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- [Headlines wednesday 28 april 2021](#)
- [2021.04.28 - Coronavirus](#)
- [2021.04.28 - Spotlight](#)
- [2021.04.28 - Opinion](#)
- [2021.04.28 - Around the world](#)
- [Headlines monday 26 april 2021](#)
- [2021.04.26 - Coronavirus](#)
- [2021.04.26 - Spotlight](#)
- [2021.04.26 - Opinion](#)
- [2021.04.26 - Around the world](#)
- [Headlines tuesday 27 april 2021](#)
- [2021.04.27 - Coronavirus](#)
- [2021.04.27 - Spotlight](#)
- [2021.04.27 - Opinion](#)
- [2021.04.27 - Around the world](#)

Headlines wednesday 28 april 2021

- [Politics Senior Tories urge PM to come clean on funding of Downing Street refurb](#)
- [Lord Brownlow Who is Tory donor who helped fund No 10 refurb?](#)
- [Alistair Darling Ex-chancellor declined to join renovation trust](#)
- [Newcastle United Partner in Saudi bid to buy club is major Tory donor](#)
- [Environment Scientists find way to remove polluting microplastics with bacteria](#)
- [London Shaun Bailey criticised for ‘victim blaming’ girls in comments on domestic violence](#)
- [Universities UK universities are institutionally racist, says leading vice-chancellor](#)
- [Motorways ‘Self-driving’ cars could get green light for use in UK this year](#)
- [US Arizona passes sweeping bill banning abortion for genetic issues](#)
- [China Government orders companies to step up monitoring of foreigners in anti-spying push](#)
- [Green economy MPs warn over lack of plan to manage fossil fuel tax loss](#)
- [Baftas Small Axe picks up 15 nominations for TV awards](#)
- [New York Post Reporter quits citing pressure to write false Kamala Harris story](#)

[Boris Johnson](#)

Senior Tories urge PM to come clean on funding of Downing Street refurb

Johnson faces growing disquiet after allegations he was loaned £58,000 from party funds while being seen to personally foot the bill



Boris Johnson faces pressure on a number of fronts, including claims that he said he would rather see ‘bodies pile high’ than order a third coronavirus lockdown last year. Photograph: Justin Tallis/PA

Boris Johnson faces pressure on a number of fronts, including claims that he said he would rather see ‘bodies pile high’ than order a third coronavirus lockdown last year. Photograph: Justin Tallis/PA

[Aubrey Allegretti](#) and [Jessica Elgot](#)

Tue 27 Apr 2021 15.54 EDT

Boris Johnson is being urged by senior Tories to come clean about the funding of his flat refurbishment as it emerged that a former Labour

chancellor [refused to join a trust overseeing Downing Street upkeep](#) out of concerns it could lead to a cash-for-access scandal.

The prime minister faced growing disquiet from within his own party on Tuesday over allegations that he was loaned £58,000 from Conservative party funds while being seen to personally foot the bill for renovations of his Downing Street residence.

Reports have alleged that the refurbishment was initially paid for by a donation from Tory peer and donor [Lord Brownlow](#) to Conservative campaign headquarters (CCHQ), which then loaned the money to Johnson.

No 10 has insisted that “Conservative party funds are not being used to pay for the Downing Street flat” but have not denied the existence of a donation or loan arrangement. Labour has demanded a formal investigation into whether the government was trying to orchestrate a “cover-up”.

It comes as Johnson faced pressure on a number of fronts, including claims that he said he would rather see “bodies pile high” than order a third coronavirus lockdown last year.

On Tuesday the Guardian confirmed that Alistair Darling [turned down an offer](#) to be a member of a new trust to refurbish No 10 and No 11 Downing Street, citing concerns about the potential for donors to expect political favours.

After being approached through the office of Labour leader Keir Starmer in July, Darling is said to have expressed concern about the plans – first due to a belief that the state has a duty to maintain the iconic buildings and second because of what he saw as a significant risk of cash for access.

The head of the civil service, Simon Case, confirmed on Monday that the idea of a trust had been looked into but would not have worked. “A charitable trust can’t cover private areas of Downing Street, so that’s clear that that can’t be done,” he told MPs.

The full cost of the refurbishment works has not been confirmed but is thought to have gone well above the £30,000 cap available for premiers to

claim taxpayers' money. No date has been set yet for when the Cabinet Office will publish its annual accounts or the register of ministers' interests, which is expected to shed light on the funding.

The ministerial code stipulates that ministers "must ensure that no conflict arises, or could reasonably be perceived to arise, between their public duties and their private interests, financial or otherwise". The Electoral Commission is considering opening a formal investigation into whether all donations were properly declared by the Conservative party.

On Friday Johnson's former chief of staff Dominic Cummings revealed that he had been deeply opposed to soliciting donations for the flat's refurbishment. Cummings claimed he warned Johnson that the plans were "[unethical](#), [foolish](#), [possibly illegal](#) and almost certainly broke the rules on proper disclosure of political donations if conducted in the way he intended".

On Tuesday a cabinet minister said that, while they detected little public pressure on the issue, giving Johnson some room for manoeuvre, there was a feeling that clarity would now help. "My view has always been that start with the truth, that's where you'll end up anyway," they urged.

Some Tory MPs railed privately at their party and raised questions about co-chair Amanda Milling, who said less than a month ago that "Conservative party funds are not being used to pay for the Downing Street flat".

The same claim was made by the prime minister's former press secretary Allegra Stratton about the residence, where Johnson lives with his fiancée, Carrie Symonds, and their son.

Tory MPs said there could be an innocent answer to how Johnson footed the costs but that a lack of proof was making things worse. "There's a reasonable set of questions that need to be answered – our position at the moment isn't ideal," one said.

Concern is also rising that while the issue may not have had significant cut-through with the public yet, it may in the days ahead, including in the run-up to elections on 6 May.

A senior MP said: “Broadly I do think the ‘he said/she said’ stuff just turns everybody off politics full stop, and generally the mood is positive. But after a while the general atmosphere – rather than the specific details – around trust start to seep out. I sometimes wonder who is actually working for the PM and who is working for their own little tribe. It will need a long-term fix, not a quick one.”

Caroline Slocock, former private secretary to Margaret Thatcher who now runs the Civil Exchange thinktank, told the Guardian she was “concerned” about any donors “paying for work which the prime minister should be paying for”, adding: “We do appear to have a very un-transparent situation here, which is a problem.”

Labour’s deputy leader, Angela Rayner, has demanded that Case investigates Stratton’s denials last month that Tory funds were used to help pay for the renovations. Case revealed on Monday that he has opened an inquiry into the matter, and Rayner said it should include whether Stratton had broken the civil service code on acting with honesty and integrity.

He was urged by Rayner to look into whether Stratton “knowingly misled journalists and the public, or was misled herself by senior members of the government who seem intent on a cover-up”.

No 10 said: “Any costs of wider refurbishment this year beyond those provided for by the annual allowance have been met by the prime minister personally. Conservative party funds are not being used for this.”

A Conservative party spokesperson added: “All reportable donations to the Conservative party are correctly declared to the Electoral Commission, published by them and comply fully with the law. Gifts and benefits received in a ministerial capacity are, and will continue to be, declared in Government transparency returns.”

[Boris Johnson](#)

Who is Lord Brownlow, the man who helped pay for Downing Street refurb?

Peer is revealed to have paid £58,000 towards cost of makeover of Downing Street flat



David Brownlow is ranked the 521st richest person in the UK with an estimated £271m fortune. Photograph: Steven Cargill/Racing Fotos/REX/Shutterstock

David Brownlow is ranked the 521st richest person in the UK with an estimated £271m fortune. Photograph: Steven Cargill/Racing Fotos/REX/Shutterstock

[Rupert Neate](#) *Wealth correspondent*

[@RupertNeate](#)

Tue 27 Apr 2021 11.20 EDT

The thing about making charitable donations that gives David Brownlow the most satisfaction, he says, is “to make a difference to people’s lives”.

The sort of difference, we now know, that means the prime minister and his fiancée, [Carrie Symonds](#), can relax in the luxurious surroundings created by a very upmarket interior decorator in their Downing Street flat.

Lord Brownlow of Shurlock Row in the royal county of Berkshire, who is ranked the 521st richest person in the UK with an estimated £271m fortune in the Sunday Times rich list, was [revealed by the Daily Mail](#) to have paid the Tory party nearly £60,000 towards the cost of the makeover by [Lulu Lytle](#), described by Tatler magazine as “one of smart set’s most loved designers”.

The peer confirmed he had made the payment in an email to the Conservative co-chairman Ben Elliot and the head of fundraising, Mike Chattey, sent in October last year. No 10 said Johnson paid for the refurbishment of the Downing Street flat personally.

Dominic Cummings, Johnson former chief adviser, has claimed the prime minister sought to have Tory donors “secretly pay for the renovation” and condemned the plan as “unethical, foolish, possibly illegal and almost certainly broke the rules on proper disclosure”.

Brownlow has donated almost £3m to the Conservatives and even more to projects and charities supported by the Prince of Wales. He is a generous philanthropist with connections built through business, horse racing and charity work that ranges from sponsoring a local children’s football team to helping finance a grand project led by Prince Charles to renovate Dumfries House, a Palladian country house in Ayrshire.

He was invited for a private dinner with Theresa May at Chequers in November 2017 and handed a peerage by the former prime minister in her resignation honours’ list in 2019.

He [gave cash to May’s own Maidenhead constituency office](#), donated £100,000 to the Stronger In campaign during the Brexit referendum and

served as vice-chairman of the Conservative party between July 2017 and July 2020.

Brownlow, 57, was born in Liverpool and read economics at Newcastle Polytechnic, before joining the police in Slough at the Thames Valley police headquarters.

After two years in the force, he left to become a recruitment consultant and went on to co-found the recruitment firm Huntswood in Reading in 1996. The company, which now has 4,500 specialists overseeing company transformations, says it specialises in “governance, risk and compliance”.

He has said Huntswood is different from its competitors because it operates as a meritocracy. “Imagine a game of snakes and ladders ... but without the snakes,” [he said in an interview he promotes on his website](#).

In 2013, Brownlow co-founded a private equity firm, Havisham, through which he has invested more than £20m in a range of property, hospitality, travel and fashion businesses, as well as a 1992 Ferrari F40 Michelotto.

Providing £58k to cover part of the bill for the lavish interior design requirements of Johnson and Symonds is not the first time that Brownlow has dug deep to help out a prime minister and their life partner.

Via Havisham Assets Limited, Brownlow is also one of the biggest investors in Cefinn, the fashion label founded by David Cameron’s wife, Samantha, which sells trouser suits for £700 and dresses that start at about £250. The Times described Brownlow as Cameron’s “white knight” rescuer as Cefinn was losing more than £500,000 a year when Brownlow took a 10% stake in 2018, at the head of an investment totalling £2.6m.

“I am joining the company in part because I like the management team,” he said at the time. “I thought they were very energetic and enthusiastic. I like the creative direction of the business. I am joining because it’s a business I like and I want to help it grow.” Asked if his links to the Camerons and the Conservative party had played a part, he said: “No, I am a businessman.”

His other business interests range from a chain of upmarket dining pubs in Berkshire and Surrey, to a TV production company in Aberdeen, an electric car subscription service, and Havisham Homes, which builds multimillion pound mansions in and around Berkshire.

Brownlow, who refers to himself as “Lord Brownlow CVO DL”, was appointed a deputy to the lord lieutenant of the Royal County of Berkshire in January 2018 (to which the DL refers). He is also a trustee of the Royal Albert Hall trust.

In 2013 he set up the [David Brownlow Charitable Foundation](#), which he says is “dedicated to enhancing the lives and wellbeing of individuals and communities where there is an element of disadvantage, through personal development such as education, the provision of new equipment, or the improvement and regeneration of their community”.

The charity supports various local projects in Berkshire, and the Prince’s Countryside Fund a charity founded in 2010 by Prince Charles to support rural pursuits.

“You need to have happiness and purpose in your life,” Brownlow said when asked about his charity in 2015. “It is important as a successful entrepreneur to make a contribution, to make a difference to people’s lives – that is what gives me the most satisfaction.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/apr/27/lord-david-brownlow-tory-donor-paid-no-10-refurbishment-boris-johnson>

[Alistair Darling](#)

Alistair Darling turned down offer to sit on trust to refurbish No 10

Former chancellor cited concerns about the potential for donors to expect political favours



Alistair Darling in 2014. Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

Alistair Darling in 2014. Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

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

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Tue 27 Apr 2021 14.41 EDT

The former chancellor Alistair Darling turned down an offer to be a member of a trust to [refurbish No 10 and No 11 Downing Street](#), citing grave concerns about the potential for donors to expect political favours, the Guardian understands.

The former chancellor, one of only three living Labour politicians to have lived in Downing Street, is understood to have been approached because of this connection to the building while there was a desire within the Cabinet Office for the trust to be established on a cross-party basis.

Boris Johnson's former chief of staff [Dominic Cummings](#) revealed on Friday that he had been deeply opposed to soliciting donations for the flat's refurbishment – towards which Johnson has now paid £58,000. Reports have alleged that the flat was initially paid for by a donation to Conservative Campaign Headquarters (CCHQ), which lent the money to Johnson.

It is understood that the Cabinet Office approached the office of the Labour leader, [Keir Starmer](#), office in July 2020 to speak to Darling. Darling was told the trust was to maintain the buildings in Downing Street and that it would be similar to the arrangements for the White House, where private donors can contribute to upkeep.

[No 10 refurb row: Grieve calls Boris Johnson 'vacuum of integrity'](#)
[Read more](#)

Darling believed the intent was to maintain state rooms and offices and it is understood civil servants did not raise the refurbishment of the prime minister's personal quarters.

Darling is said to have immediately expressed concern about the plans – first due to a belief that the state has a duty to maintain the iconic buildings, and second because of what he saw as a significant threat of cash for access.

It is understood Darling advised that donors might expect political favours, access to the prime minister, peerages, honours or tours of the property. Darling is also understood to have been concerned when he was told the other name involved was [Lord Brownlow, a Conservative donor](#).

Darling informed the Cabinet Office the following day that he did not want to be involved, it is understood, and wrote to Starmer to convey his decision and voice his concerns, so the party would be informed in case the Cabinet Office decided to approach other Labour politicians. He is believed to have told Cabinet Office civil servants that the trust plans were unworkable.

The head of the civil service, Simon Case, said on Monday that the idea of a trust had been looked into but would not have worked. “A charitable trust can’t cover private areas of Downing Street, so that’s clear that that can’t be done,” he told MPs.

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

Boris Johnson

Partner in Saudi bid to buy Newcastle United is major Tory donor

Jamie Reuben's involvement in bid supported by Boris Johnson raises more cronyism questions



According to leaked messages reported by the Daily Mail, the Saudi crown prince privately contacted the prime minister about the bid. Photograph: David Rogers/Getty Images

According to leaked messages reported by the Daily Mail, the Saudi crown prince privately contacted the prime minister about the bid. Photograph: David Rogers/Getty Images

[David Conn](#) and [Harry Davies](#)

Tue 27 Apr 2021 10.25 EDT

An investor in the planned takeover of Newcastle United that [received high-level support from Boris Johnson](#) last year is a major Conservative party

donor who has personally funded the prime minister's constituency office and leadership campaign.

Jamie Reuben, 34, his father, David, and uncle Simon, who own the [Reuben Brothers](#) property development empire, were co-investors with the Saudi Arabian Public Investment Fund (PIF), and the financier Amanda Staveley, in the [£300m bid](#) to buy the Premier League club from Mike Ashley.

The deal [stalled last May](#) as the Premier League reportedly pressed PIF, whose chairman is the Saudi crown prince Mohammed bin Salman, for clarity about its structure, and whether it is a government entity.

According to [leaked messages](#) reported by the Daily Mail this month, Prince Mohammed privately contacted Johnson in June, complaining about the delay and warning him that if the Premier League blocked the takeover, it would have “a negative impact on both our countries [sic] economic and commercial relations”.

The Saudi-Reuben Brothers-Staveley consortium ultimately [withdrew from the deal](#) on 30 July, blaming the “unforeseeably prolonged process”.

In September, according to the leaked messages, Johnson asked his adviser Edward Lister to investigate the chances of the deal being revived. When Lister told the prime minister that he was hopeful it was back on, [Johnson reportedly replied](#): “Brilliant.”



Jamie Reuben. Photograph: David M Benett/Getty Images for Burlington Arcade

Jamie Reuben has previously donated £700,000 to the Conservative party and Johnson's support for a deal that was being pursued by such a substantial donor, and which followed personal messages from Prince Mohammed, raises further questions surrounding allegations of cronyism, and whether business figures and political donors enjoy privileged access to the prime minister and his government.

Under the league's "owners and directors test" there were potentially deal-breaking concerns about a Saudi state entity owning a club, following the finding that [persistent piracy of international football TV rights](#) had been carried out from Saudi Arabia.

A Saudi takeover of a Premier League club was also hugely sensitive following the murder of the journalist Jamal Khashoggi in October 2018, in which Prince Mohammed has been implicated [by the UN](#) and other official reports.

A source with knowledge of the deal said they have been shocked to discover Prince Mohammed's intervention with Johnson, because he was

supposed to be keeping out of the deal, given the case the PIF was making that it was separate from the Saudi government.

A spokesman for Reuben Brothers told the Guardian Jamie Reuben did not contact the prime minister about the Newcastle takeover.

“We’re not denying that Jamie has a relationship with [Boris Johnson](#) and they talk,” the spokesman said, “but Jamie is quite specific that he hasn’t contacted or talked to him or Lord Lister about the Newcastle deal.”

Downing Street did not directly answer questions about whether the prime minister had contact or discussions with Jamie Reuben about the Newcastle deal, but denied seeking to influence it. A government spokesperson said: “This was a commercial matter for the parties concerned and the government has not been involved at any point in influencing the [Newcastle United](#) takeover talks.”

[Do you have information about this story? Email \[investigations@theguardian.com\]\(mailto:investigations@theguardian.com\), or use Signal or WhatsApp to message \(UK\) +44 7584 640566 or \(US\) +1 646 886 8761.](#)

Jamie Reuben first donated £35,000 to the Tory party in 2012, and has [donated more than £700,000](#) to the party altogether, including £50,000 to Johnson personally in the run-up to the 2019 Conservative leadership election. In October and November 2019, before the general election at which Johnson was elected prime minister, Reuben made two donations of £200,000, and one of £48,000.

A further donation from Reuben made in December 2019, of £123,750, was the provision of offices owned by the Reubens for use by the party. A company in which Jamie Reuben is a director, Investors in Private Capital Ltd (IIPC), has donated [a total of £1.98m](#) more to the Conservatives, including £25,000 to Johnson’s own office in his Uxbridge and South Ruislip constituency in March 2015.

Another of Reuben’s companies, [Melbury Capital](#), states on its website that he served as the committee chairman for Johnson’s re-election campaign as London mayor in 2012 and 2019 [presumed to refer to Johnson’s

Conservative party leadership campaign], and that Reuben is currently a treasurer of the Tory party.

Jamie's father, David, made a registered donation to Johnson of £4,000 in 2008, consisting of prizes provided for auction. The Reuben family was also a substantial donor to Zac Goldsmith's constituency of Richmond Park while he was an MP. In 2016, [a spokesman told the Guardian](#) that the Reuben and Goldsmith families had known each other well for many years and that Jamie and Dana, Simon Reuben's daughter who donated £26,000, had become "good friends with Zac".

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/apr/27/partner-in-saudi-bid-to-buy-newcastle-united-is-major-tory-donor>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

Microbiology.

Scientists find way to remove polluting microplastics with bacteria

Sticky property of bacteria used to create microbe nets that can capture microplastics in water to form a recyclable blob



Microplastics and organic matter float in water inside a container at Manly Cove Beach in Sydney, Australia. Photograph: James Redmayne/Reuters

Microplastics and organic matter float in water inside a container at Manly Cove Beach in Sydney, Australia. Photograph: James Redmayne/Reuters

Sofia Quaglia

Wed 28 Apr 2021 03.00 EDT

Microbiologists have devised a sustainable way to remove polluting microplastics from the environment – and they want to use bacteria to do the job.

Bacteria naturally tend to group together and stick to surfaces, and this creates an adhesive substance called “biofilm” – we see it every morning when brushing our teeth and getting rid of dental plaque, for example. Researchers at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU) want to use this sticky bacteria property and create tape-like microbe nets that can capture microplastics in polluted water to form an easily disposable and recyclable blob.

Although these findings, [presented on Wednesday at the Microbiology Society’s annual conference](#), are still preliminary, this invention could pave the way for sustainably lowering plastic pollution levels in the long run by simply using something found in nature.

“It is imperative to develop effective solutions that trap, collect, and even recycle these microplastics to stop the ‘plastification’ of our natural environments,” said [Sylvia Lang Liu](#), microbiology researcher at PolyU and lead researcher on this project.

Microplastics are the plastic fragments, usually smaller than 5mm, which are accidentally released into the environment during production and breakdown of, for example, grocery bags or water bottles – or during everyday activities such as washing synthetic clothes such as nylon or using personal care products with scrubbing microbeads in them.

Although they are tiny, the risk they post to the environment is huge. Microplastics are not easily biodegradable, so they stick around for long periods of time and they also absorb and accumulate toxic chemicals. They disperse into wastewater and into the oceans, endangering marine animals who end up eating them and eventually trickling into the food chain and harming human health too. Microplastics had been found in more than 114 aquatic species in 2018, according to the [International Maritime Organization](#), and they have been found in salt, lettuce, apples, and more.

Yet, there are not any sustainable, one-size-fit-all ways to eliminate microplastics.

With this research, Liu’s team has engineered a bacterial biofilm, from a bacteria called *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, able to immobilise and incorporate

rogue microplastics floating around in the water. These microbe nets trap and group the microplastics and make them sink to the bottom of the water. Then, thanks to a “capture-release mechanism” using a biofilm-dispersal gene, the researchers can unlatch the microplastics from the bacteria traps and find themselves with bulks of collected microplastics ready to recycle.

“This is a really innovative and exciting application of biofilm engineering to address the plastic pollution crisis,” said [Dr Joanna Sadler](#), researcher at University of Edinburgh, who was not involved in this study. “One of the biggest challenges in dealing with microplastics is capturing such small particles so they can be degraded and removed from the environment. Liu and co-workers have demonstrated an elegant solution to this problem, which holds great potential to be further developed into a real-world wastewater treatment technology.”

However, the experiment is still preliminary: it has been carried out as a proof-of-concept test in a controlled lab environment and not in the ocean or the sewers; and it was done using the “aeruginosa” bacteria strain, which is a disease-carrying bacteria for humans and probably could not be used in large-scale projects. But the researchers are confident that the method can be replicated to find natural biofilm-forming bacteria directly in sewage or other watery environments and go from there.

“In terms of the capture of microplastics, it’s an interesting development,” said [Dr Nicholas Tucker](#), senior lecturer in molecular microbiology at the University of Strathclyde, who was not involved in the study. “Whether it’s scalable is going to be interesting to see.” According to Tucker, there will need to be more research on what types of surfaces to grow the biofilm on.

However, research like this provides a good example of the many uses for microbial biotechnology and what big feats tiny bacteria can accomplish. “In general, this shows that microbes can and will play a role in every stage of the life cycle of plastics,” Tucker said.

UK news

Shaun Bailey criticised for ‘victim blaming’ girls in comments on domestic violence

Past comments on male violence by Tory London mayoral candidate included ‘the repair starts with girls’



Conservative London mayoral candidate Shaun Bailey poses in front of a branded bus. Photograph: Neil Hall/EPA

Conservative London mayoral candidate Shaun Bailey poses in front of a branded bus. Photograph: Neil Hall/EPA

[Jessica Elgot](#)

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Wed 28 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

The Conservative mayoral candidate [Shaun Bailey](#) has been criticised for past comments suggesting girls should “accept less of men’s rubbish” to avoid domestic violence, which Labour described as victim blaming.

In the newly unearthed comments Bailey says that ending domestic violence “starts with girls” and suggests men’s behaviour is highly dependent on impressing women.

The remarks, [in an archived post on the Conservative Women’s Organisation website](#), were made at an event on gang culture when Bailey was a parliamentary candidate for Hammersmith. The article appears to have since been removed from the website.

The report of Bailey’s comments says he told the group that men would “always be involved in violence” but “the repair starts with girls, because if you could get girls to accept less of men’s rubbish then men would have to change because ultimately men are after a girl. Men’s behaviour is affected by what he feels it is to be a man and what he feels will impress a girl”.

[Labour calls for Shaun Bailey to condemn ads attacking Sadiq Khan](#)
[Read more](#)

Rupa Huq, Labour MP for Ealing Central and Acton, said the comment was victim blaming. “Someone with Bailey’s hard right attitudes should simply never have the opportunity to lead a city that counts more than 4 million women and girls among its population,” she said.

“His long history of talking [women down](#) is completely at odds with London’s open, modern and progressive values.”

The Tory candidate, who is trailing in the polls to the Labour incumbent Sadiq Khan, was also recently criticised for a tweet that appeared to try to capitalise on the killing of Sarah Everard, saying he would “deliver for the safety of women and girls” if elected in May.

A campaign spokesperson for Bailey said: “Once again Labour are taking old comments out of context. Shaun’s point, emphasised repeatedly, was that

the only way to end domestic violence is to change the behaviour of men – exactly what women are saying, not to mention Sadiq Khan.

“If Labour want to talk about the issues, then let’s start with Sadiq Khan’s admission that [London](#) isn’t safe for women and girls. While Sadiq Khan offers just words, Shaun Bailey has a plan: 1,000 more police to tackle violence against women and girls, 24/7 foot patrols in dangerous areas, and more CCTV across the transport network to catch perpetrators.”

Bailey has experienced [a series of criticisms](#) over [past articles and comments](#). He was challenged for suggesting teenage mothers pushed people who “do the right thing” down the housing ladder, telling the Sun that teenage pregnancy was disadvantaging other housing claimants.

He has been dogged by news stories detailing previous comments about teen pregnancy, single mothers and welfare, including [from 2005](#), when he said “a culture of dependency rules the working class”.

The Conservative candidate has also made a series of controversial comments during the campaign, including suggesting homeless Londoners [could save up a £5,000 deposit for a mortgage](#).

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/apr/28/shaun-bailey-criticised-for-victim-blaming-girls-in-comments-on-domestic-violence>

Universities

UK universities are institutionally racist, says leading vice-chancellor

Prof David Richardson cites systemic issues that disproportionately affect black and minority ethnic students



One University of Manchester student said security officers who had accused him of ‘looking like a drug dealer’ held him up against a wall and demanded to see his ID. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

One University of Manchester student said security officers who had accused him of ‘looking like a drug dealer’ held him up against a wall and demanded to see his ID. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

[Aamna Mohdin](#)
[@aamnamohdin](#)

Wed 28 Apr 2021 03.00 EDT

UK universities are institutionally racist and must do more to support students of colour, a leading vice-chancellor has said.

Prof David Richardson, chair of [Universities](#) UK's advisory group on stamping out racial harassment on campuses and vice-chancellor of University of East Anglia, said there was evidence of systemic issues that disproportionately affect students from black and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds.

Speaking on BBC Three's documentary *Is Uni Racist?*, he said: "There's mixed experiences, but many aren't good. There is a lot of evidence that points towards universities perpetuating systemic racism, being institutionally racist and I have acknowledged that on behalf of the sector.

"Institutional racism is when there are systemic issues that are impacting disproportionately on particular members of your community, which need to be dismantled."

The documentary, presented by the journalist Linda Adey, investigates the experiences of four black students at British universities, with a focus on happens when complaints of racist abuse are made.

Students who complain about such incidents said they were locked out of the process, left dissatisfied and felt their universities had failed them. They were frustrated that they were often not allowed to know the outcome of their complaints because of data protection laws, and said their experiences had made a significant impact on their psychological wellbeing and educational performance.

Zac Adan, a 19-year-old first-year student, said he had been accused of "looking like a drug dealer" by University of Manchester security officers, who held him up against a wall and demanded to see his identification in November. The incident sparked widespread calls for the vice-chancellor, Nancy Rothwell, to resign. She later apologised for falsely claiming on national television to have written to Adan to make an apology.

Adan said it had been difficult but important to take part in the documentary and tell his story. "The reasons I did it were to shed light on the issue, and to

make people aware that this is actually something that's going on, that it needs to be addressed," he said.

He agrees that UK universities are institutionally racist. "I think it's ingrained and indoctrinated within the system. It's not so much something that's really overt, open racism, although that does exist. It's more the micro-aggressions and systemic racism. A prime example that is shown in the documentary is when students want to report issues of racism, they're really downplayed. They said not to be as serious as they claim to be.

"The university's reputation comes first. And how they portray themselves to the public and to the media is way more important to them, and making public statements seems to be more of a priority for the universities than the actual welfare and well being of the students."

When asked if universities were downplaying racism issues, Richardson said: "Perhaps governing bodies are concerned about the reputational impact of the university being seen to be a place that was institutional racist. I think five years ago people, leaders, universities would not have called this problem out."

He said it was disappointing that students were afraid to make a complaint for fear it would affect their grades or career choices. "We need to acknowledge that and put in place better support to make them feel safe and to help them be reassured that this will not damage their grades," he said.

Manchester University said: "We have significant ongoing work to strengthen our approach to equality, diversity and inclusion in collaboration with our students and staff. We have developed through a robust action plan and a [Race Matters report](#), which we are putting into place as a priority."

** 'Is Uni racist?' will be available to watch on iPlayer from 6am on 28 April and will also air at 10.45pm on BBC One.*

Self-driving cars

‘Self-driving’ cars could get green light for use on UK motorways this year

Automated lane-keeping systems likely to be allowed only when traffic is moving slowly



Insurers and motoring organisations said much more work needed to be done to ensure the safety of automated lane-keeping systems. Photograph: Fabio De Paola/PA

Insurers and motoring organisations said much more work needed to be done to ensure the safety of automated lane-keeping systems. Photograph: Fabio De Paola/PA

[Gwyn Topham](#) *Transport correspondent*
[@GwynTopham](#)

Tue 27 Apr 2021 19.01 EDT

Motorists could legally allow their cars to “self-drive” on British motorways later this year – but only slowly, the government has announced.

Drivers could soon be allowed to read a newspaper or watch a film via the car’s built-in screen in periods of slow-moving traffic, using automated lane-keeping system (Alks) technology that makes the car stay in lane and a safe distance from other vehicles.

But insurers and motoring organisations said much more work needed to be done to ensure safety, after the Department for Transport [confirmed it would pursue plans](#) to allow new models fitted with Alks to drive without the driver’s input.

The cars will be defined as self-driving when the system is in operation, at a maximum speed of 37mph. According to the DfT, the technology, which will constantly monitor speed and distance from other cars, could improve road safety by reducing human error.

Under UN regulation, the system is for use only on motorways, where traffic flows in the same direction and no pedestrians or cyclists are permitted. It must hand back control to the driver when required, such as when a traffic jam clears and traffic speeds up, with up to 10 seconds for the transition.

A fresh consultation on the Highway Code has been launched to examine what rules are needed to ensure Alks is used safely.

Transport minister Rachel Maclean said it was a “major step for the safe use of self-driving vehicles in the UK, making future journeys greener, easier and more reliable.

“But we must ensure that this exciting new tech is deployed safely, which is why we are consulting on what the rules to enable this should look like.”

However, insurers warned that the government was sowing confusion over the capabilities of the cars by referring to models with Alks as “self-driving”.

Matthew Avery, director of research at the insurer-funded Thatcham Research, said: “There is still a lot of work needed though by both

legislators and the automotive industry before any vehicle can be classed as automated and allowed safely on to the UK roads.”

He said Alks should not be called automated as it still relied on a driver being ready to take control. “Our concern is that the UK government is contributing to the confusion and frequent misuse of assisted driving systems that have unfortunately already led to many tragic deaths.”

The deaths of two men in a [Tesla crash in April](#) is under investigation in the US, with no one believed to have been in the driving seat. An inquest last year found another Tesla driver was using the car’s self-driving function and [playing a video game](#) when he died in 2018.

The AA also urged caution. The motoring group’s president, Edmund King, said: “Without doubt vehicle safety technology can save lives, but we shouldn’t be in a race to take drivers’ hands off the wheel.

“There are still gaps in how this technology detects and stops if the vehicle is involved in a collision. There are still question marks over how drivers will be fully informed how these systems work. More needs to be done to rigorously test these systems before they are used on UK roads.”

However, the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders said the government’s announcement was a vital step forward.

The SMMT chief executive, Mike Hawes, said: “Technologies such as Alks will pave the way for higher levels of automation in future – and these advances will unleash Britain’s potential to be a world leader in the development and use of these technologies, creating essential jobs while ensuring our roads remain among the safest on the planet.”

The government has pinned significant economic hope on connected and autonomous vehicle technology, which it claims could be a £42bn industry employing another 38,000 people in the UK by 2035.

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

Abortion

Arizona passes sweeping anti-abortion bill banning procedure for genetic issues

Under bill signed by the governor, doctors can in some cases face felony charges for performing the procedure



Arizona reproductive rights groups march to deliver a petition to Doug Ducey to veto the latest abortion bill passed by the state legislature. Photograph: Ross D Franklin/AP

Arizona reproductive rights groups march to deliver a petition to Doug Ducey to veto the latest abortion bill passed by the state legislature. Photograph: Ross D Franklin/AP

Associated Press

Tue 27 Apr 2021 21:21 EDT

Arizona's governor has signed a sweeping anti-abortion bill that bans the procedure if the woman is seeking it solely because a fetus has a genetic

abnormality such as Down's syndrome.

Doctors who perform an abortion solely because the child has a survivable genetic issue can face felony charges. The proposal also contains a raft of other provisions sought by abortion opponents.

The measure passed the Republican-controlled legislature on party-line votes over unanimous opposition from minority Democrats. Doug Ducey, a Republican, is an abortion opponent who has never vetoed a piece of anti-abortion legislation.

The abortion bill as originally written made it a felony for a doctor to perform the procedure because the fetus has a genetic abnormality such as Down's syndrome, and contained a slew of other provisions, including one that confers all civil rights to unborn children. Democrats call that "personhood" provision a backdoor way to allow criminal charges against a woman who has an abortion.

[The tiny American towns passing anti-abortion rules](#)
[Read more](#)

In addition to the ban on abortions for genetic abnormalities and the "personhood" provision, the bill bans mail delivery of abortion-inducing medication, allows the father or maternal grandparents of a fetus aborted because of a genetic issue to sue, and bans the spending of any state money toward organizations that provide abortion care.

The measure also requires fetal remains to be buried or cremated, and it forbids state universities from providing abortion care.

The measure was a top priority for the social conservative group Center for Arizona Policy. Its president, Cathi Herrod, routinely backs anti-abortion bills in the legislature. National anti-abortion groups hailed its passage.

Minutes after the governor acted, Herrod sent out a news release with the subject line "Life Wins!"

Pro-choice groups had rallied at the Capitol on Monday, urging Ducey to veto the measure and presenting him with petitions signed by opponents of the bill.

Democrats lamented the governor's action, including representative Diego Espinoza of Tolleson.

“Governor Ducey’s decision to sign SB1457 is not pro-life. It is anti-families, anti-woman, and anti-doctor,” Espinoza tweeted. “I’m disappointed to see Arizona moving in this direction, ignoring the needs and desires of doctors, women, and families for an extreme political agenda.”

Republican-controlled legislatures in Arizona and several other states – emboldened by the possibility that a more conservative US supreme court could overturn Roe v Wade, the 1973 decision that found women have a constitutional right to seek an abortion – have embraced proposals this year that could completely ban abortion. An Arizona proposal doing that, however, has not advanced.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/27/arizona-anti-abortion-bill-downs-syndrome>

[China](#)

China orders companies to step up monitoring of foreigners in anti-spying push

State security will provide ‘guidance’ to organisations deemed to have anti-espionage responsibility as hostilities with western governments deepen



The move comes amid new public campaigns to watch out for foreign spies in China Photograph: John MacDougall/AFP via Getty Images

The move comes amid new public campaigns to watch out for foreign spies in China Photograph: John MacDougall/AFP via Getty Images

[Helen Davidson](#) in Taipei

[@heldavidson](#)

Wed 28 Apr 2021 01.57 EDT

Chinese social groups, enterprises and public entities will have increased responsibility to combat foreign espionage under new regulations issued by the country's ministry of state security.

The regulations, which were released and took effect on Monday, come amid deepening hostilities between [China](#) and some western governments, including over the detention of foreigners accused of national security crimes.

According to [state media](#), state security will work with other government departments to “adjust” the list of groups susceptible to foreign espionage and to develop measures to safeguard against it, including Chinese Communist Party and state organs, social groups, enterprises and public institutions.

[Yang Hengjun: Australian writer held in China for almost two years officially charged with espionage](#)

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Once organisations are designated as having anti-espionage responsibility, state security will provide “guidance, supervision and inspection” of their efforts, including personnel vetting, and strict training, monitoring and debriefing for staff trips overseas. Identified organisations must report suspicions and incidents to authorities.

It come amid increasing public campaigns to watch out for foreign spies, which [state media has warned](#) could be an “intimate lover” or “an online friend with the same interests”.

The new regulation “places emphasis on companies and institutions taking precautionary measures against foreign espionage,” Li Wei, an expert on national security and anti-terrorism at the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations, told state media outlet, the Global Times on Monday.

Li said key fields would include companies or institutions working in national defence, diplomacy, economy, finance and tech.

“Cases of Chinese people working in various industries who were wooed by money or intimidated to engage in espionage activities and became pawns of foreign spy intelligence agencies are numerous.”

Xinhua cited an unnamed security official saying the new national regulations were in response to “intensified infiltration into China” by overseas spy agencies and “hostile forces”.

Chinese authorities have arrested a number of foreigners on national security or espionage charges in recent years, prompting condemnation from their governments and accusations the detentions were instead instances of “hostage diplomacy”.

Two Canadian nationals, Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor, have been held since 2018 and [went on trial last month](#). Their cases are believed to be retaliation for Canada’s arrest of Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou under a US extradition warrant.

Australian nationals [Yang Hengjun](#) and Cheng Lei are also currently detained. Yang, a writer and blogger, was charged with [endangering national security](#) by joining or accepting a mission from an unidentified espionage organisation, but has maintained he is innocent throughout more than 300 interrogations.

Lei, a news anchor for state broadcaster CGTN, [has been detained for eight months](#), “on suspicion of illegally providing state secrets to foreign forces”. Australia was “not privy to evidence” supporting the charge, foreign affairs minister Marise Payne said in February.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/28/china-orders-companies-to-step-up-monitoring-of-foreigners-in-anti-spying-push>

[Cop26: Glasgow climate change conference 2021](#)

Green economy: MPs warn over lack of plan to manage fossil fuel tax loss

MPs say Treasury has not set out how tax system will help UK meet target to cut emissions



MP Meg Hillier, chair of the public accounts committee, said the Treasury and HMRC needed to ‘catch up fast’. Photograph: Isabel Infantes/EMPICS Entertainment

MP Meg Hillier, chair of the public accounts committee, said the Treasury and HMRC needed to ‘catch up fast’. Photograph: Isabel Infantes/EMPICS Entertainment

PA Media

Wed 28 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

The Treasury cannot explain how it will manage declines in tax revenues worth £37bn from fossil fuels as the UK shifts to a clean economy, MPs

have warned.

A report from the influential parliamentary public accounts committee also warned that the Treasury had not set out how the tax system was going to help the government meet the target to cut emissions to “net zero” by 2050.

With just six months until the UK hosts the crucial UN Cop26 climate summit, the committee’s chair, Meg Hillier, warned that the Treasury and HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) needed to “catch up fast” in the face of the climate storm.

Meeting the net zero goal to curb global temperature rises and tackle the climate crisis requires cutting emissions as close to zero as possible and offsetting any remaining pollution with steps such as planting trees.

It will mean significant shifts in how people live their lives in the next few years, including ending sales of new petrol and diesel cars by 2030 and shifting to electric vehicles – which will eat into the £28bn a year in fuel duty revenues.

The committee said the Treasury had told the MPs the government did not have a plan for the reduction in tax revenue on fossil fuels and greenhouse gases, which, in addition to fuel duty, includes £9bn of other taxes.

The report also warned that immediate priorities have also often outweighed action needed to support long term environmental objectives, for example the freeze in fuel duty to help with the cost of living.

And with just four taxes defined as environmental taxation, the Treasury and HMRC do not sufficiently assess the green impacts of taxes such as fuel duty or air passenger duty, the report said.

The committee called for the Treasury to set out a clear vision of how it would help the UK achieve net zero, before Cop26 in November in Glasgow.

The Treasury should also set out a timetable for consulting on options for replacing fuel duty and other fossil fuel-based taxes, it said.

And from the next budget the Treasury should assess the environmental impact of every tax change considered and publish the green impacts of all measures in the budget, it urged.

The committee's report said tax was an important tool for pursuing the government's environmental goals. But it warned of a lack of leadership and coordination and said the exchequer departments had taken a "very limited view of the role of tax so far", adding that HMRC had not done enough to evaluate how taxes changed behaviour.

The MPs called for the Treasury to be clear and transparent on the role tax will play in the shift to net zero so taxpayers can make informed decisions and other government departments could plan.

Hillier said: "The economic revolution required to abandon fossil fuels and reach net zero must be the greatest coordinated ask, of governments around the globe, in history.

"But the UK government has been blithely issuing ever more ambitious climate targets for years now, with no sign of a roadmap to reach any of them.

"The departments in charge seem stuck in a bygone era, with little sign of the innovative thinking needed to achieve all this.

"Every week brings reports of some climate record disturbingly broken – the hottest year, the hottest decade, warming seas rising faster than we feared, carbon emissions raging even as the economy takes more faltering steps.

"Now we are six months from hosting the next major global climate summit and the climate storm is breaking all around us. HMRC and HM Treasury need to catch up fast."

[Baftas](#)

Small Axe picks up 15 nominations for Bafta TV awards

Steve McQueen's series nominated, with stars Letitia Wright and John Boyega in running for acting awards



Letitia Wright in Mangrove. Photograph: Des Willie/BBC/McQueen Limited

Letitia Wright in Mangrove. Photograph: Des Willie/BBC/McQueen Limited

PA Media

Wed 28 Apr 2021 03.06 EDT

Small Axe, the anthology series directed by Sir Steve McQueen, has garnered 15 nominations at this year's Bafta TV awards.

It has been nominated for nine craft awards and six in the television category.

The show's stars – John Boyega and Letitia Wright – have each been nominated in the acting categories, Boyega for his role in Red, White and Blue, with Wright nominated for her part in Mangrove.

Netflix's royal drama series The Crown has received 10 nominations – four TV nominations and six in the craft categories.

Josh O'Connor is nominated for his role as the Prince of Wales in the Netflix series, with his co-stars Helena Bonham Carter and Tobias Menzies also nominated.

Bonham Carter is nominated for her portrayal of Princess Margaret and Menzies for his role as the Duke of Edinburgh.

Michaela Coel's I May Destroy You has received eight nominations, with BBC's Normal People receiving seven nominations.

Daisy Edgar-Jones is nominated for her role in Normal People in the leading actress category. Also nominated in the category are Billie Piper, Hayley Squires, Jodie Comer, Letitia Wright and Michaela Coel.

More to follow ...

US news

New York Post reporter quits citing pressure to write incorrect story about Kamala Harris

Laura Italiano claimed she was forced to write a report about migrant children being given a copy of the VP's book as part of a welcome kit



Kamala Harris promoting her book in 2019. The New York Post falsely claimed it was being handed out to migrant children in California. Photograph: Sait Serkan Gurbuz/AP

Kamala Harris promoting her book in 2019. The New York Post falsely claimed it was being handed out to migrant children in California. Photograph: Sait Serkan Gurbuz/AP

Guardian staff

Wed 28 Apr 2021 01.09 EDT

A reporter at Rupert Murdoch's New York tabloid has resigned after she claimed she was forced to write an incorrect [story about migrants and Kamala Harris](#).

The New York Post [published a story on 23 April](#) headlined “Kam on in”, which claimed that migrant children were being given a copy of the vice-president's 2019 book, *Superheroes Are Everywhere*, as part of a welcome kit in Los Angeles.

Laura Italiano was credited with writing the story but on Tuesday she announced [on Twitter](#) that being told to write the “incorrect story” was her “breaking point” over working at the tabloid.

“Today I handed in my resignation to my editors at the *New York Post*,” she said. “The [Kamala Harris](#) story — an incorrect story I was ordered to write and which I failed to push back hard enough against — was my breaking point.

“It's been a privilege to cover the City of New York for its liveliest, wittiest tabloid—a paper filled with reporters and editors I admire deeply and hold as friends. I'm sad to leave.”

The story was followed up by several rightwing outlets such as Fox News. One of the cable channel's reporter's asked a question about the alleged use of Harris's book at a White House press briefing.

An announcement: Today I handed in my resignation to my editors at the New York Post.

— Laura Italiano (@Italiano_Laura) [April 27, 2021](#)

But the story was based on a single photograph of the book taken at a temporary immigration facility at the Long Beach convention center in Southern California, and was revealed as being incorrect.

The [Daily Beast reported](#) that it had been taken off the Post's website but was later reinstated with a footnote.

“The original version of this article said migrant kids were getting Harris’ book in a welcome kit but has been updated to note that only one known copy of the book was given to a child,” the editor’s note said.

An investigation by the Washington Post revealed that the book had turned up at the Long Beach facility as part of a book and toy drive for migrant children.

“The city of Long Beach, in partnership with the Long Beach convention and visitors bureau, has a city-wide book and toy drive that is ongoing to support the migrant children who are temporarily staying in Long Beach at the US Department of Health and Human Services shelter,” city spokesman Kevin Lee told the Washington Post.

“The book you reference is one of hundreds of books that have already been donated. The book was not purchased by HHS or the City.”

The Guardian has contacted the New York Post for comment.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/apr/28/new-york-post-reporter-quits-over-incorrect-story-about-kamala-harris-book>

2021.04.28 - Coronavirus

- ['We're all in this together' Dr Fauci says world has failed India](#)
- [Fiji Fears of Covid 'tsunami' as India variant drives outbreak](#)
- [Vaccine Single dose found to nearly halve transmission](#)
- [Covid certificates Spain to welcome overseas travellers from June](#)
- ['People phone up pleading' The volunteers battling India's oxygen crisis](#)
- [India's Covid crisis Delhi crematoriums forced to build makeshift pyres](#)
- [Vaccines Leading scientists urge UK to share Covid vaccines with poorer nations](#)
- [Live Coronavirus: India deaths pass 200,000; crisis needs global response – Fauci](#)

[Coronavirus](#)

‘We’re all in this together’: Dr Fauci says world has failed India as Covid cases surge

US’s top infectious disease expert lambasts wealthy countries for failing to provide equitable access to coronavirus vaccines

- [Families of Australians caught in India Covid surge plead for repatriation](#)
- [Why Australia is under pressure to upgrade advice on aerosol transmission](#)
- [WHO blames ‘perfect storm’ of factors for India Covid crisis](#)

02:45

Dr Fauci calls for global response as Covid infections surge in India – video

[Melissa Davey](#)

[@MelissaLDavey](#)

Tue 27 Apr 2021 22.51 EDT

Dr Anthony Fauci, the White House’s chief medical adviser, has said countries have failed to unite to provide an adequate global response to prevent the “tragic” coronavirus outbreak from overwhelming [India](#), and singled out wealthier nations for failing to provide equitable access to healthcare around the world.

Speaking to Guardian Australia from the US, Fauci said the situation in India had highlighted global inequality.

“The only way that you’re going to adequately respond to a global pandemic is by having a global response, and a global response means equity

throughout the world,” Fauci said.

[Australia should make Covid vaccine rollout ‘top priority’, Anthony Fauci says](#)

[Read more](#)

“And that’s something that, unfortunately, has not been accomplished. Often when you have diseases in which there is a limited amount of intervention, be it therapeutic or prevention, this is something that all the countries that are relatively rich countries or countries that have a higher income have to pay more attention to.”

[India](#) recorded 360,960 new cases in the 24 hours to Wednesday morning according to health ministry data, another new daily global record. The ministry also said that India’s total number of fatalities had passed 200,000 to stand at 201,187.

The latest epidemiological update from the World [Health](#) Organization (WHO) issued on Tuesday said Covid-19 cases increased globally for the ninth consecutive week, with nearly 5.7m new cases reported. India accounts for the majority of cases, with 2,172,063 new cases reported in the past week – a 52% increase.

01:19

WHO chief says the Covid surge in India 'beyond heartbreaking' – video

Fauci said while WHO was trying to accelerate support to India through [the Covax initiative](#) – a global program aimed at ensuring countries most in need get access to vaccines and other treatments – “we have to do even more than that”.

“The United States has really revved up their activity in helping out India ... we’re sending oxygen, [remdesivir](#), personal protective equipment, a variety of other medications and soon we’ll be sending vaccine to help out,” he said.

[Australia ‘morally obliged’ to help repatriate citizens caught in India’s Covid crisis](#)

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“So I think that that’s a responsibility that the rich countries need to assume. Right now it’s a terrible tragic situation where people are dying because there’s not enough oxygen, where there’s not enough hospital beds. We have to try, looking forward, to get as much equity when it comes to public health issues as we possibly can.

“Because we’re all in this together. It’s an interconnected world. And there are responsibilities that countries have to each other, particularly if you’re a wealthy country and you’re dealing with countries that don’t have the resources or capabilities that you have.”

Looking ahead, health systems globally would need to be upgraded so that issues emerging could be detected sooner, Fauci said. Transparency and communication between countries would be key, he said, adding that this was not just an issue for countries like India but for the US as well.

“You want to have the capability of better surveillance internationally, so that when something comes up and emerges in a given country there’s not a big delay in getting recognition of what’s going on,” he said.

“I know in the United States, for example, our local public health system has not been kept up to the level that we would have liked ... we are still using fax machines, which is really unacceptable. You have to be prepared to have interconnectivity.”

As the tragedy unfolds in India, he said Australians should feel grateful that they had two safe and effective vaccines in AstraZeneca and Pfizer, even if the rollout of those vaccines had been slower than anticipated.

[‘I don’t stop crying’: families of Australians caught in India Covid surge plead for repatriation](#)

[Read more](#)

“Just because you have only two vaccines that are available, that doesn’t necessarily mean you’re at a disadvantage, so long as you have enough efficacious and safe vaccine,” he said. “I don’t think the numbers of [different types of] vaccines in the sense of different vaccines is as important as getting enough for your citizens.”

Though there had been delays to the rollout in Australia, the federal government has secured enough vaccine supply to vaccinate the entire Australian population of 25m, even before other candidates such as the Novavax vaccine have been approved and available. If regulators approve the Novavax vaccine once more clinical trial data is available, the government anticipates 51m doses of that vaccine will be made available in Australia during 2021.

Asked whether the situation in India and elsewhere, such as in Papua New Guinea, meant the world would struggle to ever contain Covid, Fauci responded: “I believe we will get there.

“But it makes it more difficult when you have the spread of infection in a country that’s not handling it very well. If you get infections in a country in which there are a lot of immunosuppressed individuals, including people who are infected with HIV and the virus infects them, they don’t clear it as rapidly as you would hope and that gives the virus a chance to mutate, which leads to the development of additional variants.”

[Why Australia is under pressure to upgrade advice on Covid’s aerosol transmission](#)

[Read more](#)

Fauci said the evolving situation meant he “can’t even begin to think” of a life and career beyond responding to the pandemic. While the rapid pace of the vaccination program in the US has seen a reduction of new infections, there were nonetheless 406,000 new cases reported in the US in the past week – a 15% decrease from the week prior.

“This is such an important and challenging situation we’re dealing with right now,” Fauci said. “I’m devoting all of my attention, all of my energy, 24/7, on trying to get control of this terrible outbreak that we’re experiencing, not only here in the United States, but throughout the world.”

[The Pacific project](#)[Fiji](#)

Fears of Covid ‘tsunami’ in Fiji after outbreak found to be Indian variant

Covid-19 outbreak in Pacific nation has forced lockdowns across the country, after the island nation avoided transmission for a year



Security officers check cars along a road in Suva after the Fijian capital entered a 14-day lockdown after a leak from a quarantine facility and a funeral caused Covid-19 to spread in the community. Photograph: Leon Lord/AFP/Getty Images

Security officers check cars along a road in Suva after the Fijian capital entered a 14-day lockdown after a leak from a quarantine facility and a funeral caused Covid-19 to spread in the community. Photograph: Leon Lord/AFP/Getty Images

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Tue 27 Apr 2021 23.00 EDT

Fijian health officials are bracing for a “tsunami” of Covid-19 cases, after the Indian variant was detected in the Pacific nation this week, with lockdowns announced in an attempt to stem the outbreak.

The Pacific country had [largely managed to avoid community transmission over the course of the pandemic](#), before a cluster emerged this month linked to a quarantine facility, and exacerbated after a woman with the virus attended a funeral with 500 people.

The permanent secretary for health and medical services, James Fong, said six new cases had emerged in quarantine facilities on Tuesday and events in India showed the threat posed by the strain could not be underestimated.

[Deserted islands: Pacific resorts struggle to survive a year without tourists](#)
[Read more](#)

“We cannot let that nightmare happen in Fiji,” he said in a televised address.

“We still have time to stop it happening but a single misstep will bring about the same Covid tsunami that our friends in India, Brazil, South Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States are enduring.”

As of Tuesday, Fiji had recorded 109 cases and just two deaths in a population of 930,000 since the pandemic began. There are currently 42 active cases, 18 of them detected at the border and 24 locally transmitted.

The cluster emerged after a soldier contracted the virus at a quarantine facility and transmitted it to his wife, who then exposed up to 500 people at a funeral.

Fong said there was evidence that soldiers who had returned from overseas deployments had broken quarantine rules by mixing with each other when they should have been in isolation.

“This is unacceptable,” he said, adding that the military was investigating what had happened.



Security officers man a checkpoint in Suva on Wednesday after the Fijian capital entered a 14-day lockdown. Photograph: Leon Lord/AFP/Getty Images

The capital of Suva is in lockdown, along with Nadi and Lautoka, Fiji's second-largest city.

Authorities on Tuesday banned inter-island travel, while national carrier Fiji Airways suspended all international and domestic passenger flights.

Fiji received four new Gene-X Pert testing machines on Wednesday, from the World Health Organization, Unicef and the Pacific Community.

The health minister, Dr Ifereimi Waqainabete, said the machines can run four Covid tests in 45 minutes and would assist the country's efforts to stop the spread of the virus.

The ministry of health said the country conducted an average of 777 tests per day in the last week.

The emergence of community transmission is a blow for Fiji's hopes of opening quarantine-free travel bubbles with Australia and New Zealand, both major sources of international tourists before the pandemic.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/28/fears-of-covid-tsunami-in-fiji-after-outbreak-found-to-be-indian-variant>

UK news

Single dose of Covid vaccine can nearly halve transmission of virus, study finds

Research from Public Health England suggests that protection conferred a fortnight after vaccination

- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



Martin Gillibrand receives an AstraZeneca vaccination at a Boots pharmacy on Fleet Street in the City of London. Photograph: Hollie Adams/Getty Images

Martin Gillibrand receives an AstraZeneca vaccination at a Boots pharmacy on Fleet Street in the City of London. Photograph: Hollie Adams/Getty Images

PA Media

Tue 27 Apr 2021 19.39 EDT

A single dose of a Covid-19 vaccine can slash transmission of the virus by up to half, according to a Public [Health](#) England study.

The PHE finding offers further hope that the pandemic can be brought under control as it indicates that vaccinated people are far less likely to pass the virus on to others.

The study found that people given a single dose of either the Pfizer/BioNTech or Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccines – and who became infected at least three weeks later – were between 38% and 49% less likely to pass the virus on to people living in their homes, compared with those who were unvaccinated.

Protection was seen from about 14 days after vaccination, with similar levels regardless of a person's age. Other studies have already shown that both vaccines are highly effective at stopping people getting sick and ending up in hospital.

Experts will now assess whether two doses of vaccine can cut transmission of the virus even further, and more work is being carried out on transmission in the general population.

PHE said similar results could be expected in places where the risk of transmission is like in the home, [such as shared accommodation and prisons](#).

The health secretary, Matt Hancock, said: “This is terrific news – we already know vaccines save lives and this study is the most comprehensive real-world data showing they also cut transmission of this deadly virus.

[Vaccinating adolescents could help prevent third wave of Covid in UK – study](#)

[Read more](#)

“It further reinforces that vaccines are the best way out of this pandemic as they protect you and they may prevent you from unknowingly infecting someone in your household.

“I urge everybody to get their vaccines as soon as they are eligible and make sure you get your second dose for the strongest possible protection. This is a huge national effort and we will beat the virus together.”

The study, which has yet to be fully peer-reviewed, included more than 57,000 people living in 24,000 households who were the contacts of a vaccinated person.

They were compared with nearly 1 million contacts of people who had not had a vaccine.

Contacts were defined as secondary cases of coronavirus if they tested positive two to 14 days after the initial household case. Most of the people in the study were under the age of 60.

Dr Mary Ramsay, head of immunisation at PHE, said: “While these findings are very encouraging, even if you have been vaccinated, it is really important that you continue to act like you have the virus, practise good hand hygiene and follow social distancing guidance.”

The Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccines are credited with having saved 10,400 lives among the over-60s as of the end of March.

Data out last week from the national Covid-19 Infection Survey run by the University of Oxford and the Office for National Statistics (ONS) also found that vaccines were likely to cut transmission.

Just one dose of either the Pfizer/BioNTech or AstraZeneca vaccines cut coronavirus cases by nearly two-thirds and were 74% effective against symptomatic infection, according to the real-world UK data.

After two doses of Pfizer, there was a 70% reduction in all cases and a 90% drop in symptomatic cases – these are the people who are most likely to transmit coronavirus to others.

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

[Spain](#)

Spain to welcome overseas travellers with Covid certificates from June

Digital health certificates could show whether tourists have been vaccinated, tested negative or recovered from the virus

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



Son Bou beach, one of the most popular beaches on the island of Menorca, Spain. Photograph: vivoo/Alamy

Son Bou beach, one of the most popular beaches on the island of Menorca, Spain. Photograph: vivoo/Alamy

[Sam Jones](#) in Madrid and [Daniel Boffey](#) in Brussels

Tue 27 Apr 2021 18.46 EDT

Spain aims to reopen to overseas holidaymakers from June under the Covid digital health certificate scheme, the country's secretary of state for tourism has said.

Fernando Valdés told the World Travel & Tourism Council summit in Mexico on Tuesday that the programme – under which tourists could show they have been vaccinated, tested negative or recently recovered from the virus - would prove “fundamental to offering travellers certainty”.

Valdés said Spain would participate in a pilot digital certificate scheme in May and would be “ready to receive visitors in June”. He said the new scheme – and Spain's vaccine rollout – represented “a before and an after” in comparison with the situation last year, but stressed the certificates were “not a magic wand”.

What they did offer, he said, in [comments reported by the Spanish news agency Europa Press](#), was a degree of security because they would allow tourists to travel if they had been vaccinated, if they had tested negative despite not having had the jab, or if they had already recovered from Covid.

Spain, which depends on tourism for about 12% of its GDP, is in its fourth wave of the pandemic. To date, coronavirus has infected 3,496,134 people in the country and claimed 77,855 lives.

Efforts to vaccinate Spain's population of about 47 million people are gathering pace, with 14,994,667 doses of the vaccine administered, and 4,020,945 people already receiving both doses.

The country's socialist-led coalition government has said it is aiming to have 70% of the population vaccinated by the end of the summer.

News of the planned reopening came as it emerged that talks over the mechanics of reopening travel routes between the UK and the European Union over the summer holidays [will open with Brussels within days](#).

Officials in Whitehall are working on a proposal for the mutual recognition of Covid passports, which will contain information on vaccines administered to the holder and recent test results.

Earlier this month, Boris Johnson said he was “hopeful” about restarting international travel on 17 May. EU countries with large tourist sectors are pushing for the European commission to coordinate with London.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/27/spain-to-welcome-overseas-travellers-with-covid-certificates-from-june>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

India

‘People phone up pleading’: the volunteers battling India’s oxygen crisis

As supplies run low during a devastating second Covid wave, a civilian army has stepped into the breach

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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Relatives of coronavirus patients queue with empty cylinders at an oxygen filling centre in Delhi on Tuesday. Doctors in the city have told patients to find their own oxygen, sending prices soaring. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Relatives of coronavirus patients queue with empty cylinders at an oxygen filling centre in Delhi on Tuesday. Doctors in the city have told patients to find their own oxygen, sending prices soaring. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images



[Hannah Ellis-Petersen](#) in Delhi

Wed 28 Apr 2021 00.00 EDT

For more than two weeks the calls have kept on coming, sometimes over 1,000 a day. The voices on the end of Mohit Arora's phone are desperate for only one thing: oxygen.

"We are getting 1,000 calls a day but we can only accommodate 10 to 15 cylinders a day, that's it," said Arora. "It's very painful – people are calling and crying down the phone, pleading for oxygen all through the night."

As a [devastating Covid-19 second wave](#) has enveloped India, the capital, Delhi, has found itself gasping for breath, as cases have soared and oxygen supplies have run low – and, in some hospitals, have run out entirely, leaving patients to die in their beds.

As hospital and intensive care beds in the capital have filled far beyond capacity, the instruction from doctors has been for patients to find oxygen for themselves. As a result, demand for oxygen cylinders has soared to unprecedented levels, with some hidden market vendors selling a single oxygen cylinder usually worth 6,000 rupees (£58) for upwards of £700.

['The system has collapsed': India's descent into Covid hell](#)

[Read more](#)

But a civilian oxygen army has also stepped into the breach in the city, providing cylinders and oxygen refills free of charge to those in desperate need. Arora is part of the Sewa Satkar Trust, which distributes free oxygen cylinders across Delhi to those who call. But its capacity is nowhere near enough to meet the ever-growing demand.

“The situation in Delhi is particularly terrible: people are dying on the roads and outside of hospitals when they cannot get the oxygen they need,” he said. “We do the best we can but it’s so painful to have to say no, because every day we just don’t have enough. Sometimes we have to switch off our phones so we can relax, even just for half an hour.”

Recently even Delhi’s largest private hospitals such as Vedanta have been calling “telling us they have shortages and asking we help provide them with emergency cylinders”, said Arora.

[India cases](#)

He added: “It’s very clear that both the central and state governments have failed, and so it’s up to small NGOs and civilians to try and step in and do what we can. But it’s not enough, it’s not even nearly enough to fill the gap.”

The Sewa Satkar Trust was among several volunteer organisations which said it was getting harder and harder for them to find oxygen from industrial plants. New regulations introduced by the government mean that industries now have to give their oxygen directly to hospitals, rather than filling up individual cylinders. But most patients in need of oxygen can’t get into the hospitals.

Cases are still going up in the capital, which now has a positivity rate of over 35% and is registering more than 20,000 new cases every day, while [India](#) continued to report more than 300,000 new cases again on Tuesday; that day there was not a single intensive care bed available in Delhi.

India’s oxygen crisis has become so severe that [the international community has begun to send support](#), with the World Health Organization sending

4,000 oxygen concentrators, which draw oxygen from the air, and countries including Germany, Singapore, the US, the UK and even the tiny neighbouring kingdom of Bhutan all pledging oxygen supplies and generators.

India deaths

Faisal Khaliq of the Masjid and Madrasa Amania Trust is among those who have been helping distribute oxygen cylinders free of charge across Delhi. Working with another NGO, the Asma Esa Foundation, it started buying cylinders in February and now distributes about 200 cylinders for nothing across Delhi. But Khaliq said it was “impossible” to fulfil all the requests and at least 5,000 oxygen cylinders would be needed to meet the current demand.

“To be very honest, in many cases I have cried after hearing the way people were asking – no, literally begging – for an oxygen cylinder to save their loved ones,” said Khaliq. “After disconnecting sometimes I cry for 10 minutes, then start picking up the calls again. It’s really unbearable to hear those begs, those cries, asking for oxygen, ready to pay anything, ready to do anything for a 10kg cylinder.”

Mohammad Nauman of the Asma Esa Foundation said the volunteers – who are funding the cylinders and refills from their own pocket and through donations – were not sleeping as calls for oxygen came 24 hours.

“It is getting more difficult every day to find the oxygen, the requirements and demand is so high, and we worry every single day that we won’t be able to get what we need because availability is getting lower day by day,” said Nauman.



Patients in a banquet hall in Delhi temporarily converted into a Covid-19 ward. Photograph: Money Sharma/AFP/Getty Images

“We feel helpless. We want to give oxygen to everyone who calls but there is no way, we don’t have enough.”

It is not just Delhi that is struggling with oxygen supplies. In Uttar Pradesh, one of India’s most populous states, the city of Agra – home of the Taj Mahal – has been experiencing acute oxygen shortages. Despite the Uttar Pradesh chief minister, Yogi Adityanath, insisting that the state had “no shortage of oxygen”, and threatening to take legal action against hospitals which claimed to be running dry, those living in Agra spoke of a “miserable shortage of oxygen”.

Activist Narendra Kumar Paras, who is helping to distribute oxygen across the city, said he was receiving 900 phone calls a day but could only answer about 500 of them. “Thousands of people are queueing every day at the oxygen centre to get oxygen for their loved ones, with no social distancing,” said Paras. On Tuesday, a violent tussle broke out at an oxygen centre and one man was caught on video shouting: “Shoot me but don’t stop me from taking the oxygen cylinder.”

“I have been in contact with lot of people who are not getting oxygen for the past three days,” said Paras. “It’s so distressing. People call me weeping. Sometimes children call me crying, asking me to bring oxygen for their father, who cannot breathe.”

Paras said several hospitals in Agra were calling him because they did not have the oxygen supplies that they needed. “The hospital authorities are also upset. They plead with the administration that we do not have oxygen,” he said. “They are so helpless they are calling me to help provide oxygen to their patients.”

In Jhansi, another hard-hit city in Uttar Pradesh, student Akash Parashar has helped provide oxygen to more than 1,500 people locally. “People here are begging for oxygen, but because of the failures of the government people have to say farewell to their loved ones because they can’t get the oxygen they need,” he said. “The whole district is suffering but it is as if the government is blind and deaf to our pain.”

Mohammad Sartaj Alam contributed reporting

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/28/people-phone-up-pleading-the-volunteers-battling-indias-oxygen-crisis>

[India](#)

India's Covid crisis: Delhi crematoriums forced to build makeshift pyres

Grieving relatives of the dead forced to wait hours for a funeral pyre amid an explosion of new Covid cases

01:12

Crematoriums in Delhi forced to build makeshift pyres as India's Covid crisis intensifies – video

Guardian staff and agencies

Tue 27 Apr 2021 21.11 EDT

Crematoriums in Delhi are being inundated with so many bodies that they have been forced to build makeshift funeral pyres on spare patches of land as the Covid crisis sweeping India led to [an explosion of new cases](#).

Crematoriums across the capital are struggling to cope, with grieving relatives forced to wait up to 20 hours for a funeral pyre for their loved ones.

In Delhi, photographs taken on Tuesday showed smoke billowing from dozens of pyres lit in a car park that had been turned into a makeshift crematorium. Elsewhere, workers built makeshift pyres on land outside crematoriums.

[WHO blames ‘perfect storm’ of factors for India Covid crisis](#)

[Read more](#)

“People are just dying, dying and dying,” said Jitender Singh Shanty, who is coordinating more than 100 cremations per a day at the site in the east of the city.

“If we get more bodies then we will cremate on the road. There is no more space here,” he said, adding: “We had never thought that we would see such horrible scenes.”



Workers are seen constructing makeshift platforms for funeral pyres in a park inside the premises of a crematorium in Delhi Photograph: Sajjad Hussain/AFP/Getty Images

India's Covid-19 death toll surged past 200,000 on Wednesday as shortages of oxygen, medical supplies and hospital staff compounded a record number of new cases of the virus.

The second wave has seen at least 300,000 people a day test positive for the past week, overwhelming healthcare facilities and crematoriums and driving an increasingly urgent international response.

In the past 24 hours, 360,960 new cases were recorded, the largest single-day total in the world, taking India's total to nearly 18 million. A further 3,293 deaths, the deadliest day so far, took the death toll to 201,187. Experts believe the official tally vastly under-estimates the actual toll in the country of 1.3 billion, with populous states such as Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat accused of undercounting Covid-19 fatalities and cases. As the death toll mounts, the night skies in some Indian cities glow from the pyres.

The BBC reported that [trees in parks were being cut down](#) to use in funeral pyres and relatives of the dead were being asked to help pile up wood.

It said 27 new pyres had been built in the capital's Sarai Kale Khan crematorium and dozens more were being added in a nearby park. Officials were also looking for additional space near the city's Yamuna river bed.

The Hindustan Times said families were [waiting up to 20 hours](#) to cremate their loved ones as crematoriums were full. India Today said that [crematoriums were expanding](#) to manage the surging death tolls.



Workers construct new platforms to cremate bodies outside a crematorium, in New Delhi Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Crates of ventilators and other oxygen devices from Britain were unloaded at a Delhi airport Tuesday, among the first emergency medical supplies to arrive in the country where infection and death rates are growing exponentially.

[chart](#)

The United States has also pledged to export millions of AstraZeneca vaccine doses, while president Joe Biden hailed the “stunning” progress his nation by contrast has made to get the pandemic under control.

The explosion in infections in India – 350,000 new cases were recorded there on Tuesday alone – has driven a surge in global cases to 147.7 million. The virus has now killed more than 3.1 million people worldwide.

The World Health Organization said on Tuesday that a variant of Covid-19 feared to be contributing to the surge in coronavirus cases in India has been found in over a dozen countries.

The UN health agency said the B.1.617 variant of Covid-19 first found in India had as of Tuesday been detected in over 1,200 sequences uploaded to the GISAID open-access database “from at least 17 countries”.

[People in India: share your experience of the current coronavirus surge](#)
[Read more](#)

“Most sequences were uploaded from India, the United Kingdom, USA and Singapore,” the WHO said in its weekly epidemiological update on the pandemic.

The WHO recently listed B.1.617 - which counts several sub-lineages with slightly different mutations and characteristics - as a “variant of interest” but so far it has stopped short of declaring it a “variant of concern”. That label would indicate that it is more dangerous than the original version of the virus by for instance being more transmissible, deadly or able to dodge vaccine protections.

Despite India’s status as the “pharmacy of the world”, the biggest producer of generic drugs has been unable to meet the demand for antiviral medication such as remdesivir.

Many doctors say the drug is not essential for the treatment of Covid-19, but hospitals have been prescribing it anyway.

“This government has failed us so much that those who can normally survive also die,” said one exhausted man, Vinod Kumar, as he waited in line for medication.

The US, France, Germany, Canada, the EU and the World Health Organization have all promised to rush supplies to India. On Monday Biden announced the United States would send up to 60 million doses of the AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine abroad.

[India's Covid disaster: a crisis for the world – podcast](#)
[Read more](#)

While Washington has not decided yet which countries will be the recipients, India appears to be a leading contender after Biden spoke with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

“India was there for us, and we will be there for them,” Biden tweeted, referencing India’s support for the United States when it was enduring the worst of its Covid crisis. France also said it would send eight oxygen production units, oxygen containers and respirators to India.

And the EU said the first shipment of aid from the bloc’s member states to India would be delivered “over the coming days.”

The initial assistance included 365 ventilators and 700 oxygen concentrators – machines that purify the air supply by removing nitrogen – from Ireland, 120 ventilators from Sweden, 58 ventilators from Luxembourg, 80 oxygen concentrators from Romania, and thousands of doses of remdesivir from Belgium and Portugal.

At the same time, many countries are shutting their borders to travellers from India.

Belgium became the latest, also banning travel from Brazil and South Africa, similarly hit by fast-spreading coronavirus variants.

Spain said it will impose a 10-day quarantine on all travellers arriving from India beginning Wednesday.

Australia has also cut all passenger air travel with India, suspending flights until at least May 15, leaving a host of high-profile cricketers stuck there after playing in the lucrative Indian Premier League.

In Fiji, an outbreak of the Indian variant has forced the capital into lockdown after the island nation had avoided infections for a year, with health officials saying they fear a “tsunami” of cases.

Agence France-Presse contributed to this report

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

Coronavirus

Leading scientists urge UK to share Covid vaccines with poorer nations

Donating doses to countries such as India would tackle soaring death toll and curb new variants, experts say

- [Opinion: leaders must ensure vaccines aren't the preserve of the rich](#)
- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



A Kashmiri man receives the Covid vaccine in Srinagar. Only one in 500 people in low-income countries have been vaccinated. Photograph: Farooq Khan/EPA

A Kashmiri man receives the Covid vaccine in Srinagar. Only one in 500 people in low-income countries have been vaccinated. Photograph: Farooq Khan/EPA

[*Sarah Boseley*](#)

Wed 28 Apr 2021 02.00 EDT

Leading scientists are urging the UK to share the Covid vaccines it has bought with India and other nations, to tackle the soaring death toll and reduce the spread of the virus and new variants around the world.

Sir Jeremy Farrar, the director of the Wellcome Trust, said rich countries including the UK that have bought up most of the vaccine supply “urgently need to start sharing these doses with the rest of the world, alongside national rollouts in their own countries, and through the Covax programme. And they must set out a timetable for how these donations will be increased as they vaccinate more of their populations domestically.”

[Writing in the Guardian](#), Farrar called on the UK to lead the world, through its presidency of the G7. “We have already vaccinated over half of our population – including those who are most at risk from Covid-19. In fact, the UK has given almost as many doses to its own citizens than Covax has been able to ship to 120 countries in dire need of jabs,” he said.

Covax, the UN-based initiative to get vaccines to the most vulnerable 20% of the population of every country, has [managed to deliver only a fifth of the doses](#) of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine expected by May, because of global shortages and problems with supply.

One in four people in high-income countries are now protected but only one in 500 in low-income countries, where unvaccinated health workers are still putting their lives on the line. The US has announced it will give India 60m doses of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine, which is not yet licensed for use in the US.

Farrar said sharing vaccines was in every country’s self-interest. “The shores Covid now rages upon may seem distant to some, but the reality is that so long as the virus continues to spread in other countries, it continues to be a threat to everyone. If we allow Covid-19 to keep spreading, it will go on evolving, increasing the risk of new variants that could cross borders and evade vaccines and treatments.”

Farrar's views are shared by other leading scientists in the UK, as well as the World [Health](#) Organization's director general, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, who has talked of the "moral outrage" of vaccines for rich countries but not the poor and called for countries to share.

Prof Andrew Pollard, the director of the Oxford Vaccine Group, said the UK needed to get to the point where all adults are vaccinated, but added: "Globally, leaders need to be saying how can we make sure that the world's population is not dying in front of us, which we are seeing at the moment.

"If we continue to focus on vaccinating younger and younger age groups in the high income countries, when there are many thousands of people dying who are not getting the vaccine. I don't think that's a situation that's acceptable. So, if the question to me is, should we be rethinking where we are. I think the answer is yes, we should be, because the only way that we can stop those people dying next month is by vaccinating them this month."

The grim scenes playing out in India are increasing the pressure on rich countries to act. Polly Roy, professor of virology at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM), said: "The Covid-19 situation in India is currently uncontrollable. India needs to vaccinate as many people as possible to stop the transmission of this virus.

"We must share our vaccines with them to control further infection and death. Vaccination is key to controlling every aspect of Covid going forward, for India and for all of us."

Prof Beate Kampmann, the director of LSHTM's vaccine centre, said the UK had ordered five times the amount of vaccines it needed for its population. Rather than give vaccines to the under-30s whose risk is low in pursuit of some concept of herd immunity, politicians should give them to the most vulnerable people in India and other countries to save lives.

"As far as the UK is concerned, I think the kind of approach of going for what we think is an elusive concept of herd immunity rather than sharing vaccines across the globe to prevent deaths is a huge mistake," she said.

Some argue that vaccines will not help those who are suffering now in India's hospitals for want of treatment. "But that doesn't mean there are not other places, including in India, where vaccines can have a rapid life-saving impact," she said.

Dr Michael Head, a senior research fellow in global health at Southampton University, said he liked the idea of a "tithe" for countries such as the UK, put forward by Prof Gavin Yamey of the Duke Global Health Institute in the US. For every nine vaccines given in the UK, one would be donated to Covax.

"The UK is in the enviable position of having vaccinated virtually all of our elderly and vulnerable populations and other priority groups such as healthcare workers. It would be very reasonable to suggest that some of the vaccine rollout now be distributed internationally to countries of high need," said Head.

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[Coronavirus](#)

Coronavirus live news: India deaths pass 200,000; crisis needs global response – Fauci

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2021.04.28 - Spotlight

- ['Bras are a curse!' How lockdown changed readers' views of their breasts](#)
- ['They're playing chicken' Inside Mark Zuckerberg and Tim Cook's feud](#)
- [Xernona Clayton The civil rights legend who befriended a KKK leader – and changed his mind](#)
- ['What if Superman was your dad?' Comics legend Mark Millar on Jupiter's Legacy](#)
- [The nature of ... The singing fish: it glows green during courtship and looks like Boris Johnson's hardship face](#)
- ['It's about curiosity' Mastermind's youngest champion reflects on his victory](#)
- ['Warm, kind, wise and brilliant' Guardian writers remember Kakoli Bhattacharya](#)
- [Nature on the doorstep 10 of the best rural glamping hideaways in Britain](#)

[How to live now](#) Women

‘Bras are a curse!’ How lockdown changed readers’ views of their breasts

A year since the pandemic started, women’s bodies and habits have changed. Here they discuss underwiring, sleep underwear, and how going bra-free helps with polymastia



‘Covid made it possible for me to go braless for an entire year’ (posed by model). Photograph: Anetlanda/Getty Images/iStockphoto

‘Covid made it possible for me to go braless for an entire year’ (posed by model). Photograph: Anetlanda/Getty Images/iStockphoto

[Guardian readers](#)

Wed 28 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

‘Lockdown has released me from the bra’

I was a teen in the 70s and morphed into a feminist. I find bras hideously uncomfortable; I only started wearing one in 2018 when I went back to work and the lack of confidence that often besieges women over 60 made me too self-conscious to face the public bra-free. Lockdown has released me from the bra, and the job, and I doubt I'll wear one again. **Jackie, writer, Midlands**

‘Underwired bras now seem an unkind way to treat my body’

Underwired bras were my staple. That all changed in lockdown. I lost my job and within a few weeks had decided to retrain as a personal trainer. I've spent the past year [in a sports bra](#). The rigidity and harshness of a wire now seems like an unkind way to treat my body. And lockdown has taught me a lot about being kinder. Recently I found a lump in my breast. Fortunately, it was nothing serious, but as I sat in the hospital waiting for the results of the tests, I knew some of the other women sitting with me would not be so lucky. That rather frightening experience further reinforced my appreciation for my little breasts as they are, and I'll carry on being kind to them. **Gabrielle O'Hare, personal trainer, Manchester**

‘Gravity hasn't had the drastic effect I feared’

I don't wear a bra when I am at home or working in my studio. A year ago I said: ‘If this lockdown carries on for any length of time, my boobs will be down at my waist!’ But gravity hasn't had as drastic effect as I feared (yet). **Anonymous, Scotland**

[Ethical undies: from bamboo bras to peace silk pants](#)
[Read more](#)

‘Given the culture of my island, nipples would cause havoc’

I used to always need underwiring, since I'm top-heavy. Post-pandemic, I have given up wearing bras at home and only wear them when out. I wish

bras weren't necessary, but given the culture of my little island, nipples would cause pure havoc, car crashes and maybe even something tabled in parliament. It's interesting, given that photographs of native women before colonial rule include bare-chested women. How these notions of covering up integrated into our society is something I ponder often. Bras are a curse!
Minal Wickrematunge, designer and artist, Sri Lanka

‘Perhaps I’ll never wear one again’

Bra-wearing was always an uncomfortable thing for me. Since I fed my three children, my breasts have grown to a size that made not wearing a bra an impossibility. However, I suffer from polymastia and the third breast that developed into a complete breast after breastfeeding is directly under the right breast, exactly where the lower band of a bra normally rests. Covid made it possible for me to go braless for an entire year and I don't regret it. Perhaps I'll never wear one again. **Elaine, teacher, Germany**

‘I have bought a lot of new bras this year’

I seem to have bought more bras this year than any year previously – all sports bras, bralettes and sleep bras. Isn't it funny how you think you are the master of your own actions, only to realise you're part of a much bigger wave? **Helen Berry, Cambridgeshire**



Photograph: Galina Zhigalova/Getty Images/EyeEm

‘I have ventured back into underwired bras’

Before lockdown I had a partner and I had a selection of underwired bras. The relationship became more strained through the early weeks of lockdown, and we eventually withdrew from each other. Then I found a breast lump in June, and was swiftly referred and diagnosed with cancer. I had surgery in August, and spent three months recovering. My only possible bras were post-surgical ones. These are functional, old-lady-style garments.

Since the new year, I have re-measured my assets (still intact) and gradually ventured into some smooth textured, but now underwired, rather more attractive bras. I find I feel more secure in a sleep bra at night, and sometimes I keep it on a couple of hours in the mornings. After all, there’s now no one else to please, which is a shame ... **Janet, retired lecturer, Leeds**

‘A good bra is a fundamental part of feeling good’

Before my son was born, it was always my intention to breastfeed, so in the run-up to the birth, I bought an assortment of nursing bras in varying sizes with a view to being ready for anything. All the baby advice tells you that your breasts will change, but what it doesn't say is that they will change week-on-week and nothing will ever fit consistently. I think it's safe to say I hated the nursing bras! Chronically uncomfortable, with lumps and rolls in the fabric. I finished breastfeeding just a few weeks ago and I cannot tell you the utter bliss and luxury of finally being able to wear a wired bra again.

I've come to realise that a good bra is a fundamental part of feeling good. In many ways, the pandemic has helped me avoid the stress of going out in an uncomfortable bra, knowing that I didn't look right, in other ways it has helped me realise the bizarre way in which it brings structure to life. Good bra on, ready for the day. Bad bra on, things just aren't right. **Vanessa Scanlan, information analyst for the NHS, Essex**

‘Going braless was an act of rebellion’

My underwired bras must think I'm dead. When quarantine began I immediately stopped wearing them. I wore sports bras at first, then went full braless for six or seven months (I'm a 36E so this was an act of utter rebellion). Being totally braless wasn't great for working from home; Zoom calls aside, I never felt like I transitioned from lounge time to work time. So, I finally splurged on two bralettes made for bigger chests. I guess the physical constraint helps remind me that I'm "in the office", so to speak. **Alicia, New York**

[A hard day's nightie: will lockdown change the way we dress forever?](#)
[Read more](#)

‘Lockdown made me realise that boobs aren't everything’

I have no boobs, hence I wear a bra – so I gain some. But lockdown has made me realise that boobs aren't everything and I've spent all my life persecuted by hammocks that just give me pain. One benefit of having no boobs – everyone always looks me in the eyes. **Jan Atkins, [graphic designer](#), Hammersmith**

'I dread going back to the daily bra'

I have proudly ditched my bra while working from home and I am sure my 32FF boobs have started to become firmer as they have had to hold themselves up. I dread going back to daily bra-wearing and recoil as I remember the pain it caused me. Societal norms be damned. **Anonymous, London**

'I stopped wearing bras altogether'

I live in a fairly conservative city on the Muslim-majority island of Java. I was specifically told before moving here that it's considered socially unacceptable for women's nipples to show through clothes. This worked fine for the first year I lived there, but once the pandemic started and I wasn't leaving my apartment, I stopped wearing bras altogether. On a humid, 35C day, the last thing you want is a heavy cotton bra collecting your boob sweat. Now that the city is reopening, I am daunted by the prospect of going back to daily bras. I'm actually looking into moving to a less conservative island, just to get away from this pressure to cover up. **Sydney Michelle, teacher and writer, Yogyakarta, Indonesia**



‘I dread going back to daily bra-wearing.’ Photograph: dannikonov/Getty Images/iStockphoto

‘Bra-wearers put up with daily nuisance’

The way I think about bras has changed. Why don’t more of them fasten at the front?! It’s really awkward to strap yourself into and fasten them at the back, especially if you’ve got physical issues. It’s not until you stop and think about it that you realise its just another daily nuisance that bra-wearers put up with. Maybe it’s a structural thing, but human beings have built impossible structures before – bridges, tunnels, extraordinary hats – so surely all it needs is someone to take on the challenge. Maybe bridges are just considered of greater importance than the everyday comfort of more than half the adult population. **Anonymous**

‘I became obsessed with finding the right bra’

Lockdown was an absolute godsend for me in the underwear department, as I was recovering from a single mastectomy in September 2019, followed by radiotherapy, which effectively toasted my chest wall and has left me with constant soreness and pain. There was such pressure to undergo reconstructive surgery following the removal of a breast, but I was always

adamant that I didn't want a Frankenboob, so I elected to go flat on my left side.

Enter the world of “foobs” – hospital discharge triangular cushions, realistic NHS silicon breasts, lovingly hand-knitted knockers – a myriad of false breasts, none of which I quite got on with. I spent hundreds of pounds on specialist bras with rigid upholstery that gripped my chest wall like an iron band. Following Facebook groups' recommendations, I tried cheapo supermarket cropped tops.

My life had become an obsession with finding the right bra. Then lockdown came, and with it the opportunity to dress for comfort rather than to satisfy the constant pressure to disguise my missing breast. Gradually, I became more and more confident about spending time without a boob. I started going boobless around the house with my family, then gradually started introducing short shopping trips and family walks, and within months I had given up on post-surgical bras and foobs altogether.

[Cup half full: the lingerie brands ditching padding and underwire](#)
[Read more](#)

I came to realise how much pain and inconvenience I had been putting myself through to make myself look “normal” so “nobody would ever know” and “you can't tell”. I've had breast cancer. I can tell. I do still know. I am in daily pain. I don't conform to a “body normal” standard any more. I am an amputee. I shouldn't have to hide it. Lockdown gave me the chance to come to terms with this, and to mentally adjust at my own pace, for which I shall be forever grateful. **Anonymous, Scotland**

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[Mark Zuckerberg](#)

‘They’re playing chicken:’ inside Mark Zuckerberg and Tim Cook’s feud

Tensions between Facebook and Apple have been growing, but is it just an attempt to get ahead of US antitrust regulators?



Facebook and Google have been at odds on several occasions in recent years, often over consumer privacy and Apple’s app store policies. Photograph: Eric Risberg/AP

Facebook and Google have been at odds on several occasions in recent years, often over consumer privacy and Apple’s app store policies. Photograph: Eric Risberg/AP

[Kari Paul](#) in San Francisco

Wed 28 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

A longstanding feud between [Mark Zuckerberg](#) and Tim Cook could come to a head this week, as a highly-anticipated Apple operating system update

will for the first time allow users to opt out of cross-platform tracking.

Tensions between [Facebook](#) and Apple have been growing for some time, but the new operating system threatens to kneecap Facebook's business model, and has turned up the heat, said Ari Lightman, a professor of digital media and marketing at Carnegie Mellon University's Heinz College.

"They are at each other's throats," he said of Zuckerberg and Cook in recent months. "The issues have been different over the years, but consumer privacy is always at the heart of it, and with this update, Facebook could be in trouble."

Apple's new iOS update allows users to see what information companies collect about them and opt out of such data collection. This is bad news for Facebook, whose business model [is 99% advertising](#) based on such data collection.

[Is big tech now just too big to stomach?](#)

[Read more](#)

Facebook has described the update as an attack on small businesses that rely on its advertising models – even releasing a [number of television commercials](#) on the matter – while Apple has positioned itself as a privacy savior. Neither of those narratives is exactly accurate, said Gautam Hans, an intellectual property and privacy law professor at Vanderbilt University.

"It's more about control of the industry," he said. "Apple is a company very focused on controlling its own products and services, and they view Facebook as undermining that."

On Tuesday, a Wall Street Journal report [showed](#) Apple's own ad products may benefit from the new update that disadvantages Facebook.

Shots fired

The update from Apple is the latest roadblock for Facebook, but the two companies have been at odds on several occasions in recent years, often over consumer privacy and Apple's app store policies.

In perhaps his earliest Facebook-related commentary, Cook [warned in 2014](#) about tech companies that profit from collecting user data, encouraging users to “follow the money” to see if they should be “worried” about what apps they are using without naming Facebook directly.

The Apple CEO took a more direct shot at Facebook in 2018. Asked in an interview [what he would do](#) about Facebook’s Cambridge Analytica scandal if he ran Facebook, Cook responded he “wouldn’t be in this situation”.

In an interview with Ezra Klein, Zuckerberg dismissed Cook’s comments as [“extremely glib” and “not at all aligned with the truth”](#). He also told staffers in private that Facebook should “inflict pain” on Apple over the comments, according to the Wall Street Journal.

They are playing a game of chicken and nobody is willing to cede their side

Jennifer King

The companies’ frustrations reached a bigger stage last year, when the CEOs traded complaints during hearings on antitrust issues in the US Congress. In July 2020, Zuckerberg argued in front of lawmakers that Apple’s iMessage [holds a large market share](#) for the messaging space, deflecting from Facebook’s own dominance. Last week, in a conversation with the former Vox technology journalist Casey Newton, Zuckerberg argued that the fees Apple charges creators stifles the economy.

“I’ve been pretty vocal that I think some of the app store policies hurt the creative economy, especially during Covid taking a 30% tax from small businesses that have had to move online, is tough,” Zuckerberg said.

‘They’re playing a game of chicken’

According to Jennifer King, a fellow at the Stanford Institute for Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence, it’s important to see the rift between Facebook and Apple against the backdrop of a new push from US lawmakers to regulate big tech.

“This is much more about trying to get ahead of regulators potentially going down this path they can’t control, even if it doesn’t have a dramatic impact on their revenue,” she said.

“They are playing a game of chicken and nobody is willing to cede their side,” she added. Apple declined to comment on the issue.

Dani Lever, a spokeswoman from Facebook said the fight is about much more than advertising dollars. From the start, Facebook and Apple have put forward very different ideas of the internet – Facebook championing ad-supported, free services and Apple preferring subscription-based or hardware profit-supported models

“This is not about two companies – this is about the future of the free internet,” Lever said. “[Apple] claims this is about privacy but it is really about profit, and we’re joining others to point out Apple’s hypocrisy and anti-competitive behavior.”

The back-and-forth between the companies comes at a time of unprecedented legislation aimed at big tech. In January, it was reported that Facebook [has been preparing](#) an antitrust lawsuit against Apple over its App Store rules.

Ultimately the changes amount to power moves and little else, said Lia Holland, a spokesperson at digital rights group Fight for the Future, as the two companies have drastically different business models: Facebook’s business model relies on collecting data on users and selling it to advertisers, she explained. Apple’s business model relies primarily on selling expensive devices to people, meaning it has no need to rely on data like its competitors do.

Interestingly, both companies are due to report their first quarter earnings of 2021 on Wednesday.

The changes to these business models would not be happening if the two companies were not currently at the center of an antitrust battle with regulators, Holland added.

“[Amid] increasing scrutiny on tech giants’ manipulation of our digital lives, Apple is throwing Facebook under the bus to try and claim that its App Store monopoly protects customers from much-maligned surveillance capitalism,” she said.

“We’re watching the latest toss in a game of PR hot-potato between two tech giants that feel the anti-monopoly hammer coming down – the only difference is that this time, everyday people’s rights benefit,” Holland said.

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

Xernona Clayton: the civil rights legend who befriended a KKK leader – and changed his mind

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[Superhero TV](#)

Interview

‘What if Superman was your dad?’ Comics legend Mark Millar on Jupiter’s Legacy

[Hanna Flint](#)



Boomers v millennials ... Jupiter’s Legacy. Photograph: Alamy

Boomers v millennials ... Jupiter’s Legacy. Photograph: Alamy

The Kick-Ass and Kingsman creator is back with a TV series about a warring super-powered family. The Scot reveals how Carrie Fisher helped inspire it – and why he’s delighted Covid scuppered his move to Hollywood

Wed 28 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

Mark Millar is remembering one of the best bits of advice he ever came across, something he read as a teenager that was said by [Alan Moore](#), the legendary creator of such milestones in comics as Watchmen and V for

Vendetta. “Never believe that you’re a genius,” quotes Millar, himself the creator of such revered titles as Kick-Ass and Kingsman, “and also never believe you’re rubbish.” Speaking by Zoom from the office he keeps in his Glasgow home, Millar rounds this off with the words: “You’ve just got to do your best and enjoy it.”

It’s a healthy rule to live by, given the sometimes toxic fandom that surrounds the comics world. Millar, whose only dream as a five-year-old was to write superhero adventures, has experienced this vitriol a fair few times. That’s no surprise, considering the Scot’s habit of chewing up and spitting out the expectations of the genre.

For DC, he reimagined the origin story of Superman, crashlanding his spaceship in the Soviet Union rather than Kansas. He thinks Michael B Jordan, who was supervillain Erik Killmonger in Black Panther, would make a great Superman (Jordan’s also the favourite for JJ Abrams’ own reboot). Then, at [Marvel](#), Millar helped pull the company back from the brink thanks, in part, to the success of his brutal reinvention of The Avengers as The Ultimates. This was as much a critique of superhero archetypes as it was a dig at American post-9/11 neo-conservatism, with the team reinvented as band of super-soldiers directing their fists at the war on terror. In The Ultimates 2, Bruce Banner is publicly outed as the Hulk and blamed for hundreds of deaths, while Thor is locked up after apparently developing mental-health issues.



Young blood ... Andrew Horton as Brandon. Photograph: Alamy

Millar, a long-time Labour party member and a [Brexit supporter](#), has often woven political commentary into his work, but he was rather surprised to receive thank-you letters from readers who were inspired to join the army and go off to fight in the Middle East. “People missed the entire point of the story,” he laughs.

When I told Carrie Fisher she inspired one character, she said: 'That's very interesting – now go get me another drink'

If nothing else, this is evidence of how far Millar has come. “I started off doing stuff for seven-year-olds: Superman Adventures at DC. People were saying, ‘He’s the guy who does the junior stuff.’ So then I did something a bit more shocking to lose that reputation. The stuff I’m doing now is incredibly different to what I was doing five years ago, which is different from five years before that. When people have me pegged as something, it’s good to completely wrong-foot them.”

Well aware of the popularity of his work – written and drawn with a cinematic eye that makes it perfect for the big screen – Millar grew tired of work-for-hire rates and went solo, setting up his own imprint. By 2010, the Scot was working full time on Millarworld, which now boasts more than 20

titles. This brings us to Jupiter's Legacy, the first Millarworld franchise to be adapted for TV, and the first to be released by Netflix, which [bought his company for £24.8m](#) in 2017.

Jupiter's Legacy is based on Millar and artist Frank Quitely's 2013 cross-generational saga about rifts in a super-powered family, whose conflicting politics and ideologies manifest themselves as a global power struggle, causing significant collateral damage. "People expected it to be like [Kick-Ass](#) or Kingsman," he says, "which are quite nihilistic, really violent and ironic, whereas this show is very sincere. [Kick-Ass](#) is a pastiche of superheroes, but Jupiter's Legacy is a love letter. The big question is: is it ethically correct, if you have the power to save the world, to stand back and do nothing?"



Power struggle ... Tenika Davis as Petra Small in Jupiter's Legacy. Photograph: Steve Wilkie/Netflix

Millar grew up on a council estate in Coatbridge on the edge of Glasgow, the youngest of five siblings. To this day, he still visits and reinvests in the community through his charitable foundation. "I just love it," he says. "There's 6,000 people, 1,000 houses, five shops and a pub. And I know everyone out there."

He credits a brother for introducing him to comics – his first was [The Amazing Spider-Man issue No 121](#). By the age of 18, however, he had put his dreams of writing his own on hold to study Politics and Economics at Glasgow University. When his father died, four years after his mother, he could no longer finance his studies, so dropped out to make his childhood ambition a reality.

While the 51-year-old still lives in Glasgow, with his wife Lucy and his two youngest daughters, a move south to Surrey is now in the pipeline. “Last year, we did plan to move to California but coronavirus happened. We had a house and everything.” Being cut off from everyone during the pandemic made him change his mind. “It lost its appeal and I want to stay in the UK.”

It also made him realise what has been the key to his writing success. “Don’t move to Hollywood!” he says. “Stay where you came from – because all those little things that came together and made you who you are – they’re unique to you. If you move, as we were planning, then you’re just going to be hanging out with other guys who do the same thing you do. It brings something to the job if you can reflect the real world as opposed to reflecting on it.”



Ultraviolent irony ... Aaron Johnson-Taylor and Chloe Grace Moretz in Kick-Ass 2. Photograph: Allstar/Universal Pictures/Sportsphoto

So he will continue to work from the UK: after selling up to [Netflix](#), a deal Lucy (also his business partner) made happen, he was taken on as president of its “Mark Millar division” – which, he says, felt like selling your house for a fortune and then being handed back the keys. “I don’t have the same autonomy I had, but I talk to other execs every day and decide which directors and showrunners we’ll interview. I read every script and give notes. I was watching cuts of Jupiter’s Legacy and sending in suggestions. I didn’t realise what a massive control freak I am, but my name is at the front of the credits. I want it to be good.”

The series contains what Millar calls a “boomer versus millennial argument”. This is reflected mostly through the Sampson family: Sheldon (AKA The Utopian) and Grace (AKA Lady Liberty) are the elder, age-defying leaders of The Union, a paramilitary team that has symbolised the American ideal ever since they gained their superpowers during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Cut to the present day and we find their children, Chloe and Brandon, are increasingly disillusioned by their parents’ code and expectations. “Superman is the best guy you could possibly have,” says Millar, “but imagine if he was your dad? That’s the idea with The Utopian, who the whole world loves. But what does that mean for your children? Because the pressures are incredible.”

Star Wars, King Kong and Roman mythology were influences – as was Carrie Fisher. “I remember reading [Wishful Drinking](#) and Carrie saying her mum was Debbie Reynolds and her dad was Eddie Fisher – and, even though she was Princess Leia, she felt she could never live up to them.” Millar met Fisher at the bar during a Star Wars: The Force Awakens premiere in 2015. When he excitedly told her she was the inspiration for Chloe, the late actor’s response was decidedly nonchalant. “She was like, ‘That’s very interesting – now go get me another drink.’”



‘I just love it’ ... Mark Millar in Coatbridge. Photograph: Michael McGurk/Alamy

So, was the superhero Sampson family at all inspired by his own? Millar’s eldest daughter Emily, from a previous relationship, is an artist who recently released her own original comic – and designed a cover for an issue of [Hit-Girl](#), the ultra-violent vigilante tween from Kick-Ass she partly inspired. But Millar believes he’s the complete opposite of the superhero patriarch he created. “The Utopian’s idea with his daughter is, ‘I want you to do what I did and I’m going to choose your path’ – which is the worst thing a parent can do. I don’t think you create a healthy individual or a great artist by forcing them to do it. Jupiter’s Legacy is almost like a warning: don’t do this to your kid.”

Millar has slowly moved away from writing mostly male stories where people spend their time “shooting each other and climbing walls”. By the time his third daughter arrived, most of the lead characters in his creations – from Reborn to Hit-Girl, from Empress to The Magic Order – were women. “I was watching movies and shows with my daughters,” he says. “Maybe subconsciously, I was picking up all of these Hannah Montana facts. I liked the idea of doing stuff my kids would be interested in, so I found myself writing female characters.”

He recently read Jupiter's Legacy to his nine-year-old, skipping the more "scary" panels. When she asked to watch the TV series, he promised she could – "in about six years' time". Clearly, Millar's edge hasn't been completely blunted: Jupiter's Legacy promises to echo such recent TV series as Falcon and the Winter Soldier, The Punisher and The Boys, which adopt a more brutal depiction of violence even as their leads are positioned as symbols of hope. And, increasingly, heroes are being celebrated by audiences because of their flaws as much as their greatness.

[WandaVision women's acceptance of grief is what makes them truly super](#)
[Read more](#)

"Superhero stories, and I think comic books in general, are about being our best possible selves," says Millar. "But they need to go through a lot before they can be a hero. The hero story in Jupiter's Legacy is one of these kids realising there's honour in public service – just stepping up when it looks like there's no hope. This is the classic hero's journey. It never goes out of fashion and it feels great, as an audience, to see someone fulfil this, because it appeals to the best aspect of ourselves."

Despite this, he says, providing inspiration is not his priority. It's just a bonus. "Entertainment," he says, "has one function: to entertain. Whether something is filled with hope, is incredibly nihilistic, frightening or moving, I just want to be entertained. Superhero stuff rises to the challenge. And every year, they are trying something new – which is why it's thriving."

- [Jupiter's Legacy](#) is on Netflix from 7 May.

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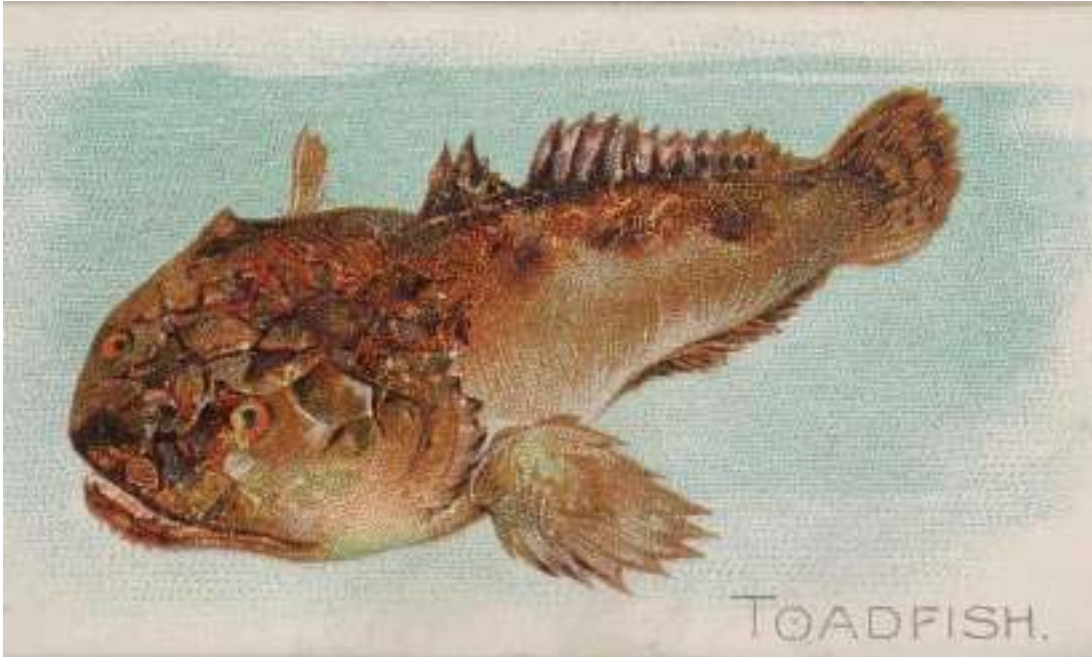
The nature of ...Fish

A singing fish: it glows green during courtship and looks like Boris Johnson's hardship face

[Helen Sullivan](#)



People were uncertain the fish existed, until citizen scientists made an underwater recording



In California, houseboat residents heard the sound and thought it was produced by navy experiments or aliens. Fortunately, it was the “plainfin midshipman”, a species of toadfish. Photograph: Hamza Khan/Alamy

In California, houseboat residents heard the sound and thought it was produced by navy experiments or aliens. Fortunately, it was the “plainfin midshipman”, a species of toadfish. Photograph: Hamza Khan/Alamy

Tue 27 Apr 2021 13.30 EDT

If, at midnight, you stick your oar into the water of the lagoon near Kallady Bridge in Batticaloa, on Sri Lanka’s east coast, you might hear fish sing. It sounds, [according to Prince Casinader](#), who was a former local MP moonlighting as a journalist, “like a man idly playing on the keys of a piano. Bass notes and treble notes. Or like someone rubbing a finger around the rim of a wet wine glass.”

For a while, people were uncertain about whether the fish really existed. In a 2017 Trip Advisor [review](#) of singing fish tours organised by a local hotel, the tourist writes, “The Sound was there and we listened by placing the ear-end of the Oar ... in water. And in one spot we heard it even without listening through the oars. It was an amazing experience.” The hotel’s owner responds: “Even though a lot of people know Batticaloa as the ‘Land of the Singing Fish’ most of them including locals think it is a legend and no truth

to it. I heard it first when I was around 12 almost 30 years ago and after the long disruption due to the civil war people forgot about it and it slipped into distant memory.”

[A donkey: ‘Better to be born a limpet in the sea than a load bearing donkey’](#)
[| Helen Sullivan](#)
[Read more](#)

A few years earlier, a group of citizen scientists who call themselves the Science Navigators, set out to see if they could record the fish – they had found musical notation of a recording of the fish taken in the 1950s and since lost, so the fish were surely real. They dropped a waterproof microphone into the lagoon and [there it was](#): deep whomps and reedy notes. Like frogs, but less croaky. You can listen from the bridge, too, if you press your ears against its iron pillars.

In an interview for a documentary about the fish, one of the Science Navigators, cardiologist Arulnithy Kanagasingam, says, “I have no knowledge of music. So what I can hear is a good sound, it’s not a disturbing sound.” He says that they have seen references to similar singing in California.

There, [according to the Christian Science Monitor](#), houseboat residents heard the sound and thought that it was produced by navy experiments or aliens. Fortunately, it was “plainfin midshipman”, a species of toadfish that glows green during courtship and looks like [Boris Johnson’s hardship face](#). The fish produce the sound by “vibrating a gas-filled bladder within the abdomen”.

In 2014, scientists discovered that fish, like people, raise their voices when their environment gets noisier. In other words, as Emily Anthes writes in one of my favourite science articles of all time, [they shout](#). The scientists were investigating the effects of the noises humans have introduced to water – ferries, cargo ships, sonar and drilling – on the creatures that live there. In order to test how fish were adapting to the brouhaha, an ecologist and her doctoral student placed blacktail shiners, a type of minnow, into a tank. The male shiners are known to growl. When white noise was played in the tank, the fish, instead of moving closer, growled more loudly.

I thought about shouting fish and singing fish recently while watching an opera – La Traviata – performed on the water in Sydney harbour. My husband and I had bought tickets using the government vouchers given to the good people of the state of New South Wales to encourage us to “Dine and Discover” in the name of post-pandemic recovery. The opera had offered to double the value of the vouchers (give a man \$25 and he will watch a simple movie. Teach a man to double his voucher money etc etc). Speaking of post-pandemic recovery, scientists (and fish) are [hoping the economic devastation has left the seas quieter](#).

The singers performed on a tilted square-shaped stage, like a large paper napkin suspended on the water, over which hung a giant chandelier. They sang of “love, the pulse of the whole world” and “cruel fate” as the moon moved from stage left to stage right and bats squeaked and chirped – more loudly than usual, I suspect – in the giant fig trees overhead.

“[The Nature of](#) ... ” is a column by Helen Sullivan dedicated to interesting animals, insects, plants and natural phenomena. Is there an intriguing creature or particularly lively plant you think would delight our readers? Let us know on Twitter [@helenrsullivan](#) or via email: helen.sullivan@theguardian.com

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BBC

‘It’s about curiosity’: Mastermind’s youngest champion reflects on his victory

Jonathan Gibson, 24, says practice makes perfect for quiz success



Jonathan Gibson: ‘I wouldn’t say that it really has anything to do with intelligence in a classical way.’ Photograph: BBC/PA

Jonathan Gibson: ‘I wouldn’t say that it really has anything to do with intelligence in a classical way.’ Photograph: BBC/PA



[Ben Quinn](#)

[@BenQuinn75](#)

Tue 27 Apr 2021 14.32 EDT

He is the youngest ever winner of Mastermind, who charmed the nation the morning after his win was broadcast by bursting into song on breakfast television.

But Jonathan Gibson describes himself as the history-loving “black sheep” of a family of lawyers and insists that the secret to quizzing lies in practice, not brain power.

“I wouldn’t say that it really has anything to do with intelligence in a classical way. It’s about curiosity and just continuing to do quizzes whenever you can,” says the 24-year-old, who was crowned as Mastermind champion 2021 on the last ever episode to be hosted by [John Humphrys](#).

['I've started ... now I'll finish': John Humphrys to quit Mastermind after 18 years](#)

[Read more](#)

The student, who is studying a PhD in modern history at the University of St Andrews, won by four points in the grand final – scoring a perfect 11/11 in his specialist subject on comedy songwriting duo Flanders and Swann.

Having grown up listening to the duo's songs, which his father played to him on car journeys, he welcomed the prospect of a revival of interest in the work of the stars, who had their heyday in the 1950s and 60s.

“I love the idea of more people rediscovering them to be honest and if that's a consequence of winning Mastermind then that would be great,” says Gibson, whose delivery of a classic Flanders and Swann song after an impromptu invitation on to [BBC](#) Breakfast has helped seal his persona as one of the more memorable Mastermind champions of recent times.

Reflecting at home in Glasgow on a “surreal” aftermath to the final, he says: “The reaction has been overwhelmingly positive but the best bit really has been hearing from people who I haven't seen or heard from for a while but who have been getting in touch to say: ‘Well done.’”

□□□□

24 year old Jonathan Gibson is the youngest Mastermind Champion, after a perfect score in his specialist subject , the comedy song-writing duo Flanders and Swann.

He gave [#BBCBreakfast](#) a little rendition of one of his favourites.<https://t.co/8CzhhjnsOh> pic.twitter.com/zWrwcUVklg

— BBC Breakfast (@BBCBreakfast) [April 27, 2021](#)

He was also taking satisfaction from sharing his success with what he described as the “wider quizzing community”, which has grown after more people took part in Zoom contests, though Gibson's involvement long predates its expansion.

“I can't remember a time when I did not love quizzing as a pastime,” Gibson says. “Watching The Weakest Link and shouting out the answers was part of

growing up.

“But I do also think of when I was in senior school and took part in a tournament that was based on the rules of University Challenge and which I did for about six years running. I remember doing it and realising that this was something I was unusually good at. I was so used to sport, which I wasn’t so good at, and loved the idea that here was something I could compete at and take on people who were older than me.”

The Mastermind win had been kept under wraps for four months since the final was filmed with only Gibson’s immediate family being in on the secret, though he says: “I think my mum couldn’t resist telling a few friends.”

When it came to the broadcast on Monday night, he invited some old school friends to enjoy it on a screen in the garden, where they watched him glide – seemingly without too much effort – to victory.

Asked if he had any regrets, he says there was a question about Greek letters. “If I was to have had 10 seconds to think about it I am pretty confident I would have got it but when you are in the chair you have to build up a rhythm, so you sort of end up answering with the first thing that comes into your head.”

Before the final, the student’s other specialist subjects throughout the competition were Agatha Christie’s Poirot in the heat and, in the semi-final, William Pitt the Younger.

He scored perfect scores on all three specialist subjects, as well as a perfect general knowledge score in his semi-final round, seeing him through to becoming the competition’s youngest-ever champion since the show began in 1972, a record previously held by Gavin Fuller in 1993.

He was planning to reimmerge himself in his first love of history as soon as he could turn off his phone on Tuesday, looking forward to finishing off a chapter on his PhD thesis about the rhetorical trope of “plain speaking” and its particular relevance to the language of Cromwellian politics.

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

[India](#)

‘Warm, kind, wise and brilliant’: Guardian writers remember Kakoli Bhattacharya

Our Delhi correspondents pay tribute to the Indian journalist and Guardian news assistant, who has died of Covid



Kakoli Bhattacharya, who has died aged 51, had worked as an assistant, translator and fixer for the Guardian since 2009.

Kakoli Bhattacharya, who has died aged 51, had worked as an assistant, translator and fixer for the Guardian since 2009.

Guardian staff

Tue 27 Apr 2021 11.04 EDT

Every Guardian south Asia correspondent over the past decade can remember the first time they met Kakoli Bhattacharya. A smart, brilliant and

tenacious journalist, Kakoli joined the Guardian in Delhi in 2009 as an assistant, translator and fixer – but the role she would play in the lives of all the correspondents who worked with her far outstripped her official duties.

On Saturday, Kakoli – who was known to her friends and family as Pui, meaning “birdsong” – [died in hospital of Covid-19](#). She was 51. Her death leaves a great absence. Here, Delhi correspondents past and present share their lasting memories of a much valued colleague and friend.

Jason Burke (south Asia correspondent 2009-2016)

I remember meeting Kakoli for the first time in a poor area of north Delhi where we were to work on an “honour killing” story. She was as enthusiastic, perceptive, warm and capable then, and was never any different through the six years we worked together. Switching effortlessly between any of her various languages, negotiating the wilder reaches of Indian bureaucracy with equal ease, chasing down contacts or stories, she was indispensable.

I remember her sitting with me on a *charpoy* in a village in Haryana, explaining in her calm, clever way all the local political and social dynamics, or a trip to find the family of a Uttar Pradesh hitman where we ended up talking to the killer himself in prison on a mobile phone.

Even as my own understanding of the region deepened, Kakoli never ceased to amaze me with her own profound knowledge. That she is no longer with us is a huge professional and personal loss for all the correspondents who owe her so much over the years.

Somehow she managed the Guardian’s demands with those of her very talented daughter. My thoughts are very much with her daughter, Khushi, and her husband, Himanshu.

Michael Safi (south Asia correspondent 2016-2019)

Covering India, you are bombarded with advice. But on one matter my predecessors in Delhi were unequivocal: work with Kakoli, and make sure she’s happy. They had learned what quickly would become clear to me too.

Whether by her steady demeanour, or her extraordinary ability to track down names and phone numbers, in a country that often challenged and perplexed Kakoli just made everything easier.

At one of our early meetings, I told Kakoli I had been utterly defeated by bureaucratic manoeuvring required to get a journalist's accreditation in Delhi. She arched an eyebrow. Why hadn't I told her earlier? She made a couple of phone calls, and I had the certificate within a week.



Kakoli with her son, Hriday

I got to see what Kakoli was really made of weeks later, when she managed to talk us into being allowed to stow away overnight with a group of “cow vigilantes”, young men who kept watch on trafficking routes between Indian states, on the pretext of preventing cows from being illegally smuggled to slaughterhouses.

It was not especially dangerous, though the men were armed and unpredictable, but Kakoli dismissed any suggestion that she might ride out the midnight patrol in the hotel. She never blinked, chatting throughout the night to the young men and their leaders, drawing out of them rich quotes and anecdotes that would find their way into the story. Later she confessed it was a hair-raising evening, but in the moment, she was pure steel and charm.

Kakoli tried to quit the Guardian around the time I arrived in 2016. She wanted to devote herself more fully to helping Khushi, her daughter, achieve her dream of representing India in badminton at the Olympics. She agreed to stay on the condition that we work around Khushi's training schedule. That was how we ended up holding editorial meetings at courtside, or how her son, Hriday, ended up translating for me during some stories in Delhi – Kakoli was away at a mountain training camp with Khushi.

Her husband, Himanshu, a water expert and activist, also became a regular source for Guardian stories on the vitally important topic. Kakoli made you feel like family, and seamlessly integrated her own family into the Guardian's work.

Hannah Ellis-Petersen (south Asia correspondent 2019-present)

I still remember arriving in India and within hours, the first person who had called was Kakoli. Did I have somewhere nice to stay? Had I eaten? Had Indian bureaucracy defeated me yet? I was feeling overwhelmed at the chaos of Delhi but Kakoli made me roar with laughter and instantly feel at home in my new city.

Her gifts as a journalist became clear the next morning when we worked on our first story together. I speculatively sent her an image from a newspaper of a woman bathing in a polluted river: did she know anyone who could speak about these scenes of Delhi's pollution? She replied a few minutes later with the name and telephone number of the woman in the picture. I still have no idea how she did it. But she never failed to find a contact, no matter how mysterious or obscure.

Kakoli had a knack of being such a charming, empathetic presence that even the most reluctant interviewees would open up to you when you worked with her. We were dispatched to find farmers who were illegally burning their fields in Punjab. For hours, our efforts were rebuffed but Kakoli was never to be defeated by a story. By the end of the day, we sat under a tree, playing cards and drinking chai with a group of farmers who had all joyfully confessed to Kakoli they had set fire to their fields a day earlier. On another

occasion, during a terribly sad story about the rape and murder of a nine-year-old in Rajasthan, Kakoli sat quietly and held the girl's weeping grandmother in her arms.



‘Her dedication was awe-inspiring’: Kakoli and her daughter, Khushi

Kakoli's deep knowledge of south Asia was indispensable, her belief in the power of journalism was unflinching and her warmth and kindness made her feel like family. Her dedication to her daughter Khushi's badminton career was also particularly awe-inspiring, especially as her commitment to the Guardian never faltered. We spoke almost every day and even when she told me that her fever was getting bad and her oxygen was dipping after being diagnosed with Covid, her only messages were to ask if I was doing OK. She was selfless and brilliant to the end. I will miss her every day.

Rebecca Ratcliffe (interim south Asia correspondent 2019)

I worked in Delhi only briefly but feel very lucky to have reported alongside Kakoli. She was incredibly driven and resourceful. No matter who we needed to track down, no matter the time of day or night, she somehow always found a way, and always with baffling speed.

Together we covered one of the most pressing human rights stories in India at that time – [Assam's National Register of Citizens](#) (NRC), which was designed to identify illegal immigrants. It was a bureaucratic nightmare, and threatened to make 2 million people in north-east India stateless.

Kakoli was warm, kind and wise, and that made her a brilliant journalist. People would open up to her – whether we were all sitting face-to-face or speaking over a crackling phone line.

Kakoli was also the most caring colleague. She would share her many stories of reporting across India. She would help guide your ideas. And, when you felt completely flustered and overwhelmed, she would tell you not to panic – the story will work out. She was both a skilled and determined journalist, and a true friend.

Annie Kelly (editor of the Guardian's Rights and Freedom reporting project)

I had the enormous privilege of working with Kakoli as a Guardian freelancer in India and for two weeks in 2009 making a documentary with her about honour killings, on which she worked as a local producer.

She was a great, talented, determined and tenacious journalist with an astonishing capacity for putting people at ease and an instinctive understanding of how to tell stories with clarity and compassion. She was also brilliantly funny, vivacious and kind (at one point holding my hand and feeding me boiled eggs she'd brought from home when I was sick on assignment). Even though I haven't seen her for over 10 years I've thought of her often.

Her deep love for her family was clear and my deepest condolences go to them at their enormous loss.

Glamping

10 of the best rural glamping hideaways in Britain



There's a strong Swedish vibe at Lilla Stugan in Worcestershire

There's a strong Swedish vibe at Lilla Stugan in Worcestershire

These fun, characterful boltholes with nature on the doorstep are featured in *Stay Wild*, a new book from Canopy & Stars

Wed 28 Apr 2021 01.30 EDT

Lilla Stugan, Alfrick Worcestershire

Standing in a 100-year-old apple orchard close to the Malvern Hills and on the edge of [Knapp and Papermill nature reserve](#), this house is the work of two generations of a family with Scandinavian heritage. There's a strong Swedish vibe: from the structure of the "little cottage" to the pine-lined interior and the red-and-blue colour scheme. In among the trees is a huge

firepit. It's a beautiful spot, with the orchard carpeted with meadow grasses in summer and its boughs heavy with fruit in autumn, and a gate leading straight on to the nature reserve.

Sleeps four from £120 a night

Big Sky Lookout, Crediton, Devon



Photograph: Canopy and Stars

Tranquillity pervades this woodsy cabin, particularly in summer, when guests can slide open the doors to let the countryside in. One of three hideaways on Hookhill Plantation, Big Sky Lookout is built from wooden boards: the exterior is a dark blue and the interior is composed of natural wood, with royal blue frames around the windows. Two swings hang from the nearest tree and, just beyond the deck, there's a tripod firepit for cooking. Step straight on to the [Two Moors Way](#), the long-distance trail that connects Exmoor and Dartmoor, or head to Dartmoor, for hiking and climbing. The retreat offers wildflower meadows in summer and come autumn, blackberries, sloes, greengages and elderberries can be foraged in the woodland. It's a haven for butterflies, birds, badgers, foxes, deer, and owls, too.

Sleeps two from £100 a night

Dragon Cruck, Meifod, Powys



This holiday home for two occupies a woodland spot overlooking the Vyrnwy valley in mid-Wales. Hand-crafted by owner Mike – a tree surgeon – and his team, everything from the shingle on the roof to the curvaceous crucks were made from locally sourced wood. Coupled with an outdoor kitchen, the place has an open feel to it, immersing guests in the woodland surroundings. It's a peaceful spot from which to observe the local wildlife, including ravens, jays, and woodpeckers, or to go wild swimming, hiking, and picnicking in the valley. Ask Mike for tips – he's also a mountain guide. *Sleeps two from £110 a night*

The Lake, Bodmin, Cornwall



Skirting the edge of a flooded former quarry in a little pocket of Bodmin Moor, a converted industrial container provides a base for exploring 486 hectares (1,200 acres) of open moorland, and beyond. Accessed via a half mile or so of rough track, the simply kitted-out container is off-grid, with solar panels powering the lighting and a woodburner keeping things cosy. Water for cleaning is pumped directly from the lake, and there's a hot supply in the showers behind the main space. For those who do venture further, on offer are miles of walking trails to nearby tors and day trips to the Cornish coast. At night, guests can await the spectacular show of stars above the moor.

Sleeps two from £120 a night

[Stargazer's Wagon](#), Shobdon, Herefordshire



On a ridge at one end of a large wildflower meadow, Stargazer's Wagon is off-grid and remote enough for guests to feel at one with nature. Raised on a wooden platform, the wagon faces south, with panoramic views across five counties. By day, there's plenty to explore in the surrounding countryside: walk to Shobdon church and arches, and at night light up the fire bowl and loll in a deck-side hot tub, watching dusk descend across the landscape. The spacious wagon is kitted out with a double bed, a leather sofa, a woodburner and fine fabrics in neutral colours. Guests can draw on a well-stocked kitchen, or tuck into a home-cooked welcome supper courtesy of owners Victoria and Chris (ask for prices when booking).

Sleeps two from £98 a night

Gwennol near Capel-y-ffin, Brecon Beacons



This hand-crafted shepherd's wagon, created by woodsman James Noble, is beside a stream in a glade in the Black mountains; the clearing is accessible only on foot or horseback, or by bike. A clay tagine for slow-cooking hangs over the firepit. Nearby are numerous hiking trails through the Brecon Beacons and a host of other outdoor activities, including pony trekking at Grange Trekking in the nearby village of Capel-y-ffin, and canoeing on the River Wye.

Sleeps four from £82 a night

Digital Detox Cabin, Saffron Walden, Essex



This small cabin overlooks the open Essex countryside on Rockells Farm, just outside Saffron Walden. The quiet, secluded hut, kitted out in a back-to-basics style, has a ban on digital devices: guests have to lock away their smartphones on arrival. To help city-dwellers cope with withdrawal symptoms, there's a box of pre-digital goodies that includes a Polaroid camera, a cassette player and postcards to send to the device-dependent friends and relatives guests have left behind. Visitors are free to roam the rural surroundings, stroll to the [Axe & Compasses in Arkesden](#) for a slow pint, or simply sit on the bench outside the cabin and do nothing.

Sleeps 2 from £130 a night

Humble Bee, Okehampton, Devon



A 15-minute walk from the north edge of Dartmoor national park , the Humble Bee is a beehive-shaped three-tier cabin. It sits in owner Yvette's landscaped gardens in a quiet corner of Okehampton. At the top of the "hive", a king-size bed is above the main space, while the landings below feature a kitchen area and a fireside corner for lounging. Dark wood panelling, a honeycomb feature wall, and thick furs provide a cosy vibe, but guests can also open the large doors and windows to let the woodland scenery in. A stone bath is carved into the rock outside.

Sleeps two from £150 a night

[The Beermoth](#), near Aviemore, Highlands



Not many people return from the Highlands having slept in a 1950's fire truck. Fewer still get to sweat it out in a horse-box sauna. But that's the charm of the Beermoth on the Micklethwaits' Inshriach Estate just outside Aviemore. The truck has oak parquet flooring salvaged from a Tudor mansion, a woodburner at one end and an elegant Victorian bed at the other. It makes for a rough-and-ready base from which to enjoy the estate – a haven for wildlife – as well as activities further afield, including white-water rafting at Rothiemurchus Estate and pony-trekking across the Spey valley from the Alvie Estate in Kincaig.

Sleeps two from £74 a night

Ferry Waiting Room, Lochearnhead, Stirling



Standing side by side with uninterrupted views of Balquhiddar Glen, a bothy and a redundant waiting room make for an incongruous pair. Each was once consigned to the scrapheap, before landing here as one half of this Highlands hideout, for which the interiors have undergone renovations to suit the personality of the exteriors. The waiting room is a bedroom for four and has whitewashed walls, sophisticated textiles and modern furnishings. The more rustic bothy, with its mishmash of plywood and tongue-and-groove walls, serves as a small kitchen and sitting room. In the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs national park, the hideout is a wildlife haven, with red squirrels, sparrowhawks, and red deer on the doorstep. When out and about, guests can climb Ben More or fish in nearby Lochs Voil or Doine – complimentary fishing permits are provided for guests.

Sleeps four from £145 a night

All places are featured in the Canopy & Stars book [Stay Wild: Cabins, Rural Getaways and Sublime Solitude](#) (Gestalten, £35), available from 29 April, and can be booked at canopyandstars.co.uk

2021.04.28 - Opinion

- In the court of King Boris, only one thing is certain: this will all end badly
- Political leaders must ensure Covid vaccines aren't the preserve of the rich
- No, Biden has not declared war on meat. But maybe that's what the world needs
- Boris Johnson needs some good PR. Why not borrow Turkmenistan's dog day?
- The G7 must act to end 'vaccine apartheid' or everyone in the world will suffer
- The politics sketch Drafted in to say nothing about anything, Thérèse Coffey finds her forte
- Decor without decorum – this is home economics, Johnson-style
- The media are allowing this government's cronyism and dishonesty to flourish

OpinionBoris Johnson

In the court of King Boris, only one thing is certain: this will all end badly

Rafael Behr



Brexit, Covid and the prime minister's character add up to a triple whammy that has upended the old ways of doing politics



‘The prime minister approaches truth the way a toddler handles broccoli.’
Boris Johnson visits a farm in Wrexham on Monday. Photograph:
WPA/Getty Images

‘The prime minister approaches truth the way a toddler handles broccoli.’
Boris Johnson visits a farm in Wrexham on Monday. Photograph:
WPA/Getty Images

Wed 28 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

Instead of a cabinet, Britain has courtiers. In place of a prime minister, there is a potentate. The traditional structures still exist, but as tributes to an obsolescent way of governing. There are still secretaries of state. But their place in the formal, constitutional hierarchy has little bearing on real power, which swirls in an unstable vortex of advisers and officials vying for [proximity to Boris Johnson’s throne](#).

The product of this arrangement is the acrid stew of scandal [leaking out of Downing Street](#) – a mixture of financial irregularities, reckless statecraft and vendetta, some of it involving the prime minister’s fiancée, just to complete the impression of Byzantine intrigue.

No 10 has always had informal cliques and “kitchen cabinets”. Prime ministers have commonly trusted advisers more than ministers. Alastair

Campbell was a mythic enforcer of Tony Blair's will when Dominic Cummings was splashing around at the political shallow end, advising (and [inevitably betraying](#)) Iain Duncan Smith. But the current situation is unprecedented for three reasons.

First, Brexit. There might have been a way to disengage Britain from the EU without defining the task as a project of total rupture from the past, requiring elimination of dissenting opinion. But that way was not chosen. Johnson embraced the revolutionary ethos, according to which institutional norms are dispensable. Compromise is weakness; victory is secure only when all the bridges are burnt.

Second, the pandemic. Lockdown involved parliament surrendering power on a scale unknown outside wartime. The government took quasi-authoritarian control, offering MPs only cursory debate in exchange. The strictures of social distancing denuded the Commons. Whips wield MPs' proxy votes by the bucketload. The claim that urgency trumps scrutiny might have been justified at the start of the emergency, but it became elastic, stretching across the full range of government business. Expediency morphed into a presumption that due diligence was optional and unnecessary when so much business could be done casually, [in the VIP contacts lane](#).

Third, Johnson's character. The prime minister approaches truth the way a toddler handles broccoli. He understands the idea that it contains some goodness, but it will touch his lips only if a higher authority compels it there. Everyone who has worked with him in journalism and politics describes a pattern of selfishness and unreliability. He craves affection and demands loyalty, but lacks the qualities that would cultivate proper friendship. The public bonhomie hides a private streak of brooding paranoia. Being incapable of faithfulness, he presumes others are just as ready to betray him, which they duly do, provoked by his duplicity.

Johnson is driven by a restless sense of his own entitlement to be at the apex of power and a conviction, supported by evidence gathered on his journey to the top, that rules are a trap to catch weaker men and honour is a plastic trophy that losers award themselves in consolation for unfulfilled ambition.

[Don't expect transparency in a government run by WhatsApp | Iain Overton](#)

[Read more](#)

Having such a personality at the heart of government makes a nonsense of unwritten protocol. Much of British politics proceeds by the observance of invisible rails guarding against the tyrannical caprices that formal constitutions explicitly prohibit. There is an accrued cultural expectation of democratic propriety, a self-policing code of conduct summarised by [historian Peter Hennessy](#) as the “good chap” theory of government.

It was never rigorous. All manner of hypocrisies flourish when a self-selecting elite chooses the boundaries of legitimate behaviour. But there were boundaries. Johnsonism has none. He does, however, meet the traditional ethnographic criteria for a good chap: white, Eton-educated, male. It is a camouflage of repute perfect for a pattern of fraud that would never have been tolerated so long by so many if it hadn't been perpetrated in the style, accent and idiom of England's ruling class.

Conservative MPs are not under any illusions about the man who leads them. They appointed a rogue as their king because they craved the success that his methods bring. It was inevitable that evidence of his unsuitability for the job would leak into the public domain, even if it takes a while for misrule to have an electoral consequence. The question pinging around Tory WhatsApp groups is how far the current furore reaches beyond Westminster. Do voters care about loans to do up the Downing Street flat? Do they believe that Johnson said he would rather see bodies “[pile high](#)” than impose a third lockdown?

Most are reserving judgment pending next week's local and devolved elections. If Tories poll well, the conclusion will be that Johnson's system still works. Whether it is a good system – whether a prime minister's popularity should erase qualms about his ethics – is a question that will be deferred until the next crisis.

That will come along soon enough. Downing Street is now a machine for generating vindictive enmity. Energies that should be spent on policy are consumed settling scores and lighting new fires to fight old ones. This is not a phase, nor is it an accident. It is a new mode of government being improvised because events flattened the old way. The court of King Boris

combines the zealotry of a revolution with the conceit of an empire and the probity of gangsters. It is hard to predict how long such a regime can last, but two things can be forecast with confidence: the fall will be messy, and few who cheer Johnson today will boast of having done so once he is gone.

- Rafael Behr is a Guardian columnist

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

OpinionCoronavirus

Political leaders must ensure Covid vaccines aren't the preserve of the rich

[Jeremy Farrar](#)

If those who can afford to share treatments and equipment choose not to, this pandemic will drag on for all of us

- [Report: leading scientists urge UK to share Covid vaccines with poorer nations](#)
- Dr Jeremy Farrar is director of the Wellcome Trust, a global charitable foundation



‘Some countries have responded to the demand for vaccines to be shared fairly around the world – but not on the scale that is necessary.’ Medical aid arrives in Delhi, India, from the UK, on Tuesday. Photograph: Foreign, Commonwealth & Development/AFP/Getty Images

‘Some countries have responded to the demand for vaccines to be shared fairly around the world – but not on the scale that is necessary.’ Medical aid arrives in Delhi, India, from the UK, on Tuesday. Photograph: Foreign, Commonwealth & Development/AFP/Getty Images

Wed 28 Apr 2021 02.00 EDT

In the last few days, major powers have responded to the horrific crisis unfolding in India. The US government’s decision to share 10m vaccine doses within weeks, and [up to 50m more](#) over the summer, is welcome and urgently needed. New Zealand, Norway and France have also responded to the demand for vaccines to be [shared fairly](#) around the world. But frankly, no country is acting on the scale that is necessary.

This pandemic is a long way from over. The [scenes in India](#), where Covid-19 continues to overwhelm health systems and sink the economy, are harrowing. In many countries, hospitals are flooded with patients and face shortages of vital medical supplies.

At a global level, I fear the worst is yet to come. Across the world, there have been almost [100,000 reported deaths](#) in the 10 days since the [global total passed the 3m mark](#). Because of a lack of data collection, the true figure is likely much higher. Each death is a tragedy, the loss of a loved one, an untold story.

Why, when we have vaccines and treatments for Covid, are we still seeing horrific reports of this virus raging through communities? The responsibility for this lies with global political leaders. While science has made significant progress, producing vaccines, treatments and tests in record time, the G20 have failed to come together and back the sustained global response that is desperately needed.

This puts our hard-won scientific progress at risk. Science is only useful if it’s delivered to society. Until vaccines and tests for Covid are [available to everyone](#), we won’t be able to stop this pandemic and its devastating consequences. Ensuring the world’s population has access is the best way to drive down transmission, reduce deaths and prevent dangerous new variants from emerging.

[Britain won't be safe from Covid-19 until people everywhere have been vaccinated](#) | [Devi Sridhar](#)

[Read more](#)

It is simply not acceptable that while an estimated [one in four people](#) in high-income countries have received a Covid vaccine, just one in 500 have received the jab in low-income countries, or that hospitals in poorer countries are still struggling to access basic supplies like oxygen, sedatives and PPE. Healthcare workers in every country, who are putting themselves at risk to protect us all, must be first in line for vaccinations.

Right now, global political leaders are the only people who can make these essential resources available. Rich countries – including the UK and US – [have bought up](#) the majority of existing vaccine supplies. They urgently need to start sharing these doses with the rest of the world, alongside national rollouts in their own countries, and through the Covax programme. And they must set out a timetable for how these donations will be increased as they vaccinate more of their populations domestically.

The UK is in the perfect position to lead these efforts through its G7 presidency. Half of our population – including those who are most at risk from Covid – have had at least one dose of the vaccine. In fact, the UK has given almost as many doses to its own citizens as Covax [has been able to ship](#) to 120 countries in dire need of jabs. Covax and the Access to Covid-19 Tools Accelerator are ready to make vaccines and vital medicines available where they are most needed, but they can only deliver these with real support from political leaders.

Vaccinating the whole world isn't just the morally right thing to do – it's in every nation's scientific, public health and economic self-interest. The shores Covid now rages upon may seem distant to some, but the reality is that so long as the virus continues to spread in other countries, it continues to be a threat to everyone. If we allow Covid to keep spreading, it will go on evolving, increasing the [risk of new variants](#) that could cross borders and evade vaccines and treatments. With global infections at an all-time high, this is a very real risk. We are playing with fire. The first vaccines cannot be the preserve of the rich.

At the same time, science needs to keep pace with the evolving virus and develop the next generation of vaccines that will protect against future waves and variants. This will require building up manufacturing capacity globally, and combining all the tools needed to fight the virus: public health, honest communication, tests, sequencing, oxygen, PPE, treatments and vaccines. We have made remarkable progress in developing the crucial first vaccines, treatments and tests over the last year – driven in large part by the work of the ACT-Accelerator. This initiative [still needs \\$19bn](#) (£13.5bn) to finish driving the science forward and ensure these benefits are distributed equitably around the world – a tiny amount compared to the trillions governments are spending on stimulus packages to address the economic consequences of Covid.

If countries who can afford to share choose not to, this pandemic will drag on, resulting in more deaths, suffering and economic hardship. We're in danger of creating a fragmented, unequal world of haves and have-nots, where it will be far harder to come together and address the shared challenges of this century.

We can exit this crisis and turn Covid into a treatable and preventable disease in 2021. But we'll only be able to do this if all countries benefit equitably from scientific advances in treating the virus, and if science has sufficient support to keep up as the virus evolves. There can be no more delays or excuses. The longer we wait, the worse it will be for all of us. The world's political leaders have a choice to make. It should be an easy one.

- Dr Jeremy Farrar is director of the Wellcome Trust, a global charitable foundation

[OpinionUS](#) [politics](#)

No, Biden has not declared war on meat. But maybe that's what the world needs

[Arwa Mahdawi](#)



American conservatives are outraged at the latest ‘threat’ to their burger-loving way of life. But let’s face it: it’s unsustainable



The amount of meat consumed per person has nearly doubled in the past 50 years. Photograph: Michael Berman/Getty Images

The amount of meat consumed per person has nearly doubled in the past 50 years. Photograph: Michael Berman/Getty Images

Tue 27 Apr 2021 13.57 EDT

It looks as if the right are giving themselves heartburn to own the libs. Over the weekend, some prominent US conservatives [shared pictures](#) of themselves eating enormous slabs of meat in response to fabricated claims that president Joe Biden is planning to limit red meat consumption. Despite the fact that Biden's imaginary meat quotas exist only in these people's heads, rightwingers have spent the last few days frothing at the mouth over them. Several Fox News hosts have repeated this baseless claim and a number of Republican politicians, including the [governor of Texas](#), have tweeted their opposition to this fictional policy. Larry Kudlow, the former economic adviser to Donald Trump, even complained that Biden wants Americans to drink "[plant-based beer](#)". You know, as opposed to the flesh-based beer that real Americans enjoy.

What on earth sparked this carnivorous conservative fever-dream? MailOnline. On Thursday it published a [highly misleading](#) article claiming: "Biden's climate plan could limit you to eat just one burger a MONTH." The

word “could” is doing a lot of heavy lifting there: Biden has said nothing of the sort. The assertion stems from a 2020 academic paper that has no connections to Biden; this study noted that if Americans made a 90% cut to their beef consumption, there would be a 51% reduction in diet-related US greenhouse gas emissions between 2016 and 2030.

Factchecking all this is largely futile, of course: the people who get het up about an imaginary war on burgers tend to not let reality get in the way of their feelings. I suspect many of the high-profile people pushing the Biden-bans-beef narrative knew very well it was baloney; they just wanted to stoke the culture wars. Fox News, for example, rammed the story down people’s throats for days then [acknowledged on Monday](#) that its reporting about Biden’s meat quotas had been somewhat inaccurate. The rightwing grievance cycle goes like this: invent something to get upset about; have jowly men with names like Tucker and Chad amplify this imaginary grievance on conservative media outlets; [find ludicrous](#) and often self-defeating way to protest against this imaginary grievance; get Tucker and Chad to quietly admit they may have somewhat exaggerated things; conjure up something new to get outraged about.

This isn’t the first time the right has had a meat-based meltdown. Meat has become a cornerstone of the culture wars, a [recurring theme](#) in the endless rightwing grievance cycle. “They want to take away your hamburgers,” the former Trump adviser Sebastian Gorka yelled at the [2019 Conservative Political Action conference](#). “This is what Stalin dreamed about but never achieved.” Ah, yes, Stalin’s Five-Year Hamburger Eradication Plan – I remember learning about that in history class. In today’s polarised world, meat is no longer just a foodstuff: performative meat-eating has become a way to signal that you’re a Real Man (or a Traditional Woman who appreciates Real Men) who loves guns and freedom and is sceptical about the climate crisis. Fox News host Jesse Watters once ate a steak on air to [“trigger” a vegan](#). Very edgy stuff! Jordan Peterson, the right’s favourite philosopher, has memorably endorsed a [meat-only diet](#). (Tangentially, according to [one study](#) by researchers from the University of Hawaii, men incorporate more red meat into their diet when they feel like their manliness is threatened.)

Ultimately, however, it is not just the right that has an unhealthy obsession with meat. Global meat consumption keeps rising: the amount of meat consumed per person nearly doubled in the [past 50 years](#). “Plant-based” eating may have become fashionable, yet the world is on track to [consume more meat in 2021](#) than ever before. That is a problem because the meat industry has a huge [carbon footprint](#). While banning people from eating animal products obviously isn’t feasible, we desperately need to find ways to reduce global meat consumption. Food for thought while you enjoy a plant-based beer, anyway.

Arwa Mahdawi is a Guardian columnist

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[OpinionDogs](#)

Boris Johnson needs some good PR. Why not borrow Turkmenistan's dog day?

[Arwa Mahdawi](#)



The central Asian republic has created a national holiday to celebrate the alabai breed. Sounds like just the sort of distraction our floundering PM might welcome



Golden boy ... a statue of an alabai in Ashgabat, the capital of Turkmenistan.
Photograph: Reuters/Alamy

Golden boy ... a statue of an alabai in Ashgabat, the capital of Turkmenistan.
Photograph: Reuters/Alamy

Wed 28 Apr 2021 02.00 EDT

Turkmenistan may be a bleak dictatorship with [a dreadful human rights record](#), but it certainly knows how to appreciate dogs. On Sunday, the former Soviet republic celebrated a [new national holiday](#) dedicated to its native breed, the alabai. President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov, a [dentist turned despot](#) who likes to relax by [DJing and rapping](#), has already written a 272-page book about the alabai, AKA the central Asian shepherd dog, and [erected a gold statue](#) of one in the country's capital.

Look, even an objectionable megalomaniac can have a good idea now and again. There ought to be more national holidays devoted to dogs. Perhaps the UK could kick things off by replacing bank holidays with border collie days. No one likes banks; everyone likes border collies: it's a no-brainer.

Speaking of no-brainers, I am happy to give Boris Johnson my dog-holiday idea gratis. I have a feeling our esteemed leader may be in the market for a stunt that will steer the conversation away from the allegations that he said

he wouldn't impose another lockdown [even if “bodies pile up high in their thousands”](#).

Turkmenistan isn't the only place with wacky holiday inspiration. Every 27 July, Finland celebrates [national sleepy head day](#). This isn't a recent invention of the alarm clock lobby: it goes back to the middle ages and stems from the legend of the [Seven Sleepers](#) – a story about some young men who hid in a cave. Alas, Elon Musk wasn't around to [tweet about how he would rescue them](#), so it took 300 years for them to get out. Finns now celebrate by waking up the family member who is snoozing the longest by pouring water over them. In the city of Naantali (home of [Moominworld](#)), they [chunk a celebrity into the sea](#).

Look, I love Guy Fawkes Night, but burning effigies of Roman Catholic rebels is starting to feel a little passé. So here's a thought: let's take a leaf out of Finland's book and replace Bonfire Night with Throw-a-Politician-in-a-Fountain Night. Again, prime minister, you can have that idea for free.

- Arwa Mahdawi is a Guardian columnist

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Opinion **Vaccines and immunisation**

The G7 must act to end ‘vaccine apartheid’ or everyone in the world will suffer

Rowan Williams

Future generations will condemn the richest countries if they don’t use their power to make vaccines universally available

- Rowan Williams is the chair of Christian Aid and a former archbishop of Canterbury



A policeman guards a shipment of Covid vaccines at Kamuzu airport in Lilongwe, Malawi. Photograph: Thoko Chikondi/AP

A policeman guards a shipment of Covid vaccines at Kamuzu airport in Lilongwe, Malawi. Photograph: Thoko Chikondi/AP

Tue 27 Apr 2021 07.00 EDT

Until the later part of the 19th century, what we regard today as the fundamentals of public health were mostly unknown. Clean water and public sanitation systems in cities, access to basic professional support for women in childbirth, hygiene in hospitals and operating theatres – all these and many more such provisions took time to arrive on the scene in Europe and North America, and it often took a disastrous epidemic, or a massive loss of life that could be correlated with the lack of these provisions, to spur reformers and governments to take the necessary measures.

Future generations will look back with incredulity at our failure so far to do what is necessary for global public health in the course of this pandemic. We know that certain groups, such as frontline workers and those forced to live in overcrowded housing, are made more vulnerable to infection. But as the tragic scenes in India right now demonstrate, the virus fundamentally is blind to politics, class, race or geography. Like the climate crisis, it does not read maps or need passports. Piecemeal response is ineffectual and the idea that certain enclaves can simply throw up walls around themselves is fantasy. If the bitter struggles and confusions of the past 13 months have shown us anything, surely they have shown us this.

We have been reminded as never before in our lifetimes that our safety and our neighbours' safety are inseparable. Investment in the health of others is not simply a moral imperative indulged in by armchair philanthropists or rootless idealists. It is investment in a shared future. Dispassionate economists have calculated that the cost to the G7 nations of making vaccines universally available would not only be a minute fraction of the trillions already earmarked for post-Covid economic recovery, but would result in net gains of some [\\$466bn](#) to G7 economies over the next four or five years.

Conversely, a failure to respond adequately would drive vulnerable economies further into decline or chaos, leading to global instability as states face failure and populations drift in search of some kind of economic security. Crucially, as bad as this is, it would be massively worsened by the continuing threat of infection and the prospect of that endless Groundhog Day scenario that we have learned to fear – being forced back again and again into emergency measures to limit damage and protect health services.

The call that is being made by the [People's Vaccine Alliance](#), reinforced by a [call from the leaders of various religious groups](#), is that this year's G7 summit should make an unambiguous commitment to provide vaccines now to all countries, irrespective of their financial standing; to guarantee a continuing programme of vaccination that will produce manageable levels of immunity; and to support the short-term waiver of patents that will allow the rapid localisation of vaccine production outside the world's wealthier countries.

People have begun to talk not only about “vaccine nationalism” but about “vaccine apartheid” – an ugly term for an ugly reality where, for example, [less than 1% of the population](#) of sub-Saharan Africa have been injected. The pandemic has already been a tragedy of enormous proportions, it would be far worse if we refused to face the uncomfortable facts that it has uncovered – the unpalatable truths about global injustices and inequalities, as well as the serious inequalities within prosperous nations. We have no excuse for not recognising these things, and no alibi for refusing to act on this recognition.

[Campaign to waive Covid jab patent highlights \\$26bn shareholder payouts](#)
[Read more](#)

Much work has already gone into spelling out the various mechanisms by which funds could be made available. More importantly, perhaps, the last year has shown again and again the readiness of so many people across the world to act in a way that acknowledges our dependence on one another. What is needed now is to extend that generous and realistic spirit from local communities to the entire community of the world's nations.

In the 19th century, governments in the wealthier world gradually came to understand that health was a genuine public good. The health of each and the health of all were seen as inseparably connected. So it is today: we are challenged to see global health as a universal common good – not a benefit that can be cultivated for a privileged few. The [G7](#) meeting, which is to be held in the United Kingdom between 11 and 13 June, has the power to declare that a shared world and social environment mean shared access to health and protection. The security, and indeed the human dignity, that we claim for ourselves means nothing if it is not open to all.

- Rowan Williams, the former archbishop of Canterbury, is chair of Christian Aid

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

[The politics sketch](#) [Thérèse Coffey](#).

Drafted in to say nothing about anything, Thérèse Coffey finds her forte

[John Crace](#)



Work and pensions secretary was at pains to be as evasive as possible in the morning media round

01:06

Thérèse Coffey says people do not care about Boris Johnson's flat makeover – video

Tue 27 Apr 2021 13.50 EDT

It's a dirty job, but someone's got to do it. And it sure as hell isn't going to be the person who created the mess. Boris Johnson's enthusiasm for giving press conferences in his new £2.6m media suite is diminishing by the hour. Yesterday it was Michael Gove's turn to clean up after Boris with a half-

hearted non-denial denial about not having been in the room to hear the prime minister [remarks about “letting the bodies pile high”](#). You can always depend on the Govester to make a bad situation worse when it suits him to cause trouble.

On reflection, No 10 could see that choosing Mikey had been a mistake. What was needed was someone more bland. Someone who could be trusted to send an audience to sleep. Someone who could be guaranteed to know nothing about anything an interviewer was likely to ask. So today [it was the turn of the work and pensions secretary, Thérèse Coffey](#), to be thrown under the bus of the morning media round to explain away the latest twists and turns in the ongoing Tory sleaze and alleged-indifference-to-the-number-of-Covid-deaths sagas.

LBC’s Nick Ferrari got in first by asking Coffey straight out what was more embarrassing? The prime minister talking about letting the bodies pile high or spending £58k over the normal allowance on doing up a flat? She began by trying to pretend she wasn’t at all sure what Ferrari was talking about. The prime minister had said he had never uttered the words “letting the bodies pile high” and he was a man whose word could be taken on trust. The very idea that Boris might lie about anything was clearly absurd. Even when he had told her it was her talent and charisma that had drawn him toward appointing her to the cabinet.

OK, said Ferrari, sensing he was going to get nowhere with the bodies or “letting the virus rip” because Coffey could genuinely claim complete ignorance. Back to the £58K. It wasn’t a great look when so many people were losing their jobs or being put on furlough. “Er,” the minister mumbled. She didn’t have any of the details about how the money had been spent. But Ferrari did. Boris had bought wallpaper at £840 per roll. And he had spaffed £3k on a Lily Drum table and £9.8K on a Baby Bear sofa. Whatever they were.

Now Coffey began to panic as even she could see this was a bit excessive. Johnson had had to spend much more time in the Downing Street flat than other prime ministers, she guessed, conveniently forgetting to say where all these other prime ministers had slept when they had been in residence at No 10. And it was only right to fork out loads of cash on expensive furniture

when you've got a baby because then you can waste a lot of time trying to prevent him from getting his sticky hands all over it. But would she spend £5.9k on a rattan armchair? Good God, no. She rather preferred the John Lewis look. This was not Coffey's finest hour.

[Johnson's renovations are immaterial – unlike the other sleaze allegations | Simon Jenkins](#)
[Read more](#)

Though things were about to get even worse when she was interviewed by Justin Webb on the Today programme. Now her answers consisted of little more than surly “don't knows” when it was pointed out to her time and again that Johnson had broken electoral law by failing to declare the loan within a month. Something which, Webb observed, he had failed to do on 10 previous occasions. So he had form for it. “He just wanted to be prime minister,” she said unhappily.

Coffey went on to say that throughout the pandemic Johnson's sole motivation had been the public good. If he had a fault, it was that he cared too much. About whom, she didn't elaborate. Though she now appeared uncertain enough about her short-term future to be certain that Boris would never have dreamed of saying anything about bodies piling high or letting the virus rip because if he had done he would have consulted her first. It was just former advisers and media outlets making mischief. Johnson was concentrating so hard on making the country a better place it was believed he had personally taken the time to phone three newspaper editors to brief against Dominic Cummings.

“So is Dominic Cummings a credible witness?” Webb asked. Coffey replied that the only impression Dom would have made on the public would have been his disastrous press conference in the Downing Street rose garden the previous summer. The one that, at the time, Boris and the entire government had insisted was an entirely credible account of his Durham safari and day trip to Barnard Castle.

Inside No 10, Boris groaned. There were drawbacks to letting Coffey out after all as there was always the danger that someone who knew nothing might accidentally tell the truth. Not that she was making assertions about

Dom's integrity, Coffey added. Though she was. Just as she had inadvertently called Johnson's trustworthiness into question. It was a race to the bottom in the battle of the unreliable narrators. Still, looking on the bright side, it would be a while before she was asked to do the media round again.

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

[Opinion](#)**Boris Johnson**

Decor without decorum – this is home economics, Johnson-style

[Marina Hyde](#)



The lavish No 10 flat refurb flouts a basic rule the rest of us live by: if you can't pay for something, you can't have it



‘Maybe Boris Johnson and Carrie Symonds planned to do an at-home photoshoot with Tatler or something, so the boring little Conservative party members with their supposedly “nightmare” John Lewis furniture could see what their party subscriptions had paid for.’ Photograph: Tolga Akmen/AFP/Getty Images

‘Maybe Boris Johnson and Carrie Symonds planned to do an at-home photoshoot with Tatler or something, so the boring little Conservative party members with their supposedly “nightmare” John Lewis furniture could see what their party subscriptions had paid for.’ Photograph: Tolga Akmen/AFP/Getty Images

Tue 27 Apr 2021 10.43 EDT

Well, I for one won’t be happy until I see [Dominic Cummings](#) in a rattan armchair, looking right at Oprah Winfrey and saying: “Thank you for asking how I am. Not many people have asked if I’m OK.”

Ever since Cummings stepped back from duties last year, it has been clear there is a certain amount of hurt between him and his former brothers-in-arms. But events of the past few days have revealed just how deep that bitterness runs. God forbid Michael Gove is taken from this earthly realm any time soon, but if it did happen I hope that Peter Phillips would be available to walk between Dominic and Boris Johnson at the funeral. It goes

without saying that their rift would have devastated Princess Diana. In 2017, the princess's former psychic healer [told the Daily Express](#) that Diana had been in touch to inform her she would have voted Brexit. The princess backed leave, said her medium, "because Britain was really great before the EU. That's the only political thing she's ever said – because she loved the country."

If any of the above feels absurd to you, please consider just how much more absurd it is that the actual prime minister decided to ignite a war with his crazy ex-spade. Boris Johnson had better hope the polling public decides that he's the royal family in all of this, and [not the Meghan-and-Harry](#).

And so to the Johnson-Symonds's' apparent belief that No 10 Downing Street was some kind of hovel. Remember, prime ministers can spend £30,000 a year – a year! – doing up this flat, which, owing to the churn in personnel, gets done up fairly frequently anyway. You also get to spend your weekends at a fully staffed stately home. Chequers is, of course, where Boris chose to skip various Cobra meetings as the pandemic closed in.

Yet I've lost count of how many well-sourced [stories](#) there have been about poor old Johnson's "[money troubles](#)" during the past pandemic year. They simply never stop. Read the room, guys! The only hard-luck tale people would have found more affecting was Prince Harry's story of being "financially cut off" aged 36, forced to buy emergency \$20m accommodation in the California billionaires' enclave of Montecito.

[Don't expect transparency in a government run by WhatsApp | Iain Overton](#)
[Read more](#)

Michael Gove's wife, Sarah Vine, once declared that a picture of Ed Miliband's kitchen told you "[all you needed to know](#)" about the then Labour leader as a human being. Maybe you can tell the same amount about Johnson and his fiancée from the way they've gone about their own interior designs. I'm afraid that whatever the weird loans/donations/retrofitted hokey cokey that led to the PM spaffing up to [£200,000](#) on his flat, one thing is crystal clear. Boris and Carrie's lavish redecoration scheme was undertaken by two people apparently refusing to accept the most basic rule of home

economics that the rest of the country has to work under. Namely: if you can't pay for something, *then you can't have it*.

The prime minister and his fiancée didn't think such a rule was for them, and here we are. As indicated, they are not exactly helped by the backdrop against which all this was taking place. It seems pretty grotesque that while Johnson was delivering hard-nosed little homilies about why he couldn't extend free school meals, he himself was indulging in truly feckless luxury interiors spending.

Maybe Boris and Carrie planned to do an at-home photoshoot with Tatler or something, so the boring little Conservative party members with their supposedly "nightmare" John Lewis furniture could see what their party subscriptions had paid for. Or maybe some nice businessman was going to buy it all for them as a no-strings-attached present. We don't know, as it hasn't been comprehensively disclosed. What we do know is that when Peter Mandelson was revealed to have taken an undisclosed home loan, Telegraph columnist [Boris Johnson](#) was positively rapturous about his sacking: "In the Ministry of Sound," he wrote, "the tank-topped bum boys blub into their Pils ... for Mandy is dead, dead ere his prime!"

Can't believe the guy who wrote that turned out to be a shit. Honestly, what were the chances? Perhaps that's yet another question for the cabinet secretary, Simon Case, a sensationally unimpressive man whose appeal to Johnson (who appointed him) was made abundantly clear as he stonewalled his way through a select committee appearance on Monday. Simon not-on-the-Case, more like. Britain's most senior civil servant seems to be conducting about 37 interminable reviews or inquiries into the inevitable implications of a serial liar and newspaper columnist leading a country at a time of crisis (I paraphrase only slightly). Maybe he's trying to create one Whitehall internal affairs job for every 100 that'll be lost thanks to Johnson's calamitous failure to understand that optimising for health and the economy were the same thing.

As for where all this will or won't lead, one of the worst aspects of British political life is that no piece of alleged wrongdoing is permitted to emerge without a load of the in-crowd rushing to the airwaves to explain loftily how the out-crowd don't understand or care about it. Talking about whether

people are really talking about something now accounts for about 80% of the commentator economy. In not so many words, these know-alls suggest the public are too thick or busy surviving for whatever it is to “cut through” – more in-group lingo – which probably doesn’t end up being the anti-elitist look they were going for.

The Conservatives are doing rather a lot of this at the moment. If Johnson did make the remark about allowing the bodies to pile up, [opined](#) his biographer Andrew Gimson, it will simply “strengthen his reputation as a man who talks as a man in the pub would”. Elsewhere, I very much enjoyed Thérèse Coffey’s haute-Ladybird book explanation of the flat saga for Sky News viewers this morning. As the work and pensions secretary put it: “These sorts of things often get tidied up in something called the annual accounts.” Something called the annual accounts ... Okaaaaay, Thérèse, I THINK I get it? Just about? You’ve gone on something called a television to tell something called the public that something called money is normally featured in something called the annual accounts? Sorry, we’re probably being idiots – does that sound right? Also: let us know when the prime minister tidies up the accounts of how many something-called-kids he has.

Maybe the geniuses of Boris Johnson’s Downing Street will keep insulting the public’s intelligence. But you don’t have to be in with the in-crowd to have a stake in politics or a deep understanding of how you’re viewed. I keep reading that Dominic Cummings “knows where the bodies are buried”. Unfortunately, so do 127,000 families.

- Marina Hyde is a Guardian columnist

OpinionConservatives

The media are allowing this government's cronyism and dishonesty to flourish

[George Monbiot](#)



The BBC especially should be holding ministers to account. But, like most of the press, it has been asleep for the past year



Boris Johnson through a viewfinder during a Downing Street press conference on 12 March 2020. Photograph: Simon Dawson/AFP via Getty Images

Boris Johnson through a viewfinder during a Downing Street press conference on 12 March 2020. Photograph: Simon Dawson/AFP via Getty Images

Tue 27 Apr 2021 12.28 EDT

How does Boris Johnson get away with it? How does he lie and cheat and break the rules with apparent impunity? Plenty of theories are aired in the media: his alleged charisma, the weakness of the opposition, the success of the vaccine programme. But the most likely explanation isn't Johnson's character or circumstances. It's the one staring back from the mirror. For most of his career, he has been protected by the news organisations that should have held him to account.

Surely the media are doing a great job. First the Cameron story and now Boris Johnson's dirty business have been plastered all over the front pages. The recent scandals show that journalism in the UK is the lively scourge of dishonesty and corruption. Really?

Information about the government's lobbying outrages has been trickling out for almost a year. The way the government issued contracts for PPE and other vital goods and services during the first wave of the pandemic is – or should have been – a much bigger scandal than David Cameron's lobbying, Boris Johnson's text messages or the refurbishment of his flat. While qualified suppliers were desperately trying to sell their wares, the government ignored them and established a “[VIP lane](#)” for its chums. Billions were spent on unadvertised, untendered contracts. In some cases – for instance, the [research company](#) owned by people close to No 10 – the recipients had special relationships with ministers and officials.

Nobody died as a result of Cameron's lobbying or Johnson's home furnishings. But health and other frontline workers [died](#) because vital protective equipment was either missing or inadequate. The procurement fiasco was likely to have been partly to blame.

There was a range of problems. The first hint that something odd was happening with the government's procurement processes emerged on 7 May 2020, with a [story](#) in the Telegraph about useless surgical gowns sourced by bizarre means from Turkey. It was picked up briefly, then the media moved on. On 13 May, openDemocracy [exposed](#) strange decisions made by the government's fixer, Deloitte. On 14 May, the campaign group We Own It [published](#) a detailed report on the collapse of the NHS supply chain for PPE. It was completely ignored.

In early June, the Good Law Project lodged its first pre-action protocol about a massive contract granted, out of public sight, to a company without relevant qualifications. This crowdfunded legal campaign then released a stream of shocking and astonishing claims that [friends](#) of ministers and civil servants and other [well-connected people](#), [including party donors](#), were operating through special channels. Companies with apparently [no prior experience](#) secured contracts for vital equipment. In some cases, the equipment either turned out to be useless or wasn't delivered at all.

Far from making procurement faster and more efficient, as the government now claims, this system caused total chaos and catastrophic decisions. According to the Good Law Project's suit, civil servants complained about

“[drowning in VIP requests](#)” to favour companies that were unable to meet the necessary standards.

These stories were covered sporadically by several newspapers, and individual journalists did brilliant work. But none of the media, with the exception of openDemocracy and Byline Times, gave the issue the intense and unwavering coverage it deserved: in my view it should have hit the headlines day after day.

In mid-July I published a [column](#) asking why this scandal wasn't all over the front pages. Above all, I was mystified by the BBC's failure to cover it. By this stage, the corporation had touched on the issue just once, as far as I could tell, with a [short and muted story](#) that sank without trace.

In October, the Guardian revealed how Serco had given crucial roles in the government's test-and-trace programme, previously discharged by qualified clinicians, to unqualified [teenage call centre workers](#), who had to make crucial clinical decisions. It was a big story, or so I thought, but the BBC and other outlets took weeks to pick it up. Only when the National Audit Office published its [report](#) on the fiasco in November did the media as a whole bestir itself, but just for a few days.

Last month, I criticised the sluggishness of the BBC's coverage of Covid contracts. In response, Nick Robinson, presenter of the Today programme and former BBC political editor, [claimed](#): “It was the BBC's Lucy Manning who first broke the story.” Manning is an excellent correspondent, but when I checked with her she told me that the first time she covered it was on 6 August. In other words, Robinson, arguably the BBC's most senior political journalist, appears to have been unaware, for the first three months of its existence, of what should have been the UK's biggest political scandal.

This is part of what I see as a pattern of failure. As the former BBC reporter Patrick Howse [remarks](#), “top BBC managers are absolutely terrified of the government and are bending over backwards to appease it”. He points out that it scarcely mentioned the latest revelations about Boris Johnson's relationship with Jennifer Arcuri. I can find only [two stories](#) on its website published about the issue this year, both of which were mild, dull and remarkably late. I single out the BBC not because it is worse than most other

outlets, but because it should be better. Funded by us, with vast reach and resources, it should be the leading investigator of government malfeasance.

Vigilance? Diligence? Initiative? For most of the past year, most of the media have been fast asleep.

- George Monbiot is a Guardian columnist

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

2021.04.28 - Around the world

- [Andrew Brown Autopsy shows he was shot five times, attorneys say](#)
- ['Example to many' Journalist Maria Ressa wins Unesco press freedom prize](#)
- [Britney Spears Singer will address LA court about father's control of her career](#)
- [Kenya Government debates lowering age of consent from 18 to 16](#)
- [US Republicans falsely claim Biden wants to restrict meat in climate crisis fight](#)
- [US Genetically-modified mosquito larvae to be released in Florida Keys](#)
- [Business live Lloyds beats forecasts with near-£2bn profit; markets eye Fed decision](#)
- [Alphabet Revenue soared for Google owner as Covid brought more people online](#)
- [Year of the Croc Sales soar as rubber shoe brand predicts bumper year](#)
- [Brazil Parliamentary inquiry into Bolsonaro's Covid response begins](#)

[Andrew Brown shooting](#)

Andrew Brown autopsy shows he was shot five times by police, attorneys say

Independent pathologist hired by Brown family examined his body and noted one wound to the head

- [Police killings amount to crimes against humanity, report finds](#)



Protesters march in Elizabeth City, North Carolina, on 26 April. Photograph: Jonathan Drake/Reuters

Protesters march in Elizabeth City, North Carolina, on 26 April. Photograph: Jonathan Drake/Reuters

[Edward Helmore](#) and agencies

Tue 27 Apr 2021 14.08 EDT

Attorneys for the family of Andrew Brown, a Black man killed by deputies last week, said on Tuesday an independent autopsy showed he was shot five times, including in the back of the head.

“It was a kill shot to the back of the head,” one attorney, Ben Crump, told reporters. “It went into the base of the neck, bottom of the skull and got lost in his brain. That was the cause of death.”

[Andrew Brown shooting: anger as family shown only ‘snippet’ of police footage](#)
[Read more](#)

Another lawyer, Wayne Kendall, said Brent Hall, a former medical examiner in Boone, [North Carolina](#), hired by the Brown family, had examined Andrew Brown’s body. The doctor noted four wounds to the right arm and one to the head.

The family’s lawyers also released a copy of the death certificate, which lists the cause of death as a “penetrating gunshot wound of the head.” The certificate, signed by a paramedic services instructor who serves as a local medical examiner, describes the death as a homicide.

Brown was shot last Wednesday by deputies serving drug-related search and arrest warrants in Elizabeth City, a town in north-east North Carolina with a population of about 18,000, of which about half is Black.

“We have an execution here in Elizabeth City,” said the attorney Bakari Sellers. “We demand justice. We demand justice for Andrew Brown and his family.” “You don’t have to be Black, you don’t have to be white. You just have to have a beating heart to understand that injustice was done.”

Another lawyer, Chantel Cherry-Lassiter, said: “This is painful, for his family and this community. This was an execution – an assassination of this unarmed Black man.”

The shooting has prompted days of protests and calls for justice and transparency, including demands for the release of body-camera footage.

Later on Tuesday, the FBI field office in Charlotte said it had opened a civil rights investigation.

On Monday, the Pasquotank county sheriff, Tommy Wooten, and the chief deputy, Daniel Fogg, urged the public to reserve judgment until all evidence is reviewed by the state bureau of investigation.

“This tragic incident was quick and over in less than 30 seconds and body cameras are shaky and sometimes hard to decipher,” Wooten said in a video posted on social media. “They only tell part of the story.”

But family lawyers [accused](#) authorities of “hiding” video evidence, after relatives were shown only a 20-second clip of the incident from a single officer’s body camera.

At an afternoon press conference, attorneys said the snippet they were permitted to view showed Brown, 42, with his hands on the steering wheel of the car he was driving when he was shot dead in a hail of police bullets.

A court hearing on access to the video has been scheduled for Wednesday. The hearing will consider petitions to release the footage, including filings by a media coalition and by the county attorney on behalf of the sheriff. A North Carolina law that took effect in 2016 allows law enforcement agencies to show body camera video privately to a victim’s family, but it generally requires a court to approve any public release.

It’s not clear how soon a judge could rule or how quickly the video would be released if the release is approved. In similar cases, it has sometimes taken weeks for the full legal process to play out.

Democrats in the North Carolina general assembly filed a measure this month proposing that body camera video be released within 48 hours unless a law enforcement agency asks a court to delay its distribution. But the legislation faces long odds with the GOP controlling both chambers of the legislature.

The family’s lawyers and racial justice advocates noted that law enforcement agencies in other states have moved faster. In Columbus, Ohio, the day

before Brown was shot, body camera footage was released within hours of an officer fatally shooting a 16-year-old Black girl who was swinging a knife at another girl.

“My dad got executed just trying to save his own life,” Khalil Ferebee, Brown’s son, said on Monday. “It’s messed up how this happened. It ain’t right. It ain’t right at all.”

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

[Maria Ressa](#)

‘An example to many’: journalist Maria Ressa wins Unesco press freedom prize

Ressa has been subject to sustained campaign of gendered online abuse and has been targeted by Philippine leader Rodrigo Duterte



Maria Ressa has been awarded the Unesco press freedom prize Photograph: Rolex dela Peña/EPA

Maria Ressa has been awarded the Unesco press freedom prize Photograph: Rolex dela Peña/EPA

Agence France-Presse

Tue 27 Apr 2021 21.40 EDT

The UN’s cultural agency has awarded its annual press freedom prize to Philippine journalist [Maria Ressa](#) whose reporting has made her a target of her country’s judiciary and online hate campaigns.

Ressa, a former Asia lead investigative reporter for US network CNN and head of domestic network ABS-CBN News, now manages the news website Rappler whose reporting has [attracted the wrath](#) of Philippine leader Rodrigo Duterte.

She has been involved in many international initiatives to promote press freedom, and arrested several times “for alleged crimes related to the exercise of her profession”, [Unesco](#) said.

[Facebook and fear in Manila: Maria Ressa’s fight for facts](#)
[Read more](#)

She has also been subject to a sustained campaign of gendered online abuse, threats, and harassment, the agency said in a statement. At one point she received an average of over 90 hateful messages an hour on Facebook, it said.

“Maria Ressa’s unerring fight for freedom of expression is an example for many journalists around the world,” jury chair Marilu Mastrogiovanni said in the statement.

“Her case is emblematic of global trends that represent a real threat to press freedom, and therefore to democracy,” Mastrogiovanni said.

[The Guardian view on the Philippines and Maria Ressa: an attack on democracy](#) | [Editorial](#)
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Ressa, who is 57, was in court last month to deny charges of dodging taxes as authorities continued a crackdown against the country’s independent media. Rappler was three years ago branded a “fake news outlet” by Duterte and Ressa has since been the subject of at least 11 investigations into her business.

She said the legal cases are payback for her criticism of the president’s policies including his war on drugs that has killed thousands of people.

Last year Ressa, who was named Time's person of the year in 2018, was convicted of cyber libel by a Manila court but is free on bail pending an appeal in a case that could see her handed six years in jail. Other cases against her are pending.

Duterte has faced international calls to drop all charges against the veteran reporter, with rights groups saying they amount to state harassment, but the pleas have fallen on deaf ears.

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

[Britney Spears](#)

Britney Spears to address LA court about father's control of her career

Singer rarely takes part in hearings but has asked to speak directly to court, lawyer says



Britney Spears' lawyer did not say what matters she wished to address.
Photograph: Eduardo Muñoz/Reuters

Britney Spears' lawyer did not say what matters she wished to address.
Photograph: Eduardo Muñoz/Reuters

Guardian staff and agencies

Tue 27 Apr 2021 18.27 EDT

Britney Spears will personally address the Los Angeles court dealing with her long-running conservatorship in June, a judge agreed on Tuesday.

Spears, 39, has been under a conservatorship since 2008 but rarely takes part in hearings. Her lawyer said on Tuesday that she had asked to speak to the court directly, but he did not say what matters she wished to raise.

“My client has requested a hearing at which she can address the court directly,” Samuel Ingham told the court on Tuesday. “My client has asked that it be done on an expedited basis.”

The judge set a 23 June hearing for Spears to speak to the court. It was not known which matters the singer planned to address.

['I cried for two weeks': Britney Spears responds to documentary about her life](#)

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The case centers on Spears’s conservatorship, a [legal arrangement](#) that has given her father, Jamie Spears, control over her estate, career and other aspects of her personal life, including medical treatment, for the past 13 years.

Jamie was appointed his daughter’s conservator in 2008 after the pop star was hospitalized for psychiatric treatment following a widely publicized breakdown.

Britney Spears made clear last year through her lawyer that she no longer wants her father involved in her affairs.

Lawyers for the 39-year-old singer last year [filed](#) for Jamie to be removed as conservator, arguing in LA court that Spears was “afraid of her father” and would [not resume her career while he controlled it](#).

A previous bid to remove him failed in August 2020 and a hearing on Tuesday on a new request to remove him was postponed until July without discussion.

A television documentary in February brought new scrutiny to the case and to the #FreeBritney movement started by fans, some of whom rallied outside the courthouse on Tuesday.

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

Global development

Kenya debates lowering age of consent from 18 to 16

While some point to the number of teenage boys jailed for consensual sex, others fear gender equality gains could be lost



Critics of a change in the law argue ‘children under 18 are not adequately developed to consent to sex’. Photograph: Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP/Getty

Critics of a change in the law argue ‘children under 18 are not adequately developed to consent to sex’. Photograph: Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP/Getty

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[Peter Muiruri](#) in Nairobi

Wed 28 Apr 2021 02.15 EDT

Kenya's judges and child welfare organisations are embroiled in a fresh debate on whether to lower the age of consent.

Some members of the [judiciary](#) believe the age of consent should be lowered from 18 to 16 for heterosexual acts (gay sex is criminalised at any age, punishable by up to 14 years in prison) because boys and girls have “reached the age of discretion and are able to make intelligent and informed decisions about their lives and their bodies”.

According to the [Kenya Demographic and Health Survey](#), 15% of women and 22% of men aged between 20 and 50 had their first sexual experience by the age of 15. Nearly a quarter of Kenyan women gave birth before 18.

Proponents say lowering the age of consent will reduce the number of teenage boys convicted and jailed for “defilement” (the abuse of a child in Kenyan law) after having consensual sex with a girl.

They are concerned that aspects of the country's Sexual Offences Act conflict with the Children's Act, and disproportionately punish teenage boys.

The Sexual Offences Act does not make exemptions for any child found guilty of sexual offences. Children are punished as adults, and remanded in custody with adults. It has no specific provisions on how to deal with a case where two minors are involved.

The Children's Act, however, states that minors – those under the age of 18 – are to be tried in a children's court, unless charged with a capital offence, such as murder. When a child is found guilty in a children's court, they should be, among other measures, put under the care of a "fit person, whether a relative or not, or a charitable children's institution willing to undertake his care", rather than be sent to jail.



Justice Said Chitembwe recently said the practicality of the law had to be reviewed. Photograph: Courtesy Kenya Judiciary

Debate on the issue of consent has been ongoing since a controversial ruling in 2016, when Justice Said Chitembwe, who was recently considered for the post of Kenya's chief justice, freed a 24-year-old man who had been jailed for the statutory rape of a 13-year-old girl. In his ruling, he stated that "she was behaving like a full grown-up woman who was already engaging and enjoying sex with men."

The judge added: “It is true that under the Sexual Offences Act, a child below 18 years old cannot give consent to sexual intercourse. However, where the child behaves like an adult and willingly sneaks into men’s houses for purposes of having sex, the court ought to treat such a child as a grown-up who knows what she is doing.”

The ruling received international condemnation, with the Women’s Link Worldwide awarding it the [2017 Gold Bludgeon award](#) because it set a “dangerous precedent assuming that girls who consent to sex before age 18 should not be afforded special protection”.

But a national debate on lowering the age of consent to 16 was sparked two years ago, after [three judges](#) of the appellate court [reversed](#) a 15-year sentence on a man, who was over 18, accused of the statutory rape of a 17-year-old girl. The man had already served eight years in jail.

[Kenya court upholds ban on gay sex in major setback for activists](#)
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“Our prisons are teeming with young men serving lengthy sentences for having had sexual intercourse with adolescent girls whose consent has been held to be immaterial because they were under 18 years. The wisdom and justice of this unfolding tragedy calls for serious interrogation,” said the judges.

Public forums and discussions followed, but a final report, [Minimum Age of Consent for Sex: Addressing the Dilemma](#), recommended that the age of consent remain at 18, adding that any reduction could negate gains made by the country on gender equality.

It stated that the primary objective of the minimum age of sexual consent should be to protect children and adolescents from any form of sexual abuse and the consequences of early sexual activity on their rights and development.

Joyce Mutinda, who chairs the National [Gender](#) and Equality Commission, said people under the age of 18 are incapable of making comprehensive decisions and judgments about their sexuality: “Children under 18 are not

adequately developed socially, mentally and psychologically to consent to sex. Earlier sexual debut exposes children to physical and psychological effects.”



Teacher Elizabeth Wanjiru addresses teenage mothers at the Serene Haven secondary school, which accommodates pregnant girls and teenage mothers in Nyeri, Kenya. Photograph: Monicah Mwangi/Reuters

However, the debate has been reopened in past weeks by the [high court judge Luka Kimaru](#). During public hearings by the Power of Mercy Advisory Committee, which is currently reviewing some of the country’s laws, Justice Kimaru said: “Challenges arise when teenagers experiment, when they try to discover their sexuality. Some of them go overboard, and that is why we have these teen pregnancies. Most of these relationships are more or less consensual.

“A teenage boy and a teenage girl have sex – you can call it consensual – it is the boy who is punished and the girl who is not. And yet they did it together consensually.

“The law does not consider a girl or a boy who is under 18 to have the capacity to give consent. But the social reality is that these things are

happening. When this is criminalised, it creates another injustice. The aspect of the offender being a minor is often forgotten.”

During his interview for the post of chief justice earlier this month, Chitembwe said that, while the law found anyone who “defiled” a person under 18 guilty, the practicality of implementing the legislation needed to be reviewed.

The law states that a person who commits a sexual offence against a child should be imprisoned for at least 15 years.

“How do you take a 19-year-old man to 15 years in jail for having a relationship with a 17-year-old girl?” he asked the panel.



People celebrate the new year in Nairobi’s Kibera slum on on 1 January 2021. Photograph: Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP/Getty

A 2016 audit of Kenya’s justice system stated that young boys are more at risk of falling foul of the sexual offences law than girls, and that the former lack social systems to cushion them from such vulnerabilities.

“While a range of programmes are available for vulnerable girls, there is an absence of programmes for boy children. Interventions which seek to reduce

the vulnerability of boy children to being in conflict with the law should be investigated,” stated the [National Council on the Administration of Justice](#).

Although the report on the age of consent did not call for a lowering of the age, it did recommend amendments to the Sexual Offences Act and Children’s Act to protect children having consensual sex.

- The [NSPCC](#) offers support to children on 0800 1111, and adults concerned about a child on 0808 800 5000. The National Association for People Abused in Childhood ([Napac](#)) offers support for adult survivors on 0808 801 0331. Other sources of help can be found at [Child Helplines International](#)

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[Climate change](#)

Republicans falsely claim Biden wants to restrict meat in climate crisis fight

Unfounded claims do not reflect president's proposals to tackle global heating, which make no mention of meat consumption



‘Bye, bye burgers’ said an on-screen graphic on Fox News, which ran the false claim that the US president would tyrannically allow Americans to devour just one burger a month. Photograph: Nikos Panidis/Getty Images/EyeEm

‘Bye, bye burgers’ said an on-screen graphic on Fox News, which ran the false claim that the US president would tyrannically allow Americans to devour just one burger a month. Photograph: Nikos Panidis/Getty Images/EyeEm

[Oliver Milman](#)

[@olliemilman](#)

Wed 28 Apr 2021 03.00 EDT

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At a major summit hosted by [Joe Biden](#) last week, a procession of world leaders fretted over the spiraling dangers of the climate crisis, with some pledging further cuts to planet-heating emissions, others touting their embrace of electric cars and a few vowing the end of coal.

In the US, however, Biden's political opponents were focused on one pressing matter – meat.

“Bye, bye burgers” screamed an on-screen graphic on Fox News, which ran the false claim that the US president would tyrannically allow Americans to devour just one burger a month. Larry Kudlow, a former economic adviser to Donald Trump now Fox Business host, [baselessly envisioned](#) Fourth of July celebrations where people would only be allowed to “throw back a plant-based beer with your grilled Brussels sprouts” on the barbecue.

Prominent Republicans seized upon the supposed Biden climate diktat – which does not exist. The Texas governor, Greg Abbott, retweeted a claim of a 4lb-a-year meat allocation with the comment: “Not gonna happen in Texas!” The far-right conspiracy theorist Marjorie Taylor Greene, a Republican representative, called Biden the “Hamburglar” while Garret Graves, ostensibly a more moderate House Republican, [said](#) the president's plan amounted to “dictatorship”.

[How US chemical industry lobbying and cash defeated regulation in Trump era](#)

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The unfounded claims, which appear to have somehow sprouted from a University of Michigan study on the impact of meat eating, do not reflect Biden's actual proposals to tackle global heating, which make no mention of personal meat consumption. But they have dealt a hefty blow to Republicans' latest efforts to present themselves as committed to taking on the climate crisis.

A week prior to the White House climate summit, Republicans [released what they framed as a sensible, market-based alternative](#) to Biden's climate

plan. “Democrats often dismiss Republicans as disinterested in address global climate change – this is just false,” said Kevin McCarthy, the House Republican leader. McCarthy said that Republicans have been “working for years to develop thoughtful, targeted legislation” to reduce emissions that, unlike Democratic proposals, “won’t kill American jobs”.

Cognizant of growing voter alarm over the climate crisis – a majority of Republican voters [now support](#) the regulation of carbon dioxide – McCarthy has brushed aside the objections of some colleagues to recast the party’s beleaguered environmental reputation by promoting various tax breaks for renewable energy, making it easier to import minerals for clean technology and supporting a push to plant one trillion trees around the world.

Critics, however, say the proposals are wildly inadequate to avoid disastrous global heating, [which scientists say](#) must involve sharply cutting emissions this decade before reaching net zero by the middle of the century. In lieu of any mention of phasing out fossil fuels – the primary cause of the climate crisis – the Republican plan instead calls for the construction of the Keystone XL pipeline, an oil project halted by Biden.

“Getting to net zero requires extraordinary and sustained effort across all of society, not just the federal government, so you can’t just take a piecemeal approach like this, clap your hands and say, ‘We’re done here,’” said Nate Hultman, an expert in public policy at University of Maryland who helped draw up emissions reduction targets for Barack Obama’s administration. “This is a sort of mishmash of proposals, not a comprehensive strategy. I just don’t see how you get to a 50% cut by 2030 or to net zero with this.”

Neither McCarthy’s office nor Citizens for Responsible Energy Solutions (CRES), a conservative group that created a website for the plan, responded to questions on what emissions reductions the assorted proposals would achieve. Last week, Heather Reams, executive director of CRES, accused Biden of “radically impacting our already battered economy” by promising to cut US emissions in half by the end of the decade.

During Trump’s presidency, Republicans laid siege to various climate regulations, largely backed his decision to remove the US from the Paris climate accords and acquiesced as the president repeatedly mocked climate

science. Despite moves by some younger, more moderate conservatives [to prod](#) the party to respond to the increasingly severe wildfires, storms and heatwaves strafing the US, the party's rhetoric has barely shifted following Trump's election loss, according to Robert Brulle, a visiting professor of the environment and society at Brown University.

"These guys need to get a new PR agency, it's like they are talking about climate change in the 1990s," said Brulle. "It's just recycled arguments from the past or, on the meat thing, just outright lies. These arguments may have worked in the past to delay climate action but it's so exhausted now. It's different day, same old shit."

Michael Mann, a climate scientist at Penn State, said it was pleasing to see most Republicans shift away from outright denial of climate science but that a "new climate war" was opening up involving "reassuring sounding but empty rhetoric" to stymie regulations to reduce emissions.

"They have the same intent as outright denial – to keep us addicted to fossil fuels as long as possible so that fossil fuel interests, who now have such great influence over the Republican party, can continue to make trillions of dollar profits, at our collective expense," Mann said.

[Last week's climate summit](#), which featured more than 40 world leaders, offered a stark illustration of the extreme position Republicans now find themselves in the global political landscape.

During the virtual gathering, even leaders considered climate villains by environmentalists called for greater action on global heating, with Vladimir Putin, president of Russia, warning the "fate of our entire planet, the development prospects of each country, the well-being and quality of life of people largely depend on the success of these efforts" to reduce emissions.

"The GOP is an extraordinary outlier in the political spectrum around the world, they have backed themselves into a political and rhetorical cul de sac," said Brulle.

"They are stuck in a really bad position that no other major political party in the world is in. Climate obstructionism is now a core part of Republican

creed, much like opposition to abortion and gun control. As long as they remain competitive in elections I don't see that changing.”

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

[Florida](#)

Genetically-modified mosquito larvae to be released in Florida Keys

Non-biting male mosquito larvae part of controversial program to curb spread of diseases such as dengue, Zika and yellow fever



An *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, known to carry the Zika virus. Photograph: Felipe Dana/AP

An *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, known to carry the Zika virus. Photograph: Felipe Dana/AP

[Edward Helmore](#)

Wed 28 Apr 2021 03.00 EDT

The [Florida](#) Keys will this week see the release of genetically-modified, non-biting male mosquito larvae as part of a controversial program designed to curb the spread of insect-borne diseases such as dengue, Zika, yellow fever and other human diseases.

The Florida Keys Mosquito Control District and British firm biotech Oxitec announced last week that 12,000 of the invasive *Aedes aegypti* mosquito species are expected to emerge each week for three weeks from six locations: two on Cudjoe Key, one on Ramrod Key and three on Vaca Key.

[US researchers seek citizen scientists as billions of Brood X cicadas set to emerge](#)

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Eventually it is planned that [hundreds of millions](#) of the mosquitos might be released.

Oxitec's non-biting male mosquitoes will mate with the local biting female mosquitoes and since the female offspring cannot themselves survive to reproduce, the population of *Aedes aegypti* is subsequently controlled.

[According to the CDC](#), the genetically-modified mosquitos carry two types of genes: a fluorescent marker gene that glows under a special red light, and a self-limiting gene that prevents female mosquito offspring from surviving to adulthood.

Mosquitos at the target locations will then be monitored against untreated comparison sites as part of an Environmental Protection Agency-approved project. Oxitec says an evaluation of the project will be provided by the CDC and the University of Florida's Medical Entomology Laboratory, among others.

According to Oxitec, *Aedes aegypti* makes up about 4% of the mosquito population in the Keys but is responsible for "virtually all mosquito-borne diseases transmitted to humans" and can transmit heartworm and other potentially deadly diseases to pets and animals.

"As we are seeing development of resistance to some of our current control methods, we are in need of new tools to combat this mosquito," said Andrea Leal, executive director of the Florida Keys Mosquito Control District. "And given the unique ecosystem we live in, those tools need to be safe, environmentally friendly, and targeted."

More than [7,300 dengue cases](#) were reported in the US between 2010 and 2020 – cases are largely contracted outside the US, though 71 [cases](#) were transmitted in Florida, according to CDC. Over the summer of 2016, the Zika virus infected 29 people within a six-block area forcing them to aerial spray to control mosquitoes, the [agency has said](#).

The EPA approved an [experimental use permit](#) after a [risk assessment](#) in 2019 “determined that there will be no unreasonable adverse effects to humans or the environment as a result of the experimental permit to release Oxitec’s OX5034 male mosquito”.

The company claims a trial of the technology in [Brazil](#) were successful and did not “persist in the environment or cause harm to beneficial insects”, [according to its website](#).

But a similar test in the Cayman Islands in 2016 was delayed by opponents who “argued that the government had not provided sufficient information about potential risks or adequately studied other alternatives”, reported [the Associated Press](#).

Some environmentalists remain skeptical or outright opposed. Last year, Jaydee Hanson, policy director for the International Center for Technology Assessment and Center for Food Safety, [told the Guardian](#) the program is a “Jurassic Park experiment”.

Barry Wray, executive director of the Florida Keys Environmental Coalition added: “People here in Florida do not consent to the genetically engineered mosquitoes or to being human experiments.”

A [recent report](#) by the non-profit digital science magazine [Undark](#) noted that Oxitec had been pushing for an experimental release in the Keys but both Key Haven and Key West had rejected the proposals after critics demanded more proof that the release is necessary.

Undark drew attention to the use of tetracycline – an antibiotic without which the female mosquitoes will die in [early larval stages](#).

The EPA assessment noted that release of modified mosquitos will not take place within “500 meters of commercial citrus growing areas or wastewater treatment sites due to considerations regarding the impact of environmental sources of tetracyclines on female OX5034 mosquito survival”.

A Yale University study that analyzed Oxitec’s Brazil release had claimed some of the offspring of the genetically modified mosquitoes had survived to adulthood, though Oxitec rejected the findings, telling [Gizmodo](#) in 2019 that the study includes “numerous false, speculative and unsubstantiated claims and statements”.

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

[Business live](#)

[Business](#)

Lloyds beats forecasts with near-£2bn profit; markets eye Fed decision – business live

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Alphabet

Alphabet: revenue soared for Google owner as Covid brought more people online

Company exceeded Wall Street's expectations with \$55bn in revenue, even as it continued to face landmark antitrust lawsuits



Alphabet, the Google parent company, saw revenue jump 34% from a year ago. Photograph: Marcio José Sánchez/AP

Alphabet, the Google parent company, saw revenue jump 34% from a year ago. Photograph: Marcio José Sánchez/AP

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Tue 27 Apr 2021 17.55 EDT

Google's parent company, [Alphabet](#), reported record profits for the second consecutive quarter and a 34% jump in revenues but warned bumper traffic and ad sales during the pandemic may slow as stay-at-home measures are eased.

Exceeding Wall Street's expectations, Alphabet brought in just under \$18bn in profits, and \$55.3bn in revenue in its first quarter of the year, a 34% rise from the same time a year ago.

The results provided the first sign that [Google](#) services such as search and YouTube may hold on to gains made since lockdowns and other pandemic restrictions forced people to shop and communicate online over the last year. Google's ad business, the global market leader as measured in sales, accounted for 81% of Alphabet's first-quarter revenue.

Alphabet chief financial officer Ruth Porat told analysts on Tuesday that it was "too early to forecast the extent to which these changes in consumer behavior and advertising spend will endure."

However, nearly \$4bn of earnings came from paper gains on shares in venture capital investments and accounting changes on the book value of its equipment.

[Apple and Google 'hold data hostage' and stifle competition, Senate told](#)
[Read more](#)

Google's CEO, Sundar Pichai, said during an earnings call on Tuesday that Alphabet will also invest \$7bn in offices and data centers and will add 10,000 full-time jobs, as the company continues to prioritize its sustainability efforts.

He also said the top priorities going forward include building and providing helpful parts and services, increasing user trust by keeping data safe and private, reopening their offices effectively, and building sustainable value for the business and partners.

"In some parts of the world the economy began to rebound, which created a rising tide in the first quarter," Pichai said, adding that investments in

startups are at an all-time high. “Thank you to our Googlers around the world for a great start to the year,” he said.

While they celebrated the successes and opportunities for continued growth the executives were also quick to emphasize that the future is still uncertain, especially when it comes to changes in consumer behavior that came along with the Covid crisis.

“It is too early to say how durable this consumer behavior will be,” Ruth Porat, CFO, said during the call, noting that a bump in consumption also came as workers outfitted their homes to work remotely. She added that year-over-year comparisons will probably be affected by the unique circumstances.

The company [ended the 2020 fiscal year](#) on a high note – after suffering [the weakest revenue growth](#) in close to five years in the first quarter of last year – announcing in February that a rebound in ad spending over the holiday season spurred a 23% rise in sales.

Despite the successes shared Tuesday, the company is still facing obstacles on several fronts. Google continues to face fallout in a spate of controversies – including federal inquiries and allegations of anticompetitive business practices and issues with diversity and discrimination.

In October, the company was hit with landmark civil antitrust lawsuits brought by the US Department of Justice and a coalition of states, which allege Google maintained “monopolies through anticompetitive and exclusionary practices in the search and search advertising markets”.

In February, the company announced Google would pay a \$2.6m settlement to more than 5,500 employees and applicants who had allegedly been subject to discrimination as female engineers or Asians, in California and Washington state.

The company has also had to address internal turmoil over its scientific ethics, after coming under fire for how managers review Google’s scientists’ work. In December, Timnit Gebru, a prominent Black scientist, wrote on Twitter that she was fired by Google after she pushed back against the

company for trying to suppress her research on the ethics of artificial intelligence. Within months, [another member of Gebru's AI ethics team was let go](#), escalating the issue.

Executives have also had to make regular appearances on Capitol Hill, and have been called to testify in front of the Senate judiciary antitrust subcommittee.

Last week, a number of smaller apps, including Spotify, Tile and Match, [told legislators](#) that Google and Apple “hold data hostage” to stifle their competition. Senator Amy Klobuchar, the Democratic chair of the subcommittee, agreed and said the tech companies “exclude or suppress apps that compete with their own products” and “charge excessive fees that affect competition”.

“The only way apps can get to consumers is through one of these two platforms, which are owned by just two companies,” she said. “The best thing to do here would be to admit that we have a huge monopoly problem across the board, and put in some stiffer rules and standards to address it.”

The Associated Press contributed reporting

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Manufacturing sector

Sales of Crocs soar as rubber shoe brand predicts bumper year

Company reports revenues up 64% in first quarter as shoppers seek comfort during the pandemic



Questlove arrives at the Oscars on Sunday in a pair of gold crocs.
Photograph: Chris Pizzello/AFP/Getty Images

Questlove arrives at the Oscars on Sunday in a pair of gold crocs.
Photograph: Chris Pizzello/AFP/Getty Images

[Joanna Partridge](#)

Tue 27 Apr 2021 15.13 EDT

Once considered a fashion faux-pas, sales of Crocs soared in the first three-months of the year, as the rubber shoe brand celebrated record demand from shoppers seeking comfortable footwear during the pandemic.

The company's revenues climbed by 64% in the first quarter, reaching a record-breaking \$460m (£331m), just days after a [gold pair of Crocs](#) appeared on the Oscars red carpet, sported by musician Questlove, the awards' musical director.

“Demand for the Crocs brand is stronger than ever with expected 2021 revenue growth of 40% to 50%,” said Andrew Rees, Crocs' chief executive, adding that the company was enjoying growth in all regions and through all sales channels, including 26% sales growth in Asia.

As a result, the company raised its profit guidance for 2021 as it predicted consumer demand would accelerate globally.

Crocs shares jumped by 17% on the bumper sales numbers, changing hands on Wall Street for \$99 (£71) by lunchtime on Tuesday, well above their previous peak of about \$74 at the height of Crocs' popularity in 2007. In April last year, Crocs shares were worth about \$20.

Fashion website Who What Wear [declared last December](#) “2021 is set to be the year of the Croc”. The forecasters have been proved right.

When they first appeared, the rubber cloggs were initially marketed at sailors and water sport enthusiasts because they are made from a lightweight and odour-resistant special resin, before becoming a fashion phenomenon in the mid-noughties.

However, the shoes soon fell out of fashion, and Crocs teetered on the brink of bankruptcy in 2009, after [making a loss of \\$185m](#) the previous year. The latest turnaround began when Crocs launched high-profile partnerships with designer fashion houses including Balenciaga and Christopher Kane.

While they have remained much loved by gardeners and workers in hospitals and hospitality venues whose jobs require them to stand for long periods, the shoes have been enjoying a fully fledged fashion renaissance in recent months thanks to high-profile collaborations with [pop artists including Justin Bieber](#), whose designs are embellished with cartoon animals.

Launching his version, the pop star proudly announced: “I wear Crocs all the time, so designing my own pair came naturally.”

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

Coronavirus

Brazil begins parliamentary inquiry into Bolsonaro's Covid response

Opponents hope investigation will torpedo chances of re-election for far-right president

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President Bolsonaro in March 2021. Brazil has suffered the world's third-highest number of infections and second-highest death toll, with nearly 400,000 dead. Photograph: Andressa Anholete/Getty Images

President Bolsonaro in March 2021. Brazil has suffered the world's third-highest number of infections and second-highest death toll, with nearly 400,000 dead. Photograph: Andressa Anholete/Getty Images

[Tom Phillips](#) in Rio de Janeiro

Tue 27 Apr 2021 13.20 EDT

Brazil's congress has launched a parliamentary inquiry into what critics call Jair Bolsonaro's disastrous and potentially criminal response to a Covid pandemic that has killed nearly 400,000 Brazilians.

The politically charged investigation, which rivals of Brazil's far-right president hope will torpedo his chances of re-election, will be conducted by 11 of the country's 81 senators, including several of Bolsonaro's fiercest opponents.

[Spreading faster, hitting harder – why young Brazilians are dying of Covid](#)
[Read more](#)

Officially, their task will be to scrutinise the government's overall handling of one of the worst coronavirus outbreaks on Earth. Brazil has suffered the world's third-highest number of infections after the US and India and second-highest death toll, with at least 392,204 fatalities.

The inquiry, which Bolsonaro's detractors call the "CPI da Morte" or "death committee", will pursue multiple lines of inquiry. They include why the government promoted ineffective treatments such as hydroxychloroquine, why three health ministers were removed during the pandemic, and what caused [January's devastating healthcare collapse](#) in the Amazon when hospitals ran out of oxygen and patients died of asphyxiation. Investigators will also examine the government's failure to impose lockdowns or promote social distancing and the conduct of Bolsonaro's former health minister [Eduardo Pazuello](#), an army general who was appointed despite having no background in public health.

"Eighty-six per cent of Brazilians know someone or have a relative who has died – we've never seen anything like this in Brazilian history," the Amazonian senator Omar Aziz told senators after being elected the inquiry's president on Tuesday.

Aziz, whose brother is among the dead, said the investigation was about justice not revenge, and would home in on any official found to have made mistakes, independent of ideology. But observers say the inquiry, known by its Portuguese acronym CPI, is fundamentally about the actions of one man: Jair Bolsonaro.

“He’s the number one target,” said Maria Cristina Fernandes, a political columnist for the newspaper Valor Econômico. “The CPI’s work is going to be aimed at directly incriminating the president. I’ve no doubt about it.”

The most potentially damaging areas of investigation are likely to revolve around Brazil’s failure to acquire sufficient vaccines to protect its 212 million citizens and Bolsonaro’s allegedly calculated pursuit of herd immunity by letting Covid run wild. Critics claim that strategy cost many thousands of Brazilians their lives.



The first session of the inquiry that will investigate the government’s handling of the coronavirus pandemic. Photograph: Edilson Rodrigues/Brazilian Senate/AFP/Getty Images

“The CPI is going to want to show that there was a deliberate push for herd immunity – and the ultimate manifestation of this herd immunity is the 400,000 deaths we have, which could well reach 600,000,” Fernandes said.

There were [reports](#) on Tuesday that Brazil’s health ministry had ignored at least 11 offers to supply vaccines, including a proposal for 70m Pfizer shots last August.

The inquiry catches Bolsonaro, a 66-year-old Trump-admiring populist, at arguably his lowest ebb since he took office in January 2019. [Polls suggest](#)

[rising anger](#) at his pandemic response, although he retains the backing of perhaps a third of voters. Bolsonaro appears rattled by [the political revival of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva](#), the charismatic former union leader who was president until 2011 and looks likely to challenge him for the presidency next year.

Past CPIs into issues including cybercrime, gun-running, high-level corruption and people trafficking have often failed to achieve tangible political results. But signs of nervousness have emerged from the Bolsonaro camp in recent days, including one former minister's apparent bid to deflect blame from the president over Brazil's vaccine shortage.

[Speaking to](#) the magazine *Veja*, Fabio Wajngarten, Bolsonaro's communications minister until March, blamed Brazil's failure to buy millions of Pfizer vaccines on the health ministry's "incompetence and inefficiency". "President Bolsonaro is completely exempt of any responsibility whatsoever," Wajngarten claimed.

[Latin America's lack of a united front on Covid has had disastrous consequences | Andre Pagliarini](#)
[Read more](#)

On Friday Bolsonaro, a former paratrooper notorious for his praise of Latin American autocrats, [threatened to deploy the army](#) if state governors tried to prevent citizens going to church or work with Covid lockdowns.

Cláudio Couto, a political scientist from the Getulio Vargas Foundation, said such braggadocio betrayed Bolsonaro's irritation and anxiety over the investigation: "It's the reaction of someone who is clearly shaken and understands the danger he's in."

The inquiry will initially last 90 days but Fernandes suspected Bolsonaro's foes would seek to prolong it to maximise the political damage it would cause him in the lead up to the 2022 presidential election. "They're going to roast the pig on a low flame," she said.

Bolsonaro's senator son, Flávio Bolsonaro, denounced the inquiry as an "untimely" intervention that put the lives of senators and their staff in danger

by obliging them to attend in-person hearings.

“The government favours investigation, but not now,” claimed Bolsonaro, whose father has repeatedly undermined containment measures by [holding dozens of political events](#) in his palace and shunning masks.

Flávio Bolsonaro claimed voters would punish any politician who dared to “climb on the coffins of nearly 400,000 dead” Brazilians to attack his father.

The centre-left senator Eliziane Gama told lawmakers: “We cannot solely blame the federal government for the number of deaths we are seeing. But it’s very clear that the failures and lack of action of authorities contributed to the catastrophic situation we are experiencing in Brazil.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/27/brazil-begins-parliamentary-inquiry-into-bolsonaros-covid-response>

Headlines monday 26 april 2021

- [Coronavirus Minister denies Johnson said 'thousands' more deaths better than lockdown](#)
- [Live UK Covid: minister denies PM said he'd rather 'bodies pile high' than have third lockdown](#)
- [No 11 refurbishment Labour calls for urgent inquiry](#)
- [The 'chatty rat' and the lockdown leak All you need to know](#)

[Coronavirus](#)

Johnson denies saying he would rather see ‘bodies piled high’ than third Covid lockdown

Bereaved families call PM’s alleged comment ‘a punch in the stomach to all those grieving’

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



A woman looks at the memorial wall of more than 150,000 hearts, each representing a coronavirus death, in evening sunlight in London in April. Photograph: David Cliff/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

A woman looks at the memorial wall of more than 150,000 hearts, each representing a coronavirus death, in evening sunlight in London in April. Photograph: David Cliff/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

[Rajeev Syal](#), [Robert Booth](#) and [Jessica Elgot](#)

Mon 26 Apr 2021 10.14 EDT

Boris Johnson has denied he said he would rather see bodies piled “high in their thousands” than order a third lockdown, an alleged comment that bereaved relatives described as “a punch in the stomach to all those grieving”.

Johnson said it was “total, total rubbish” that he had said those words. He said: “What I certainly think is that this country has done an amazing job with the lockdowns. And they’ve been very difficult. And they’ve been very tough for people. And there’s no question about that.

“Nobody wants to go into a lockdown but they’ve helped us. The discipline the public has shown has helped us to get the numbers of cases down very considerably.”

His denial came after the Daily Mail reported an unnamed source as claiming the prime minister said at a Downing Street meeting in October: “No more fucking lockdowns – let the bodies pile high in their thousands.”

Asked on Monday if he made the comments, Johnson said: “No, but I think the important thing I think people want us to get on and do as a government is to make sure that the lockdowns work.”

Johnson’s official spokesman also denied the claims to reporters. “This is untrue and he has denied [saying] that.”

The incendiary claim follows a [briefing war](#) this weekend between Johnson and his former key adviser Dominic Cummings, who resigned from his No 10 job after what was believed to be a power struggle with Johnson’s partner, Carrie Symonds.

However, Johnson did not firmly deny another key allegation by Cummings, that he discussed using donations to fund a Downing Street flat refurbishment. Asked if he had ever discussed using donors to fund the work, he said: “If there’s anything to be said about that, any declaration to be made, that will, of course, be made in due course.”

The defence secretary, Ben Wallace, also dismissed claims that the government was “sleazy” amid [mounting allegations](#) that the prime minister accepted undeclared donations from Conservative donors.

“Look, it is not true. It has been categorically denied by practically everyone,” Wallace told Sky when asked about the reported remark.

Wallace said the claims were “gossip”. “We are getting into the sort of comedy chapter now of these gossip stories – unnamed sources, by unnamed advisers talking about unnamed events.”

For members of the Covid-19 Bereaved Families For Justice group, the alleged comments compounded their anger at the government’s [claim that it would be too busy for months](#) to launch a public inquiry into the UK’s handling of the pandemic and refusal to meet them.

Matt Fowler, who co-founded the group, said he could not comprehend “how someone could be so heartless, disrespectful and unsympathetic”.

“If [the comments] can be proven to be true, he should resign,” said Tony Fitzgerald who lost his wife, Ann, 65. “I for one, will never forgive him ... shame on you Boris.”

Shelly Weeks, whose husband Roy, 73, died last April, said she was “disgusted”, while Sioux Hill, whose father John Leigh, died with Covid last April, shed “tears of pain” at the comments.

“I would like to challenge Boris to personally walk the memorial wall and be faced with all the names and hearts of beautiful people who should still be here,” said Weeks. “Does he want to see bodies piled high in morgues?”

“Johnson’s refusal to meet with bereaved families is hurtful and insulting, and demonstrates even more than his words quoted in the Daily Mail today how morally contemptible he is,” added Rivka Gottlieb, who lost her father.

Johnson is facing a stream of allegations about his [muddled initial handling of the Covid-19 crisis](#), questions over who financed the [redcoration of his Downing Street flat](#), and claims that [multibillion pound contracts have been handed to party donors](#).

[Chart](#)

Downing Street named Cummings on Thursday as a source of a number of damaging leaks about the prime minister. Cummings hit back on Friday, denying he was the source and casting Johnson as incompetent and lacking in integrity.

Cummings said Johnson's plans to have donors secretly pay for the renovation of his Downing Street plan were "unethical, foolish, possibly illegal and almost certainly broke the rules on proper disclosure of political donations".

On the BBC's Radio 4 Today programme, the defence secretary said Johnson paid for the refurbishment of the Downing Street flat "out of his own pocket" and that all the rules were followed.

"As the prime minister has been clear, the prime minister paid personally for the flat. The prime minister has complied at all stages with the rules and we've been very clear on that.

"We have engaged with the Electoral Commission and we will continue to engage with that," he said.

Wallace said he did not "recognise" suggestions that Johnson had asked Tory donors for financial help to pay for the upgrades, saying they were "based on a large amount of speculation".

['Mad and totally unethical': Dominic Cummings hits out at Boris Johnson](#)
[Read more](#)

He added: "The prime minister, as I've said, paid for it out of his money. The action he did was he paid the money for the flat out of his own pocket."

Simon Case, the cabinet secretary, is expected to be questioned on Monday about Cummings' claim that the prime minister tried to quash a formal leak inquiry – the so-called search for a "chatty rat" – because it implicated a friend of Symonds.

Case will appear on Monday afternoon before the public administration and constitutional affairs committee.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/26/minister-denies-boris-johnson-said-thousands-more-covid-deaths-better-than-another-lockdown>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

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UK Covid: Boris Johnson ‘corrupting standards of public life’, says Labour’s Rachel Reeves – as it happened

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/live/2021/apr/26/uk-covid-live-news-boris-johnson-bodies-pile-high-lockdown-coronavirus>

[Boris Johnson](#)

Labour calls for Electoral Commission inquiry into PM's flat refurbishment

Party says Boris Johnson and Dominic Cummings must be summoned to give evidence on how works were paid for



10 Downing Street with No 11 (white facade) above which Boris Johnson lives. Photograph: Blake-Ezra Cole/Alamy Stock Photo

10 Downing Street with No 11 (white facade) above which Boris Johnson lives. Photograph: Blake-Ezra Cole/Alamy Stock Photo

[Aubrey Allegretti](#)

[@breeallegretti](#)

Sun 25 Apr 2021 14.16 EDT

The Electoral Commission must legally summon Boris Johnson, [Dominic Cummings](#) and Conservative officials to give evidence on how the prime minister paid for refurbishments to his Downing Street flat, Labour has said.

Calling on the commission to launch a formal investigation, lawyers for the party said the matter was “incontrovertibly in the public interest”.

In a letter sent to the commission’s chief executive, Bob Posner, on Sunday and seen by the Guardian, Edwards Duthie Shamash Solicitors said there was “ever-increasing evidence” to warrant such an inquiry.

Previously the watchdog has said only that “discussions” are under way with the Tories as they “work to establish” whether any reporting of political donation requirements had been breached.

Labour cited Cummings’ incendiary blog post published last week that claimed Johnson planned to “have donors secretly pay” for the refurbishment of the No 11 flat where he lives with fiancée Carrie Symonds and son Wilfred. The bill for the works reportedly ran to up to £200,000.

In a post distancing himself from [accusations of leaking](#), the former top aide to the prime minister, who left that role last November, said Johnson’s actions around the refurbishment were “unethical, foolish, possibly illegal and almost certainly broke the rules on proper disclosure of political donations if conducted in the way he intended”.

Cummings said he had made known his desire not to be associated with the plan, writing that he refused to help and so his knowledge about it was limited. However, he added: “I would be happy to tell the cabinet secretary or Electoral Commission what I know concerning this matter.”

Labour’s lawyers said the commission should look into “potential offences or other actions that may have contravened” the legislation governing political parties’ spending, and said it should summon the relevant invoices to “resolve this”.



Boris Johnson and his former special adviser Dominic Cummings.
Photograph: Daniel Leal-Olivas/AFP/Getty Images

Cat Smith, a shadow Cabinet Office minister, accused the [Conservatives](#) of “trying to cover this up”, and urged them to “hand over everything they have” if they wanted to “do something about the stench of sleaze engulfing them”.

If the commission resists launching a formal investigation, some clearer details are likely to be provided in the form of Cummings’ planned appearance in front of a parliamentary select committee next month. He has promised to “answer questions about any of these issues to parliament on 26 May for as long as the MPs want”.

The government over the weekend refused to answer questions about whether Johnson had received a loan from a Tory donor to help pay for the works.

Liz Truss, the international trade secretary, [said Johnson paid all costs personally](#), but refused to deny Johnson had not originally met the costs, and paid the money only once attention was drawn to the subject.

She did not say when Johnson made the payment or whether he had received a loan to help him pay it. Nor did Truss say when the next register of

ministers' interests, which is meant to be published twice a year, would be published, given the last one came out in July 2020. She dismissed the "stream of allegations about personal issues" facing Johnson, and called some of them "tittle-tattle".

A No 10 spokesperson said: "As has been the case under successive administrations, refurbishments and maintenance are made periodically. More information on works on the Downing Street estate, including the residences, will be covered in the Cabinet Office's 2021 annual report and audited accounts. Any costs of wider refurbishment in this year have been met by the prime minister personally."

They claimed all ministers had "acted in accordance with the appropriate codes of conduct" and added: "All reportable donations are transparently declared and published – either by the Electoral Commission or the House of Commons registrar – in line with the requirements set out in electoral law, and gifts and benefits received in a ministerial capacity are declared in transparency returns."

A spokesperson for the Conservatives said: "All reportable donations to the Conservative party are correctly declared to the Electoral Commission, published by them and comply fully with the law."

The Electoral Commission declined to comment.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/apr/25/labour-calls-for-electoral-commission-inquiry-pm-flat-refurbishment-downing-street>

[Boris Johnson](#)

The ‘chatty rat’ and the lockdown leak: all you need to know

Dominic Cummings’ ‘nuclear’ blogpost is likely to send shockwaves around Westminster for weeks



Dominic Cummings, once Boris Johnson’s most trusted ally, has turn on him in a blame game over leaks. Photograph: Peter MacDiarmid/Rex/Shutterstock

Dominic Cummings, once Boris Johnson’s most trusted ally, has turn on him in a blame game over leaks. Photograph: Peter MacDiarmid/Rex/Shutterstock

[Aubrey Allegretti](#)
[@breeallegretti](#)

Sun 25 Apr 2021 12.20 EDT

The political fallout from Dominic Cummings' latest incendiary blogpost, which has been called a "nuclear dom" in Westminster, caused some immediate tremors and is likely to lead to aftershocks for weeks to come.

Months after being turfed out of Downing Street, Boris Johnson's once most senior adviser and trusted ally has turned on him in a blame game over leaks.

The final straw seems to have been a text exchange between the prime minister and the entrepreneur James Dyson, in which the prime minister promised to "fix" a tax issue. The most explosive row, however, is focused on [who leaked news of England's second national lockdown](#), nicknamed the search for the "chatty rat".

[‘It is beyond moronic’: fury at how PM set the stage for Cummings’s revenge](#)

[Read more](#)

What happened?

Various newspapers including the Times, the Daily Mail and the Sun reported on 30 October last year that the government was planning to announce a national lockdown.

Having denied for months that another lockdown would be necessary and after resisting Labour's calls for a "circuit breaker" in England like the one introduced by the Welsh government, Downing Street seemed caught by surprise when the news emerged.

A Whitehall inquiry was ordered, but more than six months on, no culprit has been publicly identified. Asked repeatedly to give an update on the investigation, a No 10 spokesperson has simply said they have no new information to offer.

Who's in the frame?

According to a coordinated briefing to three Conservative-friendly newspapers by "No 10 sources" on Friday, Johnson believes Cummings has

been “engaged in systematic leaking”.

Downing Street did not deny the reports, and some have speculated that a more pro-authoritarian Cummings leaked the news to bounce Johnson into taking action. But after the direct attacks on him earlier this week, Cummings came out swinging to defend his reputation and pointed the finger of blame at another No 10 staffer.

[Post-Cummings quiet life goes to pot as ‘No 10 sources’ leak and brief](#)
[Read more](#)

Cummings said in his blog on Friday that a meeting was had been held last year with him, Johnson, the cabinet secretary, Simon Case, and the No 10 head of communications, Lee Cain, about the investigation. Cummings claimed Case had exonerated him and Cain, and said that “all the evidence definitely leads” to a man called Henry Newman, a special adviser who moved from Michael Gove’s office to No 10 and is a close personal friend of [Carrie Symonds](#), the prime minister’s fiancée.

Cummings alleged that Johnson was “very upset” and told him that if Newman was confirmed as “chatty rat”, he would have to fire him, which would “cause me very serious problems with Carrie”, so the prime minister suggested the leak inquiry be quashed. Johnson has since dismissed the claim and No 10 sources deny that Newman was the leaker.

Will we ever know?

The inquiry may well fail to deliver a definitive verdict on the leaker’s identity. A cabinet minister, Liz Truss, has said the investigation is still ongoing.

The Sunday Times reported MI5 as saying it had been roped in to help make a breakthrough, and that so far it had found one person who had sent a WhatsApp message from the cabinet room at around 6pm the day after the meeting where the lockdown was discussed. Present, they said, were Johnson, Cummings, Cain, an unnamed political aide and two civil servants.

Which other leaks have aroused suspicion?

A separate inquiry has been set up into how the texts between Johnson and Dyson fell into the BBC's hands.

The Daily Mail also revealed that the Saudi crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, told Johnson in a text message that UK-Saudi relations would be damaged if the British government failed to intervene to "correct" the Premier League's decision not to allow a £300m takeover of Newcastle United last year.

[Boris Johnson has a text addiction and it's bad news for all of us | Marina Hyde](#)
[Read more](#)

It was also revealed this year that an extensive redecoration had taken place of the Downing Street flat where Johnson lives with Symonds and their son, Wilfred, reportedly of a cost up to £200,000. The issue has caused particular embarrassment because of another leaked email from a Tory donor and peer, Lord Brownlow, to the Conservative co-chairman Ben Elliot, which confirmed a £58,000 payment to the party "to cover the payments the party has already made" on renovations.

What do all these leaks tell us?

Whereas Cummings' departure from Downing Street and a new chief of staff being brought in was meant to "professionalise" operations, it seems the old turf wars are still playing out in No 10 between those sympathetic to Symonds and to Cummings.

The leaks are damaging, but the [Conservatives](#) are far ahead in the polls. Labour is hoping that its attacks on alleged cronyism and sleaze will start to penetrate more, and stick on not just Johnson but others around him – including cabinet ministers who may be thinking about running to replace him when the time comes.

The answers to some questions are still unknown. Did the cabinet secretary really exonerate Cummings for leaking and instead blame Newman? Was the prime minister loaned money to pay for Downing Street refurbishments,

to cover up an original plan for the party to pay for them? And who is responsible for the leaks causing such a headache for No 10?

Cummings is expected to appear before a select committee next month, and has promised to “answer questions about any of these issues to parliament ... for as long as the MPs want”. We may not have to wait much longer for some answers.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/apr/25/chatty-ratty-and-the-lockdown-leak-all-you-need-to-know>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

2021.04.26 - Coronavirus

- [India Doctors sound warning over oxygen hoarding](#)
- [Twitter Social network under fire over deletion of critical Covid tweets in India](#)
- ['Menu of neglect' Preventative care hits cliff as US health resources diverted to fight Covid](#)
- [Vaccines Covid jabs to be offered to 44-year-olds in England from Monday](#)

India

India's Covid crisis: doctors sound warning over oxygen hoarding

People are stockpiling medicine and oxygen as hospitals struggle to access supplies

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



A hospital worker checks oxygen cylinders as India sets another global record on coronavirus cases. Photograph: Mukhtar Khan/AP

A hospital worker checks oxygen cylinders as India sets another global record on coronavirus cases. Photograph: Mukhtar Khan/AP

[Hannah Ellis-Petersen](#) in Delhi and [Alison Rourke](#)

Mon 26 Apr 2021 02.41 EDT

People are hoarding oxygen and vital medicines in homes in [India](#), creating panic and causing shortages in hospitals treating critically ill Covid patients, senior Indian doctors have said.

India recorded another 352,991 new coronavirus cases on Monday, breaking its own global record for the fifth straight day, and 2,812 new deaths, its highest daily figure for fatalities.

01:23

India: tearful relatives beg for oxygen and hospital beds for Covid patients – video

In the week to 25 April, the country recorded a cumulative 89% increase in Covid deaths compared with the week before, and a total of 2.2 million new cases – the highest seven-day increase experienced anywhere in the world. Total confirmed infections have passed 17 million.

“Hoarding of injections like remdesivir and oxygen in homes is creating a panic and this hoarding is causing a shortage of these medicines,” said Dr Randeep Guleria, the director of India’s Institute of Medical Sciences, in a [statement released by the ministry of health on Sunday night](#).

Guleria said most people should not need to be treated with oxygen and holding it in private homes could reduce availability for critical patients. He emphasised, too, that Remdesivir was no “magic bullet”.

01:18

India: drone footage shows makeshift mass crematorium in Delhi – video

“Covid-19 is (a) mild infection and 85-90% people will only suffer from cold, fever, sore throat and body ache. Only symptomatic treatment at home is enough to ride through these infections and there is no need for oxygen or Remdesivir,” he said.

Demand for oxygen has risen more than 20% nationally in the past few days. In Delhi, hospitals have been reeling from acute oxygen shortages, sometimes coming within 30 minutes of supply running dry, putting hundreds of lives at risk.

Delhi has recorded the highest number of Covid-19 cases

On Saturday, 20 patients died at Jaipur Golden hospital in the capital during a severe oxygen crisis. On Sunday, four patients at Gurgaon's Kathuria hospital and four patients at Virat hospital in Rewari, both south-west of Delhi, all died when the facilities ran out of oxygen.

After hospitals issued a number of warnings last week about their low oxygen supplies, some relatives of patients turned to sourcing oxygen themselves.

One man told NDTV he had stood in a long queue to fill a 10-litre oxygen cylinder for his 65-year-old father who was in Pentamed hospital in Delhi. Another relative said his brother had been in hospital for 10 days and the family was sourcing oxygen itself.

The vast majority of hospital beds for Covid-19 patients in Delhi are occupied

A thriving black market has also emerged for oxygen and Remdesivir, with cylinders and injections selling for exorbitant prices. Over the weekend, three men were arrested for attempting to sell Remdesivir injections for 40,000 rupees (£384) each.

Lockdown in Delhi has been extended until 3 May as cases continue to rise across the country. On Sunday, the southern city of Bengaluru became the first after Delhi to record more than 20,000 new cases in a day.

The US on Sunday led international pledges of support for India as the country grappled with worsening crisis. Joe Biden said the US was “determined to help India in its time of need”. immediately making available supplies of vaccine-production material, therapeutics, tests, ventilators and protective equipment.

Just as India sent assistance to the United States as our hospitals were strained early in the pandemic, we are determined to help India in its time of need. <https://t.co/SzWRj0eP3y>

— President Biden (@POTUS) [April 25, 2021](#)

“The United States has identified sources of specific raw material urgently required for Indian manufacture of the Covishield vaccine,” a White House statement said, referring to the India-produced version of the AstraZeneca shot.

But it did not mention whether the US would send millions of surplus AstraZeneca vaccine doses to India, after top US pandemic adviser Anthony Fauci said on Sunday that would be considered.

The [UK announced it had dispatched ventilators](#) and oxygen to Delhi and France and Germany were set to send much-needed oxygen to the countries in the coming days.

Pakistan, a traditional foe of India, offered medical equipment and supplies after the prime minister, Imran Khan, tweeted prayers for a “speedy recovery”.

In the Indian capital, more than a quarter of people tested for the virus on Sunday were positive.

The prime minister, Narendra Modi, said the country had been shaken by a “storm” as he called on people to get vaccinated and not “get swayed by any rumour about the vaccines”.

02:10

India Covid crisis: families' plea for help amid oxygen shortages and mass cremations – video report

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/26/doctors-sound-warning-over-oxygen-hoarding-as-india-reports-record-covid-cases-and-deaths>

India

Twitter under fire over deletion of critical Covid tweets in India

Lawmakers and rights activists say removals risk people's health and harms freedom of speech



The Indian prime minister, Narendra Modi, receives his Covid vaccine in New Delhi in March. Photograph: AP

The Indian prime minister, Narendra Modi, receives his Covid vaccine in New Delhi in March. Photograph: AP

Reuters

Mon 26 Apr 2021 05.17 EDT

The removal of dozens of tweets seen to be critical of the Indian government's handling of the coronavirus pandemic is putting people's health at risk and quashing dissent, according to lawmakers and human rights activists.

Twitter withheld some tweets after a legal request by the Indian government, a company spokesperson told Reuters on Saturday. These included tweets from a lawmaker, a minister in the state of West Bengal, and a film-maker.

“Suppression of information and criticism of government is not only dangerous for India but it is putting people around the world at risk,” said Mirza Saaib Beg, a lawyer whose tweets were among those withheld.

“Freedom of inquiry is an intrinsic part of freedom of speech and expression. These restrictions are further reflective of the weakening of all institutional spaces in India,” said Beg, who is studying at the University of Oxford.

01:18

India: drone footage shows makeshift mass crematorium in Delhi – video

India’s ministry for information technology did not respond to a request for comment.

The country’s confirmed new coronavirus infections [hit a record peak for a fifth day on Monday](#), rising to about 353,000 cases.

There is mounting criticism that prime minister Narendra Modi’s government and state authorities let down their guard earlier this year, allowing big religious and political gatherings to take place when cases fell to below 10,000 a day.

“Questioning the government of India’s decision to allow mass gatherings ... where people from all across the country gathered and violated Covid safety protocols ... cannot be called to be violating any laws of the country,” said Pawan Khera, a spokesman for the opposition Congress party, whose tweets were also withheld.

The law cited in the government’s Twitter request is the Information Technology Act, 2000, which allows authorities to order blocking of public access to information to protect “sovereignty and integrity of India” and maintain public order.

Requests from the government are reviewed under Twitter's rules and the local law, a spokeswoman for Twitter told Reuters.

[Covid graphic](#)

There is a “lack of transparency” in the government's order, said the [Internet Freedom Foundation](#), a digital rights group in Delhi. “What is clear is there are more directions being issued across social media platforms in India,” it said in a statement.

Twitter has about 17.5 million users in India.

In its most recent transparency report for the six months to June 30, 2020, Twitter said it had received 42,220 legal demands to remove content from 53 countries, with most of the requests coming from five countries including Russia, India and Turkey.

Earlier this year, the social media company [withheld dozens of accounts](#) on the request of the Indian government on grounds that users were posting misleading content related to farmers' protests near Delhi, aiming to incite violence.

Twitter did not fully comply with the government order to take down more than 1,100 accounts and posts, saying it had not blocked all of the content because it believed the directives were not in line with Indian laws.

Following the face-off with Twitter earlier this year, the Indian government unveiled tougher rules to regulate big social media firms it said were needed to hold the companies accountable for any misuse or abuse.

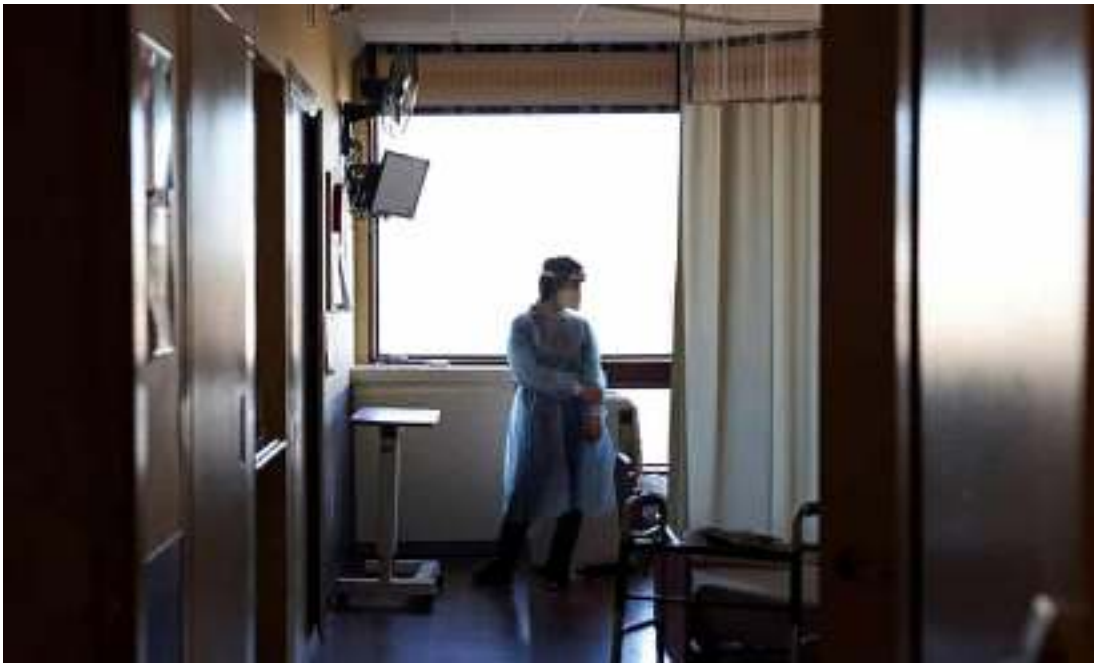
“We all would prefer free spaces to objectively critique power in the offline as well as online space. However, both spaces are increasingly shrinking,” Beg told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

US healthcare

‘Menu of neglect’: the long-term health problems being ignored in US amid pandemic

Many routine measures, such as childhood vaccinations and lead screenings, are being skipped as experts warn pandemic is likely to widen health inequalities



‘We assess for lots of things during primary care visits which have been deferred or delayed.’ Photograph: Yuki Iwamura/Reuters

‘We assess for lots of things during primary care visits which have been deferred or delayed.’ Photograph: Yuki Iwamura/Reuters

[*Nina Lakhani*](#) and [*Jessica Glenza*](#)

Mon 26 Apr 2021 05.00 EDT

Health resources diverted to fight the Covid-19 pandemic have caused a major drop in critical preventative care including childhood vaccinations and lead screenings, sexually transmitted disease testing and substance abuse services.

['My city is on fire': pandemic wreaks renewed havoc in Flint after water crisis](#)

[Read more](#)

In short, many of the routine measures meant to keep Americans healthy – and keep American health from slipping further behind that of other developed, peer nations – have hit a worrying cliff.

As attention has focused on the immediate crisis of the pandemic and the hundreds of thousands of lives lost in America, this other hidden crisis represents another layer of disaster that also has profound implications.

“This is either the second or first worst pandemic in modern human history,” said Dr Howard Markel, a pandemic historian and pediatrician at the University of Michigan. “We knew there would be repercussions and unintended consequences.”

Now, there is a “whole menu of neglect” to address as a national vaccine campaign allows people to slowly emerge from a year of lockdowns and social distancing. “There is no historical precedent for this,” added Markel.

In the first few months of the pandemic alone, at least 400,000 children missed screenings for lead, a toxic heavy metal. Doctors and nurses ordered 3m fewer vaccines for children and 400,000 fewer for measles specifically.

There is no historical precedent for this

Howard Markel

For the first time, clinics were forced to ration lab tests for sexually transmitted diseases as lab capacity and supplies were diverted to test for Covid-19. Contact tracers were also redeployed from tracking chlamydia,

gonorrhea and syphilis cases to finding people in contact with Covid-19 patients.

Data from one [large commercial lab](#) showed 669,000 fewer HIV tests were processed. Compared with 2019, the lab diagnosed nearly 5,000 fewer cases of HIV. Delayed diagnosis can lead to people [unwittingly transmitting the virus](#).

Last year, more than 87,000 Americans died of drug overdoses as substance abuse clinics shuttered – the highest death toll since the opioid epidemic began. Some of those clinics never fully reopened, as funding dried up.

While some of these metrics have rebounded since the most severe lockdown in March and April 2020, most have failed to fully catch up as health services remain stretched due to ongoing Covid outbreaks and budget cuts. Meanwhile millions of Americans have lost employer health insurance, slipped into poverty or had lives thrown into upheaval.

Importantly, experts warn that the pandemic is likely to widen health inequalities for those who already had disproportionately worse health – including racial and sexual minorities, the poor and the rural Americans.

“Just as this has accelerated all of the disruptive movements of American society, this has really exposed vulnerability based on poverty, poor access to healthcare, housing issues – the social determinants of health we’ve been talking about for years,” said Markel.

Lead testing

Lead is an invisible and odorless toxic heavy metal found in ageing water pipes, contaminated soil and old peeling paint – hazards found in an estimated [3.6m homes](#) with young children nationwide, according to the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Most lead exposure is believed to occur when babies crawl across contaminated surfaces, which is why the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends children be tested for lead at 12 and 24 months old during routine primary care checks.

As clinic visits plummeted during the pandemic, an estimated 10,000 children with elevated lead levels in 34 states went undiagnosed between [January and May 2020](#), according to a CDC study. The fall in testing also happened as children spent more time confined at home in potentially toxic environments because of school and day care closures.

Lead is highly toxic to the brain and nervous system, as well as most other organs. There [is no safe level](#), but the higher and longer the exposure, the worse the range and severity of the consequences.

The testing decline will probably have a disproportionate impact on Black, brown and poor families who are more likely to be living in older housing which still have lead-based paint, and have suffered the highest rates of economic distress which increases the risk of ending up in unsafe housing.

In Ohio, preliminary reports suggest testing fell by more than 30% in some cities such as Cleveland, where older housing stocks and housing instability are associated with an elevated risk of lead poisoning.

The fall in lead testing didn't happen in isolation, according to Aparna Bole, a pediatrician in Cleveland and associate professor at the department of pediatrics at Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine.

“Development and nutritional assessments, vaccinations, child abuse and neglect, parental depression ... We assess for lots of things during primary care visits which have been deferred or delayed, so kids weren't getting diagnosed or the early interventions they needed for many things,” she said.

Childhood immunizations

Childhood immunizations to prevent potentially fatal disease fell across the US in the spring and summer of 2020, mostly due to lockdowns and diversion of resources and workers to fight Covid-19, as well as avoidance of healthcare settings as public fear spread.

[In Michigan](#), immunizations plummeted to the lowest levels in a decade, significantly increasing the risk of outbreaks of measles, mumps and whooping cough. Vaccine coverage in all milestone age groups dropped

from about 67-70% in the five years before the pandemic to less than 50% in 2020, according to state health officials.

For measles, a highly contagious virus which can lead to [serious long-term complications including death](#), only 81% of 19- to 36-month-olds and 76% of five-year-olds have been vaccinated. To achieve herd immunity, 95% of the community must be vaccinated or otherwise immune.

“My fear is we’re going to have another pandemic take the place of what we’re experiencing now with Covid,” Bob Swanson, Michigan department of health and human services immunization division director, told the [Lansing State Journal](#).

Nationwide, states are struggling to catch up, with recovery slowest among Black and brown children, according to [Anita Shet](#), pediatrician and senior scientist, director of Child Health at the International Vaccine Access Center at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

“Low vaccination coverage is a country-wide phenomenon, and one that needs a multipronged approach to combat these barriers and get everyone vaccinated,” said Shet. “If children who missed out on their vaccines during the pandemic do not get caught up, measles outbreaks can become common again very soon, and we may even see deaths.”

According to the [CDC](#) analysis, routine childhood vaccinations will prevent 8m hospitalizations and 1m early deaths for children born between 1994 and 2018.

Sexually transmitted diseases

Even before the pandemic, sexual health services were chronically underfunded in the US. After adjusting for inflation, spending on STD [programs has decreased by over 40% since 2003](#). Syphilis rates tripled over the same period.

After record numbers of chlamydia, gonorrhea and syphilis for the past [six consecutive years](#), the figures for 2020 are expected to be significantly lower

– which is terrible news, according to sexual health experts, reflecting a steep increase in undiagnosed STDs.

Left untreated, STDs can [cause serious conditions](#) including pelvic inflammatory disease, infertility, cancer, birth defects and even death. Routine tests are crucial as patients can be asymptomatic.

Accessing sexual health services became much harder last year. Nationwide, four out of five sexual health screening clinics reduced opening hours or shut down altogether sometime during the pandemic, according to a poll by the [National Coalition of STD Directors](#) (NCSD). Health departments diverted STD health staff to work on Covid-19 resulting in big declines in contact tracers for chlamydia (28%) gonorrhea (18%) and syphilis (23%). The workforce remains depleted due to budget cuts, hiring freezes and Covid outbreaks.

Last year, clinics were forced to ration STD tests as manufacturers prioritized coronavirus test kits. In October, more than 70% of labs surveyed by the [American Society of Microbiology](#) reported testing equipment shortages.

We've never been in that situation before

Jennifer Mahn

“The [shortage] situation is resolved now, but for months after clinics reopened public health labs could not find test kits for anything, it was unbelievable, we've never been in that situation before,” said Jennifer Mahn, associate director for clinical programs at NCSD.

In fall 2020, several states including California and Michigan reported outbreaks of drug-resistant gonorrhea, in mostly young people, which experts say was probably caused by a mutation of the bacterium that was replicating unchecked due to falls in testing and treatment. The outbreaks forced the CDC to issue new treatment guidance in December.

The rise in undetected infections is likely to disproportionately harm people of color, who have long faced higher rates of STDs and HIV due to gaps in

services. In 2019, two-thirds of all babies born with congenital syphilis were Black or Latino, highlighting the stark disparities in testing and treatment, according to the [NCSD](#).

“Historically, sexual health clinics have been the entry point for people from marginalized communities, it’s where a lot of referral to primary care, mental health and Medicaid enrollment happens, but now there are less places for those individuals to go,” said Mahn.

“It’s really scary, the pandemic has led to further cuts in an already crumbling public health infrastructure for sexual health, god knows what treatment resistant strains are out there. We’re trying to sound the alarm but budgets for STDs and HIV are always the first to be cut.”

Opioids

More than 87,000 Americans died of drug overdoses over the 12-month period that ended in September – a 27% rise on the previous year, according to [preliminary data](#) recently published by the CDC.

After a slight drop in deaths in 2018, fatal overdoses had started climbing in the months leading up to the pandemic, but went up sharply in April and May 2020 when a nationwide lockdown led to widespread closures in drug treatment and addiction support services, some of which never reopened due to budget cuts.

The states hardest hit by fatal overdoses last year included West Virginia and Kentucky, which have long ranked at the top, but notably also included California, Arizona, Louisiana and Tennessee. Most deaths were linked to synthetic opioids like fentanyl, but stimulants like methamphetamine were also involved in many fatal overdoses as dealers mixed drugs to increase profits.

A decade ago, the opioid epidemic mostly affected white Americans in rural and suburban areas, but now Black Americans are dying disproportionately. The risk of dying from a methamphetamine overdose is 12-fold higher among Indigenous Americans than other groups.

Joe Biden is yet to appoint a drugs tsar to lead the charge on tackling the epidemic, but his Covid relief package includes more than \$1.5bn for substance misuse prevention and treatment, and a pledge to address racial inequities in access to services.

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

[Coronavirus](#)

Covid jabs to be offered to 44-year-olds in England from Monday

All those over 40 likely to follow within days, as chief executive of NHS England hails ‘another important milestone’

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



About half a million more people will now be eligible to book an appointment online or by ringing 119. Photograph: Ian Forsyth/Getty Images

About half a million more people will now be eligible to book an appointment online or by ringing 119. Photograph: Ian Forsyth/Getty Images

[Aubrey Allegretti](#)

[@breeallegretti](#)

Sun 25 Apr 2021 19.01 EDT

Coronavirus vaccines will soon be offered to the next priority group, with 44-year-olds able to get a jab in England from Monday and all those over 40 likely to follow within days.

About half a million more people will be eligible to book an appointment online or by ringing 119, as the chief executive of NHS England, Sir [Simon Stevens](#), hailed the passing of “another medically important milestone in the biggest vaccination campaign” in the country’s history.

He revealed that over two-thirds of 45-to-49-year-olds had received a vaccine so far, and urged younger people to come forward when they were offered a jab because it is “the best protection you and your loved ones will receive from this deadly virus”. Uptake has been higher among the over-50s, 95% of whom have already had their first jab.

NHS England said it would make a decision on extending the rollout to people aged 40-43 “in the coming days”, as it waits for the latest advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI).

The Sunday Times reported that the JCVI is still deciding whether the AstraZeneca vaccine should be offered to people in their 30s – given [its recommendation earlier this month](#) that healthy adults under 30 who are not at high risk should have the option of a different jab if one is available in their area, in light of concerns over rare blood clots.

NHS England’s medical director, Prof Stephen Powis, praised the “hard work of NHS staff” for helping the vaccine rollout progress to the next age group, and said the jab was “simple, effective and provides vital protection against the coronavirus”.

Matt Hancock, the health secretary, added: “It will protect you and your loved ones, and help put this pandemic behind us.”

The news came as ministers launched a new drive to encourage younger people to get vaccinated, given fears of a fall in take-up because of the diminished risk of death from Covid-19 among those from lower age groups.

01:00

'Protect yourself and others': UK government launches vaccination advert – video

After the Guardian revealed last month that [the government was worried that the drop-off could be “stark”](#), the Department of Health released a new series of pictures capturing life across a series of vaccine centres. Alice Tooley, 25, a volunteer for a refugee charity in Leeds who features in one of the images, said: “As younger people my age get called for theirs, I hope they jump at it the way I did, so, as a collective, we all play our part in getting back to a more normal way of life.”

TV adverts will also start airing from Monday showcasing the “collective effort of everyone who has played a part” in the vaccine rollout, from scientists and clinical trial participants to NHS and care sector staff and volunteer stewards at vaccination sites.

Meanwhile, in Northern Ireland, vaccines will be offered to the over-35s from Monday. The health minister, Robin Swann, said: “Vaccination is absolutely vital in helping us move through this pandemic. There is no doubt that there are people in Northern Ireland alive today because they have been vaccinated.”

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2021.04.26 - Spotlight

- ['Shame doesn't help anything' Will Young on prep school, PTSD and psychotherapy](#)
- ['War weary' Libya reflects 10 years on from Gaddafi and Arab spring](#)
- [Key Oscars moments Glenn Close's magnificent Da Butt and superb flirting](#)
- [Oscars fashion trends Midriffs and statement tuxedos catch up with Gen Z style](#)
- [OnePlus 9 review A good, well-priced top-spec smartphone](#)

Will Young on prep school, PTSD and psychotherapy: ‘Shame doesn’t help anything’

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[Arab spring: 10th anniversary](#)[Libya](#)

‘War weary’ Libya reflects 10 years on from Gaddafi and Arab spring



People wave flags and chant slogans during a gathering to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the Arab spring in Martyrs Square on 17 February, 2021 in Tripoli, Libya. Photograph: Nada Harib/Getty Images

People wave flags and chant slogans during a gathering to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the Arab spring in Martyrs Square on 17 February, 2021 in Tripoli, Libya. Photograph: Nada Harib/Getty Images

Overshadowed by Syria, the lessons of Libya from the past decade have barely been cross examined



[Peter Beaumont](#)

Mon 26 Apr 2021 00.00 EDT

The last days of Libya's Colonel Muammar Gaddafi 10 years ago conjure up competing images of defiance, defeat and death.

In March 2011, in one of his last public appearances and with rebellion against his regime gathering around him, the soon-to-be-deposed leader arrived at the People's Congress in Tripoli riding an electric golf cart.

Entering the hall, puffy faced and ageing, Gaddafi punched the air before delivering a lengthy and erratic speech to the gathered "representatives of the people." Libyans, he thundered, would "fight to the last man and woman" against foreigners if Nato intervened.



Gaddafi on 17 March, 2011. Photograph: Reuters

He offered money and a new constitution if those rebelling against his rule gave up their fight and blamed al-Qaida and other actors. He warned Libyans they would be “slaves again” if he was gone.

In the streets of his police state beyond the People’s Congress and its obedient representatives, Gaddafi’s notion of freedom was more clear: people who spoke out were disappeared and killed; towns and cities placed under siege.

By August Gaddafi his inner circle was “gone”, fleeing Tripoli after Nato planes led by Britain and France entered the war, their command of skies bending the outcome decisively in the rebels favour.

In October, with the net of rebel forces tightening around the last few blocks his forces still controlled in the city of Sirte, Gaddafi – who had disappeared from view – would try to make a break out of the encirclement, finally caught and killed as he hid in a culvert.



Gaddafi on state television in February 2011. Photograph: Libyan TV/AFP/Getty Images

In retrospect, it was that final battle in Sirte that prefigured so much of what would come later including the internecine rivalries between east and west, and rival cities.

Characterised by bitter street to street fighting as the rival rebel brigades from Benghazi and Misrata converged on the regime's last seafront redoubt, wading sometimes through waist deep water in the flooded streets, the rebels even then seemed often at sharp odds.

Overshadowed by the bloodletting in Syria, the lessons of Libya from the past decade, of Gaddafi's fall and the conflicts that followed, have barely been cross examined and if they have, then they have been forgotten.

It would be a conflict too that would cast a long shadow for international relations, and for the reputations of some.

In 2016 Barack Obama would speak of his disappointment with the European efforts following Gaddafi's fall suggesting, in particular, that David Cameron had been "distracted" and that had contributed to "the mess" that followed. For former French president Nicholas Sarkozy, the fall out

would be more personal and serious: seeing him embroiled in accusations that he had taken campaign money from Gaddafi for his 2007 election.

Originally held up as a model humanitarian intervention under the doctrine of Responsibility to Protect – known by its shorthand of R2P – barely two years after Gaddafi's fall, Alan Kuperman in the journal *International Security* was casting Libya not as a success story but a case study in precisely how not to intervene.

By 2016 the chair of the House of Commons foreign affairs select committee, the Conservative MP Crispin Blunt, was equally scathing of the intervention backed by the then Tory prime minister David Cameron.



In April 2011, president Barack Obama, David Cameron and Nicolas Sarkozy wrote a joint letter vowing to keep up the pressure on Gaddafi and pledging to maintain Nato military pressure on his forces. Photograph: Daniel Ochea de Olza/AP

Suggesting that while “UK policy in Libya was initially driven by a desire to protect civilians, he added: “we do not accept that it understood the implications of this, which included collapse of the state, failure of stabilisation and the facilitation of Islamist extremism in Libya.”

The reality is that the tensions in Libya, perhaps with the exception of Syria, were always less well comprehended than the drivers of the uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia, where established – if suppressed – political movements were far better understood.

And the fall out in the immediate aftermath of Gaddafi's fall was as swift as it was unanticipated.

The large weapons stocks held by the regime were rapidly dispersed contributing to the destabilisations of the wider region, not least Mali.

Tens of thousands of African migrants in Libya, no longer welcome, were displaced at the start of a complex migration crisis that would later see Libya become a pathway into Europe for large scale human trafficking.



Nato air strike in Tripoli, Libya, 7 June 2011. Photograph: EPA

And the vacuum of power that emerged allowed jihadi groups to flourish.

They were all risks presciently described in 2012 in Foreign Affairs magazine by Zahia Zoubir who warned that Libya risked fracturing amid the competition among armed groups. “The major challenge for Libya ... is avoiding partition, as happened in Sudan – or worse, “Somalization,” where

the state cannot control the various militias that impose their own laws on their respective territories.”

At times the fracturing harked back to a pre-modern era of city states each with their own army, guarded by checkpoints and city gates thrown up out of truck containers and scrap metal.

As Claudia Gazzini, the Libya specialist at Crisis Group who has closely followed events in the country for the past decade notes, Gaddafi’s summary execution in Sirte surrounded by his enemies, and captured on grisly video, far from marking the end of state violence in Libya only made it more widespread.

And for Gazzini it is far from clear that without Nato’s intervention the Gaddafi regime would have been toppled.

“If you start with the Nato-led intervention, the big lesson learned was that this planted the seeds for the disarray that followed. A very idealistic invocation of responsibility to protect led to full and violent regime change.

“The way Gaddafi was gunned down and killed infused the idea that it’s OK to kill, it was OK to storm places like Tarhouna and Beni Walid. It was a culture where the militias were empowered to strike against anyone they thought linked to the regime.”

Lacking even the most cursory of plans for after the fall of the regime, Libya fractured into regional and city-based militias who tried to use their force of arms to bargain for political power – including control of ministries, Gazzini and others note. This offered a way in not only to increasing outside intervention by regional players, including in the Gulf and Turkey, but violent Islamist groups as well.

In a paper for Chatham House two years ago surveying the long violent aftermath of Gaddafi’s fall, Georges Fahmi argued that the experience of Libya also had broad implications for the transition of countries from authoritarian states.

“Resorting to violence is the fastest way to end any hope for democratic change,” suggested Fahmi. “Protesters who decided to take up arms offered their regimes the chance to reframe the political uprisings as civil war, as was the case in Syria. Even when armed groups manage to bring down the regime, their presence endangers the transitional phase afterwards, as [was] the case in Libya.”



Anti-Gaddafi fighters celebrate the fall of Sirte in the town 20 October , 2011. Photograph: Esam Omran Al-Fetori/Reuters

In Libya that initially saw a multiplicity of groups, defined by both tribal and regional allegiances in the country’s split between east and west, compete for both the political spoils and resource-rich areas including key cities like Misrata and Zintan.

Equally destabilising was the competition between east of the country “Cyrenaica” and Benghazi and areas controlled by the government in Tripoli in the west.

As Gazzini makes clear, however, far from being discreet, the competitions in post-Gaddafi Libya were often dangerously overlapping and exacerbated by international concerns including the EU’s interest in security and closing the migration routes to Europe.

“There was no international state building plan except for the idea of let’s put in place a UN mission to go and organise elections. There was no strong will or capacity for anything else,” she said.

“Then there was the international community’s ambiguous approach to supporting the Libyan security sector needs and failing to recognise there was a tentacular jihadist network that was finding its way through and the consequent polarisation of the discourse on radical groups for political purposes on all sides.

When jihadist groups would come to be seen as a threat, the response was to subcontract the issue out to those seen as effective fighting against them, not least the eastern warlord Khalifa Haftar whose ambitions would later see him besiege the UN-backed government in Tripoli in a failed bid for power.

In the name of the fight against terror, Haftar would gain the support of a number of foreign actors including the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Russia, France, and Saudi Arabia. That in turn exacerbated tensions in the region between Turkey – which would move to support the government in Tripoli – and the UAE and Egypt.

Issandr El Amrani, an expert on the region now with the Open Society Foundations in Amman, worries that some lessons have been lost in what he sees as a sometimes “dishonest” and centred debate between those who opposed the intervention in the first place and its proponents.

“Those who point to the emergence of Isis and the country collapsing into warlordism ignore the reality that there was a real risk of a massacre in [by Gaddafi forces in the rebel centre of] Benghazi in 2011 and that substantial numbers of Libyans were calling for intervention.”

Instead, says Amrani, senior Russian officials – including Vladimir Putin who backed calls to intervene under the aegis of Responsibility to Protect – would feel “swindled” by what turned into an intervention for regime change. It was a breach of trust he suggests may have “killed” appeals to the R2P principle “for decades to come”.

“Libya, the way it is, encapsulates the messiness of the great power politics as it is now. There was no united international leadership. No US leadership after the Americans shied away from the peace process from 2014-2017 after Trump came to power. There was zero interest except for counter-terrorism.”

Both Gazzinni and Amrani are, however, more optimistic about the renewed peace process sensing a war weariness in Libya after a decade of conflicts.

“There does seem a genuine war fatigue across the country. But Libyans seem to have come to their senses and want a Libya that they have been deprived of in the various rounds of war and political bickering,” said Gazzini.

“On top of that Libya was polarised at the peak of intra Gulf dispute and tensions between Turkey and various Arab capitals. Now we are seeing that gradually ending.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/26/war-weary-libya-reflects-10-years-on-from-gaddafi-and-arab-spring>.

Oscars 2021

Glenn Close's magnificent Da Butt and superb flirting: key Oscars moments

An impromptu dance masterclass became an instant highlight, but Steven Soderbergh's directorial shakeup delivered a ceremony with few highs and frequent depressions

03:00

Key Oscars moments: from the historic to the hilarious – video

[Adrian Horton](#), [Benjamin Lee](#), [Andrew Pulver](#) and [Catherine Shoard](#)

Mon 26 Apr 2021 01.25 EDT

Twerving in a train station

In a skewiff ceremony of overlong speeches, quiet applause and a downsized red carpet, one moment effortlessly stole the show: Glenn Close doing the dance to the 1988 funk hit [Da Butt](#).

Nearly three hours into the telecast, presenter Lil Rel Howery started a trivia-pub-quiz-style segment in which Questlove, the house DJ, played a throwback song; Howery picked a famous name from the crowd to guess if the tune won an Oscar, was nominated, or wasn't nominated at all. Close was tasked with identifying Da Butt, a 1988 single from the soundtrack to Spike Lee's film School Daze by the the Washington, DC go-go band EU (Experience Unlimited).

Glenn Close knows everything about E.U.'s 1988 hit "Da Butt."
[#Oscars](#) [#Oscars2021](#) [#GlennClose](#) [#Oscar](#) [#DaButt](#)
pic.twitter.com/pwO0bpb6xy

— AC Junior 🍷 (@CamJunior1972) [April 26, 2021](#)

An enthusiastic Close, 74, who appeared to be taking her 8,000th [Oscars](#) defeat (this time for Hillbilly Elegy) in her stride, explained the history of the track, then obligingly demonstrated the moves. And thus, the meme of the evening was – belatedly – born.

GLENN CLOSE DOING "DA BUTT" [#Oscars](#)
pic.twitter.com/AwhR46pmWX

— Vulture (@vulture) [April 26, 2021](#)

But the fun was not contagious

While bringing in [Steven Soderbergh](#) as co-producer did, at times, bring a stylish sheen to the show, it also made it rather dull, his attempt at reigniting an Ocean's 11-era levity ultimately suffocated by the dry humourlessness of the evening. Regina King's stylish strut into Union Station, modelled as if it were the start of a movie, was frankly as interesting as his direction got, a high bar that soon sank as his other decisions failed to justify themselves. Theoretically deciding not to play any award-winner's speech off was a sensitive touch but they soon, predictably, started running on far too long and without any musical numbers (which were all left to the pre-show) or comedy bits, it was all too businesslike and alienating for those not obsessively invested in the films at play. After last year's ratings fell to an all-time low, this is not the jumpstart that the Oscars needed right now.

Lots of the speeches referenced police racism and brutality



Refusing hate ... Tyler Perry. Photograph: ABC/Getty Images

The lack of levity throughout the evening was also perhaps a sign of the unusually awful last year we've all had, both in terms of the horrors of the pandemic globally as well as the increased awareness of the ever-present dangers of racism in the US in particular. References to Covid were slight (Regina King explained how the night was taking place safely, Angela Bassett referred to the millions lost before the In Memoriam section, Frances McDormand begged us to return to cinemas soon) while reminders of the ongoing traumas faced by black people at the hands of police were more visible, and more powerful. King spoke of fame and fortune making no difference in reducing fear, Bassett spoke of lives lost to injustice and racism, winners of both animated and live-action shorts made impassioned pleas not to forget or stop fighting while Tyler Perry implored those watching to "refuse" hate. It was unavoidable that the first post-Trump Oscars would allow room to rally against systemic issues bigger than just one man but with individuals making points that the show at large should have been making as well, was it all enough?

Youn Yuh-jung: sterling flirt



‘I didn’t smell him’ ... Youn Yuh-jung and Brad Pitt. Photograph: Chris Pizzello/AFP/Getty Images

After her already legendary Bafta speech, where she offered condolences to the nation over the death of Prince Philip and then called the British snobs, a lot was expected of Youn should she pick up the Oscar. She didn’t disappoint. She called out roguishly to presenter Brad Pitt: “Nice to meet you” (and backstage, denied she had got close enough to get a whiff of the personal Pitt aroma. “I didn’t smell him,” she said. “I’m not a dog.”). She then admonished everyone who has mispronounced her name, before graciously saying: “Tonight, you are all forgiven.” After adding she believed it was only “a little bit of luck” that got her past [Glenn Close](#), she said thank you to her “two boys who make me go out and work”. She signed off with a note of pride: “This is the result because mummy worked so hard!” A classic of its kind.

The running order shakeup made for an abrupt final curtain

“Freshen it up” was clearly one of the instructions given to Soderbergh and his co-producers Jesse Collins and Stacey Sher. Tinkering with the hallowed climax of the show was probably a tweak too far. Normally the Oscars

finishes with best picture, allowing a sort of climatic group huddle – but sticking the actor prizes after it blew the structure. In the event, it was a massive anti-climax – McDormand had already made her point before she had to get up again, almost embarrassed, and Hopkins wasn't even there. Not one of the Oscars' best ideas.

Diversity triumphed – if slightly less so than expected



the Oscar-winning makeup and hairstyling team from Ma Rainey's Black Bottom. Photograph: Todd Wawrychuk/AMPAS/Rex/Shutterstock

Going into this year's ceremony, it seemed like it would bring us the [most diverse](#) set of winners the Oscars have ever seen, and while a few last minute shocks prevented it from being quite as historic as many had predicted (Hopkins and McDormand rather than Boseman and Davis), it was still a night of firsts and rarities. The most visible of which was [Chloé Zhao](#) becoming the first woman of colour, and only the second ever woman, to win best director, a deserved triumph that along with her upcoming Marvel film, announces her as a force to be reckoned with. The night also saw the first ever Korean actor to win an Oscar in the shape of Minari's Youn Yuh-jung as best supporting actress, winning alongside [Daniel Kaluuya](#) as best

supporting actor for Judas and the Black Messiah. [Emerald Fennell](#) then became the first female winner of best original screenplay since 2007, joining a depressingly short list, while Ma Rainey's Black Bottom's makeup and hairstyling Oscar was the first time black women were recognised in that category.

An alarming death rattle

This year's In Memoriam segment must have been a daunting prospect for the incoming Oscars producers. Not only did more people than usual sadly pass away, but the usual 12 months' worth of deaths had an extra couple of months added on because of the delay to this year's ceremony. There were a lot of big names to pay tribute to, including relatively recent Oscar winners (Christopher Plummer) and of course a 2021 best actor nominee (Chadwick Boseman). Early predictions suggested a good quarter of an hour would be devoted to paying tribute. There would be lavish orchestration and suitably sombre tone. Maybe the deceased would be introduced by those who knew them. Certainly we'd see someone play the cello. Nope! We got a lickety-split Stevie Wonder number and the names raced through at such a pace you'd think you'd sat on the remote.

Selective storytelling

In an initial email sent to nominees, [one that was promptly and rightfully ridiculed by most](#), Soderbergh et al asked for speeches to "tell a STORY" and for winners to "make it PERSONAL", a patronising missive but one that did seem to have an effect, in both good and bad ways. The speeches were more "when I was 11" than they ever have been and while there were gems, there were also tales best left to family get-togethers, quickly turning from intriguing to alienating, not helped by similarly wordy introductions for most of the categories. Clips and graphics were kept to a bare minimum and instead, we had presenters either provide mini Actors Studio assessments to other actors or we were educated on other childhood anecdotes, again of varying interest. Given the reduced scale of the evening, it perhaps made more sense to make it seem more intimate on all fronts. But it ultimately robbed the show of even more dynamism, and made it seem even more

impenetrable for those of us not in the inner circle; a party we looked at from afar rather than one we felt we were a part of.

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

Fashion

Oscars fashion trends: midriffs and statement tuxedos catch up with Gen Z style



Gold stars ... nominees Carey Mulligan, Leslie Odom Jr and Andra Day on the red carpet at Union Station, Los Angeles. Photograph: Chris Pizzello/AP

Gold stars ... nominees Carey Mulligan, Leslie Odom Jr and Andra Day on the red carpet at Union Station, Los Angeles. Photograph: Chris Pizzello/AP

On the red carpet, cleavage gave way to abs for Hollywood's women, while men's suits stole the show with colour and variety

[Jess Cartner-Morley](#)

[@JessC_M](#)

Mon 26 Apr 2021 02.35 EDT

The dresses at the 2021 [Oscars](#) confirmed what a walk through any park or beer garden this weekend would have told you: for the younger generation, a

cantilevered cleavage has been replaced by a flash of bare midriff as the key signifier of party dressing.

For Generation Z, a plunging neckline is what mums wear in date-night photos they post on Facebook. A crop top above high waisted jeans, to show a few inches of skin, or a dress with a shark-bite sized cut out to show some side-ab, is a more modern way to power (party) dress.

Carey Mulligan's gold sequins showcased two ribs between a vast skirt and a tiny boob tube. (Mulligan chose to leave the matching face mask with which the look was accessorised when it starred on the Valentino haute couture catwalk in January at home.) Andra Day, fellow best actress nominee for her portrayal of Billie Holiday, also wore gold sequins with an emphasis on abdomen. "There's cut-outs, leg, peekaboo – it's a scandal," Day's stylist Wouri Vice told *Vogue*. The dress was inspired by Bob Mackie's daring 1980s Oscar gowns for Cher, created by Vera Wang – and engineered with the aid of a welder. Zendaya's sunshine yellow Valentino was bikini on top, ballgown below; Vanessa Kirby's pale pink Gucci had a delicate half moon gap above the waistband.

When fortunes are made by high-kicking action roles, perhaps it makes sense that dresses that show off boxer abs are edging out the meringue prom aesthetic

In an era when Hollywood fortunes are made by high-kicking roles in all-action blockbusters, rather than by nailing the America's sweetheart role, perhaps it makes sense that dresses that show off boxer abs are edging out the meringue-adjacent, prom-princess aesthetic. As far as body positivity in popular culture goes, however, the power side-ab is at best a sideways move.

Time was that red carpet fashion was about women, with menswear relegated to a final paragraph referencing the odd novelty bow tie. Not any more. Minari director Lee Isaac Chung commissioned the Asian American brand Goodfight to make his shawl-collar tux with pocket-chain detailing, which he teamed with yellow-stitched Dr Martens; his nine-year-old star, Alan Kim, was dressed in tailored shorts by menswear supremo Thom Browne. Colman Domingo of *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* wore a fuchsia

three-piece Versace suit with a matching shirt, while his co-star Daniel Kaluuya wore a double-breasted Bottega Veneta tuxedo with a necklace of Cartier diamonds so large and bright they looked like a string of pearls. Leslie Odom Jr wore a gold shirt to match his gold Brioni suit.



Tailored shorts ... Minari star Alan Kim with producer Christina Oh. Photograph: Matt Sayles/AMPAS/Rex/Shutterstock

The strongest political statement on the red carpet also came from tuxedos. Travon Free and Martin Desmond Roe, the directors of *Two Distant Strangers*, stopped on the red carpet to open their jackets and display the linings, on which the names of 17 black Americans killed by police were embroidered in yellow. When the directors' stylist, Tara Swennen, approached Dolce & Gabbana with the idea, the designers "were over the moon and said yes immediately," she said. The 17th name was that of Daunte Wright, fatally shot on 11 April. "I don't know how they did it but they were able to fit his name in as well at the last minute, which meant a lot," said Free.

The aesthetic of *Nomadland*, which dominated the night, is sumptuous to look at while rigorously anti-glamour. The film is bathed in natural light, finding beauty in rugged landscapes and bare faces. Fittingly, director Chloé Zhao collected her Oscar wearing white sneakers with her understated

oyster-toned Hermes dress, and wore her hair in plaits rather than a Hollywood blow-dry; Frances McDormand wore long sleeved black, stark and simple but for the feathers at the cuffs.



Travon Free shows off his suit lining embroidered with the names of police shooting victims. Photograph: ABC/Getty Images

A non-traditional Oscars night made room for more non-traditional gowns. Olivia Colman looked chic in ketchup-red Christian Dior with long bell sleeves and a high funnel collar. [Emerald Fennell](#) wore chunky signet rings with her Gucci kaftan, and told reporters that “tonight I am Susan, your pottery teacher who has a business opportunity for you which is absolutely not a pyramid scheme”. Not a typical Oscar look – but then, this was hardly a typical Oscar night.

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[Smartphones](#)

OnePlus 9 review: a good, well-priced top-spec smartphone

Big, fast screen, flagship chip, long battery life and slick experience – but a few corners cut to save money



The OnePlus 9 offers most of what makes the very best phones great but at under £650. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

The OnePlus 9 offers most of what makes the very best phones great but at under £650. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

[Samuel Gibbs](#) *Consumer technology editor*

Mon 26 Apr 2021 02.00 EDT

The OnePlus 9 offers the same top-performance, slick experience and long battery life as the firm's best phone but with a few corners cut to slice £200 off the price.

The £629 handset looks almost identical to its [more expensive sibling, the £829 OnePlus 9 Pro](#). It has a marginally smaller screen that is flat rather than curved at the sides, and the edge of the phone is plastic not metal, but the rest is in effect a copy – which is a good thing.



The back of the phone is curved for a better grip. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

The 6.55in OLED screen is bright, colourful and good-looking, with its 120Hz refresh rate keeping animations and scrolling super smooth. The screen has an FHD+ resolution, making it slightly less crisp than the QHD+ display on the 9 Pro, but it is in line with [competitors from Samsung](#) and others.

Specifications

- **Main screen:** 6.55in FHD+ OLED (402ppi) 120Hz
- **Processor:** Qualcomm Snapdragon 888
- **RAM:** 8 or 12GB of RAM
- **Storage:** 128 or 256GB

- **Operating system:** Oxygen OS 11.2 based on [Android](#) 11
- **Camera:** Triple rear: 48MP wide, 50MP ultra-wide, 2MP monochrome; 16MP front-facing
- **Connectivity:** 5G, dual nano sim, USB-C, wifi 6, NFC, Bluetooth 5.2 (AAC, aptX/HD, LDAC) and location
- **Water resistance:** none
- **Dimensions:** 160 x 74.2 x 8.7mm
- **Weight:** 192g

Rapid, smooth and super-fast charging



The phone charges from dead to 100% in only 34 minutes, hitting 50% in 14 minutes with the included 65W adaptor. It also has 15W wireless charging and reverse wireless charging. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

The OnePlus 9 has the top chip available to Android devices, Qualcomm's latest Snapdragon 888 processor, with at least 8GB of RAM and 128GB of storage. It matches the 9 Pro for speed and smooth experience, making it one of the fastest-feeling phones available.

It also has very good battery life, only needing charging every other night. It lasts just under 47 hours with the screen used for 5.5 hours in various apps, meaning a single charge lasts from 7am on day one until at least 5am on day three.

Sustainability

OnePlus says the battery should last 1,000 full-charge cycles while maintaining at least 80% of its original capacity. The battery can be replaced and the smartphone is [generally repairable by OnePlus in the UK](#).

[How we are changing the way we rate sustainability of consumer electronics](#)
[Read more](#)

The company offers [a trade-in programme](#) for its own phones and models from rivals. It did not comment on the use of recycled materials in its smartphones. OnePlus does not publish environmental impact assessments but [did publish a sustainability report in 2019](#).

Oxygen OS 11.2



The in-screen fingerprint scanner is fast and accurate, making it one of the very best available. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

The 9 ships with the latest version of OnePlus's Oxygen OS, which is one of the most refined and bloat-free western-oriented versions of Android 11 available. It is fast, slick and easy to use, with a good amount of customisation options that aren't overwhelming.

OnePlus offers software support for three years from release, including two years of Android version updates and then a further year of security updates bimonthly. Samsung offers four years and Apple offers five for their respective phones, so OnePlus still has work to do.

Camera



The camera app has simple point-and-shoot and 'Hasselblad Pro' modes with manual control. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

On the back of the phone are three [Hasselblad](#)-branded cameras, including a 48MP main and 50MP ultra-wide, plus a gimmicky 2MP “monochrome” camera that can be safely ignored.

The 50MP ultrawide camera is the same as [equipped to the 9 Pro](#), making it one of the best available, shooting good images across a range of light levels while supporting Nightscape and other special modes.

The main 48MP camera is different to that fitted to the 9 Pro, lacking a few of the more advanced technologies. However, the captured images are very similar, being generally well-exposed and balanced but a little oversharpened when blown up to full size. Low light performance was solid, if a little more prone to hand shake as the camera lacks optical image stabilisation, while the dedicated Nightscape mode works well. There's a good macro mode and some fun camera effects to play with alongside the "Hasselblad Pro" mode for extensive manual control similar to a [DSLR camera](#).

There's no optical zoom, meaning anything magnified beyond 3x with digital zoom lacks detail. The 16MP fixed-focus selfie camera shot some great-looking photos in good lighting but was a little soft on detail when viewed at full size and lacks a dedicated low-light mode. Video captured up to 8K at 30 frames a second was good, too.

Overall, the camera is generally good for the money but a lack of optical zoom and its tendency to oversharpen images is slightly disappointing.

Observations



The alert slider on the side of the phone toggles between silent, vibrate and ring. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

- Call quality and 5G performance on Three was excellent.
- The screen is covered in the older Gorilla Glass 5, not the latest significantly more shatter-resistant [Gorilla Glass Victus](#).
- The phone comes with a pre-installed screen protector and a good clear rubber case in the box.

Price

The OnePlus 9 costs [£629](#) with 8GB of RAM and 128GB of storage or [£729](#) with 12GB and 256GB.

For comparison, the [OnePlus 9 Pro](#) has an RRP of [£829](#), the [Samsung Galaxy S21 Ultra](#) costs [£1,149](#), the [Galaxy S21+](#) costs [£949](#) and the [Xiaomi Mi 11](#) costs [£749](#).

Verdict

The OnePlus 9 has taken the firm somewhat [back to its “upstart” roots](#), offering a top-flight experience for significantly less money than premium smartphone rivals.

But to do so the company has cut corners that it hasn't resorted to in the past, such as using plastic rather than metal for the phone's frame, and yet it is still asking for £30 more than last year's [excellent OnePlus 8](#). It makes the 9 good value but not quite the bargain previous iterations were known for being.

There are still few rivals priced under £650 that offer the combination of speed and slick experience, big screen, solid camera and good software you get with the OnePlus 9. But with only three years of software support, there are phones offering similarly great experiences and better value over the long term from rivals [Samsung](#) and [others](#) for only a little more.

Pros: super slick, long battery, top performance, good 120Hz screen, good software, speedy charging, fast fingerprint scanner, alert slider, good camera, lower cost.

Cons: only three years of software support, camera can oversharpen images, no optical zoom, screen glass not the toughest available, no water-resistance rating, plastic frame.



The selfie camera pokes through a small hole in the top left of the screen.
Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

Other reviews

- [OnePlus 9 Pro review: super slick, rapid charging Android phone](#)
 - [Galaxy S21+ review: the big-screen Samsung phone for slightly less](#)
 - [Xiaomi Mi 11 review: cheaper, top-spec phone undercuts competition](#)
 - [Fairphone 3+ review: ethical smartphone gets camera upgrades](#)
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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

2021.04.26 - Opinion

- Johnson's Tories are reaping the rewards of an economy built on rising house prices
- Did you have a lockdown haircut? Sad to say it, but retribution is coming ...
- I worried about reopening my bookshop, but it's brought some much-needed joy
- We know Amazon is killing the high street, so why do we keep clicking on 'buy now'?

OpinionHousing

Johnson's Tories are reaping the rewards of an economy built on rising house prices

[William Davies](#)

For a decade, wages stagnated while governments have propped up the housing market – with dire consequences for our society



Illustration: R Fresson

Illustration: R Fresson

Mon 26 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

It was 14 years ago, in the summer of 2007, that the first signs of the global financial crisis appeared: the liquidation of two hedge funds heavily invested in mortgage-backed securities, and the start of the [collapse of Northern Rock](#). This is more than enough time for a new economic model to take

shape. After all, 14 years after Richard Nixon signalled the end of the “Keynesian” era by disbanding the fixed exchange rates system that shaped the post-1945 economy, Margaret Thatcher was on the cusp of her third election victory, and London was awash with “yuppies” making fast money out of the stock market.

The picture of Britain’s post-crash economic settlement was clear even before the dramatic impact of Covid. To put it bluntly, the proceeds of economic growth in the UK now flow entirely to asset-owners – including homeowners. Study after study has shown that in the decade after the financial crisis, average real wages [simply stopped rising](#) – something that had never happened in two centuries of industrial capitalism.

And yet, Britain’s housing market defies all economic threats and shocks. While wages have stagnated, the [average British house price](#) is now approximately 50% higher than it was in January 2009, and in London around double. While the economic crisis of 2007-9 was accompanied by a housing crash, the first year of Covid-19 saw a [boom in property prices](#). In 2020, [London overtook](#) Hong Kong and New York for the number of “super-luxury” properties (costing more than \$10m) sold. There may be no better symbol of our new national priorities than the “Stanley Johnson clause” in the Covid travel rules announced last month, which allows visits to [property overseas](#) but not family.

[UK property sales at 16-year high as house prices soar](#)
[Read more](#)

The UK’s ratio of housing wealth to GDP is [now above the level](#) seen in Japan before its historic crash in 1991 – but there is no sign that policymakers wish to alter the place of housing wealth in the UK economy, or indeed its dominant imprint on our politics. George Osborne’s refusal to use fiscal policy to support the economy after 2010 meant that the UK became even more dependent on monetary policy – very low interest rates and quantitative easing – which simply allowed more money to be poured into assets, hugely enriching asset-owners at the expense of everyone else. As a way of trying to get the economy moving, this was – as Mark Blyth and Eric Lonergan put it in their book *Angrynomics* – like attempting to fill up your kettle by flooding your entire house.

Predictably, the chancellor Rishi Sunak's package of measures to jumpstart the economy in the summer of 2020 included a stamp duty holiday, which further inflated the housing boom. After extending this holiday in his March budget, Sunak now faces the danger of triggering a property crash when he finally ends it. The OECD has recently joined the chorus of [rightwing voices](#) demanding that the holiday be made permanent.

Most economic commentators agree that this boom is unlikely to end well, whenever the end arrives. But very little attention has been paid to the political and social harm already done to British society by this new model of capitalism over the past decade. A closer study of the consequences of an artificially engineered housing boom might cast light on the particular deformities of our politics, and help explain a number of seemingly unrelated afflictions – from the Brexit vote to the enduring power of “culture war” provocations by Downing Street and its court press.

Consider what a bizarre model of “growth” has governed Britain since the crash – where the value of a home rises by roughly 5% every year, but the value of an hour's work rises not at all, year after year. What does this do to us, psychologically and culturally? Capitalism's principal source of legitimacy since 1945 has been that everyone gets *some* share in the spoils of its growth, even if some get much larger shares than others. This has now been abolished: those without assets (who are predominantly younger) now have no share in that growth. This helps explain the rising appeal of socialism to those born since 1980.

But it's not clear that this economic model has bred much contentment among its apparent beneficiaries either. The substitution of house price growth for collective prosperity can engender a paranoid and resentful mentality among asset-owners, in which any vision of social change looks fanciful and even threatening. Knowing that one's home is worth 5% more than it was a year ago may generate some inner comfort, but it doesn't represent any commensurate improvement to quality of life, in the way that a 5% increase in income might do.

Recent research, showing that those with wealth [were more likely to support Brexit](#), confirmed that the crude narrative of “left behind” Brexiters was inaccurate. But it also posed questions about the political psychology of

property ownership in an age of wage stagnation. The study's authors suggested that the "insurance" of housing wealth might allow for riskier political choices. What has not been adequately explained is why the apparent "winners" in our economic model have become so discontented.

[From housing to vaccine passports, politicians act as if young people don't exist | Zoe Williams](#)

[Read more](#)

One explanation is that progress and prosperity are now widely viewed as private rather than public ideals. After a decade in which austerity measures have allowed the [public realm to crumble](#), many people believe there isn't enough money to go around, and you must cling all the more tightly to what you already have. Those voters who famously swung from Labour to the Conservatives in 2019 in the so-called "red wall" may have felt ignored by London, seen their high streets boarded up and their public services underfunded – but many of them still had large amounts of housing equity.

This weird model of capitalism, in which houses appreciate in value but people don't, may not have been consciously planned, but nor was it an accident. It is a consequence of an ideology of home ownership that has been essential to the Conservative party's policy agenda since Thatcher came to power. But it has never been exploited so deliberately and divisively: this is the real innovation of Johnson's "vote leave" government. The most extraordinary feature of Britain's post-crash political era is that the Tories have steadily grown their share of the vote while offering very little that looks like growth or prosperity.

It's under these distinctive economic circumstances that "cultural" factors become politically significant. The Tories have become expert at overseeing and manipulating a new sort of post-growth economy, in which there is no attempt to produce a "rising tide that lifts all boats", and the state simply intervenes to divert money toward those voters who deserve it and away from those who do not.

A blatant moralistic opposition between the traditional home-owning family and a "woke" statue-toppling mob becomes more vivid and electorally potent in a dysfunctional economy, which feels like a zero-sum competition.

Given the nature of their current coalition, one has to wonder: if the Tories had the option to end wage stagnation and deliver affordable housing, would they even take it?

- William Davies is a sociologist and political economist. His latest book is *This is Not Normal: The Collapse of Liberal Britain*

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

[Opinion](#) **Women's hair**

Did you have a lockdown haircut? Sad to say it, but retribution is coming ...

[Zoe Williams](#)



My hairdresser has turned vigilante, inspecting customers' heads for signs of illegal styling. It has put me off visiting her – despite the terrible state of my barnet



‘My hairdresser is like a forensic stylist, dispensing vigilante hair justice’ (posed by models). Photograph: Konstantin Tsevelev/Getty Images

‘My hairdresser is like a forensic stylist, dispensing vigilante hair justice’ (posed by models). Photograph: Konstantin Tsevelev/Getty Images

Mon 26 Apr 2021 03.00 EDT

My hair has crossed the line from “unprofessional” to “downright disrespectful”. Every day that passes since the salons reopened makes it more discourteous still. Ideally, I would go back in time and spend a portion of the time I put into [booking tables outside pubs](#) on getting it cut, but that is a small regret compared with the others.

Somehow this lank barnet has infected my self-perception and I now hate all my clothes as well. I feel dowdy, scruffy, slightly stained and careworn, powerfully aware that this would be the right time to buy new stuff, except without any enthusiasm to do so.

I raised the problem with my friend K, who buys new stuff all the time. “You have to think of three words that you want to look like,” she said, and made some suggestions. “Bright? Fun? Fashionable? Chic? Elegant?”

Nope. None of those.

“Serious? Businesslike? Peppy?”

Ha. No. “I want my corporeal self to vanish and to appear as a heart-lifting spirit.”

“Maybe let’s start with the hair.”

But when I plugged back into the hair network, I heard disturbing news. The hairdresser has gone a bit lockdown-fundamentalist; if she suspects you of having had an illegal haircut, she berates you all the way through and then deprioritises your subsequent appointments.

Even if it is months since your offence, she reckons she can always see the ghost of your last haircut and can tell in an instant whether or not she did it – if she didn’t, it follows that you must have broken the rules. She is like a forensic stylist, dispensing vigilante hair justice. Even though I am as safe as houses in this regard, because I look like a train wreck, I am incredibly annoyed by it.

Obviously, it is good to have stuck to the rules during the pandemic; to have done otherwise would have been to collaborate with the virus or, worse, Laurence Fox. However, I favour an aftermath full of celebration and regeneration, rather than recrimination and judgment. If this means I have to cut my own hair, so be it. This is going to work wonders for my vanity crisis.

- Zoe Williams is a Guardian columnist

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[Opinion](#)[Small business](#)

I worried about reopening my bookshop, but it's brought some much-needed joy

[Suzy Prince](#)

After months of lockdown, welcoming customers back to my independent shop in Manchester has delighted us all



‘Nobody goes into the independent bookselling business for untold riches.’

Photograph: imageBROKER/Alamy

‘Nobody goes into the independent bookselling business for untold riches.’

Photograph: imageBROKER/Alamy

Mon 26 Apr 2021 04.30 EDT

The first sign that things were finally creeping back to normal in my shop was when a customer bounded in and said: “You were the last non-essential

shop I went to before lockdown, and I wanted to make you the first I visited when it was over.” It was a happy, hopeful moment.

Last November [I wrote](#) about keeping an independent bookshop afloat throughout the pandemic: I’m based in Levenshulme, south Manchester – at the time it was a Covid hotspot and we were facing the prospect of another long mandatory period of closure.

I was fully aware of the very real chance that our shop, along with many other independent businesses that rely on footfall and people actually being allowed in through the door, may not survive. But for the most part I still felt, somehow, upbeat. It seemed to me then that there was a clear public groundswell towards supporting independent shops and local high streets. Most people seemed to agree, although I was also accused by some of being “falsely positive”.

Several months on, I wouldn’t go so far as to say it’s been a fully positive experience, but we are still here – and, thankfully, our doors are now open once more.

Having a shop that is not allowed to be open to the public is really odd: there is a pervading sense that time is standing still, as dust gathers on your stock. When your shop is open, you often complain about how you’re too busy to sort out those fiddly jobs like getting new signage made. If only there was more time, life would be much easier. So of course, in theory, the non-essential retail pause should have been an ideal time to do all of the other things that running a shop entails. In reality, like most other people I’ve asked, we managed precisely none of that. A strange kind of inertia set in as we waited for news of a reopening date.

[Bouncing back? UK businesses’ views mixed as Covid lockdown eases](#)
[Read more](#)

Now, here we are finally: open once again, and hoping against hope that this is the end of lockdowns – especially in Manchester where ours has gone on for so long. I felt jittery and nervous about reopening two weeks ago, not least because I’m still waiting for my vaccine. When people come into a bookshop they want to browse, take their time and often have a chat. And

frankly I wouldn't want any kind of bookshop without that being possible for customers. However, I caught Covid last year, despite being ultra careful, when my daughter brought it home from school, and was significantly ill. So I have felt a level of risk on reopening.

Any nerves, however, only lasted for about half an hour on day one. They were swiftly overtaken by a sense of relief and sheer joy, from both our customers and ourselves. People now seem to be much more conscious about wearing a mask all the time, and social distancing comes more naturally. Several times people said things like "we're so glad you're still here", and "we were worried that you wouldn't make it". People talked about how much they've missed going to shops and wanted to keep going more often. I chatted until my throat was sore: after many months of existing in our family bubble, I was visited by both personal friends (before the Covid police kick off, they were also book shopping!) and a ton of familiar faces from the neighbourhood. It just felt nice. And normal.

I started out feeling overwhelmed, and ended our first day feeling tired but exhilarated. Just what the doctor ordered.

We received government grants to keep us afloat and pay the bills while the shop was closed, and without those I'm fully aware we would be facing the future in considerable debt. As it is, we are unlikely to be retiring on our takings – but nobody goes into the independent bookselling business for untold riches; most of us are a bunch of dreamers. But things feel good. It's not time to make any big decisions or changes: for now we just want to breathe in that bookshop air and stay calm.

- Suzy Prince is the co-owner of Bopcap Books in Levenshulme, Manchester

[OpinionOnline shopping](#)

We know Amazon is killing the high street, so why do we keep clicking on ‘buy now’?

[Adam Greenfield](#)

As the online giant devotes vast resources to instantly gratify our shopping desires, it becomes increasingly hard to resist



‘Each click of the buy button launches one of the hugely precarious army of mostly immigrant workers through the streets of the city.’ Photograph: Artur Widak/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

‘Each click of the buy button launches one of the hugely precarious army of mostly immigrant workers through the streets of the city.’ Photograph: Artur Widak/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

Mon 26 Apr 2021 03.00 EDT

“Libidinal” is just about the last word that comes to mind when gazing upon Amazon’s rather anonymous warehouse in Bromley-by-Bow. If you want to understand why a significant fraction of all the things bought and sold in greater London in the course of any given day flows through this one building, though, libido is a particularly useful concept to have at hand.

The idea, as developed by a line of psychoanalytical thinkers going all the way back to Freud, refers to the rhythms of desire, its frustration and release. Nothing else quite captures what’s going on in the circuit that runs straight through this building, fusing Amazon’s familiar, consumer-facing website to factories on the other side of the world. This is because, like some giant analogue of our response to desire, the entire sprawling apparatus is dedicated to nothing other than the elimination of friction.

In the past, whenever you perceived the need for some good or service, and you wanted to satisfy it via the market, you necessarily had to shoulder a certain amount of inconvenience. For some this meant a bike ride in the rain, or a trip across town on a crowded bus; for others, remembering to keep the petrol tank topped up, and keeping one’s cool amid the struggle for parking. Whatever its specific nature, every last one of these hassles presented an impediment to the consummation of an act of commerce.

This all began to change in the late 1990s, when online shopping first became a credible way of buying and selling, and under the circumstances of lockdown we’ve all endured this past year, the pace of change has accelerated until we find ourselves at something very like an apotheosis. Now the number of “touchpoints” we engage in the conduct of daily commerce has dwindled from many down to one, or at most a very few. The relationships fostered have shrivelled from chatty daily interactions at the corner shop where the proprietor might hold a spare copy of your keys, water your plants while you are out of town or extend you credit if your pay cheque failed to clear on time (and yes, such things did happen) to, at best, a nodding acquaintance with a ferociously casualised delivery-person.

[Amazon to bring pay-by-palm technology to Whole Foods](#)
[Read more](#)

Now, the longest trip involved, at least for you, is the one from where you happen to be standing at the moment you feel the first tingling of desire for a thing to wherever it was you last left your laptop. More and more of the time, when you do open that lid to fire up your browser, it's Amazon you'll turn to, all by [itself accounting](#) for some 20% of the [£99bn](#) Britons spent online last year.

Of course, your convenience is other people's risk. As is the case with Deliveroo orders, and food delivery more broadly, each click of the buy button and every "effortless" online transaction launches one of the hugely precarious army of mostly immigrant workers through the streets of the city, masked or not, to contend with whatever pitfalls await them. (Though Amazon appears to have prevailed in its fight against [warehouse-worker unionisation](#) in the US, at least for the moment, it too dreams of the day degrading, underpaid human drudgery is eliminated. The difference is that where activists dream of eliminating it via decent wages, collective bargaining and representation in management decision-making, Amazon would [prefer to do so via total automation](#).)

In its quest to devise still more frictionless ways of circumventing thought and separating us from our savings, the company has experimented with everything from subscriptions to something called [Dash buttons](#): branded, adhesive devices that you could stick up in prominent locations around the house, and press whenever you needed to order a new case of toilet paper, cat food or laundry detergent, in effect turning your home into an Amazon shop front. Amazon discontinued the physical Dash button product in 2019, after concluding that spoken commands via its Alexa virtual assistant accomplished much the same thing.

Like virtually all companies with a major online presence, Amazon employs an army of experience and service designers to map the ostensible "pain points" of bourgeois existence, and devise ways to circumvent them. You don't need to look any further than the recycling bins outside houses, stuffed full of smile-branded cardboard, to realise those designers have succeeded. The fulfilment of desire is now as uncomplicated and as literally thoughtless as a wish spoken aloud.

However, among the things we forget to attend to when we indulge such wishes is what we give away when we do so. To begin with, we surrender an intimately detailed, hugely valuable representation of our being – a picture of our stage in the life cycle, household structure, political affiliations and current psychic state, whose rough contours are sketched in with the first few things we order, and which becomes a little more complete with every successive purchase.

Sure, shopping in person involved a certain amount of hassle, but it also gave rise to so much else that we value, including many of the things we recognise as the signatures of city life. Our custom didn't merely support the physical layout of high streets and other retail districts, but the second- and even third-order services that sprouted up to capitalise on the opportunities they presented, from coffee kiosks to shoeshine stands. Above all, perhaps, we forfeit sociality, and what the urbanist Jane Jacobs called the “sidewalk ballet” of the happenstance interactions that bring life, vibrancy and safety to the public way. A little more of all these things disappears every time we click on “add to basket”.

It's not that this isn't broadly understood, as if people were somehow failing to connect the fairly obvious causal links between the statistics on Amazon usage and all the failing shopping centres and [depopulated high streets](#). We understand perfectly well what we're doing to ourselves and our communities each time we click on “buy now”. The problem, as so often seems to be the case when the better angels of our nature come into direct conflict with some libidinal charge, is that we just can't seem to stop.

- Adam Greenfield is author of *Radical Technologies: The Design of Everyday Life*

This article was amended on 26 April 2021 to remove a reference to zero-click ordering.

2021.04.26 - Around the world

- [France Volunteers leave cave after 40 days without daylight or clocks](#)
- [Chad 'We won't negotiate', says new regime, as armed rebels regroup](#)
- [Albania Man jumps feet-first into moving car to stop dangerous driver](#)
- [Chernobyl Out of a heap of broken images, Chernobyl seeks World Heritage status](#)
- [Turkmenistan Holiday dedicated to enormous national dog breed](#)

[France](#)

15 French volunteers leave cave after 40 days without daylight or clocks

Deep Time project investigated how a lack of external contact would affect sense of time – and two thirds wanted to stay longer

01:53

'Like pressing pause': volunteers emerge from 40-day cave isolation experiment – video

Associated Press in Lombrives

Sun 25 Apr 2021 06.40 EDT

Fifteen people have emerged from a cave in south-west [France](#) after 40 days underground in an experiment to see how the absence of clocks, daylight and external communications would affect their sense of time.

With big smiles on their pale faces, they left their voluntary isolation in the Lombrives cave to a round of applause and basked in the light while wearing special glasses to protect their eyes after so long in the dark.

“It was like pressing pause,” said Marina Lançon, one of seven women to take part in the experiment. She did not feel any rush to do anything and wished she could have stayed in the cave a few days longer, she said, but that she was happy to feel the wind and hear birdsong again.

She did not plan to look at her smartphone for a few more days, hoping to avoid “too brutal” a return to real life, Lançon said.



Members of the team inside the cave. Photograph: AP

The group lived in and explored the cave as part of a project called [Deep Time](#). There was no natural light, the temperature was 10C and the relative humidity 100%. They had no contact with the outside world, no updates on the pandemic nor any communications with friends or family.

Scientists at the Human Adaption Institute, which is leading the €1.2m (£860,000) project, say the experiment will help them understand better how people adapt to drastic changes in living conditions and environments.

As expected, those in the cave lost their sense of time.

“And here we are! We just left after 40 days ... For us it was a real surprise,” the project director, Christian Clot, said. “In our heads, we had walked into the cave 30 days ago.”



Members of the team meet to discuss their experiences. Photograph: Bruno Mazodier/AP

One team member estimated the time underground at 23 days.

Johan Francois, a maths teacher and sailing instructor, ran 10,000-metre circles in the cave to stay fit. He said he sometimes had “visceral urges” to leave.

With no daily obligations and no children around, the challenge was “to profit from the present moment without ever thinking about what will happen in one hour, in two hours”, he said.

In partnership with laboratories in France and Switzerland, scientists monitored the 15 team members’ sleep patterns, social interactions and behavioural reactions via sensors. One sensor was a tiny thermometer inside a capsule that participants swallowed like a pill. It measured body temperature and transmitted data to a computer until it was expelled naturally.

The team members followed their biological clocks to know when to wake up, go to sleep and eat. They counted their days not in hours but in sleep cycles.

“It’s really interesting to observe how this group synchronises themselves,” Clot said earlier in a recording from inside the cave. Working together on projects and organising tasks without being able to set a time to meet was particularly challenging, he said.

Two-thirds of the participants expressed a desire to remain underground a little longer to finish group projects started during their stay, said Benoit Mauvieux, a chronobiologist involved in the research.

“Our future as humans on this planet will evolve,” Clot said after emerging. “We must learn to better understand how our brains are capable of finding new solutions, whatever the situation.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/25/deep-time-team-ends-40-days-underground-in-french-cave>

Chad

‘We won’t negotiate’, says new Chad regime, as armed rebels regroup

The new government led by the son of late president Idriss Déby says it is pursuing rebels into Niger, but capital may still face assault



France’s president, Emmanuel Macron, and Mahamat Déby in Chad last week at the funeral of the latter’s father. Photograph: Issouf Sanogo/AFP/Getty Images

France’s president, Emmanuel Macron, and Mahamat Déby in Chad last week at the funeral of the latter’s father. Photograph: Issouf Sanogo/AFP/Getty Images

Associated Press

Sun 25 Apr 2021 22.32 EDT

Chad’s military transitional government has said it will not negotiate with the rebels blamed for killing the country’s president of three decades, raising

the possibility that the armed fighters might press ahead with their threats to attack the capital N'djamena.

A spokesman for the rebel group known as the Front for Change and Concord in Chad (Fact) said on Sunday that it was now joining forces with other armed groups who oppose the Mahmat Idriss Déby taking control of the country following the death of his father.

[Chad dictator's death spells chaos in Islamist terror's new ground zero | Simon Tisdall](#)
[Read more](#)

In a televised statement, the military spokesman, Gen Azem Bermandoa Agouma, said the rebels were seeking to collaborate with “several groups of jihadists and traffickers who served as mercenaries in Libya”.

“Faced with this situation that endangers Chad and the stability of the entire sub-region, this is not the time for mediation or negotiation with outlaws,” he said.

[sahel map](#)

The military spokesman said some of the rebels had escaped in the direction of Chad's border with Niger and called for Niger's government to help capture them.

“The defence and security forces launched after them with the support of the air force located the enemy scattered in small groups regrouping in Niger territory,” far from the Chadian capital, he said.

A spokesman for the armed group, Kingabe Ogouzeimi de Tapol, told Associated Press that the [rebels had not given up](#), though he declined to say where the forces were located on Sunday, citing security reasons.

“There are other armed groups that have joined us,” he said. “We welcome them and we are integrating them into our different battalions.”

The Chadian rebels, known by their French acronym Fact, were based in southern Libya and are believed to have crossed back into Chad earlier this

month on election day. Idriss Déby, the country's president since 1990, was easily handed victory based on official results as several leading opposition politicians did not take part.

However, the military announced the next day that Déby had been [mortally wounded](#) while visiting the frontlines of the battle against the rebels. His son was named head of a military council that plans an 18-month transition toward new elections.

The former colonial power, [France](#), has been careful not to criticise the military's actions, and France's president, Emmanuel Macron, attended Déby's funeral last week. Chad is home to a French military base where counter-terrorism operations for the Sahel region are headquartered. Chad also has supplied critical troops to the United Nations peacekeeping mission in northern Mali.

However, opposition groups have decried Mahmat Déby's appointment as a coup d'état, saying the president of the national assembly should have taken over instead. The opposition has called for demonstrations this week to call for a return to civilian rule.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/26/we-wont-negotiate-says-new-chad-regime-as-armed-rebels-regroup>

[Albania](#)

Man jumps feet-first into moving car to stop dangerous driver in Albania

Car was reversing erratically in pedestrianised city square in capital, Tirana, before dramatic leap through open window

00:55

Man jumps into moving car through window to stop dangerous driver in Albania – video

[Helen Sullivan](#)

[@helenrsullivan](#)

Sun 25 Apr 2021 20.08 EDT

A man has made a running jump, feet-first, through the open window of a moving car in Albania's capital to stop the driver spinning erratically through the city's Skanderbeg Square.

Footage captured by dozens of cameras set up to report on the country's general election shows the car's wheels screeching as it reverses in circles around the pedestrianised square.

Onlookers in the square, which is also one of the main sites of the city's coronavirus vaccinations, tried to stop the car by grabbing the driver through the open door. But when the door slammed shut as it spun around, a man jumped feet-first through the driver-side window to bring the car to a stop.

Police said the driver, 32, had previously crashed three other cars in other parts of the city, local media told Reuters. He was believed to be driving under the influence of drugs, the BBC [reported](#), citing police.

– *with Reuters*

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Out of a heap of broken images, Chernobyl seeks World Heritage status

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[Turkmenistan](#)

Turkmenistan dedicates holiday to enormous national dog breed

The country's president has also erected a gold statue and dedicated an ode to the Alabai dog breed



A man dressed in a national costume pets his border guard shepherd dog Alabai during the Dog Day celebration in Ashgabat Photograph: AP

A man dressed in a national costume pets his border guard shepherd dog Alabai during the Dog Day celebration in Ashgabat Photograph: AP

[Helen Sullivan](#) and Reuters

[@helenrsullivan](#)

Sun 25 Apr 2021 21.03 EDT

Turkmenistan marked a new holiday on Sunday dedicated to its national – and very large – Alabai dog breed, to which its longtime leader has already [erected a gilded monument](#) and written an ode.

The new holiday took place on the same day as a festival celebrating the Akhal-Teke horse breed, which [Turkmenistan](#) also considers part of its national heritage.



Turkmenistan's President Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov rides an Akhal-Teke stallion as part of celebrations for the Day of the Horse in Ashgabat. The Alabai dog breed is now also being celebrated on that day. Photograph: Igor Sasin/AFP/Getty Images

The Alabai day included a contest to find the best of the large shepherd dogs. President Kurbanguly Berdimukhamedov, who has run the isolated desert country of six million since 2007, awarded the top prize for courage to a border guard service dog. He has also written a 272-page book about the breed, one of the more than 50 titles authored by the president.

In 2017 he gifted an Alabai puppy to Russian president Vladimir Putin.

The president's son, deputy prime minister Serdar Berdimukhamedov, presented the award which included a medal for the dog and a car for its handler.



A man dressed in a national costume runs with his border guard shepherd dog Alabai during Dog Day celebration in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, Sunday, 25 April 2021. Photograph: AP

The authorities also organised a race for Akhal-Teke purebreds, horses known for their elegant stature and metallic sheen.

Dogs and horses are sources of national pride in the former Soviet republic bordering Afghanistan, where they are widely used by many traditional herders.

[Turkmenistan leader unveils giant gold statue of local dog](#)
[Read more](#)

Last year, the government erected a six-metre high gilded Alabai statue on a busy traffic circle in the capital, Ashgabat. Another street junction features a statue, also coated in gold, of President Berdymukhamedov himself, seated on a horse.

Headlines tuesday 27 april 2021

- [Conservatives Minister seeks to play down growing accusations of Tory sleaze](#)
- [Live Tory sleaze row: minister casts doubt on Dominic Cummings' credibility](#)
- ['Let the bodies pile high' Pressure mounts on Johnson over alleged remarks](#)
- [Analysis PM 'isolated and at risk of becoming uncontrollable'](#)

Conservatives

Minister seeks to play down growing accusations of Tory sleaze

Thérèse Coffey says public does not care about makeover of Boris Johnson's Downing Street flat

01:06

Thérèse Coffey says people do not care about Boris Johnson's flat makeover – video

[Matthew Weaver](#)

Tue 27 Apr 2021 03.55 EDT

Soon-to-be-published annual accounts will “tidy up” the controversy over the funding of the refurbishment of the prime minister's Downing Street flat, according to a government minister.

In an interview with Sky News, the work and pensions secretary, [Thérèse Coffey](#), sought to play down growing accusations of sleaze, and claimed the public did not care about the makeover of the apartment after the prime minister said he would foot the £58,000 bill himself.

She suggested that if any initial donations for the work had been made they would be declared later.

Coffey said: “I think it's important that prime minister will make the declarations in the usual way. These sorts of things often get tidied up in something called the annual accounts, which get published by departments every year.”

She added: “The right declarations will be made. The prime minister paid for it personally and in the meantime he's out leading the government in

trying to get back on the road roadmap to recovery and I think we're making good progress on that."

Coffey claimed the public was more concerned with the vaccine rollout. She said: "We're trying to make sure that we get through in tackling the virus and get people back into work, I don't think the majority of the public anyway is interested about some wallpaper or sofas or something like that."

She added: "We have a real level of transparency within government."

By acknowledging that declarations may have to be made, Coffey went further than cabinet colleagues over the weekend who would say only that the prime minister would pay for the work while refusing to discuss any earlier alleged payments by other sources.

Coffey also said she believed Johnson when he denied saying "let the bodies pile high in their thousands" during discussions about an England-wide lockdown late last year.

She said: "The prime minister says he didn't say them, so, I take the prime minister on his word. I'm not aware that any politician has said anything like that."

Hannah White, the deputy director of the Institute for Government and former head of the committee on standards in public life, said MPs had a duty to declare any loans within a month under the MPs code of conduct.

Speaking to BBC Radio 4's Today programme, she said: "I have to say that the prime minister has a bit of a record on being late on these things. There was a report done by the standards committee in the House of Commons, which detailed 10 instances where he'd been late in declaring financial interests as required under the code of conduct. So it's fair to say it's possibly not something that he has a history of giving great priority to."

Coffey also turned on Johnson's former aide Dominic Cummings who claimed in a [blogpost on Friday](#) that "plans to have donors secretly pay for the renovation were unethical, foolish, possibly illegal and almost certainly broke the rules".

Coffey said: “A lot of people will have seen Dominic Cummings for the first time ever last year when he gave a press conference in the Rose Garden at No 10. They’ll have come to their own views.”

The shadow health secretary, Jonathan Ashworth, has said Johnson’s alleged remarks about letting “bodies pile high” were “crass” and “wrong”.

Speaking to ITV’s Good Morning Britain, he said: “It’s so upsetting. There is more sources telling the most senior journalists in the country that he did say it.

“There will be so many viewers who have lost a loved one, perhaps lost a mum, or a grandma, a dad, a grandfather, who never got the opportunity to say goodbye properly – probably didn’t have a decent funeral.

“The remarks are sickening, they are disgusting, they are crass, they are wrong.”

The cabinet secretary, Simon Case, said on Monday that the prime minister has asked him to review how the refurbishment to the Downing Street flat was funded.

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[Politics live with Andrew Sparrow](#)

[Politics](#)

Tory sleaze row: No 10 refuses to deny Johnson argued for ‘let it rip’ approach before agreeing second Covid lockdown – as it happened

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[Boris Johnson](#)

Pressure mounts on Johnson over alleged ‘let the bodies pile high’ remarks

Tory sources have lent weight to claim PM said he’d prefer thousands of deaths to another lockdown

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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Boris Johnson during a visit to Llandudno on Monday. Photograph: Phil Noble/Reuters

Boris Johnson during a visit to Llandudno on Monday. Photograph: Phil Noble/Reuters

[Jessica Elgot](#) and [Robert Booth](#)

Mon 26 Apr 2021 14.59 EDT

Boris Johnson faced mounting pressure on Monday night as Conservative insiders added weight to claims that the prime minister said he would rather see bodies pile up than order another lockdown.

Faced with fury from relatives of the bereaved, Johnson and senior ministers emphatically denied he said “no more fucking lockdowns – let the bodies pile high in their thousands” after reluctantly approving a second England-wide lockdown late last year.

The claim followed a briefing war at the weekend between Johnson and his former chief aide Dominic Cummings, who resigned from Downing Street after what was believed to be a power struggle with the prime minister’s fiancée, Carrie Symonds. The government is also facing growing calls for a [public inquiry](#) into a pandemic that left the UK with one of the worst death tolls among major economies last year.

First reported in the Daily Mail on Monday, Johnson’s alleged comments were supposedly made after he felt corralled into agreeing to a four-week lockdown in November, months after it was [recommended by Sage scientists](#) to curb soaring coronavirus cases. He apparently warned he would never again back another national lockdown.

ITV reported source claims that the “let the bodies pile high” comments were shouted from an office in Downing Street after a crunch meeting with ministers, rather than during the meeting.

[What is the Covid row between Cummings and Johnson about?](#)
[Read more](#)

Speaking to the Guardian, a source corroborated that account and hinted that the comments had been heard by a small number of people, outside Johnson’s office. A second source, who did not hear the comments directly, said there had been “chatter” about them in Downing Street last year, though the phrase the source expressly recalled was “no more fucking lockdowns ... no matter the consequences”.

The source said they understood the comments to have been made in frustration and underlined that the prime minister went ahead with a third

lockdown in January.

00:53

Boris Johnson denies ever saying he'd rather have "bodies pile up" than another lockdown – video

Despite on-the-record denials from Johnson and his spokesperson, [the BBC also said it had confirmed the remarks](#) with sources, and said they said were made “during a heated discussion in No 10”.

Michael Gove, the chancellor of the duchy of Lancaster, defended the prime minister in the House of Commons on Monday. “I was in the meeting that afternoon with the prime minister and other ministers ... the prime minister made a decision in that meeting to trigger a second lockdown, he made his subsequent decision to trigger a third lockdown,” he told the House of Commons.

“This is a prime minister who’s been in a hospital himself in intensive care. The idea that he would say any such thing I find incredible. I was in that room, I never heard language of that kind.”

One source who spoke to the Guardian said Gove did not hear the comments himself, and suggested that ministers who did not know if the comments were true or not should not deny them so strongly.

Amid growing anger over the alleged comments, Labour’s deputy leader, [Angela Rayner](#), said: “[Johnson has] degraded the office he holds with rampant and overwhelming sleaze. But making light of the more than 127,000 deaths that happened on his watch and then trying to cover it up is a new low. This must now end.”

The Scottish National party said the prime minister should resign if it was proved that he made the remarks. There have been suggestions that Cummings has taped evidence to back up claims he is poised to make when he gives evidence to MPs next month.

For members of the Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice group, the alleged comments were “a punch in the stomach to all those grieving” and

compounded their anger at the government's [claim it would be too busy for months](#) to launch a public inquiry into the UK's handling of the pandemic.

Dozens of grieving families took to social media to post pictures and memories of loved ones they lost saying they “were not a body”.

Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice said Johnson's “callous comments will have caused untold hurt to thousands of us. It said that, despite seven requests, Johnson has declined to meet with the group.

“These ‘bodies’ were our loved ones,” it said. “Mothers and fathers, daughters and sons, brothers and sisters, grandparents, husbands and wives. Those who have lost loved ones already have to cope with the lack of dignity many of their loved ones faced as they passed.

“Is it too much to ask that the prime minister would be sympathetic and respectful to our loss? This demonstrates exactly why an urgent inquiry is so vital, to understand the decisions and considerations in protecting our loved ones that the government chose.”

Johnson said suggestions he had made the remarks about letting bodies pile up were “total rubbish”. He said: “What I certainly think is that this country has done an amazing job with the lockdowns. And they've been very difficult. And they've been very tough for people. And there's no question about that.

“Nobody wants to go into a lockdown, but they've helped us. The discipline the public has shown has helped us to get the numbers of cases down very considerably.” Johnson's official spokesperson also denied the claims to reporters. “This is untrue and he has denied [saying] that.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/apr/26/pressure-mounts-on-boris-johnson-over-alleged-let-the-bodies-pile-high-remarks>

[Boris Johnson](#)

Boris Johnson ‘isolated and at risk of becoming uncontrollable’

Analysis: Tory sources say PM’s aides are too inexperienced to handle toxic briefing wars in No 10



Boris Johnson has lost several senior aides in recent months. Photograph: Paul Ellis/AP

Boris Johnson has lost several senior aides in recent months. Photograph: Paul Ellis/AP

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

[@jessicaelgot](#)

Mon 26 Apr 2021 15.01 EDT

Boris Johnson is isolated in Downing Street with no longstanding trusted aides and at risk of becoming “uncontrollable”, Tory sources have said after he allegedly personally briefed against [Dominic Cummings](#) following

confirmation that the prime minister had to foot a £58,000 refurbishment bill.

Several insiders who spoke to the Guardian described Johnson's two closest advisers, – the cabinet secretary, Simon Case, and Downing Street chief of staff, Dan Rosenfield – as insufficiently politically experienced to handle the toxic briefing wars in No 10.

“The prime minister is being failed here,” one said. “There need to be interventions from his team but that isn't happening. These are the moments when it matters – having people who can say no. He is surrounded now by people he doesn't particularly trust or particularly know.”

Case [appeared before a select committee](#) on Monday but had to suffer repeated opprobrium from MPs for [refusing to answer questions on a continuing inquiry](#) into the leak of the November lockdown plans.

The so-called “chatty rat” inquiry was said by Cummings to have implicated Henry Newman, a close friend of Johnson's fiancée, Carrie Symonds, though other sources have briefed that Cummings – formerly Johnson's most senior aide – is not in the clear.

Another Whitehall source spoke of frustration that the government seemed to have lost credibility when denying claims on the record. On Monday, [the prime minister and his spokesman denied](#) that Johnson had said he would refuse to impose a third lockdown even if “bodies pile up high in their thousands”.

00:53

Boris Johnson denies ever saying he'd rather have "bodies pile up" than another lockdown – video

“How have they got themselves in this horrible position where they can deny things on the record and the [BBC will run it anyway](#) because they think their own sources are more trustworthy?” the source said.

Johnson has seen the departure of a number of longtime close aides in recent months, including Cummings, his veteran director of communications, Lee

Cain, who departed alongside him, and his one-time chief of staff Eddie Lister, who has been under scrutiny for his private sector connections. The only experienced Tory party communications expert who remains in his inner circle is Symonds.

A number of Tories questioned why Johnson had not been talked out of briefing newspapers – as is alleged – that Cummings was responsible for leaks and why he had yet again been dragged into a toxic Downing Street war when it had been widely briefed that that era was over with the departure of Cummings.

“We’ve got a massive majority – the main feeling I have is sadness that this is happening,” one said.

On Friday, the Cabinet Office confirmed in a statement to parliament that Johnson would pay £58,000 himself for refurbishment works on his Downing Street flat – cash he is accused of having originally solicited from donors.

One insider said the decision by the Cabinet Office to confirm Johnson would foot the bill himself was the straw that broke the prime minister’s back, and sent him into such a fury that he called newspaper editors to implicate Cummings as the leaker of multiple damaging stories. No 10 refused to deny that was how the news had been broken.

There is now significant disquiet in the building about what Cummings could say or do next. The former adviser has said he will give evidence to a committee of MPs on 26 May.

“I expected when Dom left government for him to just start publishing stuff on his blog, but I think he probably knows his reputation with the public is that what he says is not credible because of the [Barnard Castle eyesight](#) stuff so it makes more sense to get it into newspapers,” one former ally said.

“There are certain things that have the hallmarks of leaks from him – particular stories that damage Carrie and ones that might damage Eddie Lister, like the Saudi story, as well as the journalists he would be most likely to go to. I suspect No 10 doesn’t actually have any further proof than that.”

One former colleague of Cummings said he had never intended to leave government under a cloud and believed genuinely that much could be “left on good terms”.

There are still many strands of the lobbying scandal that can be pulled, from Johnson’s flat to the lobbying of Greensill Capital, the departure of Lister and the texts between Johnson and business leaders, as well as world figures such as the Saudi crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman.

One Tory source said the government was “lucky in a way to be fighting a war on so many fronts” and suggested it may mean the public may find the story confusing. They cited the Sunday Times story that Rosenfield and Johnson may have been [warned in private about the European Super League](#). “Honestly, I think that has the potential to be the most damaging in the longer term,” the source said. “It could be career-ending if that happened on another day.”

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2021.04.27 - Coronavirus

- [India International aid arrives to combat deadly Covid crisis](#)
- [Vaccine US to share up to 60m doses amid pressure to lead fight](#)
- [Mutations, politics, vaccines The factors behind India's Covid crisis](#)
- [Singapore Now leading New Zealand as best place to be in pandemic](#)

Coronavirus

WHO blames ‘perfect storm’ of factors for India Covid crisis

Health body says mass gatherings, low vaccination rates and more contagious variants all to blame for surge in cases

- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



A banquet hall has been temporarily converted to a Covid-19 ward for coronavirus patients in Delhi. Photograph: Naveen Sharma/SOPA Images/REX/Shutterstock

A banquet hall has been temporarily converted to a Covid-19 ward for coronavirus patients in Delhi. Photograph: Naveen Sharma/SOPA Images/REX/Shutterstock

[*Hannah Ellis-Petersen*](#) in Delhi

Tue 27 Apr 2021 12.55 EDT

The World Health Organization (WHO) has said India's deadly Covid-19 second wave was caused by a "perfect storm" of mass gatherings, low vaccination rates and more contagious variants.

Speaking on Tuesday, WHO spokesperson Tarik Jašarević warned against blaming mutations of the virus as the sole cause of the tsunami of cases that have engulfed India in recent weeks, pushing the country's healthcare system to the brink of collapse, and said that complacent behaviour had also played a role.

One coronavirus variant found to be circulating in India, the B1617 variant with two mutations, is thought to be more infectious, according to some preliminary science and anecdotal accounts from doctors on the frontline.

"The extent to which these virus changes are responsible for the rapid increase in cases in the country remains unclear, as there are other factors such as recent large gatherings that may have contributed to the rise," said Jašarević.

The WHO also said unnecessary pressure was being put on India's healthcare system by people who were going to hospitals in a panic when they could recover from Covid-19 at home. Jašarević emphasised that only around 15% of Covid-19 patients required treatment in hospital and urged efficient screening and triage of patients to ensure people received the care they needed.

India recorded yet another day of over 300,000 new cases on Tuesday and 2,771 new deaths. However, health experts believe the official toll is far higher, with populous states such as Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat accused of undercounting Covid-19 fatalities and cases. With Covid testing labs overwhelmed in cities such as Delhi, many with symptoms have been unable to get a test.

The Covid positivity rate in Delhi continued to rise to over 35%, while in the city of Kolkata in West Bengal, a state which is still going through heavily criticised state elections, doctors reported it was almost 50%.

The WHO is also part of a growing international effort to bring aid to India, as the country has been crippled by acute shortages of oxygen and medical equipment. The WHO chief, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, said it would send 4,000 oxygen concentrators to India and redeploy more than 2,000 experts in India towards the pandemic response efforts.

Cases

“The situation in India is beyond heartbreaking,” said Tedros. “WHO is doing everything we can.”

01:19

WHO chief says the Covid surge in India 'beyond heartbreaking' – video

On Tuesday morning, a flight from the UK carrying vital medical supplies including ventilators landed in Delhi. Six oxygen containers were flown in from Dubai and in a phone conversation between the Indian prime minister, Narendra Modi, and the US president, Joe Biden, on Monday, Biden pledged “America’s steadfast support” to India by providing oxygen-related supplies and vaccine raw materials.

International cooperation at work! Appreciate the shipment of vital medical supplies from □ □ including 100 ventilators & 95 oxygen concentrators that arrived early this morning.
pic.twitter.com/MBZFwSn4cH

— Arindam Bagchi (@MEAIndia) [April 27, 2021](#)

“Just as India sent assistance to the United States as our hospitals were strained early in the pandemic, we are determined to help India in its time of need,” Biden wrote on Twitter.

[India reportedly running out of vaccines amid Covid surge](#)
[Read more](#)

The crisis prompted the German army to provide a large oxygen production plant while France has said it will send supplies to India via air and sea,

including eight oxygen concentrators, containers of liquid oxygen and 28 respirators.

The EU said it would send medicine and oxygen to India in the coming days. “The EU is pooling resources to respond rapidly to India’s request for assistance,” said Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European commission, on Twitter.

Pledges of support have also come from Denmark, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Australia and Bhutan. The tiny kingdom which neighbours India, also said it would be sending “a spare few hundred litres” of oxygen as soon as its newly built oxygen plant was up and running.

In March, India gifted Bhutan over half a million Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccines, which helped the country implement one of the world’s fastest vaccinations rollouts, where it vaccinated 93% of the small population in just 16 days.

Many fear that the international aid being sent to India will not be enough to fill the acute gap in supplies of oxygen, which has been affecting hospitals in Delhi and Uttar Pradesh, despite the state’s chief minister insisting there was “no oxygen shortage”, and threatening private hospitals with criminal charges if they “spread rumours” about oxygen scarcity.

On Monday, Australia said it was suspending direct flights from India until at least 15 May because of the rising Covid cases. Thailand, Bangladesh, Singapore and the UK have already placed limitations on air travel from India.

In Delhi, smoke billowed from dozens of pyres lit inside a parking lot that has been turned into a makeshift crematorium.

“People are just dying, dying and dying,” Jitender Singh Shanty, who is coordinating the cremation of around 100 bodies a day at the site in the east of the city, told AFP.

“If we get more bodies then we will cremate on the road. There is no more space here.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/27/international-aid-arrives-in-india-to-combat-deadly-covid-crisis>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

Coronavirus

US to share up to 60m vaccine doses amid pressure to lead global virus fight

- White House to distribute AstraZeneca vaccine overseas
- Biden calls Modi to offer assistance as Indian surge continues



The White House press secretary, Jen Psaki, said at the Monday briefing: 'We are looking at ways to help India so we're talking about what we can redirect, what is available now.' Photograph: Evelyn Hockstein/Reuters

The White House press secretary, Jen Psaki, said at the Monday briefing: 'We are looking at ways to help India so we're talking about what we can redirect, what is available now.' Photograph: Evelyn Hockstein/Reuters

[*David Smith*](#) in Washington and [*Hannah Ellis-Petersen*](#) in New Delhi

Mon 26 Apr 2021 15.45 EDT

The US will share up to 60m doses of AstraZeneca's coronavirus vaccine with other countries, the White House has announced, amid intensifying pressure for it to lead the global fight against the pandemic.

The pledge came as Joe Biden spoke with Narendra Modi, the prime minister of India, which is reportedly [running out of Covid-19 vaccines](#) just as a deadly second wave continues to devastate the country.

Hospitals across the capital, Delhi, continued to issue SOS calls over acute oxygen shortages, with eight patients dying in private hospitals on Sunday when [oxygen supplies ran dry](#). Many of the biggest hospitals in the capital said they had stopped admitting new patients as all beds were full and oxygen was running out, while Delhi's Ganga Ram hospital said it was in "beg and borrow mode" for oxygen cylinders used in its ambulances.

The US has committed to send [India](#) oxygen systems, ventilators, testing kits, therapeutic drugs and personal protective equipment.

[India reportedly running out of vaccines amid Covid surge](#)
[Read more](#)

Biden "pledged America's full support to provide emergency assistance and resources in the fight against Covid-19", the US president [tweeted](#). "India was there for us, and we will be there for them."

America has vaccinated more than 53% of its adult population with at least one dose of its three authorised vaccines from Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson, and it expects to have enough supply for its entire population by early summer. This has fuelled demands for it to step up and help the rest of the world, especially as China and Russia's aggressive international donations led to concerns that they are beating Washington at ["vaccine diplomacy"](#).

The White House announced on Monday it would distribute the AstraZeneca vaccine overseas as production allows. Andy Slavitt, the White House senior Covid-19 adviser, posted on Twitter: "US to release 60 million AstraZeneca doses to other countries as they become available."

Much of the US effort over the past year has been focused inwards, but the crisis in India has concentrated minds. The virus is ripping through a population of nearly 1.4bn, with the healthcare system on the brink of collapse.

On Monday, India set another record for new coronavirus infections: a fifth day in a row at more than 350,000. It reported running out of Covid-19 vaccines, and numerous hospitals in the country are desperately low on supplies of oxygen. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the WHO director general, described the recent surge as “beyond heartbreaking”.

From Saturday, everyone in [India](#) over 18 will be eligible for a vaccine, a decision made by the government as the virus has brought India’s healthcare system to its knees, with more than 352,000 new cases on Monday and more than 2,800 more deaths.

High hopes have been placed on an expanded vaccine rollout to help halt the spread of the virus. However, in several of the worst-affected states, including Rajasthan, Punjab, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh, state governments have said there is already a shortage or complete lack of jabs, and they had been unable to order more, throwing doubt on to any expansion of vaccine rollout by 1 May, when about 900 million more people will become eligible.

Almost 10% of India’s population of 1.3 billion have received one jab. Just over 1% have received both vaccines.

In the week to 25 April, India recorded a cumulative 89% increase in Covid deaths compared with the week before, and a total of 2.2m new cases – the highest seven-day increase experienced anywhere in the world. Total confirmed infections have now passed 17m.

Most of the onus to deliver the vaccines has fallen on India’s Serum Institute, the country’s largest vaccine producer, which produces the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine, known in India as Covishield. However, it has been struggling to meet demand, with capacity currently to make only 70m doses a month. Last week the government approved a \$400m grant to the company to boost production to 100m doses a month by the end of May.



People carry oxygen cylinders after refilling them in a factory in Ahmedabad. India recorded 352,000 Covid cases on Monday. Photograph: Amit Dave/Reuters

The grim picture is thrown into sharp relief by the speedy vaccination progress of richer countries such as the US, the UK and Israel.

The AstraZeneca vaccine is widely in use around the world but has not yet been authorised by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in the US. The US decision to distribute the AstraZeneca vaccine abroad was made easier because it does not need the doses domestically.

A senior White House official told reporters on a conference call: “Given the strong portfolio of vaccines that the US already has and that have been authorised by the FDA, and given that the AstraZeneca vaccine is not authorized for use in the US, we do not need to use the AstraZeneca vaccine here during the next few months.

“Therefore the US is looking at options to share the AstraZeneca doses with other countries as they become available.”

Before any AstraZeneca doses can be shipped, however, they must meet the FDA’s “expectations for product quality”, the official said.

[Vaccine hoarding is all the more disturbing as a Covid disaster unfolds in India](#) | [Gaby Hinsliff](#)

[Read more](#)

Jen Psaki, the White House press secretary, said at a briefing: “We are continuing to look for a range of ways to help India so we’re talking about what we can redirect, what is available now. A lot of what they need at this moment is oxygen; that is what they will tell you. We are quite focused on that, as well as PPE, testing and other immediate needs they have now.”

Sending vaccines to India, Psaki explained, will take longer.

She said: “Right now we have zero doses available at AstraZeneca. We’re talking about what the FDA needs to go through, a review to ensure the safety and it’s meeting our own guidelines.”

Psaki said approximately 10m doses could be released when the FDA grants approval, but warned that this would not be immediate.

Asked about criticism that the US response is coming late, Psaki added: “The US has been one of the largest providers of assistance to address the Covid pandemic around the world including to India.”

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India

Mutations, politics, vaccines: the factors behind India's Covid crisis

Analysis: experts believe a number of things coalesced to cause the world's worst coronavirus outbreak

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



Health workers attend to a Covid patient at a hospital in Mumbai, India.
Photograph: Rafiq Maqbool/AP

Health workers attend to a Covid patient at a hospital in Mumbai, India.
Photograph: Rafiq Maqbool/AP

[Michael Safi](#)

[@safimichael](#)

Mon 26 Apr 2021 09.23 EDT

India is [now identifying more than 1 million coronavirus cases every three days](#), with many times more thought to be going unregistered in a vast country where public health surveillance is often poor. Daily deaths exceeded 2,800 on Sunday, but these too are thought to be many times higher.

Epidemiologists and other experts are speculating that several factors have coalesced over the past months to bring [India](#) to the point of the world's worst Covid-19 outbreak.

Mutations

One idea is that India's second wave is being driven by highly infectious variants of the virus that causes Covid-19. The so-called "double mutation" or B1617 variant has received significant attention, though virologists note that it does not appear to be the dominant strain across the country, and nowhere near enough samples of the virus have been taken to firmly place the blame on any one variant.

The UK variant is driving infections in parts of India, as well as other mutations that are yet to be studied properly. The best guess of epidemiologists is that these are more infectious than the iterations of the virus that were spreading in the country last year.

"We can say [these variants] are all more infectious based on their behaviour," Dr Shahid Jameel, a virologist and director of the Trivedi school of biosciences at Ashoka University, told the Guardian last week. "Though in India we have not been able to correlate the mutant variants with the surge, based on what we've seen earlier [in the UK and elsewhere], it's the logical explanation."

Political failings

Variants of interest or concern have been circulating in India since at least last December, when cases there were still declining, so they are unlikely to be the only factor driving this renewed outbreak. India had largely relaxed

its social distancing and quarantine measures by March – a decision now viewed as a profound political misjudgment.

Official case numbers in India started to decline steeply from September. It could have been an opportunity to gird the country's healthcare system and build vaccination infrastructure ahead of a larger second wave of the kind that other countries had witnessed, and which many scientists were warning was inevitable.

[cases](#)

Instead, the Indian prime minister, Narendra Modi, pressed ahead with election rallies, where he boasted about the size of the crowds, and cricket matches including in a new stadium that bore his name. His Bharatiya Janata party declared India had beaten Covid-19 in a laudatory February resolution.

Events permitted to go ahead included the Kumbh Mela, one of the largest gatherings in the world, [which drew millions of pilgrims to the banks of the river Ganges](#) over several weeks, and probably provided no shortage of potential hosts for whatever variants were circulating.

[deaths](#)

For many Indians, living in crowded slums or forced to work to survive, social distancing is impossible. Yet others, especially middle-class people in larger cities, were able to take Covid-19 precautions last year that helped to slow the spread of the virus. Taking the cue from their leaders, many Indians abandoned these measures through February and March, returning to restaurants, salons and malls. For some, this has been a fatal decision.

Weak health infrastructure

India has many excellent hospitals and medical professionals, but its state healthcare system is one of the most poorly funded in the world, hovering at a little over 1% of GDP. There is less than one doctor for every 1,000 people, and that figure drops further in rural areas and poorer states.

The result is a fragile system built on fewer beds than required and supplies of medical equipment, drugs and oxygen that cannot withstand a surge of cases.

It also means less ability to track the scale of the pandemic. In rural areas especially, most people are thought to die at home, their cause of death unregistered.

[Delhi beds graphic](#)

Vaccines

India entered the pandemic as the world's largest producer of vaccines. It continues to produce more than 80m doses a month, but is now being outstripped by China and the US, who made significant investments in their manufacturing last year. India, in contrast, is running into shortages, even though vaccine take-up among Indians has been slower than expected, with about nine in 100 people receiving at least one dose so far.

But owing to its sheer size, vaccinating its way out of the pandemic imminently is out of India's reach. As of Saturday, there were about 1bn doses administered worldwide. If every single one of those had been used in India, and assuming a two-dose regimen (Johnson & Johnson's formulation is the only one-dose vaccine so far), the total sum would have been enough to inoculate about 500 million Indians – leaving about 400 million adults still awaiting a shot.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/26/mutations-politics-vaccines-the-factors-behind-indias-covid-crisis>

New Zealand

New Zealand loses top spot for best place to be during Covid to Singapore

Slow vaccine rollout cited as the difference between the two countries, both of which have virtually no community coronavirus cases

- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



New Zealand's slow vaccine rollout has been blamed for the country losing out to Singapore as the best place to be during Covid. Photograph: HOGP/AP

New Zealand's slow vaccine rollout has been blamed for the country losing out to Singapore as the best place to be during Covid. Photograph: HOGP/AP

[Tess McClure](#) in Christchurch

[@tessairini](#)

Mon 26 Apr 2021 19.11 EDT

New Zealand has been dethroned for the first time as the best place to be during Covid 19, as a result of its slower vaccine rollout. The country was bumped from the top spot by Singapore, in [Bloomberg's Covid resilience ranking](#).

While both countries have near-zero community cases, Singapore's vaccine rollout is much further advanced. So while life was relatively normal in several countries thanks to strong control of the virus, "Singapore has already administered vaccines equivalent to cover a fifth of its population, an aspect of pandemic control that other virus eliminators like [New Zealand](#), Australia and Taiwan are lagging on," the report concluded.

Some countries, like Poland and Canada, fell in the Covid resilience rankings, despite climbing vaccination rates. In many cases, their governments had loosened restrictions when vaccinations began, unleashing high rates of infection with new variants before the population reached high-enough levels of immunity.

[Victorious over Covid, Australia and New Zealand grapple with vaccine rollout](#)
[Read more](#)

After being lauded internationally for its Covid-19 response, [New Zealand's vaccine rollout has been criticised for its pace](#). The government says it will have its entire willing and vaccine-eligible population vaccinated by the end of the year, and vaccines will be available to all adults by around July.

So far, the country is hitting its monthly targets, and officials say the rollout will ramp up significantly in the coming months – but still only [4.5% of eligible people](#) have received a shot so far. In the meantime, New Zealand's border is still closed to most international tourists.

Speaking to [the Guardian earlier this month](#), University of Auckland vaccinologist, Helen Petousis-Harris said New Zealand could have started preparations to roll out the vaccine earlier. The national immunisation register, which records vaccinations and second doses, was out of date, she said: "It had to be put in place and that, I would argue, should have happened a lot earlier and should have been much further along."

New Zealand's health system wasn't overwhelmed with managing a high case load, so this should have been achievable, she said.

The Covid resilience ranking is updated monthly, and uses a range of social measures, including Covid case rates, vaccination rates, community mobility, placement on the human development index, and GDP, to assess which countries are most effectively containing Covid-19 cases without enormous damage to their lifestyle or economy. That data is used to calculate a final "resilience score". New Zealand's score this month had dropped 0.1 points, to 79.6. Singapore's was 79.7

The database ranks 52 economies, valued at more than \$200bn prior to the pandemic.

Australia came in close behind New Zealand, in third place.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/27/new-zealand-loses-top-spot-for-best-place-to-be-during-covid-to-singapore>

2021.04.27 - Spotlight

- [Lost to the virus Donna Coleman died after Covid ran riot at Burnley College. Should it have been open?](#)
- [Clockwork universe Is free will an illusion?](#)
- ['Boris on the ropes' What the papers say about mounting pressure on PM](#)
- [Q+A Cummings-Johnson row explained](#)
- ['It's satisfying to learn the wealthy have problems' Why is reality TV obsessed with the super-rich?](#)

Donna Coleman died after Covid ran riot at Burnley College. Should it have been open?

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The clockwork universe: is free will an illusion?

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[Newspapers](#)

‘Boris on the ropes’: what the papers say about mounting pressure on PM

Johnson has denied he said ‘let the bodies pile high’ during debate over national lockdown late last year



The UK's front pages focus on the PM's alleged remarks last year over Covid restrictions. Composite: Various

The UK's front pages focus on the PM's alleged remarks last year over Covid restrictions. Composite: Various

[Alison Rourke](#)

Mon 26 Apr 2021 23.07 EDT

The front pages will do little to ease the pressure on [Boris Johnson](#) over allegations that he said “let the bodies pile high” in relation to the national lockdown late last year.

The **Guardian** splashes with “Pressure on Johnson after claim of slur on Covid dead”. It says [faced with the fury of grieving relatives](#) the PM and senior ministers denied that he made the alleged comments, which were first reported by the Daily Mail on Monday.

[Boris Johnson ‘isolated and at risk of becoming uncontrollable’](#)
[Read more](#)

Guardian front page, Tuesday 27 April 2021: Pressure on Johnson after claim of slur on Covid dead [pic.twitter.com/sO7N6m9bh6](#)

— The Guardian (@guardian) [April 26, 2021](#)

The **Mail** says the PM is under siege, under the headline “Boris on the ropes”. It alleges “fresh sources” have come forward to claim the PM had made “crass comments” about lockdown deaths.

Boris Johnson under siege after he denies 'bodies' remark but BBC and ITV confirm it [https://t.co/VAtfrZSMdg](#) [pic.twitter.com/D5YnZkav7j](#)

— Daily Mail U.K. (@DailyMailUK) [April 26, 2021](#)

The **Mirror**’s front page is a large picture of the Covid memorial wall at St Thomas’ hospital in London with the headline: “Not just bodies, Boris ... we loved them”. The paper says three people have now claimed the PM made the alleged comments, which it says has upset grieving families.

Tuesday's front page: Not just bodies, Boris we loved them.
[#TomorrowsPapersToday](#) [https://t.co/V10cQ8oesI](#)
[pic.twitter.com/T0jwLSLBdr](#)

— The Mirror (@DailyMirror) [April 26, 2021](#)

The **Times** leads with claims “Johnson ‘said he would let Covid rip’ in lockdown row”, saying the row suggests No 10 was in turmoil over the economic damage of the virus. The paper says it has been told the PM

allegedly told aides he would rather “let it rip” during the period late last year than implement another lockdown because of the damage to businesses and the people who would lose their jobs.

The paper also claims the PM expressed regret about the first lockdown and quoted a No 10 spokesperson saying: “These are gross distortions of his (Johnson’s) position.”

Exclusive:

Boris Johnson allegedly told aides he would rather ‘let it rip’ than implement a second coronavirus lockdown because of impact on business & jobs

Johnson said to have argued he did not believe lockdowns worked, describing them as ‘mad’ <https://t.co/HF8eEgSO8A>

— Steven Swinford (@Steven_Swinford) [April 26, 2021](#)

The **Telegraph** says the PM is fighting to “move on from leaks row”. The paper says the PM will tell his cabinet on Tuesday to be “totally focused on the public’s priorities”. While it says Johnson has categorically denied the remarks, both the BBC and ITV cited sources who contradicted him.

□ The front page of tomorrow's Daily Telegraph:

'PM fights to move on from leaks row' [#TomorrowsPapersToday](#)

□ Sign up for the Front Page newsletter □ <https://t.co/x8AV4Oomry.pic.twitter.com/DXRzqgVv8D>

— The Telegraph (@Telegraph) [April 26, 2021](#)

The **Daily Express**’s splash is “Boris denies ‘let bodies’ pile high’ outburst”, saying he branded the allegations “total, total rubbish”, and that No 10 is fighting back over the “war of words”.

Tomorrow's front page: Boris denies 'Let bodies pile high' outburst.
[#TomorrowsPapersToday](#) [pic.twitter.com/9d97vQ5m7l](#)

— Daily Express (@Daily_Express) [April 26, 2021](#)

The **Sun** mocks up a police case file for its front page with the pun headline “Lying of Duty”, saying the No 10 leaks row is a plot worthy of the police drama.

Tomorrow's front page: 'PM hits back over Cummings slur 'fibs'
<https://t.co/txK9JWQHMH> [pic.twitter.com/fxoWVEtE9F](#)

— The Sun (@TheSun) [April 26, 2021](#)

The **i** has “PM tainted by sleaze, say voters” in what it describes as a “withering verdict” for Johnson on a dramatic day in Westminster. It reports a new poll which shows at least half of the people questioned believe there is a “culture of sleaze” in the government [following the Greensill lobbying scandal](#). It describes Michael Gove’s refusal to deny the PM’s alleged remarks over bodies as a “wounding blow”.

Tuesday's front page: PM tainted by sleaze, say voters
[#TomorrowsPapersToday](#) <https://t.co/CEVyE5pRKD>
[pic.twitter.com/sCMiZ1SJQV](#)

— i newspaper (@theipaper) [April 26, 2021](#)

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Coronavirus

What is the Covid row between Cummings and Johnson about?

PM and his former aide are in midst of furious row over pandemic legacy

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



Boris Johnson and Dominic Cummings in 2019. Photograph: Daniel Leal-Olivas/AFP/Getty Images

Boris Johnson and Dominic Cummings in 2019. Photograph: Daniel Leal-Olivas/AFP/Getty Images

[Ian Sample](#) *Science editor*

[@iansample](#)

Mon 26 Apr 2021 12.05 EDT

What are Dominic Cummings's reported allegations about Boris Johnson's failings amid the Covid pandemic?

Amid a furious row, the prime minister's former chief aide is expected to accuse Johnson of allowing the death toll to rise in the pandemic, leaving the UK with one of the worse death rate among all major economies.

Cummings is thought to blame the prime minister for blocking proposals to close Britain's borders early last year and for delaying the introduction of a second England-wide lockdown in autumn. Cummings is due to give evidence to MPs as part of an inquiry into the UK's Covid response on 26 May.

What was the issue on border controls?

Cummings is said to have supported plans put forward by the home secretary, Priti Patel, in March 2020 to reduce the risk of travellers bringing the virus to the UK by halting daily flights from Covid hotspots such as China, the US and Iran. At the time, many European countries were considered less risky because domestic lockdowns were in place.

Between January and mid-March, travellers from designated high-risk countries such as China, Iran and Italy, but not Spain, were issued non-mandatory advice to self-isolate for 14 days on arrival. That guidance was withdrawn on 13 March. Four days later, the EU announced it was banning nearly all travel from outside the bloc for at least a month.

What was the advice from the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage)?

Sage discussed the value of travel restrictions on 3 February 2020. They stated that halving imported infections would delay an epidemic in the UK by five days, while cutting them by 75% would push the epidemic back 10 days. The committee advised that "only a month of additional preparation time for the NHS would be meaningful" but that this would require

“draconian and coordinated measures” that blocked at least 95% of imported cases – with knock-on effects for supply chains.

The Home Office went back to Sage on 22 March, the day before the first national lockdown, and asked if the advice on borders should change given the coronavirus response had moved from containment to delay. The following day, Sage minutes reiterated the message that “closing borders would have negligible effect on spread”, adding that the number of cases arriving from other countries was estimated to be “insignificant” at about 0.5% of cases.

Discussions around border restrictions continued throughout the lockdown and the Home Office went back to Sage on 28 April to see if the advice should be updated. In a letter to the committee, the Home Office noted that Sage had previously concluded there was “little scientific justification for implementing any measures at the border at that point”. In response, Sage advised that as cases fell in the UK, the proportion coming in from other countries might rise. Measures at the border could “change the level of risk” and these were reviewed.

What do we know now?

The UK had a poor understanding of the state of the outbreaks in European countries, and failed to detect tens of thousands of infected people who entered the country, largely from the continent.

Of the 18.1 million people who arrived in the UK by air in the three months before lockdown, only 273 were quarantined. In May, the government’s chief scientific adviser, Sir Patrick Vallance, revealed that in early March that year the UK had seen a “big influx” of thousands of infections that “seeded right the way across the country”. Genetic analysis of the imported cases showed that about a third came from Spain, another third from France, and about 14% from Italy. The percentage of cases from China was minimal, at about 0.1%.

In August, a [damning report](#) from the home affairs select committee branded the government’s failure to impose border measures, such as mandatory self-isolation before the lockdown, “a serious mistake”.

[The ‘chatty rat’ and the lockdown leak: all you need to know](#)
[Read more](#)

What about England’s second national lockdown?

Following a leak, a number of newspapers reported on 30 October that [Boris Johnson](#) was to order a second lockdown in England after denying that another would be necessary and resisting calls for an earlier “circuit-breaker” as was introduced in Wales. Johnson did so the next day.

What was the advice from Sage?

Sage documents show that ministers were warned more than a month earlier, on 21 September, that the country faced “catastrophic consequences” unless they took urgent action and brought in a two-week circuit-breaker and other measures to stem the surge in cases. At the time, cases in England were doubling every week after an August of limited restrictions and the “eat out to help out” scheme which filled cafes and restaurants.

What did the prime minister do?

Instead of a circuit-breaker, Johnson brought in a tiers system for local lockdowns on 12 October. This imposed tough restrictions on places with the highest case numbers but allowed infections to rise everywhere else until those too came under the most stringent measures.

Immediately after Johnson’s announcement of the tiers system, Sage released the September document in which it urged ministers to move fast. Between Sage calling for the circuit-breaker and the tiers system coming in, UK reported daily infections rose threefold to nearly 14,000, and were more than five times higher by the time the second lockdown came into action.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/26/what-is-the-covid-row-between-cummings-and-johnson-about>

Reality TV

‘It’s satisfying to learn the wealthy have problems’: why is reality TV obsessed with the super-rich?



That’s rich ... (clockwise from top left) *Bling Empire*; *The Real Housewives of Atlanta*; *Selling Sunset*; *Fabulous Lives of Bollywood Wives*. Composite: The Guide

That’s rich ... (clockwise from top left) *Bling Empire*; *The Real Housewives of Atlanta*; *Selling Sunset*; *Fabulous Lives of Bollywood Wives*. Composite: The Guide

From *Bling Empire* to *Made in Chelsea*, the uberwealthy trend in TV is here to stay – and it might even be good for diversity

[Michelle Kambasha](#)

Tue 27 Apr 2021 03.00 EDT

In the first episode of [reality TV show Bling Empire](#), heiress Anna Shay commits to an excursion so globe-straddlingly audacious it would make Greta Thunberg weep. Los Angeles resident Anna asks a friend and her objectively awful boyfriend to go to her favourite restaurant with her – in Paris. They chart a private plane, eat their dinner and head back to LA the next day. It sets the scene for a series that luxuriates in the lives of the super-rich, and the candour, conflict and rule-breaking that such an existence affords.

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Bling Empire, which follows the fortunes of a wealthy pocket of LA's east and south-east Asian-American community, is not an outlier; in the last few years networks have commissioned a host of similar shows, capitalising on the popularity of series such as the Real Housewives franchise and the enduring appeal of the soon-to-end [Keeping Up With the Kardashians](#) (Bling Empire is produced by Jeff Jenkins Productions, the company led by Keeping Up With the Kardashians' exec producer). On this side of the Atlantic, the new (and 21st) season of Made in Chelsea – which is known for its own late-notice getaways to New York and Argentina – is set in the somewhat less glamorous climes of the Cotswolds, because of Covid regulations, but is still bejewelled with wealth: the cast isolate in a grand house and guzzle champagne while adorned in mink coats.

Traditionally, we think of reality TV as portraying ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances – think Orwellian contests such as Big Brother. Shows like the Up series, which began in 1964, mapped the chequered lives of its everyday participants from youth to adulthood, while in the 2010s Benefits Street and Skint tapped into our complicated curiosity about poverty and government welfare.



Made of money ... Made in Chelsea. Photograph: Channel 4

Recently, however, working-class stories on reality television have fallen out of favour. Matt Nicholls, agent to *Made in Chelsea* cast members Olivia Bentley and Mark-Francis Vandelli, thinks that shows such as *Benefits Street* became so popular that commissioning producers started pushing for more extreme, desperate conditions “until there was nowhere left to go”. Viewers began to question the ethics of treating low-income “reality stars” like zoo animals to be poked, prodded and guffawed at. Known as “poverty porn”, it was a concept [discouraged by global aid workers](#) for its perpetuation of misrepresentative stereotypes of working-class people.

These shows still exist but are less extreme: take the savvy working-class people on *Bargain Brits* or *Benefits* or the benevolent nurses on Channel 4’s long-running show [One Born Every Minute](#). But since these tempered versions of reality TV don’t satiate our need for extreme, they have left a space for more shows about the wealthy. “Punching up rather than down is perhaps less problematic,” says Dr Ruth Deller, a lecturer at Sheffield Hallam University and the author of *Reality Television: The TV Phenomenon That Changed the World*, “especially if [the rich] are in on the joke.”

The unstoppable rise of wealth TV can be traced back to the success of US teen drama *The OC*. The fictional portrayal of the life of wealthy teens and their parents in the exclusive communities of a southern Californian town proved to be so popular that reality TV commissioners wanted a piece of the proverbial pie.



California love ... *The Real Housewives of Orange County*. Photograph: Bravo/NBCU/Getty

In 2004, MTV launched the first rich reality TV show in Laguna Beach: *The Real Orange County*, which lasted two years and spawned a successful spin-off, [The Hills](#). But the true game-changer came in the form of reality TV network Bravo's *The Real Housewives of Orange County*, which began airing in 2006. Showing the lives of rich, white women in the OC, the franchise grew nine spin-off shows in the US alone, including Atlanta and New York, and many more globally. Over 15 years, Bravo has managed to diversify its cast, and capture a varied audience, from gay fans attracted to the camp fabulousness of the lives on show to bored housewives themselves.

In the past year, Netflix has attempted to challenge Bravo's power with their own line of shows, including *Bling Empire* and 2019 hit *Selling Sunset*, about a team of high-end, west coast real-estate agents. The result is a cycle of ultra-rich one-upmanship. "Producers are thinking: how can we make a

show ‘even glossier’ and more aspirational,” Nicholls says. For more than a decade, fans have become used to Housewives spending five figures on shopping sprees, but on Bling Empire, “we meet a woman whose father is an arms dealer,” says Ben Mandelker, co-host of reality breakdown podcast Watch What Crappens, “and a person who owns the stores that these housewives do their spending sprees in”.

For all the gaudy opulence on show, there has been an unlikely positive gained from this trend for wealth TV, in the burgeoning diversity seen on screen. “Audiences [in the US] are no longer predominantly white and viewers want to relate to the stories they are watching,” [says Jeff Jenkins](#), the executive producer of Bling Empire. “It seems arrogant to think, in 2021, that people just want to consume stories about white folk.”



Feeling beachy ... Fabulous Lives of Bollywood Wives. Photograph: Rachel Santos/Netflix

[Bravo has been very strong in this regard](#), airing shows such as Shajs of Sunset and Family Karma that feature predominantly Muslim and Jewish Persians, as well as Indian cast members. The success, meanwhile, of the network’s Black reality series such as The Real Housewives of Atlanta and Potomac – the former is the most watched in the whole Housewives

franchise – has dispelled the tired notion that minority shows don't capture large audiences.

In the past year, Netflix has successfully emulated this trend with shows such as *Fabulous Lives of Bollywood Wives*, *Indian Matchmaking* and, of course, *Bling Empire*. These shows serve as a departure from reality TV's past portrayals of minorities, on American reality shows such as *Cops* and *The First 48*, which encouraged the stereotype that Black people are prone to crime and deceit. Still, modern reality shows aren't entirely perfect when it comes to race. The often heavily stereotyped portrayals of minorities – be it overbearing Indian parents or uber-wealthy south-east Asians – serve as a reminder that representation in itself isn't always enough in telling the reality of people's lives.

It is no coincidence rich reality TV is enjoying a boom just as the world faces the upheaval caused by Covid, offering as it does *schadenfreude* and escapism. We can't call up Jeff Bezos to tell him his wealth's growth during a pandemic disgusts us. But we can jeer at those who have chosen to flaunt their money on our TV. It would be wrong to assume that the lives of the very rich are entirely easy, says Jenkins. "For most of us it's perhaps secretly satisfying to learn that the wealthy also have lots of problems – and sometimes their problems are even worse than our own."

Wealthy people aren't going anywhere. So why not bask in their lives, from a safe distance? (A very safe distance, in the case of *Bling Empire*'s Anna – who in one scene knocks down the wall of her walk-in closet with a sledgehammer, while wearing a ballgown.) Considering they control the world we live in, perhaps it's a good idea we keep an eye on them.

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2021.04.27 - Opinion

- [Labour will need to do more than shout 'Tory sleaze'](#)
- [This Cummings spat could be a dangerous political trap for Johnson](#)
- [Rich countries close their eyes to the global Covid surge at their own peril](#)
- [Tom Cruise spotted on location in North Yorkshire! Why am I so excited?](#)

OpinionConservatives

Labour will need to do more than shout 'Tory sleaze'

[Alan Finlayson](#)

In British politics, too few people have had too much power for far too long – the opposition should not be afraid to say so



Keir Starmer campaigning in Hartlepool. 'Labour's bet is that people will connect sleaze to broader concerns about about Johnson's competence and lifestyle. In contrast, Starmer will be confirmed as the trustworthy, safe choice.' Photograph: Ian Forsyth/Getty Images

Keir Starmer campaigning in Hartlepool. 'Labour's bet is that people will connect sleaze to broader concerns about about Johnson's competence and lifestyle. In contrast, Starmer will be confirmed as the trustworthy, safe choice.' Photograph: Ian Forsyth/Getty Images

Tue 27 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

One of the most important of the political arts is that of line-drawing: lines in the sand, party lines, lines to take at a press briefing. A well-drawn political line separates and unifies. It distinguishes your politics from others. It shows the values, issues and people you side with – and how far you would go to support them. It also helps to answer important questions, such as: “When he privately texts a businessman promising to fix a tax issue, what line is a prime minister crossing?”

The intensifying “[stench of sleaze](#)” engulfing Downing Street has turned into the sort of story beloved by those for whom politics is a profession and a hobby – especially now that Dominic Cummings has returned to the fray. For Labour, still trailing Boris Johnson by double digits, the return of “Tory sleaze” looks like a gift. The party has seized on the scandals as an opportunity to colour in the lines of a political sketch it has been working on for a year. It’s one that paints Keir Starmer as Jeeves to Johnson’s Wooster: the Tories drawn as lazy, unprofessional, careless in awarding government contracts; Labour pictured as people who do their homework, stay up late to read treaties all the way through, cautious with public money. The hope is that the magic phrase “Tory sleaze” conjures indelible links with the party’s past scandals: [linking foreign aid to arms deals](#); [cash for questions](#); and [homes for votes](#).

Labour’s bet is that people will connect sleaze to broader concerns about Johnson’s competence and lifestyle. In contrast, Starmer will be confirmed as the trustworthy, safe choice. The danger is that all of this salacious briefing and counter-briefing – all the drama of Boris v Dom v Carrie – reduces the problem to the behaviour of individuals while tainting all politicians in Westminster, and amplifying the anti-politics sentiment that this government has already learned how to exploit. And it is a problem for Labour that anyone over 40 may remember that sleaze didn’t stop in 1997 and that “[Tony’s cronies](#)” paid [cash for passports](#), [cash for honours](#) and [cash for influence](#) – while [Tony Blair himself is on the TV news](#), saying that there is “nothing wrong” with lobbying.

Labour might need to take a bigger gamble than simply waiting around for Johnson’s government to crumble under its own scandals – and the opinion polls already suggest an opening. The latest [British Social Attitudes survey](#) finds that trust and confidence in British government are at a record low.

Only 15% of us say we trust government all or most of the time, while 79% think that the way we are governed is in need of “a lot or a great deal of” improvement. On that leavers and remainers agree. It’s not that we think everything is always corrupt. It’s simply that when prime ministers, a current chancellor, senior civil servants and aides are all involved, it no longer looks like a breach of the rules. It looks like how the game is played. The line we draw doesn’t connect to high crimes and misdemeanours. It joins the dots between [dodgy deals](#) and [dodgy dossiers](#).

Most of us, in all sorts of workplaces, know the rules about fair employment, putting contracts out for competitive tender and treating colleagues with respect. It’s not only the “left behind” who can see that Whitehall and [Westminster have not quite caught up](#) with the modern world.

Despite the forces of democratisation, British politics in the 20th century continued to practise what the political scientist Michael Moran described as “[club government](#)”. Politicians, civil servants, financiers, judges and the rest, shared a common culture. There was no need to write down rules to manage their relationships. Club members were by definition all good chaps. If needs be they could take care of their own.

This club culture is just one element of what political scientists call the “[British political tradition](#)”: the belief that politics is something only politicians can do; that good government is best when concentrated, strong and decisive, exercising the unconstrained sovereign power of the crown in parliament; and that the power of the people is best limited to distant oversight in the form of elections, the odd referendum or, in spectral form, via the opinion poll.

In this tradition, day-to-day politics is the business of those born or trained to steer the great ship Britannia. It is quite natural therefore to award posts, peerages and procurement contracts to people you know from school, university or your legal chambers. They know how to [get things done](#). Bureaucratic [rules get in the way](#) when things need to be fast tracked.

However that tradition has been under pressure for a long time. The scandals of the 21st century are not only about the closed doors of the club; they are about the way the doors have been partially opened, and who benefits. To

the idea that only the natural born or well-trained can govern has been added the belief that success in business is the standard against which all else can be judged. It follows [that civil servants should study for MBAs](#), that the private sector gives the best advice to government, that public services should be privatised, contracted out or run as if for profit. As the prime minister himself said, only [greed and the profit motive](#) get things done.

The cosy club still exists, but its rules have been replaced with regulations written by the people they are meant to govern. David Cameron's ties to Lex Greensill are just one example of the blurred lines between public government and private interests in education, health, prisons and more. The opportunities for opportunism are baked in to a cake that the public can't have because others have already eaten it.

That is where the opposition should draw a line. It should be unafraid to be a little "populist": *for* a renewed and modernised democracy; *against* old-fashioned, insiders-only chumocracy. In other words, [Labour](#) must resist the temptation to confine these scandals to a box marked "Tory sleaze". The conservative press and commentariat will be happy running exciting stories of blue-on-blue backstabbing. If it all gets too much, "Boris" can be replaced by "Rishi" and business-as-usual continues.

If Labour wants to make the [Conservatives](#) uncomfortable, it needs to insist that the issue is not simply the moral failings of individuals. It is the institutions and procedures of our antiquated democracy. Too few people having too much power for far too long. Government procurement scandals are what you get when political and economic inequalities combine. The line Johnson has crossed separates democracy from oligarchy. Labour ought not to fear stepping up to it and pointing it out.

One of the things Brexiters were voting against was centralised, we-know-best, scratch-each-other's-back government. What they have won – as Covid policy has demonstrated – is a recrudescence of culturally and geographically centralised power convinced it can manage everything and contemptuous of the expertise, insight and public spirit of people they didn't go to university with. Labour should highlight and strengthen the lines that connect the 79% of us who think we can be governed better: counterweights to executive power; public oversight of those with private control of public

services; regional political and economic powers; and a proper electoral system. It is not enough to be tough on sleaze – the opposition must be tough on the causes of sleaze.

- Alan Finlayson is professor of political and social theory at the University of East Anglia.

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

[Opinion](#)**Boris Johnson**

This Cummings spat could be a dangerous political trap for Johnson

[Katy Balls](#)



Tory MPs fear the prime minister stands to lose far more than his opponent in a public row over leaks



‘Boris Johnson seems keen to remove all reminders of Dominic Cummings from Downing Street.’ Cummings and Johnson outside No 10, October 2019. Photograph: Peter Summers/Getty Images

‘Boris Johnson seems keen to remove all reminders of Dominic Cummings from Downing Street.’ Cummings and Johnson outside No 10, October 2019. Photograph: Peter Summers/Getty Images

Mon 26 Apr 2021 12.47 EDT

Boris Johnson once cited his [favourite movie scene](#) as the multiple retribution killings at the end of The Godfather. But it’s a line from the film’s sequel that best explains the events that have led to the row between the prime minister and his former adviser Dominic Cummings that is currently engulfing Downing Street: “Never hate your enemies. It affects your judgment.”

On Thursday, Downing Street briefed several newspapers that Johnson believed his one-time right-hand man had been behind a number of damaging government leaks. These leaks were wide-ranging – from the recent publication of messages between Johnson and James Dyson over ventilators, to the leaked news of [England’s second lockdown](#), when Johnson was forced to bring forward plans for a circuit breaker.

Since Cummings quit, following a row that included [Johnson's fiancée, Carrie Symonds](#), the relationship between the prime minister and his former aide has gone from bad to worse. Aides have been advised against keeping in contact with members of the Vote Leave team, and Johnson has seemed keen to remove all reminders of Cummings from Downing Street.

Johnson's belief that damaging stories in the papers – from the Downing Street refurbishment, to [Dilyn the dog's antics](#) and his messages to the Saudi crown prince [Mohammed bin Salman](#) – were down to Cummings have compounded these tensions. Aides argue that Cummings is “bitter” that the government hasn't fallen down in his absence.

What the briefings last week did, however, was to make a private annoyance public. Cummings was quick to hit back with a [blog post](#) in which he denied being the source of the leaks and made new allegations, claiming the prime minister considered breaking the law with his plans for a lavish Downing Street flat refurbishment, and that he called off a leak inquiry because he was concerned it could mean he had to fire one of his fiancée's close friends.

Given the Tories are currently riding high [in the polls](#), one could be forgiven for thinking this is a court drama that will simply fizzle out. But understanding the row is important, because it could have big implications for the government.

Why did the prime minister decide to go on the attack? There are two schools of thought about the wisdom of this approach. The charitable case, as put forward by Johnson's most loyal supporters, is that he was simply responding to a campaign of abuse from Cummings and this was the best way to limit the damage.

The reasons for this are twofold. One, Cummings is not a popular public figure. The row over his trip from London to Durham during England's first lockdown made him one of the most unpopular figures in the country. Even to this day, “red wall” MPs say that wordclouds of constituent emails show “Barnard Castle” in the largest font. It follows that as Johnson is more popular than Cummings, blaming the former aide could limit the damage to his public reputation.

The second reason is 26 May – the date that Cummings is [due to give evidence](#) to MPs about the government’s Covid response. There are nerves in No 10 ahead of this appearance, particularly about what Cummings could say and what evidence he could later provide. “I wouldn’t be surprised if he made a load of outlandish claims, forced the government to deny them and then published all the evidence,” says one former colleague of Cummings.

If the prime minister were successful in discrediting Cummings as a figure ahead of this appearance, some think it could limit the damage. This is why the leak of England’s second lockdown is particularly significant. Cummings denies it was him. Were the prime minister able to prove otherwise, it could make his former aide appear an unreliable witness.

Yet few people have made these arguments. Even if discrediting Cummings was Johnson’s aim, it seems odd that he would have triggered this row before a bumper set of local elections, rather than waiting until after polling day.

Speak to government aides and MPs who support the prime minister and they are more likely to say this is all a horrible misjudgment. “A lot of people were saying this is a massive mistake, but the prime minister just cracked,” says one government figure. “It was death by a thousand cuts. He’s not a happy figure.”

The fear is that Johnson has fallen into a trap – a public spat he cannot win. It’s not that Johnson won’t damage Cummings, but rather that Johnson simply has far more to lose. One is a public figure keen for re-election in a few years’ time, the other is a private individual.

For now, however, Johnson has the support of his parliamentary party. Many Tory MPs were desperate to see the back of Cummings – he had little time for them when in post. While the current headlines are far from ideal, the more important thing is that MPs do not believe this row will affect the local elections. The Tories are still enjoying a comfortable lead in the polls. Although Labour has been going on the attack on Tory sleaze since the Greensill saga, MPs say it appears to have had little impact on the doorstep so far. Several Conservative MPs claim they have not received a single email from constituents over Greensill and lobbying.

But this could change. MPs returning to parliament this week after a weekend out on the doorstep say constituents have started to voice the issue of the flat refurbishment, along with Tory infighting. If these become contentious issues among voters, Tory nerves will grow.

Johnson didn't win the support of his party because he has close individual ties within it. In fact, he doesn't have much in the way of a loyal camp of MPs. What keeps him in place is the fact that he is viewed as a winner. If the Cummings row changes this, the prime minister will have a real reason to worry.

- Katy Balls is the Spectator's deputy political editor

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[Opinion](#) **Coronavirus**

Rich countries close their eyes to the global Covid surge at their own peril

[Laura Spinney](#)

The pandemic's death toll is now being felt most gravely in developing nations. This virus is not done yet



‘Without oxygen it’s impossible to treat a severely ill Covid patient, but there’s a global shortage.’ People queue to refill oxygen cylinders in New Delhi, India, 23 April. Photograph: AP

‘Without oxygen it’s impossible to treat a severely ill Covid patient, but there’s a global shortage.’ People queue to refill oxygen cylinders in New Delhi, India, 23 April. Photograph: AP

Tue 27 Apr 2021 02.00 EDT

Is there one pandemic, or two? That was a [question being asked](#) a year ago, when wealthy countries accounting for only 15% of the global population

had 80% of the Covid deaths. Could it be that the rich world was more vulnerable, somehow, because its populations were older, or more individualistic, or had forgotten to be scared of infectious disease?

Even then, some were warning that the worst was yet to come, once the disease took hold in poorer countries. World Bank analysts Philip Schellekens and Diego Sourrouille, for example, predicted a “massive shift” in disease burden to the developing world. Just in terms of demography, they said, you’d expect those countries to account for around 70% of deaths. As things stand they account for a little over [half of it](#), which is probably an underestimate due to variations in data quality – and the pandemic is far from over.

Last week saw more than [5.8 million new cases](#) of Covid globally, the highest number yet. More than 3 million people have now died from Covid, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), which also reports that infections and hospitalisations in those aged 25 to 59 are increasing at an alarming rate. “It took nine months to reach 1 million deaths, four months to reach 2 million, and three months to reach 3 million,” WHO director general, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, [said last week](#).

[Revealed: big shortfall in Covax Covid vaccine-sharing scheme](#)
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The sharpest upticks in recent weeks have been seen in south-east Asia – driven [in large part by India](#) – and the eastern Mediterranean and western Pacific regions, but the situation is also very bad in Latin America. People who migrated to Brazil in search of work are now [reported to be fleeing](#) the humanitarian catastrophe [that is unfolding there](#).

Infection rates are [still high](#) in many wealthy countries – including the US and much of Europe – but the mood is more upbeat: as vaccines roll out, many people feel the worst is behind them. Some US states have [rashly lifted](#) their mask mandates. The British government gave the most optimistic signal it could think of earlier this month, when it reopened pubs. And Covid-19 is slipping down the headlines, reflecting not just fatigue at having to respect the rules, but fatigue at the very mention of the disease. Fear

concentrates the mind, but fear is dissipating; we'd rather read about Tory sleaze, or the doomed European Super League.

Again, you could be forgiven for asking, is there one pandemic or two? Only now the question has an entirely different meaning. The tables have turned.

In reality, there was only ever one pandemic. We tend to think of it in terms of national impacts and responses, at best regional ones, but for it to make sense you have to stand back and look at it globally. For all its idiosyncrasies, Covid will stay true to type in at least one way: like pandemics throughout history, it will hammer the poorest hardest.

Depending on where you're standing, there are genuine [reasons to be cheerful](#). The vaccines are effective in mitigating the disease and there's growing evidence that they slow its spread too. But their rollout is extremely uneven. A [quarter of Americans](#) have been fully vaccinated to date, compared with fewer than [2% of Ghanaians](#). An Israeli is 20 times more likely to have received a single vaccine dose than a Palestinian, and there are still countries that haven't administered any.

There's unevenness within countries too, in part due to vaccine hesitancy. A [recent survey](#) of US healthcare workers showed that 48% had yet to be vaccinated, and 18% didn't intend to be. Partly because they have seen relatively few Covid deaths locally, people in Hong Kong are [staying away](#) from vaccine clinics – a manifestation of the so-called “[prevention paradox](#)”.

The recent increases in cases and deaths are partly due to the [spread of new Covid variants](#). These are all more transmissible than the original form, first detected in China, and some of them are more lethal. There's good reason to hope that the vaccines will continue to work against them – or can be updated to do so – but in the meantime the variants, combined with slow vaccine rollout, are pushing fragile health systems to breaking point.

[We need to mark the countless lives Covid has claimed. But how to do it? | Laura Spinney](#)
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Without oxygen, for example, it's impossible to treat a severely ill Covid patient, but there's a global shortage of the gas. In Peru, where hospitals are in crisis, Médecins Sans Frontières [reports that](#) "people in many cities queue overnight and sleep in the rough to fill up their oxygen tanks from the few working reservoirs, hoping to take care of their relatives at home". When a health system is paralysed, non-Covid patients are unable to get treated too, and resources are sucked away from longer-term public health campaigns – meaning that the burden of diseases such as HIV and malaria may increase. Demography is not the only reason for the developing world's continuing vulnerability, in other words.

The Covax facility, which was designed to offset vaccine nationalism, aims to get a first vaccine dose to at least 20% of the population of each participating country by the end of 2021 – though it now looks like it will [fall short of that goal](#). Even if it hits its target, since less than a quarter of the global population is judged likely to have acquired immunity through natural infection to date, that will leave at least half of it susceptible to Covid in the short term.

The disease still mainly targets older people, and though rich countries tend to have proportionally more older people than poorer ones, in absolute terms there are far more elderly people in the developing world. India, for example, has around three times as many people aged 60 or older as Japan, though in terms of its population structure, Japan is considered the [oldest country in the world](#). Burgeoning infection rates in the developing world therefore herald absolute, if not relative, carnage there.

We can still hope that the global death toll from Covid in 2021 will not exceed that of 2020 – as the vaccines do their work – even if it's far from a given. But we can be confident that poorer countries will contribute most of this year's Covid deaths. That thought alone should give us pause – and in addition we should remember that rich countries are not immune from what happens beyond their shores. Rampant Covid in countries such as India and Brazil will shape the evolution of the virus and could cause new, even more dangerous variants to emerge, which neither our borders nor our vaccines are guaranteed to keep out. That's why it's too early to rest on our laurels and why vaccine equity is so important – because this is a pandemic, meaning it's global.

- Laura Spinney is a science journalist and author. Her most recent book is *Pale Rider: The Spanish Flu of 1918 and How it Changed the World*

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

[OpinionCelebrity](#)

Tom Cruise spotted on location in North Yorkshire! Why am I so excited?

[Emma Beddington](#)



In these restricted times, reports of the global megastar filming on the North Yorkshire Moors Railway have been as thrilling as his Burj Khalifa stunt



Tom Cruise spotted near the market town of Pickering. Photograph: Michael Mayhew/Allstar

Tom Cruise spotted near the market town of Pickering. Photograph: Michael Mayhew/Allstar

Tue 27 Apr 2021 02.00 EDT

[Like the giant tropical sunfish spotted in Hartlepool last summer](#), or [the Thames whale](#), the sighting of a celebrity far from his or her natural habitat is a source of wonder and amazement: something to tell the grandchildren. It feels as if the balance of the Earth is slightly off-kilter in a miraculous way, allowing us to see something we should not, in the normal scheme of things, be privy to.

Obviously, the more mundane and off-brand the better: [Matt Damon, in Dalkey, on the Irish coast, with his swimming trunks in a SuperValu](#) (local supermarket) bag for life, Sharon Stone buying a jumper in Margate or, arguably the peak of these sightings, Harrison Ford on a narrowboat in Llangollen (someone on Twitter told me their cousin Valerie directed him to the carvery in Telford, warning him it was “a bit on the pricey side”). It’s less “celebrities, they’re just like us”; more “celebrities, they’re nothing like us”. Seeing one is like seeing a dragon buying prawns in Asda.

Last week North Yorkshire was blessed with a sighting – the most impressive since Ellie Goulding got married in York in 2019, with Katy Perry and Orlando Bloom in attendance (but not, to local disappointment, in Thomas the Baker). Tom Cruise, global megastar, sofa-jumping enthusiast and holder of Views (I hope this is sufficiently generic to fly under the litigious Church of Scientology radar) was [spotted near the market town of Pickering](#). Checking out Flintoft Ironmongers, perhaps? Dropping into the Steam and Moorland Garden Centre for some hardy annuals, or picking up pink fancies at Elizabeth Botham’s Tea Rooms?

Apparently, he was filming the latest Mission: Impossible on the nearby North Yorkshire Moors Railway. Cruise famously does all his own stunts, but I’m not sure a steam train one will push the envelope quite as much as scaling the [Burj Khalifa](#). Perhaps movie stars don’t get old, they just perform stunts on slower and slower modes of transport? Next year I look forward to him vaulting over a donkey in Filey.

Emma Beddington is a Guardian columnist

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2021.04.27 - Around the world

- [Russia Prosecutor suspends activities of Alexei Navalny's organisation](#)
- [Pollution Thousands of barrels of toxic DDT found dumped in California ocean](#)
- [Lost submarine Poignant video shows crew's farewell singalong before departure](#)
- [BP Quarterly profit hits \\$3.3bn as oil price rebounds](#)
- [Video First supermoon of 2021 rises across the globe](#)

[Alexei Navalny](#)

Russia suspends activities of Alexei Navalny's organisation

Move by prosecutor comes ahead of expected ruling to outlaw opposition movement as 'extremist'



A demonstrator is taken away by law enforcement officers during a rally in support of jailed opposition figure Alexei Navalny in St Petersburg last week. Photograph: Anton Vaganov/Reuters

A demonstrator is taken away by law enforcement officers during a rally in support of jailed opposition figure Alexei Navalny in St Petersburg last week. Photograph: Anton Vaganov/Reuters

[Andrew Roth](#) in Moscow

Mon 26 Apr 2021 06.08 EDT

Russia's prosecutor has suspended the activities of [Alexei Navalny](#)'s nationwide political organisation ahead of a court ruling that is expected to

outlaw the opposition movement as “extremist” and threaten supporters with long jail terms.

In a decision published on Monday, the prosecutor banned his regional headquarters from holding opposition rallies or engaging in elections activity pending a landmark court decision that could cripple the democratic opposition to [Vladimir Putin](#).

The designation is part of a sweeping crackdown on Navalny’s activities, from sentencing the Kremlin critic to a [two-and-a-half-year prison term](#) to dozens of arrests of his top aides and regional staff.

“They’re just yelling here: we’re afraid of your activity, we’re afraid of your protests, we’re afraid of smart voting,” wrote Ivan Zhdanov, the head of the Anti-Corruption Foundation, uploading a copy of the prosecutor’s decision. Smart voting refers to efforts to direct opposition against Putin and the ruling United [Russia](#) party’s strongest competitors.

[Jailed Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny ends hunger strike](#)
[Read more](#)

Court proceedings are expected to begin on Monday in the extremism case, a designation mostly reserved for terrorist organisations such as al-Qaida or religious organisations such as the non-violent Jehovah’s Witnesses, who have been targeted with mass arrests since being outlawed in 2017.

In a statement this month, the Moscow prosecutor accused Navalny’s organisation of “creating conditions for changing the foundations of the constitutional order, including through the scenario of a ‘coloured revolution’”.

The decision could affect thousands of staff, supporters and donors who have given support via crowdfunding efforts. The evidence in the case has been kept hidden because it contains state secrets, the government has said.

Police have already begun rolling up Navalny’s organisation nationwide, arresting more than 70 staff and supporters at the weekend following a

nationwide protest calling for his freedom. Navalny recently [ended a 24-day hunger strike](#) to demand better medical care.

The Kremlin critic was arrested in January after returning from Germany, where he had treatment for novichok poisoning that he and the online investigative collective Bellingcat had [traced back to Russia's FSB](#).

On Monday Navalny's allies said they would halt their public activities in order to protect their employees from fines and arrests. Membership of extremist organisations is punishable by up to six years in prison.

Several regional headquarters have started posting messages on their social networks saying they will stop updating them. "Unfortunately we can no longer work in the current format. It is not safe for our staff and supporters. From today, no information will appear on this page. It will be frozen," a message on the Moscow headquarters' Telegram channel read.

In a recent interview, the Navalny ally Leonid Volkov said that the organisation's expansion into Russia's regions was "one of the most painful and irritating [situations] for Putin".

"If we leave it the way it is, then certainly they're going to initiate a mass criminal case against all the staff of the regional headquarters," he said of the organisation.

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Pollution

Thousands of barrels of suspected toxic DDT found dumped in California ocean

Extent of possible toxic waste site near Catalina Island ‘staggering’, says chief scientist on sea survey

01:03

Scientists find huge suspected toxic dumpsite off California coast – video

Associated Press

Tue 27 Apr 2021 05.44 EDT

Marine scientists say they have found what they believe to be as many as 25,000 barrels possibly containing DDT dumped off the southern [California](#) coast near Catalina Island, where a massive underwater toxic waste site dating back to the second world war has long been suspected.

The 27,345 “barrel-like” images were captured by researchers at the University of California San Diego’s Scripps Institution of Oceanography. They mapped more than 36,000 acres of seafloor between Santa Catalina Island and the Los Angeles coast in a region previously found to contain high levels of the toxic chemical in sediments and in the ecosystem.

Historical shipping logs show that industrial companies in southern California used the basin as a dumping ground until 1972, when the Marine Protection, Research and Sanctuaries Act, also known as the Ocean Dumping Act, was enacted.

Resting deep in the ocean, the exact location and extent of the dumping was not known until now.

The territory covered was “staggering”, said Eric Terrill, chief scientist of the expedition and director of the Marine Physical Laboratory at Scripps Institution of Oceanography.

Underwater drones using sonar technology captured high-resolution images of barrels resting 900 metres (3,000ft) below the surface all along the steep seafloor that was surveyed. They also were seen beyond the dumpsite limits.

“It really was a surprise to everybody who’s worked with the data and who sailed at sea,” he told reporters on Monday.

The survey provides “a wide-area map” of the barrels, though it would be up to others to confirm through sediment sampling that the containers held DDT, Terrill said. It is estimated between 320 and 640 tonnes of DDT were dumped in the area, 12 miles from Los Angeles, and 8 miles from Catalina Island.

The long-term impact on marine life and humans was still unknown, said Scripps chemical oceanographer and professor of geosciences Lihini Aluwihare, who in 2015 co-authored a study that found high amounts of DDT and other man-made chemicals in the blubber of bottlenose dolphins that died of natural causes.

“These results also raise questions about the continued exposure and potential impacts on marine mammal health, especially in light of how DDT has been shown to have multi-generational impacts in humans,” said Aluwihare, who was not part of the survey expedition.

Diana Aga, a chemistry professor at University at Buffalo who is not affiliated with the study, said the findings were shocking if the barrels were proven to contain the toxic chemical. “That’s a lot of DDT at the bottom of the ocean,” she said.

If the barrels had not leaked, they could be moved to a place where disposal was safer, Aga said. If they leaked, scientists could take samples from the water, sediment and other marine life to gauge the damage.



Researchers on the research vessel Sally Ride deploy an autonomous underwater vehicle near Santa Catalina Island. Photograph: AP

Scientists conducted the survey from 10-24 March following a Los Angeles Times report last year about evidence that DDT was dumped into the ocean.

[Regulators missing pollution's effect on marine life, study finds](#)
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Terrill said: “Unfortunately, the basin offshore Los Angeles had been a dumping ground for industrial waste for several decades, beginning in the 1930s. We found an extensive debris field in the wide area survey.”

Scientists started the search where University of California Santa Barbara professor David Valentine had discovered concentrated accumulations of DDT in the sediments and spotted 60 barrels about a decade ago.

High levels of DDT have been detected in the area’s marine mammals, and the chemical has been linked to cancer in sea lions.

Scripps researchers say they hope their survey will support clean-up efforts. The expedition on the Sally Ride research vessel included a team of 31 scientists, engineers, and crew conducting 24-hour operations and two autonomous underwater vehicles.

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

[Indonesia](#)

Poignant video shows crew of sunken Indonesia submarine singing farewell song

Video shows some of the 53-strong crew singing Sampai Jumpa, an Indonesian hit whose title translates as Goodbye

00:27

Video shows Indonesian submarine crew singing in the weeks before vessel sank

Agence France-Presse

Mon 26 Apr 2021 19.57 EDT

A poignant video has emerged showing the crew of a sunken Indonesian submarine singing happily together on board their vessel.

The video, filmed a few weeks before the KRI Nanggala 402 went down with all hands lost, shows some of the 53-strong crew singing Sampai Jumpa, an Indonesian hit whose title means Goodbye.

Submarine commander Heri Oktavian is among those gathered around a seaman strumming an acoustic guitar.

[Photos show missing Indonesian navy submarine found broken up on seabed](#)
[Read more](#)

“Even though I’m not ready to be missing you, I’m not ready to live without you,” the sailors sing. “I wish all the best for you.”

The video was recorded as a farewell for the outgoing commander of the navy’s submarine corps, whose successor took up his role in early March,

Indonesian military spokesperson Djawara Whimbo told AFP.

The German-built submarine – one of five in Indonesia's fleet – [disappeared early Wednesday](#) while it was scheduled to do live torpedo training exercises off Bali.

Indonesia's military announced Sunday it had found the vessel in pieces on the seafloor, about 800 metres (2,600 feet) below the surface.

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

BP

BP's quarterly profit hits \$3.3bn as oil price rebounds

Recovery has allowed group to pay off debt and start its \$500m share buyback scheme earlier than expected

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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BP has benefited as the oil price returns to \$60 a barrel from less than \$20 a barrel last April. Photograph: Alastair Grant/AP

BP has benefited as the oil price returns to \$60 a barrel from less than \$20 a barrel last April. Photograph: Alastair Grant/AP

[*Jillian Ambrose*](#)

Tue 27 Apr 2021 14.18 EDT

BP has reported its biggest quarterly profit since the Covid pandemic began, and will hand investors a \$500m (£360m) cash windfall, as the global oil markets recover from the crisis.

The oil company reported a profit of \$3.3bn for the first quarter, up sharply from [a loss of \\$628m in the same period last year](#), when oil prices began to slide in line with China's economic slowdown.

BP's quarterly profit figure is more than four times higher than in the last quarter of 2020, and has allowed the company to start a \$500m scheme to buy back shares from its investors a year earlier than expected.

Bernard Looney, the BP chief executive, said the first quarter's better than expected results demonstrated "what we mean by [performing while transforming](#)".

The oil company generated more than \$6.1bn in cash, almost six times as much as its operating cashflows in the first quarter of 2020 and enough to reduce its debt so it can begin buying back the shares it has paid to investors in lieu of dividends.

The cash boom is in large part owing to the recovery in global oil prices, which fell to 21-year lows of less than \$20 a barrel in April last year because of the abrupt halt in global travel and economic activity. The company added that "an exceptional gas marketing and trading performance" also helped to bolster its revenues in the first months of the year.

The return to profit marks the end of BP's toughest year since the Deepwater Horizon disaster in the Gulf of Mexico a decade ago. The company was forced to cut its dividend, scrap its executive bonus pay and cull 10,000 jobs from its global workforce, while beginning the transition away from fossil fuels and towards a low-carbon energy portfolio.

The impact of the pandemic caused [the sharpest slump in global oil demand](#) in the industry's history, but experts predicted that the years ahead could bring the fastest surge in demand in response.

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Global oil prices fell from an average of just over \$61.60 a barrel in January last year to an average of \$21.40 a barrel in April 2020. During the first quarter of 2021, the average price of Brent crude returned to almost \$60 a barrel, and is expected to [bolster the fortunes of the world's biggest oil companies](#). Brent was trading at \$66 on Tuesday morning.

The influx of cash allowed BP to cut its debt by \$5.6bn over the last quarter to \$33.3bn, meaning its share buybacks can begin in the second quarter, Looney said.

“And at the same time, we’ve delivered disciplined strategic progress right across BP – including building a high-quality offshore wind business, making great strides in our electrification agenda and setting ourselves up for further growth in the Gulf of Mexico,” he said.

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[The moon](#)

First supermoon of 2021 rises across the globe – video

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Table of Contents

[The Guardian.2021.04.28 \[Wed, 28 Apr 2021\]](#)

[Headlines wednesday 28 april 2021](#)

[Politics Senior Tories urge PM to come clean on funding of Downing Street refurb](#)

[Lord Brownlow Who is Tory donor who helped fund No 10 refurb?](#)

[Alistair Darling Ex-chancellor declined to join renovation trust](#)

[Newcastle United Partner in Saudi bid to buy club is major Tory donor](#)

[Environment Scientists find way to remove polluting microplastics with bacteria](#)

[London Shaun Bailey criticised for 'victim blaming' girls in comments on domestic violence](#)

[Universities UK universities are institutionally racist, says leading vice-chancellor](#)

[Motorways 'Self-driving' cars could get green light for use in UK this year](#)

[US Arizona passes sweeping bill banning abortion for genetic issues](#)

[China Government orders companies to step up monitoring of foreigners in anti-spying push](#)

[Green economy MPs warn over lack of plan to manage fossil fuel tax loss](#)

[Baftas Small Axe picks up 15 nominations for TV awards](#)

[New York Post Reporter quits citing pressure to write false Kamala Harris story](#)

[2021.04.28 - Coronavirus](#)

['We're all in this together' Dr Fauci says world has failed India](#)

[Fiji Fears of Covid 'tsunami' as India variant drives outbreak Vaccine Single dose found to nearly halve transmission](#)

[Covid certificates Spain to welcome overseas travellers from June](#)

['People phone up pleading' The volunteers battling India's oxygen crisis](#)

[India's Covid crisis Delhi crematoriums forced to build makeshift pyres](#)

[Vaccines Leading scientists urge UK to share Covid vaccines with poorer nations](#)

[Live Coronavirus: India deaths pass 200,000; crisis needs global response – Fauci](#)

[2021.04.28 - Spotlight](#)

['Bras are a curse!' How lockdown changed readers' views of their breasts](#)

['They're playing chicken' Inside Mark Zuckerberg and Tim Cook's feud](#)

[Xernona Clayton The civil rights legend who befriended a KKK leader – and changed his mind](#)

['What if Superman was your dad?' Comics legend Mark Millar on Jupiter's Legacy](#)

[The nature of ... The singing fish: it glows green during courtship and looks like Boris Johnson's hardship face](#)

['It's about curiosity' Mastermind's youngest champion reflects on his victory](#)

['Warm, kind, wise and brilliant' Guardian writers remember Kakoli Bhattacharya](#)

[Nature on the doorstep 10 of the best rural glamping hideaways in Britain](#)

[2021.04.28 - Opinion](#)

[In the court of King Boris, only one thing is certain: this will all end badly](#)

[Political leaders must ensure Covid vaccines aren't the preserve of the rich](#)

[No, Biden has not declared war on meat. But maybe that's what the world needs](#)

[Boris Johnson needs some good PR. Why not borrow Turkmenistan's dog day?](#)

[The G7 must act to end 'vaccine apartheid' or everyone in the world will suffer](#)

[The politics sketch Drafted in to say nothing about anything, Thérèse Coffey finds her forte](#)

[Decor without decorum – this is home economics, Johnson-style](#)

[The media are allowing this government's cronyism and dishonesty to flourish](#)

[2021.04.28 - Around the world](#)

[Andrew Brown Autopsy shows he was shot five times, attorneys say](#)

['Example to many' Journalist Maria Ressa wins Unesco press freedom prize](#)

[Britney Spears Singer will address LA court about father's control of her career](#)

[Kenya Government debates lowering age of consent from 18 to 16](#)

[US Republicans falsely claim Biden wants to restrict meat in climate crisis fight](#)

[US Genetically-modified mosquito larvae to be released in Florida Keys](#)

[Business live Lloyds beats forecasts with near-£2bn profit; markets eye Fed decision](#)

[Alphabet Revenue soared for Google owner as Covid brought more people online](#)

[Year of the Croc Sales soar as rubber shoe brand predicts bumper year](#)

[Brazil Parliamentary inquiry into Bolsonaro's Covid response begins](#)

[Headlines monday 26 april 2021](#)

[Coronavirus Minister denies Johnson said 'thousands' more deaths better than lockdown](#)

[Live UK Covid: minister denies PM said he'd rather 'bodies pile high' than have third lockdown](#)

[No 11 refurbishment Labour calls for urgent inquiry](#)

[The 'chatty rat' and the lockdown leak All you need to know](#)

[2021.04.26 - Coronavirus](#)

[India Doctors sound warning over oxygen hoarding](#)

[Twitter Social network under fire over deletion of critical Covid tweets in India](#)

['Menu of neglect' Preventative care hits cliff as US health resources diverted to fight Covid](#)

[Vaccines Covid jabs to be offered to 44-year-olds in England from Monday](#)

[2021.04.26 - Spotlight](#)

['Shame doesn't help anything' Will Young on prep school, PTSD and psychotherapy](#)

['War weary' Libya reflects 10 years on from Gaddafi and Arab spring](#)

[Key Oscars moments Glenn Close's magnificent Da Butt and superb flirting](#)

[Oscars fashion trends Midriffs and statement tuxedos catch up with Gen Z style](#)

[OnePlus 9 review A good, well-priced top-spec smartphone](#)

[2021.04.26 - Opinion](#)

[Johnson's Tories are reaping the rewards of an economy built on rising house prices](#)

[Did you have a lockdown haircut? Sad to say it, but retribution is coming...](#)

[I worried about reopening my bookshop, but it's brought some much-needed joy](#)

[We know Amazon is killing the high street, so why do we keep clicking on 'buy now'?](#)

[2021.04.26 - Around the world](#)

[France Volunteers leave cave after 40 days without daylight or clocks](#)

[Chad 'We won't negotiate', says new regime, as armed rebels regroup](#)

[Albania Man jumps feet-first into moving car to stop dangerous driver](#)

[Chernobyl Out of a heap of broken images, Chernobyl seeks World Heritage status](#)

[Turkmenistan Holiday dedicated to enormous national dog breed](#)

[Headlines tuesday 27 april 2021](#)

[Conservatives Minister seeks to play down growing accusations of Tory sleaze](#)

[Live Tory sleaze row: minister casts doubt on Dominic Cummings' credibility](#)

['Let the bodies pile high' Pressure mounts on Johnson over alleged remarks](#)

[Analysis PM 'isolated and at risk of becoming uncontrollable'](#)

[2021.04.27 - Coronavirus](#)

[India International aid arrives to combat deadly Covid crisis](#)

[Vaccine US to share up to 60m doses amid pressure to lead fight](#)

[Mutations, politics, vaccines The factors behind India's Covid crisis](#)

[Singapore Now leading New Zealand as best place to be in pandemic](#)

[2021.04.27 - Spotlight](#)

[Lost to the virus Donna Coleman died after Covid ran riot at Burnley College. Should it have been open?](#)

[Clockwork universe Is free will an illusion?](#)

['Boris on the ropes' What the papers say about mounting pressure on PM](#)

[Q+A Cummings-Johnson row explained](#)

['It's satisfying to learn the wealthy have problems' Why is reality TV obsessed with the super-rich?](#)

[2021.04.27 - Opinion](#)

[Labour will need to do more than shout 'Tory sleaze'](#)

[This Cummings spat could be a dangerous political trap for Johnson](#)

[Rich countries close their eyes to the global Covid surge at their own peril](#)

[Tom Cruise spotted on location in North Yorkshire! Why am I so excited?](#)

[2021.04.27 - Around the world](#)

[Russia Prosecutor suspends activities of Alexei Navalny's organisation](#)

[Pollution Thousands of barrels of toxic DDT found dumped in California ocean](#)

[Lost submarine Poignant video shows crew's farewell singalong before departure](#)

[BP Quarterly profit hits \\$3.3bn as oil price rebounds](#)

[Video First supermoon of 2021 rises across the globe](#)