under the Conservative party during the 1930s and 1980s was notoriously stacked against workers in declining heavy industries in Scotland, Wales and northern England. In our own time, a combination of [stagnant wages and skyrocketing asset prices](#) disadvantage young workers and renters everywhere, especially in Britain's Labour-voting cities.

Treating “patriotism” as a static [set of values](#) that a metropolitan Labour party has carelessly abandoned misunderstands the challenge confronting

Labour. The party has a dynamic relationship with patriotism, shaped by a rhetorical contest with its opponents over endless possible visions of the nation, and by peoples' changing material circumstances. The story of our time is not the party's abandonment of an English working class that has long been undergoing a wrenching process of decline. Rather, it's of how the right has presided over an economy that rewards asset-owners at the expense of everyone else, while purging liberalism and social democracy from Britain's political culture.

The result of this is a superficial, misanthropic kind of nationalism that is devoid of any real regard for Britain's history or institutions, and is based on little more than blind deference to privilege, cruelty to outsiders, and contempt for our fellow citizens. To voters, the main attraction of this new Tory nationalism is that it makes voting for Britain's traditional governing party seem like an act of thrilling rebellion against the "woke orthodoxy" represented by under-40s living in big cities. In focus groups conducted in "red wall" seats, you often hear the accusation that Labour is a party ["for students"](#). The Labour leadership rightly reads this as an invitation to find out what it needs to do to convince former voters the party still represents them. But it's the intensity of the disdain for students, not the belief that Labour is *for* those students, that is new and concerning here.

As things stand, [Labour](#) is going to have a hard time convincing anybody that it isn't "for" young people and those who are "woke" – at least to a greater degree than the Conservatives, which is what matters in electoral terms. It would be folly, then, to allow this kind of ginned-up resentment to set the parameters for how [Labour](#) tries to tell its own story about Britain. Unless the party can convincingly articulate why idealistic young people have a role to play in the nation's future (something that, in a more functional political culture, would not be such a hard sell), then it will be permanently boxed into the defensive crouch it has occupied for much of the past decade. The only way to break free is for [Labour](#) and the people it represents (whoever they are) to establish their own idea of the country's future, and confidently invite others to join them.

A good starting point would be to take a little more pride in Labour's good standing with young people. In many other European countries, established parties of the centre left would do almost anything to attract thumping

majorities among the under-35s in support of their programmes. It is not something to take for granted; nor is it surprising that in an ageing society where young people are forced to seek work in a small number of large cities, the votes of these cohorts count for less than they once did. But Labour shouldn't accept a zero-sum choice between keeping the coalition it has and growing the coalition it needs. The party leadership doesn't need to praise or condemn every action by social movements advancing racial and climate justice. Nor should these movements set much store by what the leader of the opposition does or doesn't say about them.

What Labour politicians *can* do, however, is vigorously reject the notion that there is something inherently unpatriotic about challenge and dissent; and proudly weave popular movements, past and present, back into a more generous, less brittle account of what it means to live in 21st-century Britain. Unlike the cynical politicians and journalists who fall over themselves to sneer at movements such as Black Lives Matter and the climate strikers, these movements actually believe (at least on some level) that Britain is capable of addressing both the nation's past atrocities and present injustices. This isn't patriotism by the lights of the opinion pages or the focus groups. But it exhibits a greater faith in the actual moral and intellectual capacities of British citizens than the boosterish rhetoric Johnson and his acolytes spout whenever the cameras are rolling.

- James Stafford is a historian of Ireland and Britain since 1750. He is a contributing editor for *Renewal: A Journal of Social Democracy*.

[The politics sketch](#) **Keir Starmer**

If Starmer wants to win Hartlepool, polls suggest he should stop visiting [John Crace](#)



As the byelection campaign continues, the Labour leader's media appearances couldn't be duller if he tried



Keir Starmer speaks with members of the public on a campaign walkabout in Seaton Carew, Hartlepool. Photograph: Ian Forsyth/PA

Keir Starmer speaks with members of the public on a campaign walkabout in Seaton Carew, Hartlepool. Photograph: Ian Forsyth/PA

Tue 4 May 2021 13.22 EDT

It's going to be [a long old week](#) for Keir Starmer. One which will be first spent trying to convince the country he hasn't given up on winning the Hartlepool byelection and then, almost certainly, explaining why he never expected to hold on to the north-eastern constituency anyway.

The [Labour](#) leader's day had got off to a bad start with a Survation opinion poll, commissioned by ITV's Good Morning Britain, showing the Tories held a 17% lead over [Labour](#) in Hartlepool; a seat that had never gone to the Conservatives in its history. GMB's Susanna Reid cut to the chase. "Why were things going so wrong?" she asked.

"I've been to Hartlepool three times now," Starmer began. Though maybe he might have been better off visiting less frequently, as every time he showed his face Labour appeared to do worse in the polls. Starmer pressed on. It was jobs that were coming up with the voters he had met and only he was promising to improve job security.

Which rather suggested he had been having different conversations than the ones others had been holding or that the people he had met had been humouring him. Because it looked to everyone else that either people had now decided they were quite happy with more than a decade of Tory governments or that Labour was still viewed as an anti-Brexit party and that those who had voted for the Brexit party in 2019 were now planning on backing the Conservatives.

After Starmer had merely repeated his jobs, jobs, jobs mantra, Reid asked him about the photo opportunity in the John Lewis wallpaper department. Why had he bothered? Starmer sighed. He had known at the time it was a bad idea – after all, only Boris Johnson was ever given a free pass on such lame political stunts – but now he was obliged to defend a weak visual gag as serious commentary on Tory sleaze and spending priorities by getting sidelined on to nurses' pay. Reid was unimpressed. "Was it really that bad to spend money on doing up Downing Street?" she said. The GMB presenter clearly sees a future in sponsored government. Suits with Betfred logos. Just like the snooker players. Nappies donated by Dyson. The possibilities were endless.

Reid's sidekick, Adil Ray, went for the jugular by going back to Hartlepool. If Labour did lose on Thursday, would Starmer consider standing down as leader? Starmer dodged the question by insisting the byelection was not yet lost. Hopefully also, most pundits would spend more time dissecting the Scottish results than one byelection. Fingers crossed for an SNP overall majority. That really would give the Tories a headache. And besides, his position was surely safe enough for now. Did Labour MPs really want another leadership election so soon after the last one? Who knew whom the members might choose next time round?

Things didn't get any more comfortable for Starmer an hour later when [he was interviewed by Mishal Husain](#) on the Today programme. Did he accept that Thursday's results would be a reflection of his leadership? He did. In which case, Husain said, if the dismal results of the 2019 general election were down to a combination of Jeremy Corbyn and Brexit, to what would he attribute the loss of Hartlepool?

“My job is to win the next general election,” he said, carefully side-stepping the question. “We have a mountain to climb and we’re climbing it.” Only Starmer currently gives the impression of someone who is doing more sliding down than climbing up. Then maybe you need a few falls before you reach the summit. Still, whatever the extenuating circumstances of there being no Brexit party candidate to split the Tory vote this time round, no one really expected Labour to be going backwards from its 2019 position.

Er, yes, Husain observed. But we’re talking about a seat that Labour has always held. Surely it was blindingly obvious the polls indicate that the punters didn’t give a toss about sleaze and broken promises. They were happy enough for Johnson to do what he liked and to have caused the deaths of thousands of people from his mishandling of the coronavirus response in the early months of the pandemic. The vaccine rollout was going just fine and they were prepared to go along with the Tories’ “levelling up” agenda even if they didn’t really believe it would ever happen. Boris was successfully selling a vision. Even if it turned out to be a Ponzi scheme. So where was Labour’s big transformational ideas?

“And fifthly ... ” said Starmer, having run through four other plans for the future. Somehow even when he was trying to share his dream, he managed to find a form of language to disengage his listeners. Before he could get to sixthly, Husain switched the subject. Focus groups saw him as an aloof “Mighty Eagle”, soaring above the political battleground. So what could he say about himself that might surprise voters?

This was the time for Starmer to let rip. To have shown some genuine passion about what motivates him. Or to have lied about making models of buses. Instead we got the standard politician’s response. That he liked meeting people. He couldn’t have sounded duller if he had tried. Then maybe the one surprise about Starmer is that there is no surprise. And right now, that’s not a vote-winning look.

[Opinion](#) **Work & careers**

Want to be a model employee? Just shut up and knuckle down

[Arwa Mahdawi](#)



Companies like Basecamp and Coinbase hate it when staff bring their politics to work. But that's just what humans do



Photograph: Posed by models/Getty

Photograph: Posed by models/Getty

Wed 5 May 2021 02.00 EDT

Looking for a new job? I have a feeling technology company Basecamp may be hiring! Last week, a [third of Basecamp's employees resigned](#) after the company, which makes productivity software, announced it was banning “societal and political discussions” on workplace messaging platforms.

“Sensitivities are at 11, and every discussion remotely related to politics, advocacy or society at large quickly spins away from pleasant,” said Basecamp’s CEO, Jason Fried, [in a blogpost](#). “It’s a major distraction.” After outlining why banning his underlings from discussing politics was in everyone’s best interest, Fried announced another new company policy: “No more paternalistic benefits.” Basecamp’s leadership had decided offering employees a fitness benefit was patronising and intrusive, apparently.

Basecamp isn’t the first company to try to purge itself of politics. Last year, Coinbase, a cryptocurrency exchange, [called social activism](#) a divisive “distraction” that was negatively affecting productivity. The company announced it would be discouraging political discussions and [offered a severance package](#) to any employee unhappy with this policy. Last week,

Coinbase's CEO [cheered on Basecamp's decision](#) to follow its lead, stating that making such a decision "takes courage in these times" and asking "Who will be next?"

I dunno who's going to be next, but it seems unlikely Basecamp and Coinbase will be one-offs. I think we're going to see a trend of mega-privileged CEOs styling themselves as courageous thought-leaders for essentially telling their employees to shut up and work. It's sort of tragically hilarious. These people fancy themselves as intellectuals, yet they seem incapable of understanding that "politics" isn't a neatly self-contained issue that doesn't overlap with anything else. I don't know how clueless you have to be to think you can possibly separate politics from everyday life.

Actually I do. Early in my career, one of the senior people at the company where I worked made homophobic comments about me. I went to HR to complain, and suggested a few ways the company could make itself a more welcoming place for LGBT employees. "The thing is," said the HR representative, smiling patronisingly at me from a desk filled with pictures of her family, "not everyone wants to bring their personal life or politics into the office." Me wanting to be treated with respect at work? That was political, apparently. That episode happened more than a decade ago. I thought the world had moved on. Seems like it hasn't.

- Arwa Mahdawi is a Guardian columnist

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[Guardian Opinion cartoon](#)
[Byelections](#)

Steve Bell on Boris Johnson, ‘levelling up’ and the Hartlepool byelection – cartoon

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[Nils Pratley on finance](#)[House prices](#)

Sunak's stamp duty holiday extension has merely inflamed the housing market

[Nils Pratley](#).



Throwing money at an already heated market looks nonsensical and could lose the Treasury £2bn



The chancellor extended the deadline for the £500,000 zero band on stamp duty in England and Northern Ireland until 30 June. Photograph: Guy Bell/Rex/Shutterstock

The chancellor extended the deadline for the £500,000 zero band on stamp duty in England and Northern Ireland until 30 June. Photograph: Guy Bell/Rex/Shutterstock

Tue 4 May 2021 14.52 EDT

Surprise, surprise. Presented, or so they thought, with an end-March deadline to save a few thousand pounds on stamp duty, buyers [ruled to complete their house purchases](#). Mortgage lending in the month reached a new record.

It requires no imagination to see what will happen in June, the extended deadline for the £500,000 zero band on stamp duty in England and Northern Ireland – an extension announced very late in the day by the chancellor, [Rishi Sunak](#), in his March budget. There will be a repeat. Then the drama will be replayed in a miniature form in September as buyers try to get on the right side of the taper from £250,000 to £125,000.

Take a step back and you have to wonder why Sunak ever felt compelled to succumb to the housebuilders' self-interested warnings about “a cliff edge”

in March. He has merely created a new rush for completions at a moment when the housing market, by most measures, is running hot. Interest rates are rock bottom, [mortgage availability is strong](#), and prices, viewed as a multiple of earnings, are back at 2007 levels. This is not a market that needed a fresh dose of adrenalin.

The Treasury in March estimated the cost of the extension at £1.3bn in the current tax year. Given that approvals are running so much higher than estimates, the final figure will probably end up closer to £2bn. In the grand scheme of the government's economic response to the pandemic it is not much, but there are at least three reasons why the chancellor should not be given a free pass.

First, anecdotal evidence suggests a large chunk of buyers' stamp duty "saving" has been pocketed by sellers in the form of inflated prices – first-time buyers have had to pay more. Second, letting £2bn slip between the cracks makes it harder to impose savings elsewhere. Third, stimuli work best when they are counter-cyclical. If Sunak had to dabble, a better moment would have been this autumn, as the furlough scheme ends.

Not for the first time (and surely not for the last), the government's approach to throwing money at the housing market looks nonsensical.

Oxford Nanopore's roundabout route to flotation

[Oxford Nanopore](#), regarded as one of the UK's most exciting tech prospects, is taking a roundabout route to flotation, or IPO. The big event is still scheduled for the second half of this year, but the DNA sequencing and analytics group topped up with £195m in a private round of funding on Tuesday.

The timing is slightly odd since an IPO, in theory, should be able to provide the financing the company seeks. Perhaps it is a case of management opting for safety and protecting themselves against a change in the financial weather. That is not unreasonable.

More interesting is the identity of the four new investors that contributed £125m of the £195m. Only one, M&G Investments, is from the UK. The

other three are from overseas – Temasek from Singapore, Wellington Management from the US, and Nikon from Japan. That makeup fits a pattern in the UK tech scene: most of the pre-IPO funding for bright UK ideas comes from abroad.

Robin Klein, co-founder of LocalGlobe, a tech specialist venture capital firm, argued the other day that asset allocation in the UK pensions and institutional world has not got to grips with the tech revolution. It's a fair point: Canadian pension funds almost seem more active than their UK counterparts at the scale-up stage of the UK industry. The position may be improving – but very slowly.

Pay packet row is the last thing AstraZeneca needs

Pascal Soriot of [AstraZeneca](#) has a better claim to a big bonus this year than most chief executives. The company has led the Covid vaccine fight and, for all the production and communication hiccups, is supplying a product for no profit in large volumes, which is commendable. Nor has [AstraZeneca](#) neglected the day job: last week's trading figures were excellent.

Even so, a [row over Soriot's pay package](#) is the last thing AstraZeneca needs. The contentious element is a boost in his incentive shares from 550% of salary to 650%, which sounds minor but is the sort of tweak that infuriates shareholders.

Soriot has collected £15m in each of the last two years, which may make him a pauper by comparison with big pharma peers in the US but ought to be enough. There was no need for another potential million on top.

2021.05.05 - Around the world

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[Myanmar](#)

Myanmar junta bans satellite dishes in media crackdown

Anyone who installs satellite dishes could face a one-year prison sentence or \$320 fine, military-controlled media reported



Demonstrators march during an anti-military coup protest in Mandalay, Myanmar, on Wednesday. Photograph: EPA

Demonstrators march during an anti-military coup protest in Mandalay, Myanmar, on Wednesday. Photograph: EPA

[Rebecca Ratcliffe](#) *South-east Asia correspondent*

Wed 5 May 2021 02.07 EDT

Myanmar's military junta has banned satellite dishes, threatening prison sentences for anyone who violates the measure, as it intensifies its crackdown on access to independent news outlets.

The junta, which faces unanimous opposition from the public and has struggled to maintain order, has imposed increasingly tough restrictions on communication since seizing power on 1 February.

Mobile data has been cut for most people for more than 50 days, while broadband access has also been subject to severe restrictions. Several media outlets have been banned but continue to operate in hiding, either publishing online or broadcasting for television.

['We wanted to scare them': the brothers who fought back against Myanmar's army.](#)
[Read more](#)

On Wednesday, the military-controlled newspaper Global New Light of Myanmar reported that news agencies were using illegal satellite dishes to broadcast programmes that “harm the state security, the rule of law and community peace and tranquillity”. Anyone who installs satellite dishes could face a one-year prison sentence or K500,000 (\$320) as a fine, it said.

More than 80 journalists have been arrested in recent months, according to the independent Irrawaddy news outlet, which is itself facing legal action under Article 505(a) of the Penal Code. This law states that publishing information that causes fear or spreads false news is punishable by up to three years in prison.

On Monday, Yuki Kitazumi, a Japanese journalist, was charged under the same law, according to a report by Kyodo news agency. Kitazumi became the first foreign reporter to face charges since the coup.

Thousands of people have been arrested under the junta, including 3,677 people who have been sentenced or are in detention, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) advocacy group. It reported that 769 people have been killed by the military.

Despite the risks of military violence, protesters have continued to gather to oppose the coup. Teachers, students and parents marched outside schools in Mandalay on Wednesday morning, according to local media, calling for a

boycott of the education system under the junta. On Tuesday night, a candlelit vigil was held in northern Kachin state.

Earlier this week, five protesters were killed and another injured in a blast in the southern region of Bago. State media said the group were trying to plant a bomb, and that Thet Win Hlaing, a 35-year old former MP for Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) party, was among those who died.

A number of blasts have been reported in Yangon and other cities over recent weeks, including some targeting government and military property.

On Tuesday, Myanmar's ambassador to the United Nations told the US Congress to intensify pressure on the military by imposing more targeted sanctions. Kyaw Moe Tun called for measures against the state-run Mayanmar oil and gas company Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise, and the state-owned bank Myanmar Foreign Trade Bank.

"I wish to stress that Myanmar is not just witnessing another major setback to democracy, but also the crisis is threatening the regional peace and security," he said.

The US, along with several western countries, has condemned the coup and imposed sanctions on the generals as well as some of their family members and businesses.

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Afghanistan

Thousands of Afghans flee as fighting erupts after US troop withdrawal begins

Fighting between government forces and the Taliban has broken out in Helmand province



A US flag is lowered as American and Afghan soldiers attend a handover ceremony in Helmand on 2 May 2021. Photograph: AP

A US flag is lowered as American and Afghan soldiers attend a handover ceremony in Helmand on 2 May 2021. Photograph: AP

Agence France-Presse in Kandahar

Tue 4 May 2021 16.00 EDT

Thousands of Afghans have fled their homes in Helmand province as fierce fighting between government forces and the Taliban erupted after the [US military](#) began withdrawing its remaining troops.

Afghan forces pushed back a string of insurgent attacks on checkpoints across the southern province, where the US military on Sunday handed over a base to government forces as [part of its formal pullout](#) that began on 1 May.

About 1,000 families have fled their homes to escape the fighting that erupted on the outskirts of Lashkar Gah, the capital of Helmand, and some other parts of the province, said Sayed Mohammad Ramin, the region's director for refugees.

He said the families had taken refuge in Lashkar Gah and had come from areas where fighting was intense in the past two days.

“We will survey their needs tomorrow, but many who still have not found shelter in the city need urgent assistance,” Ramin told AFP.

The defence ministry said government forces had killed more than 100 Taliban fighters in Helmand in the past 24 hours when the insurgents attacked some checkpoints on the outskirts of Lashkar Gah.

Another 22 al-Qaida fighters from Pakistan were also killed in the fighting, the ministry said.

[‘Terrible days ahead’: Afghan women fear the return of the Taliban](#)
[Read more](#)

Officials said the Taliban fighters initially captured some checkpoints but they were retaken by government forces who pushed back the insurgents.

“The enemy has now lost all the areas it had captured and suffered heavy casualties,” Attaullah Afghan, head of the Helmand provincial council, told AFP.

The Taliban said dozens of Afghan troops were killed in the fighting. Both sides are known to exaggerate casualties inflicted on the other.

UK-based medical care provider Emergency said it is receiving large numbers of “war wounded patients” at its surgical centre in Lashkar Gah due to widespread fighting in the area since 1 May.

It said the hospital received 106 patients, of which 65 had to be admitted.

“These are very difficult days in Lashkar Gah ... We have also put beds in the physiotherapy room to accommodate all the injured patients,” Viktor Urosevic, medical coordinator at the hospital, said in a statement issued by Emergency.

Emergency’s [Afghanistan](#) coordinator, Marco Puntin, said fighting in Helmand was not an isolated event.

“We have witnessed an escalation of conflict across Afghanistan,” he said.

Fighting was also reported in several other provinces since the US military formally began pulling out its remaining 2,500 troops.

The Pentagon has downplayed the fighting.

“We’ve seen nothing thus far that has affected the drawdown, or had any significant impact on the mission at hand in Afghanistan,” US Department of Defence spokesperson John Kirby said on Monday.

Nearly 20 years after US and allied Natotroops invaded Afghanistan and ousted the Taliban government as they pursued al-Qaida after the September 11, 2001 attacks, [President Joe Biden ordered in April the final withdrawal](#).

On Tuesday, US officials said the military has completed two to six percent of the withdrawal.

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[Mali](#)

Mali woman has given birth to nine babies, says health ministry

Halima Cisse was expected to have septuplets but apparently gave birth to very rare nonuplets – five girls and four boys – at a hospital in Morocco



A woman from Mali has given birth to nine babies in hospital in Morocco, according to Mali's health ministry. Photograph: Luis Cortes/Reuters

A woman from Mali has given birth to nine babies in hospital in Morocco, according to Mali's health ministry. Photograph: Luis Cortes/Reuters

Staff and agencies

Tue 4 May 2021 20.44 EDT

A woman in [Mali](#) has given birth to nine babies – two more than doctors had detected inside her womb – according to the country's health ministry, joining a small pantheon of mothers of nonuplets.

Halima Cisse, 25, had been expected to give birth to seven babies, according to ultrasounds conducted in Morocco and Mali that missed two of the siblings. All were delivered by caesarean section.

The pregnancy of Cisse has fascinated the west African nation and attracted the attention of its leaders. When doctors in March said Cisse needed specialist care, the country's transitional leader, Bah Ndaw, ordered that she be sent to Morocco, where she gave birth to five girls and four boys, according to Mali's health ministry.

"The mother and babies are doing well so far," Mali's health minister, Fanta Siby, told Agence France-Presse, adding that she had been kept informed by the Malian doctor who accompanied Cisse to Morocco.

They are due to return home in several weeks' time, she added.

However, Morocco's health ministry spokesman Rachid Koudhari said he had no knowledge of such a multiple birth having taken place in one of the country's hospitals.

[World at 'peak twin' as birth rates reach historic high, study finds](#)
[Read more](#)

Doctors had been concerned about Cisse's health, according to local press reports, as well as her babies' chances of survival. Nonuplets are extremely rare. Medical complications in multiple births of this kind often mean that some of the babies do not survive.

With Agence France-Presse and Reuters

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/05/mali-woman-has-given-birth-to-nine-babies-says-health-ministry>

[Spain](#)

People's party wins Madrid snap election but fails to get majority

Isabel Díaz Ayuso's conservatives take 65 of 136 seats and will need support of far-right Vox party



Isabel Díaz Ayuso, the People's party regional president, at the celebrations for election results after the Madrid elections. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Isabel Díaz Ayuso, the People's party regional president, at the celebrations for election results after the Madrid elections. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

[Sam Jones](#) in Madrid

[@swajones](#)

Tue 4 May 2021 18.34 EDT

Spain's conservative People's party has won a resounding victory but fallen just short of an absolute majority in a Madrid regional election dominated by the coronavirus pandemic and marked by a [bitter and deeply polarised campaign](#).

The PP, led by incumbent regional president Isabel Díaz Ayuso, won 65 seats in the 136-seat regional assembly, more than doubling its tally in the 2019 regional election and taking more seats than all three leftwing parties combined. However, its failure to cross the majority threshold of 69 seats means it will now have to rely on the help of the far-right Vox party to form a new government.



The People's party leader, Isabel Díaz Ayuso, with the party's national leader, Pablo Casado, as they celebrate the results at the party's headquarters in Madrid on Tuesday evening. Photograph: David Mudarra/People's party/EPA

The Socialist party of the prime minister, [Pedro Sánchez](#), suffered a bruising night that was compounded by the news that his former coalition partner, the Unidas Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias, was leaving Spanish politics. Not only did the Socialists slump from 37 seats to 24, they were also pipped to second place by the leftwing regional Más Madrid party, which also took 24 seats but which attracted a fractionally higher share of the vote.

Despite winning 13 seats – just one more seat than in 2019 – Vox is now guaranteed a pivotal role in Madrid politics. The far-left, anti-austerity Unidas Podemos won 10 seats – three more than last time – and came in fifth. But, as the count neared its end, Iglesias, [who had resigned as a deputy prime minister in the coalition government to run in the regional election](#), announced he was leaving Spanish politics.

“I will remain committed to my country but I won’t get in the way of new leadership,” he said.

The centre-right Citizens party, once the great hope of the Spanish centre-ground, crashed out of the regional assembly, losing every one of the 26 seats it won two years ago. The participation rate was 76.2%, 11 percentage points up on 2019.

Ayuso hailed the result as “another triumph for freedom in Madrid” and told Sánchez his “days are numbered” while the PP’s national leader, Pablo Casado, said it represented a vote of no confidence in Spain’s leftwing coalition government.



Outside the Vox party headquarters in Madrid on Tuesday, 4 May. The poster depicts party leaders Rocio Monasterio (l) and Santiago Abascal. Photograph: Manu Fernández/AP

Vox's leader, Santiago Abascal, immediately announced that his party would help facilitate Ayuso's return to power "to ensure that there is no way for the left to govern in Madrid".

Mónica García, Más Madrid's candidate, thanked the 600,000 people who had voted for her and said her party would "[be the political force that leads the alternative in the Madrid region](#)".

The Socialist candidate, Ángel Gabilondo, said the party's results "aren't good and aren't what we'd hoped for", while the Citizens candidate, Edmundo Bal, claimed his shrinking party still represented "the antidote to extremes and polarisation".

['We're all Ayuso': lockdown sceptic poised for victory in Madrid election](#)
[Read more](#)

The snap election was triggered in March when Ayuso – who has dragged the Madrid PP far to the right of its national counterpart – responded to efforts to topple PP-led regional governments elsewhere in Spain by [dissolving her coalition administration with Citizens](#).

Ayuso, a vociferous critic of the Sánchez government and an opponent of its Covid lockdowns, has refused to rule out a deal with Vox, saying it shares common ground with the PP on "[some fundamental questions](#)".

While Ayuso's attitude has won her the respect of many hospitality industry workers, her critics accuse her of putting the regional economy before people's health. In May last year, the head of public health in the region resigned after disagreements over Ayuso's response to the pandemic. Her insistence on keeping bars and restaurants open has been questioned.

The number of Covid cases per 100,000 people over the past fortnight stands at 343 in Madrid, compared with a national average of 214. In Madrid's intensive care units, 44% of the beds are occupied by Covid patients; across Spain as a whole, the proportion is 22.9%.



The Spanish PM, Pedro Sánchez, casts his ballot. He said the far-right Vox party was a threat to Spain's democracy and coexistence. Photograph: Ballesteros/EPA

By mid-morning on Tuesday, long queues had formed outside polling stations, where workers had been provided with two masks, face screens, disposable gloves and hand gel. Older voters were invited to cast their ballots between 10am and 12pm, while those with the virus or in quarantine were asked to vote in the final hour, between 7pm and 8pm.

The electoral campaign was littered with recriminations and accusations, and two of the candidates – including Ayuso – received death threats.

Last month Iglesias [walked out of a TV debate](#) after Vox's candidate, Rocío Monasterio, tried to cast doubt on the death threat he and his family had received along with four assault rifle bullets.

Ayuso had seized on Iglesias's candidacy to suggest Tuesday's poll was a choice between "communism and freedom", while Vox has been criticised for stigmatising unaccompanied migrant children in its election posters.

Sánchez, meanwhile, had claimed that a deal between the PP and Vox could herald "the beginning of the end of Madrid's strong democracy and its many rights and freedoms".

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[Spain](#)

Pablo Iglesias leaves Spanish politics, ‘very proud’ of Podemos legacy

Former deputy prime minister says he led ‘a project that changed the history of our country’

- [People’s party wins Madrid snap election but fails to get majority.](#)



Pablo Iglesias, the Unidas Podemos candidate at the Madrid regional elections and former Spanish vice president announces his resignation. Photograph: Kiko Huesca/EPA

Pablo Iglesias, the Unidas Podemos candidate at the Madrid regional elections and former Spanish vice president announces his resignation. Photograph: Kiko Huesca/EPA

[Sam Jones](#) in Madrid

[@swajones](#)

Tue 4 May 2021 19.39 EDT

One of the more remarkable and once-unthinkable trajectories in modern Spanish politics came to an end a little before midnight on Tuesday when the [Podemos](#) leader and former deputy prime minister Pablo Iglesias announced he was leaving the political stage for good.

Speaking after the [conservative People's party \(PP\) triumphed in the Madrid regional election in which he had stood as his party's candidate](#), Iglesias said the time had come for him to “leave my post and leave politics”. But the former politics lecturer added that he remained “very proud” to have led “a project that changed the history of our country”.

It was not an empty boast. In the seven years since Podemos was born from the fury of Spain's *indignados* movement, the far-left, anti-austerity party has transformed the country's politics.

[People's party wins Madrid snap election but fails to get majority](#)

[Read more](#)

After breaking through in [2014's European elections](#), Podemos – together with the now moribund, centre-right Citizens party – brought an end to four decades of dominance by the duopoly of the PP and the Spanish Socialist Workers' party (PSOE).

While the much-predicted [sorpasso \(overtaking\) of the PSOE failed to materialise at the 2016 general election](#) – and although [Podemos has long struggled with factional squabbles and schisms](#) – the party still managed to [enter Spain's first coalition government in eight decades](#) a mere six years after its foundation.

“Being in politics broadens the shoulders,” [he told the Guardian in 2017](#). “There's that cruel saying: ‘What doesn't kill you makes you stronger.’ And I think the punches we've taken have made us stronger.”

Throughout his time in both opposition and government, Iglesias has never found himself lost for words. In 2016, [he stunned his then deputy, Iñigo Errejón](#), by rounding on the PSOE in congress by reminding the Socialists of their role in [the dirty war against Basque terror group Eta in the 1980s, when government-funded death squads murdered suspected terrorists and disposed](#)

[of their bodies](#). Iglesias told the chamber that the former PSOE leader Felipe González was a man with “a quicklime-stained past”.

More recently, he has reserved his anger and rhetoric for his opponents in the far-right Vox party, suggesting [it would like to see a coup d'état in Spain but lacked the courage to stage one](#), and telling its MPs: “You’re not even fascists – you’re just parasites.”

Iglesias has also spoken of [a “sewers of state” structure](#), operated by certain media figures and PP members, which, he alleges, has long engaged in efforts to protect the party from judicial scrutiny and smear its opponents with fabricated political scandals.

Despite walking out of a recent election debate after Vox’s candidate tried to cast doubt on the death threat he and his family had received – along with four assault rifle bullets – Iglesias is unlikely to keep his opinions to himself now that he has left politics. Enemies and former allies alike can expect to find themselves the target of a man who travelled, over the course of a few short years, from being one of the fiercest critics of the ruling elite to one of those at its very heart, albeit only briefly.

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North Korea

North Korea faces economic ruin amid food and medicine shortages

Country's economy battered by more than a year of border restrictions imposed after the Covid outbreak

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North Korea observers believe worsening conditions are coinciding with a crackdown by the Pyongyang regime. Photograph: Jon Chol Jin/AP

North Korea observers believe worsening conditions are coinciding with a crackdown by the Pyongyang regime. Photograph: Jon Chol Jin/AP

[*Justin McCurry*](#) in Tokyo

Tue 4 May 2021 20.00 EDT

North Korea is facing one of the worst economic crises in its 73-year history, amid shortages of food and medicines and warnings of rising unemployment and homelessness.

The country's economy has been battered by more than a year of border restrictions imposed after the coronavirus outbreak, flooding caused by natural disasters, and international sanctions imposed in response to the regime's nuclear and [ballistic missile](#) programmes.

Last month, the North Korean leader, Kim Jong-un, called on ruling party members to wage another [“arduous march”](#) to stave off an economic crisis, which he likened to a 1990s famine in which up to three million people are thought to have died.

While groups monitoring the North say they have seen no evidence of an unfolding humanitarian disaster, observers with contacts inside the country believe worsening conditions are coinciding with a crackdown by a regime fearful of a repeat of the social upheaval that followed the famine.

“There are many obstacles and difficulties ahead of us, and so our struggle for carrying out the decisions of the eighth party congress would not be all plain sailing,” Kim told grassroots members of the ruling Korean Workers’ party, according to the state-run KCNA news agency.

Kim, who is facing the biggest domestic test of his nine years in power, said he had instructed party members at every level “to wage another, more difficult arduous march in order to relieve our people of the difficulty, even if just a little”.

The term “arduous march” is a euphemism used to describe the aftermath of the 1990s famine, which was caused by the fall of the Soviet Union – then a leading aid provider – economic mismanagement and disasters. The estimated death toll ranges from the hundreds of thousands to between two and three million people.

The North sealed its land borders with China and Russia early last year after the first reports of Covid-19 cases in the Chinese city of Wuhan. While the closures and restrictions on people's movements inside the country appear to

have prevented the pandemic from taking hold, they have devastated its import-dependent economy.

“The North Korean economy is on the brink of a huge recession,” said Jiro Ishimaru, who heads the Osaka-based [Asia Press](#) website and operates a network of citizen journalists in North Korea.

Ishimaru said the near-collapse of trade with China had caused significant job losses, with people forced to sell possessions and even residency rights to their state-owned homes to buy food.

Data shows North Korea’s trade with China shrank by about 80% last year after Pyongyang sealed its borders, knowing that significant virus cases would quickly cripple its already weak health infrastructure.

“A lot of people are suffering,” Ishimaru said. “I have spoken to contacts who say there are more people begging for food and money at markets, and a rise in the number of homeless people. There is also a desperate need for antibiotics and other medicines.”

Kim, who has been unusually candid about the “worst ever” challenges facing North Korea, appears to be using anti-Covid measures – with strict limits on people’s movements – to strengthen his grip on power, amid concern inside the regime that a prolonged economic crisis could cause a breakdown in social order.

“Kim Jong-un promised the North Korean people in 2012 that they would never have to tighten their belts again,” said Leonid Petrov, a North Korea expert and senior lecturer at the International College of Management, Sydney.

“Obviously, nobody could envisage that a global pandemic would compound international sanctions, so the assumption that the ‘arduous march’ is coming back is designed to mobilise party members to work harder to prevent disaster.”

Gaining an accurate picture of conditions in the country has been made more difficult by [the departure of large number of diplomatic staff](#) and aid workers

during the pandemic.

North Korea continues to [report that it has not identified a single case of Covid-19](#), but US and South Korean officials have cast doubt on those claims.

Russia's ambassador to Pyongyang, Alexander Matsegora – one of the few diplomats still in the country – said in April that life in North Korea was “difficult”, but that there were no signs of a repeat of the 1990s famine.

“Thank God, it is a long way from the ‘arduous march’, and I hope it will never come to that,” he told Russia's Tass news agency. “The most important thing is that there is no famine in the country today.”

Kim's reference to the famine was an ideological call to arms rather than a serious prediction of impending disaster, said Leif-Eric Easley, an associate professor of international studies at Ewha University in Seoul.

“He was not crying ‘famine’, but rather demanding national unity for increasing domestic production,” Easley said. “Kim is also using North Korea's self-imposed Covid isolation to clean house of foreign influences he considers subversive to his rule.”

There are signs that North Korea is trying to rebuild its economic lifeline with China – its main ally and aid donor – including the resumption of a cross-border cargo train service and the construction of quarantine facilities that would allow supplies to be brought in by truck.

China is keen to avoid economic collapse in the North in case it triggers a humanitarian crisis and political turmoil that could end in the peninsula being controlled by South Korea and the US. “China and Russia cannot afford to lose North Korea to the US and its allies in the region,” Petrov said.

Italy

Rome court to rule on two Americans accused of fatally stabbing police officer

Jury to start deliberations on Wednesday with prosecutor demanding students get life sentence



The Californian students Gabriel Natale-Hjorth, left, and Finnegan Lee Elder, in court in Rome on 26 April. Photograph: Remo Casilli/AP

The Californian students Gabriel Natale-Hjorth, left, and Finnegan Lee Elder, in court in Rome on 26 April. Photograph: Remo Casilli/AP

[*Angela Giuffrida*](#) in Rome

Wed 5 May 2021 00.00 EDT

The fate of two American students [accused of killing an Italian police officer](#) will be decided by a Rome court this week in a case being closely watched in Italy.

Finnegan Lee Elder, 21, and Gabriel Christian Natale-Hjorth, 20, both from California, were in Rome on holiday when Mario Cerciello Rega was fatally stabbed on a street in the Italian capital in July 2019.

Cerciello Rega, who was 35, had only just returned to work after his honeymoon. A state funeral was held for the officer, who the prosecutor Maria Sabina Calabretta said was killed in a “disproportionate and deadly attack”.

Calabretta has called for the accused pair, who have been in prison since their arrest, to be given life sentences. “Life imprisonment is not a trophy to be exhibited but a just penalty ... In the face of such tragic facts, nobody wins and nobody loses,” Calabretta said in her rebuttal to defence arguments in late April.

A jury will begin deliberating the case on Wednesday, with a verdict expected that day or Thursday.

Elder’s parents and the father of Natale-Hjorth, who is from an Italian background, are in Rome for the ruling.

On 26 July 2019, Cerciello Rega [was stabbed 11 times](#) and his colleague, Andrea Varriale, was injured after the officers, both in plainclothes and without their service pistols, confronted Elder and Natale-Hjorth in the Prati district of Rome while investigating a bag snatch.

Elder, who had travelled to Italy with an 18cm (7in) combat knife in his suitcase, and Natale-Hjorth say they mistook the officers for criminals out to get them.

Earlier in the evening, the students had contacted a middleman to buy cocaine in Trastevere, a popular nightlife area. The middleman took them to a drug dealer, who sold them aspirin instead for €80. In retaliation they took the middleman’s bag, containing his mobile phone, and fled before allegedly demanding a cash ransom and cocaine to return the bag.

The middleman called his phone and arranged to meet the pair in the Prati district. He had also contacted the police to report the theft, and the two

officers went to the site.

The students fled the scene and the next day were traced to a hotel, where police found the knife used to kill Cerciello Rega.

Elder has admitted stabbing Cerciello Rega multiple times, but said he and Natale-Hjorth were suddenly confronted by the men, who they thought were drug dealers.



Rosa Maria Esilio, widow of Mario Cerciello Rega, holds a photograph of her husband. Photograph: Alessandra Tarantino/AP

In an emotional statement to Rome's Assise court last September, Elder apologised. "I want to apologise to everyone, to Cerciello Rega's family and to his friends. To the whole world," he told Rome's Assise court. "If I could go back and change things, I would do it now, but I can't."

Roberto Capra, Elder's lawyer, said: "He apologised because he wanted to, not for any other reason. But of course, the court could evaluate this and consider this aspect when sentencing."

In a more recent hearing, Elder said: "When those men approached they immediately attacked us like they wanted to rob or hurt us without saying a

word and without showing any ID or any other object. They didn't even say '*polizia*', which sounds like the English word police."

Calabretta dismissed defence arguments that Elder's constant fear of attack, the result of a history of psychiatric problems, had led him to kill Cerciello Rega after mistaking him and Varriale for criminals.

Varriale testified that the two officers approached the young men on the street from the front and showed their badges, although Cerciello Rega's was never found.

Natale-Hjorth, who fought with Varriale, also faces the charge of "voluntary murder".

Fabio Alonzi, Natale-Hjorth's lawyer, has tried to distance his client from Elder. "My client is extraneous to everything that has to do with homicide," he told the court.

If the jury finds the men guilty and the judge hands down a life sentence, the pair will most probably have to remain in prison while the verdict is appealed. If they are given a lesser sentence, they may be able to leave prison and be put under house arrest during the appeal process.

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[Belgium](#)

Farmer moves border stone for tractor – and makes Belgium bigger

French farmer could theoretically face criminal charges for moving 200-year-old marker



The stone has marked the border since the battle of Waterloo. Photograph: David Lavaux/Facebook

The stone has marked the border since the battle of Waterloo. Photograph: David Lavaux/Facebook

[Daniel Boffey](#) in Brussels

Tue 4 May 2021 10.05 EDT

The boundary between France and [Belgium](#) is believed to have been inadvertently redrawn by a farmer who found the 200-year-old border stone marking the divide in an inconvenient location for his tractor.

The French farmer could theoretically face criminal charges after making Belgium bigger by moving the stone that has marked the border since after the defeat of Napoleon at the battle of Waterloo.

A local amateur historian taking a walk in forest near to the Belgian village of Erquelinnes discovered two weeks ago that the stone dating back to 1819 had been moved 2.29 metres (7.5ft). The farmer's perimeter fence had also been shifted.

The Franco-Belgian border, stretching 390 miles (620km), was formally established under the Treaty of Kortrijk of 1820.

While amused by the enlargement of his town, David Lavaux, the mayor of Erquelinnes, gently pointed out that the farmer was legally obliged to move the border stone back – and that it would be best not “to create a diplomatic incident”.

“We have no interest in expanding the town, or the country. He made Belgium bigger and [France](#) smaller. It's not a good idea,” Lavaux told the French TV channel TF1. “I was happy, my town was bigger. But the mayor of Bousignies-sur-Roc didn't agree.

“If [the farmer] shows goodwill, he won't have a problem, we will settle this issue amicably,” Lavaux added with a smile.

If the farmer fails to comply, the issue could be referred to the Belgian foreign ministry, which might have to summon a Franco-Belgian border commission, dormant since 1930, to settle the exact delimitation of the border.

“We should be able to avoid a new border war,” Aurélie Welonek, the mayor of Bousignies-sur-Roc, told La Voix du Nord.

Mexico

Anger mounts as death toll from Mexico metro overpass collapse rises to 24

- Mexico City mayor promises thorough investigation
- Subway train crashed on to traffic on street below



Two subway carriages hang from the collapsed overpass in Mexico City. At least 24 people have died in the disaster. Photograph: Sáshenka Gutiérrez/EPA

Two subway carriages hang from the collapsed overpass in Mexico City. At least 24 people have died in the disaster. Photograph: Sáshenka Gutiérrez/EPA

[David Agren](#) in Mexico City
[@el_reportero](#)

Tue 4 May 2021 17.37 EDT

The death toll from [the collapse of an overpass on the Mexico City metro](#) has climbed to 24, as crews worked to clear the wreckage – and anger grew over the latest in a string of catastrophes to hit one of the world’s largest mass transit systems.

Officials refused to speculate on the cause the disaster which sent two carriages crashing into passing traffic on the street below on Monday night. The city’s mayor, Claudia Sheinbaum, promised a thorough investigation by an outside firm and the federal prosecutor’s office – though she stood by the embattled director of the metro, Florencia Serranía.

[At least 24 dead as Mexico City metro overpass collapses](#)
[Read more](#)

“We’re going to get to the truth. We’re not going to cover anything up. This is the request we’re making to the prosecutor’s office. There will be accountability,” she said at a tense press conference on Tuesday.

President Andrés Manuel López Obrador called for a swift and open investigation.

“There’s no impunity for anyone,” he told reporters. López Obrador is a former mayor of Mexico’s capital and it has been governed by him and his allies since 2000.



Military guard the site of the disaster. Photograph: Julian Lopez/IPA/REX/Shutterstock

Footage from security cameras showed the overpass collapsing on to a busy street about 10.30pm on Monday night, leaving one of the wagons dangling precariously.

“We only heard a thunderous noise and everything started coming apart,” a survivor identifying herself as Mariana [told the newspaper](#) El Universal. “We were sent flying and hit the ceiling.”

Bystanders and passersby rushed to pull survivors from the wreck. Adolfo Ángel Ibarra, 21, was travelling on a small bus when he heard the roar of collapsing concrete and turned around to see a cloud of dust.

Running to the scene he and other bystanders forced open the door and pulled stunned survivors from the wreckage. “I was scared, but I also felt like a hero. I felt like someone who was needed,” Ibarra said from the scene near the Los Olivos metro station.

Emergency medical crews and firefighters worked through the night to free trapped passengers, and 79 people were taken to hospital.

Families of missing passengers joined in the desperate search at the scene and pleaded for information at overwhelmed hospitals.

One mother identified as Marisol Tapía interrupted a press conference held on Tuesday morning by an opposition party at the scene of the crash to demand answers.

“We’ve searched all night and nobody knows where he is,” Tapía wailed as she pressed for an answer on the whereabouts of her son Giovanni Hernández Tapía, 13.



A resident reacts as she arrives at the crash site at Los Olivos station in Mexico City on Tuesday. Photograph: Henry Romero/Reuters

Serranía said the collapsed metro line – which was inaugurated in 2012 – was last inspected in January 2020.

The collapse followed a spate of calamities in the metro, including trains crashing into each other and a fire tearing through the system’s central command centre.

It also occurred on Line 12 – the “Golden Line” – which opened to fanfare as a modernization of Mexico City’s metro, but was beset by closures and construction problems.

Mexican social media resurfaced old tweets and posts from people warning something was amiss with the elevated metro line.

“I always said one day it’s going to collapse,” said Paulina García, 45, a resident of the crash area in the south-eastern Tláhuac borough.

“There have been problems since it was inaugurated,” she said, as nearby a crane lifted one of the fallen wagons so it could be hauled away.

Homero Zavala, leader of the metro workers’ union, said four of the lines were “time bombs” due to dilapidated infrastructure. “All this was generated by a lack of maintenance and a lack of proper administration,” he told reporters.

Line 12 carried approximately 350,000 passengers daily from semi-rural Tláhuac to a south-central part of the capital. Its inauguration was heralded as a long-overdue infrastructure advancement for a metro system founded in 1969, but chronically underfunded and rife with dilapidated infrastructure.

Line 12 was supposed to be the crowning achievement of a former mayor, Marcelo Ebrard, who left office in 2012 and is now foreign minister – and a close ally of the president. Political observers consider Ebrard and Sheinbaum to be rivals in the succession to López Obrador, who steps down in 2024.

US news

US birth rate sees biggest fall for nearly 50 years

The Covid pandemic has accelerated a longer-term trend towards fewer births, with the rate dropping to 1.6 children per woman



The birth rate fell in 2020 for women of all races and ethnicity, and nearly all ages, according to a new government report. Photograph: Kena Betancur/AFP/Getty Images

The birth rate fell in 2020 for women of all races and ethnicity, and nearly all ages, according to a new government report. Photograph: Kena Betancur/AFP/Getty Images

Associated Press

Tue 4 May 2021 21.30 EDT

The US birth rate has fallen 4% in the largest single-year drop in nearly 50 years, according to a government report.

The rate dropped for mothers of every major race and ethnicity, and in nearly all age groups, falling to the lowest point since federal health officials started tracking it more than a century ago, the report due to be published on Wednesday said.

Births have been declining in younger women for years, as many postponed motherhood and had smaller families.

[The birth rate in the US has declined. One reason is economics not moral failure | Moira Donegan](#)
[Read more](#)

Birth rates for women in their late 30s and in their 40s have been inching up, but that trend dipped last year.

The US once was among only a few developed countries with a fertility rate above the 2.1 children per woman that ensured each generation had enough children to replace itself.

But the rate has been sliding for more than 10 years and last year dropped to about 1.6, the lowest rate on record.

“The fact that you saw declines in births even for older moms is quite striking,” said lead author of the report, Brady Hamilton, of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The figures suggest that the current generation will not have enough children to replace itself.

The CDC report is based on a review of more than 99% of birth certificates issued last year. The findings echo a recent Associated Press analysis of 2020 data from 25 states showing that births had fallen during the coronavirus outbreak.

[As birth rates fall, animals prowl in our abandoned 'ghost villages'](#)
[Read more](#)

The pandemic contributed to last year's big decline, experts said. Anxiety about Covid-19 and its impact on the economy likely caused many couples to think that it was not the right time to have a baby.

But many of the 2020 pregnancies began well before the US epidemic. CDC researchers are working on a follow-up report to better parse out how the decline unfolded, Hamilton said.

Other highlights from the CDC report include:

- About 3.6 million babies were born in the US last year, down from about 3.75 million in 2019. When births were booming in 2007, the US recorded 4.3 million births.
- The US birth rate dropped to about 56 births per 1,000 women of child-bearing age, the lowest rate on record. The rate is half of what it was in the early 1960s.
- The birth rate for 15 to 19-year-olds dropped 8% from 2019. It has fallen almost every year since 1991.
- Birth rates fell 8% for Asian-American women; 3% for Hispanic women; 4% for Black and white women; and 6% for mothers who were American Indians or Alaska Natives.
- The caesarean delivery rate rose slightly to about 32%. It had generally been declining since 2009.
- The percentage of infants born small and premature – at less than 37 weeks of gestation – fell slightly to 10% after rising five years in a row.

[Europe](#)

EU efforts to ratify China investment deal ‘suspended’ after sanctions

Political outreach to promote the massive trade agreement stalls after tit-for-tat sanctions prompted by Beijing’s policy in Xinjiang



The European commission vice-president, Valdis Dombrovskis, says current relations between Brussels and Beijing are not conducive to further work on the trade deal. Photograph: Yves Herman/Reuters

The European commission vice-president, Valdis Dombrovskis, says current relations between Brussels and Beijing are not conducive to further work on the trade deal. Photograph: Yves Herman/Reuters

[*Vincent Ni*](#) *China affairs correspondent*

Tue 4 May 2021 16.14 EDT

The European Commission has said that efforts to ratify a massive investment deal with China have been in effect suspended after tit-for-tat

sanctions were imposed over China's treatment of its Uyghur population in March.

"We now in a sense have suspended ... political outreach activities from the European Commission side," said the commission's executive vice-president, Valdis Dombrovskis, on Tuesday. He said that the current state of relations between Brussels and Beijing was "not conducive" for the ratification of the deal, which is known as EU-China comprehensive agreement on investment.

"It's clear in the current situation with the EU sanctions in place against China and Chinese counter sanctions in place, including against members of European parliament [that] the environment is not conducive for ratification of the agreement," Dombrovskis said. He added that it will now "depend really on how broader EU-China relations will evolve".

Although Dombrovskis's comments do not suggest the pact has been formally suspended, they do, however, suggest that recent tensions between Brussels and Beijing have dampened the EU's appetite for such a deal with China.

[The Guardian view on China, Xinjiang and sanctions: the gloves are off | Editorial](#)

[Read more](#)

The European Union and China [approved a controversial investment agreement](#) in late December after seven years of marathon negotiations. The German chancellor, Angela Merkel, gave the talks a final push; the Chinese market is especially important to German carmakers and manufacturers who have a large presence in the country.

At the time, the pact was defended as a long-overdue opening to China's vast market that would benefit European companies. If ratified, it could lead to Beijing loosening some of its notoriously stringent rules on foreign companies such as the need to operate through joint ventures with local partners.

The conclusion of the negotiations was a diplomatic victory for China's leader, [Xi Jinping](#). The talks were wrapped up in a video call with Xi, the European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, president Emmanuel Macron of France and Merkel herself.

[China deal damages EU's human rights credibility, MEPs to say](#)
[Read more](#)

But the agreement angered China sceptics and human rights activists in Europe.

Some of them had long lobbied Brussels to impose sanctions on China over its treatment of its Uyghur population and its policy on Hong Kong. The Biden administration publicly voiced its displeasure as well.

Then, in a dramatic turn of events in March, the [European Union](#) imposed sanctions on four Chinese officials involved in Beijing's policy on Xinjiang. In response, China swiftly imposed counter sanctions that targeted several high-profile members of the European parliament , three members of national parliaments, two EU committees, and a number of China-focused European academics.

Analysts said that Dombrovskis' comments on Tuesday were unsurprising and reflected how relations between Beijing and Brussels have deteriorated in the last few months. The chances of further progress, according to Michael Reiterer, distinguished professor at Brussels School of Governance, look uncertain.

“As long as members of the European parliament are on sanction list – impossible,” he said.

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[Coronavirus](#)

Covid infection rates in UK ‘very encouraging’, says Neil Ferguson

Epidemiologist says he feels optimistic country will feel ‘a lot more normal by summer’

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Neil Ferguson: ‘We don’t see any prospect of the NHS being overwhelmed.’
Photograph: Antonio Olmos/The Observer

Neil Ferguson: ‘We don’t see any prospect of the NHS being overwhelmed.’
Photograph: Antonio Olmos/The Observer

[*Caroline Davies*](#)

Tue 4 May 2021 04.38 EDT

Recent data on Covid deaths and rates of infection in the UK are “very encouraging”, and though a third wave of infections was possible in late summer it was unlikely to overwhelm the NHS, the leading epidemiologist Neil Ferguson has said.

Prof Ferguson, of Imperial College London who advised the government at the beginning of the pandemic, said he was “feeling fairly optimistic that we will be not completely back to normal, but something which feels a lot more normal by the summer”.

With one Covid death reported on Monday, and infection levels at an eight-month low in the UK, Ferguson said: “The data is very encouraging and very much in line with what we expected.”

“Whilst we’re seeing cases actually plateau at the moment – and they may start edging up – mortality, deaths and hospitalisations are still going down, and we expect them to continue to go down, maybe tick up a little bit next month but only within manageable levels, and so that puts us in a very good position to be keeping to the government roadmap – relaxing some restrictions in a couple of weeks’ time and then many more in June.”

Concerns he and his team had about late summer and autumn were “diminishing”, he said, with research showing those vaccinated were less infectious. “And so that has pushed our estimates of the scale of any potential autumn wave down.”

Ferguson added that the risk of vaccines being less effective in the face of variants was “the major concern” that could still lead to a “very major third wave in the autumn”.

It was “essential we roll out booster doses, which can protect against that, as soon as we’ve basically finished vaccinating the adult population, which should finish by the summer”.

[UK coronavirus cases](#)

On international travel safely reopening, he said one major caveat would be if vaccination was undermined by variants, such as the South African one,

spreading in an uncontrolled manner.

But, he added, if by summer infection levels in France and Italy, for example, are the same as in the UK, “then there’s no risk associated with travelling overseas”.

“The risk comes from going from a place like the UK with very low infection levels and going to a place with much higher infection levels and therefore having the risk of bringing infection back,” he told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme, adding he had not booked a foreign holiday himself.

On the prospect of removing the 1-metre-plus rule on social distancing in June, Ferguson said: “We have factored these things into the modelling we’ve been undertaking. So to be clear, we do expect transmission and to some extent hospitalisations and deaths to tick up in late summer if we completely go back to normal, but at a much lower level than we saw, for instance, back in December and January.

“So it’s obviously a political judgment as to what is acceptable in terms of number of infections, but we don’t see any prospect of, for instance, the NHS being overwhelmed – with the one caveat around variants I’ve already mentioned – so it’s always a matter of judgment.

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As long as symptomatic people still isolate, and the test and trace system continues for at least another few months, “then that will keep some sort of lid on how quickly infections can rise”.

He said there would need to be “much higher levels of infection in society in order to risk overwhelming the NHS and we think that’s actually unlikely to happen unless a variant comes along which resets that relationship again”.

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[Coronavirus](#)

Women face significant jobs risk during Covid pandemic, UK analysis finds

Exclusive: women are experiencing far higher levels of redundancy than in previous recessions

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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Women are more likely to be on furlough than men and to work in sectors hit hardest by Covid. Photograph: Ian Forsyth/Getty Images

Women are more likely to be on furlough than men and to work in sectors hit hardest by Covid. Photograph: Ian Forsyth/Getty Images

[*Alexandra Topping*](#)

Tue 4 May 2021 01.00 EDT

Working women are facing a significant risk in the labour market, with far greater numbers being made redundant as a result of the pandemic than during the 2007 financial crisis, according to analysis seen by the Guardian.

Women are experiencing much higher levels of redundancies during the Covid pandemic than in previous recessions, according to the Trades Union Congress. Female redundancies in the UK hit 178,000 between September and November 2020, according to its analysis – 76% higher than the peak reached during the height of the financial crisis when female redundancy levels hit 100,000.

In the same 2020 period 217,000 men were made redundant – 3% more than the peak of male redundancies during the financial crisis.

“Women are more likely to be on furlough than men and to work in sectors hit hardest by Covid, like retail and hospitality. And they bore the brunt of childcare while schools and nurseries were closed,” said Frances O’Grady, the general secretary of the [TUC](#). “Without ongoing support from ministers, many more women face losing their jobs.”

[Graphic](#)

Experts say the jobs market looks [particularly fragile for women](#), who often dominate the industries hardest hit by Covid. According to the TUC’s jobs monitor “there is a significant risk to women’s employment going forwards”. From the 12 months from December 2019 women accounted for six in 10 job losses in hospitality, six in 10 job losses in wholesale and retail and almost 60% of job losses in other services including hairdressers, beauty and care services.

Soph Hudson was made redundant from her role as an assistant manager for a cafe and conference centre. Without an income, she focused on increasing the success of her “side hustle”: making gender-free children’s clothing into a fully fledged business. “I felt I had no other choice as we were still in the midst of the pandemic and I saw no increase in the jobs in that sector,” she said.

[Pregnant women need better Covid safety at work, say campaigners](#)

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While the number of female redundancies has slowed down since November last year, numbers remain at “crisis levels”, said the TUC. According to the latest official figures there were close to 94,000 female redundancies between December and February of 2021 – close to levels seen at the peak of the financial crash.

Economists said another wave of female redundancies was likely when the current furlough scheme ends in September, as women are more likely to have been furloughed than men. According to [research](#) from the Women’s Budget Group, 52.1% of women have been furloughed despite women only making up 47.3% of the overall UK workforce. By the end of February 2021, 2,337,900 women were furloughed compared with 2,144,700 men.

“Unfortunately, things are likely to get worse before they get better,” said Felicia Willow, the chief executive of the Fawcett Society. “When the furlough scheme ends, we expect to see employers in hospitality, retail, and other customer service industries lay off large numbers of employees. Because of the clustering of women in these sectors, we fear that redundancy rates of women will increase significantly.”

Mary-Ann Stephenson, the director of the Women’s Budget Group said the government plans to ‘build back better’ focus largely on construction projects, but WBG research showed that investment in care could create [nearly three times as many jobs](#) as similar investment in construction. “A care-led recovery would create more jobs for men, and many more for women, who are at greater risk of redundancy,” she said.

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Amazon

Amazon had sales income of €44bn in Europe in 2020 but paid no corporation tax

Despite lockdown surge the firm's Luxembourg unit made a €1.2bn loss and therefore paid zero corporation tax



The Amazon EU Sarl accounts filed in Luxembourg show 2020 sales rose by €12bn from €32bn in 2019. Photograph: Bloomberg/Getty Images

The Amazon EU Sarl accounts filed in Luxembourg show 2020 sales rose by €12bn from €32bn in 2019. Photograph: Bloomberg/Getty Images

[Rupert Neate](#) *Wealth correspondent*

[@RupertNeate](#)

Tue 4 May 2021 01.00 EDT

Fresh questions have been raised over Amazon's tax planning after its latest corporate filings in [Luxembourg](#) revealed that the company collected record sales income of €44bn (£38bn) in Europe last year but did not have to pay any corporation tax to the Grand Duchy.

Accounts for Amazon EU Sarl, through which it sells products to hundreds of millions of households in the UK and across [Europe](#), show that despite collecting record income, the Luxembourg unit made a €1.2bn loss and therefore paid no tax.

In fact the unit was granted €56m in tax credits it can use to offset any future tax bills should it turn a profit. The company has €2.7bn worth of carried forward losses stored up, which can be used against any tax payable on future profits.

The Luxembourg unit – which handles sales for the UK, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain and Sweden – employs just 5,262 staff meaning that the income per employ amounts to €8.4m.

Margaret Hodge, a Labour MP who has long campaigned against tax avoidance, said: “It seems that Amazon's relentless campaign of appalling tax avoidance continues.

“Amazon's revenues have soared under the pandemic while our high streets struggle, yet it continues to shift its profits to tax havens like Luxembourg to avoid paying its fair share of tax. These big digital companies all rely on our public services, our infrastructure, and our educated and healthy workforce. But unlike smaller businesses and hard-working taxpayers, the tech giants fail to pay fairly into the common pot for the common good.

“President Biden has proposed a new, fairer system for taxing large corporations and digital companies but the UK has not come out in support of the reforms. The silence is deafening. The government must act and help to grasp this once-in-a-generation opportunity to banish corporate tax avoidance to a thing of the past.”

[Download original document](#)

Paul Monaghan, the chief executive of the Fair Tax Foundation, said: “These figures are mind-blowing, even for Amazon. We are seeing exponentially accelerated market domination across the globe on the back of income that continues to be largely untaxed – allowing it to unfairly undercut local businesses that take a more responsible approach.

“The bulk of Amazon’s UK income is booked offshore, in the enormously loss-making Luxembourg subsidiary, which means that not only are they not making a meaningful tax contribution now, but are unlikely to do so for years to come given the enormous carried forward losses they have now built up there.”

The Amazon EU Sarl accounts filed in Luxembourg show 2020 sales rose by €12bn from €32bn in 2019. The accounts, that extend to just 23 pages (compared with hundreds of pages for large UK companies), do not break down how much money Amazon made from sales in each European country.

However, [Amazon’s US accounts show that its UK income soared by 51% last year to a record \\$26.5bn \(£19.4bn\)](#) as people at home during the coronavirus pandemic lockdowns turned to it for online shopping as high street stores remained closed for most of the year, while homeworking drove increased use of its cloud software, Amazon Web Services.

While [Amazon celebrated the rise in revenue collected from UK customers](#), it did not state how much corporation tax it paid in the UK in total last year. The company, which has made its founder and outgoing chief executive Jeff Bezos a \$200bn fortune, paid just £293m in tax in 2019 despite the company collecting UK sales of \$17.5bn that year.

Guardian business email sign-up

The £19.5bn that UK customers spent at Amazon in 2020 is approximately double the takings at Marks & Spencer, the 137-year-old retailer, and underlines how the Covid-19 pandemic is revolutionising the way we shop and threatening the future of the high street. Last week [Amazon reported its largest ever quarterly profit](#) of \$8.1bn on sales of \$109bn.

An Amazon spokesperson said: “Amazon pays all the taxes required in every country where we operate. Corporate tax is based on profits, not revenues, and our profits have remained low given our heavy investments and the fact that retail is a highly competitive, low margin business.

“We’ve invested well over €78bn in Europe since 2010, and much of that investment is in infrastructure that creates many thousands of new jobs, generates significant local tax revenue, and supports small European firms.”

Doug Gurr, the recently-departed managing director of Amazon.co.uk, [has explained that](#): “The Amazon.co.uk website is operated by Amazon EU Sarl, a Luxembourg-based entity, which is a European headquarters of Amazon.”

Just over 600,000 people live in Luxembourg but many of the world’s biggest companies have headquarters in the low-tax country.

[Amazon arrived in Luxembourg in 2003](#), and within a few months secured a confidential agreement with the country’s tax authorities.

Bob Comfort, Amazon’s head of tax until 2011, told a Luxembourg newspaper that Jean-Claude Juncker – then the country’s prime minister and a former president of the European Commission – had [personally offered](#) to help Amazon.

“His message was simply: ‘If you encounter problems which you don’t seem to be able to resolve, please come back and tell me. I’ll try to help.’” Comfort was later [appointed](#) Luxembourg’s honorary consul to Seattle, the location of Amazon’s US headquarters.

Last month Joe Biden tabled plans at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, a club of mostly rich countries, [for sweeping changes to the global tax system](#), including a minimum corporation tax rate in an attempt to stop multinational companies exploiting loopholes in the system. Germany and France have backed the plans but the UK has remained silent.

Washington had long resisted calls for the global treaties that reformers argued were needed to ensure that powerful multinational companies pay

their fair share of taxes.

Under the US president's proposals, large technology companies and corporations would be forced to pay taxes to national governments based on the sales they generate in each country, irrespective of where they are based.

A global tax floor would also be agreed. The US has suggested a rate of 21%, although this is higher than in several jurisdictions – including Ireland, Hungary and the Caribbean – and could be a stumbling block.

Bezos, [the world's richest person](#), welcomed Biden's proposals and [said Amazon was "supportive of a rise in the corporate tax rate"](#).

Amazon is not alone in creating complex corporate structures to avoid tax. The big six US tech firms – Amazon, Facebook, Google, Netflix, Apple and Microsoft – [have been accused of avoiding \\$100bn of global tax](#) over the past decade, according to a report by the campaign group the Fair Tax Foundation. All have said that they pay the correct amounts of tax.

The report singles out Amazon as the worst offender. It said the group paid just \$3.4bn (£2.6bn) in tax on its income so far this decade, despite achieving revenues of \$961bn and profits of \$26.8bn.

The Fair Tax Foundation said this meant Amazon's effective tax rate was 12.7% over the decade when the headline tax rate in the US had been 35% for most of that period.

Amazon said the report's "suggestions are wrong" and the company had "a 24% effective tax rate on profits from 2010-18".

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2021.05.04 - Coronavirus

- [Live Coronavirus: India passes 20m cases; Nepal calls for urgent AstraZeneca doses as cases surge](#)
- [Travel UK likely to green-light fewer than 10 EU countries](#)
- [EU Plans to reopen to fully vaccinated tourists from June](#)
- [Wales Tears and bear hugs as ban on having a cwtch ends](#)

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[Travel & leisure](#)

UK likely to give green light for travel to fewer than 10 EU countries

Traffic light system to be used cautiously despite European plan to let in Covid-vaccinated tourists from June

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Lisbon. Portugal is expected to be one of the few EU countries from which returning travellers will not have to go into quarantine. Photograph: Rrrainbow/Alamy

Lisbon. Portugal is expected to be one of the few EU countries from which returning travellers will not have to go into quarantine. Photograph: Rrrainbow/Alamy

[Jessica Elgot](#) and [Daniel Boffey](#)

Mon 3 May 2021 12.45 EDT

Britons' summer holiday plans were given a major boost on Monday, as the EU confirmed vaccinated travellers will be able to fly to [Europe](#) from June, though it's understood the UK could give the green light to travel to fewer than 10 countries.

The changing quarantine requirements for popular holiday destinations looks set to make 2021 the year of the last-minute booking.

[The EU will reopen to holidaymakers](#) from countries with low Covid infection rates such as the UK, and to anyone who has been fully vaccinated, by the start of June under a European Commission plan.

A [traffic light system](#) will be announced this week under which countries will be added to green, amber and red lists, with different rules regarding issues such as quarantine of returning travellers for each list.

Senior UK government sources said the number of destinations to which Brits can travel quarantine-free from 17 May could be in single figures – despite pressure from Conservative MPs for the UK to greenlight travel to the whole of Europe as vaccine rates improve. A significant number of countries on the list are unlikely to be major holiday destinations, one source warned.

One Whitehall source said changes could come quite rapidly over the summer as the list of green countries is reviewed every three weeks.

“It will be a cautious approach, but then things could start to change quickly,” the source said.

On Monday, Johnson said that he did not want to see an “influx of disease” once international travel resumes, which is why the government said it is being “as cautious as we can” with the roadmap.

“We do want to do some opening up on 17 May but I don’t think that the people of this country want to see an influx of disease from anywhere else,” the prime minister told reporters during a campaign visit to Hartlepool. “I certainly don’t and we have got to be very, very tough, and we have got to be as cautious as we can, whilst we continue to open up.”

The government will have the right to rapidly remove countries from the green or amber lists if cases spiral quickly, but more routinely countries will be added to a “watch list”, raising questions about the implications for cancellations and insurance.

Portugal, Malta and [Gibraltar](#) are likely to be green list countries, where testing will be required before travel but not quarantine after returning. Popular destinations like Spain and France are expected to be on the amber list initially where home quarantine is still required. Red list countries, which are likely to include Brazil, UAE and South Africa, require quarantine in government-mandated hotels.

Advice to UK ministers will be given by the Joint Biosecurity Centre, which will give its final verdict on Wednesday, meaning an announcement is likely to be delayed until Friday because of local elections on Thursday. However, one government source said there was a possibility Johnson could make the announcement on Wednesday, a vital morale boost before the polls after a week battling stories of Tory sleaze.

The government will give the go-ahead for international travel to recommence on 17 May, and official advice to “minimise travel” will change to “travel safely, plan ahead” with no advice on limiting travel around the UK.

The Labour leader, [Keir Starmer](#), warned there should not be a repeat of the “chopping and changing” of the travel corridors list introduced last summer. “We need to be very careful. I think it’s clear that the virus is increasing in some countries around the world, so we have to be very, very careful,” he told reporters during a campaign visit to Lewisham.

Agreement on opening of European borders is due to be sought from EU member states during meetings on Tuesday and Wednesday.

The existing requirement to undergo Covid testing before or after arrival or to quarantine could still be enforced by member states but EU officials hope there will be a gradual phasing out of these conditions.

Under the commission's proposals, member states would allow travel into the EU of those people who had received, at least 14 days before arrival, the final dose of an authorised vaccine.

Even those who have not been fully vaccinated, which is likely to be a younger demographic in the UK, will be allowed into the EU if they are coming from a country with a "good epidemiological situation".

As it stands, only seven countries worldwide are on a green list allowing for non-essential travel. The commission is proposing to increase the threshold of 14-day cumulative Covid-19 case notification rate from 25 to 100. The UK's seven-day rate is about 23.2 per 100,000 people.

A senior official said the UK could be added to the green list but that it would depend on a reciprocal willingness to open its borders to all EU citizens. "The figures for the UK are good," the EU official said. "Those vaccinated in the UK will be eligible to travel to the EU but [we are] mindful of other aspects: reciprocity. It is still a principle under this new recommendation."

The commission is proposing, however, an emergency brake. When the epidemiological situation of a non-EU country worsens quickly and in particular if a variant of concern or interest is detected, a member state will be able to "urgently and temporarily suspend all inbound travel by non-EU citizens resident in such a country".

Johnson also confirmed that the UK is likely to relax social distancing measures on 21 June when the government intends to loosen all remaining restrictions on hospitality and social gatherings. However, it is likely to mean that masks remain mandatory in some indoor settings.

"I think we have got a good chance of being able to dispense with the one-metre plus from 21 June," Johnson said. "That is still dependent on the data, we can't say it categorically yet, we have got to look at the epidemiology as we progress, we have got to look at where we get to with the disease. But that's what it feels like to me right now."

On Monday, the UK recorded 1,649 new coronavirus cases and just one death within 28 days of a positive Covid test, the lowest figure since 30 August last year. However, there is always a lag in reporting deaths – greater at weekends and bank holidays – so it does not necessarily mean only one such death has occurred the previous 24 hours.

This article was amended on 4 May 2021. An earlier version failed to make it clear that the cumulative Covid-19 case notification rate given for the UK was over seven days, rather than 14.

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European Union

EU plans to reopen to fully Covid-vaccinated foreign tourists from June

Holidaymakers would also be welcome from countries with low case rates but bloc would retain ‘emergency brake’

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A woman wearing a face mask walks around the Trevi fountain in Rome, Italy, empty and without tourists, in March. Photograph: Antonio Masiello/Getty Images

A woman wearing a face mask walks around the Trevi fountain in Rome, Italy, empty and without tourists, in March. Photograph: Antonio Masiello/Getty Images

[*Daniel Boffey*](#) in Brussels

Mon 3 May 2021 10.41 EDT

The EU will reopen to holidaymakers from countries with low Covid infection rates, such as the UK, and to anyone who has been fully vaccinated, by the start of June under a European Commission plan.

With the rate of vaccination rising “dramatically” in EU member states, commission officials said it was time to relax rules on non-essential travel while legislating to provide for powers to pull an “emergency brake” if necessary.

EU borders would be reopened by the start of June at the latest, the officials said, with agreement due to be sought from member states this month.

The requirement to undergo Covid testing before or after arrival or to quarantine could still be enforced by individual states, but an official said: “Hopefully with the situation improving and the vaccination rate immensely picking up, we will also see a gradual phasing out of these additional conditions.”

[EU in vaccine passport talks with US but not UK](#)
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Ursula von der Leyen, the European Commission president, tweeted: “Time to revive tourism industry & for cross-border friendships to rekindle – safely. We propose to welcome again vaccinated visitors & those from countries with a good health situation. But if variants emerge we have to act fast: we propose an EU emergency brake mechanism.”

Tight restrictions on those wishing to travel into the EU have been in force since last year.

The commission’s announcement will come as welcome news to people in the UK hoping to take a European summer holiday. Under the UK government’s plan to relax coronavirus restrictions, international travel for leisure purposes could resume from 17 May. A [traffic light system](#) is expected to be unveiled this week under which countries will be added to green, amber and red lists, with different rules regarding issues such as quarantine of returning travellers for each list.

Asked on Monday about the potential for summer holidays, Boris Johnson urged Britons to be cautious in making bookings. “We will be saying more as soon as we can,” the prime minister said. “I think that there will be some openings up on the 17th, but we have got to be cautious and we have got to be sensible and we have got to make sure that we don’t see the virus coming back in.”

Under the commission’s proposals, member states would allow travel into the EU of those people who had received the final dose of an authorised vaccine at least 14 days before arrival. The vaccines made in Russia and China – Sputnik and Sinopharm – are yet to be approved by the European medicines agency. Those administered with these jabs would not be able to rely on them for entry.

The commission added that unless quarantine and testing rules were waived, “children who are excluded from vaccination [will] be able to travel with their vaccinated parents [only] if they have a negative PCR Covid-19 test taken at the earliest 72 hours before arrival”.

However, even those who have not been fully vaccinated will also be allowed into the EU if they are coming from a country with a “good epidemiological situation”.

As it stands, only Australia, New Zealand, Rwanda, Singapore, South Korea and Thailand are on a green list allowing for non-essential travel into the EU. The commission is proposing to increase the threshold of 14-day cumulative Covid-19 case notification rate from 25 to 100. The UK’s rate is about 23.2 in every 100,000 people.

A senior official said the UK could be added to the green list but it would depend on a reciprocal willingness to open its borders to all EU citizens. “The figures for the UK are good,” the EU official said. “Those vaccinated in the UK will be eligible to travel to the EU but [we are] mindful of other aspects: reciprocity. It is still a principle under this new recommendation.”

The official added that Israel would be on the exempt list, given its low level of infection. “The UK: question mark. The US: for the time being, not

quite,” he said. “But we see how quickly the situation in the US is evolving, notably for the rate of vaccination.”

The commission is also proposing, however, an emergency brake. When the epidemiological situation of a non-EU country worsens quickly, and in particular if a variant of concern or interest is detected, a member state will be able to “urgently and temporarily suspend all inbound travel by non-EU citizens resident in such a country”.

The only exceptions would be healthcare professionals, transport personnel, diplomats, transit passengers, those travelling for imperative family reasons, seafarers, and people in need of international protection or for other humanitarian reasons. They would instead be subject to strict testing and quarantine arrangements even if they have been vaccinated.

The commission will draw up a list of approved vaccination certificates issued by non-EU countries, with discussions with the US government said to be at an advanced stage. Talks are yet to be opened with the UK.

A UK government spokesperson said: “Ensuring free and open travel with our European partners is vitally important, which is why we will be engaging the European Commission on reopening travel routes from the UK shortly.”

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Wales

Tears and bear hugs as Wales lifts ban on having a cwltch

‘A wonderful day’: friends and families finally able to enjoy a cuddle after months of abstention

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‘Not being able to do this has felt really difficult’: Liz Phillips, left, hugs her mother, Ann, while Tony Phillips holds baby Theo. Photograph: Gareth Phillips/The Guardian

‘Not being able to do this has felt really difficult’: Liz Phillips, left, hugs her mother, Ann, while Tony Phillips holds baby Theo. Photograph: Gareth Phillips/The Guardian



[Steven Morris](#)

[@stevenmorris20](#)

Mon 3 May 2021 13.00 EDT

Some were accompanied with laughter, others with tears. There were shy, tentative cuddles but also great bear-sized hugs.

After long months of abstention, families and friends across [Wales](#) were finally able to enjoy a cwch – Welsh for a cuddle or hug – on Monday.

“We’re having a wonderful day,” said Ann Phillips, 66, who was relishing hugs with her daughter, Liz Phillips, 40, and cuddles with her six-month-old grandson, Theo Pryce. “Not being able to do this has felt really difficult, really unnatural.”

Outside, the bank holiday weather was dreadful but the family were able to hunker down inside and the grownups could enjoy the cake Ann had made, accompanied by endless cups of tea.

Liz said the family, from [Penarth](#) in the Vale of Glamorgan, had been able to see each other outside. “But when the weather is bad, that’s not very easy,

especially when you have a baby. We have got lots of grandparent/grandchild things to catch up on.”

A string of Covid restrictions were eased in Wales on Monday including the reopening of gyms, community centres and swimming pools. Thirty people were in the water at Penlan leisure centre in Swansea moments after it opened at midnight.

But the most eye-catching and heartwarming easing was that two households can now come together to form an “exclusive bubble”. Members of this bubble can meet indoors and – crucially – “have contact”, to use the Welsh government’s description.

Announcing the changes, the Welsh government said it had been able to make the changes before the rest of the UK because it had the lowest Covid rates and most advanced vaccination programme.

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The Labour-led government dismissed the notion it was announcing good news [to try to bolster its performance](#) at this week's Welsh parliament elections.

Rebecca Collins from Pontypridd in south Wales met her parents and two brothers, who all live together, indoors for the first time since Christmas Day.

They enjoyed a chicken dinner, which stood in for the Boxing Day and birthday celebrations they had missed. She told BBC Wales it was an emotional day. "We've missed each other a lot."

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2021.05.04 - Spotlight

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- [Escape to glory The intoxicating myth of boxing as 'a way out'](#)
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[Our disappearing glaciers](#)Glaciers

Melting ice reveals first world war relics in Italian Alps



A lantern found at the cave barracks on Mount Scorluzzo, Lombardy.
Photograph: Stelvio National Park

A lantern found at the cave barracks on Mount Scorluzzo, Lombardy.
Photograph: Stelvio National Park

Accelerating retreat of glaciers in Lombardy and Trentino Alto-Adige reveals preserved history of ‘White War’

[Angela Giuffrida](#) in *Stelvio national park*

Tue 4 May 2021 02.00 EDT

The soldiers dug the wooden barracks into a cave on the top of Mount Scorluzzo, a 3,095-metre (10,154ft) peak overlooking the Stelvio pass. For the next three-and-a-half years, the cramped, humid space was home to about 20 men from the Austro-Hungarian army as they fought against Italian

troops in what became known as the White War, a battle waged across treacherous and bitterly cold Alpine terrain during the first world war.

Fought mainly in the Alps of the Lombardy region of [Italy](#) and the Dolomites in Trentino Alto-Adige, the White War was a period of history frozen in time until the 1990s, when global warming started to reveal an assortment of perfectly preserved relics – weapons, sledges, letters, diaries and, as the retreat of glaciers hastened, the bodies of soldiers.

The presence of the barracks on Scorluzzo's summit was known for some time, but it was only in 2015, when the ice that had sealed it off for almost 100 years melted completely, that researchers were able to enter. The shelter had been hastily locked up when the war ended in November 1918, with the soldiers abandoning most of their belongings. Inside were the details of their daily lives: beds made of straw, clothes, lanterns, newspapers, postcards, coins, tinned food and animal bones empty of marrow.



Inside the cave barracks on Mount Scorluzzo. Photograph: Stelvio National Park

The cave has now been excavated, and the refuge and all its artefacts will go on display at a museum due to open in the Lombardy town of Bormio in 2022.

“The barracks is a time capsule of the White War that helps us to understand the extreme, starving conditions that the soldiers experienced,” said Stefano Morosini, a historian and coordinator of heritage projects at Stelvio national park. “The knowledge we’re able to gather today from the relics is a positive consequence of the negative fact of climate change.”

Many more soldiers are believed to have been killed by avalanches, falling down mountains or hypothermia than were killed during fighting. Dozens of corpses, some still in their uniforms, have emerged from the melting ice over the past decade. Last summer, a hiker stumbled across the [remains of a soldier](#) wrapped in the Italian flag on the Adamello glacier, part of a mountain range that straddles Lombardy and Trentino. In 2017, the relatives of an Italian soldier were able to bury him after documents revealing his identity were found with his body on Presena glacier.

[Map showing the location of Mount Scorluzzo in northern Italy.](#)

“A corpse is found every two or three years, usually in places where there was fighting on the glacier,” said Marco Ghizzoni, a member of staff at the White War museum in Adamello who also helped to excavate the Mount Scorluzzo barracks.

Before the thawing of the soldiers’ icy tombs, the most extraordinary discovery of human remains on a melting glacier was made in 1991, when two German hikers found the 5,300-year-old mummified body of a hunter in the Ötztal Alps, close to Italy’s border with Austria. The body of “Ötzi the Iceman”, replete with tattoos, is on display at a museum in Bolzano.

“The Ötzi discovery was huge,” said Morosini. “Here was a relic of the prehistoric era, and today we are finding relics of the first world war.”

Ötzi paved the way for glacial archaeology. A rock with writing on it that is believed to date back 3,500 years was uncovered by the retreating Forni glacier, also part of Stelvio national park.



The Stelvio pass, South Tyrol, with Mount Scorluzzo on the right.
Photograph: Stelvio National Park

The effects of climate change are visible all across the Italian Alps. Forni, one of Italy's largest valley glaciers, has retreated 800 metres within the past 30 years and 1.2 miles (2km) over the past century. In the summer of 1987, the guard of a shelter looking out towards Forni witnessed huge chunks of ice fall from the glacier amid days of heavy storms, eventually producing a rock avalanche that triggered the Val Pola landslide and killed 43 people.

Luca Pedrotti, a scientific coordinator at Stelvio national park, said the melting glacier was also changing the vegetation dynamic in the area, while rising temperatures had led to a reduction of wildlife populations, including chamois, a species of goat-antelope, and grouse. "Some species really suffer as they are very adapted to the cold Alpine environment," said Pedrotti. "So they have to go higher and higher in search of cold temperatures and better-quality food."



Bottles and tins taken from the cave barracks. Photograph: Stelvio National Park

Pedrotti said human beings were as much responsible for the altered Alpine landscape as climate change. Close to Scorluzzo is the Stelvio glacier, where ardent skiers have flocked during the summer since the 1950s. “We have gone from a garden that was perfectly managed through cultivation, to a situation with lots of tourism – this has a strong footprint on the landscape,” Pedrotti said. “We need tourism but we also need conservation and the two things don’t always follow the same path.”

With grim climate forecasts, it is only a matter of time before glacial melting brings a stop to skiing at the Stelvio glacier.

A study published last year found that the melting of Italy’s glaciers is accelerating, especially at [Marmolada](#), the largest and most symbolic glacier of the Dolomites.

“Marmolada is decreasing in volume so dramatically, and we don’t have a clue how to stop this process,” said Aldino Bondesan, a geophysics professor at the University of Padua and member of the Italian Glaciological Committee, which is monitoring 200 of Italy’s 900 glaciers.

Meanwhile, the changes in mountain permafrost in the Alps also risks triggering landslides.

“When I was asked 20 or 30 years ago whether I agreed with climate change, my answer was not as sharp as the one I give today,” said Bondesan. “The climatic models were not so clear ... but now we have more than a century’s worth of data, and every time you go to the Alps, you see how much things are changing.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/may/04/melting-ice-reveals-first-world-war-relics-in-italian-alps>

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Escape to glory: the intoxicating myth of boxing as ‘a way out’

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2021/may/04/escape-to-glory-the-intoxicating-myth-of-boxing-as-a-way-out>

[Books interviewBooks](#)

Interview

‘Jaws at 35,000 feet’: the flight attendant whose debut thriller sold for seven figures

[Alison Flood](#)

TJ Newman dreamt up her terror-in-the-skies novel *Falling* while guarding the cockpit as the pilots took a toilet break. She reveals how she kept going through furlough and 41 rejections



‘The pilot didn’t have a clue what he would do’ ... Newman preparing to fly.
Photograph: Courtesy: TJ Newman

‘The pilot didn’t have a clue what he would do’ ... Newman preparing to fly.
Photograph: Courtesy: TJ Newman



Tue 4 May 2021 01.00 EDT

Flight attendant Torri Newman was working on the red-eye flight from Los Angeles to New York when the idea for her debut novel came to her. To be precise, she was blocking access to the cockpit, a security procedure required when pilots take a toilet break. “I was standing at the front of the airplane,” she says, “looking out at the passengers. It was dark and they were all asleep. And I had this thought, ‘All of their lives, our lives, are in the hands of the pilots.’ That’s not exactly new – but the flipside of that also came to mind. With that much power and responsibility, how vulnerable does that make a commercial pilot?”

Newman, speaking via Zoom from her home in Phoenix, [Arizona](#), was rattled. “I just couldn’t shake the thought. A few days later, I was working a different trip with a different set of pilots, and I said to the captain, ‘Hey, what would you do if your family was taken, and you were told that if you didn’t crash the plane, they would be killed?’” What was his reaction? “He had no clue what he would do – the thought terrified him.”

She realised she had the beginnings of a story. Working as a flight attendant, mostly in first class on red-eye flights, so named because they’re overnight, she often had the plane’s forward galley to herself, as the passengers slept.

So she used the peace to sketch out a plot in her head. She started with her pilot, Bill Hoffman, discovering that his wife, son and baby are being held hostage by a terrorist. “It’s simple,” he is told. “Crash your plane or I kill your family. The choice is yours.” Newman says: “What does he do? I started there, then the story just kind of evolved.”



‘The drinks, the food, the smiling – that’s not the job’ ... Torri Newman.
Photograph: Steve Craft/The Guardian

It became [Falling](#), her much-heralded debut thriller. Bought for a seven-figure sum by Simon & Schuster, the novel was described by crime author Don Winslow as “Jaws at 35,000 feet”. Swinging from the dilemma on the plane – will Bill tell his crew, will they alert the passengers and risk panic? – and the nightmare unfolding for his wife Carrie and the children at home, *Falling* also delves into what lies behind the terrorists’ demands.

Mayhem in the sky is nothing new. From *Airport* to [Snakes on a Plane](#), the lives-hanging-by-a-thread narrative has produced plenty of high-octane drama. But Newman’s background means *Falling* brings a freshness and depth to the genre. While the story is propelled by the impossible situation Bill and his captive family find themselves in, at its heart is the relationship between the tight-knit crew: Bill, his co-pilot Ben, his old friend Jo, and her fellow flight attendants Kellie (new to the job) and old hand Michael (known

as Big Daddy). It's an eye-opening look into the reality of working on a plane. As Jo says, the service side of the role – the drinks, the food, the smiling – isn't the job. It's just something they provide. "Five weeks of training," she says, "and in only one of those days did they go over food, drinks and hospitality."

Newman elaborates: "For better or for worse, the light that flight attendants are most often portrayed in is slightly more salacious – you know, more low-hanging fruit. Most people don't actually see flight attendants doing our *job*. They see us bringing food and drink and, you know, smiling – but that's not our job. Service is something we gladly provide, but we're there for safety and security at the end of the day."

Newman was careful in her depiction of the people who take Carrie and her children Scott and Elise hostage: these are not your run-of-the-mill, anti-American baddies. "I worked hard to create three-dimensional characters that are not the stereotype of the terrorists we've seen so often. They're the opposite. The antagonist storyline is not about America's enemies. It's about America's friends. And the actions I portrayed are – what would happen if we betrayed our allies and our friends?"



High jinks ... Newman during her flying days. Photograph: Courtesy TJ Newman

Newman's mother and sister are flight attendants, too, but it wasn't her original plan to follow them into the "family business". She did a degree in musical theatre at Illinois Wesleyan University and moved to New York to start "hacking away at being an actor". It didn't go well. "It was failure after failure after failure after failure," she says. She moved back home to her parents' house in [Phoenix](#) to "reassess where I was at", and ended up working at an independent bookshop called Changing Hands. "I just absolutely fell in love with being surrounded by books and talking about books. It was exactly what I needed to find my balance again."

She'd always written stories, starting and abandoning book after book, and decided that the flexibility of flight attending would let her properly work on her writing. She quit the bookshop in 2011, when Virgin America took her on. "It's absolutely an enjoyable job," she says, "but it definitely has its lows. It's a group of strangers inside a metal tube. Who knows what's going to happen? There are days you question every choice you've ever made. And flying brings out aspects of people's personalities. That can create very interesting interpersonal experiences, especially if you [add alcohol](#) or a medical emergency."

It was some time before she was ready to show anyone the story she'd spent all those long nights writing. "When I came back from New York, after getting burned so badly, I felt my personal quota of public creative risk had been used up – that it was time to get serious, get a real job, hunker down and become an adult. And so I didn't tell anyone. I convinced myself nobody needed to know, to just do it for myself, that if the story doesn't go anywhere other than your own brain and computer, that's enough."



Hanging by a thread ... Dean Martin and Jacqueline Bisset in 1970 thriller Airport. Photograph: Album/Alamy

The feeling didn't last. Around 30 drafts later – with input from her old bookseller friends - she went searching for an agent. She didn't know where to start, so she bought a copy of *The Essential Guide to Getting Your Book Published* and began making queries. She sent out 41 copies and got 41 rejections. It was a difficult time. “Rejection is hard,” she says. “Even if my time in New York had made my skin a little thicker, it's still hard, especially 41 rejections. But I never lost the bedrock belief that it was a good story people would enjoy reading.”

Her 42nd submission, late in 2019, was to Shane Salerno, the [Hollywood screenwriter turned starry literary agent](#) whose writing credits include *Armageddon*, *Savages* and *Shaft*. “I was like, ‘I have nothing to lose at this point.’ I'm 41 rejections in and this guy's the biggest of the big. There's not a chance he's going to be interested.”

I almost gave up. But seeing two authors at a Q&A reminded my why I had to keep going

Salerno, famous for brokering major deals for his authors, signed her up immediately. They worked together on the manuscript while Newman

continued to fly full-time – until the pandemic struck in March last year. She took a voluntary furlough from the airline, and spent every day at home alone, editing and rewriting. “It was a nice distraction to have that sense of purpose at a time when we were all just shaking our heads and going, ‘Where do we go from here?’ It was just me and the voices in my head.”

By autumn, *Falling* was signed by the first editor Salerno approached: seven figures for a two-book deal. “I drove to my parents’ house,” says Newman, “because that was our little quarantine pod. I stood in their kitchen and I think my face just looked confused. It’s been a surreal, surreal experience. There was one time when I almost gave up. Then I went to a book-signing here in Phoenix. There were two authors talking about their books and doing a Q&A. Just seeing them reminded me what I was working towards, why I needed to keep going until I got my yes.”

Falling will be published this summer and Newman’s first book-signing will be at [Changing Hands](#). The author, who has quit her job as a flight attendant, is predicting there will be tears. “I can’t believe this is really happening,” she says. “It’s an incredible, full-circle Cinderella story.”

Falling by TJ Newman is published by Simon & Schuster on 10 June in the UK, and a month later in the US.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/may/04/jaws-35000-feet-falling-torri-newman-debut-novel-terror-skies>

Elvis never left: how Britain kept the king of rock'n'roll alive – in pictures

A lager advert, London, 1995

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2021.05.04 - Opinion

- An electoral stamp of approval for the Tories risks dishonesty becoming the new normal
- Forget Line of Duty. I have found a show that brings me hours of primal joy
- How John Lewis's brand of middle-class aspiration lost its lustre
- The ignorance that underpinned empire and slavery still has staunch defenders

[Opinion](#)Local elections

An electoral stamp of approval for the Tories risks dishonesty becoming the new normal

[Polly Toynbee](#)



Everyone must have seen the recent stories of greed and arrogance. How will this play out on Thursday's elections?



‘Far more rides on these local elections than usual: most of the time, people should vote on the quality of their councils.’ Photograph: WPA/Getty Images

‘Far more rides on these local elections than usual: most of the time, people should vote on the quality of their councils.’ Photograph: WPA/Getty Images

Tue 4 May 2021 02.00 EDT

What kind of country has this become? We will know more when Thursday’s election results roll in by the weekend. [Polls are narrowing](#) but the Tories average 42% against Labour’s 35%. That’s extraordinary, when a party 11 years in power should expect heavy losses in midterm votes.

But these are exceptional times: after 14 months of draconian restrictions the UK emerges blinking into the light, vaccinated and liberated, bouncing with anticipated bingeing and boozing. Many households who’ve saved money through lockdown are awash with [surplus cash](#) and homeowners revel in Rishi Sunak’s deliberately created [house-price boom](#). Even those who lost relatives and livelihoods celebrate freedom: if not, then success on Thursday tells the government it can safely ignore them as a discontented minority.

Politicians soliciting votes, like fixed-grin salesmen, are obliged to pretend the voter is always right. Out canvassing, they may listen politely to whatever atrocious views or insults get hurled at them, resisting the impulse to shake sense into unreasonable people. When politicians lose elections, they must blame themselves – but never the voter. Failure sends them into mea culpas of “listening” to seek out the fault within their party.

But the rest of us are under no such constraint to pretend the voter can’t be wrong or irresponsible, gullible or pork-barrel bribed, without checking basic facts available at the click of a mouse. Try [Full Fact](#) or the BBC’s [Reality Check](#) for clear and simple explanations.

Worse, many don’t bother to vote at all, proclaiming: “They’re all the same.” No, they never are, and the man in No 10 is a Trump-favoured knave. Citizens have a duty to vote: I’d make it compulsory, as non-voters forfeit any right to complain.

Everyone has been shown recent revelations of alleged dishonesty, greed, and arrogance, far beyond anything witnessed in their lifetimes. The full litany would overflow this column with allegations of [contracts for cronies](#), Greensill lobbying, ministerial codes flouted, gold wallpaper, [Mustique holidays](#) and claims that nannies were [paid for by donors](#), not to mention country-wrecking Brexit lies.

A prime minister beyond anyone’s control [elbows out](#) civil servants who demur in order to terrorise the rest. His government [meddles](#) with public bodies for political ends. His ministers in TV studios defend the indefensible. Mounting investigations may be shrugged off.

Scandals splashed across even devoutly Tory newspapers mean any slightly interested citizen must have noticed. Despite a corrupted voted system, the power of X on a ballot paper can throw the scoundrels out or, this week, inflict a humiliating condemnation of the Johnsonocracy. He will seize on anything less as endorsing his behaviour. If voters don’t care, none of it matters: nothing to see here in this “farrago of nonsense”, as he says. An electoral stamp of approval risks dishonesty becoming the new normal.

That's why far more rides on these local elections in England than usual: most of the time, people should vote on the quality of their councils. But they look unlikely to turn out in multitudes to denounce their deplorable leaders. The "authentic" showman elected in 2019 has got Brexit done and he's vaccinating everyone.

[It should be Super Thursday for local elections but London still holds the reins | Rafael Behr](#)
[Read more](#)

That's not good enough. Citizens have a duty to keep their government straight. Myriad quotes make the point, but here's Einstein: "The world is in greater peril from those who tolerate or encourage evil than from those who actually commit it." If "evil" is too epic for tawdry selfishness, self-obsession and greed, remember Johnson has let the bodies pile higher in the UK than anywhere in Europe and casually imperilled peace in Northern Ireland.

Voters have no excuse, with Keir Starmer and his frontbench a thoroughly electable, decent and honest alternative compared with the rogues' gallery opposite. As Johnson arms himself with a hyped-up culture war of English nationalism and Brexit tribalism, he thrives on a more dangerously divided country.

Deciphering local election results will be complex: despite a 1% lead over Tories in "red wall" seats, YouGov [predicts](#) Labour losing many of those wards and councils, and there's no clear winner [in sight](#) in Hartlepool. Before Labour – a party that Rob Ford, professor at Manchester University, calls "as precariously put together as Tito's Yugoslav republics" – breaks into its usual strife, it should consider this.

Be patient. Soon, voters will see the chancellor's [brutal budget cuts](#) causing crises in the NHS, schools, policing and jobs. Meanwhile, later this month, watch Dominic Cummings, in a "[suicide vest](#)" of explosive tapes and texts, deliver potentially career-limiting blows to his old employer. If not quite yet, not this Thursday, the Johnson timebomb is ticking.

- Polly Toynbee is a Guardian columnist

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[Opinion](#) **Television & radio**

Forget Line of Duty. Sweden's Great Elk Trek is giving me hours of joy

[Emma Beddington](#)



My must-watch show is this riveting spring moose migration, a natural drama full of atavistic pleasures



Sweden's national TV channel has filmed the annual moose migration 24/7 for the past three years. Photograph: Christian Bardenheuer/Getty Images/EyeEm

Sweden's national TV channel has filmed the annual moose migration 24/7 for the past three years. Photograph: Christian Bardenheuer/Getty Images/EyeEm

Tue 4 May 2021 02.00 EDT

Appointment viewing is a different prospect in Sweden. The nation is not glued to AC-12 interviews with an officer one rank superior. Instead, each spring for the past three years, the state broadcaster Sveriges Television has filmed 24/7 coverage of migrating moose (also known as European elk). [The Great Elk Trek](#) is another [Nordic slow TV sensation](#), following on from Norway's train journey to the Arctic Circle, Knitting and Firewood (12 hours of stacking and burning, watched by more than a million viewers).

The annual spring migration involves the moose herd having to swim across the Ångermanälven river. They are in no hurry – this is slow TV, after all - and will not cross until the last ice on the shore has melted. This means the livestream often offers up an hour or two of a single moose chewing meditatively, warm breath vapour dissipating gradually in the forest chill, or just standing looking at the river. That is a best-case scenario. “I’m watching

the monitors right now and there is absolutely nothing happening,” said presenter Anders Lundin, who was interviewed about the trek [in its first year](#). Most of the time you get a delightful, entirely moose-free landscape.

Thrill-seekers can head to the daily highlights for moments of drama, such as a moose – or even several – breaking into a light jog. I’m joking: there is peril, as when an animal falls through the ice. That makes the times when you finally see them crossing feel genuinely momentous and celebratory.

I’m hooked. Watching – or, more often, looking for – these creatures in this beautiful environment, seemingly free from human interference, brings me deep peace. It feels primal: “Humans have been sitting and waiting exactly as we are now for thousands of years,” says Lundin. This is the kind of calm content Netflix, with its new [Meditation TV](#) can only dream of. Now, apologies, but it’s drizzling in the Swedish forest and time for me to play “moose or tree stump”.

Emma Beddington is a Guardian columnist

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[Opinion](#) **John Lewis**

How John Lewis's brand of middle-class aspiration lost its lustre

[Lynsey Hanley](#)

The PM's 'John Lewis nightmare' comes at a time when Britain's ailing city centres are bidding farewell to department stores



John Lewis's Birmingham store cost £35m when it opened in 2015, but didn't reopen after the first lockdown. Photograph: Jacob King/PA

John Lewis's Birmingham store cost £35m when it opened in 2015, but didn't reopen after the first lockdown. Photograph: Jacob King/PA

Tue 4 May 2021 05.14 EDT

Boris Johnson and his fiancée, Carrie Symonds, have spent an estimated £200,000 from who knows where renovating their official flat in order to avoid the shame of being upper-class people with middle-class furnishings. It's not surprising that their – and according to [Tatler magazine](#) their visitors'

– distaste for Theresa May’s “John Lewis furniture nightmare” seems to have attracted just as much attention as the questions over how Johnson might have paid for it.

John Lewis, like all class signifiers in Britain’s neurotic social minefield, means more than just a name: it means respectability and, by extension, middle-class acceptance. Although it’s been around for ever – [it first opened in 1864](#) – in the last 20 years the brand has taken on ever greater social cachet. Its recentish growth mirrored New Labour’s aggressively middle-class aspirations, and the idea that the way to “rescue” declining high streets was effectively to price working-class people out of using them.

[Britain’s overgrown Eton schoolboys have turned the country into their playground | John Harris](#)
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For towns and cities that lacked a branch, getting a [John Lewis](#) felt like more than a vital shot at economic regeneration: it was a way of saying that the place mattered. Its recent history points to its status as a boom-time store, associated with the expanding homeownership and booming equity of the 2000s. Between 2008 and 2020, the company opened more than 20 new stores and, prior to the pandemic, planned to open even more.

But there was something subtler and more insidious going on in parallel. John Lewis’s relentless emphasis on understated “good taste” and “quality” – not to mention the piety of its profit-sharing partnership model – was made for an era in which class markers, far from dissolving amid mass affluence, were only becoming more entrenched. The laughable idea that “everyone” went to John Lewis – tell that to my entire extended family – was cemented by the chain’s extravagant, Brown- and Cameron-era Christmas adverts, but it was never the case in reality.

Having a John Lewis on your high street meant something more than “footfall” and “average spend”: it meant middle-class – dominant class – credibility. Indeed, the success of this strategy seemed to insulate the company against the wider collapse of department stores after the 2008 financial crash. But only for so long. The John Lewis Partnership, which only a few years ago seemed to be on a ceaseless upward trajectory, reported

[losses of £517m for 2020](#) and has announced [the closure of 16 stores](#) – about a third of its total estate – since July 2020.

In 2015, a new shopping centre, Grand Central, was opened at Birmingham's refurbished New Street station, with a huge John Lewis costing £35m as its “anchor” store. Whether Birmingham needed another department store is another matter: it was literally across the road from a vast Debenhams – like BHS, soon to disappear from our high streets – and the [gimmicky, New Labour-era Selfridges building](#).

Last summer, when it was announced that the store would close permanently after the first lockdown, the [West Midlands Tory metro mayor, Andy Street](#) – whose previous job was actually running John Lewis as its MD – declared that to close one of the chain's largest stores was [“a dreadful mistake”](#) and that John Lewis needed to maintain a presence in the big regional cities.

That the second largest city in the UK couldn't sustain its own branch of John Lewis seems significant in itself, until you consider Birmingham's demographics: almost half of the city's population is under 30, with an overall unemployment rate of 9.8% and – [as the Observer reported late last year](#), more workers on furlough than any other local authority in the UK.

The fact is that John Lewis never had a chance in a city that is disproportionately young, poor and weighted towards people renting out of necessity rather than choice. It couldn't have picked a worse time or place to try to establish itself. By contrast, at the height of the extended credit boom in 2001, it opened a branch in nearby Solihull – far richer, much older and a lot whiter – which remains open.

On hearing the announcement that the [Birmingham](#) store was to close, local Reddit users began to speculate on what they wanted to see fill the cavernous building after John Lewis's departure, and the list returned a plangent – and unmistakably Brummie – statement of working-class considerations and budgetary options: Ikea, B&M, Wilko, Wickes. These are precisely the kind of stores that regeneration-by-retail experts don't want to see more of in the city centre, no matter how useful they are.

To Birmingham, then, having a John Lewis was a statement of confidence in a city that doesn't have a lot of confidence to spare. Relying on a department store to boost your image, in an era when department stores are on their way out, isn't going to fix that. The era of cities and town centres relying on specific stores and brands as an "anchor" for regeneration is over.

Places such as Preston realised this a long time ago, and it ought to be a source of embarrassment to Birmingham's leaders that they haven't yet caught up. The much-heralded [Preston model](#) – where city councils look to local businesses and foundational services, rather than big names, to anchor their economies – came about precisely because of the failure of what we might call the John Lewis model.

The Lancashire city spent much of the 2000s trying to get a vast shopping centre, Tithebarn, off the ground with the development behemoths Lendlease and Grosvenor as backers and – yes – a new John Lewis as its main attraction. When the 2008 crash put paid to the entire project, Preston was forced to go back to square one and ask what its citizens actually needed, rather than what they were told they should want. And – as was the case at Downing Street – generic, overpriced furniture wasn't on the list.

Lynsey Hanley is the author of [Estates: An Intimate History](#), and [Respectable: Crossing the Class Divide](#)

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[OpinionMuseums](#)

The ignorance that underpinned empire and slavery still has staunch defenders

[Zoe Williams](#)



It's not the 'woke' who want to erase the past, but those who are determined that it should never be examined



A statue of Cecil Rhodes outside Oriel College in Oxford. Photograph: Eddie Keogh/Reuters

A statue of Cecil Rhodes outside Oriel College in Oxford. Photograph: Eddie Keogh/Reuters

Mon 3 May 2021 11.17 EDT

It seems that the government's war on woke is box office gold, infinite spite fired at an endlessly replenished stream of targets, none of them moving very fast, since they totally weren't expecting culture secretary [Oliver Dowden](#) to even be aware of their work.

But, ask anyone who uses it pejoratively to describe another person what "woke" actually means, and it turns out to have a specific usage. In an academic or museum trustee, it means anyone who talks about decolonising the curriculum, as in the case of the academic whose reappointment to the board of the Museum of Greenwich was [reportedly vetoed by Dowden](#). In the context of youth, it's the ones on Black Lives Matter protests, unless it's the ones posing a threat to a slave owner's statue.

Its purpose is to reframe any anti-racist activism or intellectual inquiry as a threat to either public order or British heritage. It's tactically rather neat – if you're unwilling to say "racism is good, actually", then it's hard to lodge a

heartfelt opposition to anti-racists. Yet if you can interpolate some other dearly held principle (history, public order and, oh go on then, freedom of speech), claim it is under attack and pledge to defend it with all your might, well, here's the emotional heft you were lacking.

That argument, where it relates to history, rests on a parallel idea, that anti-racist revisionism is seeking to erase the past. If we take down a statue of Cecil Rhodes, we begin an act of conscious forgetting, which corrodes the national identity.

[Academic who backed 'decolonising' curriculum dropped from museum board](#)

[Read more](#)

The threat is actually coming from the opposite direction – by ignoring history we are unable to understand the shape of our nations. I'm thinking specifically of three recent works of popular history about colonialism and slavery; Nikole Hannah-Jones's 1619 Project for the New York Times, for which she won a Pulitzer last year (the [podcast](#) is incredible); Sathnam Sanghera's Empireland; and Alex Renton's Blood Legacy, which details his own family's slave ownership in late 18th-century Tobago. Each work is hauntingly original, and the perspectives different, but certain themes emerge. The first, forensically analysed by Hannah-Jones in the American context, is how slavery and exploitation as systems get into the fabric of all that is woven afterwards, whether that's modern-day healthcare or the economics of agriculture. "We're here because you were there", Sanghera writes, quoting the academic Ambalavaner Sivanandan, collapsing the walls between the past and the present.

Why, though, are those walls so important to a conservative worldview? It is not out of respect for history, or a sense that it's so fragile it must remain entombed in the shape it was first told. Rather, it is because the story they want to tell is one of discontinuity, which functions as both pardon and silencer. What happened, happened; it cannot unhappen; it could not happen now. So really, what would be the point evaluating its morality or legitimacy? It's history as video game: you clear a level. It wasn't pretty, but now you're on the next level, and there's no going back.

Nowhere is this clearer than on matters of character: statues shouldn't be destroyed, since those great men of the past cannot be judged by our standards. They wouldn't have been able to apply concepts of universal humanity, because they conceived of other races as sub-species. This was implicitly argued by the German state in an ongoing case against it for the [Namibian genocide of 1904-08](#). "The legal concept of genocide does not apply in this case," read its motion to dismiss, which left lawyers scratching their heads: it only doesn't apply if the Herero and Name people aren't, you know, *people*.

The problem is, it's not true: from Renton's book, which draws on archives of his family's letters, it is quite plain that slave owners did conceive of enslaved people as humans, and some of them did have a unified theory of what "humane" treatment looked like. What comes across much more strongly than a completely other, unrecognisable worldview is total cognitive dissonance; men who could quote you a scripture in the morning about love for all mankind, then put in an insurance claim for 76 slaves lost at sea in the afternoon, without any sense of that as a tragedy, still less of their own culpability. The denaturing agent, here, is money. How do you compartmentalise sentiment and torture? By maintaining a separation between the God-fearing human and the level-headed businessman.

Ignorance has always been a cornerstone of empire and the slave trade: Kerem Nisancioglu, co-author of *How the West Came to Rule*, points out that at the height of colonialism, the majority of Britons couldn't reliably name a British territory. The purpose of this ignorance, and the amnesia that is now so ardently protected, is not so much to hide past events as to distance them so much that they are infinitely dispersed. That behaviour was typical of that age, therefore everybody of that period is responsible. The inconvenience of this fresh look at the era is not that it wants to vandalise it but understand it.

- Zoe Williams is a Guardian columnist

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G7

UK and US urge G7 to ally against threats from Russia and China

Dominic Raab and Antony Blinken call for defence of open societies and rules-based order



Antony Blinken, left, and Dominic Raab hold a press conference after their meeting in London on Monday. Photograph: Reuters

Antony Blinken, left, and Dominic Raab hold a press conference after their meeting in London on Monday. Photograph: Reuters

[*Patrick Wintour*](#) and [*Vincent Ni*](#)

Mon 3 May 2021 14.38 EDT

Antony Blinken, the US secretary of state, and the UK foreign secretary, Dominic Raab, have called for a revitalised and broadened alliance of G7 nations determined to defend open societies and the rules-based order from the threats posed by the autocracies of China and Russia.

Speaking after a meeting in London on Monday, Raab said he saw “an increasing demand and need for an agile cluster of countries that share the same values and want to protect the multilateral system”.

He said the fact the UK had invited Australia, South Korea, India and South Africa to [the G7 foreign ministers meeting in London](#) was “a sign that we can see a shift to a pattern of like-minded countries working together”.

Raab said the door to diplomacy was always open with autocracies, but also warned the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, to end his “brinkmanship sabre-rattling on the border of Ukraine, the cyber-attacks and misinformation and the poisoning of Alexei Navalny, that was not just a human rights abuse but a use of chemical weapons on Russian soil”.

Blinken said it was “not the US purpose to contain [China](#), or hold it down”, adding: “What we are trying to do is to uphold the international rules-based order, that our countries have invested so much in over so many decades to the benefit, I would argue not just of our own citizens but of people around the world, including, by the way, [China](#).”

“And when any country – China or otherwise – takes actions that challenge or undermine or seek to erode that rules-based order and not make good on the commitments that they’ve made to that order, we will stand up and defend the order.”

Ahead of his trip to the UK, Blinken accused China of repression at home and aggression abroad. But he told CBS 60 Minutes that a military conflict between the world’s two biggest economies does not serve either of their interests.

Raab said London and Washington see “eye-to-eye” on China’s challenge to their shared values. He also urged Beijing to step up to the plate and play its full role on issues such as climate change.

[‘We no longer fear the tweet’: Biden brings US back to world stage in first 100 days](#)

[Read more](#)

In remarks that underline [how far the US has moved from the “America first” era of Donald Trump](#), Blinken said: “The challenge for us is to demonstrate that we can deliver for our citizens and when we are looking at most of the issues that are having an impact on their lives, whether it is this pandemic, climate change or the disruptive impact of new technologies, not a single one can be met by one country acting alone, not even the US.”

Wider [G7](#) talks on Tuesday and Wednesday are likely to range over major international crises, but the unifying theme will probably be the defence of open societies, from Myanmar and Libya to Syria. Joe Biden has promised to stage a democracies summit, an event to which Raab made reference.

Blinken also hailed the “special relationship” between the two countries, saying that the US had “no closer ally, no closer partner”. He skirted around the chance to call out the UK for its recent cuts to its overseas aid budget, and avoided explicit criticism over how the UK has [put the Good Friday agreement at risk](#) with the Brexit deal.

Blinken also denied that the US had failed to consult its allies before the major foreign policy decision to [withdraw US troops from Afghanistan by September](#) – saying the decision had been endorsed unanimously at Nato.

He insisted the US was not cutting and running, saying: “We have made it absolutely clear that as we withdraw our forces from Afghanistan we will protect them and take decisive action in response to any attacks. We have also been clear our forces are drawing down, but we are not disengaging. We intend to be very active diplomatically in trying to advance a political settlement between the Afghan government and the Taliban.”

Both men denied there had been any progress in arranging [the release of dual nationals detained in Iran](#) but Blinken said: “We have to take a stand on the arbitrary detention for political purposes. I would hope that with time and effort countries should establish a norm that this practice is unacceptable.”

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Taiwan

Chinese man seeking ‘freedom and equality’ says he travelled to Taiwan in dinghy

The man told police he arrived in a 2.6m rubber dinghy he bought online



The Liaoning aircraft carrier is accompanied by navy frigates and submarines conducting an exercises around Taiwan at the northern edge of the South China Sea in 2018. Photograph: Li Gang/AP

The Liaoning aircraft carrier is accompanied by navy frigates and submarines conducting an exercises around Taiwan at the northern edge of the South China Sea in 2018. Photograph: Li Gang/AP

[Helen Davidson](#) in Taipei

[@heldavidson](#)

Tue 4 May 2021 01.09 EDT

A Chinese man seeking “freedom and equality” has said he travelled undetected to [Taiwan](#) in a dinghy through the heavily patrolled [Taiwan](#) strait, according to authorities.

Taichung Port police officers detained the man, surnamed Zhou, after they received reports of a man behaving suspiciously near the docks. A police spokesperson said Zhou told officers he had travelled from Quanzhou in Fujian province, in a 2.6m long rubber dinghy he’d bought online, powered by an outboard motor.

The 180km journey took about 10 hours, they said, through the highly militarised Taiwan Strait, which is patrolled by both Taiwanese and Chinese authorities.

[Australian defence chief says war between China and Taiwan would be ‘disastrous’](#)

[Read more](#)

In a video of the arrest posted online, police officers can be heard asking Zhou “did you come over for freedom?” Zhou replies: “Yes, I came by boat”.

“Taiwan has more freedom and equality,” he said.

Asked if life is bad in [China](#), Zhou said he believed life in [China](#) “is all kinds of bad”. Zhou told officers he had not committed any crime in [China](#).

Taiwan has no formal process for asylum seekers, instead dealing with individuals on a case-by-case basis. The lack of refugee-specific laws amid Taiwan’s tangle of visa rules is a growing cause for concern among local human rights groups, particularly as people seek to leave the authoritarian crackdown on nearby Hong Kong. A resettlement assistance program for Hong Kongers who legally travel in Taiwan has [raised concerns over inequitable access](#) and a lack of transparency or oversight.

Taiwan has amended laws to decriminalise the act of arriving unlawfully to seek political asylum but has no dedicated refugee program, case review process or streamlined support service in Taiwan. Amnesty International has

described other asylum seekers caught in catch-22s, unable to work without official status but unable to get official status without employment.

Opposition political parties have pushed various proposals for a dedicated refugee law, but the issue has been clouded by concerns over the potential for Chinese infiltrators to exploit any program.

Taiwan is a self-governing democracy, but is under [increasing threat from the People's Republic of China](#). The governing Chinese Communist party has never ruled Taiwan but claims it as a province, and has not ruled out “unifying” by force.

Military buildup along the Taiwan Strait coast, and [increased drills and air force sorties](#) by the PLA into Taiwan’s air identification zone and across the unofficial “median line” of the strait have raised the likelihood of confrontation. Taiwan has increased its arms purchases from the US and lobbied for greater international assistance to ward off the threat.

Defence leaders were quick to reject concerns Zhou’s journey revealed holes in national security, and suggested the boat was likely too small to be detected by military radars.

“The radars of the maritime patrol agency might be able to see it, but naval shore-mounted radars can’t see such a target,” said vice admiral Chiang Cheng-kuo, who also expressed some doubt about the man’s story because of fuel limitations.

Taiwan’s defence minister Chiu Kuo-cheng, said the “shortcomings” could be “remedied”.

Cai Shiying, a legislator with the governing Democratic Progressive Party, told local media the conditions in the strait are milder in the spring and autumn and vessels under three metres in length were usually “filtered out as general noise” by surveillance. Cai added there were some contradictions in the man’s story, but did not elaborate.

Taichung police said Zhou was screened by disease control units to check for fever, before he was transferred to investigators on suspicion of violating

national security and immigration laws, which could bring jail time and deportation back to China. He was undergoing 14 days of quarantine and was in good health, the coastguard said.

Crossings from China to Taiwan are a rare event.

Last year 12 Hong Kong activists were intercepted less than 100km from Hong Kong island by Chinese coastguards. The group – most of whom were facing protest-related charges – was attempting to flee for Taiwan, but were detained in China and [convicted for illegally crossing borders](#).

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/04/chinese-man-seeking-freedom-and-equality-says-he-travelled-to-taiwan-in-dinghy>.

Ghislaine Maxwell

Ghislaine Maxwell's sex trafficking trial postponed until autumn at her request

Judge agrees to delay amid new charges and planning difficulties related to coronavirus



Prosecutors announce charges against Ghislaine Maxwell during a press conference in New York City last year. Photograph: Johannes Eisele/AFP/Getty Images

Prosecutors announce charges against Ghislaine Maxwell during a press conference in New York City last year. Photograph: Johannes Eisele/AFP/Getty Images

Reuters

Mon 3 May 2021 19.20 EDT

A US judge has granted Ghislaine Maxwell's request to delay her trial on charges she procured teenage girls for the late financier Jeffrey Epstein to

sexually abuse, saying the trial will begin in the fall.

The US district judge Alison Nathan in Manhattan said on Monday that a “short” postponement of the scheduled 12 July trial was appropriate because federal prosecutors had added new charges to the case, and Covid-19 protocols had made trial preparation harder.

Nathan ordered prosecutors and Maxwell’s lawyers to propose by 10 May their “earliest possible” trial date. “No additional delay is necessary or in the interests of justice,” she added.

Lawyers for Maxwell did not immediately respond to requests for comment. A spokesman for the US attorney Audrey Strauss in Manhattan declined to comment.

Maxwell, 59, has pleaded not guilty to sex trafficking and other charges over her alleged role in procuring four teenage girls for Epstein to abuse between 1994 and 2004.

She had sought to delay the trial until at least 8 November, and perhaps to next January, because adding the sex trafficking charges to her indictment more than doubled the size of the government’s case.

Prosecutors opposed an adjournment but said they could accept a March 2022 start date to avoid scheduling conflicts.

[Ghislaine Maxwell: lawyers release photo showing bruised face](#)
[Read more](#)

Nathan said any adjournment must be “no longer than necessary”, noting that Maxwell was being jailed in Brooklyn.

“Importantly, any victims and the public more broadly have a strong interest in trial proceeding without undue delay,” she added.

Maxwell’s lawyers have complained repeatedly that her trial preparation has been impeded by her treatment in jail.

She has objected to guards who allegedly interfere with her review of evidence, and wake her at night by [shining flashlights into her cell](#) to ensure she does not die by suicide.

Epstein killed himself in a Manhattan jail in August 2019 while awaiting trial on sex trafficking charges.

- In the US, the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) is at 800-273-8255 and [online chat is also available](#). You can also text HOME to 741741 to connect with a crisis text line counselor. In the UK and Ireland, [Samaritans](#) can be contacted on 116 123 or email jo@samaritans.org or jo@samaritans.ie. In Australia, the crisis support service [Lifeline](#) is 13 11 14. Other international helplines can be found at www.befrienders.org

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/may/03/ghislaine-mawell-trial-postponed-delayed>

[Australian foreign policy](#)

Australian government urged to press Saudis to reveal whereabouts of extradited citizen

Fresh doubts have been raised over an alleged criminal case in Saudi Arabia against Osama al-Hasani



Osama al-Hasani, a dual Australian and Saudi citizen, was detained in Morocco on 8 February just hours after meeting his newborn daughter

Osama al-Hasani, a dual Australian and Saudi citizen, was detained in Morocco on 8 February just hours after meeting his newborn daughter

[*Daniel Hurst*](#) *Foreign affairs and defence correspondent*

[*@danielhurstbne*](#)

Tue 4 May 2021 05.33 EDT

Saudi Arabian authorities must urgently reveal the location of the Australian citizen who was extradited to the country, human rights advocates say, amid fresh doubts over the alleged criminal case against him.

Osama al-Hasani, 42, was transferred from Morocco to Saudi Arabia at 2.45am on 13 March, just hours after United Nations officials sent an urgent letter asking authorities not to deport him over fears he would face torture there, according to Human Rights Watch.

Human Rights Watch called on the Australian government on Tuesday to press the Saudi government to immediately disclose the whereabouts of al-Hasani and pursue his rights to due process and a fair trial.

The organisation said it had reviewed the Saudi extradition request, which was dated 11 February, or three days after his arrest in Morocco, and it “states that he is wanted for conspiring with others to steal a number of Range Rovers from a car dealership in February 2015” with such charges carrying a potential penalty of two years in prison.

[Moroccan court approves Australian citizen's extradition to Saudi Arabia](#)
[Read more](#)

Human Rights Watch said it had also reviewed a 2018 Saudi lower court trial judgment in the case, which named six co-defendants, while al-Hasani – who was not in the country at the time of the trial – was labelled by prosecutors as a co-conspirator throughout the trial.

“In its ruling, the court stated that there was no evidence to convict the six co-defendants, but it nevertheless sentenced all of them to three months in prison in a discretionary ruling, which the Saudi legal system allows,” Human Rights Watch said in a statement.

“A September 2019 affidavit from the Justice Ministry, however, noted that following the lower court ruling and appeals ruling, all six co-defendants, as well as al-Hasani, had been cleared of all wrongdoing in the case due to lack of evidence presented by prosecutors.

“The affidavit stated that the court saw ‘no reason for the continuation of the search for him, the tracking of his arrival, the arrest warrant, stopping his [government] services, the international extradition request against him, and all criminal procedures against him in this case ...’”

The deputy Middle East director at Human Rights Watch, Michael Page, blasted authorities in both Morocco and Saudi Arabia over their handling of the case.

“Trying al-Hasani on charges for which he was previously cleared would be yet another shameless example of the Saudi judiciary’s lack of independence and due process,” Page said on Tuesday.

“The Moroccan authorities’ dismissal of al-Hasani’s justified fear of ill-treatment and unfair trial upon return makes a mockery of their international human rights obligations.”

Guardian Australia has sought comment from the governments of both Saudi Arabia and Morocco, via their embassies in Canberra.

International lawyers acting for al-Hasani, 42, [have previously raised](#) “credible concerns” that he was being targeted by the Saudi Arabian government for his political opinions.

Al-Hasani – a dual Australian and Saudi citizen – was detained shortly after he arrived in Morocco on 8 February. His wife, Hana al-Hasani, lives in Morocco with [their baby](#).

She told Guardian Australia in March: “The fact that he will be extradited to Saudi Arabia means simply that he is going to be tortured and maybe worse than that, things I don’t want to think about right now.”

Human Rights Watch said the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights had sent Moroccan authorities a letter on 12 March urging them not to deport al-Hasani over fears that he could face torture in Saudi Arabia.

But it said Morocco’s mission in Geneva responded the following day to say authorities had already extradited him to Saudi Arabia at 2.45am on 13

March “before the competent Moroccan authorities were able to process” that request.

In a statement [first reported by the ABC](#), Page also called on Saudi Arabia to reform its criminal justice system to comply with human rights norms.

Until that point, he said, “the likelihood is that those who fall afoul of the law will be mistreated”.

“Other countries should not forcibly return people who would most likely face an unfair trial and other abuses in Saudi Arabia,” Page said.

Comment has been sought from Australia’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Dfat), which has previously raised concerns over the case.

Lynette Wood, a first assistant secretary at Dfat, told Senate estimates in March that the Australian government was “concerned about the circumstances of Mr al-Hasani’s detention, his access to due process of law, and the extradition proceedings that led to his extradition to Saudi Arabia”.

Wood said Moroccan authorities had confirmed to Australia that the extradition had taken place three days earlier, “which we had some concerns about”.

“Australian officials in Canberra, Rabat and Riyadh have been active on this case, making representations to ascertain the circumstances of Mr al-Hasani’s detention, both in Morocco and now in Saudi Arabia,” she said in March.

“We have repeatedly expressed our concerns for his welfare; we’ll continue to advocate for his interests and provide consular assistance to him and his family.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/may/04/australian-government-urged-to-press-saudis-to-reveal-whereabouts-of-extradited-citizen>

Global development

‘Gamechanger’: Uganda launches drone delivering HIV drugs to remote islands

Technology could ensure critical medicines reach Lake Victoria communities with country’s highest prevalence of HIV/Aids



A crowd watches the launch of the project to deliver antiretroviral drugs.
Photograph: Makerere University Infectious Disease Institute

A crowd watches the launch of the project to deliver antiretroviral drugs.
Photograph: Makerere University Infectious Disease Institute

Global development is supported by



[About this content](#)

[Samuel Okiror](#) in Kampala

Tue 4 May 2021 02.15 EDT

As the bottles of medication are carefully loaded into the body of the drone, a small crowd gathers to watch on the other side of the yellow tape marking out the grassy landing strip.

With a gentle buzz the drone rises, a little uncertainly, into the sky, on its 1.5-metre wings. The precious cargo leaving Bufumira health centre III, in Uganda's Kalangala district, is critical drugs for people living in some of the most far-flung communities in the region. Kalangala is made up of 84 islands in Lake Victoria, the world's largest tropical lake, which [Uganda](#) shares with Tanzania and Kenya.

The drone taking off last week was a pilot for a new project which will now see 20 scheduled flights a month, carrying mostly HIV medicines out to 78 community groups and health facilities across the widely scattered Ssesse islands, which have the highest HIV prevalence in Uganda.

Located about 60 miles from the capital, Kampala, and home to more than 67,000 people, Kalangala district has an HIV prevalence rate of 18%, far

higher than [the national](#) rate of 5.6%. The government's HIV strategy estimates prevalence of the virus to be up to 40% in some fishing communities.

The delivery of antiretroviral drugs (ARVs) and healthcare is difficult, weather-dependent and risky for healthcare workers, as travel into the region is possible only by boat. The drones, it's hoped, which cost about £4,000 each, carry loads of up to 1kg and fly for 150km, will “close that last mile”, said Andrew Kambugu, executive director at Makerere University [Infectious Disease Institute](#) (IDI).

“Closing the last mile of delivery and ensuring that people living in remote communities have equitable access to modern treatments for HIV is one of the most significant challenges in global health and in Uganda,” he said.



Jude Matovu of the Bufumira health centre. Photograph: Makerere University Infectious Disease Institute

“Medical drones can help solve this challenge by safely and reliably delivering lifesaving medications, thereby empowering frontline healthcare workers to allocate more time and resources to performing other essential services, resulting in healthier and more resilient communities.”

Uganda's ministry of health, the Academy for Health Innovation, Uganda, and IDI collaborated on the [medical drones](#) pilot at Bufumira, which carried ARVs to more than 1,000 people living with HIV.

The “overcoming geographical barriers with technology” initiative will ease challenges, said Henry Mwebesa, Uganda's director general of health services, who watched the launch.

“Using medical drones is a huge step for us as a health sector in improving service delivery especially in hard to reach areas,” he said.

“It's very useful. Once it's successful we can adopt it for other facilities and replicate it in other places.”

The drones are controlled by locally trained experts who monitor the flight and landing.

“This is exciting. It will ease the transportation of vaccines to our health facilities in those landing sites,” said Jude Matovu, in charge of the Bufumira health centre. “So we expect our outpatient department coverage to increase.”

The [Uganda Medical Association](#) has welcomed the drones, but expressed concern over [drug shortages](#) due to inadequate funding. Its secretary general Mukuzi Muhereza said: “We are welcoming it. It's very important and it could be a gamechanger. It would be nice to see whether it really works with our bad network and connectivity.

“While the distribution and delivery is welcome, the other biggest problem I see is that even other public health facilities get stock-outs even when they can be reached by road. So the stock-outs I don't think would be because of the transportation or connectivity. The biggest stock-outs are because of the funds,” he said.

[This World Aids Day the global response to HIV stands on a precipice | Winnie Byanyima and Matthew Kavanagh](#)
[Read more](#)

“Realistically I think we are not giving enough money to national medical stores to purchase drugs and supplies for every Ugandan that needs it. The biggest change would be if we can enhance the budget and make sure we have what [we need] to send.”

Other African countries, including Rwanda and Ghana, are also using drones to deliver blood and medical supplies, with the technology estimated to be serving more than 22 million people.



A drone carrying batches of blood is launched in Rwanda in 2016, marking the start of the development of drones for medical purposes in rural parts of Africa. Photograph: Stephanie Aglietti/AFP/Getty Images

Rosalind Parkes-Ratanshi, director at the Academy for Health Innovation, said the programme will also be an important research opportunity to assess and quantify how effective drones are at delivering medications, data that will help scale drone technology and respond to emergencies.

“Thanks to the support and coordination of our partners, including Johnson & Johnson, this programme will help gather the information and data needed to help make this future a reality, while also helping to deliver lifesaving care to people in need,” said Parkes-Ratanshi.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/may/04/gamechanger-uganda-launches-drone-delivering-hiv-drugs-to-remote-islands>

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[Health policy](#)

Holidays abroad should be discouraged to stop Covid third wave, say MPs

All-party group on coronavirus gives recommendations on international travel for leisure, which could resume on 17 May

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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People enjoy a day out at Magaluf Beach in Calvia on the Spanish island of Mallorca. The cross-party group advises that Covid security should be improved at all points of entry into the UK. Photograph: Jaime Reina/AFP/Getty Images

People enjoy a day out at Magaluf Beach in Calvia on the Spanish island of Mallorca. The cross-party group advises that Covid security should be improved at all points of entry into the UK. Photograph: Jaime Reina/AFP/Getty Images

[Nicola Davis](#) *Science correspondent*

[@NicolaKSDavis](#)

Mon 3 May 2021 01.00 EDT

Holidays abroad should be discouraged even once legal, a cross-party group of MPs have said as part of a suite of recommendations to prevent a third wave of coronavirus and further lockdowns.

Under the UK government's roadmap to relax coronavirus restrictions, international travel for leisure purposes could resume from 17 May.

Ministers have confirmed that a [traffic light system](#) is to be put in place in which countries will be added to green, amber and red lists, with different rules regarding issues such as quarantine of returning travellers for each list.

On Sunday the foreign secretary, Dominic Raab, told the BBC's Andrew Marr show that details of the traffic light system were "[coming shortly](#)".

But on Monday the all-party parliamentary group on coronavirus (APPG) issued a report recommending that holidays abroad should be discouraged in light of experts' concerns about international travel.

"The UK government should discourage all international leisure travel to prevent the importation of new variants into the UK, in order to reduce the risk of a third wave and further lockdowns," the report states, adding that financial support must be given to the travel industry. "This recommendation should be implemented immediately and reviewed on a quarterly basis."

The SNP MP Dr Philippa Whitford, the group's vice-chair, said: "Our cross-party inquiry has heard how the UK's border management is acting more like a sieve than a shield in the fight against coronavirus. Ministers must act on these recommendations and learn from the mistakes made last year, when the premature reopening of international travel contributed to a second wave. With the threat of importing dangerous new Covid variants, we must not throw away recent hard-won progress made through the sacrifices and efforts of the public."

At a hearing on 20 April a number of experts including Lucy Moreton, of the Immigration Services Union, and Deenan Pillay, a professor of virology at University College London, gave evidence to the APPG.

“Notably, of those witnesses questioned in the hearing, none were prepared to travel internationally in the near future,” the group’s report states. “Above all, the evidence makes clear that international travel poses a significant risk of the importation of new Covid-19 variants, which may in turn lead to further lockdowns, and inevitably, further loss of life.”

Among recommendations, the group advises that Covid security should be improved in arrival halls at all points of entry into the UK, including preventing the mixing of passengers from countries on the different traffic light lists, and that the government should not delay in adding countries to the red list.

The report also stresses the need for international standard for documents detailing results of Covid tests or vaccinations. According Moreton, more than 100 fraudulent Covid certificates are identified each day by UK Border Force staff, but typically only because of spelling mistakes.

Prof Rowland Kao, an epidemiologist at the University of Edinburgh and member of the Scientific Pandemic Influenza Group on Modelling, who was not involved in the report, said new “escape mutant” variants with the ability to infect people more easily or cause more severe illness posed the greatest threat to hopes of near-normal conditions for social and economic activity this summer.

“As the numbers of infections here go down, this is most likely to occur through the importation of variants from countries which have not yet been so fortunate,” he said.

A Labour spokesperson described the government’s record on border security against Covid as woeful. “Late to close borders, late to introduce testing requirements, a hotel quarantine system that has let through dangerous mutations and a test, track and isolate system not up to the task,” they said.

“The fact that India was only added to the red list last Friday – despite going through such a heartbreaking wave at the moment – shows how inadequate and dangerous the current system is.”

A government spokesperson said: “We introduced robust border controls to stop coronavirus variants in their tracks and every essential check we’ve introduced for arrivals has strengthened our defences against new mutations.

“As the UK unlocks domestically and with many British families spread far and wide, we understand that people may need to travel abroad for all sorts of reasons. But we can only permit it if it is done safely, which is why the global travel taskforce has produced the traffic light system allowing us to manage the risk from imported cases by varying restrictions depending on the risk of travel from a specific location.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/may/03/holidays-abroad-should-be-discouraged-to-stop-covid-third-wave-say-mps>

[Prince Harry](#)

Prince Harry calls for equitable distribution of Covid vaccines

In first appearance since death of Prince Philip, Harry urges people to ‘look beyond ourselves’

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



Prince Harry speaks onstage at the Vax Live fundraising concert at the SoFi stadium in California on Sunday. Photograph: Valérie Macon/AFP/Getty Images

Prince Harry speaks onstage at the Vax Live fundraising concert at the SoFi stadium in California on Sunday. Photograph: Valérie Macon/AFP/Getty Images

[Caroline Davies](#)

Mon 3 May 2021 05.06 EDT

The Duke of Sussex made his first public appearance since the funeral of his grandfather, the Duke of Edinburgh, at a charity concert in [Los Angeles](#) to promote the equitable distribution of coronavirus vaccines worldwide.

Prince Harry urged people to “look beyond ourselves with empathy and compassion” during a speech at [Vax Live](#), hosted by [Global Citizen at the SoFi stadium](#) before an audience of vaccinated guests.

Harry, appearing without the Duchess of Sussex, who is expecting their second child, praised the world’s frontline medical workers at the concert, which featured a host of famous names from the worlds of music, film and politics.

He pleaded for vaccines to be distributed to everyone, everywhere.

“Tonight is a celebration of each of you here, the vaccinated frontline workers in the audience and the millions of frontline heroes around the world,” he said.

“You spent the last year battling courageously and selflessly to protect us all. You served and sacrificed, put yourselves in harm’s way, and acted with bravery, knowing the costs. We owe you an incredible debt of gratitude. Thank you.”

It was Harry’s first public appearance in the US since his and Meghan’s [bombshell interview](#) with Oprah Winfrey in March. He and Meghan are campaign chairs for the Vax Live event, which was hosted by Selena Gomez and featured musical performances from Jennifer Lopez, Pearl Jam’s Eddie Vedder, Foo Fighters, J Balvin and HER.

The event raised £38.3m (\$53.8m) for Covax, which is working to provide vaccines for low- and middle-income countries. The US president, Joe Biden, and Pope Francis were among dignitaries to send messages of support.

Messages about vaccine equity were heard from guests including Ben Affleck, David Letterman, Gayle King, Jimmy Kimmel and Sean Penn.

President Biden said in a video address that the US was “working with leaders around the world to share more vaccines and boost production to make sure every country has the vaccines they need”.

The Global Citizen co-founder and CEO, Hugh Evans, said: “Global Citizen initially set out to secure enough funding from philanthropists, the private sector and governments, to purchase 10m vaccine doses as part of our campaign. Through the amazing work of our hosts, campaign chairs, and actions taken by global citizens, I am proud that tonight we have already surpassed our goal, securing enough funding for 10.3m doses.

“And the momentum is only just building. Additional commitments are rolling in and will be announced as part of our global broadcast on 8 May. Critically we need to see the US and the UK step up and start sharing additional doses, and we need pharmaceutical companies such as Moderna to urgently provide millions of doses to Covax to the poorest countries at non-profit prices.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/may/03/prince-harry-calls-for-equitable-distribution-of-covid-vaccines>

[Health policy](#)

Limit of 30 mourners at funerals in England to be lifted this month

While social restrictions are beginning to lift, Dominic Raab says masks may still need to be worn after 21 June

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



A funeral cortege for a hospital porter passes Southampton general hospital in May 2020. Photograph: Finnbarr Webster/Getty Images

A funeral cortege for a hospital porter passes Southampton general hospital in May 2020. Photograph: Finnbarr Webster/Getty Images

[Rajeev Syal](#)

Sun 2 May 2021 19.01 EDT

The 30-person limit on the number of mourners who can attend funerals in England is to be lifted later this month, the government has announced, as Dominic Raab indicated that masks may still need to be used after 21 June.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government said on Monday that the legally enforced limit would be removed as part of the next stage of lockdown easing, expected on 17 May.

The capacity will then be determined by how many people venues such as places of worship or funeral homes can safely accommodate while maintaining social distancing.

This includes indoor and outdoor venues, and all organisers must continue to be Covid-secure and follow social distancing rules. While venue capacities will vary, the department said many would be able to allow “significantly” more than 30 people to attend.

The department said attendances for other life or commemorative events, such as weddings and wakes, were expected to still be limited to 30 people in stage 3 of the roadmap, while barmitzvahs and christenings will be allowed again for the first time since the new year.

Hospitality venues, entertainment venues such as cinemas and soft play areas, the rest of the accommodation sector and indoor adult group sports and exercise classes will also reopen. Limited crowds will be allowed at sporting events, and foreign holidays could be permitted for people living in England.

All remaining restrictions on social contact could be lifted from 21 June, allowing for larger events to go ahead and nightclubs to reopen.

Dominic Raab, the foreign secretary, said on Sunday that “some safeguards” may stay in place when legal restrictions end, such as continued use of masks and physical distancing.

Raab told BBC One’s Andrew Marr Show on Sunday: “We want to get to the position at the end of June when we can get life back as close to normal as possible, but there will still need to be some safeguards in place.”

Quizzed on the measures likely to be retained after stage 4 of the roadmap, Raab said: “I think it will be around distancing, maybe there will be something around masks.”

He said no decision has been made on whether to vaccinate children, and the government was looking at “different contingencies”.

For funerals, a limit of 30 attenders was applied at the funeral of the Duke of Edinburgh last month.

Robert Jenrick, the communities secretary, said: “Losing a loved one has been incredibly hard during the pandemic and I am pleased we are now in a position, thanks to everyone’s continued efforts and the rollout of the vaccine, to remove these limits and allow more friends and family to come together and pay their respects.

“I look forward to working with faith leaders responsible for places of worship, and those who manage venues such as funeral homes, to introduce the new arrangements in a way that continues to keep people safe.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/may/03/limit-of-30-mourners-at-funerals-in-england-to-be-lifted-this-month>

NHS

NHS faces exodus of doctors after Covid pandemic, survey finds

Long hours and the impact of the pandemic are taking their toll on medics, BMA findings show

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



Surveys show persistent and often widespread shortages of staff in significant areas of the NHS. Photograph: Adrian Dennis/AFP/Getty Images

Surveys show persistent and often widespread shortages of staff in significant areas of the NHS. Photograph: Adrian Dennis/AFP/Getty Images

[Denis Campbell](#) *Health policy editor*

Mon 3 May 2021 01.00 EDT

Thousands of UK doctors are planning to quit the [NHS](#) after the Covid pandemic because they are exhausted by their workloads and worried about their mental health, a survey has revealed.

Almost one in three may retire early while a quarter are considering taking a career break and a fifth are weighing up quitting the health service to do something else.

Long hours, high demand for care, the impact of the pandemic and unpleasant working environments are taking their toll on medics, the British Medical Association findings show.

In a survey of 5,521 doctors 1,352 (31.9%) of the 4,258 who replied to a question about whether their career plans had changed over the last 12 months said they were now more likely to retire early than they were last year – more than double the 14% who said the same in June 2020.

Smaller proportions were more likely to take a career break (25%), leave the NHS for an alternative career (21%), work in another country (17%) or become a locum (15%). Some respondents selected more than one option. In addition, half said they were more likely to reduce their hours.

Dr Chaand Nagpaul, the leader of the BMA, said the high numbers of disillusioned doctors could worsen the NHS's staffing problems and leave patients waiting longer for treatment.

“It's deeply worrying that more and more doctors are considering leaving the NHS because of the pressures of the pandemic – talented, experienced professionals who the NHS needs more than ever to pull this country out of a once-in-a-generation health crisis,” Nagpaul said.

One acute specialist doctor told the BMA: “My usual finish time is around two hours after I'm rostered to leave. I spend my rest days catching up on the rest of the emails I don't have time to deal with at work. It's exhausting.

“I've started exploring career opportunities outside of the NHS. I don't know yet if I'll leave clinical medicine but I'm seriously considering it. It's a tough thing to consider. I love the NHS but I know I can't keep up this pace

indefinitely. My own mental and physical health will have to become a priority at some point.”

Asked what factors had influenced their thinking, doctors cited workload (45%), personal wellbeing (43%), pay (29%), working conditions (22%) and the culture in their workplace (22%).

A GP in Yorkshire said: “In my more than 20 years of training and working in the NHS I have been closest to leaving the job that I love in the last few months. Like most, I’ve had days where I wanted to stop. I’ve had colleagues in tears, some scared of what is happening around us and some completely overwhelmed with the avalanche of work that has hit general practice.”

An exodus of doctors would make it even harder for the NHS in England to tackle the backlog of care caused by the widespread suspension of normal services during the pandemic. The waiting list for hospital treatment already stands at [4.7 million](#) – the highest it has ever been.

Nagpaul said: “More than half of doctors are afraid of an unmanageable workload to try to deal with the backlog of millions of patients who are waiting for treatment, and most do not feel that their hospital or department will be able to cope with demand. Three out of five doctors are worried about the impact of the backlog on patient care.”

[BMA survey April 2021](#)

A Department of [Health](#) and Social Care spokesperson said: “There are record numbers of doctors, nurses and NHS staff [in England] – over 1.18 million – and there are now more medical students in training than at any point in NHS history.

“We are backing our NHS with an extra £7bn for health and care services this year, bringing our total additional Covid-19 investment to £92bn, including £1bn to support NHS recovery by tackling waiting lists.”

It released figures last week showing there are record numbers of doctors working in the NHS in England. There are more than 123,800 doctors,

almost 6,300 more than a year ago, and more than 303,000 nurses, more than 11,200 up on last year, it said.

But surveys by medical staff groups show persistent and often widespread shortages of staff in significant areas, which can lead to patients waiting longer than they should for diagnostic tests and treatment including cancer care, heart operations and other surgery.

For example, a survey last week by the Royal College of Radiologists showed that a shortage of radiologists, who analyse scans, is delaying care, including cancer treatment.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/may/03/nhs-faces-exodus-doctors-covid-pandemic-survey>.

2021.05.03 - Coronavirus

- [Covering India's Covid crisis Hundreds of journalists have lost their lives](#)
- [Hong Kong Plan to force vaccines on foreign domestic workers sparks alarm](#)
- [India Australians could die from Covid flight ban from country, medical chief warns](#)
- [New Zealand Country fires nine border workers who refused vaccine](#)

[Inside the GuardianIndia](#)

Covering India's Covid crisis: 'Hundreds of journalists have lost their lives'

Our South Asia correspondent reflects on a catastrophe that is now affecting the lives of almost everyone in the country



Funeral pyres for Covid-19 victims burning at a mass cremation site set up in New Delhi. Photograph: Altaf Qadri/AP

Funeral pyres for Covid-19 victims burning at a mass cremation site set up in New Delhi. Photograph: Altaf Qadri/AP

[Hannah Ellis-Petersen](#), as told to [Sophie Zeldin-O'Neill](#)

Mon 3 May 2021 02.00 EDT

You recently lost a close colleague, [Kakoli Bhattacharya](#), to Covid-19. Can you tell us about her and the important work that she did?

Kakoli was the Guardian's news assistant over here and had worked for us since 2009. She could find any number or contact I needed and smoothed over any and all of the bureaucratic challenges that working in India can present. She made reporting here a huge joy, when it could be a huge challenge, and she was hugely well thought of by journalists for other organisations too. More than that, though, she was the person who welcomed me to Delhi. She knew the region inside out. She was incredibly warm and was someone I could always call on. The Guardian's India coverage won't be the same without her.

[‘Warm, kind, wise and brilliant’: Guardian writers remember Kakoli Bhattacharya](#)
[Read more](#)

We last spoke [in autumn 2020](#), when the crisis was starting to escalate but there were more pressing issues being faced, such as the displacement of migrant workers. How has the situation shifted since then?

India's first wave hit between July and September 2020, but by November, cases had fallen to extraordinarily low levels. No one could really explain why the country had recovered so quickly, and seemed to be avoiding a second wave. All sorts of reasons were being put forward as to why. People were talking about [India](#) having achieved herd immunity, about Indians being somehow naturally immune because of the presence of other viruses here, others were celebrating the Modi government and saying they had defeated it – which ignored the huge crises happening for swathes of displaced migrant workers, and the fact that hundreds of millions of people had been pushed back into poverty.

Soon mosques and temples were reopening for weddings, parties and religious ceremonies. A culture of complacency developed and people stopped being scared of Covid, which I think is perhaps the most terrifying mistake that was made. In February, cases started to go up and up, first in Maharashtra, where Mumbai is, and then in Delhi – at which point the

system really started to collapse. We're now in a crisis, where hospitals are out of oxygen supplies, bodies are piling up at crematoriums, and really every life here has been touched by the virus. It's hard to know when it'll end.

What has contributed to this surge in cases and deaths?

The Kumbh Mela festival and cricket matches have become notorious as super-spreader events, and they were undoubtedly catastrophic, but people were also gathering in their hundreds for weddings, social occasions, smaller religious festivals and so on. People were going out to work, mingling in public places like markets, being quite complacent about social distancing and mask wearing. Then we saw the emergence of new variants, which seem to be more virulent.



Sadhus, or holy men, bathing in the Ganges river during the Hindu Kumbh Mela festival earlier this year. Photograph: Anushree Fadnavis/Reuters

Why are younger people being affected more than in other countries?

This B1167 variant we're now seeing seems to be particularly contagious. In the first wave, the trend was that young people would catch it and be

asymptomatic. This time, a lot of young people are getting really ill or even dying. They have been going out a lot more to work and offices, and socialising, so often have had exposure to high viral loads. And of course, those who have been vaccinated already are mainly older people.

India is the world's foremost vaccine producer. How quickly are Covaxin and other vaccines being distributed?

India only ordered 15m vaccines, and that was in January this year when a lot of other countries had already placed their orders. A lot of those countries had also ordered them from the Serum Institute here in India, but there seemed to be a lack of urgency from the government. There are two approved vaccines – Covishield, which is the name given to the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, and Covaxin, which is the Indian-made vaccine, and because that was introduced before having gone through the normal phase 3 trials, people felt they were being guinea pigs and resisted take-up.

The target is to vaccinate 300m of the country's 1.3bn population by August, and people are certainly more willing to have it now, but there's a shortage of vaccines because the Serum Institute didn't have the orders and investment until only recently. India has now banned exports so no one else is able to have the Indian-made vaccine, and from Saturday anyone over 18 will be eligible for it – but whether the supplies are there is another question.

[India's Covid disaster: a crisis for the world – podcast](#)

[Read more](#)

How will this affect the developing nations who are relying on the Serum Institute to deliver supplies of vaccines?

India won't be exporting vaccines for a while, and that's very bad news for the developing world. The Serum Institute in Pune was supposed to be one of the biggest contributors to the Covax programme, which all of India's neighbours – the likes of Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Nepal – are relying on. So as Europe and the US start to exit the crisis, we may well see a lot of the developing world continuing to struggle.

What has it been like to report on this story?

Without a doubt, this is the most difficult story I've ever had to cover. I'm reporting on an unfolding tragedy that has not only touched me personally, but also everyone around me and there is no opportunity to get any distance from it all. My day recently spent at a crematorium which was cremating the Covid dead of Delhi was one of the most gut-wrenching days of reporting I've ever done.

People have compared it to a warzone here. Certainly it does feel like India is under assault, but when the enemy is invisible and battlegrounds are hospitals, somehow the fear is greater, more unnerving. I read the newspapers cover to cover but I do wake up every day with a sense of dread, wondering how many more people will have died, and how many of those will be the families of people that I know and love.

I am so grateful to the many brave, overworked doctors who will call me after a 24 hour shift on a Covid ward to talk to me and honestly describe what is happening behind hospital doors. It was doctors who warned me weeks ago that a deadly wave had set in, and doctors who have become my most reliable sources of information, when the government has continued to insist that there is no shortage of oxygen and drugs and vaccines.

What service are journalists providing there?

I've also never reported on a story which felt so urgent and where I could see clearly the vital role that journalism plays. India's tragedy is the world's tragedy and it can not go ignored. As the families I have spoken to in the crematoriums, and outside hospital gates as they begged for beds said, please show the world what is happening to India. What is unfolding in India also serves as a stark warning to the rest of the world, particularly the increasingly vaccinated western countries, that this pandemic has not gone away and this is no time for complacency.

India is a huge, diverse country to cover and I'm indebted to the brilliant work of local journalists who have been on the ground, exposing the shortage of oxygen and beds and counting the bodies at crematoriums to hold local authorities to account for covering-up the true death toll of the pandemic. They have paid a heavy price for their reporting: hundreds of

Indian journalists have lost their lives covering this pandemic, including over 50 in just the past few weeks.

Who has been worst hit?

The migrant and daily-wage workers, the people who live hand-to-mouth, who live in big cities, who maybe live in their place of work. There is no safety net and they are reliant on help from NGOs. There are millions of these people, and a lot of them are undocumented, so no one is making sure they're OK.

Just prior to the pandemic, you wrote that “the country had gone through a historic democratic uprising, as tens of millions from across religions, classes and castes took to the streets in [protest against a new citizenship law](#) seen as discriminatory to Muslims”. How has the pandemic affected relations between the different faiths?

One of the terrible narratives that reared its head in the first wave was that Covid was somehow a “Muslim disease”. There were 2,000 Muslims gathered at the headquarters of a missionary movement called the Tablighi Jamaat, and when lockdown was introduced with only four hours' notice, all these people got stuck there and accused of being super-spreaders, of waging “corona jihad”. There is already a lot of Muslim hatred under this government, but these rumours made things so much worse. Later we saw Modi wishing people good luck at the Kumbh Mela, at which 10 million Hindus gathered.

This time though, because the tragedy had been so widespread and intense, it has been a leveller – and this time the government is being blamed.

What needs to happen now in order for the crisis to abate?

Aid was slow initially – I think the world was very taken aback at how quickly this crisis hit India, just as India itself was. The WHO is sending in 4,000 oxygen concentrators, which draw oxygen from the air. A lot of

countries don't have a lot of vaccines to spare, but the US has finally agreed to lift an export ban on some raw materials which are helpful in the creation of vaccines. That had been a source of conflict in the past, but this is good news as the Serum Institute might not be able to increase production for another couple of months.

There is talk of a national lockdown, but lockdowns don't work here in the way they work in the west, because of the scale of poverty. The only thing that is going to get us out of this crisis is amping up vaccine production and distribution.

What are the political implications of this catastrophe? Is Modi's popularity being affected?

Modi is an incredibly popular prime minister and was seen as having handled the crisis well up to this point. But now it feels as though people are losing faith in the state and central governments as they see for themselves the lack of preparation and supplies. People are losing relatives who couldn't even get a hospital bed, and they're looking for someone to blame. It's the first time I've ever seen people really criticising the Modi government – it's even visible in the newspapers that are traditionally quite pro-government.

What about the lack of transparency regarding data?

Yes, it's become obvious in recent weeks that on a state level the government isn't being honest about the death rates. The official numbers in no way match up to the number of bodies that are piling up between hospital morgues and crematoriums – the true figure is believed in some instances to be as much as 10 times higher. Local journalists have been stationed outside crematoriums and been counting the bodies themselves. Data is what helps you understand and fight a crisis, so to lie or obfuscate is to hurt the people and to prevent the correct resources coming in.

As journalists, we quote the official statistics, but with the caveat that experts believe the real number is significantly higher. The chief minister of Uttar Pradesh has said there is no shortage of oxygen in his state, and has threatened to slap criminal charges on anyone who says there is, yet I spoke

to two people in Uttar Pradesh who lost loved ones this week because they couldn't get access to the oxygen they needed.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/membership/2021/may/03/india-covid-deaths-crisis-kumbh-mela>

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[Hong Kong](#)

Hong Kong plan to force Covid vaccines on foreign domestic workers sparks alarm

Authorities accused of ‘blackmailing’ workers over plan to make vaccine a condition of getting a job

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



Migrant workers queue up for Covid-19 testing in the Central district of Hong Kong on Saturday. Photograph: Peter Parks/AFP/Getty Images

Migrant workers queue up for Covid-19 testing in the Central district of Hong Kong on Saturday. Photograph: Peter Parks/AFP/Getty Images

[Helen Davidson](#) in Taipei

[@heldavidson](#)

Mon 3 May 2021 02.09 EDT

Hong Kong's government has sparked discrimination concerns over plans to force hundreds of thousands of foreign domestic workers to be vaccinated against Covid-19 or face losing their job.

Authorities have embarked on mass mandatory testing of the city's 370,000 domestic workers after a more infectious strain was detected in the community, and flagged plans for compulsory vaccinations.

Under the measures, workers would need to be vaccinated before their contracts could be renewed, and any incoming worker would be required to have the vaccination to enter Hong Kong.

[Hong Kong passes law that can stop people leaving](#)
[Read more](#)

The vast majority of Hong Kong's domestic workers are migrant workers, primarily from the [Philippines](#) and Indonesia, and no other foreign workforce has been singled out for mandatory vaccines, drawing criticism from [Philippines](#) officials. The country's foreign affairs secretary, Teddy Locsin Jr, praised Hong Kong's provision of free vaccines to domestic workers, but said singling them out to make it mandatory "smacks of discrimination".

"If it is a special favour, it is unfair to other nationalities. Hong Kong can do better than that," he said.

Eman Villanueva, spokesperson for the Asian Migrants Coordinating Body, said the enforced testing and proposed vaccinations were "discrimination and social exclusion of domestic workers at its worst", and accused the government of "blackmailing" workers by tying vaccines to contracts.

"They did not respond like this when there were outbreaks in several fitness gyms and [dance studios](#), restaurants, banks, etc," he said in an opinion piece for Stand News. "It's because to them we are easy targets and scapegoats."

It's because they know we don't have much choice but to follow their discriminatory, illogical, and unreasonable impositions or end up jobless."

The comments by Locsin echoed those by the Philippines consul general, Raly Tejada, who said his office had been very supportive of Hong Kong's free vaccine programme, but if it was to become mandatory for work contracts then it should be non-discriminatory and include "other non-resident workers who are similarly situated so that there is no feeling of being singled out".

In explaining the new rules, Hong Kong's minister for labour, Dr Law Chi-king, said the "high risk group" mainly spent their holidays with friends, which could lead to cross-family infections. The migrant workers, who usually travel alone to Hong Kong, have one day off a week and frequently gather in public places to socialise away from the home where they work.

"In the long run, we need to think about how to get more domestic workers vaccinated," said Law.

On Sunday the Hong Kong government [said](#) the labour department was "working out the relevant details" on mandatory vaccines. It said its mandatory testing programme did not discriminate based on race or status, but did not address accusations that its plans for mandatory vaccines were.

It appealed to all workers to get their vaccines voluntarily "to protect their own health and that of their employers' family and others, and to avoid being subject to any regular testing in the future".

It also urged employers to encourage their workers and to give them sufficient rest after getting vaccinated. Those who could not be vaccinated for health reasons could get an exemption, it added.

On Sunday health authorities reported the second consecutive day of no community transmission cases detected. There had been about 20 in the past two weeks.

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Health

Australians could die from Covid in India under travel ban, medical chief warns

But Prof Paul Kelly recommended suspending arrivals, citing ‘significant risk’ of coronavirus leaking from hotel quarantine

- [Legal challenges loom after government bans citizens returning from India](#)
- [India travel ban: does the health justification stack up](#)



A medical worker (centre) observes Covid-positive patients in a makeshift care centre in New Delhi. In Australia the release of the chief medical officer’s advice comes as the government defends its move to criminalise returning to Australia from India. Photograph: Getty Images

A medical worker (centre) observes Covid-positive patients in a makeshift care centre in New Delhi. In Australia the release of the chief medical

officer's advice comes as the government defends its move to criminalise returning to Australia from India. Photograph: Getty Images

[Sarah Martin](#)

[@msmarto](#)

Mon 3 May 2021 02.54 EDT

Australia's chief medical officer, Prof Paul Kelly, has warned the government that citizens stranded in India face the prospect of serious illness without healthcare and a "worst-case scenario" of death from Covid under a controversial [ban on travel to Australia](#).

But given Australia's "limited" quarantine facilities, Kelly recommended the government go ahead with its decision to suspend arrivals from India until 15 May, noting it would be the first time that such a determination had been used [to prevent Australian citizens and permanent residents](#) entering Australia.

On Monday night, the immigration minister, Alex Hawke, indicated the government would review exemptions to Australia's outbound travel ban in response to the worsening coronavirus situation overseas.

The release of the Kelly advice comes as the Morrison government defended the controversial inbound travel ban that criminalises returning to Australia from India. The Coalition said it was a necessary health measure and the prime minister, Scott Morrison, said the government would review the suspension as soon as this week.

[Marise Payne denies racism motivated ban on Australian citizens returning from Covid-ravaged India](#)

[Read more](#)

Kelly's letter to the federal health minister, Greg Hunt, noted the penalties for breaching the relevant section of the Biosecurity Act included five years' jail or a fine of \$66,600 or both. The medical officer made no specific recommendation on fines and jail time

Kelly advised there remained a “significant risk” of leakage from Australia’s hotel quarantine system, particularly from arrivals from India. He said there had been high rates of Covid detected in arrivals from India, a high proportion of Australian cases traced back to India and a high proportion of virus “variants of concern” among those cases.

“Each new case identified in quarantine increases the risk of leakage into the Australian community through transmission to quarantine workers or other quarantined returnees and subsequently into the Australian community more broadly,” Kelly’s letter to the government, tabled in parliament on Monday, states.

“Australia’s quarantine and health resources needed to prevent and control Covid-19 introduced into Australia from international arrivals are limited.

“Due to the high proportion of positive cases arising from arrivals from India, I consider [a pause until 15 May 2021 on arrivals from India](#) to be an effective and proportionate measure to maintain the integrity of Australia’s quarantine system. This measure will likely allow the system to recover capacity, which is a critical intervention in preventing and managing the spread of Covid-19 in Australia.”

Kelly said that given the determination was for only a limited time, he believed it met the criteria of being an emergency requirement that was “in place for only as long as necessary”.

But he warned that India remained a “high risk” country and that with more than 18.3 million positive cases, and over 204,000 deaths, Australians stranded there were at risk.

[Australia’s ban on travellers returning from India due to Covid crisis may be unlawful](#)

[Read more](#)

“I wish to note the potential consequences for Australian citizens and permanent residents as a result of this pause on flights and entry into Australia,” Kelly said.

“These include the risk of serious illness without access to healthcare, the potential for Australians to be stranded in a transit country, and in a worst-case scenario, deaths. I consider that these serious implications can be mitigated through having the restriction only temporarily in place, ie a pause, and by ensuring there are categories of exemptions.”

The exemptions include airline crew, diplomats, defence personnel and members of Australian medical assistance teams.

The government has insisted the travel ban on Australian citizens and residents who have been in India in the past 14 days is legal and necessary. It has flagged it could help 650 vulnerable Australians in India as soon as possible.

“This only needs to be there in place for as long as it needs to be there to keep Australians safe,” Morrison said on Monday.

Hunt said the government had previously implemented similar measures under the Biosecurity Act including in relation to flights from Wuhan in China when the pandemic first broke out, in March 2020, and from Papua New Guinea.

“Where we have seen a major risk that would threaten a wave [of the pandemic] in Australia, we have taken action,” Hunt said.

He said it had been an “agonising” decision to put in place the determination, but the rate of infection was about seven times the level the hotel quarantine system could safely manage.

[While India is desperate for oxygen, its politicians deny there's even a problem | Mukul Kesavan](#)
[Read more](#)

He said the number of cases in Australia from returned travellers from India had gone from 14 in February to 38 in March, then jumped to 210 in April – a 1,500% increase.

“That led to an agonising decision, just as we did with China, just as we did with Papua New Guinea.”

On Monday evening Hawke responded to the backlash by suggesting the ban could end sooner than its 15 March automatic expiry date.

Hawke told ABC radio the government was not “waiting until the 15th” and it was engaging in logistics to prepare for the resumption of flights such as talking to transit countries and determining the most vulnerable to come home first.

“Our intention is to resume flights as soon as possible,” he said.

Hawke told ABC’s 7.30 program the federal government may review the exemptions for outbound travel with the latest data indicating more than 130,000 trips out of Australia had been allowed.

Hawke said exemptions had “fluctuated” over time with more granted “as things became more positive” and fewer during the outbreak in Victoria.

“As we take further advice, we’ll have to keep considering that around the world,” he said. “The government is consistently adapting its policy to what’s happening.”

Last week, the foreign minister, Marise Payne, said the government was exploring ways to help the 650 Australians in India who had registered as vulnerable.

“They are also all over India, literally in every single corner of the country. There is not a significant concentration in one place or another other than New Delhi, and that does make the process challenging. But we will stay in touch with them as I said, redouble our efforts to do that and provide any support we are able to.”

New Zealand

New Zealand fires nine border workers who refused Covid vaccine

PM Jacinda Ardern had previously said workers who declined to be vaccinated would be moved to other roles



New Zealand says 95% of its frontline border workers have had their first Covid vaccination and 85% have had their second. Photograph: Xinhua/REX/Shutterstock

New Zealand says 95% of its frontline border workers have had their first Covid vaccination and 85% have had their second. Photograph: Xinhua/REX/Shutterstock

[Tess McClure](#) in Christchurch
[@tessairini](#)

Sun 2 May 2021 21.32 EDT

New Zealand's customs agency has fired nine border workers who refused to get the Covid-19 vaccine. The country has required all frontline border workers to be vaccinated by the end of April.

In February, the prime minister, Jacinda Ardern, said the government would not be making the vaccine compulsory for frontline staff, and that [those who declined the vaccine would be moved into backroom roles](#).

But no other work could be found to redeploy the nine workers who were in fixed term employment at the maritime border, Jacinda Funnell, Customs' deputy chief executive for people and capability, said.

[Victorious over Covid, Australia and New Zealand grapple with vaccine rollout](#)

[Read more](#)

“We regret that these individuals have had to leave employment, and understand what a difficult situation this is for them,” Funnell said in a statement.

She said about 95% of Customs' frontline staff who were required to be vaccinated had received their first dose, and 85% had received the second dose of the vaccine.

Customs had been discussing options with staff since the beginning of March, she said, and had told them that “options for redeployment were very limited due to no other Customs functions existing in the area”. She said the agency had also explored redeployment options across the wider public service.

A Ministry of Health order made under the Covid-19 Public Health Response Act has made it a legal requirement for anyone working in high-risk border environments to be vaccinated by the 1 May deadline.

[New Zealand loses top spot for best place to be during Covid to Singapore](#)
[Read more](#)

In April, the New Zealand Defence Force threatened to fire service members who refused to get a Covid-19 vaccination.

In correspondence to staff [published by RNZ](#), the chief of Defence Force, Air Marshal Kevin Short, said: “Electing to not meet the baseline immunisation readiness criteria will result in a review of an individual’s future service.”

New Zealand’s unions have spoken out against the firing of workers who decline the vaccine, saying they should be redeployed instead. E tū union [has said in their member FAQs](#): “We do not support mandatory vaccination and will not tolerate discrimination against workers who choose not to vaccinate.” The Public Service Association union [has said](#) unvaccinated border staff “should be redeployed, and their employment rights must be protected”.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/03/new-zealand-fires-nine-border-workers-who-refused-covid-vaccine>

2021.05.03 - Spotlight

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[Cornwall](#)

‘Real thuggery’: Cornwall boats vandalised amid ‘incomer’ tensions

Some blame new residents and second-home owners not keen on sight and sounds of ‘local’ vessels



A sign in St Agnes, Cornwall. Photograph: Jonny Weeks/The Guardian

A sign in St Agnes, Cornwall. Photograph: Jonny Weeks/The Guardian



[Steven Morris](#)

[@stevenmorris20](#)

Mon 3 May 2021 02.00 EDT

The spot could hardly be more idyllic. A Cornish creek fringed by apple trees where boats bob at high tide and dogs and children frolic in the mud at low.

But there is trouble in the parish of Feock after a string of acts of vandalism aimed at those bobbing boats led to a wave of anger, fear and suspicion.

Some of the victims blame [second-home owners](#) and “incomers” – those who have arrived in the last few years in search of the good life – claiming some of them are not keen on the sight and sounds of “local” people’s vessels moored in the creek.

The police are investigating and the saga has focused attention on the tricky issue of second-home owners and new arrivals, especially given the exit from cities that the Covid crisis has caused, making homes unaffordable for most locally born people.

“This place isn’t what it was,” said John Carnon, a roofer working on his small motorboat in Penpol Creek, just south of Truro. “I’ve been coming

here for 30 years but now there are people who have moved in with loads of money who think they own everything.”



Boats on an estuary near Feock, Cornwall. Photograph: Jonny Weeks/The Guardian

Carnon said his boat had been targeted. “The hull was damaged from front to back.”

He said the moorings of another vessel were recently freed, allowing it to drift out to sea. A canoe and paddleboard have also been reported missing, adding to the sense that something is amiss.

Then came an attack on the boat owned by Mike Bastian, a 67-year-old oyster fisher, Cornish born and bred, who works the creeks and the estuary.

At the end of March the oyster fishing season ends and Bastian planned to store his old wooden sailing working boat on Penpol Creek for safekeeping over the summer. However, earlier this month at low tide, someone dug the anchor out from the mud and unbolted a support. The boat fell on its side and risked being swamped by water when the tide came in.

A neighbour rang Bastian and he, a family member and friends managed to carry out a 3am rescue to save the boat.

A relative told the tale in a social media post that made headlines and said it exposed a “divide between local people and those who buy into a Cornish life”. She added: “No wonder the Cornish learn to hate the wealthy who come down and buy their dream home in our lovely county.”



Boat owners have reported a spate of vandalism. Photograph: Jonny Weeks/The Guardian

Bastian, who lives inland, is still reeling. “I feel I’ve been driven off the beach,” he said. “It went down with a wham. It’s disgusting, shocking that anyone could do that – real thuggery. There are signs saying it is a public beach but people with money come in and think they own the lot. I had to move the boat. I wouldn’t have had any peace of mind otherwise.”

It is not just in Feock where tensions over second homes and incomers are rising. Not far away, in St Agnes, a former police officer, Steve Ridholls, has put up a sign reading: “No more second homes (our village is dying!!).”

“Houses rarely come up for sale in St Agnes and they are gone in minutes,” he said. “Second-home owners come swanning down as if they own the place. If they intend to live here permanently, crack on and get involved. But it does my head in that some buy and leave their homes empty for most of the year. I can’t afford to buy here – I have to rent.”

A little further west in Hayle, a letting agent, Deborah Plowright, caused a stir after describing her anguish at having to turn away locals because they were being priced out. She said that for every advertised two-bedroom terrace house in the town, the agency received about 100 inquiries within two days.

[‘English out’: Cornwall’s fightback against second homes](#)
[Read more](#)

Dick Cole, the leader of the Cornish nationalist party [Mebyon Kernow](#), said local control over all aspects of housing and planning were needed. “Homes are on the market for ridiculous prices,” he said. “We need to find a mechanism that allows people to live in their own communities and protect the fabric of those communities.”

The former St Ives MP Andrew George, who now [runs a charitable trust](#) that works to address housing needs, said: “The market – for both sale and rent – operates as if locals had no right to live here. The system rewards property investors, big developers and land value speculators but severely penalises those who simply seek a decent, secure and genuinely affordable home.”

Back in Feock, where million-pound-plus homes are commonplace, a local boat business owner – who asked not to be named – described his problems with neighbours who complained that his comings and goings disturbed their peace.

“People have worked these creeks and estuaries for hundreds of years,” he said. “The ones who complain about the boats are the same ones who would move next to a village church and then complain about the bells ringing.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/may/03/real-thuggery-cornwall-boats-vandalised-amid-incomer-tensions>

[How to live now](#)Comedy.

‘You’ll be whooping from your sofa!’ 25 hilarious standup sets to make everything better



Standups ... (from left) Fary Lopes, Chris Rock, Deon Cole, Rose Matefeo, Ali Wong, and Norm Macdonald. Composite: Guardian Design; Foc Kan/WireImage; Deborah Feingold/Getty Images; John Roberts/Alex Crick/Michael Keegan/Netflix

Standups ... (from left) Fary Lopes, Chris Rock, Deon Cole, Rose Matefeo, Ali Wong, and Norm Macdonald. Composite: Guardian Design; Foc Kan/WireImage; Deborah Feingold/Getty Images; John Roberts/Alex Crick/Michael Keegan/Netflix

From classic Chris Rock to Sarah Millican at her bluntest, these are the routines that have got comedians, readers and Guardian writers through a difficult year

Mon 3 May 2021 05.00 EDT

Fary: Hexagone (Netflix)

French comic Fary Lopes caused a stir at the Molière theatre awards in 2019 by addressing the crowd with “*Salut les blancs!*” (Hey, white people!). I love that his comedy is politically charged and cheeky; with Hexagone, he calls out the ridiculousness of everyday racism, the struggle of not quite fitting in back “home” (his parents are from Cape Verde), and the fact that his half-black, half-Chinese brother doesn’t resemble anyone, except, perhaps “a group of people who have suffered”. **Hannah J Davies, Guardian deputy TV editor**

Dylan Moran: Off the Hook (BBC iPlayer)

I have followed him since the 90s when he was performing in my local pub in Sheffield. His act is such a brilliant combination of wit, poetic prose, surrealism and insight, and his onstage persona is so appealingly whimsical, lost, angry and lovable. He does very few media appearances or panel shows, so if you want see him, you’ve got to see his shows; he is truly the Led Zeppelin of standup. This performance had me in tears, twice. Sublime. **Phil Tucker, university lecturer, Stockholm and Swansea**

Brett Butler: The Child Ain’t Right

Dressed in a shiny 80s power suit, Brett Butler (best known for the sitcom *Grace Under Fire*) shifts seamlessly between observations on growing up in the American south (“I’m so southern I’m related to myself”), her abusive ex-husband (“I knew it wouldn’t work; I used to introduce him as my first husband when we were still together”) and politics. This set is a masterclass on storytelling through the standup form, with huge replay value. **Priya Elan, Guardian deputy fashion editor**

Norm MacDonald: Hitler’s Dog, Gossip and Trickery (Netflix)



Norm Macdonald. Photograph: Michael Keegan/Netflix

A lot of American standups are extremely clever but not that many of them are, in the Eric Morecambe mould, funny-boned. Norm is: there's something about him that makes you want to laugh before he speaks. When he does, though, you laugh more, as his delivery – a unique combination of folksy and deadpan – is hilarious. In this 2017 special, there's a bit (spoiler alert) where he assumes the character of Lee Majors, of Six Million Dollar Man fame, accepting an offer to do a hearing aid advert, the punchline to which is Majors asking his agent to include in the contract the words: "I'm sad." It made me very un-sad. **David Baddiel, comedian. David Baddiel's new book, [Jews Don't Count](#), is out now**

Huge Davies: live on Comedy Against Living Miserably

I love Huge Davies. I love his palpable hostility, I love his stupid ponytail, I love that his badly customised keyboard 1) is always on the brink of complete dysfunction and 2) will definitely be the cause of late-in-life back pain. And I love being on a bill with Huge, not only because he has a car, but because I get to watch audiences experience the thrill of his nihilism for the first time. Lip-syncing Walking Down the Street With My Dad from the

wings is one of life's purest joys. I hope he never finds happiness. **Sophie Duker, comedian.** Sophie Duker's show [Hot Girl Summer \(WIP\) is at the Pleasance, London, 14 July](#)

[Ali Wong: Baby Cobra \(Netflix\)](#)



Ali Wong. Photograph: Alex Crick/Netflix

Baby Cobra gives the lie to the claim that comedians are no longer edgy or that standup as social commentary is being watered down by wet-flannel millennials. Wong knows her material on race and sex will make people uncomfortable; she revels in it. And it works because she's never punching down. An Asian-American woman, she is highly literate in social dynamics and the dark humour they give rise to. Rude, whip-smart standup for those who don't want their comedy cosy. **Freddy McConnell, writer**

Chris Rock: live at NYC's the Comic Strip

The two standups that got me into the art were Dave Chappelle and Chris Rock, so I was really happy to come across this 1989 set from a young, pre-fame Rock. The best thing about it is that it's not one of those instances where you go back to an old show and you can see the potential in them.

Rock might not be as loud or as animated as he was later, but he's sharp as nails and funny right out the gate. **Anonymous, Kent**

James Acaster: Cold Lasagne Hate Myself 1999
(Vimeo, buy for £10)



James Acaster. Photograph: Edward Moore

How to pin down, from a professional lifetime of live comedy sets, a favourite? On any given day I might give you a Hans Teeuwen, a Bridget Christie or a Flight of the Conchords. But right now, just two months since it was finally made available on-demand, it's hard to see past James Acaster's most recent masterpiece. With its emotionally complex, audacious – and richly funny – routines about a dispute with his agent, being dumped for Mr Bean and a downward mental health spiral on The Great British Bake Off, Cold Lasagne truly is a standup set for the ages. **Brian Logan, Guardian comedy critic**

Sarah Millican: Control Enthusiast (Amazon, £3.49 to rent)



Sarah Millican. Photograph: Matt Crockett

Anything by Sarah Millican is great, but her latest material is the best, and the most uncomfortable (in a good way), especially for the men in her audiences. She is rude, blunt and very funny indeed, with lines such as: “I have developed something of a ‘cake shelf’. Somebody said recently: ‘Are you pregnant?’ I said: ‘Not unless I’ve been shagged by Mr Kipling.’”
Andrew Walker, webmaster and admin for the English Chess Federation, St Leonards, East Sussex

[Rose Matafeo: Horndog](#) (BBC iPlayer)



Rose Matafeo.

Don't be fooled by the name, says Rose Matafeo: this is not a "sexy, sex show", but "an hour of sensitive comedy from a 27-year-old Pisces". What it lacks in raunch, the New Zealander's Edinburgh comedy award-winning routine more than makes up for in gawkiness and nostalgia, mining lols everywhere from 00s internet forums ("the wild west"), to period-tracking apps ("like writing a wartime journal"), and the absurdity of motivational slogan pencil cases. Hold out for the spectacular epilogue that will have you whooping from your sofa. **Leah Harper, Guardian features commissioning editor**

Alfie Brown: Imagination

There's no one more skilled at making light of humanity's dark side than Alfie Brown. Alongside frequent collaborator/director Adam Brace, he's just released his latest special, Imagination. It's got some of the most elegantly phrased dick jokes going and a bit about Beauty and the Beast that made me pee my pants a little. If you like dark comedy I highly recommend you check it out. **[Janine Harouni](#), actor and comedian**

[Deon Cole: Cole Hearted](#) (Netflix)



Deon Cole. Photograph: John Roberts/Netflix

I've watched this special from the Black-ish actor twice, which is not something I usually do. The bit I quote to everyone is where he asks the over-40s in the audience to make some noise. Then he goes: "You only have 30 summers left." It's so accurate – and a gut-punch – to put life in those terms. There's even a bit that could be viewed as being offensive to certain people, or to myself, because it's specifically about fat women, but I love it. He talks about how great it is to get head from fat women – it's true, we are really good at it. I love that it's universally funny even though so much of it is steeped in a black American experience. **Desiree Burch, comedian**

Johnny White Really-Really: Used to Be a Wedding DJ

I've seen the Sheffield-born comedian do standup many times, and every experience is the same: like having a warm, silly bath. Johnny likes to tell richly detailed stories to calm yodic music. This one is about Tom and Jerry, and Jerry's best-man speech at Tom's wedding. It's tighter than his usual fare, which often meanders delightfully, but still uses his gorgeous visual style to create something sharp, impressionistic and unpredictable, all held

together by some of the darkest subplots this side of Yorkshire. **Morwenna Ferrier, Guardian deputy fashion editor**

Bo Burnham: Make Happy (Netflix)



Bo Burnham. Photograph: KC Bailey/Netflix

Through the use of songs, poems and camera trickery (try and spot a quick outfit change), Bo Burnham revolutionises the game. Although this special is now five years old, I would definitely recommend it for people who are looking for a fresh form of observational comedy; it makes for hilarious viewing. **Gwion Ifan, student, Cardiff**

Dave Chappelle: 8:46

On 20 April 2021, Derek Chauvin was found guilty on three counts relating to the killing of George Floyd. In silence, I watched the verdict being read out. I then rewatched Dave Chappelle's masterful 8:46, twice. Chappelle at one stage says: "This isn't funny at all." I laughed a couple times. It is among the best standup comedy ever made. **Ahir Shah, comedian. Tickets for the recording of Ahir Shah's HBO Max special Dots, at Vauderville theatre, London, on 6 June are on sale now.**

Jessica Fostekew: Hench ([touring the UK](#), 24 July-10 August)



Jessica Fostekew. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

Jess has just got this rich, beautiful, funny voice – she could read out a recipe and make it sound hilarious. But what I loved in particular about the show is its important message about being positive about your body image. When someone tells her she looks “hench”, she replies: “Thank you very much for the compliment, I’m trying really hard not to cry.” It’s honest: while we should all feel great about our bodies, she allows us to see her very human response. I thought it was a perfect hour of standup – I like feminist standup, I like standup that has a message, but what’s great about this is it’s also really bloody funny. **Ayesha Hazarika, comedian and broadcaster**

[Gary Gulman: The Great Depresh](#) (Amazon Prime, with an HBO subscription)



Gary Gulman.

This is a really great set from a comedian who had a complete breakdown, was sectioned and then took the obvious route of turning that ordeal into a standup routine. It is a fantastically funny and insightful look at how depression can affect anyone; it is genuinely heartbreaking at times but also offers hope. I won't spoil it but the final line changed the way I talk about my own mental illness and I know rings true with a lot of other people. **Tom, HR adviser, Cumbria**

The Delightful Sausage on Harry Hill's Clubnite

Comedy award-nominated double act The Delightful Sausage are so vigorously hilarious and lovable. Amy Gledhill and Chris Cantrill really push the audience to laugh at things we feel like we shouldn't laugh at, while being professionally aware not to go beyond that. Unlike a lot of sketch comedy, Delightful Sausage doesn't really have a fourth wall – or, they do, but it's behind all of us as we're right there on stage with them. We are not watching two innocently insidious holiday park employees, we are watching two very funny human comedians pretending to be holiday park employees – we're in on the joke and it's brilliant. **Sofie Hagen, comedian**

Mitch Hedberg: Do You Believe in Gosh?

I got turned on to Mitch via the podcast of the American comedian Doug Stanhope. They were friends, or at least moved in the same groups, before Mitch passed away, but Mitch's material couldn't be farther from Doug's. His rapid-fire one liners are sharp, and seemingly obvious, but it's the way he delivers them that makes them way funnier than they have any right to be. **Peter Jahn, works in non-profit digital marketing, Glasgow**

Patrice O'Neal: Elephant in the Room

This is an ageless classic of observational comedy – it was his magnus opus and has me gasping for air every time I watch it. O'Neal passed away soon after, but his work has a cult following and legendary status. The guy is completely out of order on some issues but everyone catches it: men and women, all races, the media, animals. His delivery is quiet, conspiratorial at times. He's like your funniest mate down at the pub. One of a kind. His work is keen social commentary and, best of all, he makes you laugh at your own messed-up mentality and conditioning. **D Jones, commercial manager, London**

Guy Montgomery: The A-Z of Healthy Eating

This early lockdown set from New Zealand's Guy Montgomery (of [The Worst Idea of All Time podcast](#) "fame") is fantastic for two reasons. One, it's really funny; and two, it shows you can be pissed out of your mind and really funny, which is a harder trick than it looks. **Ricky Young, works in security, London**

Tommy Ryman: Kale Chips and River Crystals

Tommy Ryman is the funniest standup comedian I've heard in a long time. His self-deprecating sense of humour and clever way of tying different parts

of his routine to each other is super-smart and hilariously funny. **Nanette McKenney, freelance graphic designer, Arizona**

Colin Quinn: The New York Story (Netflix)

The SNL veteran's specials are 20% history lesson, 80% loving takedown by the grumpiest man New York ever produced. His mastery is on full display throughout all of them, but if you had to pick one, then it would be New York Story. Anyone who caught his trip to London just before everything went wrong will know what to expect; those that didn't are in for a treat. **Richard Peacocke, product manager at Ordnance Survey, Hampshire**

Nico Yearwood: Bajan in Britain

Nico Yearwood has been keeping me laughing throughout a difficult lockdown spent homeschooling kids who would [rather be on Roblox](#). His set Bajan in Britain is hilarious, from his interactions with the audience to the variety of topics touched on. He's definitely one to watch. **Lisa Renwick, teaching assistant, Kent**

Bill Burr: Walk Your Way Out (Netflix)

To be hysterically funny while espousing deeply unpalatable opinions is something only an elite group of comedians are capable of. Disagree all you like, you cannot deny the craft. Burr's breathtaking set here is just one example of a genre he has mastered. He chastises those who label plus-size actors as brave. Doesn't sound very funny, does it? And therein lies the genius. **Simon Brodkin, comedian. Simon tours his brand-new show Troublemaker from 11 September-11 December 2021. Tickets are at simonbrodkin.com**

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2021/may/03/youll-be-whooping-from-your-sofa-25-hilarious-standup-sets-to-make-everything-better>

[Line of Duty](#)

No one makes mugs out of us! Why Line of Duty should end now

By turns tense, enraging and a tease, the finale of the anti-corruption police smash was ‘definitely’ anticlimactic. Surely the door has closed on AC-12 for good?

- [Line of Duty review – an audacious, deranged, reverse-ferreting finale](#)



Nowhere left to go ... DI Kate Fleming and DI Steve Arnott in the Line of Duty finale. Photograph: Steffan Hill/BBC/World Productions

Nowhere left to go ... DI Kate Fleming and DI Steve Arnott in the Line of Duty finale. Photograph: Steffan Hill/BBC/World Productions

[Phil Harrison](#)

Mon 3 May 2021 05.37 EDT

Warning: this article contains spoilers from the [Line of Duty](#) series six finale. Do not read on if you haven't watched

Detective Superintendent Ian Buckells always had the air of a man who might struggle with spelling. And so it proved, as his inability to spell the word “definitely” acted both as evidence against him and a measure of the banality of his particular brand of evil. But his unmasking as the Fourth Man was oddly anticlimactic, leaving a sense, in Ted Hastings’ words, of having “lost a shilling and found a penny”. That is not to say the finale was unsatisfactory – not a bit of it, fella. It was, by turns, tense, enraging, triumphant and poignant. But in this show, there is always a hint of fresh revelations lurking just outside the peripheral vision; the sense that nothing has been quite resolved.

Approaching the halfway point of the episode, the investigation seemed to be running too smoothly. When the OCG’s unearthed strongbox revealed crucial evidence relating to old friends from series past, including Tony Gates, Jackie Laverty and Maneet Bindra, it seemed like a grim but conclusive inventory of the whole drama to date. Then, a plot to permanently silence Detective Chief Inspector/Acting Detective Superintendent Jo Davidson was foiled: Steve Arnott – who had been relieved of his firearms licence by the medical officer – got to work with a taser, numerous balaclava men meekly surrendered their weapons and Davidson trotted off to a new life under witness protection.

[Line of Duty series six episode seven – open thread](#)
[Read more](#)

The real meat of the episode, though, still lay ahead. Some have criticised recent seasons of the show for resorting to thriller pyrotechnics – gunplay over nuance. That certainly wasn’t the case here. Instead, creator Jed Mercurio treated viewers to an attempt at achieving moral closure for the protagonists – which may tell its own story about whether or not Line of Duty has a future beyond this season. Many viewers harboured dark fears about Ted Hastings. Surely not Ted? Well, no. But there were undeniably questions to answer, and answer he did. The most affecting interrogation scene yet involved Hastings spilling his secrets relating to John Corbett’s death and Steph Corbett’s money, and trusting in Arnott and Kate Fleming,

whose pained, “disappointed not angry” faces were at once amusing and mildly heartbreaking.

Line of Duty was a tease to the last. Momentarily, the finale seemed to promise a High Noon showdown between AC-12 and the magnificently sinister Detective Chief Superintendent Carmichael – a woman whose smile looks like the last thing you see before the polonium kicks in and you lose consciousness. Instead, it was the more prosaic Buckells – going through stages from cocky and defiant to crestfallen – who got the last triple-barrelled interrogation of the series. Ultimately, it seemed, there wasn’t much more to it than money and control. Buckells was little more than a greedy coward.



Spilling his secrets ... Ted Hastings in Line of Duty. Photograph: Steffan Hill/BBC/PA

However, there has been a definite sense of Mercurio inserting [contemporary political resonance into this series](#), which made last night’s home straight particularly piquant. “Your corruption was mistaken for incompetence,” Hastings railed at Buckells. “How some people can fail upwards beggars belief!” Take that as you will. But there was no mistaking the wider moral message of Hastings’ rant in Carmichael’s office before he nobly threw himself under the bus over the killing of Corbett. “It devastates

me that we've stopped standing up for accountability," he fumed. "That we've stopped caring about truth and integrity." Ted, bless him, was willing to practise what he preached. Meanwhile, Carmichael's response ("What do you expect me to do with this information?") spoke volumes about her blank, expedient desire to push everything awkward under the carpet.

This, arguably, is why Line of Duty should end here. Carmichael, it seems, was nothing more than wildly, almost dementedly, ambitious. Of course, if it interferes with due process, that constitutes its own form of corruption. But there probably isn't an ongoing series in it. Chief Constable Philip Osborne remains infuriatingly elusive – sketchy as hell with his self-righteous talk of "a few rotten apples" but not directly implicated in anything specific. It's hard to see where our trio of flawed heroes might go next. It's clear that they still have each other – Arnott and Fleming had a forlorn drink in the pub where they tried in vain to cheer each other up. Hastings seems to be halfway out of the building and, given what Carmichael now knows about him, it's hard to imagine him mustering up the power to push open any closed doors.

In fact, as the always bittersweet closing summary tells us: "Currently, AC-12's powers to curb wrongdoing in public office have never been weaker." Arnott and Fleming make it clear they will continue with their Sisyphean task, so the door to season seven is ajar. But real accountability and integrity look further away than ever. As Hastings gloriously boasted during the Buckells interrogation, "Nobody makes mugs out of AC-12!" Sadly, DCS Carmichael might be about to prove him wrong. Heroes come and go. Corruption never ends.

This article was amended on 3 May 2021. An earlier version incorrectly gave DCS Carmichael's rank as "Detective Chief Inspector".

TV reviewDrama

Line of Duty review – an audacious, deranged, reverse-ferreting finale

Series six still reliably delivered the thrills, but with plot holes, agitprop and moments that came close to self-parody, Line of Duty is not quite what it was

- [Line of Duty series six episode seven – open thread](#)



Vicky McClure as DI Kate Fleming and Martin Compston as DI Steve Arnott in Line of Duty. Photograph: Steffan Hill/BBC/PA

Vicky McClure as DI Kate Fleming and Martin Compston as DI Steve Arnott in Line of Duty. Photograph: Steffan Hill/BBC/PA



[Lucy Mangan](#)

[@LucyMangan](#)

Sun 2 May 2021 17.00 EDT

Like Jed Mercurio's previous hit, *Bodyguard*, the latest series of his police procedural [Line of Duty](#) has caught fire. The public has crushed to its bosom the latest tale of anti-corruption unit AC-12, led with crusading zeal by the dauntless trio Ted Hastings (Adrian Dunbar), Steve Arnott (Martin Compston) and Kate Fleming (Vicky McClure) in the fight against individual and institutionalised rottenness in the police force. Even before last night's finale it had already become the highest rated British TV drama in 13 years (beating *Bodyguard*'s 10.4m overnight viewers by another half million). At the risk of sounding like a mere embittered fan shouting at Johnny-come-latelies, however ... *man*, you should have seen it back in the days when it was good.

Which is not to say that series six has not, superficially at least, delivered. The story of Jo Davidson (this season's guest star Kelly Macdonald) and her secret ties to the organised crime group that directed her police work held viewers' interest. The AC-12 trio's overarching, much-thwarted investigation into the possibility of an infestation of effectively untouchable, corrupt senior officers colluding expertly with each other and organised

crime over the years made headway. The finale – and Mother of God, if you haven't seen it look away now – even gave us, at last – if, I suspect many will feel, rather anti-climactically – the identity of the person known for nearly five series as “H” (before being recently retooled as “the fourth man”; a reverse-ferreting second in its deranged audacity only to Dallas retconning its entire ninth season as a Pamela Ewing dream while Bobby was in the shower).

But what Line of Duty lost along the way was important. It started losing the connection between Kate and Steve a few seasons ago. Their sense of professional and personal camaraderie warmed what was otherwise a famously meticulous but cold, bloodless world of police speak, paperwork, technical details, and long, long interview scenes with suspects. They became Line of Duty's USP, but they needed some emotional investment to work. Last night's conclusion attempted to reassert the pair's relationship, but it was too little, too late. Their celebratory drink in the pub and broaching of Steve's painkiller addiction felt more like a shareholders' meeting and strained credulity to a disruptive degree.

The interview with H/the fourth man was indicative of another problem that has grown as the series progressed. These scenes remained technically formidable, but they used to be showcases for delicate power shifts between the unusually well-matched hunter and prey – Roz Huntley's (Thandiwe Newton) springs most immediately to mind. For the most part in this series they have been reduced to exercises in memorising abbreviations and exhibit numbers and skirted dangerously close to self-parody in the process.

There have been in this – possibly final – season some plot holes that belied Mercurio's reputation for watertight narratives (most notably Kate's decision to Thelma and Louise it with Davidson after she shot Ryan Pilkington, played by Gregory Piper, in clear and legal self-defence) and, a handful of set pieces aside (including two remarkably similar ambushes, which does begin to look like carelessness), an almighty lack of ... actual police work. Relative newcomer Shalom Brune-Franklin, as the young AC-12 officer Chloe Bishop, has become a cult hero online by virtue of the fact that her role has been mostly a matter of bringing evidence she has pieced together off screen – CCTV footage, financial records, recovered files, matching signatures – to Hastings et al who then congratulate her on solving the latest

stage of the case and turn to wondering what might be next. This odd weighting of action against inertia has been a growing problem that became all but unignorable.

There was also the agitprop. As a former NHS doctor who made his name with such brilliant, fury-driven hospital-based drama series as *Cardiac Arrest* and *Bodies*, Mercurio has always been a politically engaged writer, and a master at transmuting that political fury into art. But in the last few episodes of *Line of Duty* and particularly the finale, containing a supposedly towering speech by Hastings so pedestrian that even Dunbar could barely sell it, the message has hardly been moulded at all. It's a righteous and timely one – essentially about how incompetence and its effects, if performed and excused for long enough, becomes morally and practically indistinguishable from corruption. But, so starkly unworked and delivered, it sits ill within any kind of dramatic narrative.

Still, the cultural phenomenon it has become will doubtless allow Mercurio to write his own ticket at the BBC even more freely than he could before. He and his production company have multiple projects coming up – including the counter-terror drama *Trigger Point*, starring McClure, and a series about the Stephen Lawrence murder, around which one of the *Line of Duty* plotlines was based, both for ITV. And there will always be more stories about police corruption to tell.

It was all fine. But, oh my, you should have seen it when it was good.

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How to live nowRunning

Sick of the same old route? 14 fabulous ways to get out of your running rut

Many people have been running more in lockdown - but your route may now be wearily familiar. Here's how to get the excitement back



Try running your usual route in the wrong direction. Photograph: Matthew Leete/Getty Images

Try running your usual route in the wrong direction. Photograph: Matthew Leete/Getty Images



[Emine Saner](#)

[@eminesaner](#)

Mon 3 May 2021 01.00 EDT

Over the past year – perhaps because of stress, boredom, and a need to get a break from video meetings and homeschooled children – an [estimated 7 million people in the UK](#) have been running. Sportswear stores have reported a leap in sales of running gear, and downloads of the popular Couch to 5K app almost doubled. For the able-bodied among us, running has become a new way of life. But now, after many months – and with distractions creeping in as lockdown restrictions lift – how can you ensure your running regime sticks? Here is some expert advice to keep you moving.

Change the route

You are probably running the same one or two routes from your door. “Run it in the opposite direction,” says Kerry Dixon, a personal trainer and co-founder of [The Athlete Method](#). Even better, try out new routes. As an athlete, her running has mostly been on athletics tracks, so you could try that for novelty. If the thought of doing laps isn’t inspiring, start exploring. If you’re in a city, Dixon suggests setting yourself a challenge to run around all the parks. Now it’s allowed, plan a route further away from home. Before

the pandemic, Andy Baddeley, who represented Great Britain in the 1500m in the 2008 Olympics and is CEO of [the Running Channel](#), would drive, cycle or get the train to somewhere new and run a loop there (or run home). “Even if you cycle 5k away, you’re already in a completely different neighbourhood.”

Introduce intervals

Same route, different pace. “You might say: ‘I’m going to run for five minutes a little faster than my usual pace, then maybe walk or jog for two’, and then repeat that three or four times until you’ve run the distance that you want to,” says Dixon. “It changes the way your muscles are working, and creates a whole new workout, especially if you’re finding that you’re plateauing.”

Discover Fartlek training

For some people, interval training can feel a bit prescriptive. Fartlek is “a Swedish word [that translates as speed play](#),” says Kerry McCarthy, commissioning editor at Runner’s World. “It basically means unstructured intervals.” Instead of working out an intervals plan and sticking to it, “with Fartlek you might go: ‘I’m going to leg it as fast as I can to that lamp-post, then I’m going to jog from there to the post office, and then go at medium pace to that tree.’ You kind of make it up as you go along.” It adds an element of playfulness, and keeps your mind engaged.

Set a goal

This could be anything from a time or distance you want to achieve, to signing up for a charity race or half-marathon (or more). “It’s quite fun to time yourself,” says Dixon. “It gives you something to work towards, a little competition with yourself without too much pressure.”



You can join groups that combine running with city sightseeing. Photograph: Hinterhaus Productions/Getty Images

Get a training plan

When Dixon was competing, she found having a coach and a structured training plan was key – it kept her accountable, her goals in mind, and helped her see her progress. A personal trainer can be a good option, especially one who specialises in running, but there’s a wealth of free information online to create your own training plan, she says. “Then it’s about encouraging your friends and family to hold you accountable or asking them to be there when you need a moment of support.”

Join a club

There are clubs all over the country for every level ([British Athletics](#) is a good starting point, but Facebook can be useful in finding local groups). When Dixon was competing, being part of a club was vital, she says. “Being able to turn up to the track, have everybody wanting to work towards the same thing, you were able to push and encourage each other.” Some groups don’t even focus on running – you could join running sightseeing tours.

Or run with a friend

If you enjoy combining running with socialising – as opposed to using it to get away from other people – find a buddy. It “means you have to be ready to go out, otherwise you’re letting someone else down,” says Baddeley. You could do it virtually, he adds. “Agree that you’re going to run a certain distance or time at the same time of day with one of your friends, who might be in another country, and then check in with them afterwards. You don’t want to be the one saying: ‘I didn’t go.’”

Mix up the terrain

Not only is it better for you – “it requires your body to work in different ways,” says Dixon – it’s also more interesting to switch from tarmac to grass to woodland and fields. “You can get specialist shoes that will be more grippy when it’s muddy,” says Baddeley. “Just take extra care.”

Unplug for a mindful run

You’re used to running to music or have worked your way through every true-crime podcast ever made, so leave your device at home and embrace mindful running. “Mindfulness broadly is about being more present and more aware of what you’re doing, and not judging it,” says Baddeley. On a run, it’s “not thinking about how fast you’re running, or how far, but treating that time outdoors as meditation”. Focus on your breathing. “You can do 30 seconds of classic meditation before you actually go out the door, and then when you’re running, just constantly bring your mind back to your breathing. Your breathing might be quite ragged, but it gives you a focus.” It can be easy, especially on a familiar route, to switch off, which can be nice, says Baddeley, but consciously make an effort to notice things, “this particular kind of tree, a beautiful view, the sunset. Actually stop for a moment to appreciate that.”



Go with a friend ... or join up virtually. Photograph: kali9/Getty Images

Work on your running before you go

Jenny Blizzard, a personal trainer and the founder of Blizzard Run Club, says it will make your runs faster, easier and more enjoyable. Strengthen your achilles tendons by hopping, jumping or skipping, and work on your calf muscles with calf raises (go up on to the balls of your feet). Strength training will help you run faster, and improving your posture will help you run better. One of the best ways to work on posture is while walking, she says. “Feel each foot as it touches the ground, try to extend your leg out behind you more,” she says. Keep your shoulders back and your head forward “because so many runners look down to the floor, which makes them slump”. Practise deep-breathing exercises. Because many of us sit all day and don’t think about our breathing, “when you then go out for a run, you can’t breathe properly and find it so much harder work. Doing regular deep breathing increases the amount of oxygen that you can get, and running will be less work. It also improves your posture.” If you only do one thing, make it a dynamic warmup that could include squats and lunges. It will have an immediate effect, she says, raising blood flow and activating muscles – if you find you’re only just getting into your stride when you’re nearly home, this should create that feeling sooner. Since Blizzard has been working on

these exercises outside running, she has run her fastest races in 13 years. “Without actually doing any more running, you can be running faster.”

Change your mindset

“Connect with your values,” says Shameema Yousuf, a sports psychologist and founder of [Empower2Perform](#). “Why do you go running? Is it because you want to stay healthy? If you’re going for a run with friends, is it because you like the connection?” She advises using positive self-talk to make a run more enjoyable. This could involve describing your legs as “power legs”. “When you’re out on a run, think about the next mile, or the next few hundred metres, and that breaks the run down so that it’s more manageable.” And don’t beat yourself up if, for a period, running feels like a slog or you didn’t manage to go as far as you would like. “Reframe it as: ‘I got out today and on my short run, I noticed ...’” says Yousuf.

Make it useful

McCarthy is also co-founder of the [#RunSome](#) campaign, which aims to get people building running naturally into their day. For many of us, running is something we can do even if, at the beginning, it is only for a few seconds at a time. “Given that something like 23% of car journeys in the UK are less than a mile, if you’ve got to get a pint of milk or do the school run, any of those kind of day-to-day journeys, can you switch out some or all of that for running instead?” he says. “For people going back to offices, can you run-commute part of your journey?” A waist belt or running backpack can make popping to the shops or commuting easier. “It’s building it into the fabric of your life so that ‘going for a run’ doesn’t become another big item on your to-do list.”

Gamify your run

When Baddeley and his running friends set up a scavenger hunt, “it was the most fun I’ve had in the last year on a run,” he says. They ticked off items on the list, with different points for the hard-to-find ones (a llama, a celebrity), spotting horses, dogs and rabbits, and things including a body of water, a homemade den and a right-pointing signpost. It’s available as a

[printable download](#), but he says anyone could make up their own list with their running buddy or club. “It stopped me worrying about how fast or far I was running, or how I felt. And I felt like a child because I was quite excited when I found mushrooms or something.” There are other more hi-tech ways to add fun to your run – one of the best-known is the app Zombies, Run!, in which you are a survivor of a zombie apocalypse, combining storytelling (by the novelist Naomi Alderman) and missions.



Photograph: Blend Images - Mike Kemp/Getty Images/Tetra images RF

Run with your dog

Combine two lockdown crazes – running and dogs – in one. The sport of canicross – off-road trail running, with your dog attached to you – has boomed in the past year. “You’ve got to walk your dog anyway, and if you’re going for a run, you might as well do it together,” says Ginetta George, founder of DogFit. “It’s amazing fun, and there are lots of social groups that meet up all around the UK and worldwide.” It can be good for rescue dogs who might be anxious, as they are attached to you, and is safer around livestock because your dog is never off-lead. It works for all breeds, she says, including smaller ones, and there are groups that cover very small distances as well as marathon-type ones, so it’s suitable for all levels. “You’re fitter, your dog is fitter,” she says. “You build a better bond with

your dog. It's a very social sport." People also go it alone, she says. Don't do it with a dog that's less than a year old, and in summer, don't run when it's too hot (early in the morning or in the evening is best, and take lots of water). Getting a dog to help pull you along, wearing a specially designed harness, has to be the best and most fun way to increase your running time.

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How many more images of Covid disaster will it take to jolt rich countries into action?

[Nesrine Malik](#)

The crisis in India forced the west to respond. But without an ambitious global plan, other nations may suffer similar fates



Illustration: Matt Kenyon

Illustration: Matt Kenyon

Mon 3 May 2021 01.00 EDT

As the number of Covid-19 cases rose dramatically in Europe and the US during the early part of last year, something strange seemed to be happening in the global south. South Africa's entire death toll was [less than 100](#) at the same time that Britain was losing more than 1,000 lives a day. India's death

rate during this period was so low that it was termed a “[mystery](#)”. [More confident conclusions](#) were drawn about Africa’s fate; some thought it had been spared the worst of Covid-19 because it took decisive action early on in the pandemic, while others said the continent had been saved by its warm climate, its low elderly population and its “good community health systems”. There was even brief excitement about the curative potential of homegrown sweet wormwood, a plant that the president of Madagascar [claimed was a treatment for Covid-19](#).

Most of this reasoning was speculative. But by the late summer of 2020, two clear trends were emerging. While parts of western Europe were enduring a devastating first wave of Covid-19 cases, [Africa](#) and south Asia were experiencing a slow-moving, sometimes stalling rate of infection and a comparatively low death toll. Those trends are now being reversed.

[Political leaders must ensure Covid vaccines aren’t the preserve of the rich | Jeremy Farrar](#)
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With vaccination programmes gaining momentum in the global north, the pandemic in western countries finally appears to be waning. The opposite is happening in low-income countries. Most can expect no access to either vaccine technology or donations in the near future. Healthcare facilities are overstretched and under-resourced, and data collection is limited, meaning death statistics are unreliable. Most of the world’s population outside rich countries are confronting an extended Covid crisis. Indeed, for several countries there is no way of estimating when the pandemic will be over. Instead, what lies ahead is an open-ended stretch of uncertainty, as populations try, and inevitably fail, to coexist with this virus.

For every measure that placed Africa and south Asia in a good position at the start of the pandemic, there is another that undermines it. There are indeed strong community health systems in parts of west Africa, a legacy of the Ebola crisis. Those networks can raise awareness, but without the ability to test for Covid-19, they are unable to get a clear idea of infection rates. The same applies to mortality figures. In rural areas, many people don’t have access to large hospitals, and some deaths aren’t formally recorded. The fear of social stigma that a Covid-19 diagnosis can carry means some people

bury their deceased relatives in haste, without getting a diagnosis or alerting family and social networks.

Instead of reliable data, those of us with family and friends in low-income countries have hushed, anecdotal evidence that does not correspond to official accounts. We measure waves by keeping track of what we hear; we learn to recognise the signs. Whenever relatives tell us of a quick illness or a hushed-up death, the deceased person is added to an informal mental tally of Covid-19 cases.

Successfully defeating the virus depends on having solid numbers and a dashboard of data. Without those, scientists are fighting this disease in the dark, as Michelle Gayer, director of emergency health at the International Rescue Committee, [recently told the business publication Quartz](#). When a virus is allowed to quietly spread and scientists don't have the data to map its trajectory, it's difficult to tell what's actually happening until a [traumatic spike in death rates](#) sheds light on the number of cases. This is the current reality in India, and while I don't wish to be a doom-monger, it seems likely this will soon be the case in other countries too.

A brief survey of a few of the largest African countries by population shows how volatile the situation still is. South Africa and Ethiopia remain on the UK's red list and are in varying stages of lockdown while their governments cobble together vaccine programmes. Kenya has wobbled out of another lockdown but maintains a strict curfew and remains on the red list. Egypt has truncated the school year and appears to be [heading for the peak of its third wave](#). The main coping strategies available to these countries are Sisyphean cycles of lockdowns and easing. These buy governments time and reduce the pressure on limited healthcare facilities, but they [ravage the economy](#) in the process. In poorer countries where state support is limited, lockdowns can be as deadly as the virus itself, because they remove people's ability to make a living.

The outcome is not only sporadic flare-ups or confined challenges, but an entire population trapped by and condemned to live with the virus. The best-case scenario is that governments are able to contain a high peak of cases through lockdowns, while lives and livelihoods are lost to economic restrictions. The worst is the kind of explosion we are seeing in India. Some

observers estimate that the virus will [kill more people in 2021](#) than it did in 2020.

Which brings us to what can and should be done. That the pandemic is not playing out in poorer countries with the same virulence we saw in western countries does not mean there aren't slow and deadly fires smouldering, which could yet grow into an inferno. There is a delay built into our responses to Covid-19, both at home and abroad. As western governments learned from the first wave, by the time the heavy death tolls are upon us, it is already too late. By the time the world had seen the images from [India](#) showing mass cremations, the country was already embroiled in a crisis. Those images prompted Joe Biden to reverse his position and pledge to send a "whole series of help". I'd wager that if the world had been exposed to similar images from other countries, it would have become untenable for the west to maintain vaccine apartheid.

But we shouldn't have to wait for images like those to spur action. What is required is something far more ambitious than vaccine donations. The world needs a global logistical exercise, a sort of Marshall plan that would provide financial support, expert manpower and medical technology. In the US, Democratic senators, progressives, NGOs and an alliance of 175 former world leaders and Nobel laureates have come together to apply pressure on Biden to [waive intellectual-property protections](#) on vaccines. As the virus recedes in the west, now is the time to apply this kind of pressure on leaders to deliver the south from its almost certain fate. By the time the real numbers of deaths and infections in poorer countries become clear, it will be far too late for many people.

Nesrine Malik is a Guardian columnist

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[Opinion](#)[Friendship](#)

I'm so desperate to meet people I'll work on a bank holiday. Luckily, my family won't miss me

[Zoe Williams](#)



It's not the done thing. But after 14 months of solid contact, I know the kids and Mr Z won't mind if I go to Newquay for that rare joy: a face-to-face interview



‘In short, it’s simply better, if you want to meet someone, to actually meet them.’ Photograph: The Good Brigade/Getty

‘In short, it’s simply better, if you want to meet someone, to actually meet them.’ Photograph: The Good Brigade/Getty

Mon 3 May 2021 01.00 EDT

In the past year, I’ve only done one face-to-face interview. It was magical. We sat outside a curry house, acting all professional, like two strangers exchanging important information. But the outside tables had little cabana roofs, which drove us inexorably into a holiday spirit, and before you could say “Don’t forget the tiny umbrellas,” we’d ordered piña coladas. Soon, overwhelmed by the curry fumes, we got a bunch of samosas, too, except it wasn’t like being hungry, it was more like being hypnotised.

You could argue that this all led to a much deeper human connection than a 40-minute [Zoom](#) with your idiot dog barking away in the background, and you would be quite right. I will treasure that experience as if I’d actually taken a mini-break with this person, though if you asked me what she thought about the national executive committee of the Labour party (she was an MP), that would be a hard pass. As in: I couldn’t even remember by the time I got home.

In short, it's simply better, if you want to meet someone, to actually meet them. If you think I'm trying to force you back to the office using the extrovert's switcheroo, you're half right; fellowship is stronger in the flesh, and if you don't understand why, I can't explain it to you, unless we meet in person, whereupon you will immediately understand on your own. Mainly, I'm making excuses for why I have to go to Newquay for an interview this bank holiday.

It's not really the done thing, for a family person, to take a work trip on a bank holiday Monday. It's maybe 65% worse than working over the weekend, just because there are fewer of them. And yet, if you work for yourself, and you don't garden or do DIY, and the economy has completely changed so that nobody has any workplace rights any more, and consequently nothing is closed or suspended, then of course there is no chance of your remembering it's a bank holiday until you're out of time and it's the only day you can do.

Then you get into the whirlpool of who actually cares whether you're at home or not. The kids don't mind at all, but I mind so much that they don't mind that I'm projecting a huge amount of minding on to them, which any fool can see does not exist. Mr Z, conversely, *does* mind, but I am actively glad that he minds, since it means that when I get home, he'll be really pleased to see me.

For nearly 14 months, we haven't just been able to locate one another every second of the day, we've been so damn proximal that we can summon one another by whistling. I'm sure I read somewhere that marriages thrive on a bit of late-notice absence. Actually, that's a lie: I've only ever read two things I can remember about marriage. One was a rabbi in the 80s, who said: "Don't wander around naked – the human body is a terrible thing." It's an oddity of teenagehood – questing for information about being an adult, you take overstatement as fact, and never cross-check it. "Huh," I thought. "That's marriage, then. Being viscerally disgusted by each other. Sounds totally normal and great." The other is the old adage about retirement: "For better, for worse, but never for lunch."

The fun thing to do would be to list all the things Mr Z does at lunchtime that are annoying, but I think I did that already, and besides, as astonishing

as this will sound, it's also a bit of a mixed bag having me around. My expression when I'm concentrating is somewhere between a glare, a squint and a niche ageing supervillain trying to bore through a rock with their laser eyes. It looks, to the uninitiated, a little bit like the face of pure evil. A stranger saw it once while I was on a bus and screamed. Not super-loud, but audible enough for me to know why.

I like to bowl about the house officiously, like someone who couldn't possibly spare the time to pick up a cup or put milk away, yet I can lose hours telling the dog he's good when he really isn't. If I get a call of any sort on my mobile, wham, I'll take 50 minutes just to say hello, yet if the landline should ring, I treat it as a violation of my human rights.

Goddammit, this isn't about family life or lockdown or the new normal at all. After all this time, I'm getting on my own nerves. I need to be in a different setting in order to be different. And I need to be in that setting on my own, preferably with the finest landscape the nation has to offer skimming past a train window, so that I can try on some new personalities unobserved.

Besides, there is a person I want to know more about, and they happen to live in Cornwall, and I want to ask them things to their actual face.

We used to understand that implicitly, and we will again.

Zoe Williams is a Guardian columnist

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[OpinionNHS](#)

The NHS is being privatised by stealth under the cover of a pandemic

[Andrew Fisher](#)

From PPE contracts to political appointees, the government is embedding private providers at the heart of the health service



‘Rather than selling off the NHS outright – a decision politicians know would be unpopular – they are instead doing this through the backdoor.’

Photograph: Getty Images

‘Rather than selling off the NHS outright – a decision politicians know would be unpopular – they are instead doing this through the backdoor.’

Photograph: Getty Images

Mon 3 May 2021 05.00 EDT

Cronyism and outsourcing have defined the government’s response to the pandemic, from the “[VIP lane](#)” for personal protective equipment (PPE)

suppliers with connections to the Tory party to the privatised track and trace system so flawed it was described by Sage as only being of “[marginal impact](#)”. But less attention has been paid to what the longer-term impact of these decisions might be. Far from being an aberration, the government’s pandemic response reflects its commitment to embedding private interests at the heart of the state and stealthily chipping away at our most valued national institution.

As Sir David King, a former chief scientific adviser, and the special representative for climate change under Boris Johnson when he was foreign secretary, [recently told the Guardian](#), the government is slipping through plans to “effectively privatise the NHS by stealth” in “the name of a pandemic”. This story of privatisation is not one of wholesale transfer, such as the sell-off of British Gas or Royal Mail, but rather of a gradual hollowing out, a process that has been further accelerated by the pandemic and will continue under the Johnson government. In 2010, for example, the NHS spent £4.1bn on private sector contracts; by 2019, this had [more than doubled](#) to £9.2bn.

Already, the government’s pandemic response is shaping the future structures of the NHS, public procurement and public scrutiny. Look at PPE procurement, which has functioned recently as a giant slush fund for Tory donors. Matt Hancock’s [pub landlord](#), Alex Bourne, and a former adviser to Priti Patel, [Samir Jassal](#), are just two beneficiaries of what the charity Transparency International has called “[systemic biases](#) in the award of PPE contracts favouring those with political connections to the party of government”. The charity says these red flags require more, not less, scrutiny. But less scrutiny is precisely what the government has been engineering.

Ministers are still refusing to publish the full list of companies that were placed in the “VIP lane” after being endorsed by politicians or senior civil servants. The register of ministers’ financial interests, which should be published every six months, was last [updated nine months ago](#). Basic avenues of accountability and transparency are consistently being closed down or obstructed; journalists have found freedom of information (FoI) requests delayed or blocked by the “[clearing house](#)” unit set up in the Cabinet Office to screen requests, while leaked emails show the Cabinet

Office is [collating lists of journalists](#) with details about their work, and intervening when “sensitive subjects” are inquired about. (The unit has been condemned as “[Orwellian](#)” by the former Conservative cabinet minister David Davis.)

Meanwhile, the role of overseeing the ministerial code was left vacant for five months after Sir Alex Allan resigned when Johnson opted [not to sack Patel](#) for breaching the code last November. His replacement, Christopher Geidt, will still not be able to initiate investigations into impropriety without the prime minister’s approval.

These instances reflect a dilution of oversight that bodes ill for the future. Scaling back scrutiny and accountability are vital ways of providing cover for further NHS privatisation, a policy ministers know to be politically unpopular. Another way of doing this is through the creation of new bodies, spearheaded by figures who are compliant with and sensitive to this government’s agenda. Hancock had sought to replace Public Health England (PHE) with the National Institute for Health Protection (the consulting firm McKinsey was paid £560,000 for five weeks’ work drawing up plans for the new body). [Dido Harding](#), who sits in the House of Lords as a Tory peer, was initially chosen to head the new body, an appointment that Lord Falconer termed a “[corruption of our constitution](#)”.

After a backlash against the government’s attempts to subsume public health experts under track and trace management, NIHP will now become the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), headed by Dr Jenny Harries. Understandably, the creation of UKHSA and abolition of PHE has [upset dedicated public professionals](#) across the health service.

Another policy decision that may strengthen the cronyist approach adopted during the pandemic is the [health and social care white paper](#), which was published in February this year and spun as a set of policies that would unravel Andrew Lansley’s 2012 [Health and Social Care Act](#). The white paper sets out how “integrated care systems” (ICS) will be rolled out, combining NHS trusts with GP services as commissioners from a single budget pot. These ICS bodies will no longer be required to put contracts out to tender, but can instead award them directly – creating opportunities for contracts to be awarded to politically connected firms.

[The government dithers and delays, but the UK needs a Covid public inquiry now | Marcus Shephard](#)
[Read more](#)

The campaigning thinktank We Own It is concerned that these plans would embed the role of the private sector within the health service, but with less transparency and accountability over contracts. Indeed, GP services are an area where the private sector is taking an increasing interest, with US health giants such as Centene Corporation [buying up GP services](#) through its UK arm Operose Health. Campaigners are worried these ICS bodies will be unaccountable and profit-making, and that private providers could sit on their commissioning boards (it's not yet clear whether ICS board meetings will be public and subject to FoI requests).

It's not just GP services that are an area of concern. In August last year, the government announced a four-year plan to spend [£10bn of taxpayers' money](#) on private hospitals in order to clear NHS waiting lists. This has been justified as an emergency measure to deal with a backlog, but the question remains why this money was used to fund private providers rather than NHS capacity. The health campaigner John Lister says the "institutionalised use of private hospitals will likely leave the NHS weakened and could lead to long-term expansion of the private sector for elective care".

This points to the crux of the issue. Though ministers have sought to justify their decisions with reference to the exceptional circumstances of Covid-19, many of these decisions instead seem part of a longer-term plan to embed political appointees and private providers at the heart of the state. Rather than selling off the [NHS](#) outright – a decision politicians know would be unpopular – they are instead doing this through the backdoor, by stealth. It's up to everyone who cares about the future of the [NHS](#) to make some noise about it.

This article was amended on 4 May 2021. An earlier version referred to functions of Public [Health](#) England being replaced by the National Institute for [Health](#) Protection (NIHP), led by Dido Harding. The text has been updated to reflect that NIHP was the working title for the UK [Health](#) Security Agency, and that though Harding was appointed as the interim chair

of NIHP, Dr Jenny Harries became chief executive of UKHSA in April 2021.

- Andrew Fisher was the Labour party's executive director of policy from 2016 to 2019

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OpinionWildlife

‘Reconnect with nature’ by all means – but don’t forget its lethal power

[Julian Sheather](#)

The natural world is a place of both bluebells and deadly viruses. Over-sentimentalising it is dangerous



‘A healthy respect for nature’s destructive power could improve our stewardship.’ Waves crash over the harbour wall in Newhaven, on the south coast of England. Photograph: Glyn Kirk/AFP/Getty Images

‘A healthy respect for nature’s destructive power could improve our stewardship.’ Waves crash over the harbour wall in Newhaven, on the south coast of England. Photograph: Glyn Kirk/AFP/Getty Images

Mon 3 May 2021 04.00 EDT

It was a near-perfect day on the south coast – blue sky, blue sea, enough breeze to offset the heat of the sun. The beach may have been a little full, but

it wasn't long before I was in the water. I'm an OK swimmer and struck out easily for a couple of hundred yards. With an offshore breeze, there wasn't much in the way of waves. It was lovely being away from people, at ease in the undemanding, light-shot sea, my body moving in the slight surge of an old swell.

[Scottish countryside visitors urged to be mindful of wildlife as lockdown lifts](#)

[Read more](#)

Then I turned to head back in. And the mood changed. With the wind behind me the waves had felt trivial, but now, further out, they were lifted by the breeze. Small they may have been, but they were steep-sided, each with its own little kick. One after the other they hit me in the face. I didn't have goggles on, my eyes were stinging and I was having trouble seeing where I was going. Every so often I took a mouthful of water. I didn't seem to be getting anywhere – what I could see of the shore remained stubbornly out of reach. I started to fight panic, as well as the waves.

During lockdown we have been enjoined to connect – or reconnect – with nature. For the sake of our mental health, we are urged to leave behind a world mediated by screens, get out into the green stuff, breathe some air, see some horizons. Wonderful advice it is too, and I have heeded it. In successive lockdowns I discovered the unlikely charms of the river Wandle, twisting its way from its source in Croydon, through the burbs and light industry of south London before discharging into the mud of the Thames. Likewise, Mitcham Common – several hundred neglected acres of slightly feral, down-at-heel scrub butting up against the Wandle.

But for all the exhortations about connecting with nature, there is a paradox. We are in the middle of the single biggest global upheaval since the second world war. Its purpose: precisely to disconnect us from nature, or from that tiny fragment of it known as [Sars-CoV-2](#). The nature we are invited to connect with is ordinarily a small, picturesque and highly managed subset of the wild world. In the UK, the chances are it resembles parkland or farm country. These are places where any threat to us has largely been removed. There will be footpaths to facilitate access, neighbouring car parks, proximate pubs and cafes. Along with reconnection, this is the nature we

ordinarily have in mind when we consider conservation: defending our green spaces from various forms of defilement. Lovely as much of it is, this is nature as amenity, somewhere deliberately set back where we can wander and breathe, get a little respite from the heckle and commotion. However rewilded, it remains under human sovereignty: it is effectively nature as garden.

When I finally made it back to shore on that lovely summer's day, shaken, relieved, slightly embarrassed, it was after having tussled with another kind of nature. This is nature as blind and indifferent process, that sum of forces, animate and inanimate, at work in the physical world. This version of nature is operative within and without us. This is the nature we encounter in earthquakes and landslides, but also in cancer, the anopheles mosquito and Sars-CoV-2. It is also the nature that Darwin famously recoiled from in [parasitic wasps](#), those gracile insects that paralyse their hosts before laying eggs inside them to ensure living meat for their emergent young – precisely the nature that shook his belief in a “beneficent and omnipotent God”.

In [Ash Before Oak](#), Jeremy Cooper's slow and subtle account of a “nature cure” in the Quantock Hills, the narrator describes how a sheep farmer friend found “on her morning round of inspection a ewe on its back, alive, its blooded udder eaten by a fox, the lamb standing at its mother's side bleating”. The nature that cures can also shock and horrify.

“Nature” is among the trickiest words in the language. A single noun to cover quantum mechanics, tsunamis, the Ebola virus and bluebells will have its work cut out. Lockdown has shown many of us the benefits of green spaces. Recent decades have also shown us the vulnerability of earth's physical and biological systems to human onslaught. But Covid has also reminded us that our relationship with the natural world cannot always be one of benevolence or benign harmony. As Darwin demonstrated, nature can kill with indifferent promiscuity. More than 99% of all species that have ever existed [are extinct](#). A bit further out on that lovely summer's day and I would have joined the 200-odd people who [drown every year](#) in the seas and waterways of the UK.

If we over-sentimentalise nature, see it exclusively as a place of beauty, harmony and healing, we risk misjudging its extraordinary power. Covid has

brought home to us how natural processes are unconcerned with human wellbeing – and can slaughter on an unprecedented scale. It is essential that we develop a more clear-eyed and honest view of the complexity of our relationship to the natural world. We do not need to be starry-eyed about it in order to protect and preserve it. In fact, a healthy respect for nature’s destructive power, like seafarers have for the sea, could improve our stewardship. We know, for example, that blithe encroachment into natural habitats is one of the things that encourages viruses out of the woods and into our bodies.

Part of what is enthralling about “wild” nature is its remoteness from human interests and preoccupations. We underestimate it at our peril. All of which helps to explain the relief I felt when I received a second Covid vaccine – a billion dollars of biotech, wonderfully designed precisely to disconnect me from nature.

- Dr Julian Sheather is an ethicist and the author of *Is Medicine Still Good for Us?*

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Proud Boys Canada dissolves itself, months after designation as terrorist entity

Far-right group was deemed a terrorist entity in Canada in February with authorities describing group as ‘serious and growing’ threat



Canada said the Proud Boys played a ‘pivotal role’ in the US Capitol riots. The terrorist organisation has dissolved itself. Photograph: Brian Hayes/AP

Canada said the Proud Boys played a ‘pivotal role’ in the US Capitol riots. The terrorist organisation has dissolved itself. Photograph: Brian Hayes/AP

Reuters

Sun 2 May 2021 20.52 EDT

Proud Boys [Canada](#), a far-right group that Ottawa named as a terrorist entity earlier this year, has dissolved itself, saying it has done nothing wrong,

according to a statement by the organisation.

In February, Canada said the group posed an active security threat and played a “pivotal role” in the [deadly attack on the US Capitol](#) in January by pro-Trump rioters. US authorities have charged several members of the Proud Boys in connection with the 6 January assault.

“The truth is, we were never terrorists or a white supremacy group,” the statement posted by the administrator of the official Proud Boys channel on Telegram said.

[The decline of Proud Boys: what does the future hold for far-right group?](#)
[Read more](#)

“We are electricians, carpenters, financial advisers, mechanics, etc. More than that, we are fathers, brothers, uncles and sons,” it added.

Founded in 2016, the Proud Boys began as an organisation protesting political correctness and perceived constraints on masculinity in the United States and Canada, and grew into a group that embraced street fighting.

The group’s founder, [media personality and entrepreneur Gavin McInnes](#), is a Canadian who lives in the United States.

[Proud Boys and other far-right groups raise millions via Christian funding site](#)
[Read more](#)

The group first made headlines in Canada three years ago, after five military reservists, dressed in the group’s black and yellow shirts, disrupted a protest by the Indigenous community over [a controversial statue](#). The group was banned by Facebook and Instagram in October 2018 after violating the platforms’ hate policies and is classified as an [extremist organisation](#) by the FBI.

In late January, Canada’s parliament unanimously passed a motion calling on the federal government to designate the rightwing Proud Boys as a

terrorist group. The motion had no practical legal impact, but spoke to a growing worry over rightwing extremism in Canada.

Canada's public safety minister, Bill Blair, said in February that the domestic intelligence forces had become increasingly worried about the group.

"Canada will not tolerate ideological, religious or politically motivated acts of violence," [Blair said at the time.](#)

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/03/proud-boys-canada-dissolves-itself-months-after-designation-as-terrorist-entity>.

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The Pacific projectTonga

Outpouring of grief after alleged murder of leading Tongan LGBTQI activist

Police have charged a man for the killing of Polikalepo Kefu, a lifelong advocate for the queer community across the Pacific



President of Tonga Leitis Association and prominent LGBTI activist Poli Kefu. Photograph: Twitter

President of Tonga Leitis Association and prominent LGBTI activist Poli Kefu. Photograph: Twitter

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[Leni Ma'ia'i](#)

Mon 3 May 2021 02.07 EDT

Police in [Tonga](#) are investigating the death of one of the country's leading LGBTQI+ activists after his body was found on a beach near his home in Tongatapu, Tonga's main island.

A 27-year-old man has been charged with the murder of Polikalepo Kefu, 41. Kefu, who was affectionately known as "Poli", was the president of Tonga Leitis Association, an organisation dedicated to the country's LGBTQ+ communities, providing support services, advocacy, and education on HIV-Aids.

"Police have charged a 27-year-old man from Fungamisi Vavaú, residing at Halaleva, with murder in relation to the death of 41-year-old Polikalepo Kefu of Lapaha on Saturday 1st of May 2021," said Tongan police in a statement.

"The 27-year-old accused surrendered himself to police last Saturday night and is remanded in custody to appear at the magistrate court today ... This is

a tragic event, and our thoughts are with Mr Kefu's family, friends and wider community."

Tonga Police declined to comment on whether they suspected Kefu's death was a hate crime.

Tributes have poured in from people across the region, praising Kefu's advocacy, passion and warmth.

"Poli, as he has known to many of us, was a selfless humanitarian and a tireless advocate for the rights of those with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expressions," the Tonga Leitis Association said in a statement. In their statement, they added that it appeared Kefu "was a victim of a very violent attack".

In 2016, Tonga Leitis' Association led a national consultation with Tonga government leaders, to create more protections for the country's LGBTQI people. Under current laws, cross-dressing and sodomy are criminal acts which can be punished with up to 10 years in prison.

Kefu has been a lifelong activist, a chairman of the Pacific Protection Gender Inclusion Network and the Communications Officer for the Tonga Red Cross Society.

Tongan princess Hon. Frederica Tuita numbered among the many high profile Tongan voices sharing the news of his untimely death on social media with the hashtag #JusticeForPoli.

"This one really hurts. We are absolutely devastated to hear of dear Poli's passing," wrote Tuita.

The outpouring of grief has reached all around the world, with people and organisations alike discussing his powerful influence across the Pacific.

"Poli is known to many of us in the region and globally as one of the passionate, critical, kick-ass, funny and a diehard human rights activist. With his charm and leadership, he touched so many lives and was an inspiration to us all," said Pacific Sexual and Gender Diversity Network in a statement.

In a statement, UN AIDS Pacific talked about his contributions as an activist, particularly his work around HIV response and education.

“Poli was a strong human rights activist in different fields especially for transwomen (Leitis) and in the HIV response in Tonga & the Pacific for many years,” said the UN AIDS Pacific in a statement.

In addition to his work for Tonga’s LGBTQI+ community, Kefu was also a staunch activist on the climate crisis.

A candlelight vigil for Kefu will be held on Thursday at the Basilica’s conference room from 6pm-8pm Tonga time. The public can follow along on the Broadcomfm Broadcasting Facebook page.

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Judaism

British man who died in crush at Israeli festival is named as Moshe Bergman

Bergman, 24, had been in Israel to train as a rabbi before dying at Mount Meron



A memorial to those who died at Mount Meron is displayed on the old city walls of Jerusalem. Photograph: Ahmad Gharabli/AFP/Getty Images

A memorial to those who died at Mount Meron is displayed on the old city walls of Jerusalem. Photograph: Ahmad Gharabli/AFP/Getty Images

[Edna Mohamed](#)

Sun 2 May 2021 16.13 EDT

A British man who died in a crowd crush at a Jewish festival in [Israel](#) has been named as Moshe Bergman.

The 24-year-old from Salford, [Manchester](#), had been in the country to train to be a rabbi in Jerusalem. He had been living in the city for two years and had married 18 months ago.

Rabbi Arnold Saunders, a friend of his family, told the Manchester Evening News that Bergman was a “dedicated husband for the last 18 months, a wonderful son, brother and a caring and compassionate young man”.

Rabbi Saunders told the paper: “The family have been overwhelmed by the support they have received from family and friends and the authorities. They have accepted that this was a tragic accident and as people of faith accept the will of God. They don’t want to engage in a blame game.”

He added: “They want the facts to be investigated to ensure nothing like this ever happens again, but there is no bitterness.”

It reported that Bergman was buried at a funeral in Jerusalem in the early hours of Sunday. His family have flown to the Israeli capital to mourn with his wife, Shira.

[Dozens killed in crush at Lag Baomer religious festival in Israel](#) [Read more](#)

The deadly crush on Thursday night at Mount Meron in northern Israel resulted in the deaths of 45 men and boys.

The crush was caused when tens of thousands of primarily ultra-Orthodox Jews crowded the tomb of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai to commemorate the second-century Talmudic sage’s death and mark the Lag Ba’Omer holidays.

The crush in the male section of the gender-divided site is believed to have started as people moved through a narrow passageway.

As well as Bergman there were at least eight other foreign nationals who died, with fatalities from the US, Canada and Argentina. Two young French-Israeli brothers also died.

Defence minister Benny Gantz, also the caretaker justice minister, asked the attorney general to examine whether the current transitional government

could launch a state commission of inquiry, Israel's highest level of investigation, AFP reports.

Prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu has promised a full investigation, and multiple lawmakers have called for a formal commission of inquiry.

This article was amended on 3 May 2021. The Mount Meron crush happened on Thursday night, not Friday night as an earlier version said.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/02/british-man-who-died-in-stampede-at-israeli-festival-is-named-as-moshe-bergman>

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Israel

Israel holds day of mourning for 45 crush disaster victims

Questions raised about accountability for deaths at Jewish religious festival at mystic's tomb



An Israeli flag lowered to half-mast in honour of the victims of the disaster
Photograph: Abir Sultan/EPA

An Israeli flag lowered to half-mast in honour of the victims of the disaster
Photograph: Abir Sultan/EPA

Reuters

Sun 2 May 2021 06.09 EDT

Israel observed a day of mourning on Sunday for 45 people crushed to death at a Jewish religious festival, with flags lowered to half-mast and questions raised about accountability for one of the country's worst civilian disasters.

In accordance with Jewish tradition, funerals were held with as little delay as possible. More than 20 of the victims of Friday's disaster on Mount Meron were buried overnight after official identification was completed.

"I only wish that we achieve even a small fraction of your stature in studies and holy devotion," Avigdor Chayut said, eulogising his 13-year-old son, Yedidya, at a funeral in the town of Bnei Brak, near Tel Aviv.

The victims died when an overnight annual pilgrimage by large crowds of ultra-Orthodox faithful to the tomb of a second-century Jewish mystic, Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, in northern Israel ended in a crowd crush.

Witnesses described a "pyramid" of bodies, including several children, in a packed and slippery metal-floored passageway.

Israeli media estimated that around 100,000 people attended the event, numbers that underscored a relaxing of coronavirus restrictions in a country that has sped ahead of others in its vaccination rollout.

Evidence is mounting that it was a disaster waiting to happen at a pilgrimage site that state investigators had labelled years ago as hazardous. Questions are also being raised as to whether the government and police had been reluctant to reduce the crowd size so as not to anger influential ultra-Orthodox rabbis and politicians.

"A thorough inquiry is required," the culture minister, Hili Tropper, told Kan public radio. "This terrible disaster will help everyone understand ... that there should be no place where the state does not set the rules."

The justice ministry said investigators would look into whether there had been any police misconduct.

Police and regional government officials said the Mount Meron site was administered by four separate private religious groups, making oversight difficult.

01:40

Witnesses recall deadly crowd crush in Israel – video

The prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, promised an investigation. His presidential mandate to form a new government, after an inconclusive 23 March election, expires on Wednesday, but public calls to determine responsibility for the disaster seemed certain to hound any incoming administration.

The US embassy said US citizens were among the dead and injured, but did not immediately name them.

US media have identified some of the dead, including a 19-year-old who was in Israel on a gap year. Two Canadians were killed in the disaster, the Canadian prime minister, Justin Trudeau, said on Friday.

Condolences poured in from leaders around the world, including the US president, Joe Biden, and the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/02/israel-holds-day-of-mourning-for-45-crush-disaster-victims>

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