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Megxit has been good for the royal couple... the other couple, that is

[Barbara Ellen](#)



The Cambridges are proving to be experts at self-marketing. Sorry about that, Harry



The Cambridges, in a photograph released to celebrate their 10th wedding anniversary last week. Photograph: Chris Floyd/AP

The Cambridges, in a photograph released to celebrate their 10th wedding anniversary last week. Photograph: Chris Floyd/AP

Sat 1 May 2021 13.00 EDT

When will William and Kate admit that the Harry and Meghan hoo-ha has been great for them? As the dust storms continue to billow from the Oprah Winfrey interview, presumably the Sussexes are exactly where they want to be, generating big-bucks deals (Netflix/Spotify/“wellness”) from their £11m property in Montecito, Santa Barbara. However, hasn’t it also been rather good for the Cambridges? They appear to have morphed from a rather drab, stiff, prematurely middle-aged couple into a veritable beacon of royal decorum cum quasi-middle-class decency. There’s a palpable feeling that the media/public – leastways, the royalist media/public – is behind them like never before, applauding their every move. Sure, it was always so, but, post-Oprah, there’s been a tangible turbo-boosting of the Cambridges’ profile. Call it what it is: a pushback.

Cue [last week’s video](#) celebrating their 10th anniversary. Any other couple forcing others to celebrate their decade-long tru luv would have you demanding a bucket to retch into. The snarky Brit temperament being what

it is, some might even ask: “What’s with all the PDA – are you guys getting a divorce?” But this was no public display of affection, it was marketing and the Cambriges are suddenly getting very good at it. Maybe even better than You Know Who.

Devoted smiles. Frolicking children in wellingtons. Marshmallows toasting on an open fire... In one way, it came across like a really weird Shirley Hughes children’s story (“Daddy is cross today because Uncle Harry has behaved badly”). In another, a John Lewis advert selling nothing, though, in truth, the Cambriges were hard-selling themselves.

And why shouldn’t they? This year has been grim. [William spoke out](#) against the serious racism claims in the Oprah interview, but the Cambriges suffered other indignities in silence (the story about Catherine making Meghan weep over bridesmaid dresses; the resurrection of “Waity Katie”). Though even at an occasion as sombre as Prince Philip’s funeral, a photo of Catherine peering over her mask had some combusting in excitement over “[our future queen!](#)”, while a brief chat with Harry sparked obsequious overdrive about the Cambriges’ innate refinement.

So, yes, it’s been rough but, ultimately, have the Cambriges had a good Megxit? The recurring theme post-Oprah has been worship of the Cambriges (“the future of the monarchy”) even beyond the usual sycophancy. Their popularity hasn’t only gone nuclear, it’s turned binary: choose a side, cheer on your favoured couple as if they were a football team. No more griping from the cheap seats about how Harry would have been a more “fun” king. For their part, the Cambriges appear to be actively colluding, offering themselves up as a fragrant, homegrown alternative to the Sussexes. Would that video have happened in normal times or could it be counted as a royal finger to Harry and Meghan?

So, perhaps Megxit did them a favour – it was the thunderclap that woke them up. Every strong brand needs a rival and the Cambriges appear to have found theirs.

Haven’t you heard, Tony? The nation’s barbers have reopened



Mullet it over, Tony, perhaps a hair cut is in order. Photograph: ITV News

Is there such a thing as a bad hair day on a sociohistorical scale? I'm in no position to mock former prime minister Tony Blair's flowing grey mullet as seen on ITV News – I've spent lockdown resembling Alice Cooper after a budget blow-dry. But, Christ, what was that? Ageing Rocker is a classic look (and Blair did have that university stint in Ugly Rumours) but you can't just rock up with lustrous silver tresses. You have to strike a pose, give it swagger. Am I right, Jimmy Page? Lucius Malfoy?

Likewise, the nod to *Game of Thrones/The Lord of the Rings* is all very well, but is it wise for Blair to make a bid for the fantasy-genre vote (the little-known "Frodo pound") at this stage of his post-political career? Or were darker forces at play? As revealed by her [unnecessarily candid memoirs](#), wife, Cherie, is a warm-blooded, passionate woman. Did she encourage this hair atrocity ("Tony, I need you to be more Fabio") to deter other women?

Verdict: longer hair makes Blair resemble something you might encounter staring out of a haunted mirror on a ghost train. It's hair so bad it could have changed history. Let's face it, if Blair had had *this* hair in 1997, he might not have won general elections.

Never forget the innocent mother jailed again in Iran



Richard Ratcliffe, husband of British-Iranian aid worker Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, and their daughter, Gabriella, protest outside the Iranian embassy in London. Photograph: Andrew Boyers/Reuters

When is Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe coming home? Having served a five-year sentence for spying (which she has always denied), the British-Iranian dual national has been found guilty on the charge of spreading propaganda (at a 2009 demonstration at the Iranian embassy, for speaking to a BBC Persian journalist). She has been [sentenced to a year in jail](#) and reportedly banned from leaving Iran for a year after she is released.

Zaghari-Ratcliffe has been living a nightmare since 2016. Wife of Richard Ratcliffe (who tirelessly campaigns for her release) and mother of Gabriella (now six), she's widely believed to be, as her MP, Labour's Tulip Siddiq put it, a political "bargaining chip" in Iran's dispute with the UK over the latter's failure to deliver tanks in 1979. In 2017, the then foreign secretary, Boris Johnson, made things worse by saying she was "[simply teaching people journalism](#)". There are disputes over foreign policy between the Iranian foreign ministry and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard. There are also reports

that the nuclear talks due to recommence in Vienna made the Foreign Office balk at raising human rights issues, such as Zaghari-Ratcliffe's account of torture and mental cruelty.

She is lodging an appeal, Dominic Raab called her treatment "inhuman" and Johnson said the government would "redouble its efforts" to achieve her release. They need to get on with it. The way things are going, who's to say that two years will be the end of it?

Zaghari-Ratcliffe has become a powerful symbol in Britain – an innocent mother cruelly separated from her young child. Unfortunately, she also appears to have become a scapegoat in Iran, who looks increasingly unlikely to be released until Iran gets what it wants. Sometimes, it feels as if Zaghari-Ratcliffe will never make it home, but she must. Don't forget her.

Barbara Ellen is an Observer columnist

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OpinionCoronavirus

The Observer view on the UK's role in the global fight against Covid-19

Observer editorial

Ethically and, for its own sake, Britain cannot afford not to take the lead against the pandemic



A cremation in Jaipur, India, on Friday. Yesterday, India recorded a record 401,000 new cases of Covid-19. Photograph: Vishal Bhatnagar/Shutterstock

A cremation in Jaipur, India, on Friday. Yesterday, India recorded a record 401,000 new cases of Covid-19. Photograph: Vishal Bhatnagar/Shutterstock

Sun 2 May 2021 01.00 EDT

The contrast could not be starker. Here in the UK, 3,000 clubbers in Liverpool danced to indoor DJ sets as part of a pilot to trial the safety of mass events as the country gradually reopens. In cities such as Delhi, people with Covid struggle to stay alive as family members desperately try to find a

hospital bed in a health system that has collapsed under the strain of India's second wave. As experts have warned for months, the pandemic is evolving into a tale of two health crises. Richer countries such as the US and UK have suffered dreadful death tolls, but are making such speedy progress in vaccinating their populations that the end of this nightmare seems to lie just around the corner. For low- and middle-income countries, it is only getting worse.

New analysis for the *Observer* this weekend shows that the burden of Covid-19 deaths is shifting towards poor and lower-middle-income countries. India and Brazil are in the midst of a catastrophic second wave, which is fast spreading to their neighbours [Nepal](#), Bangladesh, [Peru and Colombia](#). The main difference is, of course, in vaccination, the only route out of the pandemic. More than a billion vaccine doses have been administered globally, but around four in five of those have gone to high- and upper-middle-income countries, with just 0.2% sent to [low-income countries](#). In the UK, more than 34 million adults – 65% of those aged over 18 – have received their [first dose](#); in India and Brazil, just 9.2% and 13.8% respectively of their populations; in the world's poorest countries, it is around [one in 500](#).

The biggest risk to the UK is that a vaccine-resistant variant that develops elsewhere generates a third wave here

Global efforts to redistribute vaccines more equitably have fallen far short of what is needed to adequately suppress the virus. The original ambition of the Covax programme was far too modest: to ensure at least 20% of the population of each country – prioritising health workers and the clinically vulnerable – were vaccinated by the end of the year. But progress against that goal has also proved very slow: only one in five of the Oxford/AstraZeneca doses that Covax estimated would be supplied to countries by May has actually been [distributed](#). India is a major vaccine producer for the global south and its own Covid crisis will further reduce supply for the poorest countries.

Rich countries with plentiful vaccine supplies such as the UK – we have ordered [500m doses](#) in total – can and must step up their donations. The

ethical imperative could not be stronger. Here, we already enjoy the greatest liberation: no longer having to live with constantly worrying about loved ones who are clinically vulnerable to the virus. Life is slowly moving back to something approaching normal. Across the global south, countries with fragile healthcare systems and without the economic resources to tolerate lockdowns face months, possibly years, of waves of this virus sweeping through their populations, claiming hundreds of thousands of lives. If high-income countries step up their efforts to distribute vaccines, many of these deaths could be avoided.

Quite aside from the ethical imperative, it is also in the self-interest of the UK to bring about as speedy a halt to the pandemic as possible. As the virus spreads in other countries, it mutates, risking the emergence of more transmissible, deadly and vaccine-resistant strains. Existing vaccines are already less effective against some variants. The low capacity many countries have to trace variants will make it almost impossible to track their spread. The biggest risk to the UK is that a vaccine-resistant variant that develops elsewhere generates a third wave here, leading to more deaths and economic hardship. In the words of the former prime minister [Gordon Brown](#), “nobody is safe until everybody is safe”.

[Britain's aid cuts: what's been announced so far](#) [Read more](#)

There are several proposals on the table. More than 100 countries, including India and South Africa, are pushing for the World Trade Organization to suspend patent rules for vaccines during the pandemic. [Brown is leading an effort](#) to persuade the G7 nations to commit to a \$60bn programme of vaccine and healthcare funding for low-income countries at their summit in mid-June. One thing is clear: all wealthy countries must agree urgent collective action to ensure more equitable access to vaccines, to safeguard their own citizens as well as vulnerable populations around the world.

But where the UK once led, it has become a terrible example for the rest of the world. It is true that we are one of the [larger financial donors](#) to the Covax programme, but that donation has been dwarfed by Boris Johnson's decision to break his 2019 manifesto commitment to maintain international aid spending. Instead, he has cut it by more than £4bn a year. This will harm

the global fight against Covid and prolong the pandemic: [vital coronavirus research programmes](#), including one tracking coronavirus mutations in India, have had their funding cut by 70% and funding for water, sanitation and hygiene programmes – so critical in controlling Covid – has fallen by 80%. [The cuts](#) will lead to the avoidable deaths of children; funding for polio eradication has been cut by 95%, funding for family planning services by 85% and funding for girls' education has already been cut by 40% over four years.

The cruelty of it is unfathomable: the savings are little more than a rounding error in the government's annual budget, yet will cause immeasurable hardship and suffering across the global south. Covid-19 is only the latest health emergency to show how interconnected the world is. If countries such as Britain fail to step up, not just on vaccine distribution, but on international aid more broadly, it is not only the world's poorest countries that will pay the price.

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Opinion[Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe](#)

The Observer view on Britain's ineptitude at securing Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe's release

Observer editorial

The government must pay its £400m debt to Iran and ensure her freedom above all else



Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe in March 2020 in Iran. Photograph: Free Nazanin Campaign/AP

Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe in March 2020 in Iran. Photograph: Free Nazanin Campaign/AP

Sun 2 May 2021 01.15 EDT

The anger expressed last week by the Labour MP [Tulip Siddiq](#) over the government's failure to secure the release from Iran of her wrongly accused constituent [Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe](#) is fully justified. This distressing case has dragged on for too long. Again and again since Zaghari-Ratcliffe's arrest

in 2016, ministers have hinted at progress, only for hopes to be dashed. Now she has been condemned to a further year in jail. This is outrageous. Yet what does the government do? [Nothing that makes a difference](#).

Zaghari-Ratcliffe is one of several UK and European citizens who hold dual Iranian nationality and are ensnared in Iran's politicised judicial system. It has long been clear that Iran is using them as bargaining chips in a [wider diplomatic negotiation](#). Yet Boris Johnson's government seems unable to grasp the realities of this distasteful process. The Foreign Office's softly-softly approach to this case has been interpreted as weakness by some in Tehran.

[Female political prisoners in Iran facing 'psychological torture', say campaigners](#)
[Read more](#)

When Johnson, then foreign secretary, [disastrously misspoke in 2017](#), Iranian hardliners exploited his blunder. When the Foreign Office upped the ante in 2019 by affording her formal [diplomatic protection](#), they shrugged.

Crucially, the government has failed to resolve a long-running row over an unconnected £400m British debt to Iran. The debt is not in dispute. But payment has been linked by Tehran, in effect, to Zaghari-Ratcliffe's freedom. That is morally and legally wrong. Nevertheless, this is the price, or part of it, Iran has placed on her release. Yet rather than hold its nose and pay what it owes, the government has acquiesced in repeated [postponements](#) of high court hearings on the issue. Why?

Like [Iran](#), Britain has allowed extraneous considerations to further complicate matters. Principally, these concern the Vienna talks on resurrecting the 2015 nuclear deal with [Iran](#) agreed by the US, Britain and others, whose terms both sides have broken.

A key element in any revamped deal would be the lifting of sanctions that, it is claimed, prevent payment of Britain's debt. Settlement of that debt now appears to be mixed up with the [wider negotiation](#) to bring Iran back into nuclear compliance.

Human rights groups have highlighted the appalling treatment routinely handed out to women in Iran's jails

In other words, Zaghari-Ratcliffe's fate is, to some extent, out of the government's hands. It depends on what the Biden administration and Iran agree in Vienna. If they don't agree, she and others may be victimised all over again.

Additional influential factors are wholly beyond Britain's control. One is the increasingly overt armed conflict developing between [Iran and Israel](#). This has the potential to blow up any or all deals with Tehran.

Another unpredictable element is infighting ahead of next month's Iranian presidential election. [Anti-western conservatives](#), including those controlling the judiciary, will attempt to defeat the reformists' candidate. If they succeed, the outlook for Zaghari-Ratcliffe, political prisoners in general and a revived nuclear deal may be bleaker still.

01:20

Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe's husband speaks following her new sentence – video

Zaghari-Ratcliffe must not be forced back into prison. Last week, human rights groups highlighted the [appalling treatment](#) routinely handed out to women in Iran's jails. Women's rights campaigners and human rights lawyers, such as the admirable [Nasrin Sotoudeh](#), faced arbitrary increases in their sentences and transfers to prisons notorious for dangerous conditions, the groups said. Some women had been raped, others denied medical treatment. Their suffering, they said, amounted to "psychological torture". Against this backdrop, Iran's [election](#) last week to the UN's commission on the status of women is a travesty. It must be reversed.

Britain cannot stop the Iranian regime brutalising its own people. But it can and should pay its debt. And regardless of other considerations, the government must use all means at its disposal, short of force, to persuade Tehran to free Zaghari-Ratcliffe and other blameless hostages. If this entails

threatening a break in diplomatic relations, disrupting the Vienna talks and dashing Iran's hopes of sanctions relief, so be it.

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The emperor's new curtains – cartoon

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[NotebookMovies](#)

Fifty years on, this film is still the Sunday Bloody Sunday best

[Rachel Cooke](#)



A poster of John Schlesinger's seminal movie made a perfect anniversary present



The poster for Sunday Bloody Sunday. Photograph: United Artists/Kobal/Shutterstock

The poster for Sunday Bloody Sunday. Photograph: United Artists/Kobal/Shutterstock

Sun 2 May 2021 02.30 EDT

Some people mark wedding anniversaries with flowers. But in this house, we do things differently. On the morning of our 15th wedding anniversary last week, my domestic colleague staggered into the room carrying a poster for the greatest film about a love triangle that I know: John Schlesinger's [*Sunday Bloody Sunday*](#), starring Glenda Jackson, Peter Finch and Murray Head. Believe me – I've hardly stopped staring at it since.

As it happens, *Sunday Bloody Sunday* celebrates an anniversary of its own later this year, when it will be 50 years old. I hope someone makes a fuss of it – this movie is so timelessly gorgeous and wise and still so utterly modern. Its screenplay by Penelope Gilliatt, then the film critic of this newspaper, is sharper, wittier and more finely wrought than Pinter's *Betrayal*, which it slightly resembles. All the *Fleabag* in the world won't prepare you for the moment when the beautiful, mesmerising Finch breaks the fourth wall to talk of his character's particular heartache.

When contemporary audiences saw him, as Daniel, first greet his lover, Bob (Murray Head), in the hall of his London house – they share a casual, hello-darling-I’m-home kind of kiss – it must have been electrifying; it would be another 16 years before [two men kissed on *EastEnders*](#), when the tabloids went mad.

But even now, it still has an effect: this is a film that is content to deal in complexity and you feel it from the start. As Gilliett once wrote, *Sunday Bloody Sunday* is a grown-up movie about compromises; about what is enough and what is too little; about decisions “both impossible and necessary”. Thinking about it, which I seem to do a lot, only its title doesn’t quite work now. The heart will always have its unfathomable reasons, but the feeling induced by that dreaded day of stasis and gravy is well on its way to becoming ancient history.

Let them eat oatcakes



Staffordshire oatcakes: food of the gods. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

In my neighbourhood, something great has happened: a branch of Neal’s Yard Dairy, the cheese shop to end them all, has opened. Even more excitingly, it stocks [Staffordshire oatcakes](#), a delicious flatbread that looks

(just in case you don't know) like the bastard child of a pancake and a pikelet. Can there really be a market for them in this part of London? Lord, I hope so. I absolutely love them. One of the best journalistic assignments I ever had involved me sitting in a secret location in Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent, eating cheese and onion oatcakes with a retired copper.

But there is a problem. How to warm them? While people used to stick them between two plates and steam them over a pan of water, nowadays they use more modern technology: the microwave. Could it be that after three decades of (supposedly) adult living, this will be the thing that finally makes me crack and buy one?

Marriage guidance



Philip Larkin: nuptial adviser. Photograph: Jane Bown/The Observer

[Anthony Thwaite](#), the poet who is best known as the editor of Philip Larkin's collected poems and letters, died last month at the grand age of 90. I met him properly only once when, about a decade ago, I travelled to his house in Norfolk to talk to him about Larkin's women. I liked him very much, but he also said something that I've never forgotten. We were discussing (let us go back to where we started) marriage, of which Larkin was somewhat afraid: a phobia that, as I told Thwaite, has always seemed

perfectly reasonable to me. “Yes!” he said. “It’s like promising to stand on one leg for the rest of your life, isn’t it?”

Rachel Cooke is an Observer columnist

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The weekly stats uncoveredCoronavirus

Will Covid-19 vaccines reduce virus transmission?

[David Spiegelhalter](#) and [Anthony Masters](#)

Vaccinated people can still get infected, but they are less likely to pass it on



The National Covid Memorial Wall outside St Thomas' Hospital, London.
Photograph: Wiktor Szymanowicz/Shutterstock

The National Covid Memorial Wall outside St Thomas' Hospital, London.
Photograph: Wiktor Szymanowicz/Shutterstock

Sun 2 May 2021 02.15 EDT

There are two ways that getting vaccinated can slow the spread of the virus. First, it can help prevent you getting infected. Second, even if you are unlucky and catch the virus, it may reduce the risk of passing it on. It is crucial to understand how big these benefits are.

Two huge new studies have taken advantage of the successful UK vaccine rollout. An [Oxford-ONS analysis](#) of more than 370,000 survey participants found infections were reduced by 65% after a single dose. For protection against the virus, one dose was similar to having had a prior infection. There was no major difference between the two available vaccines.

Curiously, infection rates were lower up to three weeks before the jab. Did the virus have magical pre-cognition and keep away? More plausible is the idea of “reverse causation”. People can have the vaccination only if they have not tested positive or shown recent symptoms, so it is inevitable there were fewer recorded infections before vaccinations took place. Statistics can be tricky things.

Most important, the studies showed that if you are infected after vaccination, it tends to be much milder, both in terms of self-reported symptoms and viral load.

If vaccinated people develop a weaker infection, then they might be less likely to pass on the virus.

This seems to be the case. [Public Health England](#) studied more than 500,000 households in England and estimated that unvaccinated cases infected around 10% of people in their households. But that rate was nearly halved, to around 6%, if the original case had been vaccinated, with a similar reduction from either the Oxford-AstraZeneca or Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines.

Put these two studies together and it means that, for every six people that unvaccinated people infect, only one would have been infected had they had the jab.

People in societies link through their contacts: viruses travel along those links. The evidence builds that Covid-19 vaccines weaken that transmission. By getting vaccinated, you help protect those around you.

The [UK vaccine rollout](#) is an extraordinary success: directly protecting people and their contacts and providing [vital scientific information](#) to the world.

David Spiegelhalter is chair of the Winton Centre for Risk and Evidence Communication at Cambridge. Anthony Masters is statistical ambassador for the Royal Statistical Society

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[OpinionSpace](#)

Fifty years after Apollo, space is about to transform our life on Earth beyond recognition

[Will Hutton](#)



An almost unbelievable future is at hand, and Britain is well placed to lay claim to a stake in it



Getting material into space cheaply – satellites, spaceship power stations and factories – is one of the technologies accelerating the opening up of the territory. Photograph: Oleksiy Maksymenko/Alamy

Getting material into space cheaply – satellites, spaceship power stations and factories – is one of the technologies accelerating the opening up of the territory. Photograph: Oleksiy Maksymenko/Alamy

Sun 2 May 2021 02.45 EDT

The Apollo 11 space mission captured our imaginations in 1969. And it was achingly evocative to hear the recordings of [Michael Collins](#), who died last week, talk about how looking at Earth from space rammed home just how precious our planet is.

Last week also marked three other milestones for space. A record [\\$8.7bn](#) has been raised by venture capitalists in the last year to support companies in commercial opportunities from space; [France's Eutelsat](#) joined the UK as a shareholder in the satellite communications company [OneWeb](#); and China launched the first part of its own [space station](#) to host three “taikonauts”. We are moving beyond the wonder of watching Collins’s colleagues, Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin, walk on the moon to something transformational.

Space is at an inflection point, about to join electricity, the computer and the railway as a great general purpose technology that will transform economies and societies. To those who dare, whose capitalism and governments have the right alchemy of entrepreneurial zest and public purpose, and who possess the sheer chutzpah to see the possibilities, will fall great prizes. Britain could be among them.

Power-station spaceships with vast solar mirrors might capture the sun's rays 24/7 ... beam them to solar panels on Earth

Worried about the impact of nearly 10 billion people in 2050 burning fossil fuels that would lift the Earth's temperature insupportably? Relax. Space is on hand. By then, power-station spaceships in fixed orbit with [vast solar mirrors](#) will capture the sun's rays 24/7, turn them into microwaves and beam them to solar panels on Earth.

Sci-fi romanticism? It's already in the realms of possibility – and is one of the aims of the Chinese space station, with China promising to deliver space electricity as soon as [2030](#). It also informs the thinking behind Elon Musk's [SpaceX](#). His reusable rockets can carry material into space to build such power stations at a fraction of current costs.

Musk is the man behind Tesla. The global car industry dismissed his vision of battery-operated cars as fanciful. Now Tesla is the coolest car range around, whose [stock market value](#) is worth [more than](#) the rest of the car industry combined. Getting material into space cheaply – satellites, spaceship power stations and factories – is one of the technologies accelerating the opening up of the territory. I'd back his vision a second time round.

Factories? The only way to manufacture flawless fiberoptic cable, print exact copies of body parts such as hearts and lungs, create ultra-light metal alloys from materials such as magnesium that can be used in our bodies, and – more fancifully – reproduce an exact simulacrum of meat is to do it where there is no gravity. Within a generation, there could be space factories manufacturing all of this and more. Back on Earth, we will be transported in

satellite-guided autonomous vehicles powered by satellite-generated electricity, eating meat manufactured in space.

00:52

China begins construction of laboratory in space – video

GPS navigation systems are already satellite-enabled, and that is only the beginning. Space imagery is getting clearer and more precise; [satellite imaging](#) identified the vast concentration camps used by China for its forced “rectification” programmes for Uyghurs. It is also possible from space to see who is illegally fishing and mining; which factories are using child labour; what infrastructure is reaching the end of its life; identify what rock formations might contain vital precious metals; anticipate droughts and floods; spot movements of troops and military hardware. Companies are proclaiming their commitment to the UN’s sustainability goals, but don’t, and can’t, fully audit more than a fraction of their global supply chains. The answer is simple: do it from space.

[Michael Collins, Apollo 11 astronaut, dies aged 90](#)
[Read more](#)

Communications are being transformed. Air-traffic control systems for monitoring the whereabouts and the guidance of planes and drones will become wholly reliant on satellites. Universal [5G](#) will best be delivered by the inclusion of constellations of low Earth-orbit satellites – like those to be provided later this year by OneWeb, the space company controversially [bought](#) off the receivers last year by the British government, which holds a golden share in the company.

This was Dominic Cummings’ finest hour – even if he tried to justify it as a new freedom conferred by Brexit. So how come France can buy a stake, too – to join Japan and, it’s anticipated, Saudi Arabia? But without Cummings’ passionate conviction about Britain needing to have a space communication presence, a reluctant Department for Business, [Energy](#) and Industrial Strategy would have killed the initiative.

The framework that worked so well in making Britain a centre for vaccine manufacture should be applied for space as well

Next month the government is to publish its space strategy. It needs to be informed by the same daring that drove the OneWeb purchase. Britain is not China or the US, and leaving the EU has narrowed the possibilities of playing in the big league. But, nonetheless, Britain has assets. Alongside OneWeb are companies specialising in niches – manufacturing nano-satellites and antennae, and monitoring air quality. [Leicester and its university](#) is one of Europe's leading centres for space exploration and manufacture, alongside [Harwell](#) in Oxford, and there are plans to make Fawley, Aylesbury, the north-east and Glasgow space innovation sites.

The [Satellite Applications Catapult](#) (declaration: I am a non-executive director) is doing all it can to promote space-driven commercial activity, researching possibilities and brokering alliances. It has, for example, formed a consortium aiming to promote space-generated solar power, and, with Oxford University, is creating a centre to use satellite-gathered data not only to inform a green finance initiative but to create the AI for Planet Earth Institute, a kind of incipient Jenner Institute – not for frontier vaccines, but to promote sustainability.

The public-private framework that worked so well in making Britain an international centre for vaccine manufacture in just 18 months should be applied for space as well. Britain needs to identify two or three areas in which it aims to be global number one – space-based solar power, Earth observation to mitigate climate change, and nano-satellite manufacture. Then we need to deliver on these goals with muscle and energy. We can't pass this moment up.

Will Hutton is an Observer columnist

The shifting patterns of EnglishAberdeen Asset Management

May I have a word about... irritable vowel syndrome

[Jonathan Bouquet](#)

Or how to remove two words and three vowels and make yourself a laughing stock



‘It’s very hard to build a brand with something you can’t pronounce.’

Photograph: Standard Life Aberdeen/Reuters

‘It’s very hard to build a brand with something you can’t pronounce.’

Photograph: Standard Life Aberdeen/Reuters

Sun 2 May 2021 01.30 EDT

Oh, the piquant joy when a marketing-led rebranding goes calamitously wrong. I refer to Standard Life Aberdeen’s decision to [rename itself Abrdn](#). Remove two words and three vowels and make yourself a laughing stock. As one critic said: “It’s very hard to build a brand with something you can’t

pronounce.” The whole exercise inevitably comes wreathed in delicious corporate speak – “a modern, agile, digitally enabled brand”; “a full stakeholder engagement plan to maintain the transition”.

Elsewhere, who knew that the world of interiors was such a snake pit, so easily given to insulting language? There was a time when, if you wanted to skewer someone’s taste, you simply said, “I bet their house is top to bottom Farrow and Ball” and you’d be met with knowing approval from like-minded types. So, given the furore over the [prime minister and his flat refurbishment](#), is there anyone who would admit to shopping at John Lewis? Thought not.

There were other unpleasantnesses last week. The first was the legend on the back of a flat-bed truck – “property solution hub”. It was a builder’s van. Then there was “Auto Cosmetix”. A garage. And a sign outside a pub announced that it served Sunday roasts of chicken, beef and nut roast. Chicken had been spelt “chix”.

Lastly, what has become of the yuppie? I only ask because I was listening to an old Tom Petty album, which featured the lyric: “My sister got lucky/married a yuppie” and it made me ponder when I had last heard the word. Damned if I could remember. Is this once reviled breed a thing of the past? What is his replacement (I think yuppies were pretty much always men)? And what term, if any, has replaced it? Get me Wolff Olins on the phone – I bet it could come up with a snappy replacement.

Jonathan Bouquet is an Observer columnist

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/commentisfree/2021/may/02/may-i-have-a-word-about-irritable-vowel-syndrome>

[Names in the news](#)**Society**

Hail car-park king Gareth Wild and his Covid-beating fantasy

[Rebecca Nicholson](#)



The story of the man who pulled into every spot at his local supermarket is the epitome of lockdown entertainment



Gareth Wild: 'I find enjoyment in the little, banal things in life.' Photograph: Kathryn Wild/PA

Gareth Wild: 'I find enjoyment in the little, banal things in life.' Photograph: Kathryn Wild/PA

Sat 1 May 2021 12.30 EDT

‘This is quite you,” my girlfriend said, reading the story of [Gareth Wild](#), who last week completed his mission to park in every parking space at his local Sainsbury’s supermarket in Bromley, south-east London. I took it well – it is quite me. Wild used the satellite view of the car park to make several stages of colour-coded diagrams and then a spreadsheet, and finally, on Tuesday, he tweeted that he had parked in all 211 eligible spaces and completed his magnum opus.

“I find enjoyment in the little, banal things in life,” Wild told the *Daily Mirror*. Clearly, I am not the only person who can relate. These last 13 months or so have been a blank canvas for finding entertainment in places where it previously could not, or should not, have been found. This is why banana bread and sourdough starters became popular and then became popular punchlines. It is why my local Hobbycraft still has a queue to rival Ibiza’s summer hotspots, though it has to be said, with a much more friendly clipboard queen and more punters in fleeces.

Last April, a much hotter month than this year's frosty spring-tease, we sat in our London flat, not sure how safe it was to linger outside, or whether it was illegal to sit on a bench. I think it was around that time that the vans started patrolling the city's parks, telling people through loudspeakers that if they weren't there to exercise, they had to go home.

We didn't have a garden, so Club Tropicana was born. Two camping chairs, unfolded and set up in front of an open bedroom window. A packet of crisps, torn open and left on the windowsill to share and two cold beers brought in on a tray, as the late-afternoon sun shone through the glass.

We played Wham! and pretended that we were in a pub garden. I am admitting this because it was a small fantasy, but it helped. There was fun and sunshine, enough for everyone. I sometimes think of this as the highpoint of lockdown creativity. I know, deep down, that it was a low one, too.

You might think that Gareth Wild winning the parking Olympics could only have been achieved at a time when a pandemic had slowed life to a snail's pace for many of us, but no: amazingly, he says the pandemic actually meant it took him longer. He had reasonably assumed he could do it in four years. In the end, he needed six. It may have been a "little, banal thing", but sometimes, banality is beautiful.

Could Orson Welles bear being usurped by a bear?



Orson Welles in Citizen Kane. Photograph: Allstar/RKO

It was a bad week for Orson Welles, though I doubt he minds much, after his magnum opus, [Citizen Kane, lost its position](#) as the best-reviewed film on the aggregate site Rotten Tomatoes. For 80 years, *Citizen Kane* has been widely considered one of the best films ever made and, accordingly, had a 100% “fresh” rating on the site. But never trust a bear in a duffel coat, because, thanks to a combination of marmalade and the power of historical research, *Citizen Kane* lost its 100% fresh rating, dropping to 99% fresh and falling behind the masterpiece that is *Paddington 2*.

The reshuffle occurred when researchers found a [1941 review](#) of *Citizen Kane* published in the *Chicago Tribune* by a pseudonymous critic, Mae Tinee, who was less impressed than most. “Its sacrifice of simplicity to eccentricity robs it of distinction and general entertainment value,” Tinee wrote, oblivious to the effect this would have on the film’s ratings so many years later.

I love contrary reviews and there is no listicle I will click on faster than the “one-star reviews of classics” kind. Mary McCarthy famously [pummelled](#) *The Handmaid’s Tale* in the *New York Times* in 1986 for its weak characterisation and lack of imagination, but I also enjoy an Amazon “don’t bother, boring” review left on the sales page of a long, pretentious “classic”.

These are succinct and not always wrong. Spending 80 years at number one is a reasonable period of success for *Citizen Kane* and, let's be honest about this, *Paddington 2* is a worthy contender. Have you seen Hugh Grant's dance routine?

Nigella Lawson, Cook, Eat, Award



Queen of the microwave: Nigella Lawson. Photograph: David Vintiner/The Guardian

If the nominees for the TV [Baftas' Must-See Moment](#) award, as voted for by the people, are taking the pulse of the British public, then I wonder if the British public should consider calling 111. It is a wildly disparate selection of things, but I suppose it does stand as an accurate portrait of what has been a wildly disparate year.

[Diversity are nominated](#) for their Black Lives Matter-inspired dance routine on *Britain's Got Talent*, despite the ridiculous complaints-to-Ofcom frenzy around it. There's a nod to the blockbuster stuff in scenes from *Bridgerton* and *The Mandalorian*, while your British meat and potatoes are all present and correct in nods for *EastEnders* and *Gogglebox*.

But, brilliantly, Nigella Lawson has also been nominated. Not for a shocking plot twist or the explosive culmination of a long-running storyline, but for the way she jokingly said “microwave” as “[meecro-wah-vey](#)” on *Nigella’s Cook, Eat, Repeat*. I really hope it wins a Bafta, not only to see what they engrave on the award, but also to prove that in this culture of memes, sometimes, one good camp gag can be as successful as a show with a multimillion-pound budget.

Rebecca Nicholson is an Observer columnist

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[Observer letters](#)Cities

Letters: cities are so last century

Thanks to the technology revolution, towns are now the best places to provide work and community



Thomas Heatherwick in New York. Photograph: Mark Lennihan/AP

Thomas Heatherwick in New York. Photograph: Mark Lennihan/AP

Sun 2 May 2021 01.00 EDT

Thomas Heatherwick, and his vision of the future of the city landscape (“[The city will be a new kind of space](#)”, Magazine), fails to address the question: why cities in the first place? From the agricultural revolution around Ur to the Industrial Revolution, cities have been the centre of trade and commerce and provided a magnet to more rural populations. All this has been superseded by the technology revolution. If we hope to people our cities by luring visitors to these original cultural centres, we are in effect transforming our cities into museums of the past.

I suggest that towns now provide the elements of work, locality and community that will be more sustainable as gathering places and for cultural endeavours. [Architecture](#) can achieve so much; what it often doesn't address is the ultimate purpose.

Felicity McGowan

Cardigan, Ceredigion

Keep Scotland in the UK

We may believe that national pride is a good thing and, indeed, over the years, it may have driven people to sacrifice, work harder, fight and care (“[Ignoring the will of the Scots would be an act worthy of Trump](#)”, Nicola Sturgeon, Comment). But if national pride is promoted ahead of the national interest, this becomes a conflict. No one can dispute that Scotland is a separate country from England and this gives each country independence and something to be proud of. To automatically assume that independence should extend to membership of the United Kingdom is where we start to work against the country's national interest; this applies to Scotland and England alike.

There are numerous situations where the independence of Scotland will weaken both our countries – for example, defence, economy, the fight against pandemics, and so the list goes on. In this week's Scottish elections, let's hope that our Scottish friends will swallow their pride in favour of the nation's interests.

Stephen Boyt

Sandbach, Cheshire

Envy of the world no more

I was lucky enough to head a British embassy in an east European state emerging from communism during the 1970s and 80s.

It was a happy time to be there. We were told how much the UK was admired for its democracy and its open society and economy, free of the repression, unfair privilege and corrosive corruption of the system from which the host country was hoping at last to free itself.

We were envied for being citizens of a state governed by honest ministers who were advised by a civil service of the utmost probity, and we were bombarded with requests for help and advice on how to develop institutions that would bring their country up to the perceived high standards of the UK.

It is hard to believe that much, if any of this admiration remains, given our current shameful predicament (“[This ‘vacuum of integrity’ fails every test of public life](#)”, Editorial). How can we have allowed that international status which generated so much “soft power” to be thrown away by so second-rate, even corrupt, a government?

Richard Thomas

Wye, Kent

Sex and the older woman

I loved Rankin’s pictures and am so pleased to see older sexuality receiving some attention (“[Love in an old climate: posters celebrate the joy of sex in later life](#)”, News).

Contrary to popular belief, we don’t all become invisible in middle age and it is also possible for single, obese women in their 60s to find wonderful sexual partners of all ages. As a happily single polyamorist, I have discovered age really can be just a number.

Suzee Moon

Aberkenfig, Bridgend

No benefits for the well off

I am in full agreement with Phillip Inman (“[Blooming shame of benefits for wealthy boomers](#)”, Business). Extra benefits should be curtailed once anyone receiving a state pension reaches the higher income tax level. No one on this level of income needs free NHS prescriptions, bus passes or £200 heating allowance. However, given the level of outrage engendered by the reintroduction of the TV licence fee, it will take a brave government to implement the withdrawal of any of the aforementioned.

Margaret Bridle

Seaford, East Sussex

Murder most foul

Vanessa Thorpe asserts that the murder of Thomas Becket was “for centuries... the world’s most notorious state-sanctioned murder” ([‘Becket’s brutal murder reimaged’](#), News). I think Jesus and Pontius Pilate might beg to differ.

Alan Knight
Oxford

What about the fans?

Your editorial is correct that “football fans of all stripes” are united in believing “that the offshore owners of clubs ‘don’t understand our game’” ([“Money will still dominate football. But there’s now hope of change”](#)).

Clearly, the oligarchs, oil-state rulers and US billionaires don’t grasp that most traditional football supporters, like me, love following the existing bitter, historic and truly meaningful rivalries between clubs from the same national leagues. We don’t want to watch endless shiny, but soulless pan-European “glamour” fixtures.

Sadly, however, the collapse of the European Super League has been a short-term victory for ordinary followers. In the long run, little will change. As John Barnes rightly says: “It’s just a question of who’s going to exploit [fans]. Now that the ESL is not going to exploit them, it will be the same old guard – Fifa, Uefa, the Premier League and the big clubs.”

Joe McCarthy
Dublin

New buyers beware

Government support for homeowners? “Generation buy” beware ([“Will new 95% mortgage scheme give ‘generation rent’ keys to the future?”](#), Cash). The last generation of new buyers often bought flats, encouraged by government-backed shared ownership schemes. Many of these flats are now worthless after this government’s inept handling of the cladding scandal, post-Grenfell. This broken first rung of the housing ladder will not be fixed

any time soon and this generation of homeowners is being hung out to dry. Beware that the same doesn't happen to you.

Lynne Hamshaw

Frithville, Boston

Lincolnshire

Fish, cakes and Brexit

It is difficult to feel much sympathy for the Cornish fishermen ([“It's a betrayal': Cornish fishing vote turns against Tories over Brexit deal”](#), News).

Economic and political history is littered with those who hated sharing the cake, demanded the whole cake and ended up with not much cake at all. Our fishermen “betrayed” themselves because they refused to listen to those who told them the exact consequences for their industry if Brexit went ahead.

Andrew Elliott

Onchan, Isle of Man

Naughty but nice

I cannot agree with the headline given to Barbara Ellen's recent article ([“Thanks, Jim Steinman and Les McKeown, for reminding us that the best pop is pure fantasy”](#), Comment). Much of the best pop is impure fantasy.

John Clements

Little Melton, Norwich

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[For the record](#)[UK news](#)

For the record

This week's corrections

Sun 2 May 2021 01.00 EDT

The headline to an article about a migrant boat tragedy referred incorrectly to an “ocean” when the sinking took place in the Mediterranean Sea ([A mayday call, a dash across the ocean... and 130 souls lost at sea](#), 25 April, page 30). Also, the rescue boat Ocean Viking is operated by, but not owned by, SOS Méditerranée, and the waves it is said to have faced on the mission were 16ft, not 6ft as we said.

Other recently amended articles include:

[‘It’s a betrayal’: Cornish fishing vote turns against Tories over Brexit deal](#)

[Is a quiet revolution edging Wales down the road to independence?](#)

[Becket’s brutal murder reimagined in museum – with his skull as a finale](#)

[‘They’re stealing our customers and we’ve had enough’: is Deliveroo killing restaurant culture?](#)

Write to the Readers’ Editor, the Observer, York Way, London N1 9GU, email observer.readers@observer.co.uk, tel 020 3353 4736

[Opinion](#)**Philosophy**

Great thinkers make sense of a world racked by contradictions

[Kenan Malik](#)



The likes of Edward Said knew that the crucial issues of the day must be seen in shades of grey, not black and white



Edward Said in New York in February 2003. Photograph: Jean-Christian Bourcart/Getty Images

Edward Said in New York in February 2003. Photograph: Jean-Christian Bourcart/Getty Images

Sun 2 May 2021 02.00 EDT

Call it old age, call it the frustrations of an age in which nuance seems so hard to find, but I'm increasingly drawn to writers and thinkers whom my younger self might have dismissed as too full of ambiguities and contradictions.

People such as [Hannah Arendt](#), the German-born political theorist, who wrestled with conflicting views on democracy, human rights, the nation state and Marxism. Or [James Baldwin](#), perhaps the most important chronicler of 1960s America, whose ambivalence about the role of the artist, the nature of protest and the meaning of identity was always on view.

Then there's [Edward Said](#). In my first book, *The Meaning of Race*, published 25 years ago, I was critical of Said's most celebrated work, *Orientalism*, which I argued was one-sided in its condemnation of the "western gaze". Said unpicked the ways in which European thinkers created a mythical "Orient" but in doing so he manufactured a mythical idea of the west. That

criticism holds, but I've since come to appreciate his eloquent humanism, his critique of the politics of identity, his support for the Palestinian struggle while never losing sight of the rights of Jews. Much of the postcolonial thinking and identitarian politics that *Orientalism* helped nurture, Said himself loathed.

A new biography, [*Places of Mind*](#), by his student and friend Timothy Brennan, draws out many of the contradictions and puts them in personal and historical context.

Arendt, Baldwin and Said were very different thinkers. What they had in common was a willingness to engage with the world and a fearlessness about standing on unpopular political principles. Engaging with a contradictory world inevitably leads one to grapple with contradictory views. There is a critical spirit in their work that makes their voices feel particularly vital today.

Kenan Malik is an Observer columnist

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/may/02/great-thinkers-make-sense-of-a-world-racked-by-contradictions>

Headlines saturday 1 may 2021

- [Quarantine Holidaymakers in England may get a week's notice of overseas rule easing](#)
- [Overseas aid UK's cuts hit Covid research around world](#)
- [Coronavirus Rule that 'turned care homes into prisons' to be scrapped](#)
- [Noel Clarke Shows dropped as allegations shake TV industry](#)
- [Revealed How Bafta spent two weeks grappling with dilemma](#)

[Foreign policy](#)

English travellers to get one-week notice of overseas rule easing as ministers play it safe

Initial green list of countries requiring no quarantine to be determined but not expected to include EU countries

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



Ryanair said it had planes parked at British airports with crews on standby.
Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

Ryanair said it had planes parked at British airports with crews on standby.
Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

[Lisa O'Carroll](#), [Rob Davies](#) and [Peter Walker](#)

Sat 1 May 2021 01.57 EDT

Holidaymakers and airlines could get as little as one week's notice of the rules to allow overseas travel from England this month, as government sources insisted they would err on the side of caution when easing restrictions.

Ministers are likely to announce on Friday that the ban on non-essential foreign travel will be lifted from 17 May, but it may not release the "traffic light" list of countries to which travel will be permitted until 10 May.

Bookings soared last week as anticipation over the prospect of a foreign holiday grew. Dame Irene [Hays](#), chair of [Hays](#) Travel, which bought the Thomas Cook high street shops out of administration, said they had had their busiest day since the pandemic began this week.

She said: "People are spending more than they usually do, booking better destinations and accommodation and they are getting in quick before demand increases further and to avoid price rises nearer the departure date."

A Covid international travel committee of cabinet ministers, including Michael Gove, Matt Hancock and Grant Shapps, met on Thursday to discuss next steps. They decided it was important to finalise the list of countries on the [green, amber and red lists](#) as late as possible to make use of the latest data but also give consumers certainty once the countries are announced.

Sources say the initial green list of countries, which require no quarantine on return, has not yet been determined but is expected to be short. Analysts say it may only include a handful of EU countries including Finland, Portugal, Malta, Iceland.

The Covid travel committee is using [four criteria](#) to assess a country's risk under the traffic light system: the prevalence of variants of concern; the country's access to reliable scientific data and genomic sequencing; the rate of infection and the percentage of their population vaccinated.

Sources played down reports that a 40% inoculation rate would be the benchmark as unfamiliar. But according to the latest [EU vaccine tracker](#), Finland comes closest to this at 34.6% having had one dose. Other countries popular with British travellers include Spain at 29.4%, Ireland at 28.3%,

France at 26.7%, Italy at 26.4%, Portugal at 25.9% and Greece at 23.6% vaccination rates.

Holidaymakers will still be allowed to travel to countries on the amber list but will have to quarantine at home for 10 days and take PCR tests on day 2 and day 8 from return.

Alan French, chief executive of Thomas Cook, said: “[the] Med will be fully green by the time schools break up and we can all enjoy those much-needed weeks in the sun” with bookings already up following announcements from Spain, France and others.

President Macron announced on Thursday that France would open its borders to British travellers on 9 June.

Ryanair and Tui said they are ready to put on extra flights once they get the green light. “As soon as we understand when and where we’re able to travel to, we will adapt our flying programme accordingly. As an example, last summer when Spain was removed from the air corridor list, we increased capacity to Greece in line with customer demand,” said Tui.

Ryanair said it had planes parked at British airports with crews on standby. Many of the airline’s popular routes would reopen in June “with a significant ramp-up of operations in July onwards”.

Industry sources have been told the government plans to review the green, amber and red lists every two weeks instead of one week, as was the case last summer.

[Easyjet urges UK to put most of Europe on ‘green’ Covid travel list](#)
[Read more](#)

One of the barriers to foreign holidays is the additional cost of PCR tests required once before departure and twice after returning to England. Clinics on the government-approved list have been charging £120-£200 a test. For a family, this could lead to crippling costs.

However, prices of PCR tests are coming down, with Shapps, the transport secretary, telling the House of Commons on Thursday that one new entrant will be offering them for £45.

The Department for Transport on Friday said it did not endorse any private test provider but to its knowledge Eurofins currently had the cheapest standard PCR test at £44.90.

Ryanair this week announced it had teamed up with Randox Health to provide £60 test kits. Another company, Expresstest, which has been providing tests in the elite sporting sector, has opened a series of drive-through sites in Heathrow, Gatwick, Croydon and other sites, expected to include London's Paddington station, with tests on offer for £60.

Downing Street said it had “committed to giving at least one week’s notice to the public to confirm whether or not the changes can happen on 17 May”.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/may/01/travellers-to-get-one-week-notice-of-overseas-rule-easing-as-ministers-play-it-safe>

Aid

UK's aid cuts hit vital coronavirus research around world

Leading UK expert says loss of funding certain to damage attempts to tackle virus and variants

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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An employee in PPE removes vials of AstraZeneca vaccine from a visual inspection machine inside a lab at Serum Institute of India. Photograph: Francis Mascarenhas/Reuters

An employee in PPE removes vials of AstraZeneca vaccine from a visual inspection machine inside a lab at Serum Institute of India. Photograph: Francis Mascarenhas/Reuters

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[Patrick Wintour](#) *Diplomatic editor*

Fri 30 Apr 2021 10.56 EDT

Vital coronavirus research, including a project tracking variants in [India](#), has had its funding reduced by up to 70% under swingeing cuts to the UK overseas aid budget.

One of Britain's leading infectious disease experts said the UK government cuts were certain to damage attempts to tackle the virus and track new variants.

Oliver Pybus, a professor of evolution and infectious disease at the University of Oxford and part of the team that identified the Kent and Brazilian Covid variants, said: "A 70% cut for a huge international consortium with a budget of £20m and over 80 employees – this is devastating."

The cut would make his project unviable and in effect "kill it dead", he said. A Covid surveillance project in Brazil, which, like India, has been hit by a huge surge in cases linked in part to new variants, is also affected by cuts.

A second academic, Prof Lawrence Young from the University of Warwick, said cuts were “removing funding from existing projects that were helping to support sequencing in other parts of the world”. Young has had a project on the treatment of Covid patients in the UK and Indonesia completely cut as a result of the aid budget being slashed.

On Monday, a report from the all-party parliamentary group on Covid will call for a reversal of coronavirus-related aid cuts, it is understood.

Britain announced last year that it would cut aid spending from 0.7% of national income to 0.5%, amounting to a reduction of more than £4bn and triggering fury from [five former prime ministers](#) as well as a series of other politicians and experts. The cuts are to the UK’s Official Development Aid (ODA) budget, which is distributed by a number of Whitehall departments with a portion funding international research.

Whitehall has yet to confirm the full range of programmes affected, but it is clear that the axe is not falling evenly. Details of severe cuts to humanitarian aid in Yemen and Syria were followed by reductions in funding for polio research, clean water projects and girls’ education.

Pybus, who is also lead investigator at the Covid-19 Genomics UK (COG-UK) consortium that published a recent paper tracking the spread of cases in the UK during the first wave, warned it would take years to rebuild fractured international networks and relationships, even if the aid cuts were reversed.

“International work of this kind takes time and effort to nurture. They are central to the UK’s aim to be a global leader in pandemic preparedness. Links that take a stroke of a pen to defund will take years to rebuild. If the UK is prepared to do this to their current partners in pandemic preparedness, what message does that send to its potential prospective ones?”

Team members on his project have been providing analysis and support for Covid sequencing teams in Gujarat, one of the hardest hit regions in India, and Bangladesh. More than 6,400 people have been killed by Covid in the province.

The multi-disciplinary project was initially looking at the disease transmission risk in poultry farming, the source of avian flu, but its work was also directly supporting efforts to do genomic analysis and track Covid variants in India and Bangladesh. The project has also provided public outreach to combat vaccine hesitancy in London's Gujarati community.

The hub had been helping to develop the concept of One Health committees in India to prevent separation of different ministries, and create a holistic approach to disease control and prevention.

The research project is funded under the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF), which is financed by the ODA and managed by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

The inter-disciplinary project was launched two years ago as part of a five-year £20m project to look at emerging epidemics and antimicrobial resistance linked to poultry farming in south Asia, but in recent months some of its staff have pivoted to Covid-19. It has over 50 international partners in India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Vietnam.

Last month UK Research and Innovation announced that its ODA allocation from the business department had significantly reduced its planned expenditure for 2021-22, leading to a reduced £125m budget and a £120m gap between allocations and commitments to grant holders.

The Liberal Democrat MP Layla Moran, the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on coronavirus, said: "We have all seen the heart-breaking scenes in India this week as the country faces a deadly second wave. Slashing funding for research that is helping to track new Covid variants there is both unforgivable and incredibly short-sighted. When it comes to helping India, the government is giving with one hand and taking with the other."

[Britain's aid cuts: what's been announced so far](#)
[Read more](#)

Young's project with Gadjah Mada University in Indonesia, also supported by the GCRF, had the potential to improve clinical outcomes for patients, he

said. He said another project for which funding had been declined would have compared the severity and mortality of Indian patients with Covid-19 residing in India and the UK. The application had been made under the UK-India Covid-19 Partnership initiative.

The devastating second wave in India has been attributed in part to the B117 variant – first identified in the UK – which had ramped up cases in the state of Punjab. Another possible culprit is a homegrown variant, B1617, with two further mutations detected in Maharashtra, the worst affected state.

This variant, B1617, is also believed to be triggering surges in Bangladesh and Pakistan and led many countries, including the US, Canada and the UK, to advise citizens against travelling to the region.

The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy has been approached for comment.

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[Coronavirus](#)

England Covid rule that ‘turned care homes into prisons’ to be scrapped

Residents will no longer have to self-isolate if they leave home and remain outdoors

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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Karen Hastings visits her stepfather, Gordon, under an open-air shelter at the Langholme care home. Care home visiting rules were amended in April. Photograph: Hugh R Hastings/Getty Images

Karen Hastings visits her stepfather, Gordon, under an open-air shelter at the Langholme care home. Care home visiting rules were amended in April. Photograph: Hugh R Hastings/Getty Images

[Peter Walker](#) *Political correspondent*
[@peterwalker99](#)

Sat 1 May 2021 06.00 EDT

A rule forcing care home residents who go on any sort of outside visit to then spend two weeks in their room is being scrapped, the government announced on Saturday. Campaigners have hailed the reversal, with one group saying the regulation had turned “care homes into prisons”.

Under new guidance to begin from Tuesday, people living in care homes in England [will not have to self-isolate if they leave the home](#) to be in the garden of a relative or friend, or to visit outdoor spaces such as parks and beaches.

They must be accompanied by either a care worker or a named visitor, and must socially distance when away from the home. They cannot meet in groups, as currently permitted for others outside, and can go indoors only to use toilets.

The full guidance has not yet been set out, and could vary for areas with high or fast-rising levels of coronavirus infection, or the presence of variants of the virus being monitored by the government.

[‘Poorly thought through’: frustration over England’s care home visit rules](#)
[Read more](#)

John’s Campaign, which pushes for better visiting rights, [launched a legal challenge](#) arguing that the mandatory self-isolation brought in three weeks ago, regardless of the age or health of the individual, was discriminatory and unlawful.

Nicci Gerrard, from John’s Campaign, said the change of stance, announced by the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), was “a chink of light for residents of [care homes and their families](#), and a victory for all those people who have been eloquent in their campaign against the 14-day rule”.

But John’s Campaign co-founder Julia Jones said the rule change did not go far enough, saying it was “massively inadequate” that the isolation requirement remains for those who leave to visit the doctor.

She told BBC Radio 4's Today programme: "I'm waiting until we see the guidance. I still struggle to see what legal right the government thinks it has for preventing people with full mental capacity from walking out of their homes the same as every other member of the population. I struggle to see why they should be under surveillance."

Helen Wildbore, the head of the Relatives and Residents Association, which also campaigned against the rule, said: "Older people in care will be glad to see the back of this unfair, arbitrary policy which left them behind in continued isolation whilst the rest of the country was free to get out and reconnect. We know from our helpline the damage quarantine is causing older people in care, including increased depression, distress, and confusion for those with dementia."

The [current DHSC guidance](#) in effect acknowledged that the isolation rule meant "many residents will not wish to make a visit out of the home", but argued that such trips meant the potential arrival of Covid-19 into a care home could not be properly managed.

Announcing the change of policy, the care minister, Helen Whately, said she accepted that residents and their families "have found the restrictions on trips out of care homes incredibly difficult".

She said: "As part of this interim update before the next stage of the roadmap, care home residents will also be able to leave to spend time outdoors. I know this has been long-awaited for those who haven't had a chance to enjoy trips out. I look forward to encouraging more visiting and trips out in future as we turn the tide on this cruel virus."

One exemption for going indoors will be to allow care home residents who have not submitted a postal or proxy vote to go into a polling station to vote in person for local, mayoral and other elections next Thursday.

Prof Deborah Sturdy, England's chief nurse for adult social care, said the change in the rules would be "hugely welcomed by many", adding that according to the latest statistics, 95% of care home residents have received their first dose of the coronavirus vaccine, and 71%, their second.

Under rules amended last month, [residents were allowed two nominated visitors to their home](#), but could not go out without having to self-isolate.

A statement released by law firm Leigh Day, which was helping John's Campaign and other groups with the challenge, [quoted the parents](#) of a 30-year-old man with autism who lives in a home as saying they were unable to visit him because he did not understand why he could not go out with them, and became distressed.

Tessa Gregory, a partner at Leigh Day, said legal proceedings had been due to be issued next week.

She said: "This is good news, but as always the devil will be in the detail and John's Campaign will be scrutinising the new guidance once it is published to ensure that it is lawful and fit for purpose."

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/01/covid-rule-that-turned-care-homes-into-prisons-to-be-scrapped>

Noel Clarke

Noel Clarke shows dropped as allegations shake TV industry

ITV and Sky halt programmes featuring actor accused of sexual harassment and bullying

- [‘Sexual predator’: actor Noel Clarke accused of groping, harassment and bullying by 20 women](#)
- [How Bafta spent two weeks grappling with Noel Clarke dilemma](#)



Noel Clarke – seen here in ITV’s Viewpoint (left) and Bulletproof on Sky – denied that he had ever coerced, encouraged or pressurised any individual into non-consensual sexual activities. Composite: Shutterstock/Sky UK

Noel Clarke – seen here in ITV’s Viewpoint (left) and Bulletproof on Sky – denied that he had ever coerced, encouraged or pressurised any individual into non-consensual sexual activities. Composite: Shutterstock/Sky UK

[Lucy Osborne](#), [Sirin Kale](#) and [Jim Waterson](#)

Fri 30 Apr 2021 15.03 EDT

Allegations of sexual harassment and bullying made against the actor-producer [Noel Clarke](#) have shaken the film and television industry, prompting two broadcasters to cancel popular shows he was starring in and launching a debate about the treatment of women on sets.

The allegations against Clarke also led [to questions about the decision by Bafta \(the British Academy of Film and Television Arts\)](#) to give the actor a special award for outstanding British contribution to cinema last month.

ITV cancelled plans to show the final episode of Clarke's primetime drama Viewpoint on Friday night after the [Guardian revealed it had spoken to 20 women with allegations against Clarke](#), including that he secretly filmed naked auditions.

Sky halted Clarke's involvement in any of its productions, effective immediately, as six more people came forward with allegations of misconduct against him and industry figures spoke out in favour of the alleged victims.

They include former students at the London School of Dramatic Art (LSDA) who said he encouraged students to remove their clothes during improvisation workshops. The school's founder, Jake Taylor, confirmed the incident. Once alerted, he said he acted swiftly and "stopped [Clarke] doing the classes".

"Nobody should ever be asked to take their clothes off by a member of staff, or anybody," Taylor said.

Clarke's lawyers denied that the LSDA had ever asked him to stop giving his classes, and said this workshop, called "Facing Your Fears", was intended to help students with anxieties over their acting roles, helping to "normalise" the removal of outer clothing in a safe environment.

They say Clarke categorically denies that as part of this he encouraged or forced anyone to be naked and said the workshop was open to, and was

attended by, both male and female adult students and that Clarke made it clear it was not obligatory to participate.

Clarke has denied that he has ever coerced, encouraged or pressurised any individual into non-consensual sexual activities.

“In a 20-year career, I have put inclusivity and diversity at the forefront of my work and never had a complaint made against me. If anyone who has worked with me has ever felt uncomfortable or disrespected, I sincerely apologise. I vehemently deny any sexual misconduct or wrongdoing and intend to defend myself against these false allegations,” he said.

On Friday night, Clarke released a new statement. “Recent reports, however, have made it clear to me that some of my actions have affected people in ways I did not intend or realise. To those individuals, I am deeply sorry. I will be seeking professional help to educate myself and change for the better.”

Bafta knew of the existence of the multiple allegations two weeks before it presented Clarke with the award, but said it was provided with no evidence that would allow it to investigate. Insiders said the organisation felt it was in an “impossible” situation.

The Guardian can reveal that Bafta’s chair, Krishnendu Majumdar, repeatedly asked intermediaries to the women making allegations to speak with him, requests that continued until the night before the award was given on 10 April.

None agreed to speak to him, and Majumdar felt he was in an “impossible” position.

“People will say, ‘Bafta knew, and didn’t do anything about it.’ We’ve been trying to do something about it,” Majumdar told one intermediary. “In the court of public opinion we are going to be ... this will destroy us.”

ITV said it took the unusual decision to pull the broadcast of the final episode of its five-part big-budget thriller, due to air on Friday night,

because of the “very serious nature” of the allegations raised by women who have worked with Clarke.

“ITV has a zero-tolerance policy to bullying, harassment and victimisation, and robust procedures in place to investigate and deal with any complaints,” said a spokesperson. “We strongly believe that everyone deserves to work in a supportive and safe environment.”

The actor Alexandra Roach, who co-starred in Viewpoint, said of the women’s allegations: “I see you. I hear you. I believe you. Thank you to the women for your incredible bravery in coming forward and helping to put a stop to this kind of behaviour in our industry.”

Sky said it had stopped work on the forthcoming series of the award-winning police show Bulletproof, which was created by and also stars Clarke, after reading the allegations. “Sky stands against all forms of sexual harassment and bullying and takes any allegations of this nature extremely seriously,” it said.

Ashley Walters, Clarke’s co-star on the show, said he was shocked by the claims, “and whilst Noel has been a friend and colleague for several years, I cannot stand by and ignore these allegations”.

“Sexual harassment, abuse and bullying have no place in our industry,” he said. “Every woman has the right to a safe workplace and moving forward I pledge my dedication to this.”

Vertigo Films, the UK producer behind of Bulletproof, said it had not received any complaints, but encouraged anyone affected to get in contact. It said: “Effective immediately, Noel Clarke is removed from any Vertigo Films production.”

Michaela Coel, whose award-winning BBC series I May Destroy You was influenced by her experience of sexual assault in the television industry, also publicly offered her backing for the individuals who spoke to the Guardian.

“I am here to offer great support for the 20 brave women who have come forward; those who have shared their identities with us, but also those who

have preferred to use an alias.

“Speaking about these incidents takes a lot of strength because some call them ‘grey areas’. They are, however, far from grey.”

By Friday night, the tally of people the Guardian had spoken to with allegations against Clarke had risen to 26. They include the 20 women who had earlier accused him of sexual harassment, unwanted touching or groping, sexually inappropriate behaviour, bullying and secretly recording naked auditions between 2004 and 2019.

The Guardian also spoke to a number of people who said they had positive experiences working with Clarke. However, news of the allegations prompted more people to come forward, including those with concerns about his conduct at the LSDA in the early 2010s.

Mike Clarke, a former student at the LSDA, said that on 12 August 2012 Noel Clarke ran a dramatic workshop in which he encouraged students, mostly aged 18-20, to strip down to their underwear for a scene in which they were improvising “getting ready for bed”. All the students stripped to their underwear, with the exception of one female student who kept on her T-shirt, he said, adding that teachers at the school were “furious, which makes sense now”.

A female classmate confirmed the incident, which she said made her feel uncomfortable and which she later regretted. “I felt so ashamed that I had been so naive and gullible,” she said. “And I’ve remembered it ever since.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2021/apr/30/noel-cl Clarke-shares-dropped-as-allegations-shake-tv-industry>.

Noel Clarke

How Bafta spent two weeks grappling with Noel Clarke dilemma

Academy says it was in ‘impossible’ situation, but it faces questions over delays in offering safeguarding to alleged victims

- [Noel Clarke accused of groping, harassment and bullying by 20 women](#)



Noel Clarke receives a Bafta for outstanding British contribution to cinema on 10 April. Bafta suspended the award on Thursday. Photograph: Bafta/Reuters

Noel Clarke receives a Bafta for outstanding British contribution to cinema on 10 April. Bafta suspended the award on Thursday. Photograph: Bafta/Reuters

[Sirin Kale](#) and [Lucy Osborne](#)

Fri 30 Apr 2021 13.09 EDT

When Bafta announced its plan to give [Noel Clarke](#) the award for outstanding British contribution to cinema on 29 March 2021, the academy's film committee chair, Marc Samuelson, described him as an "inspiration ... [we] cannot think of a more deserving recipient for this year's award".

Others in Britain's film industry disagreed. Within hours, Bafta was contacted jointly by three industry figures alerting it to the existence of [several allegations of verbal abuse, bullying and sexual harassment against Clarke](#).

In a letter, they wrote they had each heard "first-hand" accounts of sexual misconduct and abuse of power against Clarke, a leading actor, director, screenwriter and producer. Information about other allegations followed, including two anonymous emails and information passed to a Bafta board member, via an intermediary, about an incident in which a woman alleged that Clarke had been threatening and abusive towards her after she rejected his advances.

Clarke, whose management had also received anonymous emails, vehemently denied the accusations and suggested to Bafta that they were malicious. The award ceremony at the Royal Albert Hall was not scheduled for another two weeks, on 10 April. Bafta had some difficult decisions to make.



The award-winning director Sally El Hosaini, one of the three industry figures who wrote to Bafta alerting it to the allegations against Noel Clarke. Photograph: Andy Hall/The Observer

The Guardian can now reveal details about how Bafta wrestled with what it viewed as an “impossible” situation over the Clarke affair. Its lawyers said in a statement it was in an “invidious position” – keen to hear direct, credible accounts from women, but ultimately left with insufficient hard evidence to warrant taking action.

However, difficult questions remain for Bafta, such as why it waited almost two weeks – until after the award had been given – before making a trained expert available to women with allegations to give them professional advice.

Bafta did not suspend Clarke’s award until Thursday at 8pm, after the Guardian published a story revealing it had spoken to 20 women accusing him of sexual harassment, groping, misconduct and bullying. The actor categorically denied virtually all the allegations.

“In a 20-year career, I have put inclusivity and diversity at the forefront of my work and never had a complaint made against me,” he said. “If anyone who has worked with me has ever felt uncomfortable or disrespected, I

sincerely apologise. I vehemently deny any sexual misconduct or wrongdoing and intend to defend myself against these false allegations.”

The intense spotlight Bafta now finds itself under will not come as a surprise to its chair, Krishnendu Majumdar, who led the charity’s response to the allegations. On 9 April, the eve of the award ceremony, he told another industry figure that he was worried about the reputational fallout.

In the court of public opinion we are going to be ... this will destroy us

Krishnendu Majumdar, Bafta chair

“People will say: ‘Bafta knew, and didn’t do anything about it.’ We’ve been trying to do something about it,” said Majumdar, adding moments later: “In the court of public opinion we are going to be ... this will destroy us.”

The first warning

A prolific film-maker and actor, Clarke is best known for his trio of celebrated films – Kidulthood (2006), Adulthood (2008) and Brotherhood (2016) – and his starring role in Bulletproof, one of Sky’s biggest shows, which he also wrote and executive-produces. (On Friday, Sky said it was halting Clarke’s involvement in any future productions “effective immediately”.)

Clarke is also known for his role in the BBC’s Doctor Who and ITV’s Viewpoint, a flagship primetime drama that was due to air its final episode on Friday night, until [the broadcaster pulled the show in the wake of the allegations](#).

The letter written to Bafta hours after Clarke’s award was announced came from three credible intermediaries: the multi-award-winning [film director Sally El Hosaini](#), the industry and talent development manager Pelumi Akindude – a former Bafta employee – and the actor and 2013 Bafta breakthrough Brit winner James Krishna Floyd.



Noel Clarke in Brotherhood. Photograph: Lionsgate/Allstar

They told Bafta they were “extremely concerned” about the potential award, given the first-hand accounts they had heard from women, and suggested the academy would be “remiss not to do its own due diligence on this matter, as it seems the numerous allegations are a well-known secret within the wider industry”. Akindude disclosed that she had been a victim herself of Clarke’s verbal bullying.

They received a reply the following day from Majumdar, who told them Bafta was open to further dialogue but said the issues raised were extremely serious and the academy would “need to follow appropriate procedures commensurate with allegations of this nature so that there is a fair process for all parties”.

‘Desperately difficult situation’

Three days later, on 2 April, Majumdar hosted a Zoom call with El Hosaini and Amanda Berry, the chief executive of Bafta. On the call, Berry disclosed that Bafta had by then also received two anonymous emails alleging sexual misconduct by Clarke.

Bafta's leaders expressed sympathy for the alleged victims of Clarke's abuse, but indicated there was little they could do without speaking to them directly or receiving more detailed evidence of their allegations. "It's a desperately difficult situation for us," Majumdar said, "because we cannot act on something that hasn't been substantiated."



Amanda Berry, the Bafta chief executive. A week before the awards she appeared to suggest that any allegations would have to be proved before Bafta could act. Photograph: Ian West/PA

Hosaini explained that women were frightened of speaking to Bafta directly, given Clarke's influence in the industry. "We cannot act as judge and jury on this," Majumdar said. Berry asked Hosaini if she knew of an organisation that might be able to support the women.

The Zoom ended inconclusively, with vague promises of a "dialogue" between all parties. Bafta said they were speaking with lawyers about the allegations.

"We are taking this extremely seriously," Berry said in an email to Hosaini on 4 April, "and spending a great deal of time and resource on the issues you have raised, because we want to do the right thing by all those involved, and to remain fair to all parties."

She suggested that alleged victims should contact the sexual harassment charity Time's Up, and offered a call with Hosaini and Bafta's lawyers about dealing with allegations against Clarke. "My door remains open," Berry wrote.

Bafta's lawyers said the information it had received did not enable it to take any action or warrant suspending the award. They point out that intermediaries were unable to put them in direct contact with women making allegations.

They said Bafta had only ever been provided with generic details about the existence of allegations, and had no knowledge of who was making them or how credible they were. They also questioned whether the organisation, as a charity which did not employ those concerned, had a legal duty to investigate such matters.

Time running out

By the evening of 9 April, less than 24 hours before Clarke was due to be given his award, Bafta's leaders appeared increasingly nervous. Majumdar called Hosaini at 9.30pm, and then Krishna Floyd at 10pm.

When Hosaini asked if Bafta could stop the award, the chair said the board "could do whatever they want", but he seemed conflicted. "We could be ruining an innocent man's career," he said. "Whereas if we think on the balance of probabilities, we've heard a bit more testimony, we could say, 'Well, we have to stop this award this weekend and look into this further.'"

Majumdar repeated the request he made the previous week, to speak directly with women with first-hand allegations. "I just feel like I need to do something tonight," he said. "And it's running out of time."

By the night before the award, Bafta appears to have been at least aware of the potential scale of mounting allegations. Majumdar said on calls he had heard there could be as many as 12 women making allegations against Clarke.

At this 11th hour, Bafta's chair seemed desperate to speak to anyone with first-hand accounts of Clarke's misconduct. "I know it's a fucking massive ask this Friday night," he told Krishna Floyd.

It was in this call that Majumdar expressed his fear about the reputational fallout for Bafta from the saga, which he worried might "destroy" the body in the court of public opinion. He added: "It's Bafta bestowing an honour on this guy who, what we're listening from you guys is that he absolutely doesn't deserve it. Because he's a bad force in this industry."

The award goes ahead

On the morning of the prizegiving, 10 April, Majumdar emailed Hosaini. "In the light of the fact that no woman felt able to come forward with their testimony on record," he wrote, "and with considerable consternation, Bafta took the decision to present the award earlier today because it could not stop the award based upon anonymous accusations without a single verifiable first-hand account."

He added that he hoped that Hosaini and the alleged victims she was in contact with would appreciate the "dilemma" faced by Bafta.

One woman, an actor with direct allegations against Clarke, did text Majumdar at 3.22pm that day, but said she did not want to speak to him on the phone, fearing that he would recognise her voice. By then it was too late: Bafta's ceremony had been pre-recorded hours earlier.

Later that night, at 9.25pm on 10 April, Majumdar texted the alleged victim who had contacted him to discuss her allegations. He told her: "We are working on this and will come back to you very shortly with a way you and anybody in your group with allegations can discuss them safely and confidentially."

The following day, 11 April, Clarke posted a picture of himself [proudly holding his trophy aloft](#). Clarke's award speech, dedicated to "the underrepresented", circulated widely on Twitter.

On 12 April, Bafta emailed Krishna Floyd and El Hosaini, notifying them of the independent specialist adviser it had made available to alleged victims of Clarke's misconduct. The adviser was an expert in sexual misconduct, and appropriately qualified to speak with the alleged victims and advise them about their options.

Bafta's lawyers said it made this service available, at no expense to alleged victims, and rejected any suggestion that it was slow to put in place an appropriate system to safeguard and advise women.

Why they're speaking out

Hosaini, Akindude and Krishna Floyd all chose to speak openly to the Guardian about their experiences as "intermediaries" for women with allegations because they believed it raises important questions for Bafta and their wider industry.

"I felt the need to speak openly," said Hosaini, "because sadly, Bafta's response was unsatisfactory and caused further distress to the survivors I know. There need to be robust, unbiased systems in place to safeguard survivors."

Bafta's response was unsatisfactory and caused further distress to the survivors I know

Sally El Hosaini

She stressed that she had no agenda against Bafta. "I've had very positive experiences with Bafta as an organisation, and I genuinely think they're trying to change our industry for the better." Hosaini was selected for Bafta's 2017-2018 Elevate programme for people from under-represented groups, and she has previously sat on Bafta's film committee.

"I've seen first-hand how they're trying to diversify their awards and membership," Hosaini said, adding that the Elevate programme had had a positive impact on her career. "That's why I felt that I could write to them confidentially with my concerns."

Likewise, Akindude said she had started out optimistic that the academy would handle these allegations in the correct manner. “It was because of my relationship with Bafta that I felt that I could come to them with this, expecting that they would handle it appropriately and sensitively,” she said.

Krishna Floyd has witnessed Majumdar’s efforts to diversify the academy at first hand, and applauds them. “He has done brilliant things on diversity,” Krishna Floyd said. But he said the Clarke episode suggested Bafta “does not have the right infrastructure to appropriately deal with these allegations of these types of abuse”.

Akindude, who alleges that she was verbally abused by Clarke at an event in October 2016, came forward after hearing first-hand of a serious sexual misconduct allegation from a female peer in the industry. “It felt wrong to me that someone who had such a troubling reputation in the industry was being acknowledged and lauded in this way,” she said.

Akindude, who is Black, tussled internally about taking forward allegations against Clarke, a Black man of working-class origins, because she knows how much harder it is for people of colour to succeed in the industry.

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“Black women,” she explains, “we don’t want to be perceived as going against our own. But calling out behaviour that is wrong is always the right thing to do.”

Akindude felt that, in Bafta’s haste to tackle the problems her industry faces with diversity and inclusion, it was awarding an honour to a person who did not deserve it, because of his history of alleged misconduct towards women.

“If we are going to talk about diversity,” said Akindude, “awards need to be going to the right people, rather than someone allegedly mistreating people in the background and abusing their power and position.”

She added: “This is a call for Bafta and other institutions to look at how they’re awarding their honours. Are they carrying out due diligence? If you’re selecting someone for an honour like that, are you checking they’re running their sets properly?”

Hosaini hopes the Guardian’s publication of allegations against Clarke will be a system reset for an industry that she believes had tolerated exploitation and abuse of women on film sets. “The institutionalised inertia towards women who speak up needs to stop,” she said. “Because remaining silent and looking the other way enables abuse.”

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2021.05.01 - Coronavirus

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[Coronavirus](#)

How continental Europe is emerging from Covid lockdown

Countries across Europe are starting to relax coronavirus restrictions as case numbers fall

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People sit at a cafe in central Copenhagen, Denmark, last week after bars and restaurants reopened. Photograph: Tim Barsoe/Reuters

People sit at a cafe in central Copenhagen, Denmark, last week after bars and restaurants reopened. Photograph: Tim Barsoe/Reuters

[Jon Henley](#) *Europe correspondent*

[@jonhenley](#)

Fri 30 Apr 2021 09.10 EDT

Counting on an [accelerating vaccination campaign](#) to keep new infections in check, much of continental Europe has announced plans for a gradual exit from lockdown over the coming weeks as case numbers begin to fall. Here is where things stand:

Belgium (at least one vaccine dose administered to 25% of whole population) aims to permit outside dining in restaurants and bars again on 8 May, with a mandatory 10pm closing time and tables limited to groups of four. Non-essential shops and hairdressers reopened on Monday.

Denmark (23%) reopened bars, restaurants, cafes, museums, libraries and football stadiums last week, but people must have a *coronapas* – digital certificate – to enter. The mobile phone app shows evidence of a negative test result within the last 72 hours, a vaccination certificate, or proof of infection between two and 12 weeks previously.

France (24%) will start easing restrictions on Monday when domestic travel restrictions will be lifted and high school pupils resume classes after a three-week closure. From 19 May, most non-essential businesses will be allowed to reopen, along with museums, theatres and cinemas and concert halls and cafe and restaurant terraces, and the country's nationwide night-time curfew will be pushed back from 7pm to 9pm. Indoor service in cafes and restaurants should resume on 9 June, when gyms will also reopen and the curfew will be pushed back to 11pm before being lifted entirely on 30 June. Big summer events such as festivals could be facilitated by a "health pass" and vaccinated foreign tourists should be welcomed from 9 June. [France](#) vaccinated 540,000 people on Thursday, a new record.

Germany (26%) hopes that with week-on-week infections falling 12% and vaccinations picking up speed, the country's week-old "emergency brake" measures – including a 10pm-5am curfew, limits on customers in shops, leisure centre closures and restrictions on household contacts in areas where infections are exceeding 100 cases per 100,000 inhabitants (most of the country) – may be lifted sooner than expected. [Germany](#) vaccinated more than 1 million people on Thursday.

Greece (21%) will reopen outdoor service for restaurants and cafes on 3 May, after Orthodox Easter, and aims to reopen for fully vaccinated tourists

from 15 May.

Italy (22%) reopens restaurants and bar terraces, museums, theatres and cinemas (at 50% capacity) across most of the country from Monday, with indoor dining expected to return on 1 June, as three-quarters of the country's regions drop into low-risk "yellow" categories. A 10pm curfew remains in place. Swimming pools, gyms, sporting events and theme parks are expected to follow suit by 1 July.

The **Netherlands** (23%) lifted its night-time curfew this week and allowed bars and restaurants to serve on outdoor terraces – with no more than two customers per table – between noon and 6pm. Shops can also admit more customers and people may now welcome two guests rather than one into their homes in any 24-hour period.

Poland (22%) reopens shopping malls and museums from 4 May, with hotels due to open their doors again on 8 May and cafe and restaurant terraces on 15 May. Indoor service will resume from 29 May, when theatres and cinemas will also be able to reopen.

Portugal (23%), which earlier this year had Europe's biggest surge in case numbers, proceeds to the last phase of its lockdown easing on 1 May, when restaurants and cafes can stay open until 10.30pm and all sports can resume. Big outdoor and indoor events will also be allowed with capacity restrictions and the land border with Spain will reopen. With 23% of the population having been vaccinated at least once, schools, shopping malls, non-essential service and restaurants have been reopening since March.

Spain (24%) aims to end its national state of emergency on 9 May, when its autonomous regions – which are responsible for implementing Covid restrictions – are expected to start ending many measures.

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[India](#)

The Hindu priest struggling to cremate India's Covid dead – video

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India

India Covid crisis: government ignored warnings on variant, scientists say

Country's government failed to impose extra restrictions despite warnings of a new, more dangerous strain in early March, experts claim

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A relative of a person who died of Covid-19 breaks down during cremation in Jammu, India, Photograph: Channi Anand/AP

A relative of a person who died of Covid-19 breaks down during cremation in Jammu, India, Photograph: Channi Anand/AP

Reuters

Sat 1 May 2021 01.53 EDT

A panel of Indian scientists warned officials in early March of a [new and more contagious variant](#) of the coronavirus taking hold in the country, it has emerged.

Despite the warning, four of the scientists said the federal government did not seek to impose major restrictions to stop the spread of the virus, Reuters reported on Saturday. Millions of largely unmasked people attended [religious festivals](#) and political rallies that were held by prime minister Narendra Modi, leaders of the ruling Bharatiya Janata party and opposition politicians.

Tens of thousands of farmers, meanwhile, continued to camp on the edge of New Delhi protesting Modi's agricultural policy changes.

[Arundhati Roy on India's Covid catastrophe: 'We are witnessing a crime against humanity'](#)

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The world's second-most populous country is now [struggling to contain a second wave](#) of infections much more severe than its first last year, which some scientists say is being accelerated by the new variant and another variant first detected in Britain.

05:03

The Hindu priest struggling to cremate India's Covid dead – video

India reported another world record 401,993 new coronavirus cases on Saturday, while deaths from Covid-19 jumped by 3,523 over the past 24 hours. Experts believe the real figures are far higher.

Compounding the misery, a fire broke out in a Covid-19 hospital ward in western India early Saturday, killing 18 patients. The fire, which broke out at the Welfare Hospital in Bharuch, a town in Gujarat state, was extinguished within an hour, police said. The cause was being investigated.

The spike in infections is India's biggest crisis since [Modi took office in 2014](#). It remains to be seen how his handling of it might affect Modi or his party politically.

The warning about the new variant in early March was issued by the Indian Sars-CoV-2 genetics consortium, or Insacog. It was conveyed to a top official who reports directly to the prime minister, according to one of the scientists, the director of a research centre in northern India who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Reuters could not determine whether the Insacog findings were passed on to Modi himself. Modi's office did not respond to a request for comment from Reuters.

Insacog was set up as a forum of scientific advisers by the government in late December specifically to detect genomic variants of the coronavirus that might threaten public health. Insacog brings together 10 national laboratories capable of studying virus variants.



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his BJP party continued to hold election rallies despite fears of a surge in Covid infections Photograph: Diptendu Dutta/AFP/Getty Images

Insacog researchers first detected B.1.617, [which is now known as the Indian variant](#) of the virus, as early as February, Ajay Parida, director of the state-run Institute of Life Sciences and a member of Insacog, told Reuters.

Insacog shared its findings with the health ministry's National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) before 10 March, warning that infections could quickly increase in parts of the country, the director of the northern India research centre told Reuters.

The findings were then passed on to the Indian health ministry, this person said. The health ministry did not respond to requests for comment.

Around that date, Insacog began to prepare a draft media statement for the health ministry. A version of that draft, seen by Reuters, set out the forum's findings: the new Indian variant had two significant mutations to the portion of the virus that attaches to human cells, and it had been traced in 15% to 20% of samples from Maharashtra, India's worst-affected state.

['We are not special': how triumphalism led India to Covid-19 disaster](#)
[Read more](#)

The draft statement said that the mutations, called E484Q and L452R, were of "high concern." It said that mutated versions of the virus could more easily enter a human cell and counter a person's immune response to it.

The ministry made the findings public about two weeks later, on 24 March, when it issued a statement to the media that did not include the words "high concern". The statement said only that more problematic variants required following measures already under way – increased testing and quarantine.



Hindus take dips in the Ganges River during Kumbh Mela, or pitcher festival, one of the most sacred pilgrimages in Hinduism, in Haridwar, India
Photograph: Karma Sonam/AP

Asked why the government did not respond more forcefully to the findings, for example by restricting large gatherings, Shahid Jameel, chair of the scientific advisory group of Insacog, said he was concerned that authorities were not paying enough attention to the evidence as they set policy.

“Policy has to be based on evidence and not the other way around,” he said. “I am worried that science was not taken into account to drive policy. But I know where my jurisdiction stops. As scientists we provide the evidence, policymaking is the job of the government.”

The northern India research centre director told Reuters the draft media release was sent to the most senior bureaucrat in the country, cabinet secretary Rajiv Gauba, who reports directly to the prime minister. Gauba did not respond to a request for comment.

The government took no steps to prevent gatherings that might hasten the spread of the new variant, as new infections quadrupled by 1 April from a month earlier.

Modi, some of his top lieutenants, and dozens of other politicians, including opposition figures, [held rallies](#) across the country for local elections throughout March and into April.

The government also allowed the weeks-long [Kumbh Mela religious festival](#), attended by millions of Hindus, to proceed from mid-March. Meanwhile, tens of thousands of farmers were allowed to remain camped on the outskirts of the capital New Delhi to [protest against new agriculture laws](#).

“We are in a very grave situation,” said Shanta Dutta, a medical research scientist at the state-run National Institute of Cholera and Enteric Diseases. “People listen to politicians more than scientists.”

The Indian variant has now reached at least 17 countries including Britain, Switzerland and Iran, leading several governments to close their borders to people travelling from India.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/01/india-covid-crisis-government-ignored-warnings-on-variant-scientists-say>.

2021.05.01 - Opinion

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- Please, please, please stop talking about pizza on dating apps
- Labour needs to go for the jugular on Tory elitism
- Gwyneth's Ark: sailing towards wellness but never quite getting there

OpinionBoris Johnson

Scandal upon scandal: the charge sheet that should have felled Johnson years ago

Jonathan Freedland



This is about so much more than wallpaper. A pattern of lying, betrayal and callousness is ruining lives



‘Johnson decides when and whether to investigate himself, making him judge and jury in his own case.’ Boris Johnson in a London school this week. Photograph: Dan Kitwood/AFP/Getty Images

‘Johnson decides when and whether to investigate himself, making him judge and jury in his own case.’ Boris Johnson in a London school this week. Photograph: Dan Kitwood/AFP/Getty Images

Fri 30 Apr 2021 12.05 EDT

Yes, it’s a real scandal. Despite the apparent absurdity of a Westminster village obsessing over soft furnishings and the precise class connotations of the John Lewis brand, there is a hard offence underneath all those cushions and throws. By refusing to tell us who first paid for the refurbishment of his Downing Street flat, [Boris Johnson](#) is denying us – his boss – the right to know who he owes and what hold they might have on him.

Offence is the right word because, even before the Electoral Commission [determines](#) whether the law on political funding was broken, Johnson’s failure to come clean may well be, by itself, a [breach of the ministerial code](#). That bars not only actual conflicts of interest between ministers’ “public duties and their private interests” but even the *perception* of such conflicts. In refusing to tell us who first paid that bill for overpriced wallpaper, or to

give full details of who paid for his December 2019 [holiday in Mustique](#), Johnson has offended the public trust.

So yes, this is a scandal. But do you know what else is a scandal? That while Johnson was racking up an estimated [£200,000](#) on home decor, his government was pushing through a post-Grenfell fire safety bill that threatens ordinary leaseholders with financial ruin, saddling them with the cost of ridding their homes of potentially lethal cladding and other hazards: one woman is facing a bill of [£70,000](#) to make her one-bedroom flat in Bristol safe. That is a scandal.

Or that by breaking his 2019 manifesto pledge and slashing the UK's aid budget, Johnson has cut our contribution to the UN effort on [HIV/Aids](#) and to lifesaving [water projects by 80%](#), and to the UN [family planning programme](#) by even more – money that could have prevented maternal and child deaths in the world's poorest countries. That, too, is a scandal.

A coronavirus death toll of [127,500](#) that remains the [highest in Europe](#), alongside the deepest economic slump in the G7. The mistake Johnson made three times over in 2020, delaying lockdowns in March, September and the following winter. The seeding of Covid in nursing homes. The decision to keep the borders open even during the height of lockdown, as smart as putting a double bolt and extra chain on the front door while leaving the back door swinging wide open. Johnson's absence from the first five Cobra meetings on Covid, preferring to flick through swatches at his weekend home at Chequers. They're all scandals.

The VIP lane for ministers' pals when the PPE contracts were being doled out, when so many politicians' chums looked at Covid and saw a commercial opportunity. The £276m contract that went to P14 Medical, run by a Tory donor, or the £160m deal with Meller Designs, also run by a Tory donor, both [revealed](#) just this week. The staggering sum of £37bn committed to a [test-and-trace programme](#) that never really worked. Johnson's support for Dominic Cummings, even as he torched the most important public health policy in a century and insulted the country's intelligence with a tall story about an eye test on wheels. Every one a scandal.

The failure to sack Robert Jenrick, even after he rushed through an “[unlawful](#)” planning decision that would save Richard Desmond, yet another Tory donor, £45m in local taxes. The failure to sack Priti Patel, even after she’d been found to have broken the ministerial code. The failure to sack Gavin Williamson, even after he’d presided over an exams fiasco that threatened to damage the life chances of tens of thousands of young people. The *appointment* of Gavin Williamson, not two months after he’d been [fired](#) by Theresa May for leaking sensitive information from the national security council. That, too, is a scandal.

Johnson’s Brexit protocol that put a border down the Irish sea, even after he’d vowed never to put a border down the Irish sea, thereby [imperilling](#) a union he swore blind he would protect. His proposal of an internal market bill that proudly declared its intention to break international law, prompting the UK’s [top legal civil servant to quit](#) – one of a [disturbing number](#) of mandarins driven to resignation on Johnson’s watch.

His illegal suspension of parliament, overturned as a violation of fundamental democratic practice by unanimous verdict of the supreme court. The lies that led to that moment: the £350m on the side of the bus or the scare story that Turkey was poised to join the EU and that Britain would be powerless to stop it. Siding with Vladimir Putin to suggest that the EU had [provoked](#) the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Scandals, all.

The blame he bears for [wrongly saying](#), when foreign secretary, that Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe had been training journalists in Iran, further condemning a woman who this week was [sentenced](#) to yet another year as a prisoner in that country. His quip about [clearing away “dead bodies”](#) in Sirte, Libya, a phrase that makes all too plausible the multiply-sourced claim that he told a Downing Street meeting on Covid he was happy to let the virus rip and “let the bodies pile high” rather than impose another lockdown.

His record as mayor, spaffing Londoners’ money up the wall on [failed vanity projects](#) that were either unused or unworkable, yet somehow managing to boost the entrepreneurial efforts of his lover, Jennifer Arcuri, cosy in her very own VIP lane with Johnson as the recipient of [£126,000 in public money](#). That, too, is a scandal.

His racist musings about a “half-Kenyan” Barack Obama, his casting of Muslim women as “bank robbers” and “letterboxes”, and Africans as “piccaninnies” with “watermelon smiles”. His running of a [Spectator editorial](#) that falsely accused “drunken fans” of causing the Hillsborough calamity, and suggesting that the people of Liverpool wallow in “vicarious victimhood”. His firings from the Tory frontbench and the Times newspaper, both times for lying.

They’re all scandals. So is a [system](#) that makes the prime minister the ultimate arbiter of the very code that he has broken, so that Johnson decides when and whether to investigate himself, making him judge and jury in his own case. Not much better is an opposition party that was walloped by him in 2019 and struggles to lay a glove on him now.

Or maybe the real scandal lies with us, the electorate, still seduced by a tousled-hair rebel shtick and faux bonhomie that should have palled years ago. Americans got rid of their lying, self-serving, scandal-plagued charlatan 100 days ago. They did it at the first possible opportunity. Next week, polls suggest we’re poised to give ours a partial thumbs-up at the ballot box. For allowing this shameless man to keep riding high, some of the shame is on us.

- Jonathan Freedland is a Guardian columnist

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[OpinionOnline dating](#)

Please, please, please stop talking about pizza on dating apps

[Clare Finney](#)

This online dating cliché is out of control – but if done properly, referencing food and drink can say something about ourselves



‘If pizza is so central to your sense of self you simply *must* mention it, detail which one, where from and what topping you always double.’ Photograph: Alamy

‘If pizza is so central to your sense of self you simply *must* mention it, detail which one, where from and what topping you always double.’ Photograph: Alamy

Sat 1 May 2021 04.00 EDT

It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a dating app must reference pizza in the course of his profile. Never mind that

liking pizza is about as remarkable as disliking warm beer, cold drizzle or indeed dating apps. My “research” would suggest around 50-60% of male users consider their preference for pizza an alluring personality quirk; up there with climbing walls and labradors when it comes to courtship displays.

Don’t get me wrong: I like pizza just as much as the next person – or, rather, the next man, and the next man, and the one after that. As a food writer, I am even more attuned than most to the potential of a good meal, or even just talk of a good meal, to spark connection, conversation and debate. My issue with this food in particular is that, in and of itself, it says absolutely nothing about you. [Pizza](#) and its close cousin pasta are almost by definition blank canvases on a plate.

This isn’t just about men, though, and it isn’t just about pizza. “Men put pizza, and women always talk about gin, Pimm’s and cheese, as if that is their sole diet,” a bisexual friend informs me. Of course, there is a good reason food and drink crop up so frequently: they are universally consumed, common reference points for anyone passing by your profile.

[Dating apps: is it worth paying a premium to find love?](#)
[Read more](#)

So how can we use food and drink to communicate something of ourselves to the swiping masses? My first instinct is to build on Victoria Wood’s preference for “Garibaldi” over “biscuit”, and suggest the secret lies in specifics. Replace “cheese” with a stinky, squidgy Époisses or perhaps a bag of pre-grated cheddar from Sainsbury’s (something about the potato starch coating the individual strands really makes it for me, texturally).

If pizza is so central to your sense of self you simply *must* mention it, detail which one, where from and what topping you always double. Defend Domino’s to the hilt (I’ll judge you, but someone else will love you for it), or signal your London metropolitan elite credentials by referencing Yard Sale’s “Maestro”, with a side of Marmite garlic bread. Sure, these are all still references to pizza – but at least you’re giving the scrolling users something to chew on.

But then, does specifying sourdough or deep pan stereotype us? This brings us full circle to the chief problem with dating apps, which is that these short, swipe-able profiles are necessarily reductive. They flatten our personalities into a series of tropes so that everything from the university we attended, to the books we read, to the places we buy food from are magnified into signs of our being basic, pretentious, common, posh, quirky or cool.

In real life, off screen, food and drink can be more than signifiers of class or “coolness”, but of values. The way you always ask your grandma for advice when baking a cake not because you need advice any more, but because you know how much she loves imparting it; your steely determination to nail a sourdough despite a string of dead starters; the fact that during your dad’s lockdown birthday you spent hours slaving over a lasagne just so you could eat his favourite meal with him over Zoom. These are the culinary stories that show character, not answering “pineapple on pizza” to a Hinge prompt – an answer even the CEO of Hinge is [considering limiting, according to Business Insider last week](#).

At my male single friends’ chief complaint – the endless references to cheese on women’s dating profiles – I squirm in recognition. “OK yes, I mention cheese – but I write about it for a living! I work with cheesemongers! I did a whole IGTV series on it to support cheesemakers during lockdown!” I protest. “Yes, but *they* don’t know that,” one replies. “So far as swiping men are concerned, you’re just another posh girl who likes a cheese platter at parties. And I’m just another basic bloke who likes pizza and climbing.”

Clare Finney is a food writer

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[Opinion](#)Politics

Labour needs to go for the jugular on Tory elitism

[Owen Jones](#)



The current approach to ‘sleaze’ risks entrenching the cynicism many already feel about politics in general



The Labour leader campaigning at Vulcan boxing club in Hull on 30 April.
Photograph: Getty Images

The Labour leader campaigning at Vulcan boxing club in Hull on 30 April.
Photograph: Getty Images

Fri 30 Apr 2021 13.02 EDT

Anywhere I've visited – market towns, Barratt estates, inner cities – and asked strangers their opinions on politics, the answers quickly drift in a predictable direction: politicians are all on the take, they're in it for themselves, lining their pockets and taking us all for a ride. Politicians are less trusted than advertising executives – only one in seven trusts them to be honest – which is why the guaranteed route to receiving applause from a Question Time audience is to dismiss politicians as “all the same”. Episodes such as the expenses scandal, quite predictably, poured accelerant over an already raging bonfire of cynicism: the number of voters [believing](#) MPs put their own interests above all else surged.

If any good emerged from Boris Johnson [reportedly declaring](#) he would rather see the “bodies pile high” than lock down the country, it was that we would finally discuss how the government oversaw a pandemic death toll three times higher than the Luftwaffe managed in the blitz. Instead, we are now debating John Lewis [curtains](#). That is not to dismiss the validity of the

scrutiny the prime minister is under. A man sacked twice for deceit is a proven and objective liar; a man who, 12 years ago, dismissed his £250,000 second salary from the Telegraph as [“chicken feed”](#) clearly enjoys a standard of living most would deem luxurious as intolerable squalor. If a prime minister can receive secret lumps of money from anonymous wealthy donors, the electorate is denied the ability to scrutinise if there are any government rewards for such generosity.

But the line of attack being deployed against the government fails on two basic counts. First, it is not remotely as grave as wilfully allowing tens of thousands to suffer premature deaths: the government’s “first duty is to protect the public in the most basic way”, as Johnson himself once [put it](#). Secondly, however, it is an argument that merely risks compounding the cynicism most of the public already has towards politics and politicians in general. This harms the left the most, because the public is more likely to be sceptical of ambitious programmes for social change if it believes those charged with delivering it tend to be corrupt and dishonest.

The dividing line Keir Starmer’s team should instead opt for is that the Tories represent an elite that looks after its own, one Labour is committed to challenging. This is, after all, the narrative that knits together the various scandals of the past few weeks. Take the David Cameron [lobbying scandal](#): it speaks to the “revolving door” that is a pillar of the British establishment, in which politicians and civil servants are generously remunerated by private sector clients exploiting connections and insights gained through public duty and at public expense. Such a system allowed Bill Crothers, a top civil servant, to join the doomed financial firm Greensill Capital while [still employed](#) by the public purse, and for Cameron, the former prime minister, to exploit his influence with senior Conservatives to lobby for the company to be granted public money. The “revolving door” between business and government explains how, for instance, major accountancy firms second staff to the Treasury to help draw up tax laws, then [advise](#) their wealthy clients to exploit loopholes in laws they helped write.

That PPE suppliers with impeccable Conservative connections were granted government contracts is, of course, a signature example of an elite that looks after its own. For those in the “fast track VIP lane”, government contracts were sprinkled like confetti: one was handed to Public First, run by Rachel

Wolf, who co-wrote the 2019 Tory manifesto, and her husband, James Frayne, who is a close ally of Michael Gove.

It can explain, too, how Matt Hancock's former neighbour was [handed a contract](#) to supply tens of millions of vials for NHS Covid tests despite having no relevant experience. And it also explains why test and trace was handed to scandal-ridden private contractors such as Serco, previously [fined](#) for tagging prisoners who were dead, and whose woeful failure compounded our national tragedy. None of this is new, of course: the private office of the former health secretary, Andrew Lansley, was [bankrolled](#) by the former head of one of the NHS's biggest private health providers. Firms that donated to the Tories, meanwhile, were handed juicy [NHS contracts](#) long before Covid-19 struck British shores.

The way in which Johnson reflects this narrative, personally benefiting from his connections, speaks for itself – but so too do his alleged comments about letting Covid rip, rather than allowing British business to be further damaged. Both Johnson and his chancellor, Rishi Sunak – who [invited](#) lockdown sceptics to Downing Street in a successful mission to head off renewed restrictions last September – both resisted shutting down the country because of the potential damage it would inflict on private business interests. That this was disastrously counterproductive on its own terms – a public health crisis allowed to spiral out of control means more severe economic consequences, as this unprecedented peacetime catastrophe underlines – is irrelevant to the critical point: our rulers believed the value of human life was secondary to economic interests, specifically the ability to make profit.

[Labour will need to do more than shout 'Tory sleaze' | Alan Finlayson](#)
[Read more](#)

Yet Labour's top team seem pathologically averse to launching such an assault. Partly it is ideological: any semblance of class politics must be buried in a Corbynite graveyard. But partly it would involve a reckoning with the ghosts of New Labour past, such as Peter Mandelson, himself forced to [resign](#) from government over a secret loan, and Tony Blair, a lobbyist in the pay of some of the world's most abhorrent dictatorships. Yet both are reportedly back in Labour's fold: the party's candidate in the

Hartlepool byelection – in which Starmer's team have privately resigned themselves to defeat – recently [gained](#) Mandelson's personal endorsement.

A narrative of challenging a self-interested and shameless elite would also logically commit Labour to a vision of radically redistributing wealth and power: there is ever-dwindling evidence that they wish to do so. Instead, Labour is left lecturing the [Conservatives](#) about the Nolan principles on public life – are they determined to extinguish government scandal with boredom? – while the public are left baffled about the prime minister's curtains. Starmer's team may discover that the legacy of this scandal is not the downfall of a self-evidently disreputable prime minister, but a cynicism towards politics that will swallow up Labour, too.

- Owen Jones is a Guardian columnist

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[Opinion](#)**Gwyneth Paltrow**

Gwyneth's Ark: sailing towards wellness but never quite getting there

[Marina Hyde](#)



The Goop cruise is essentially a floating church freighted with expensive non-solutions. Yet there's no shortage of believers



‘Along with Goop’s £1,000-a-day health summits, it all marks a move towards more organised forms of wellness religion by Gwyneth.’
Photograph: Rachel Murray/Getty Images

‘Along with Goop’s £1,000-a-day health summits, it all marks a move towards more organised forms of wellness religion by Gwyneth.’
Photograph: Rachel Murray/Getty Images

Fri 30 Apr 2021 10.40 EDT

“If you want to get rich, you start a religion.” This was the reported opinion of Scientology founder L Ron Hubbard, who in 1967 bought the first in what was to become a fleet of cruise ships. According to various whistleblower accounts, longtime devotees were finally initiated into the innermost secrets of Scientology on board one of these vessels, having spent years passing through various confected levels and parting with incremental payments totalling hundreds of thousands of dollars. This was where you [found out about Xenu](#), among more weapons-grade lunacy, the galactic tyrant who 75bn years ago exiled multiple individuals to Earth in special craft that weirdly looked exactly like DC10s, then imprisoned them in mountains before blowing them up with hydrogen bombs and brainwashing them with a huge 3D film. My theory has always been that they told you this stuff at sea to reinforce the notion that you were now in too deep to get off the boat, both literally and metaphorically.

So, yes: it's no real surprise to learn this week that turbocapitalist fanny egg pedlar Gwyneth Paltrow has [got into the cruise business](#). Face it, there's never been a better time, with the possible exception of 13 minutes after the end of the Black Death.

As it turns out, Gwyneth had announced a cruise as part of her Goop brand [over a year ago](#) but was forced to hit pause with the advent of The Great Unpleasantness. But there was obviously no way a deadly pandemic was going to sink Gwyneth's latest big idea for long. Indeed, you wouldn't even fancy an iceberg's chances against a Goop cruise.

Anyway, madam has partnered with Celebrity Cruises, and will become the brand's new "wellbeing adviser". "I'll be behind the scenes, working on some special projects," [explained Gwyneth](#) with the air of someone who would rather die than mingle front-of-house with whichever dreary civilians actually go on these things. "My team @goop is curating programming and fitness kits to add to Celebrity's wellness the [sic] experience."

Ah, there it is: wellness. "Wellness" is part of a class of words unified by the fact that only the most dreadful bores on Earth know what they mean. See also "neoliberalism". Celebrity Cruises itself adds that the fitness kits will enhance "self-care and collective wellbeing", with Gwyneth's role expected to focus on "wellness programming" and something called the "Women in Wellness initiative".

Along with Goop's [£1,000-a-day](#) health summits, it all marks a move towards more organised forms of wellness religion by Gwyneth. "She's not necessarily discovering new things," Goop's former content director [once breathed](#) reverentially, "but she's bringing ancient things into the mainstream." Mainstream life expectancy in the ancient times was about 32, but whatever floats your cruise ship, of course.

Certainly, Paltrow has often described setting up Goop as "a calling". Without wishing to come off as Joan of Snark, though, you have to wonder what sort of company much of her activity places her in, however she might hate to admit it. A few years ago, the business publication Quartz produced a fascinating article revealing how large numbers of the [exact same products](#) were sold on both Gwyneth Paltrow's Goop and Alex Jones's Infowars

outlet, only with different packaging. (To refresh your memory chakra, Jones is the far-right wingnut and conspiracy theorist who believes the Sandy Hook school shooting [was a hoax](#), among myriad other grotesqueries.) A supplement called Bacopa is marketed on Goop as part of a pack branded Why Am I So Effing Tired, and promises to “rebalance an over-taxed system”. Over on Infowars, Bacopa features in Jones’s signature Brain Force pills, pushed on the premise that “Top scientists and researchers agree: we are being hit by toxic weapons in the food and water supply that are making us fat, sick, and stupid.”

[Gwyneth Paltrow is mocked for her vagina products – but I do admire her hustle | Arwa Mahdawi](#)
[Read more](#)

Not quite the words Gwyneth would ever use – and yet, how they lurk beneath the surface of a \$250m-plus empire that unavoidably implies the path to happiness is via intense consumerism. It’s also very much an iterated journey – you buy the vagina egg for one problem, which gives you back pain, so you buy the FasciaBlaster, which gives you bruising, so you buy the homeopathic arnica montana. And so on and so on, forever course-correcting towards wellness but never quite attaining its shores. It’s possible to see your life in this church as a cascade of highly priced non-solutions, each purchase flowing from the problems caused by the previous one. How does it end? I guess by then you’re an old lady and you swallow a horse. And end up dead, of course.

It goes without saying that Paltrow is not short of believers. Whether Gwyneth’s pushing [post-Covid quackery](#) or recommending something called “whole body vibration” as a treatment for multiple sclerosis, there is something powerfully religious about the brand she has created in her own image.

I guess you could call this type of arguably exploitative luxury retail the sale of indulgences, though I’m hearing the Catholic church trademarked that early in the Middle Ages. Even so, it is increasingly clear that Paltrow is quite happy to accept the occasional bit of reformation by [mandate of the Federal Drug Administration](#), as it has never yet affected the bottom line. You get the feeling the one unpardonable sin for an employee would be to

turn whistleblower and suggest that any part of it was an obvious load of bollocks. I certainly wouldn't try it at sea. On the blasphemy laws front, Goop trails well behind Somalia and is ranked only just above Iran.

- Marina Hyde is a Guardian columnist

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‘It’s unfathomable’: Israel mourns after deadly crush at religious festival



Mourners carry the body of Rabbi Eliezer Goldberg, who died during Lag B’Omer celebrations at Mount Meron in northern Israel, at his funeral in Jerusalem. Photograph: Ariel Schalit/AP

Mourners carry the body of Rabbi Eliezer Goldberg, who died during Lag B’Omer celebrations at Mount Meron in northern Israel, at his funeral in Jerusalem. Photograph: Ariel Schalit/AP

People tell of unfolding horror at Mount Meron as inquiry begins into one of the country’s worst peacetime disasters

[Oliver Holmes](#) and [Quique Kierszenbaum](#) at Mount Meron, and [Harriet Sherwood](#)

Fri 30 Apr 2021 12.12 EDT

Signs of the night’s tragedy were scattered everywhere. Crushed plastic bottles lined the sloped path, barely 3 or 4 metres across. A metal handrail

lay bent, completely ripped from the ground by the force of the crushing throng of people. And, further down the walkway, an unused body bag.

This thin passageway at a Jewish pilgrimage site in Mount Meron, northern Israel, was the scene of [a horrific crush](#) just after midnight on Thursday. Crowds of ultra-Orthodox men and children leaving a religious gathering, the first of its kind since nearly all coronavirus restrictions were lifted, slipped and trampled each other in the panic.

Footage from the night showed men frantically pulling down metal sheets lining the alleyway to escape. Despite their efforts, by Friday afternoon, medics had reported that at least 45 people, including children, had been killed and 150 injured. It was one of the country's worst peacetime disasters.

Levy Steinmatz said he was there with his brother to organise music for the ceremony, called Lag B'Omer, which includes all-night prayer, bonfires and mystical songs and dance at the tomb of the second-century sage Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai.

[Map](#)

On a stage at the centre of the event, Steinmatz, a paramedic, said that after midnight, he noticed the crowds had grown so big that there was nowhere to move, but he did not realise there was a crisis until he saw a young boy climb a fence from the passageway below. “[I] told him it was very dangerous what he’s doing,” said Steinmetz. “He told me he has nothing to lose because below, people are crushing each other.”

Soon, bodies were being hauled up to the stage: “one person, then another, then another”. In the chaos, police blocked Steinmatz from heading down, he said, but he jumped the fence. “We started to do CPR. One after the other, they had no pulse, there was nothing we could do, and they kept bringing more.



A man prays at the site of the stampede that left at least 45 dead.
Photograph: Abir Sultan/EPA

“People lost their yarmulkes [skullcaps], their glasses, their shoes ... it looked like a scene from the Holocaust,” he said. “It is shocking to think about the last moments of those who died when people were stepping on them.”

Meir Gliksberg, 27, was volunteering in the canteen, serving food to visitors, when he heard screams nearby and ran out. “I recognised that if in a few minutes they did not do something, people would just die,” he said. “I screamed to people for help, but because of the music and the noise, they didn’t hear me.

“We started pulling wounded people into the kitchen and treating them. We had no rescue equipment, so we couldn’t give them first aid.

“The police still did not realise that there were many dead ... I grabbed a policeman and showed him the bodies, then he realised that something serious was happening.”

Permission had been given for 10,000 people to attend, but crowds were estimated to be closer to 100,000. Hundreds of buses brought people to the area; some had set up tents in the forests surrounding the tomb.

Such huge numbers led to hours of confusion in the aftermath of the crush. Unable to cope with such massive demand, mobile phone reception briefly crashed. Later, once the bodies of the dead were recovered, the phones in their pockets started ringing, according to a spokesperson for the Zaka, a voluntary medical response group.



A drone picture shows Mount Meron where thousands of ultra-Orthodox Jews had gathered at the tomb of a second-century sage for an annual festival. Photograph: Ilan Rosenberg/Reuters

“The phones of the dead don’t stop ringing, and we see [the calls are from] ‘mum’ and ‘my dear wife,’” Motti Bokchin told Army Radio on Friday morning. “It’s unfathomable.”

In a video [posted on Twitter](#), Dov Maisel, the vice-president of operations for another medical group, United Hatzalah, said the organisation’s volunteers had seen “very, very difficult sights. Sights that we have not seen here in Israel since the worst days of terrorist rage back in the beginning of the 2000s. I have no words. I honestly have no words.”

On Friday afternoon, families continued to search for loved ones. Hebrew-language social media sites had a spate of posts with photographs of missing

people and requests to call family members if the individuals were found. Meanwhile people all over the country rushed to donate blood.

Only a few bodies had been formally identified more than 15 hours after the disaster, the health ministry said. Among them were two brothers, Moshe and Yehoshua Englander, 14 and nine.

01:40

Witnesses recall deadly crowd crush in Israel – video

Compounding the dangers of the huge crowds in such a tightly packed area, witnesses said police might have unknowingly exacerbated the situation by blocking the rushing masses from dispersing, unaware of the squeeze further back.

Israel Meir Cohen, 20, said he had come to Mount Meron most years, except for last year due to pandemic restrictions. This time, he said, police set up barricades. “Every year, they allow the crowds to move freely,” he said. But this year, they had kept people moving in controlled lines.



Mourners walk through a cemetery for the funeral of Menachem Zachach, 24, in Petah Tikva, east of Tel Aviv. Photograph: Oded Balilty/AP

According to local media, the country's state comptroller warned on at least two occasions, in 2008 and 2011, that the site at the Mount Meron was dangerously ill-equipped for the huge numbers that attend annually.

The commander of the area's northern district, who oversaw the security arrangements, said the cause of the disaster was still unclear, but he held overall responsibility. "For better or worse, and [I] am ready for any investigation," Shimon Lavi told reporters.

['I thought I would die': witnesses describe panic at Lag Baomer festival crush in Israel](#)
[Read more](#)

The justice ministry on Friday said the police's internal investigations department was launching an investigation into possible criminal misconduct by officers. The prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, who made a brief visit to the scene on Friday, promised a thorough investigation, saying: "What happened here is heartbreaking."

Others said people should not rush to blame the police. "I think it is a tragedy that happened, not a mistake or negligence," Zohar Dvir, head of the Zaka rescue teams at the Meron holy site, told the Times of Israel news website.

"Things look tough now. It's important to say everything will be investigated. It was an effect like dominos of people falling, one on top of another."

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/30/israel-mourns-after-deadly-crush-at-mount-meron-holy-festival>

Israel

‘I thought I would die’: witnesses describe panic at Lag Baomer festival crush in Israel

People who escaped being trampled describe scenes of chaos and terror at Mount Meron

- [What we know so far about the Lag Baomer disaster](#)
- [Full story: ‘It was a disaster’](#)



Medics and rescue workers carry stretchers at the Lag Baomer event in Israel's Mount Meron Photograph: Jini Photo Agency Ltd/Reuters

Medics and rescue workers carry stretchers at the Lag Baomer event in Israel's Mount Meron Photograph: Jini Photo Agency Ltd/Reuters



[Helen Sullivan](#) and agencies

[@helenrsullivan](#)

Fri 30 Apr 2021 00.27 EDT

Witnesses of the deadly crush at Mount Meron in northern [Israel](#) have described their terror as panic spread through packed crowds of pilgrims who fell over one another as they tried desperately to escape.

A man who escaped from the [crowd crush at a holy festival at the Mount Meron in northern Israel](#), in which 44 people were killed, said that he thought he would die as people were trampled around him. Children are among the dead, medics confirmed.

“We were at the entrance, we decided we wanted to get out and then the police blocked the gate, so whoever wanted to get out could not get out,” he told Hebrew-language newspaper Maariv. “In that hurry, we fell on each other, I thought I was going to die.”

“I saw people dead next to me,” he said.

His story was echoed by others. A man referred to only as David told the Ynet news site that the crush occurred while people were going to see the bonfire lighting. “Suddenly there was a wave coming out. Our bodies were

swept along by themselves. People were thrown up in the air, others were crushed on the ground.”

“There was a kid there who kept pinching my leg, fighting for his life. We waited to be rescued for 15-20 minutes in this crazy, terrible crush. It was awful.”

A survivor told Ynet that policeman pulled him out of the crowd to make sure he was not trampled.

“It felt like an eternity, the dead were all around us,” he said.

Others described calling to police for help as the crush intensified.

One 24-year-old witness, identified only by his first name Dvir, told the Army Radio station that “masses of people were pushed into the same corner and a vortex was created.” He said a first row of people fell down, and then a second row, where he was standing, also began to fall down from the pressure of the crush. “I felt like I was about to die,” he said.

[Dozens killed in crush at religious festival in Israel](#)

[Read more](#)

The panic at the densely packed Jewish pilgrimage site left emergency workers scrambling to clear the area and evacuate the critically injured. The disaster occurred after midnight in Meron at the site of the reputed tomb of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, a second-century Talmudic sage, where mainly ultra-Orthodox Jews mark the Lag Baomer holiday.

Vice-president of Operations for United Hatzalah, a volunteer emergency services organisation, Dov Maisel called the tragedy one of “Israel’s worst disasters.”

Vice President of Operation Dov Maisel speaks about the tragic incident at Meron and the work of the UH team there.
pic.twitter.com/Xk7PesL6zS

— United Hatzalah (@UnitedHatzalah) [April 29, 2021](#)

Zaki Heller, spokesman for the Magen David Adom rescue service, said “no one had ever dreamed” something like this could happen. “In one moment, we went from a happy event to an immense tragedy,” he said.

The pilgrimage was the largest public gathering since the pandemic began, with estimates of up to 100,000 people, far more than was authorised. Initial reports indicated that the chaos erupted when a section of stadium seating collapsed but rescue workers later linked the casualties to a crush.

An emergency worker from Zaka, a group of voluntary community emergency response teams, said that parents were still separated from their children and that there was no mobile phone reception.

Q&A

What is the Lag Baomer festival?

Show

Lag Baomer (the 33rd day of the Omer) is a Jewish holiday honouring Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, a second century sage and mystic who is buried at the foot of Mount Meron. Bar Yochai's tomb is considered one of the holiest sites in Israel.

The holiday is held on the anniversary of the death of Bar Yochai, who is believed by some to be the author of the Zohar, one of the foundational texts of Kabbalah. Before he died, he asked that his followers celebrate the date as “the day of my joy.”

The holiday falls on the 18th day of the month of Iyar on the Hebrew calendar and is recognised as a school holiday in Israel. It is the 33rd day of the Omer, a period starting on Passover and lasting for 49 days. According to the website of [Chabad](#), Orthodox Jewish Hasidic dynasty, it traditionally features bonfires and parades as well as the pilgrimage of tens of thousands of Israelis and people from around the world to Meron. It is also traditional to spend the day outside, where children play with bows and arrows, which [symbolise](#) “the power of inwardness [and] the power unleashed by the mystic soul of Torah,” according to Chabad.org.

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

“There are more than 30 children here right now ... whose mothers and fathers aren’t answering the phone,” he told Channel 12 news, according to the [Times of Israel](#).

“Without getting graphic,” he said, “I’ve been with Zaka for decades. I’ve never seen anything like this ... We don’t know exactly what happened, but the result is unthinkable.”

A pilgrim who gave his name as Yitzhak told Channel 12 TV: “We thought maybe there was a (bomb) alert over a suspicious package. No one imagined that this could happen here. Rejoicing became mourning, a great light became a deep darkness”.

01:24

Chaotic scenes as crush kills dozens at religious festival in Israel – video

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/30/israel-lag-baomer-festival-crush-mount-meron-eye-witness-accounts-describe-panic>

US news

Failure to improve US-China relations ‘risks cold war’, warns Kissinger

Veteran diplomat also says advances in nuclear technology and artificial intelligence – where China and the US are both leaders – have multiplied the doomsday threat



Henry Kissinger said technology has power ‘beyond what anybody imagined 70 years ago’ in the cold war of the 1950s. Photograph: Adam Berry/Getty Images

Henry Kissinger said technology has power ‘beyond what anybody imagined 70 years ago’ in the cold war of the 1950s. Photograph: Adam Berry/Getty Images

[Vincent Ni](#) and agencies

Fri 30 Apr 2021 22.55 EDT

Former US national security adviser Henry Kissinger has warned that strains between Washington and Beijing pose “the biggest problem” for the world, and a failure to improve them risks a “cold war” between the world’s two largest economies.

“It’s the biggest problem for America; it’s the biggest problem for the world. Because if we can’t solve that, then the risk is that all over the world a kind of cold war will develop between [China](#) and the United States,” Kissinger told the McCain Institute’s Sedona Forum on global issues.

Kissinger’s comments come at a time when President Biden’s administration has vowed to pursue “stiff competition” with China. On Friday, the US defence secretary, Lloyd Austin, also warned that “the way we fight the next major war is going to look very different from the way we fought the last ones”.

[Compete, confront, cooperate: climate summit test for Biden’s China watchwords](#)

[Read more](#)

Kissinger, who as an adviser to president Richard Nixon crafted Washington’s rapprochement with Beijing in the early 1970s, said the mix of economic, military and technological strengths of the two superpowers carried more risks than the cold war with the Soviet Union.

The 97-year-old veteran diplomat also said that [US-China tensions](#) threaten to engulf the entire world and could lead to an Armageddon-like clash between the two military and technology giants. He called on US foreign policy elites to be united in their approach to the China challenge.

He said that while nuclear weapons were already large enough to damage the entire globe during the cold war, advances in nuclear technology and artificial intelligence – where China and the US are both leaders – have multiplied the doomsday threat.

“For the first time in human history, humanity has the capacity to extinguish itself in a finite period of time,” Kissinger said.

[Will a chilly meeting in Anchorage set the tone for US-Chinese relations? | Emma Graham-Harrison](#)

[Read more](#)

“We have developed the technology of a power that is beyond what anybody imagined even 70 years ago.

“And now, to the nuclear issue is added the hi-tech issue, which in the field of artificial intelligence, in its essence is based on the fact that man becomes a partner of machines and that machines can develop their own judgment.

“So in a military conflict between hi-tech powers, it’s of colossal significance.”

The cold war between the US and the Soviet Union during the decades after the second world war was more one-dimensional, focused on nuclear weapons competition, said Kissinger, one of the leading strategic thinkers of the past six decades.

“The Soviet Union had no economic capacity. They had military technological capacity,” he said. “[They] didn’t have developmental technological capacity as China does. China is a huge economic power in addition to being a significant military power.”

Kissinger said US policy toward China must take a two-pronged approach: standing firm on US principles to demand China’s respect, while maintaining a constant dialogue and finding areas of cooperation.

“I’m not saying that diplomacy will always lead to beneficial results,” he said. “This is the complex task we have ... Nobody has succeeded in doing it completely.”

[‘Machines set loose to slaughter’: the dangerous rise of military AI](#)

[Read more](#)

Speaking on a trip to the Hawaii-based US Pacific command, Austin called for the harnessing of technological advances and better integrating of

military operations globally to “understand faster, decide faster and act faster”.

He did not explicitly mention rivals like China or Russia. But his remarks came as the US starts an unconditional withdrawal from Afghanistan [on orders from Biden](#) aimed at ending [America’s longest war](#) and resetting Pentagon priorities.

Austin acknowledged that he had spent “most of the past two decades executing the last of the old wars”.

His remarks did not appear to prescribe specific actions or predict any specific conflict. He instead appeared to outline broad, somewhat vague goals to drive the Pentagon under the Biden administration.

“We can’t predict the future,” Austin said. “So what we need is the right mix of technology, operational concepts and capabilities – all woven together in a networked way that is so credible, so flexible and so formidable that it will give any adversary pause.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/may/01/us-china-doomsday-threat-ramped-up-by-hi-tech-advances-says-kissinger>

[Green politics](#)

Climate crisis: our children face wars over food and water, EU deputy warns

Exclusive: Frans Timmermans says older people need to make sacrifices to protect the future



Dry earth caused by extreme drought at a reservoir in Spain. Photograph: agefotostock/Alamy

Dry earth caused by extreme drought at a reservoir in Spain. Photograph: agefotostock/Alamy

[Fiona Harvey](#)

Fri 30 Apr 2021 11.38 EDT

Older people will have to make sacrifices in the fight against climate change or today's children will face a future of fighting wars for water and food, the EU's deputy chief has warned.

Frans Timmermans, vice-president of the EU commission, said that if social policy and climate policy are not combined, to share fairly the costs and benefits of creating a low-carbon economy, the world will face a backlash from people who fear losing jobs or income, stoked by populist politicians and fossil fuel interests.

He said: “It’s not just an urgent matter – it’s a difficult matter. We have to transform our economy. There are huge benefits, but it’s a huge challenge. The biggest threat is the social one. If we don’t fix this, our children will be waging wars over water and food. There is no doubt in my mind.”



Frans Timmermans: ‘Those of us who understand we need to move fast should make the social issue the pivotal issue in all of this’. Photograph: Reuters

Tackling climate change will be many times cheaper than the disruption that global heating will cause, as well as bringing benefits to health, and the costs have fallen dramatically in recent years. However, the shift away from fossil fuels will mean the end of some traditional jobs such as coalmining, and the costs of change will fall unequally on different sectors of society unless politicians step in.

“Where I see a huge risk is that you get an alliance between those who don’t want change because they see their interest affected, whether it’s in fossil fuels or in traditional economic circles,” Timmermans told the Guardian in an interview. “Those interests combine with the fear of negative social consequences. Then you could get a counter-momentum where people say, ‘Hang on, not too fast, people cannot stomach this.’”

He added: “Those of us who understand we need to move fast should make the social issue the pivotal issue in all of this. I really call upon all of those in the climate movement to join me in focusing on the social issue more than they’ve done in the past. Because this could become the biggest stumbling block.”

He warned that sacrifices would be needed from the older generation to ensure that young people can live in a safe climate. Today’s older people were the beneficiaries of a previous generation’s sacrifice, and were now being called on to make changes themselves, he said.

“Sometimes I wonder whether we are aware of the transformation we’re heading to, and how profound it is. It’s an effort comparable to restructuring after a violent conflict. I used to talk to my grandparents and my parents about how they saw this, after the war. They said, ‘Well, we sacrificed a lot because we knew our children would be better off.’ And this feeling is not there yet in our society.”

Changing people’s lives today would be difficult, but the benefits would be felt by today’s children, he added. “This for politics is a huge, huge challenge. We need to recapture that feeling of a purpose – doing something not for yourself, but for others, which I think has always led to society being at its best.”



A climate protest by Greenpeace in Brussels in December. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Any sacrifice would be mild for most, such as the [inconvenience of having a house renovated](#) to low-carbon standards, or switching to electric transport, and eating less meat. But for some it could involve a change of job or living patterns.

“We’re not asking people to go back to 1930s situations, we’re not asking people to live in caves and munch grass. It’s taking perhaps one or two steps back to be able to jump much further in to the future.”

Timmermans’ warnings reflect a growing concern among climate experts that politicians have failed to show people the benefits of a low-carbon society, which include cleaner air and water, more livable cities, and higher levels of health and wellbeing, as well as defusing the climate crisis. Politicians, including Donald Trump and Republicans in the US, have presented tackling climate breakdown as a cost, and many people are fearful for their jobs.

Timmermans acknowledged that some people in traditional industries would have to change, and said the main role for politicians was to make this

easier. Reskilling people in industries such as fossil fuel and power generation would be key.

He pointed to Poland, which is highly dependent on coal. “They have a very high level of engineering, of education – there’s a huge potential there [in a low-carbon economy] for a country like Poland. And there simply isn’t any future in coal. The longer you protract [the change], the more painful and the more costly it will be.”

Timmermans has a pivotal role this year, within the EU and globally, as he leads the [bloc’s green deal](#), intended to transform the European economy to a low-carbon footing, and leads the bloc’s climate efforts at [Cop26](#), vital UN climate talks to be hosted by the UK in Glasgow this November.

On Thursday, he travelled to London for his first official visit outside Brussels since the pandemic lockdowns began, with a four-hour meeting in Downing Street with Alok Sharma, the UK’s Cop26 president and host of the talks. He is in weekly contact with John Kerry, climate envoy to US president Joe Biden, and with China’s top climate official, Xie Zhenhua.

The EU has put in law its own climate target, of [cutting emissions by at least 55% by 2030](#) compared with 1990 levels. This is one of the [most stretching climate targets yet put forward](#), alongside those of the UK and the US, though campaigners have said the bloc could do better and have called for a 60% target.

Timmermans said no further improvement of the emissions target was possible, but said he was asking EU member states to come forward with more money for climate finance: assistance from rich to poor countries to help them cut emissions and cope with the impacts of climate breakdown.

“Our approach is ambitious; I think we’ve set the stage. I hope others will follow that example. I see what the UK is doing – that’s even slightly more ambitious than what we’re doing. But then all the others still have a lot of catching up to do. I think the onus here is not on the EU, nor on the UK.”

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Glaciers

Antarctic ‘doomsday glacier’ may be melting faster than was thought

Study finds more relatively warm water is reaching Thwaites glacier than was previously understood



Thwaites glacier in west Antarctica is more than 1km deep and holds enough ice to raise the sea level by 65cm. Photograph: Nasa/AFP/Getty Images

Thwaites glacier in west Antarctica is more than 1km deep and holds enough ice to raise the sea level by 65cm. Photograph: Nasa/AFP/Getty Images

[Matthew Taylor](#)

Fri 30 Apr 2021 06.40 EDT

An Antarctic glacier larger than the UK is at risk of breaking up after scientists discovered more warm water flowing underneath it than previously thought.

The fate of Thwaites – nicknamed the doomsday glacier – and the massive west Antarctic ice sheet it supports are the biggest unknown factors in future global sea level rise.

Over the past few years, teams of scientists have been crisscrossing the remote and inaccessible region on Antarctica's western edge to try to understand how fast the ice is melting and what the consequences for the rest of the world might be.

“What happens in west Antarctica is of great societal importance,” said Dr Robert Larter, a scientist with the British Antarctic Survey and principal investigator with the International Thwaites Glacier Collaboration, the most ambitious research project ever carried out in Antarctica. “This is the biggest uncertainty in future sea level rise.”

The ITGC's \$50m research drive has sent teams of scientists to the region to use the latest scientific tools to better understand the speed of the melting and the stability of the glacier.

This month one of the ITGC's teams, which had managed to get an uncrewed submarine under the front of Thwaites for the first time, [published a study](#) showing more relatively warm water was reaching the glacier than previously thought, triggering concerns of faster melting.

Anna Wahlin, a professor of oceanography at the University of Gothenburg who led the study, said the findings suggested that the fate of the glacier and the west Antarctic ice sheet would be sealed in the next two to five years. “The coming years will be crucial ... they will determine what happens to this glacier,” she said.

Wahlin said the front of the Thwaites glacier was resting on a number of “pinning points” under the sea. But as relatively warm water from the deep ocean increased the melting, she said, these would be lost, breaking up the ice and allowing warm water further under the ice. This would speed up the flow of the glacier into the sea.

“It could be that once that happens everything falls apart and this is just the beginning of some quite dramatic change ... but if it doesn't happen now I

think we can be more confident that it is not going to happen as the worst-case scenarios,” Wahlin said.

The worst-case scenarios for Thwaites are grim. It is the widest glacier on the planet, more than 1km deep and holds enough ice to raise the sea level by 65cm.

Ice loss has accelerated in the last 30 years and it now contributes about 4% of all global sea level rise. Experts say this could increase dramatically if the ice at the front of Thwaites breaks up, with knock-on effects for other glaciers in the area.

To heighten scientists’ concerns, west Antarctica has been one of the fastest-warming place on Earth in the past 30 years, and since 2000 it has lost more than 1tn tons of ice.

Last year, a team of British scientists [discovered cavities half the size of the Grand Canyon](#) under Thwaites that, like decay in a tooth, allow warm ocean water to erode the glacier, internally accelerating melting. And because a lot of the ground on which the glacier sits is below sea level, it is thought to be particularly vulnerable to melting as warmer water encroaches further under the ice inland.

Larter said: “The bed gets deeper upstream and there is a glaciological theory that says this is potentially a very unstable situation ... it is a very scary scenario when you first hear it, but there are various negative feedback scenarios that might counter it.”

He said if the glacier’s “pinning points” were lost in the next few years it would start to flow faster “and put more ice into the sea”. But he said the question no one could currently answer was exactly how much extra ice will go into the sea if the glacier begins to break up.

“That is a tricky question,” said Larter. “I think I would have to say come back in a couple of years.”

He added: “Nobody knows how it is going to respond to persistent warming – we don’t know because in human history we have never seen it happen.

We are trying in every way we can to get a handle on what is going to happen.”

Ella Gilbert, a research scientist at the University of Reading, said what was happening in the polar regions demanded an urgent response from the international community.

“The polar regions are the canary in the coalmine – they are the symbol of climate change,” said Gilbert, who was a joint author of [a recent study](#) warning of the catastrophic impact of global heating on Antarctic ice.

“We really do need to minimise our emissions because if we lose the polar regions, not only are we going to amplify climate change ... it will contribute to sea level rise which affects everyone around the globe.”

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Headlines friday 30 april 2021

- [Israel Dozens killed in crush at religious festival](#)
- [Mount Meron disaster What we know so far](#)
- [Video Chaotic scenes amid deadly crush](#)

[Israel](#)

Dozens killed in crush at Lag Baomer religious festival in Israel

Teams treating dozens of injured at Mount Meron as emergency medical group says at least 44 dead



Emergency personnel assist people after dozens were killed and others injured after a grandstand collapsed at Mount Meron. Photograph: United Hatzalah/AFP/Getty Images

Emergency personnel assist people after dozens were killed and others injured after a grandstand collapsed at Mount Meron. Photograph: United Hatzalah/AFP/Getty Images

[Oliver Holmes](#) in Jerusalem, [Harriet Sherwood](#) and agencies

Fri 30 Apr 2021 06.54 EDT

At least 44 people have been killed and about 150 injured in a crush at a Jewish religious gathering in northern [Israel](#) attended by tens of thousands of

people, in one of the country's worst peacetime disasters.

Children were among the dead, Eli Beer, the director of an Israeli volunteer ambulance service, United Hatzalah, said. "Unfortunately, we found small children trampled there, and we performed CPR. We were able to save some of them," he told Army Radio.

[Deadly crowd crush in Israel: what we know so far](#)
[Read more](#)

The national ambulance service, Magen David Adom, said the injured had been rushed to hospitals around the country. Six people were in a critical condition and 18 in a serious condition.

The prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, who visited the scene briefly on Friday, said it was "one of the worst disasters that has befallen the state of Israel" and offered condolences to the families. Sunday would be a day of national mourning, he added.

Permission had been given for 10,000 people to attend the largest event held in Israel since the start of the Covid pandemic last year, but the crowds at Mount Meron were estimated at up to 10 times that number.

Ultra-Orthodox Jews had travelled to the Galilee tomb of the second-century sage Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai for annual Lag Baomer commemorations that include all-night prayer, mystical songs and dance.

01:24

Chaotic scenes as crush kills dozens at religious festival in Israel – video

The cause of the crush in the early hours of Friday was not confirmed, but witnesses said people were asphyxiated or trampled in a narrow passageway while trying to exit. Footage from the night [showed](#) men frantically pulling down corrugated iron walls to escape.

Children were separated from their parents in the confusion. An emergency rescue officer told Channel 12 news: "There are more than 30 children here right now ... whose mothers and fathers aren't answering the phone."

Israeli television published the photos of seven boys, appealing for help in locating them.

Mobile phone reception crashed at Mount Meron as families tried to reach missing loved ones. A 24-year-old man, identified only by his first name, Dvir, told Army Radio “masses of people were pushed into the same corner and a vortex was created”. He added: “I felt like I was about to die.”

In one video, a crowd of men could be seen being funnelled through a narrow walkway, with some falling. Another video showed a crush at a barricade.

Israeli media published an image of a row of bodies covered in plastic bags on the ground and videos posted on social media showed chaotic scenes.

Local media [reported](#) police might have unknowingly exacerbated the situation by blocking the rushing crowds from dispersing, unaware of the squeeze further back.

[Map](#)

The commander of the area’s northern district, who oversaw the security arrangements, said the cause of the disaster was still unclear but he held overall responsibility. “For better or worse, and [I] am ready for any investigation,” Shimon Lavi [told reporters](#).

The justice ministry said the police’s internal investigations department was launching an investigation into possible criminal misconduct by officers.

The Israeli military sent medics and search and rescue teams along with helicopters to assist with a “mass casualty incident” in the area.

Yehuda Gottlieb, one of the first responders from United Hatzalah, said he saw “dozens of people fall on top of one another ... A large number of them were crushed and lost consciousness.”



Jewish worshippers sing and dance on temporary seating at the Lag Baomer event in Mount Meron, northern Israel. Photograph: Reuters

Witnesses said they only realised people had been asphyxiated when an organiser appealed over a loudhailer for the crowd to disperse.

“We thought maybe there was a [bomb] alert over a suspicious package. No one imagined that this could happen here. Rejoicing became mourning, a great light became a deep darkness,” a pilgrim who gave his name as Yitzhak told Channel 12 TV.

Motti Bukchin, a spokesperson for the Zaka ambulance service, said families were being notified and the bodies were being taken to a single location for identification. He said he expected burials to begin before sundown of the Jewish Sabbath, when funerals do not take place.

Q&A

What is the Lag Baomer festival?

Show

Lag Baomer (the 33rd day of the Omer) is a Jewish holiday honouring Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, a second century sage and mystic who is buried at the

foot of Mount Meron. Bar Yochai's tomb is considered one of the holiest sites in Israel.

The holiday is held on the anniversary of the death of Bar Yochai, who is believed by some to be the author of the Zohar, one of the foundational texts of Kabbalah. Before he died, he asked that his followers celebrate the date as "the day of my joy."

The holiday falls on the 18th day of the month of Iyar on the Hebrew calendar and is recognised as a school holiday in Israel. It is the 33rd day of the Omer, a period starting on passover and lasting for 49 days. According to the website of [Chabad](#), Orthodox Jewish Hasidic dynasty, it traditionally features bonfires and parades as well as the pilgrimage of tens of thousands of Israelis and people from around the world to Meron. It is also traditional to spend the day outside, where children play with bows and arrows, which [symbolise](#) "the power of inwardness [and] the power unleashed by the mystic soul of Torah," according to Chabad.org.

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

In a video [posted on Twitter](#), Dov Maisel, the vice-president of operations for United Hatzalah, said the organisation's volunteers had seen "very, very difficult sights. Sights that we haven't seen here in Israel since the worst days of terrorist rage back in the beginning of the 2000s. I have no words. I honestly have no words."



The scene at Mount Meron. Photograph: Sebastian Scheiner/AP

The event was the first large religious gathering of its kind to be held legally since Israel lifted nearly all coronavirus restrictions. The country has seen cases plummet since launching one of the world's most successful vaccination campaigns late last year.

Authorities had authorised 10,000 people to gather at the site of the tomb but organisers said more than 650 buses had been chartered from across the country to bring pilgrims to Meron.

The Times of Israel cited organisers saying about 100,000 people were at the site, with a further 100,000 expected on Friday morning. About 5,000 police had been deployed to secure the event.

Boris Johnson was among global leaders who sent condolences. Describing the scenes as devastating, the UK prime minister, tweeted: "My thoughts are with the Israeli people and those who have lost loved ones in this tragedy."

[Israel](#)

Deadly crowd crush in Israel: what we know so far

At least 45 people have died at a religious festival attended by tens of thousands of pilgrims in the country's north

- [Full report: 'It was a disaster'](#)



Israeli security officials and rescuers carry the body of a victim who died at Mount Meron in Israel. Photograph: AP

Israeli security officials and rescuers carry the body of a victim who died at Mount Meron in Israel. Photograph: AP

[Helen Sullivan](#)

[@helenrsullivan](#)

Fri 30 Apr 2021 13.16 EDT

Dozens of people have [died in a crowd crush](#) at an ultra-Orthodox religious festival in northern Israel attended by tens of thousands of people.

Here is what we know so far:

- **At least 45 people have died**, and approximately 150 were injured, at the annual Lag B'Omer commemorations in Galilee. By late afternoon on Friday, the health ministry said **32 of the dead had been identified**.
- The prime minister, **Benjamin Netanyahu**, **called the crush one of the “heaviest disasters”** in Israeli history and promised a thorough investigation to ensure it did not happen again. The country will observe a day of mourning on Sunday.
- **Ultra-Orthodox men clambered through gaps in sheets of torn corrugated iron to escape the crush**, as police and paramedics tried to reach the wounded.
- **The gathering was held to celebrate Lag B'Omer, a Jewish holiday honouring Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai**, a second-century sage and mystic who was buried at the foot of Mount Meron. Bar Yochai's tomb is considered one of the holiest sites in [Israel](#).
- The festival was segregated by gender, and medics said **the injuries and deaths were concentrated in the men's section**.
- **Israel has lifted most Covid-19 pandemic restrictions** and the festival was held legally. Authorities had authorised 10,000 people to attend the gathering at the tomb, but festival organisers estimated that 100,000 people were at the site by Thursday morning, according to the Times of [Israel](#).
- **The festival was the largest public gathering during the coronavirus pandemic** and 5,000 police had been deployed to secure the event.
- About a decade ago **a government watchdog report found fault with the management of the festival premises**, and a “systemic failure” in

maintenance that could endanger visitors. It was not immediately known what steps were taken to remedy the situation.

01:24

Chaotic scenes as crush kills dozens at religious festival in Israel – video

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/30/deadly-crowd-crush-lag-baomer-in-israel-what-we-know-so-far>

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[Israel](#)

Chaotic scenes as crush kills dozens at religious festival in Israel – video

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- [Live Coronavirus: some Indian states suspend jabs over vaccine shortage; England expands access to all over-40s](#)
- ['We are not special' How triumphalism led India to Covid-19 disaster](#)
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Coronavirus live: US expected to announce new travel rules for India; record daily deaths in Turkey – as it happened

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‘We are not special’: how triumphalism led India to Covid-19 disaster

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India

West Bengal elections go ahead despite India's soaring Covid death toll

Long queues reported at polling stations as US flies aid in and warns its citizens to leave the country

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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An Indian paramilitary asks masked voters to maintain physical distance outside a polling booth. Photograph: Bikas Das/AP

An Indian paramilitary asks masked voters to maintain physical distance outside a polling booth. Photograph: Bikas Das/AP

[Peter Beaumont](#)

Thu 29 Apr 2021 10.09 EDT

Millions of Indians voted in elections in the state of West Bengal on Thursday despite fears that people going to the polls may contribute further to the country's escalating coronavirus catastrophe.

As long queues were reported at polling stations, India's total recorded coronavirus cases during the pandemic passed 18m. The country reported a record 379,257 new infections on Thursday and 3,645 deaths – its highest daily total.

With large political rallies and gatherings such as the Kumbh Mela festival blamed in part for the ferocity of India's second wave, the eighth round of voting in West Bengal – one of the few states where the populist prime minister, Narendra Modi, does not have a majority – has inevitably come under scrutiny as the state reported a record 17,000 new cases on Wednesday.

The crisis has overwhelmed India's health system and required gravediggers and crematorium staff to work around the clock. Experts believe the headline figures from the health ministry probably represent an undercounting of the real scale of the problem. Some medical experts believe that India's true Covid-19 numbers could be five to 10 times greater than the official tally.

The US has warned its citizens to leave the country, citing its overburdened hospitals.

[Bar chart showing India's number of coronavirus deaths per day since the start of the pandemic](#)

As India's military transports key medical supplies including oxygen canisters across the country, hotels and railway coaches have been converted into critical-care facilities to make up for the shortage of hospital beds.

India's best hope to curb its second wave of Covid-19 infections was to vaccinate its vast population, said experts, and on Wednesday the government opened a registration system to allow everyone over the age of 18 to apply for jabs from Saturday, although some young people said it would only allow over-45s to register.

Only about 9% of India's 1.4 billion residents have received a dose since the country's vaccination campaign began in January prioritising health workers and then the elderly.

The government said more than 8 million people had registered, but it was not clear how many had received appointments. Many people complained on social media of difficulty in registering for vaccines despite claims by the government that the system worked smoothly.

Although it is the world's biggest producer of vaccine, India does not have enough stock for the estimated 800 million people now eligible for it.

"We don't have vaccines as of now. We have made requests to the company regarding vaccines; we will tell you when it comes," said the Delhi health minister Satyendar Jain when asked about the inoculation of over-18s from 1 May.

Gautam Menon, a professor of physics and biology at Ashoka University, said: "People who could have been saved are dying." He added that there had been "serious undercounting" of deaths in many states.

India thought the worst was over when cases ebbed in September, but infections began to increase again in February. On Wednesday, 362,757 newly confirmed cases – a global record – pushed the country's total past 17.9m, second only to the US.

Local media has reported discrepancies between official state tallies of the dead and the number of bodies taken to crematoriums and burial grounds. Many crematoriums have spilled over into car parks and other empty spaces as blazing funeral pyres light up the night sky.

India's daily deaths, which have nearly tripled in the past three weeks, also reflect a shattered and underfunded healthcare system. Hospitals are scrambling for more oxygen, beds, ventilators and ambulances, while families marshal their own resources in the absence of a functioning system.

"The ferocity of the second wave did take everyone by surprise," Dr K VijayRaghavan, the principal scientific adviser to the Indian government,

told the Indian Express, predicting that the current wave could peak in May.

“[Though] health experts had been warning us about the second wave, no indications from [antibody tests] suggested the scale of the surge that we are seeing,” he added, admitting that the country had slackened in its social distancing.

The US said on Wednesday that it was sending more than \$100m (£72m) worth of supplies to India, starting with products including nearly 1m instant tests.

The White House said the first shipment would arrive in Delhi on Thursday in a military plane, days after President Joe Biden promised to step up assistance.

The first flight includes 960,000 rapid tests that can detect Covid in 15 minutes, and 100,000 N95 masks for frontline health workers, the US Agency for International Development said.

“Just as India sent assistance to the United States when our hospitals were strained early in the pandemic, the United States is determined to help India in its time of need,” a White House statement said.

The White House said it was also sending supplies to India to produce more than 20m vaccine doses.

The supplies are being diverted from US orders to produce the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine, which has not been approved for use in the US.

Agencies contributed to this report

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Syria

Millions at risk from Covid surge in Syria amid test and oxygen shortages

In country where 90% of population live in poverty, ‘situation is deteriorating extremely rapidly’

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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A batch of Covid vaccines arrive at the airport in Damascus, Syria, on 24 April. For now, demand for vaccines far outstrips supply. Photograph: Firas Makdesi/Reuters

A batch of Covid vaccines arrive at the airport in Damascus, Syria, on 24 April. For now, demand for vaccines far outstrips supply. Photograph: Firas Makdesi/Reuters

[Bethan McKernan](#), *Middle East correspondent*

Thu 29 Apr 2021 12.26 EDT

Aid agencies and the UN have warned that a “rapid and accelerating” wave of coronavirus and shortages of equipment such as tests and oxygen is putting millions of people across conflict-ravaged [Syria](#) at risk from the virus.

While the official Covid-19 death toll in Syria is low compared with other parts of the Middle East, credible data collection is almost impossible, and the country is vulnerable: [10 years of war](#) have devastated the infrastructure, economy and healthcare systems.

About 90% of Syrians across regime, rebel and Kurdish-held areas now live in poverty. More than a year into the global crisis, testing facilities in the country are still almost nonexistent, making it impossible for healthcare workers to assess the true impact of the disease – or contain it.

In the north-east of the country, which is controlled by Kurdish-led forces, the only Covid-19 laboratory is likely to run out of testing kits in the next seven days, while new cases are surging. More than 5,300 cases have been confirmed in the area in April alone, according to the International Rescue Committee (IRC) – more than half of the total for the whole of 2020. Currently, more than 47% of tests are coming back positive.

Seven UN and NGO-funded treatment facilities have been [forced to close due to a lack of funding](#); several of those that remain are reaching capacity, and oxygen supplies are beginning to run out.

“Currently, 83% of patients who receive invasive ventilation in the region are not surviving and we fear that things will only get worse,” said Misty Buswell, IRC’s policy and advocacy director for the region. “The health system is struggling to cope, and the situation is deteriorating extremely rapidly.”

According to Mark Lowcock, the head of the UN’s humanitarian affairs office, the number of new cases in parts of Syria under Bashar al-Assad’s government doubled between February and March, and intensive care units in the capital, Damascus, are also now full.

Rebel and Islamist-controlled north-west Syria received the country's first shipment of coronavirus vaccines last week under the UN's Covax programme, and the vaccination campaign using 53,800 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine is expected to begin early next month.

Both Damascus and the north-east are also expected to receive UN vaccine supplies, although no dates have yet been announced. Vaccinations for health workers have already started in government-controlled areas, but not with Covax doses.

For now, demand for vaccines far outstrips supply: in Idlib and the surrounding area alone, 3 million residents live in [dire humanitarian conditions](#), and social distancing and other measures to contain the disease are hard to implement.

Further vaccine shipments for the rebel enclave are also far from certain. Last year, Russia and China used their UN security council vetoes to shut one of just two remaining border aid crossings from Turkey. The next vote, on whether to keep the final cross-border point open, is due in July.

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2021.04.30 - Spotlight

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[Metal](#)

Interview

‘Nature is hurting’: Gojira, the metal band confronting the climate crisis

[Matt Mills](#)



Gojira (from left): Mario Duplantier, Joe Duplantier, Christian Andreu, Jean-Michel Labadie. Photograph: Gabrielle Duplantier

Gojira (from left): Mario Duplantier, Joe Duplantier, Christian Andreu, Jean-Michel Labadie. Photograph: Gabrielle Duplantier

With stirring songwriting that considers grief, philosophy and ecological collapse, the French quartet have become one of the world’s greatest heavy bands. They discuss their journey so far

Fri 30 Apr 2021 04.00 EDT

Joe and Mario Duplantier grew up in a calm idyll – perhaps surprisingly for two of metal’s most forthright rabble-rousers. Born to a sketch-artist father

and yoga teacher mother, the brothers were raised in Ondres, a remote commune on France's western coast. Their house was so rural that, when a journalist visited, he compared it to a "hermitage". Music was always playing, from folk to Mike Oldfield; it only stopped when poets and painters stayed the night and the children overheard the grownups discussing international philosophies.

The pair often passed the time on the beach. Joe collected wood and stones – only to come home to find his hands black with crude oil. Mario, meanwhile, had plastic bags flying in his face when he was out surfing. The serenity of the fairytale upbringing cracked. "We were confronted by nature hurting all the time, and nature hurting hurts you," says Joe, the elder brother.

The Duplantiers vocalise that hurt in Gojira, an extreme metal quartet loved not only for their musicianship – rampaging and intricate – but also their environmentalist outcries. "The greatest miracle is burning to the ground," Joe shouts on Amazonia. A single from the new album, Fortitude, it is a grooving monster that laments the destruction of the rainforest. (All proceeds from the track go to a charity for tribes who have suffered through deforestation.)

Amazonia.

Joe says that – amid the bleak imagery – Gojira want Fortitude "to express something that would empower people and inspire them". He dubs it a call for "civil disobedience", designed to invigorate listeners into action. The anthem Into the Storm could soundtrack a revolution with its countercultural lyricism ("You're awake now! Put your fist in the air!") and Mario's marching drums, while Born for One Thing begs us to look up from our phones to a wounded world. "Who are we to say if humanity is worth continuing?" the vocalist asks. "I think having hope for the future is a default setting that we have. We choose to be in that energy that wants to succeed – if everyone says: 'We're not gonna make it,' we're not gonna make it!"

Despite their youth surrounded by creativity, Joe and Mario were not brought up to be metal's next sociopolitical visionaries. Hard rock was the

only thing their parents never played on the radio. It wasn't until the brothers' cousin "forced" Joe to listen to Metallica that it clicked. Mario, then 12, also got hooked: "It was just the vibration, the tone, the drumming – it was mystical."

Joe adds: "I think metal attracts sensitive people. I was born sensitive, bullied in school – I hated humans. The themes are very emotive, and there's a traumatised aspect that attracted me."

Its rage energised the pair to emulate their heroes, with Joe picking up the guitar and becoming a singer. "For me, it was never a thing to preach or have a message," he says. "It's music that comes from the guts. I'm yelling into a microphone. The yelling made the important words come out. I'm not gonna yell about the last pizza I had." Mario – a fiery and extroverted youngster – fell for the drums. "All my friends at school played rugby, but I didn't like it; drumming was my rugby. It was my way of expressing myself with my body," he says.



Joe Duplantier (*right*) and Jean-Michel Labadie performing with Gojira in 2019. Photograph: Steve Jennings/WireImage

Gojira formed in 1996, when the two put out an ad looking for musicians inspired by the band Death. Through that came the second guitarist,

Christian Andreu; later came the bassist, Jean-Michel Labadie. The four called themselves Godzilla – there is nothing more metal than a fire-spewing kaiju – before switching to the Japanese translation.

They self-released their debut, *Terra Incognita*, in 2001. Moulded by the conversations the Duplantiers listened in on as kids, its title alludes to Hindu mythology, specifically the unknown place where Brahma hid godhood from humanity after their abuse of its power. The 2003 follow-up, *The Link*, was similarly metaphysical, pondering resurrection, meditation and enlightenment through suffering.

“The music was more spiritual at first,” says Mario. “There were a lot of metaphors and [philosophical] images. When we released *From Mars to Sirius* in 2005, we stayed poetic, but a song like *Global Warming* was something truly important to our environmental message.”

With its sci-fi narrative about humanity depleting the Earth and searching for another home, *From Mars to Sirius* was Gojira’s first climate-crisis-oriented outing, as well as their international breakthrough. Its bold take on death metal balanced breakdown-laden juggernauts such as *Backbone* (which remains one of the heaviest things ever composed) with spaced-out epics, built on tapped guitar playing and serene vocal passages.

“We were ready to conquer the world!” Joe exclaims. “We had so much energy and we weren’t scared, tired or bored. After 10 years of grinding and working hard, we were on fire – so ready and hungry to meet new audiences.”

That piss and vinegar flowed through *The Way of All Flesh* and *L’Enfant Sauvage*, both of which refined Gojira’s abrasive sound. The band frequently tour the US and Europe and their live shows are meticulously perfected by watching videos of themselves back every night – “something every musician should do”, Mario says.



Gojira ... 'You won't be able to play crazy, violent, fast for ever.'
Photograph: Gabrielle Duplantier

That unyielding lifestyle shaped the sixth album, *Magma*, in 2015. "When you're a musician, touring is 90% of your life," the drummer says. "For weeks, you screamed every night and your body is struggling to go back to normal. It's the best job in the world and the most painful. That has a huge impact on the way you write. You won't be able to play crazy, violent, fast for ever."

The songs were hugely simplified, each built around one or two riffs. Classic verse-chorus-verse-chorus structures became more prevalent and the delicate potential of Joe's voice was emphasised further, crafting a meditative mood. That tone was consolidated after the Duplantiers' mother, Patricia Rosa, died that July. "Not all of *Magma* came from our mum passing, but it affected us, of course, deeply," says Joe. "It was such a huge deal in our hearts and minds, spiritually. It happened exactly as we were writing songs, so how to avoid that? It's impossible. It's all over the album."

"Our mum always said: 'Death is part of life. You have to accept that,'" Mario says. "Talking about death was not a problem. When we were kids, she always thought it could be an interesting discussion. You're born and

you'll die; that's the circle of life. So, as a child, I really didn't understand why everyone would cry and wear black clothes when someone died."

As a result, Magma isn't a dirge, but an inquisition into what is beyond death. The opening rocker, The Shooting Star, gives Patricia directions to the afterlife through the constellations: "Between the bear and the scorpion, you're getting close." The title track mentions reincarnation and climax; Low Lands begs for her knowledge of what is beyond the grave.

Into the Storm.

The insightful post-metal earned Gojira two Grammy nominations and they supported their idols Metallica on the accompanying tour. However, as proud as Gojira are of the album that brought such success, Fortitude is an intentional reversal. It maintains Magma's alluring simplicity, but swaps to a motivational headspace. "Magma was intimate, an inside thing, whereas Fortitude is an outside thing: a more outgoing, punchy and political thing," says Joe.

It's also an ode to the Duplantiers' artistic childhoods, exploring more than just the trauma of the climate crisis. Born for One Thing references Thai and Tibetan philosophy; the uplifting refrain of The Chant is as folk as it is metal; and The Trails is prowling prog-pop – something that could have been played on the radio back home. "We had a great time with our parents listening to the Beatles and Pink Floyd," says Mario. "I always wanted to add a few elements of that."

Representing metal at its eclectic, morally astute best, Fortitude deserves to turn Gojira into megastars, yet the band eye their future with excitement and cynicism. "I want us to be relevant for a long time, but at the same time I really don't," Joe says. "We're talking about big issues here. They need to be solved."

Fortitude is out now on Roadrunner Records.

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[3D printing](#)

Dutch couple move into Europe's first fully 3D-printed house



Harrie Dekkers and Elize Lutz outside their 3D-printed house in Eindhoven, the Netherlands. Photograph: Judith Jockel/The Guardian

Harrie Dekkers and Elize Lutz outside their 3D-printed house in Eindhoven, the Netherlands. Photograph: Judith Jockel/The Guardian

New home in shape of boulder is first legally habitable property with load-bearing walls made using 3D-printing technology



[Daniel Boffey](#) in Eindhoven

Fri 30 Apr 2021 00.00 EDT

A Dutch couple have become Europe's first tenants of a fully 3D printed house in a development that its backers believe will open up a world of choice in the shape and style of the homes of the future.

Elize Lutz, 70, and Harrie Dekkers, 67, retired shopkeepers from Amsterdam, received their digital key – an app allowing them to open the front door of their two-bedroom bungalow at the press of a button – on Thursday.

“It is beautiful,” said Lutz. “It has the feel of a bunker – it feels safe,” added Dekkers.

Inspired by the shape of a boulder, the dimensions of which would be difficult and expensive to construct using traditional methods, the property is the first of five homes planned by the construction firm Saint-Gobain Weber Beamix for a plot of land by the Beatrix canal in the Eindhoven suburb of Bosrijk.



Harrie Dekkers and Elize Lutz inside their 3D-printed house: ‘It has the feel of a bunker – it feels safe.’ Photograph: Judith Jockel/The Guardian

In the last two years properties partly constructed by 3D printing have been built in France and the US, and [nascent projects](#) are proliferating around the world.

But those behind the Dutch house, which boasts 94sq meters of living space, are said to have pipped their rivals to the post by being the first legally habitable and commercially rented property where the load-bearing walls have been made using a 3D printer nozzle.

“This is also the first one which is 100% permitted by the local authorities and which is habited by people who actually pay for living in this house,” said Bas Huysmans, chief executive of Weber Benelux, a construction offshoot of its French parent company Saint-Gobain.

01:02

Europe’s first fully 3D-printed house gets its first tenants – video

The first completed home of Project Milestone, a partnership with Eindhoven University of Technology and the Vesteda housing corporation, was due to be put on the rental market in 2019, but the challenges of the

architect's design, which involved overhanging external walls, caused delays.

The [3D printing](#) method involves a huge robotic arm with a nozzle that squirts out a specially formulated cement, said to have the texture of whipped cream. The cement is “printed” according to an architect's design, adding layer upon layer to create a wall to increase its strength.

The point at which the nozzle head had to be changed after hours of operation is visible in the pattern of the new bungalow's walls, as are small errors in the cement printing, perhaps familiar to anyone who has used an ink printer.

But while it is early days, the 3D printing method is seen by many within the construction industry as a way to cut costs and environmental damage by reducing the amount of cement that is used. In the [Netherlands](#), it also provides an alternative at a time when there is a shortage of skilled bricklayers.

The new house consists of 24 concrete elements that were printed layer by layer at a plant in Eindhoven before being transported by lorry to the building site and placed on a foundation to be worked on by Dutch building firm Van Wijnen. A roof and window frames were then fitted, and finishing touches applied.

By the time the fifth of the homes is built – comprising three floors and three bedrooms – it is hoped that construction will be done wholly on-site and that various other installations will also be made using the printer, further reducing costs.



The point at which the nozzle head had to be changed after hours of operation is visible in the pattern of the new bungalow's walls. Photograph: Judith Jockel/The Guardian

“If you look at what time we actually needed to print this house it was only 120 hours,” Huysmans said. “So all the elements, if we would have printed them in one go, it would have taken us less than five days because the big benefit is that the printer does not need to eat, does not need to sleep, it doesn't need to rest. So if we would start tomorrow, and learned how to do it, we can print the next house five days from now.”

['The future of housing': California desert to get America's first 3D-printed neighborhood](#)

[Read more](#)

Lutz and Dekkers, who have lived in four different types of home in the six years since their two grown-up daughters left the family home, are paying €800 (£695) a month to live in the property for six months from 1 August after answering a call for applicants on the internet. “I saw the drawing of this house and it was exactly like a fairytale garden,” said Lutz.

The market rent would normally be twice that being paid by the couple. “Did we earn money with this first house? No,” said Huysmans. “Do we

expect to lose money on house number two, three, four and five? No.

“With 3D printing you generate a huge creativity and a huge flexibility in design,” he added. “Why did we do so much effort to print this ‘rock’? Because this shows perfectly that you can make any shape you want to make.”

Yasin Torunoglu, alderman for housing and spatial development for the municipality of Eindhoven, said: “With the 3D-printed home, we’re now setting the tone for the future: the rapid realisation of affordable homes with control over the shape of your own house.”

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Ska

‘A blur of legs, arms and adrenaline’: the astonishing history of two-tone



Enjoy yourself ... The Specials onstage. Photograph: Ray Stevenson / Rex Features

Enjoy yourself ... The Specials onstage. Photograph: Ray Stevenson / Rex Features

As a new exhibition documents the UK ska-pop sound, stars including the Specials, Elvis Costello and Pauline Black recall how it opened up music, fashion and racial understanding

[Dave Simpson](#)

Fri 30 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

2 Tone Records began in a Coventry flat in 1979 and peaked two years later, when [the Specials’ era-defining Ghost Town](#) went to No 1 as riots blazed around a UK in recession. The [label](#) launched the Specials and the Selecter from the current City of Culture, plus Londoners Madness, Birmingham’s

the Beat and others, all to chart success, but also ended up naming an entire movement: dance crazy, [sharp-suited](#), [political](#), [multi-racial ska-pop](#) that reverberates to this day.

As a major two-tone exhibition comes to the Herbert Art Gallery & Museum in Coventry, the Guardian spoke to the people who were at the centre of a multicultural revolution.

Two-tone bubbles up from multicultural beginnings in the late 1970s, as black and white youths drink and dance together to a feverish soundtrack of punk, reggae and ska.

Pete Waterman (DJ, Locarno club): Coventry had some of the first immigrants from the West Indies. We didn't have as many racial problems as they had in Birmingham.

Trevor Evans (roadie/tour DJ, the Specials): As teenagers, us Jamaican guys drank in the same pubs as the white guys. Watched football together. It was a great city to grow up in.

Waterman: Everyone went to dances. I'd play punk next to reggae and ska: the Sex Pistols, the Upsetters then Gladstone Anderson.

Jerry Dammers (founder, the Specials, 2 Tone): Neol Davies – the white member of the Selecter – and I had played with the reggae musicians that would later be in that band. I'd written songs throughout my teens and formed the Specials to combine punk and reggae.

Neville Staple (toaster, the Specials): I heard [the Specials] in Holyhead youth club when they were the Coventry Automatics. I joined the road crew, then Jerry got me onstage and I started toasting like I had over records in the Locarno. That gave them another Jamaican rude boy element alongside Lynval [Golding, guitarist]. Jerry had the vision to bring together very different characters. Roddie [Radiation, guitarist] was a rockabilly. Horace ["Gentleman" Panter, bass] was an art teacher into jazz. Terry [Hall, singer] came from a punk band.

Waterman: I said: “He can’t sing!”, but Jerry correctly insisted that Terry had a very distinctive voice. I put them in the studio. We recorded Too Much Too Young and other tracks which would become massive hits. I told record companies: “Audiences are going nuts for them!” but the industry didn’t want to know.

Evans: We’d driven around the country crammed in a van for two years before anyone had taken notice.

Dammers: After we blagged our way on to a Clash tour I pushed the Specials to adopt more uptempo ska rhythms, matching suits and pork pie hats.



‘Audiences are going nuts’ ... 2 Tone fans, at a gig at Friars, Aylesbury, in 1980. Photograph: Toni Tye

Horace Panter (bass, the Specials): Our original drummer, Silverton [Hutchinson], left because he refused to play ska. He said: “That’s music my parents listen to.” When Brad [John Bradbury] replaced him, Jerry came along with Prince Buster’s Greatest Hits and told us all: “Listen to this.”

Suggs (singer, Madness): We were in Camden, getting into vintage things like Prince Buster. [Ska](#) had been out of fashion since the 60s. Then the Specials turned up at the Hope & Anchor wearing the same clothes as us.

Neville was blowing holes in the ceiling with a starting pistol. Afterwards Jerry stayed on my mum's sofa and said: "I want to start a record label, like Motown." I said: "That's optimistic considering you've just played to 35 people in a pub." A few months later Jerry phoned and said: "I've done it!"

Dammers: Neol Davies had a great disco dub instrumental, [The Selector](#). I said if he overdubbed a ska rhythm we could put it on the B-side of [Gangsters](#), the first Specials single.

Neol Davies: Rough Trade pressed the single for us and we rubber stamped 5,000 copies in Jerry's flat. After John Peel played it, Rough Trade couldn't keep up with demand.

Dammers: I wanted 2 Tone to be semi-independent and launch other acts, so signing the label to Chrysalis let us do that. When the Selector adopted ska rhythms and clothes I felt put out, but realised we could support each other.

The era of chart domination begins. The Specials, Madness and the Selector appear on the same episode of Top of the Pops and a national tour is triumphant as two-tone mania sweeps the UK.

Suggs: When we played with the Specials at the Nashville [in London], there was a queue of kids who looked like we did. I thought: "Fuck me. There's a scene happening." We'd recorded [The Prince](#) as a demo but it was perfect for early 2 Tone. Then suddenly it was No 16 in the charts.

Pauline Black (singer, the Selector): I wanted to portray something different to the sexist nonsense of the time. So I wore the "rude boy" look – pork pie hat, [Sta-Prest trousers](#) – but with makeup. It felt empowering. Suddenly there were "rude girls". Parents were probably relieved their daughter wasn't a punk with a mohican.



Pauline Black (front) and the Selecter, including Noel Davies (behind Black). Photograph: Vooren/Sunshine/REX/Shutterstock

Suggs: There hadn't been many multiracial bands in Britain, but suddenly there were all these bands in the Midlands and us, and white kids dancing to black music. It was an epochal moment for our culture. On the 2 Tone tour there were people like [Specials trombonist] [Rico](#), who'd been in the Skatalites and who was 60-odd. All these different ages, colours, races ... and we were kids, running around like idiots, a blur of legs, arms and adrenaline.

Elvis Costello (producer, the Specials): I'd travelled up and down the country – with just half a bottle of gin and some little blue pills to sustain me, if you must know – so I could see the Specials play live as much as possible before we went into the studio. I thought it was my job to learn everything I could about the band before some more technically capable producer fucked it all up and took the fun and danger out of it.

Panter: That first 2 Tone tour was 40 people on one bus for 40 nights. It was like a school trip with no teachers.

Davies: Two thousand people plus, every night. Fire limits obviously being exceeded. Such a thrill.

Costello: After one gig on the south coast we ended up on a beach with a bonfire and their fans, like a kinder version of Lord of the Flies. We recorded [the Specials] debut in a little place under a launderette. Cramped. Fetid. Ideal. There was just enough space outside the control room to jam the band and all their friends together with a beer and the lights off to do the crowd noise for [Nite Klub](#). When Chrissie Hynde did the heavy breathing for [Stupid Marriage](#) the band were cheering like kids. We'd been at the vodka gimlets. We had to stop one session when Neville fired a blank round at me and the engineer – our ears were ringing all day.

Black: People had sent demo tapes from all over the country, so we'd play them on the bus.



Rhoda Dakar with the Bodysnatchers on the second 2 Tone tour.
Photograph: Virginia Turbett/Redferns

Everett Morton (drummer, the Beat): 2 Tone saw us supporting the Selecter and put out Tears of a Clown, our first hit. Even after we signed to a major label, we were called a 2 Tone band. We were naturally multiracial. [Ranking Roger](#) [vocals/toasting] had been one of the first black punks. I was a reggae drummer but played faster: punky-reggae. [Saxa](#) [Lionel Martin, saxophone] was Jamaican, much older than us. The music brought everyone together.

Rhoda Dakar (singer, the Bodysnatchers, the Special AKA): Punk had opened the doors for all-girl bands like us. The energy levels on those tours was insane. The Specials would get the audience on stage. Venues just weren't built for that many people jumping. At one gig on a pier I looked down and I could see the sea beneath the floor. Afterwards there'd be schoolgirl pranks like apple pie beds and water pistols. I was 20. Miranda [Joyce, saxophone] was 16.

Suggs: We realised it could be fun and serious. We all agreed we were anti-authoritarian, but we'd work the politics out afterwards.

With the label's black and white checks symbolising racial unity, the scene confronts nationalism and racism in songs, at gigs and in person.

Dammers: The racist National Front (NF) were on the rise and [Rock Against Racism and the Anti-Nazi League](#) were counteracting them. I wrote specifically anti-racist lyrics for [Doesn't Make It Alright](#). The black and white checks in the 2 Tone label were retro but I was pleased when people saw it as a symbol of racial unity.

Suggs: It was a heavy time. [Margaret Thatcher was talking about the demise of "society"](#) and the white working class were divided between left and right. At some early gigs our audience were sieg heil-ing.



Elvis Costello. Photograph: Ian Dickson/Rex Features

Dakar: In Middlesbrough the band asked: “Why come to see us if you hate black people? Have you not seen Rhoda?” They went: “Yeah, but she’s a tart [a woman].” They smashed our van. We had to get a police escort out of there.

Dammers: The Specials played hundreds of gigs and the vast majority were joyful celebrations. I can remember the very few that weren’t because I hated any trouble so much. In Hatfield a brick went through the window of our coach and we had to drive back to Coventry with snow blowing in. The number of incidents of Nazi salutes at Specials gigs gets exaggerated. I can remember three, two involving one person and one involving three or four people, who we chased out. We’d stop playing, and the perpetrators were either humiliated into stopping or ejected.

Black: If you asked the audience: “Do you want these people in here?” it was always a resounding: “No!”

Suggs: Me and Carl [Chas Smash, trumpet] came unstuck by jumping in the audience a couple of times. You’d see these kids of 14 sniffing glue with swastikas tattooed on their foreheads and think: “What have you done?” And then they’d work out that they’d actually drawn the swastika the wrong

way round, so it was the Indian symbol for love, which really did their heads in. But you'd see them a year later and they'd renounced all that stuff.

Dammers: We would take our anti-racist message to kids who might be vulnerable to the NF. A lot of people over the years have told me that they might have become racists if it hadn't been for 2 Tone.

Black: We went to America just 10 years after a black person would be hosed down for sitting at the same lunch counter as a white person. At a photo shoot in Dallas, a flatbed truck came along with white guys on the back with a baseball bat, saying: "Get those [N-word]s out of here."



The Beat including Everett Morton (left), Saxa (with fluffy toy) and Ranking Roger (wearing hat). Photograph: Fin Costello/Redferns

Davies: If I walked into a truck stop with Pauline, the place fell silent. We hit America hard – six weeks on a bus, two shows some nights. It hit us back. Charley [Anderson, bass] threw his back out. We came back a mess. Arguments. Departures. [Radio 1's] Mike Read refused to play [Celebrate the Bullet](#) after John Lennon was shot, so no one else played it, which ruined everything.

The scene starts to fall apart amid band squabbles and music scene shifts, but a legacy has been built that stretches from generations of global ska-punk bands to the end of apartheid.

Black: We'd made our second album for Chrysalis. I walked into the record company and staff that had been wearing black and white checks were wearing kilts. [Someone played us Spandau Ballet's Musclebound](#) and said: "This is the future." I thought it was a load of crap, but I knew the writing was on the wall for us then.

Suggs: We signed to Stiff, but I don't know if it would have worked out the same for us if Jerry hadn't given us that chance.



Madness including Chas Smash (second from left) and Suggs (third from left). Photograph: Virginia Turbett/Redferns

Panter: The Specials were crumbling making the second album [More Specials, 1980, produced by Dammers]. We divided between those who wanted to stay ska and those, obviously Jerry, who wanted to experiment. Plus, the schedule was so intense. Stimulants around. We were burning ourselves out. Jerry was furious when Neville and Lynval went out and bought BMWs. Roddy came in with a load of power pop songs and Jerry

said: “These are awful. Go away and write something better.” So Roddy wrote Rat [Race](#).

Staple: We were getting on each other’s nerves. Tax bills arriving. “Why’s he getting more money?”



A boy in Coventry, 1980. From the 2 Tone: Lives & Legacies exhibition. Photograph: Toni Tye

Panter: When we played our last [2 Tone line-up] gig at the [Carnival Against Racism](#) in Leeds we were barely speaking. I think of Ghost Town as a triumph of will, that Jerry managed to get everyone in the same place to record it.

Dammers: I’d written it [after visiting Glasgow on tour](#). Thatcher’s shopkeeper economics had closed vast swathes of industry. The recession and mass unemployment were so bad that people were on the streets selling household items, but the song could have been about anywhere in Britain. It was No 1 when the Fun Boy Three [Hall, Staple and Golding] told me they were leaving in the dressing room at Top of the Pops. I was in shock. Pressure and confusion led me to rush back into the studio.

Costello: The run of singles [as new incarnation Special AKA] leading up to the [In The Studio](#) album – [War Crimes](#), [The Boiler](#) and [Racist Friend](#) – were

extraordinary and uncompromising.

Dakar: I'd written The Boiler for the Bodysnatchers. A friend had been raped in different circumstances to the song, but the lyrics reflected her fear and terror. Some idiot on Capitol Radio played it at 9am on a Saturday. Complaints flooded in. It was taken out of shops but reached No 35. Jerry fiddled with The Boiler for a year, and he did the same thing with Ghost Town. It was more than perfectionism – I think it was performance anxiety. He was worried about failing, not being the best, but to his credit, he had much more of a sense of posterity than anyone else. One day Jerry came into the rehearsal room with a chorus, "Free Nelson Mandela ..." I phoned Artists Against Apartheid to get information about Mandela and came up with: "Shoes too small to fit his feet, he pleaded the cause of the ANC."

Costello [producer, Free Nelson Mandela]: The secret weapon in the Special AKA was vocalist Stan Campbell. He had a voice that the microphone loved and he looked like he'd walked off a magazine cover. But everything had apparently become so fractious by then that it should not have been a surprise when he took off just as the record was released.

Dammers: Everything was taking too long and costing too much. By the time we finally had a hit with Free Nelson Mandela, everyone had left the band. I was asked to organise a British branch of Artists Against Apartheid and the festival on Clapham Common drew a quarter of a million people. It was the proudest moment of my life. We performed the song at the [Mandela concert](#) at Wembley [1988]. By the second Wembley concert [1990], Mandela had been freed. Hopefully all the 2 Tone and anti-apartheid efforts made some sort of contribution, but there's still so much to be done.

2 Tone: Lives & Legacies is at the Herbert Art Gallery & Museum, Coventry, from 28 May to 12 September. The 40th anniversary half-speed master of Ghost Town is released on 4 June. The Madness docuseries Before We Was We is released on 1 May on AMC and BT TV. The Selecter's 3CD Too Much Pressure box set is out now on Chrysalis. The current Specials and Selecter lineups tour this summer.

This article was amended on 30 April 2021. Rico [Rodriguez] was trombonist in the Specials, not saxophonist as an earlier version said.

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10 of the best ...Television

From Line of Duty to Lost: 10 of the best TV twists



Stoppers of bent coppers ... Line of Duty's Kate, Steve and Ted. Photograph: Aiden Monaghan/World Productions/BBC/PA

Stoppers of bent coppers ... Line of Duty's Kate, Steve and Ted. Photograph: Aiden Monaghan/World Productions/BBC/PA

Office romances, festive misery, an almighty family fall-out – here are some of the small screen's most audacious rug-pulls

- [Modern Toss on plot twists](#)

[Phil Harrison](#)

Fri 30 Apr 2021 04.00 EDT

Line of Duty's window plummet

Jessica Raine's arrival in the cast of [Jed Mercurio's anti-corruption police drama](#) was at the heart of the publicity leading up to the show's second series. The opening episode constructed DC Georgia Trotman's character: dedicated, perhaps overly fond of a drink. And then, oops, a bent copper threw her out of a fifth-storey hospital window and she was gone. Trotman, we barely knew you ...

[The Guide: Staying In – sign up for our home entertainment tips](#)
[Read more](#)

Inside No 9's tear-jerking twist

Via jarring leaps of context and chronology, the Sheridan Smith-starring [season two episode](#) The 12 Days of Christine packs a lifetime of triumph and tragedy into half an hour. The final twist manages to be both audacious and moving; a sudden sharp intake of breath that retrospectively renders the previous 30 minutes unbearably poignant. [A miniature masterpiece](#).

Lost's plotting gamechanger

At the end of season three came a twist that reversed time itself and added another temporal context in which to view the Lost castaways. It was also the moment when, depending on your perspective, this [desert island epic](#) either got interesting or ridiculous. Still, an audacious rug-pull that hinted at the glorious unpredictability of what was to come.



Eggnogg, snogs and Wernham Hogg ... The Office Christmas Special.
Photograph: BBC

The Office Christmas Special's festive treat

Plot twists don't have to be gruesome or shocking – they just usually are. But when Tim's lost love Dawn reappeared at the Wernham Hogg Christmas party having dumped her irksome fiancé, it sealed [The Office](#)'s legacy. This was that rarest of things: a twist that gave the audience exactly what it wanted.

Game of Thrones' warning shot

It certainly wasn't the show's most gory death. Probably not even in the Top 10, in fact. But the execution of Ned Stark in season one did set a standard and act as a warning to viewers. Don't get too attached to anyone, it suggested, because in [Game of Thrones](#), no one is ever going to be truly safe.

EastEnders' festive misery

Not just one plot twist but a cavalcade of them: this brutal two-hander on Christmas Day 1986 confirmed *EastEnders* as a soap willing to spring surprises. First, that Den knew Angie was lying about being terminally ill to save her marriage. Then, that he was filing for divorce. Happy Christmas!

The Wire’s ‘hero’s death’

Omar Little had been living on borrowed time: hobbling around Baltimore with a serious leg injury while deliberately antagonising a ruthless drug kingpin is not sustainable for long. But even so, his sudden demise in season five – shot while buying cigarettes, by feral juvenile Kenard – was a genuine shock. And the completely arbitrary nature of the killing was the whole point.



Demon days ... The Good Place. Photograph: NBC/Ron Batzdorff

The Good Place’s hellish reveal

The final episode of series one was the moment Michael Schur’s supernatural comedy took flight. “Arizona dirtbag” Eleanor Shellstrop is convinced that she has mistakenly arrived in heaven. But, after a whole season of tormented wrangling with three other deceased misfits, she has a

moment of realisation: [they've been in hell all along](#). Holy forking shirtballs!

Twin Peaks' scary send-off

One of the most unsettling moments in TV history and one of the most debated. In the final episode of the original series, when Agent Dale Cooper entered the Black Lodge to rescue his beloved Annie, did he sacrifice his soul? Certainly, [his transformation](#) from squeaky clean to demonic came as a jolting shock – and was all the more jarring for its ambiguity.

The Sopranos' family fall-out

It wasn't that Christopher Moltisanti hadn't become a smacked-out liability. It was just that Tony Soprano had known that for years and put up with it. But during the final series of this mafia masterpiece, a car crash gives Tony a chance to rid himself of a long-term problem. As [Tony brutally took that chance](#), the extent of his paranoia became frighteningly clear.

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2021.04.30 - Opinion

- [Forget curtains and cash – Johnson's legacy will be the bitter taste of Brexit](#)
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Forget curtains and cash – Johnson’s legacy will be the bitter taste of Brexit

[Polly Toynbee](#)



The prime minister has imperilled peace in Northern Ireland, and every day the economic fallout worsens



An anti-Brexit protester holds a placard after Boris Johnson drove past to attend prime minister's questions on Wednesday. Photograph: Matt Dunham/AP

An anti-Brexit protester holds a placard after Boris Johnson drove past to attend prime minister's questions on Wednesday. Photograph: Matt Dunham/AP

Fri 30 Apr 2021 04.00 EDT

Amid slippages, losses, vanishing investments and export drops, the drip, drip of Brexit damage never stops. I collect examples every week, as if picking up spent mortar rounds from a battlefield. On Wednesday, it was [450 jobs lost](#) as car parts manufacturer Toyoda Gosei prepares to shut factories in Rotherham and Swansea, and relocate to the Czech Republic.

A breathtaking £800 roll of gold wallpaper distracts our eye. A prime minister who caused tens of thousands of bodies to pile high, while apparently fixing taxes for pals and contracts for cronies, has our eyes out on stalks. No one knows how deep in slurry [Boris Johnson](#) can sink and still swim out.

But history will record one great political crime above all the others, his tawdry dishonesties mere illuminations round its edges. The delinquent who

miss-sold [Brexit](#) to half the nation with a stardust of false promises to secure himself the throne will leave behind the [Brexit](#) breakages long after he has gone.

The most serious so far is imperilling peace in Northern Ireland, as Arlene Foster is brought down by Brexit's impossible contradictions. There were [warnings](#): two former prime ministers spoke in Derry just before the referendum, when Tony Blair said there "would have to be checks between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK, which would be plainly unacceptable", while John Major warned of a "historic mistake" that would destabilise the Good Friday agreement. But Foster, an ardent Brexiter, dismissed this a "deeply offensive" remain scare story.

The DUP's impossible Brexit stance will be inherited by whichever unlucky candidate succeeds her. Why back Brexit when [Northern Ireland](#) was against it and the border dilemma flashed a red warning? Why back Boris Johnson when, of course, he would rat on her with his UK-splitting protocol? Why didn't the DUP demand the whole UK stay in the single market?

Unionists, like too many Britons, were beguiled by that magic word sovereignty: what irony that it may now break the union. Of this, Johnson and his wrecking crew knew nothing and cared less. There was always Kate Hoey, doughty unionist, to keep [promising](#): "Brexit won't hurt Northern Ireland at all – instead it will brighten its future." Now, in riposte, protesting against the protocol, she [claims](#) that "Northern Ireland has not got Brexit".

Just so. No one has got whatever Brexit they imagined because none was ever palatable or viable. That was the craftiness of the leavers: they never said what kind of Brexit, because any version was a killer. So here we are with the worst of all Brexit deals. Next week's elections in Scotland look certain to deliver a nationalist majority: the more repellent the Westminster Conservatives, the more appealing Holyrood independence. As the European parliament endorsed Brexit this week, Scottish cultural leaders [begged](#) MEPs to welcome Scotland back into the EU.

This week leading UK arts organisations wrote to Johnson calling on him to fix the visa, customs and work permit crisis that prevents them touring in the EU, providing earnings they need to survive. Johnson promised them last

month that he would “[fix this](#)”, but he can’t “fix” things, as every sector from fish and finance to ballet begs for some “special deal”. There is no finagling his hard Brexit: it’s the same deal every third country gets. As the European commission’s president, Ursula von der Leyen, [stressed](#): “Faithful implementation is essential.” No wonder the EU parliament added a resolution this week recording Brexit as a “historic mistake”.

[Arlene Foster has been thrown to the wolves by Johnson’s Brexit games | Martin Kettle](#)

[Read more](#)

No big bangs so far, but Brexit silently haemorrhages power and money: far more than the £350m a week on the infamous bus is lost already, Prof Nigel Driffield of Warwick Business School tells me: [£1.3tn](#) already fled from the City, while “the discounting of gilts since the referendum is worth a whole bus”. JP Morgan’s CEO [tells](#) shareholders that EU cities are taking over London business, and that “Europe has the upper hand”.

Vast lost inward investment goes unrecorded: Pernille Rudlin, a leading consultant on Japanese business, tells me: “The UK is attracting fewer new companies from Japan than other countries in [Europe](#) since Brexit. Before 2016, the UK was the number one destination for Japanese investment in [Europe](#).”

Yesterday, the Commons environment, food and rural affairs committee confirmed the woes of fishing and farming, as EU imports flood in while UK exports are stuck, [warning](#) that “businesses will relocate activity to the EU or stop exporting to Europe”.

This week, too, Make UK, representing manufacturers, responded to [official figures](#) showing profits at their lowest for more than a decade, blaming a “unique cocktail of circumstances” melding Covid with Brexit. To take just one example, James Greenham, managing director of medical equipment maker EMS Physio, says he is paying a fortune in new exporting costs, and losing customers: a Swedish company, finding three-day deliveries arriving four weeks late, has turned to another supplier in the Netherlands. He grits his teeth in irritation at government ads telling him to trade with Mexico

instead – where, he says, there are huge regulatory hurdles. “We were sold a lie.” Every week I collect reams of these tales.

Wallpaper and lies may bring Johnson down, but Brexit is the crime against the country for which he will be for ever damned. Riots and the fall of [Arlene Foster](#) imperil the peace agreement in Ireland, and the UK’s breakup is on a knife edge. A necessary trigger will come to hand soon for Labour to lead the charge against the bad Brexit deal. In his wild rant at prime minister’s questions, Johnson accused Labour of voting against it, and many wish it had – though between a rock and a hard place, no deal wasn’t an option. Well before the next election, Labour will lead the cause of guiding Britain towards a return to the single market, and the safer haven of a Norway solution.

- Polly Toynbee is a Guardian columnist

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OpinionFood

The low-hanging fruit in the climate battle? Cutting down on meat

[Gaby Hinsliff](#)



Eating fewer animal products and less dairy would make a huge difference to carbon emissions



Aberdeen Angus cattle. Photograph: Jennifer MacKenzie/Alamy Stock Photo

Aberdeen Angus cattle. Photograph: Jennifer MacKenzie/Alamy Stock Photo

Fri 30 Apr 2021 02.00 EDT

Something is cooking in the world of climate politics. Or, perhaps more accurately, something isn't.

This week, the American recipe website Epicurious [announced](#) that, for environmental reasons, it wouldn't publish any new beef recipes. No more steaks, burgers or creative ways with mince; no more juicy rib. Since about 15% of global greenhouse gas emissions [come from livestock farming](#), with beef responsible for nearly two thirds of those, it wanted to help home cooks do their bit.

All this seems guaranteed to trigger the sort of people who get very emotional about roast beef and yorkshire pudding, particularly in the same week that the White House had to quash some [wild scare stories](#) about Joe Biden banning burgers to save the planet. (Spoiler alert: not happening.) But the twist in the tale is that Epicurious actually stopped publishing beef recipes a year ago without telling anyone, and it says its traffic numbers

show the vegetarian recipes offered instead were gobbled up. Those who scream loudest don't, as ever, speak for everyone.

Cheap and relatively painless ways of tackling the climate crisis are rare, as Boris Johnson may discover once he actually spells out the detailed implications of Britain's ambitious pledge to cut carbon emissions [by 78% by 2035](#). Swapping gas boilers for environmentally friendly heat pumps will cost thousands, and they won't be suitable for every home; so far, an awkward silence hangs over what the owners of those houses are supposed to do.

The Treasury, meanwhile, has still yet to rule on the potentially politically toxic question of introducing [pay-as-you-go road charges](#), to replace the fuel tax that the increasing number of electric or hybrid drivers won't be paying. Johnson's preferred green solutions are ones that magically allow life to carry on much as before, while new technology does all the heavy lifting – a strategy he described at last week's climate summit as [“cake have eat”](#). But that was his Brexit strategy, too, and we've all seen how well that worked out. Dietary changes, however, are one of the few climate change measures where the biggest obstacle to change isn't economic but cultural, and where doing the right thing potentially saves rather than costs individuals money.

People hate being told what to eat, which is why social media is still full of furious Republicans shouting at Biden to “get out of my kitchen”. But the Epicurious episode suggests it's the idea of being nagged or lectured that really hurts; the actual reality of eating other things instead of meat can be surprisingly palatable. Progress may, in short, be easier than it sometimes sounds.

Eating habits are already changing, if not fast enough for climate scientists then faster than angry burger warriors suggest. [One in eight Britons claim](#) to be vegetarian or vegan and another one in five flexitarian, eating meat-free sometimes; and although meat [consumption rose](#) over the last decade the big rise was in chicken, not red meat. Going veggie for the sake of the planet, rather than the animals, might have sounded eccentric a generation ago but it barely raises a millennial eyebrow now. By the time generation Z are their age, counting dietary carbons may seem no stranger than counting calories.

As a lifelong carnivore, even I've been slowly reducing red meat for a while. It started with one vegetarian day a week, then substituting fish for a couple of meat meals, then swapping in more chicken, and so far none of the family has actually noticed. (Like Epicurious, I've chosen not to advertise the strategy until someone complains.) We still eat beef and lamb sometimes, but it's becoming more of an occasional treat, less of a routine midweek spag bol. Taking it gradually, meanwhile, has made the whole thing feel doable rather than daunting.

True, if the entire planet went vegan by 2050, we could save nearly eight billion tonnes of CO₂ equivalent a year, [according to](#) the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Realistically, that's not going to happen, but even the 4.5 billion tonnes saved by everyone eating according to healthy dietary guidelines (more fruit and veg but less sugar, meat and dairy) or the three billion plus saved on a "climate carnivore" diet that replaces three-quarters of red meat currently consumed with alternatives such as chicken, would be worth having. As with any diet, avoiding making the perfect the enemy of the good means people are less likely to give up halfway through, as does encouraging rather than hectoring.

Ministers have shied away from calls for a ["carbon tax" on red meat](#) for not entirely illegitimate reasons; taxing food is toughest on low-income households, because they spend proportionately more of their income on it. But if this government or its successors are reluctant to wield the big stick then they must dangle juicier carrots, starting with a public education campaign making the connection between healthy eating – something Johnson has finally agreed to push, after a [near fatal brush](#) with Covid shocked him into losing weight – and helping the climate. ([Research commissioned](#) by the Department for Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs found carbon emissions could fall by 14% if everyone in Britain stuck to healthy eating guidelines, which would also help reduce heart disease and cancer rates – although some cattle and sheep farmers would need financial help to find alternative uses for their land, with their markets taking a potentially painful hit.)

And that's just the start. A handful of restaurants are now experimenting with carbon labelling on their menus to highlight environmentally friendly choices. There's no reason that couldn't be extended to food sold in

supermarkets, encouraging producers to cut unnecessary carbon emissions and earn better ratings. The food industry will protest, but it's that or stiffer tax and regulatory changes in years to come, which they'll like even less.

Even tiny changes such as putting the veggie dish at the top of restaurant menus, rather than at the bottom like a reluctant afterthought, can shift ordering habits – as could a few primetime TV shows on climate-friendly cookery, fronted by the kind of celebrity names capable of causing a run on ingredients. A plant-based menu for heads of state at this year's Cop26 climate crisis summit, showcasing adventurous meat-free cooking, should be a no-brainer, and so should providing more communal spaces to grow our own fruit and veg, building on a surge of [enthusiasm for allotments](#) in lockdown. In a culture war it's soft power that ultimately counts, and progressives may hold more of it than they know on this one. "Let them eat chickpeas" may not be a winning electoral strategy. But nor is burning down the planet just to make dinner.

- Gaby Hinsliff is a Guardian columnist

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[Reality checked](#)Television

Why it's high time for a gay Love Island

[Yomi Adegoke](#)



From *Playing It Straight* to *Towie*, queer people haven't always had it easy on reality TV. But times are changing – and ITV has a chance to lead the way



Megan Barton Hanson on Love Island. Photograph: ITV/Rex/Shutterstock

Megan Barton Hanson on Love Island. Photograph: ITV/Rex/Shutterstock

Fri 30 Apr 2021 05.00 EDT

Homophobes have been having a tough time of it lately, what with Lil Nas X's queer anthem *Montero* being at No 1 for four weeks despite a [backlash](#) from conservative critics, and Love Island producers said to be actively encouraging LGBTQ+ singletons to apply via Tinder.

This step wouldn't provide the show with its first same-sex couplings – female bisexual contestants have already coupled up in both the UK and Australian editions – but it would mark the first time the show has intentionally included LGBTQ+ people. It's hard to tell whether this is yet another cynical spin on the [prevalent practice of queerbaiting](#) (a marketing technique in which creators hint at, but then do not actually depict, queer romance or representation). In any case, it's a stark U-turn from comments in 2017 from ITV's director of television, Kevin Lygo. At the Edinburgh television festival, when talk turned to proactively including LGBTQ+ contestants in dating shows, Lygo swatted away the suggestion, saying that the format didn't allow it. He went on to add that [“there are quite enough gay people on television”](#). In fact, according to GLAAD in the US, LGBTQ+ [representation in television has dropped for the first time](#). It is lacking in TV

generally, and in reality TV and reality TV dating shows in particular.

The reality TV boom of the early 00s prioritised salaciousness which, disturbingly, meant TV shows were more than happy to feature queer contestants, but only to use their identity as a punchline. In 2003's *Boy Meets Boy*, a gay lead had to choose a partner from 15 potential male suitors, with the "twist" being that both gay and straight men were in the lineup. A year later, *There's Something About Miriam* tasked men with [winning over the heart of Miriam Rivera](#) and a cash prize, with the series built around the revelation that she was transgender. The same year, *Playing It Straight* required its female lead to guess which of her suitors on a Nevada ranch were gay in order to win prize money. *A Shot at Love With Tila Tequila* didn't feature such obviously problematic plot points, but nevertheless presented bisexuality as equal parts confusion and greed.

Progress has undoubtedly been made since. We see heartwarming dates between queer couples on shows such as *Dating Around*, *First Dates*, *The Cabins* and *Dinner Date*. But these one-off episodes aren't comparable to the season-long coverage and visibility of a show like *Love Island*. ITV recently reiterated that the lack of gay contestants to date has been a "logistical" issue. The former contestant Megan Barton Hanson, who is bisexual, also wondered how it would work in practice. "I don't know how it would work if they just chucked in a few token gay people in there," she said, [in a recent talk at Cambridge Union's debating society](#). "I feel like we need a whole gay series. If you're going to do it, do it properly. I mean, I'd definitely go back on there if there's a gay season."

While I'd usually be concerned that a standalone series could lead to "othering", a gay series might be a brilliant option, if the eighth season of MTV's hit dating series *Are You the One?* is anything to go by. As something of a connoisseur of the genre, I will say it was unequivocally one of the greatest dating series ever produced. Ordinarily, the franchise sees 10 women and 10 men who "suck at relationships" (their words, every single season) tasked with finding their perfect match in the house as picked by a team of experts. Each week, they're given the chance to secure the correct combination of couples and a \$1m cash prize. In 2019, however, the cast was made up of 16 sexually fluid contestants whose perfect match could be anyone. The result was total carnage. There was a series-first fivesome, and

it later transpired that half of the trysts were left unaired due to time constraints.



The Bi Life.

For once, pansexuality and bisexuality were not portrayed as uniquely libidinous identities. However, the visibility of their hookups felt important, far from the neutered, sanitised and desexualised portrayals often seen elsewhere. Take a show like *Towie*; for a long time characters such as Bobby Norris, Harry Derbidge and Vas Morgan were real-life iterations of *Sex and the City*'s Stanford, gay best friend characters, with their input limited to pithy one-liners and fashion advice, and who spent most of their time discussing the relationships of others and not their own. This has since changed, with Harry and Bobby's relationship in 2013 remaining a central plot line to this day and the hooking up (and now breaking up) of Demi Sims and Francesca Farago being focal.

ITV could learn a great deal from MTV, which presented *Are You the One?* without apology or explanation, dropping viewers in the deep end of a world that is rarely depicted. We watched Basit, a non-binary drag performer, be continually snubbed by their "perfect match" Jonathan due to their gender presentation; we saw Max battle internalised homophobia. "This isn't *PeeWee's Playhouse*, this isn't PBS," MTV's senior vice president of

programming, [Sitarah Pendelton, said to TheWrap](#). “We weren’t trying to have an educational show.” Truly, it was accidentally enlightening, as the best reality TV is, getting surprisingly deep for a show with the tagline: “Come one, come all”.

While it may have been the best, it isn’t the only one. In 2018, E!’s *The Bi Life* was hosted by *Drag Race* and *Celebrity Big Brother* alum Shane Jenek AKA Courtney Act, and was well received. Two years before that was *Finding Prince Charming*, a Bachelor-style show where suitors vied for the heart of a gay heart-throb; and in 2019, nearly 18 years after it premiered, *The Bachelor* franchise had its first same-sex romance, between Demi Burnett and Kristian Haggerty, on *Bachelor in Paradise*. [Love Island](#) can choose to trailblaze for British TV or get onboard later, when everyone else catches on. Either way, to borrow a slogan: the future of reality TV is bright, the future of reality TV is rainbow-coloured.

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OpinionDrugs

Why I decided to run the UK's first drug consumption van

Peter Krykant

After overcoming my own trauma, I cannot stand back and allow governments to be complicit in allowing people to die



Peter Krykant outside his drug consumption van. Photograph: The Guardian
Peter Krykant outside his drug consumption van. Photograph: The Guardian
Fri 30 Apr 2021 05.00 EDT

I run Scotland's, and the UK's, first overdose prevention service, also known as a drug consumption room, from [an ambulance](#) in Glasgow city centre.

The service allows people to take their own drugs under supervision of trained professionals who can intervene in the event of an overdose. We also provide a sterile area with clean equipment to reduce infections and the

spread of [blood-borne viruses](#), such as HIV, of which Glasgow is experiencing its [worst outbreak](#) in 30 years.

[Enlightened drug reforms are sweeping the US. Why is Britain so far behind? | Kojo Koram](#)

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On average, four injections per hour take place when we operate in a small area of Glasgow, with an estimated 500-plus people out in the open, publicly injecting. In most alleyways, abandoned buildings and car parks you can find used paraphernalia, or in the worst-case scenario a dead body. The service I provide is needed on a much larger scale if it is truly to support people into treatment – they cannot recover if they're dead. And, by extension, only by rolling it out across [Scotland](#) can the service have a positive impact on the residents and businesses who make up our communities.

I have put everything on the line to run this facility, initially losing my job, as the service has no legal framework in which to operate, to more recently being charged by police for an [alleged obstruction](#) during a search of homeless people (the case was later dropped). The stress of seeing so many drug-related harms and so many young people in need of support takes its toll on all areas of my life. My wife, who works full-time, has also taken on the pressure of home-schooling our children during the pandemic. But when we are not around people are rushing injections in rat-infested alleyways, picking up infections and creating abscesses. Many who use on their own are risking death every time they inject.

Many may ask why? As a person who went through my own trauma – drug use and street homelessness issues many years ago – I cannot stand back and allow governments to be complicit in allowing people to die. Overdose prevention services are an internationally recognised way of reducing drug-related harms. It benefits everyone by supporting the most vulnerable and saving taxpayers' money on ambulance callouts, hospital admissions and council clean-up teams.

Scotland has more than injecting drug use problems – it has a new generation of drug users, many in their teens, using street Valium, a

homemade concoction of benzodiazepines. These can be bought on the streets of towns and cities throughout the country for as little as 20p a pill. Mixed with heroin, cocaine, alcohol and gabapentin and pregabalin, it makes for a perfect storm of drug deaths.

In 2019, Scotland had 1,264 drug deaths, 814 of them reported as “street benzo” according to the [NRA drug death statistics](#) compared to 2010 when 485 deaths were reported and no “street benzos” were detected. Many commentators claim that since prescribing services stopped prescribing benzodiazepines, the illicit market has grown exponentially and is one of the main drivers of Scotland’s unprecedented rise to the drug death capital of Europe.

In order for Scotland to reduce these terrible preventable death rates we need action. Politicians have blamed each other, with the Scottish government blaming Westminster and the UK government pointing out the more than [three times higher](#) death rates in Scotland – in reality both are to blame. The British government holds firm on the now 50-year-old Misuse of Drugs Act, which is no longer fit for purpose. The Scottish government [cut budgets](#) in 2016 after record deaths in 2015, leading to the largest increase in deaths in a single year when a 27% annual increase was recorded between 2017 and 2018.

What is apparent is that the vast majority of people dying from drug deaths come from economically deprived areas. The question I and many others have raised is: would it be different if deaths were from the most affluent areas of the country? Many countries, such as Portugal and Switzerland, have seen drug deaths and HIV rates plummet by changing policy, and it seems like the UK still does not want to change.

12:41

Heroin to Holyrood? Man behind 'illegal' drug van runs for Scottish parliament – video

In the short term, we need to get people on to medications, support them with housing and in-depth counselling to deal with much of the trauma they carry, often from childhood, compounded by dealing with the criminal justice system. In the longer term we need to deal with socio-economic

deprivation, providing a more equal society, which would lead to less drug use and ultimately less deaths.

This is the reason I decided to run for a seat in [Scotland's elections](#) next week. We need voices from people who have faced challenges with poverty, mental health, drug addiction and homelessness represented in government. Ministers often have no direct experience of the departments they are running, and advisers and civil servants don't understand what is needed to support the vast sections of society who are experiencing what I have experienced.

On 6 May, when new Scottish politicians are elected, I hope that all the parties will put the politics to one side and do what is right to take on this problem. We have suffered enough, and we should not have to suffer any more.

- Peter Krykant is the Independent MSP candidate for Falkirk East and a drugs policy campaigner

2021.04.30 - Around the world

- ['You changed America' Biden marks first 100 days in Georgia – a state key to his victory](#)
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[Joe Biden](#)

‘You changed America’: Biden marks first 100 days in Georgia – a state key to his victory

President promoted his \$4tn plans to rebuild crumbling US infrastructure and expand the social safety net at drive-in rally

01:55

Joe Biden's 100 days in office rally interrupted by protesters – video

[David Smith](#) in Washington

[@smithinamerica](#)

Thu 29 Apr 2021 20.24 EDT

On his 100th day as US president, [Joe Biden](#) spontaneously lowered his black face mask, leaned towards the microphone and shouted: “Go Georgia, we need you!”

It was a fitting moment in a state that has more claim than most to be the ground zero of a potentially transformative presidency.

Biden had just marked the 100-day milestone with [a drive-in rally in Duluth](#), about 30 miles north of Atlanta, to promote his \$4tn plans to rebuild America’s crumbling infrastructure and vastly expand the government’s social safety net.

Troubled by a cough, and briefly interrupted by protesters demanding an end to private prisons, the president gave an abridged version of [his speech to a joint session of Congress](#) the previous evening.

[‘Crisis into opportunity’: Biden lays out vision for sweeping change in speech to Congress](#)

[Read more](#)

But he paid particular attention – and gratitude – to an audience that has played an outsized role in the making of his administration.

Towards the end of his campaign, he visited Warm Springs, the Georgia town that helped Franklin Roosevelt cope with polio. Come election day, Biden became, by a narrow margin, the first Democrat to win Georgia since Bill Clinton in 1992.

Then on 5 January, unexpected runoff wins by Jon Ossoff and Raphael Warnock in Georgia gave Democrats the balance of power in the Senate. If Republicans had retained control, Biden's first hundred days would have looked very different.

Jonathan Alter, the author of *The Defining Moment: FDR's Hundred Days and the Triumph of Hope*, said on Thursday: "Without the Georgia runoffs, you would not have that transformational presidency. It would be a completely different story. If 6 January is an important date in American history, so is 5 January because of those Georgia runoffs and none of what's happening would be possible without 5 January."

Ossoff and Warnock joined Biden and the first lady, Jill Biden, on stage at Thursday night's rally. The four joined hands and held them aloft as the song (Your Love Keeps Lifting Me) Higher and Higher boomed from loudspeakers.



Joe Biden greets Senator Raphael Warnock at a rally in Duluth, Georgia.
Photograph: Evan Vucci/AP

Georgia has become a bellwether in a nationwide battle over voting rights. More than a hundred corporations, as well as civil rights organisers and sports leagues, spoke out against restrictions passed by Georgia's Republican state legislature. Biden condemned the curbs as "just wrong" and called for Congress to pass nationwide protections.

Last month Atlanta was the scene of [a mass shooting](#) in which eight people died, including six women of Asian descent, helping prompt Biden to take executive actions for gun safety and denounce hate crimes.

Long a Republican stronghold, Georgia is now a diversifying swing state that will feature closely watched races for Senate and governor next year. It will almost certainly be one of the most competitive states during the 2024 presidential campaign.

With a US national flag behind him, Biden told supporters gathered around vehicles: "Because of you, we passed one of the most consequential rescue bills in American history ... You changed America. You began to change America and you're helping us prove America can still deliver for the people."

That meant, he said, a hundred days that included the creation of 1.3m jobs, more than other president in history over the same period. It meant food and rental assistance, loans for small businesses and an expansion of healthcare. And, he said, the US is on course to cut child poverty in half this year.

The president went on to tout the biggest jobs plan since the second world war, building infrastructure, replacing lead pipes to ensure clean drinking water and expanding broadband internet to rural areas.

Tackling the climate crisis, Biden added, will “create millions of good paying jobs”, going on to repeat a line from his address to Congress: “There is simply no reason why the blades for wind turbines can’t be built in Pittsburgh instead of Beijing.”

Biden also pushed his new \$1.8tn families plan that includes free universal preschool, free community college and support for childcare. “I was a single dad for five years,” he said, recalling the death of his first wife in a car crash and how he had to depend on family members because he could not afford outside help.

Republicans have questioned how Biden intends to pay for his bold plans. He insisted: “It’s real simple. It’s about time the very wealthy and corporations started paying their fair share ... No one making under \$400,000 a year is going to pay a single additional penny in tax.”

In an emotional finale, Biden told the crowd: “Folks, it’s only been a hundred days but I have to tell you, I’ve never been more optimistic about the future in America.” America’s on the move again. We’re choosing hope over fear, truth over lies, light over darkness.

Biden, who has further campaign-style stops planned in Pennsylvania and Virginia in coming days, is enjoying popular support in opinion polls. A survey by [Navigator Research](#) found positive approval among 86% of Democrats, 61% of independents and even 59% of Republicans. Two-thirds of the public believe Biden’s pandemic-related policies have had a positive impact.

Navigator also conducted three online focus groups with low-income Republicans and Democrats across the ideological spectrum in Florida, Nevada and Texas. The comments included a man from Florida saying, “I don’t feel like I have to doom scroll through my feed to see what the next thing is,” and a Nevada man commenting, “Almost immediately as soon he took office, everything just kind of calmed down and everyone’s like, ‘OK, we have a normal person there’.”



People cheer as Biden speaks in Georgia, a state that was critical to his 2020 victory. Photograph: Evan Vucci/AP

But Republicans in Congress have condemned Biden’s spending spree, suggesting that he is exploiting the pandemic to smuggle in liberal imperatives and that his promise of bipartisanship rings hollow.

Mitch McConnell, the Senate minority leader, told Fox News: “We’re friendly. We’ve done deals together in the past. However, the reason we’re not talking now is because he’s not trying to do anything remotely close to moderate.

“Think of it as the Biden bait-and-switch. He ran as a moderate, but everything he’s recommended so far has been hard left. Bernie Sanders is really happy. He may have lost a nomination, but he won the argument over

what today's Democratic party is – more taxes, more spending, more borrowing.”

Earlier on Thursday, the Bidens visited former president Jimmy Carter, 96, and his 93-year-old wife, Rosalynn, at their home in Plains, Georgia. It was at least the third occasion this month on which Biden has spoken with one of his predecessors, following conversations with George W Bush and Barack Obama about withdrawing troops from Afghanistan.

Biden was the first senator to endorse Carter for president in 1976. Carter's defeat to Republican Ronald Reagan in 1980 ushered in an era in which calls for smaller government and lower taxes for big business and the wealthy were embraced as key to economic growth.

Alter, also the author of the [Carter biography His Very Best](#), said: “Biden wants to have a foreign policy that's based on human rights and that goes back to Jimmy Carter.

“He doesn't want to have an Iranian hostage crisis but in terms of the aspirations for American leadership in the world, and standing up for American values in the world, that really does date from Jimmy Carter, who is no longer in bad odour in the United States, particularly in the Democratic party where in the past Democratic nominees have not really been thrilled to be associated with Carter because he lost in a landslide.

“But that was more than 40 years ago. The sting of Reagan's landslide has worn off and part of what Biden is selling is a partial return to the pre-Reagan political universe.”

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US immigration

US supreme court gives hope to long-term immigrants in deportation ruling

In 6-3 decision that split conservative bloc, justices faulted government in case of man from Guatemala who entered US without papers



The justices' decision, while a technical issue, the ruling could affect hundreds of thousands of immigration cases. Photograph: Jonathan Ernst/Reuters

The justices' decision, while a technical issue, the ruling could affect hundreds of thousands of immigration cases. Photograph: Jonathan Ernst/Reuters

Reuters

Thu 29 Apr 2021 17.05 EDT

The [US supreme court](#) on Thursday offered new hope to thousands of long-term immigrants seeking to avoid deportation in a ruling that faulted the

federal government for improperly notifying a man who came to the United States from Guatemala to appear for a removal hearing.

[New York Post reporter quits citing pressure to write incorrect story about Kamala Harris](#)

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The justices, in a 6-3 decision that divided the high court's conservative bloc, overturned a lower court's decision that had prevented Augusto Niz-Chavez from pursuing his request to cancel the attempted expulsion based on the length of time he had lived in the United States. He lives in Michigan with his family after entering the United States illegally in 2005.

The justices decided that federal immigration law requires authorities to include all relevant details for a notice to appear for a hearing in one document rather than sending the information across multiple documents. While a technical issue, the ruling could affect hundreds of thousands of immigration cases.

“In this case, the law's terms ensure that, when the federal government seeks a procedural advantage against an individual, it will at least supply him with a single and reasonably comprehensive statement of the nature of the proceedings against him,” Neil Gorsuch wrote in the ruling.

Gorsuch was joined by the court's three liberal justices as well as the conservative justices Clarence Thomas and Amy Coney Barrett.

In a dissent, Brett Kavanaugh, joined by John Roberts and Samuel Alito, said the ruling was “perplexing as a matter of statutory interpretation and common sense”.

The ruling upends years of practice by the US Department of Homeland Security and in the short term will slow down the number of people placed in immigration proceedings, said the Cornell University immigration law professor Stephen Yale-Loehr.

For many, Yale-Loehr added, “it does give them a second chance to try to prove that they qualify for cancellation of removal and other forms of

relief”.

Under federal law, immigrants who are not lawful permanent residents may apply to have their deportation canceled if they have been in the United States for at least 10 years. The time counted to reach that threshold ends when the government initiates immigration proceedings with a notice to appear, a limit known as the “stop-time” rule.

In 2013, eight years after he entered the country, police stopped Niz-Chavez for a broken tail-light on his vehicle. The federal government followed up with a notice to appear for a deportation hearing.

After the supreme court in 2018 found in another case that notices to appear that omitted the time and date of the hearing were deficient, Niz-Chavez cited his faulty notice to argue that the stop-time rule had not been triggered in his case.

The Cincinnati-based sixth US circuit court of appeals ruled against him in 2019, saying that the relevant information can be sent in more than one document. The supreme court overturned that ruling.

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[Rights and freedomLibya](#)

‘Cruel’ trafficker accused of torturing refugees found guilty in Ethiopia

Tewelde Goitom reportedly ran a brutal and lucrative trade extorting migrants desperate to reach Europe from Libya



Witnesses gather following a hearing in the smuggling trials in Addis Ababa’s federal court in October. Photograph: Sally Hayden

Witnesses gather following a hearing in the smuggling trials in Addis Ababa’s federal court in October. Photograph: Sally Hayden

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HUMANITY UNITED

[About this content](#)

By Kaleab Girma and [Sally Hayden](#) in Ethiopia

Fri 30 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

One of north Africa's most notorious human traffickers, accused of extorting and torturing thousands of refugees and migrants in Libya, has been found guilty on five counts of smuggling and trafficking in [Ethiopia](#).

Tewelde Goitom, known as “Welid”, operated in Libya between roughly 2014 and 2018 and is thought to have been at the heart of a highly lucrative and brutal trade trafficking desperate migrants trying to reach [Europe](#).



Tewelde Goitom, known as ‘Welid’, is thought to have been at the heart of a highly lucrative trade in people trafficking. Photograph: Handout

Goitom was arrested in Ethiopia in March 2020, one month after one of his co-conspirators, another well-known trafficker, Kidane Zekarias Habtemariam, was also arrested. They are both originally from Eritrea.

The two men shared a compound in Bani Walid, a Libyan town nicknamed the “ghost city” by migrants, because of its lawlessness and the large number of people who disappeared there.

According to dozens of victims, the two traffickers held thousands of migrants captive for ransom.

Habtemariam was detained after an Ethiopian victim, who had returned to Addis Ababa from Libya through a UN repatriation programme, recognised him on the street in early 2020. He was put on trial, [but escaped detention in mid-February](#) 2021 before a verdict had been passed. The police officer who was guarding him has been arrested, and Ethiopia’s attorney general’s office said an investigation is ongoing. Habtemariam was later found guilty on eight charges in absentia.

There has been little international attention on the trials, which have taken place without observers from human rights organisations or European

embassies present in court. Remote testifying was also not allowed, meaning that most victims – scattered across Europe and [Africa](#) – were not able to give evidence.

Meron Estefanos, an Eritrean journalist and activist, said the verdict against Goitom should have attracted more attention. “Welid is one of the cruellest human traffickers [and] committed unimaginable crimes against Eritrean refugees. This verdict is significant in sending an unequivocal message to other traffickers that they can’t hide from being apprehended.”



Kidane Zekarias Habtemariam escaped detention in mid-February.
Photograph: Handout

Despite this, she said she has no confidence in the Ethiopian justice system. “I fear that Welid will be able to bribe [them] and run away from prison, like Kidane.”

Her concerns were shared by refugees who travelled through Libya and knew Goitom personally.

“It is better if the court transferred him to Europe,” said an Eritrean victim, who said he was held captive by Goitom for six months and forced to pay \$3,600 (£2,600) in ransoms. “Since he owns [a] huge amount of money it is

simple [for him] to pay [his way out]. That's why most of us are afraid. He can flee from Ethiopia.”

The witnesses who did testify were all Ethiopian. Some said they were scared for their lives, but desperately wanted justice to be done. Many said they had travelled to Libya because they were promised that they would reach Europe quickly for an agreed fee. Once they got to the north African country, the prices were increased and they realised there was no guarantee they would even be put in a boat to try to cross the Mediterranean Sea.

[A mayday call, a dash across the Mediterranean ... and 130 souls lost at sea](#)
[Read more](#)

Instead, they were held in warehouses for as long as 18 months. Each day, they were forced to call their families, who transferred thousands of pounds to Goitom or Habtemariam in order to save their lives. The longer it took to pay, the more they were abused and beaten. Some said their friends were killed or died from medical neglect.

“I was close to losing my sanity,” said one man who testified in court. “My friend attempted to hang himself. We were hopeless and surrounded by concrete and snipers.”

In court, victims said the two traffickers forced captives to play football matches against each other and shot at players who missed goals.



A victim shows a scar from his time with smugglers in Libya. Photograph: Sally Hayden

Witnesses in both trials said they were offered bribes not to testify. A musician and alleged associate of Habtemariam's, Ethiopian singer-songwriter [Tarekegn Mulu, has since been arrested](#) and accused of attempting to pressure witnesses.

The Guardian requested an interview with Goitom but the request was declined.

Goitom was convicted under the name Amanuel Yirga Damte, which victims say is a false identity. He will be sentenced on 21 May.

In the UK and Ireland, [Samaritans](#) can be contacted on 116 123 or email jo@samaritans.org or jo@samaritans.ie. Other international helplines can be found at www.befrienders.org

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[Islamic State](#)

Iraqi Kurds plan special court to try suspected Islamic State fighters

Kurdish parliament legislation could lead to trial of Isis suspects detained across Middle East and beyond



Men suspected of being affiliated with the Islamic State terror group are held in a prison cell in Syrian city of Hasakeh. Photograph: Fadel Senna/AFP/Getty Images

Men suspected of being affiliated with the Islamic State terror group are held in a prison cell in Syrian city of Hasakeh. Photograph: Fadel Senna/AFP/Getty Images

[Martin Chulov](#) *Middle East correspondent*

Fri 30 Apr 2021 00.00 EDT

Iraqi Kurdish officials plan to establish a special criminal court to prosecute accused [Islamic State](#) (Isis) members in a move that could lead to senior

members of the terror group being brought to Iraq to face trial.

Legislation introduced to the Kurdish parliament on Wednesday has raised the possibility that suspects detained in the years since the [extremist group's collapse](#) could be transferred to a court in the northern city of Erbil to be prosecuted with international backing.

While the court will initially deal with suspects accused of committing crimes inside [Iraq](#), political leaders in Erbil have flagged the potential for it also to be used to try members detained across the Middle East and beyond.

The legislation has been drafted with the support of the [United Nations](#) unit Unitad, which was set up to bring Isis suspects to justice. However, the global body has not provided funding to establish the court.

The prime minister of the Kurdish regional government, Masrour Barzani, said that, once passed, “the laws will create the necessary legal framework to prosecute Isis terrorists for their crimes against our peoples and humanity at large. The KRG [Kurdish regional government], Iraq and the international community have a solemn duty to hold Isis terrorists accountable.”

The Unitad special adviser, Karim Khan QC, said the organisation was supporting a parallel process in the national parliament in Baghdad.

“Similar legislation ensuring the investigation and prosecution of [Isis] for international crimes in Iraqi courts is currently progressing through the federal parliament,” he said. “Unitad has provided technical assistance and support to this legislation as well, and looks forward to its adoption as soon as possible.”



Men suspected of being Isis fighters captured by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces in group's last holdout of Baghouz in March 2019. Photograph: Bülent Kılıç/AFP/Getty Images

Senior officials say that while the Kurdish hearings will initially focus on those already in local custody, consideration is being given to transferring suspects held outside Iraq and placing them on trial under local law. Such a move would be a first in global attempts to hold Isis members to account, and whether jurisdictional and other legal issues could be resolved beforehand remains unclear.

What to do with Isis members, many of whom are being held in prisons or [detention centres across the Middle East](#), has vexed regional governments and raised security concerns in Europe and the US, where officials have been urging judicial solutions for thousands of accused members in custody.

Up to 40,000 people who led the remnants of the so-called Isis caliphate when it was [defeated on the battlefields of eastern Syria in early 2019](#) remain in two detention centres run by Syrian Kurds. Despite demands that the camps be closed and many detainees moved to Iraq, Baghdad and Erbil – the capital of the semi-autonomous Kurdish north, have been unable to agree on a location.

Kurdish officials have insisted that any relocated camp, which would be composed largely of accused Iraqi Isis members and their families, should be in the deserts of Anbar province and far from their borders.

Officials in Baghdad wanted the new camps to be established in the north, near where Isis forces overran Mosul and the Nineveh plains from 2014, leaving its people scattered and enslaved and much of the landscape torched.

[Inside the Iraqi courts sentencing foreign Isis fighters to death](#)
[Read more](#)

Thousands of accused Isis members have been detained in Iraq, with many brought before local courts in circumstances described by human rights groups as sham trials in which [death sentences have frequently been passed after proceedings that lasted 15 minutes](#) and with no statements from the accused.

In addition, large numbers of Sunni Muslims had until recently remained interned in camps in both the Kurdish north and adjoining Arab areas, unable to return to their homes or unwilling to do so for fear of persecution by the Shia militias that hold sway over their former neighbourhoods.

Many of those camps were forcibly closed late last year, with their occupants either seeking shelter elsewhere in Iraq or choosing to return to their towns and villages, where they faced uneasy or hostile receptions.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/30/iraqi-kurds-plan-special-court-try-suspected-islamic-state-fighters>

Headlines thursday 29 april 2021

- [Exclusive World will lose 10% of glacier ice even if it hits climate targets](#)
- [End of the ice New Zealand's vanishing glaciers](#)
- [Interactive Our disappearing glaciers - then and now](#)
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[Our disappearing glaciers](#)Environment

World will lose 10% of glacier ice even if it hits climate targets

Exclusive: loss is equivalent to more than 13,200 cubic kilometres of water or 10m Wembley Stadiums

- [Visualised: glaciers then and now](#)



Research suggests 1.9 billion people are at risk of mountain water shortages, most of them in China and India. Photograph: Alamy

Research suggests 1.9 billion people are at risk of mountain water shortages, most of them in China and India. Photograph: Alamy

[Jonathan Watts](#) *Global environment editor*

[@jonathanwatts](#)

Thu 29 Apr 2021 05.22 EDT

A tenth of the world's mountain glacier ice will have melted by the middle of this century even if humanity meets the goals of the Paris climate agreement, according to figures compiled exclusively for the Guardian.

The loss is equivalent to more than 13,200 cubic kilometres of water – enough to fill Lake Superior, or more than 10m Wembley Stadiums – with knock-on effects on highly populated river deltas, wildlife habitats and sea levels.

[Visualised: glaciers then and now](#)
[Read more](#)

In some particularly hard-hit areas, including central Europe, North America and low latitudes, glacier mass is expected to decline by more than half.

Scientists said the overwhelming bulk of this melt-off, which does not include Greenland or Antarctica, is unavoidable because it has been locked in by the global heating caused by humans in recent years.

However, they say the actions governments take today – including the recent announcements of more ambitious emissions-cutting goals by the US, the UK and others – can make a big difference to the landscape in the second half of this century.

“What we see in the mountains now was caused by greenhouse gases two or three decades ago,” said the glaciologist Ben Marzeion from the University of Bremen. “In one way, we could see it as a doomsday because it is already too late to stop many glaciers melting. But it is also important that people are aware of how decisions taken now can affect how our world will look two or three generations from now.”

Marzeion extracted the data from a [synthesis last year](#) of more than 100 computer models generated by research institutes around the world.

These studies projected various possible behaviours of the planet's roughly 200,000 mountain glaciers, depending on different emissions pathways and weather circulation patterns.

The compiled results are considered the most accurate estimate yet of how mountains will lose their white snow-caps and blue ice-rivers.

Between 2021 and 2050, Marzeion calculated the average mass loss over the various scenarios is 13,200 Gt. This is equivalent to melting almost five Olympic swimming pools of ice every second over the next 30 years.



View from a remote ice cave in the Eagle glacier in Juneau, Alaska. Photograph: Becky Bohrer/AP

Aggressive emissions cuts would barely slow this. The difference between the best and worst-case scenarios was less than 20%. The remaining 80% is already locked in.

That contrasts with projections for the second half of the century, when the decisions taken now will make a huge difference. In a low-emissions scenario, current glacier mass is projected to diminish by about 18% by 2100, which would be a slowdown. By contrast, in a high-emissions scenario, the loss would accelerate to reach 36%.

This has multiple consequences. Mountain glacier melt contributes more than a third of sea-level rise, a higher contribution than the Antarctic, according to [the latest European State of the Climate Report](#), which was

released last week. This is steadily raising the risk of floods and inundations along coastal regions and rivers.

Depending on how quickly emissions can be cut, the extra runoff is likely to add 79-159mm to sea levels by 2100, according to the synthesis paper.

At a local and regional level, it can also reduce the stability of river systems. On a seasonal level, Alpine glaciers help to regulate water supply by storing precipitation in winter and releasing it in summer.

But as they melt away over decades due to global heating, more downstream areas will first experience a water boom, then a bust. [Previous studies suggest](#) 1.9 billion people are at risk of mountain water shortages, most of them in China and India.

The urgency varies according to altitude, ice thickness, weather patterns and a host of other factors. Lower mountain ranges, such as the European Alps or the Pyrenees, are expected to be among the worst affected. In Switzerland and Italy, there are already cases of famous glaciers retreating rapidly or melting completely.

Scientists predict there could even be more glaciers in the world by 2050 because many of the current big bodies of ice will split into smaller fragments, but they stress the number and area of glaciers is less important than the trends affecting mass and volume over decades.

“It is very important to think long term,” said Samuel Nussbaumer of the World Glacier Monitoring Service and the University of Zurich. “Glaciers have a long memory.”

[Elle Hunt](#), [Nick Evershed](#), [Dave Fanner](#) and [Andy Ball](#)

When Cliff Goodwin first came to Franz Josef he didn't know what a glacier was. It was 2001, and Goodwin had been travelling down the length of [New Zealand](#) from his hometown Taranaki, doing odd jobs: fruit picking, housekeeping. "I worked until I had \$1,000, then I travelled until I had \$100," he says.

Goodwin had been intending to top up his bank account, then go. But soon after arriving in Franz Josef – on the West Coast of the South Island, at the foot of the Southern Alps – he went to see the town's biggest draw for himself.

A short drive into the valley, Goodwin was confronted by the bright white face of the glacier: a thick seam of ice churning its way down from the mountains and into the stony riverbed below. The sight of snow was almost startling, so close to the ocean – the glacier terminates only 20km from the Tasman Sea – and so close up.

But Goodwin was not content just to look. "I did what most young boys did: jumped over the barriers, went and walked on the ice, and had a great old time," he says. "It was awesome. I didn't have any shoes on, either."

Soon afterwards, Goodwin got a job as a glacier guide – and one season turned into many. Now he and his wife Tash run their own company, taking nature walking tours through the glacier valley.

What drew Goodwin in was the local history – stories of the glacier's storming advances, sometimes so fast that snow would swallow shoes left at its base within a day; and the subsequent periods of retreat, revealing gear and paths from the past.

On the computer in his office, Goodwin has collected thousands of photos of the glacier, dating back to the late 19th century and its early days as a tourist destination.

“I fell in love with the glacier a long time ago – I think just because it’s moving, it’s living, it’s changing,” he says. “You can try and understand it, predict it, know what it’s going to do next.”

By nature, glaciers go through phases of advance and retreat. But lately these immense bodies of ice – so vast and ancient as to have carved the surface of the Earth – have been losing ground in a warming world.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/ng-interactive/2021/apr/29/end-of-the-ice-new-zealands-vanishing-glaciers>

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[Our disappearing glaciers](#) [Glaciers](#)

Visualised: glaciers then and now

Explore an interactive database that reveals how the climate crisis is reshaping glaciers around the world

Thu 29 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 29 Apr 2021 03.26 EDT

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[Our disappearing glaciers](#)Glaciers

Speed at which world's glaciers are melting has doubled in 20 years

Glacier melt contributing more to sea-level rise than loss of Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets, say experts



Portage glacier in Chugach National Forest in Alaska. The US state accounted for 25% of global glacier loss Photograph: Yereth Rosen/Reuters

Portage glacier in Chugach National Forest in Alaska. The US state accounted for 25% of global glacier loss Photograph: Yereth Rosen/Reuters

[Jonathan Watts](#) and [Niko Kommenda](#)

Wed 28 Apr 2021 11.00 EDT

The melting of the world's glaciers has nearly doubled in speed over the past 20 years and contributes more to sea-level rise than either the Greenland or Antarctic ice sheets, according to the most comprehensive global study of ice rivers ever undertaken.

Scientists say human-driven global heating is behind the accelerating loss of high-altitude and high-latitude glaciers, which will affect coastal regions across the planet and create boom-and-bust flows of meltwater for the hundreds of millions of people who live downstream of these “natural water towers”.

Between 2000 and 2019, glaciers lost 267 gigatonnes (Gt) of ice per year, equivalent to 21% of sea-level rise, [reveals a paper published in Nature](#). The authors said the mass loss was equivalent to submerging the surface of England under 2 metres of water every year.

This was 47% higher than the contribution of the melting ice sheet in Greenland and more than twice that from the ice sheet in Antarctica. As a cause of sea-level rise, glacier loss was second only to thermal expansion, which is prompted by higher ocean temperatures.

[glacier mass loss graphic](#)

The authors found the pace of glacier thinning outside of Greenland and Antarctica picking up from about a third of a metre per year in 2000 to two-thirds in 2019. This is equivalent to an acceleration of 62Gt per year each decade.

The study uses historical Nasa satellite data and new statistical methods to construct three-dimensional topographies going back 20 years and covering 99.9% of the world's glaciers. The result is the most accurate and comprehensive assessment of the world's 217,175 glaciers to date.

Scientists said the precision of the data allowed them to be more certain than before that glacier loss is enormous and accelerating. Previous estimates of mass loss were about 20% more negative, but those had an even greater margin of error because they were either extrapolated from ground measurements at a few hundred reference glaciers and a limited coverage of satellite imagery, or based on the study of gravimetric signals which have a coarse resolution.

On average, the paper found glaciers lost 4% of their volume over 20 years. But the picture varied across time and from region to region.

Alaska accounted for 25% of the global mass loss, the Greenland periphery 12% and north and south Canada 10% each. The Himalayas and other parts of high-mountain Asia lost 8%, as did the southern Andes and subantarctic regions.



The Lower Theodul glacier, near the Matterhorn mountain in Switzerland. Photograph: Fabrice Coffrini/AFP/Getty Images

Smaller, lower glaciers did not contribute as much in volume, but they were the most vulnerable to change. The thinning of New Zealand's glaciers increased seven-fold between 2000-04 and 2015-19. Thinning rates in the European Alps were twice the global average.

The lead author, Romain Hugonnet, of the University of Toulouse, said the data was an urgent warning. "A doubling of the thinning rates in 20 years for glaciers outside Greenland and Antarctica tells us we need to change the way we live. We need to act now," he said. "It can be difficult to get the public to understand why glaciers are important because they seem so remote, but they affect many things in the global water cycle including regional hydrology, and by changing too rapidly, can lead to the alteration or collapse of downstream ecosystems."

Living in Switzerland, he feared future generations would not be able to enjoy the Alps as he has done. “It’s beautiful now but it will get more and more dry. If there are no glaciers, there will be less water in times of drought at the end of summer. For the first time, you might not see green grass in Switzerland,” he said. “The glaciers in the Alps are not thick and are [some of the] fastest melting in the world. That will continue until there is nothing left. How fast depends on different climate scenarios, but at current speed, 80-90% will be gone by 2050. That means we will lose almost everything, except the biggest glaciers.”

His greatest concern was in high Asian mountain ranges, which are the source of rivers such as the Yangtze, Mekong, Salween and Brahmaputra, which support large downstream populations. The paper urges policymakers to design adaptive policies for the billion people who could face water shortages and food insecurity before 2050, as well as for the more than 200 million who live in coastal areas threatened by rising water levels before the end of the century.



A Kashmiri villager walks past what used to be a pond holding drinking water in the village of Chandigam in the Lolab valley in the foothills of the northern Kashmir Himalayas, where glaciers are melting fast. Photograph: Tauseef Mustafa/AFP/Getty Images

“India and China are depleting underground sources and relying on river water, which substantially originates from glaciers during times of drought. This will be fine for a few decades because glaciers will keep melting and provide more river runoff, which acts as a buffer to protect populations from water stress. But after these decades, the situation could go downhill. If we do not plan ahead, there could be a crisis for water and food, affecting the most vulnerable.”

Samuel Nussbaumer, of the World Glacier Monitoring Service (WGMS) and the University of Zurich, was not directly involved in the latest assessment but he said it confirmed trends observed over many decades by ground monitoring and satellites. The WGMS previously reported that rates of glacier mass loss have roughly doubled every decade since the 1970s.

“The new paper will have a big impact. This is the most global, complete study. The gain in new information is huge,” he said. “The rapid change we see now is really interesting from a scientific point of view. Never before in history has change happened this fast.

“But on a personal level, it is sad to see. [Glaciers](#) are very dynamic. If temperatures were to drop, they would regrow. But what is happening today is that human causes are leading to long-term destruction even in these remote regions where there are no humans.”

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2021.04.29 - Coronavirus

- ['We are witnessing a crime against humanity' Arundhati Roy on India's Covid catastrophe](#)
- ['It's everywhere you look' Guardian readers in India on the Covid crisis](#)
- [US Citizens advised to leave India 'as soon as it is safe'](#)
- [Analysis Dispute casts shadow over China's offers of help for India](#)

‘We are witnessing a crime against humanity’: Arundhati Roy on India’s Covid catastrophe

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2021/apr/28/crime-against-humanity-arundhati-roy-india-covid-catastrophe>

[India](#)

‘It’s everywhere you look’: Guardian readers in India on the Covid crisis

People in India or with relatives there describe their experiences of the country’s coronavirus surge

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



Relatives of Covid patients wait outside a hospital in Delhi. Photograph: Tauseef Mustafa/AFP/Getty Images

Relatives of Covid patients wait outside a hospital in Delhi. Photograph: Tauseef Mustafa/AFP/Getty Images

[Molly Blackall](#)

Thu 29 Apr 2021 03.28 EDT

“It’s like we are in the middle of the apocalypse,” says 40-year-old Pia Desai, who lives in New Delhi, at the centre of the coronavirus crisis that has brought India’s healthcare system to its knees.

“Every family I know has been affected by Covid. It’s like a horror movie, everywhere you turn someone is asking for medicine, help with a hospital bed, food, plasma. It doesn’t matter who you are right now, you won’t get a hospital bed.”

Desai is in the 10th day of self-isolation with her family, after she and her husband tested positive for the virus. She cannot taste or smell, but counts herself as lucky. “I think I got a mild strain,” she says.

[Arundhati Roy on India’s Covid catastrophe: ‘We are witnessing a crime against humanity’](#)

[Read more](#)

“My best friend’s mother-in-law was on a ventilator in a Delhi hospital, we ran around trying to get the right medication. The government says they’ve taken over distribution, but there’s absolutely none available,” says Desai, who runs a PR firm. “We searched on social media to find someone who had it in stock, but you could only find it on the black market and the prices were astronomical. You try to do what you can to help but it’s like a shot glass trying to bail out the Titanic.”

Her friend’s mother-in-law passed away on Wednesday morning. The family have been told the crematorium is full, with a backlog of two days. Desai is upset that she cannot be there for her best friend.

“I know so many people who are in hospital at the moment,” she says. It’s everywhere you look.”



Pia Desai, pictured ‘in happier times’ prior to the pandemic. Photograph: Pia Desai/Guardian Community

The story of Desai and her friend is echoed by many who got in touch with the Guardian via a callout. India set a new record with 379,257 new Covid cases in the 24 hours to Thursday morning, according to the health ministry.

In Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, in the north of the country, 21-year-old Kinjal Pandey and her family have experienced the healthcare collapse first-hand. The whole family developed Covid symptoms and her father required oxygen but they couldn’t find any. They used connections – a friend of a friend who is a retired bureaucrat – to obtain some, but Pandey says she is painfully aware that most are not as fortunate.

“I don’t understand how other people are getting through,” says Pandey, who works in finance. “Lots of people are relying on Twitter and Instagram stories [to source oxygen] but a lot of those leads go back to the black market. Lots of people are struggling with the economic side of Covid, so don’t even realise they’re not well. Their biggest problem is not having food, so it doesn’t matter if you have a fever.”

According to health experts, the official number of coronavirus cases in India is [likely to be a vast underestimate](#), in part due to low testing. This is a

problem Pandey has seen in Uttar Pradesh.

When she and her family developed symptoms about 10 days ago, she called 15 local hospitals and testing centres but none would allow them to drive to get tested, or collect samples from their house. When they did get tests, the results were all negative, despite them all having symptoms fitting coronavirus and her father's oxygen levels dropping to 83.

According to Pandey, close family friends of theirs were tested at the same lab and also got negative results. Now, she says, two members of that family are on oxygen. "I wouldn't be surprised if the numbers are a tenth of what they are. Everyone is infected, everyone is sick."



Alan D'Mello, pictured before the pandemic. Photograph: Alan D'Mello/Guardian Community

In other regions of India, many are anxiously watching the spread of the virus.

"Not everywhere in India is as badly affected as Delhi, but it's getting there," says Alan D'Mello, a hotelier and chef who lives in Mumbai. "All possible beds are fully occupied, and no matter how much money you have, there are no beds available as we speak. The allocation of beds is not

systematic, because the system has broken down. Many colleagues and [people in my] larger network are now battling for their lives.”

D’Mello and his wife are both immunocompromised. D’Mello has asthma and had pneumonia twice, along with bronchitis. In their apartment block, two families have the virus, and the couple hope it doesn’t reach them. “It is a guarantee it’ll get worse in a few places,” D’Mello says.

Around them, restaurants and offices are closed, public gatherings are banned, but social distancing isn’t always followed. “It’s alarming that people will crowd around,” he says. “Even three people next to us is dangerous.”



Sunaina Mathapati. Photograph: Sunaina Mathapati/Guardian Community

The situation in India is reaching families and diasporas across the world. In West Yorkshire, 17-year-old A-level student Sunaina Mathapati said she feels “helpless”. Her aunt is in intensive care in Karnataka with coronavirus.

“All my extended family is India. All my relatives, everyone. A few family members have got Covid, and my aunt had to wait a few hours before she could get a hospital bed, but others are waiting days, or dying in their cars,” she says. “I worry about my grandparents constantly. It’s a very frightening situation to be in. I’m very upset.”

Mathapati is speaking to her relatives every day, and the family keep local Indian news channels on for constant updates.

“There are people dying on the pavements outside hospitals,” she says. “You hear about it in the news, but when you have family there it’s surreal how real everything is. It’s dystopian, almost.”

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India

US advises citizens to leave India ‘as soon as it is safe’ as Covid cases reach new record

US to send more than \$100m in supplies to India as the crisis continues to grow



A woman breaks down as she brings a patient suffering from a breathing difficulty to receive free oxygen support in India amid the Covid crisis
Photograph: Mayank Makhija/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

A woman breaks down as she brings a patient suffering from a breathing difficulty to receive free oxygen support in India amid the Covid crisis
Photograph: Mayank Makhija/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

Guardian staff and agencies

Thu 29 Apr 2021 02.58 EDT

The US has advised its citizens inside India to leave as soon as it is safe as the country reported [another record day](#) of Covid cases and deaths.

India's health ministry on Thursday said the country had recorded 379,257 new cases and 3,645 new deaths. India's total number of cases and deaths stood at 18.38 million and 204,832.

An alert [on the US embassy website](#) warned that “access to all types of medical care is becoming severely limited in India due to the surge in Covid-19 cases” and noted that deaths had risen sharply.

[Explainer: why is getting medical oxygen for Covid patients in some countries so difficult?](#)

[Read more](#)

“US citizens who wish to depart India should take advantage of available commercial transportation options now,” it said. The Department of State “advises US citizens not to travel to India or to leave as soon as it is safe to do so due to the current health situation in country”.

The move came as the US said it was sending more than \$100m in supplies to India, including nearly 1m instant tests on a first flight.

The country has been in the [grip of an unprecedented crisis](#) with soaring Covid cases and oxygen supplies becoming scarce in some areas. Crematoriums in Delhi have been so overloaded with bodies that they have been forced to build makeshift funeral pyres on spare patches of land.



Mass cremation for Covid-19 victims in Delhi, India. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Many believe the real death toll in the capital and across India is far higher than official figures, not least because those who die at home under quarantine are not officially registered as Covid-19 deaths. Authorities have been accused of skewing the data to downplay the scale of the crisis.

The prime minister, Narendra Modi, has been criticised for allowing massive political rallies and religious festivals that have been super-spreader events in recent weeks.

More than 8.4 million eligible voters are set to cast ballots on Thursday in the last phase of an eight-part election in the eastern Indian state of West Bengal, even as the state witnesses a record rise in coronavirus cases.

“The people of this country are entitled to a full and honest account of what led more than a billion people into a catastrophe,” Vikram Patel, a professor of global health at Harvard Medical School, wrote in the Hindu newspaper.

The White House said the first supply flight would arrive on Thursday in Delhi on a military plane, days after Joe Biden promised to step up assistance.

[India chart](#)

The first shipment includes 960,000 rapid tests, which can detect Covid in 15 minutes, and 100,000 N95 masks for frontline health workers, the US Agency for International Development said.

The White House said total aid on flights in the coming days would be worth more than \$100m and would include 1,000 refillable oxygen cylinders and 1,700 concentrators that produce oxygen for patients from the air.

“Just as India sent assistance to the United States when our hospitals were strained early in the pandemic, the United States is determined to help India in its time of need,” a White House statement said.

[Arundhati Roy on India's Covid catastrophe: 'We are witnessing a crime against humanity'](#)

[Read more](#)

The White House said it was also sending supplies to India to produce more than 20m vaccine doses. The supplies are being diverted from orders to produce the AstraZeneca vaccine, which has not been approved for use in the US.

The White House had promised on Sunday to free up material to let India produce Covishield, its low-cost version of AstraZeneca, after criticism that the US was hogging supply.

Biden said on Monday that the US would also ship overseas up to 60m AstraZeneca vaccine doses that had already been manufactured, but it remained unclear how many would go to India.

India's best hope to curb its second wave is to vaccinate its vast population, experts say, and on Wednesday it opened registrations for everyone above the age of 18 to be given jabs from Saturday.

But the country, which is one of the world's biggest producers of vaccines, does not have the stocks for the estimated 600 million people becoming eligible. Many people who tried to sign up said they failed, complaining on

social media that they could not get a slot or they simply could not get online to register as the website repeatedly crashed.

The government rejected reports of problems with its vaccine campaign. “Statistics indicate that far from crashing or performing slowly, the system is performing without any glitches,” it said in a statement late on Wednesday.

The government said more than 8 million people had registered for the vaccinations, but it was not immediately clear how many had got slots. About 9% of India’s population have received one dose since the vaccination campaign began in January with healthcare workers and then elderly people.

Reuters contributed to this report

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[India](#)

Border dispute casts shadow over China's offers of Covid help for India

Analysis: some in China see India's crisis as a diplomatic opportunity but tensions from last summer remain high



Workers sort oxygen cylinders for hospitals at a facility on the outskirts of Amritsar, India. Photograph: Narinder Nanu/AFP/Getty Images

Workers sort oxygen cylinders for hospitals at a facility on the outskirts of Amritsar, India. Photograph: Narinder Nanu/AFP/Getty Images

[Vincent Ni](#) *China affairs correspondent*

Thu 29 Apr 2021 00.00 EDT

As coronavirus rages across India, its neighbour China has made repeated offers of help. Some are asking whether this could be an occasion to ease the tense relations between the world's two most populous countries following last year's [border skirmishes](#).

China's foreign minister, Wang Yi, said this week that Beijing was "ready to provide support and assistance to the Indian people at any time according to the needs of India". A spokesperson for the Chinese embassy in Delhi said it would "encourage and instruct Chinese companies to actively cooperate".

On Sunday the Chinese embassy in Sri Lanka [tweeted](#): "800 oxygen concentrators have been airlifted today from #HongKong to #Delhi; 10,000 more in a week." A [related hashtag](#) on China's social media site Weibo had been viewed more than 23m times as of Wednesday.

800 Oxygen Concentrators have been airlifted today from [#HongKong](#) to [#Delhi](#) ; 10,000 more in a week.[#China](#) is keeping in touch with [#India](#) for urgent needs.

Stay Strong! ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ [#Solidarity](#) [#IndiaFightsCOVID19](#)
[@China_Amb_India](#) [@IndiainSL](#) <https://t.co/9uOXAfYWKbpic.twitter.com/Ai2uOhAFGy>

— Chinese Embassy in Sri Lanka (@ChinaEmbSL) [April 25, 2021](#)

Beijing has been watching the developments closely in part because of India's proximity. In the last few days, medical experts on state media have been explaining to the public why China should be concerned.


Some analysts, however, see the crisis as an opportunity. "China's statement shows that it does not link the border issue closely with overall relations with India, and that China expects bilateral relations can be improved," Dr Li Hongmei, a researcher at the Shanghai Institute for International Studies, told the South China Morning Post.

China's nationalist tabloid Global Times, meanwhile, seized on the US's short-lived [export ban](#) on vaccine materials to attack Washington's "selfishness". "The US's indifferent response ignited a wave of anti-US sentiment on social media in and out of India," the paper wrote. "The US is not a world leader as it claims but a selfish, irresponsible and unreliable country that plays geopolitics to serve its own interests."

This interpretation was echoed by some critics in India. A former minister, Milind Deora, tweeted on Saturday that the US's initial reluctance to help India was "undermining the strategic Indo-US partnership". The tweet was accompanied by a quote from John F Kennedy: "You cannot negotiate with people who say what's mine is mine and what's yours is negotiable."

By stockpiling vaccines & blocking the export of crucial raw materials needed for vaccine production, the United States is undermining the strategic Indo-US partnership.

Forgotten that India lifted its export ban & shipped 50 million HCQ tablets to help Americans last year? pic.twitter.com/ONQJq5pL1c

— Milind Deora |  (@milinddeora) [April 24, 2021](#)

But Beijing's intervention has had little impact among foreign policy elites in Delhi, according to Srikanth Kondapalli, a China expert at Jawaharlal Nehru University. He said many of India's policymakers instead saw the charm offensive as Beijing's attempt to drive a wedge between Delhi and Washington.

"The bilateral relationship is heavily clouded by the existing Sino-India border issue," he said. "The current situation [on the border] is not normal, and it is at the top of the mind of India's policymakers."

Tension along the border is not new historically. Last year it exploded into [hand-to-hand battle](#) with clubs, rocks and fists on 15 June. Twenty Indian soldiers were confirmed to have died; China's People's Liberation Army said four of its soldiers were killed. In February both countries agreed to disengage in disputed areas, but the latest round of talks this month failed to ease tensions.

[India/China border graphic](#)

The dispute intensified anti-China sentiment in India. In an August poll, nearly 60% of respondents said India should go to war with China to resolve

border tensions, and more than 90% backed banning Chinese apps and denying contracts to Chinese companies.

“The perception in India of last year’s conflict is that the Chinese army took advantage of Covid to launch its incursions,” said Tanvi Madan, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution in Washington, who is also the author of the book *Fateful Triangle: How China Shaped US-India Relations During the Cold War*.

Beijing has consistently rejected this charge. In recent weeks, Chinese diplomats have said the border issue does not represent the whole of China-India relations. China’s ambassador to India has urged both sides to “adhere to equal dialogue, manage and control differences, and resolve them through consultation, so as not to turn differences into disputes”.

Madan said: “This whole saga shows that even in times when countries might have come together in normal times, in a competitive era, geopolitics doesn’t just stay in the geopolitics box. We have seen this with the US-China relations, and now we are seeing this also in China-India relations.”

Additional reporting by Hannah Ellis-Petersen in Delhi

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2021.04.29 - Spotlight

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Women

The big squeeze: welcome to the pelvic floor revolution



Composite: Getty Images

Composite: Getty Images

There are books, podcasts, apps and devices devoted to it. But what's behind this new obsession with a strong pelvic floor?



[Emine Saner](#)

[@eminesaner](#)

Thu 29 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

If you want to know about the wonders of a healthy pelvic floor, you could do worse than look to Coco Berlin, who styles herself “Germany’s most famous belly dancer”. Berlin started belly dancing in 2002, but it wasn’t until a few years later, when she went to Egypt to study dancers there, that she wondered why they were so much better. She concluded they were seriously in touch with their pelvic floor, the internal muscular structure that supports the internal organs and prevents incontinence, among other important functions.

“When I connected to my pelvic floor, for the first time in my life, I had this feeling of embodiment,” Berlin says. It improved her dancing – before, she says, it had felt “like mimicry” – but also affected the rest of her life. She felt more confident, “I had the feeling that I own my body”. Her enjoyment of sex was greatly improved, and she felt stronger and less stressed. She thinks it is a prime reason why people assume she is much younger than she is (she’s 42 and, speaking over Zoom from her home in Germany, she looks like a woman in her 20s).

Berlin is about to release the English translation of her book [Pussy Yoga](#) – I think I see her wince a little at the title – to share her enthusiasm for pelvic floor health. “Normally, the pelvic floor is only something that you get in touch with when you’re pregnant, incontinent or have other issues,” she says. “It was such a fringe topic.”

It certainly has been – blame a historical lack of interest in women’s health, as well as squeamishness about anything to do with sex and bodily functions – but that has been changing in the last few years. The idea of “yoga” for the vagina may be the latest way to target women’s undercarriage, but it comes on the back of an increased number of features in women’s health magazines about pelvic floor exercise, apps launching (the NHS recommends [Squeezy](#), which sets exercise plans and sends reminders) and devices that train you from the inside. One of the best known devices, the [Elvie Trainer](#) – it is inserted into the vagina and you can monitor your exercise achievements on your phone – launched in 2015; the Financial Times recently ranked Elvie 41st out of Europe’s 1,000 fastest-growing companies. There are podcasts, such as [Why Mums Don’t Jump](#), hosted by the broadcast journalist Helen Ledwick, which are aimed at ending the stigma around vaginal prolapse and incontinence and other issues with pelvic floor dysfunction.

Nobody in the world of pelvic floor health would say the increased awareness is a bad thing – up to a third of women will experience a pelvic floor problem – but numerous surveys show many women have no idea what it is or its purpose. One survey of 1,000 women found one in six didn’t know where it was, and a quarter didn’t know what it did.



Coco Berlin ... 'I had the feeling that I own my body.' Photograph: Alex Baker

“It’s a part of the body people haven’t been given nearly enough information about for years,” says [Amanda Savage](#), a pelvic health physiotherapist. “The wonderful thing about pelvic health is there are a lot of things you can do that will improve the situation, through natural methods – exercise, diet, knowing how to help your bowel empty well, knowing how the bladder fills and empties. There’s a lot one can do to help oneself. It’s a shame when people haven’t found out about those things they could be doing, and they are like, ‘Why did nobody tell me this 10 years ago?’”

Celebrities are more likely to be open about pelvic health, Savage says. The TV reality star Ferne McCann has talked about the prolapse she developed after giving birth, and last weekend the comedian Joanne McNally spoke about her pelvic floor on a chatshow.

But could this become yet another body part women are supposed to be anxious about? With our outsides under more scrutiny than ever, do we need to start worrying about the insides too? “I think it’s everything in moderation,” says [Suzanne Hagen](#), professor of health services research at Glasgow Caledonian University, who researches pelvic floor disorders. “I think there has to be raised awareness, probably as young as school age,

about the pelvic floor, what its job is and how it's going to change over time."

There is, she says, increasing evidence to suggest that even if you don't have a problem, pelvic floor exercises could prevent one in future, but adds: "I don't think it's something we should be making women panic about." It is not about "women fixating on another part of their body that they have to have in prime condition. I see it as part of a general healthy lifestyle and looking after your body to take you through its life course."

Pelvic floor exercises (known as Kegels in the US, after the gynaecologist who devised them) are based around contracting and relaxing the muscles that you can use to stop urine mid-flow, which can be a way to identify them, although health professionals don't recommend doing this regularly as it could lead to a urinary infection. In men and women, exercises are used to treat symptoms of incontinence. In men, exercises can also help maintain a strong erection. For women, they can help with pain during sex, as well as issues caused by childbirth such as vaginal prolapse, but Hagen points out that they are "not the answer to everything. Some women do have quite traumatic births and there's a lot of damage done to the pelvic floor, so that's not something that's going to be easily offset by exercises. Some women do need surgery to correct problems."

The pelvic floor is made up of a group of muscles. A weak pelvic floor is an issue, but so is a pelvic floor that is too tight, which can cause problems such as pain during sex and an inability to empty the bladder or bowels. "We need balance in these muscles," says [Lucia Berry](#), a pelvic health physiotherapist and lecturer at Brunel University. We need to be able to relax them to get stuff out (urine and stools) and, if we want to, stuff in.

With a healthy pelvic floor, "what people should really feel is confidence", says Berry. You shouldn't be fearful of leaking urine if you cough, for instance. "You're able to hold urine really well and then, when you get to the toilet, you're able to relax and have a really good wee. And there should be good sensation with sex."

Pregnancy and childbirth can weaken the pelvic floor, as can hormonal changes during menopause, which can also affect women who have never

given birth. In both men and women, ageing is associated with a loss of muscle tone to the area. Your pelvic floor can also be affected by lifting heavy weights, being overweight or having a chronic cough, all of which put pressure on those internal muscles. Chronic constipation also doesn't help.

Although the links aren't fully understood, athletes also seem to be at risk – girls who do a lot of gymnastics, and long-distance runners, can experience symptoms of pelvic floor dysfunction, such as urinary incontinence. A sudden enthusiasm for high-intensity interval training or weight-lifting may come with unwelcome side-effects. You should “build up your foundation muscles – your lower abs and your pelvic floor – first before you add weights and kettlebells”, says Savage. “Sometimes when people have gone at things a bit too quick, they have done what they can see on the outside – they are lifting the weights and haven't thought about what is happening on the inside. And then you could potentially be bringing on pelvic floor symptoms, prolapse or leakage because you haven't realised you've got this mismatch.”

What is starting to become clear is that everyone could benefit from pelvic floor exercises. In women with symptoms of a weak pelvic floor, who have sought treatment, says Berry, a strengthening programme would consist of exercises probably two to three times a day, and it could take up to four months to build strength.



Exercise is key to maintaining a strong pelvic floor. Photograph: Cavan Images/Getty Images/Cavan Images RF

But, if you are in your 20s or 30s without symptoms, how often and for how long should you exercise your pelvic floor? “That’s the million-dollar question,” says Hagen, who adds that there is still little research: “It’s probably a case of trying to do them at a maintenance level if you’re in a non-symptomatic group.”

How much to do would be a personal decision. Going overboard could be counterproductive, says Berry. Anxiety can cause tension in the area, she says, and becoming fixated on the health (or not) of the pelvic floor, combined with really exercising it, can result in a muscle that is too tight or strong. “I don’t know if it’s the exercise that causes the problem, or the anxiety.”

Many people don’t know how to do a pelvic floor exercise correctly (there are resources at [Pelvic Obstetric and Gynaecological Physiotherapy](#)). Berry says it is important to ensure you are doing them correctly, “so you’re not pushing down, bearing down, and making your symptoms worse”. But many women, she points out, can’t move the muscles at all, which could lead to unnecessary anxiety, which in turn could create problems where none should exist.

She advises a self-examination with a mirror. “See if you can squeeze your vagina. The vagina should move – it should close and open. If you can’t see or feel that, you’re probably not doing it right.” However, she says, if you don’t have symptoms, “I wouldn’t worry because those muscles are clearly working to control the bladder and bowel.” (If you do have symptoms, see your GP.)

What all the physiotherapy experts agree on is that you don’t need to buy a device; many cost more than £100. “We did a trial looking at women who already had urinary incontinence. Half had training from a therapist, and half did the therapy but also used a device that measures the squeeze when doing the exercise,” says Hagen. “We wanted to see whether that helped the women do the exercises better, be more motivated to do them, and therefore that their continence might be better in the end. What we found was, on average, there was no difference between the groups. If you’ve got a really good programme of pelvic floor muscle exercise, you don’t need to have a biofeedback gadget.”

“There is no clinical evidence to say that using a device is going to help you get the exercise right,” agrees Berry. “If you can contract your pelvic floor correctly, and do the exercises, you don’t need to spend any money on a device. Other people find it hard to do regularly, so having a device can help with motivation.” Apps that remind you to do the exercises can be used in the same way, says Hagen: “If that’s the way you’re wired and you like those types of things, I think that’s a perfectly good thing to do.”

As for Berlin, she called her book *Pussy Yoga* because although “I’m not a real yogi”, strengthening her pelvic floor “was a spiritual journey for me”. We sit all day, we stare at screens and feel disconnected from our bodies, she says. Berlin doesn’t only do vaginal exercises – “I don’t just squeeze a little bit here and there” – but is so dedicated to her pelvic floor that she does activities, such as dancing and Pilates-inspired movements, throughout the day, and even squats on the loo seat so as not to put pressure on her internal muscles and organs. “I’m very open about this, and I think we have to be, otherwise everybody will just stay in this shame spiral,” she says. (Her advice for feet-on-seat toilet training is “first try a few dry runs so you’ll be ready before it gets serious”. If that’s too adventurous, using a step or stool –

the furniture kind – under your feet can create a more squat-like position than simply sitting.)

“I am a believer of really integrating the pelvic floor in your organism, like it’s the centrepiece,” says Berlin. She promises great, if not wholly researched, results. “The first change is always a deeper connection and more awareness about one’s self. You feel sexier, more vibrant and alive.”

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[Pop and rock](#)

Interview

‘Our ethos was happy music and good vibes’: genre-busting Black British band Osibisa

[Garth Cartwright](#)



Vitality and spontaneity ... Osibisa in the early 1970s. Photograph: Echoes/Redferns

Vitality and spontaneity ... Osibisa in the early 1970s. Photograph: Echoes/Redferns

Jimi Hendrix watched them rehearse, Stevie Wonder joined them on drums, and Fela Kuti partied with them in Lagos. Osibisa, whose African sunshine sound captivated the planet, have now returned

Thu 29 Apr 2021 03.00 EDT

Two Ghanaian pensioners are discussing how they first met, almost 60 years ago, in London's Soho jazz scene. Teddy Osei, a saxophonist and drummer, and Lord Eric Sugumugu, a percussionist, forged a friendship "playing among the diaspora". Sugumugu had a gig with Ginger Johnson and His African Messengers, while Osei played with Dudu Pukwana, the great South African jazz saxophonist. Sugumugu is ebullient, leaping out of his seat to exclaim about their role in making the 60s swing: among many other things, he was part of an African drum troupe the Rolling Stones employed at their [1969 Hyde Park concert](#). Although Osei wasn't there himself, he did join the Stones to perform Brown Sugar on Top of the Pops.

Osei, aged 87, is a stroke survivor, his voice rarely rising above a whisper. But with a new album out, he wants to tell his story as an unsung pioneer: as founder and leader of the band Osibisa. Best known for their two mid-70s hits [Sunshine Day](#) and Dance the Body Music, Osibisa never conformed to genre, mixing Ghanaian highlife music with jazz, soul and rock, and later funk and disco. This hybrid music, drawing from across the diaspora, is exactly what you hear in today's young Black British stars performing drill, Afro-swing and [Afrobeats](#).

[Listen to Sunshine Day by Osibisa](#)

Osei nods in agreement at the suggestion his sound was prescient. "I was born in Kumasi, Ghana's second city, and played highlife with my band the Comets in the 1950s. I shifted to Accra but I wanted to go abroad." He travelled to London in 1962. "I got work in a hotel, washing dishes, and enrolled in evening classes. I played jazz and rock'n'roll, often working with my fellow Africans – we were one community. Back then, there were very few Africans in London. Now it's full up!" He laughs, then adds: "But it's good they all got a chance to come here."



International audience ... Osibisa performing for the BBC. Photograph: David Redfern/Redferns

Leading Cat's Paw, a soul music covers band, Osei worked across Europe until, after an extended sojourn playing Tunisian hotels, he returned to London in 1969 determined to form Osibisa. Their name derived from *osibisaba*, a prewar proto-highlife rhythm. Two of his original bandmates were friends from [Ghana](#), another two were Nigerian.

"I wanted to make a difference to the African music scene," says Osei. "I wanted to make a different sound." Initially so poor the band were forced to rehearse in Osei's Finsbury Park basement flat, it was when three Caribbean musicians joined that Osibisa found their sound. "Wendell Richardson could play rock guitar," explains Osei.

Osibisa quickly made a mark, their dynamic fusion allowing them to play the Roundhouse and Ronnie Scott's alongside African and Caribbean haunts. [Jimi Hendrix](#) dropped in to see them rehearse: "He loved our rhythms. If he'd played with us, he would have lived." But it was Stevie Wonder who, while in London in 1970, was so enamoured by Osibisa he joined them on stage on drums, then helped engineer a record deal.

Stevie Wonder was so enamoured by Osibisa he joined them on stage on drums, then helped them get a record deal

They were managed by Gerry and Lilian Bron, industry veterans who had previously managed the [Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band](#). It was they, says Osei, who insisted on [Tony Visconti](#) producing Osibisa and [Roger Dean](#) designing their LP covers. (Dean later crafted fantastical visions for Yes.) Was it a culture clash, Visconti and Dean being associated with British rock bands? No, says Osei, both men listened to him. “Visconti was leaning on me for suggestions as to how to get the right sound – I love him for that! And Dean asked what kind of ideas I had. I said, ‘Something African’ and suggested an elephant. He drew a flying elephant and it’s been Osibisa’s logo ever since.”



Roger Dean’s flying elephant for the album Woyaya.

The band’s eponymous debut album and follow-up Woyaya, both 1971, were Visconti/Dean efforts that sold strongly internationally and are now regarded as their finest work. [Music for Gong Gong](#), from their debut, quickly became a soul DJ favourite (Louie Vega has remixed it), while a moving interpretation of Rahsaan Roland Kirk’s Spirits Up Above is one of Woyaya’s highlights. I mention this and Osei replies: “Roland Kirk, he jam with us in London.” Seeing I’m impressed, Osei says Osibisa also played

with Sun Ra when the maverick American made his UK debut in 1971. Sugumugu then describes his Belsize Park African music club Iroko – where the Osibisa/Kirk jam took place – as “the place where all Black musicians visiting London headed to. Fela came there!”

The Nigerian star [Fela Kuti](#) is now seen as the pioneer of Afrobeat, but Osei and Sugumugu want to make something clear. “Fela got all his vibes from Ghana,” says Osei. “That’s where he got his rhythms. He then did everything his way – no one could tell him anything. He was a character.”

“Without Osibisa,” adds Sugumugu, “Fela wouldn’t have happened. He had his own beautiful madness.”

Osibisa were the first African band to command an international audience, as well as being hugely popular across their home continent. But, as they developed a pop sound in the mid-70s, the likes of Kuti and [King Sunny. Ade](#) became the dominant figureheads for a new wave of African roots music that would capture international attention in the 80s.

“Fela was very friendly to me, maybe because we both play keyboards,” says Robert Bailey, a co-founder of Osibisa, who remains in the band. “The first time we met him in Lagos, I remember he was so pleased to see all of us.” Bailey was only 19 when he joined, finding “the music fascinating. It was very familiar to me with all the rhythms that I had played and listened to in Trinidad.” Not only did the eight musicians bond but, he says, audiences also responded immediately.



Good vibes ... performing at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, London in 2010.
Photograph: Photoshot/Getty Images

“The ethos was happy music and good vibes. We got on to the student union circuit and shared the bill with many rock groups – [Black Sabbath](#), [Jethro Tull](#) – which was a great experience. I was amazed how fast it all happened. We then toured for four years with an occasional week off. It was fine for a while, but it became exhausting.”

So much so that Bailey first left the band in 1975: Osibisa’s revolving-door policy has seen band members coming and going over the decades. “Teddy’s always been very calm,” says Bailey, “so there has never been any bad blood between us. I’ve taken time out to work as an arranger and bandleader but I love to return to Osibisa. It’s something special – this African and Caribbean music made in London.”

Is it true, I ask, that marijuana played a big part in Osibisa’s sound? “Oh, yeah,” replies Bailey with a laugh. “It’s a spiritual drug and we were heavy smokers.”



Calling the shots ... Teddy Osei in 1974. Photograph: Fin Costello/Redferns

After releasing 1977's *Black Magic Night: Live at the Royal Festival Hall*, Osibisa concentrated on touring, commanding huge audiences across Africa, India (100,000 people attended one concert in Kolkata) and Latin America. Ghanaian guitarist Kari Bannerman joined after Wendell Richardson was drafted into Free, and recalls his first tour with the band being in Thailand. Then they played in Lebanon – “the Israelis had bombed the airport the day we arrived” – and Syria. “People all over the world loved the vitality and spontaneity of the music,” says Bannerman.

We brought Black people together in America, the Caribbean, Africa.
Osibisa gave Africans confidence in their own music

Lord Eric Sugumugu

Indeed, seeing them at the London Barbican in 2015, I was struck by their musical ebullience. That year, Osei also suffered a stroke that stopped him from touring, but at 87 he still calls the shots: while he doesn't play on *New Dawn*, Osibisa's first studio album in 12 years, Osei signed off everything from the songs to the sleeve design. I suggest that contemporary African pop stars [Burna Boy](#) and [Fuse ODG](#) are Osibisa's sonic offspring but the veteran jazzman appears bemused by my suggestion. “They talk,” he says. “Not so

much singing and playing.” Sugumugu, not about to let the moment pass, declares: “Yesterday I listened to Afrobeats on Kiss FM – and they all come from Osibisa!”

What is he most proud of? “Osibisa,” he says, “brought Black people together in America, the Caribbean and Africa. Osibisa gave Africans confidence in their own music.”

New Dawn is out now on Marquee Records.

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The US politics sketchJoe Biden

Biden's speech to Congress is a once unthinkable call for transformation

Sketch: The president went big in an address that offered post-Trump healing and an image of a new era



Biden with Representative Maxine Waters and Senator Bernie Sanders after the speech. Photograph: Melina Mara/EPA

Biden with Representative Maxine Waters and Senator Bernie Sanders after the speech. Photograph: Melina Mara/EPA



[David Smith](#) in Washington

[@smithinamerica](#)

Thu 29 Apr 2021 00.55 EDT

It has always been Washington's version of the Oscars: a primetime TV audience, an overlong speech and fierce disagreement among critics.

On Wednesday, Joe Biden's first address to a joint session of Congress, on the eve of his first 100 days in office, followed the Academy Awards with a small, physically distanced gathering that, given the US president's love of trains, might have switched to a railway station too.

His 65-minute speech, the most important since his inauguration 99 days ago, could be summed up with three Bs: Big (in ambition), Boring (at times) and Bipartisan (or maybe not so much, judging by Republican grimaces).

['Crisis into opportunity': Biden lays out vision for sweeping change in speech to Congress](#)

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It will not go down as a rhetorical masterpiece, but nor will it be seen as the cringeworthy equivalent of a tearful Oscar acceptance speech. Instead, in the

sparsely populated chamber of the House of Representatives, it laid out a transformative presidency and offered some more healing for post-Trump stress disorder.

Indeed, even in the extraordinary circumstances of a global pandemic, with masked members sitting several seats apart on the floor and in the public gallery, this scene felt more ordinary than when Donald Trump delivered red meat to raucous cheers from Republicans and boos, heckles and sorrowful head shakes from Democrats.



‘The new age was best summed up in a single image.’ Photograph: Melina Mara/EPA

The Trump era culminated in a [deadly insurrection at the Capitol on 6 January](#) with members cowering in the public gallery of this very chamber, with agents pulling guns to keep the mob at bay. On Wednesday night, as the first lady, Jill Biden, entered the gallery to cheers on Wednesday evening, all that felt like a lifetime ago.

Instead, the new age was best summed up in a single image: behind “Uncle Joe”, the 78-year-old white man at the lectern, [sat two women](#), Vice-President Kamala Harris and the House speaker, Nancy Pelosi – both from deeply liberal California.

“Madam Vice-President,” Biden said. “No President has ever said those words from this podium ... and it’s about time.” Harris and Pelosi exchanged glances above their masks.

[Biden flanked by two women as he addresses Congress in historic first](#)
[Read more](#)

The tableau was a vivid reminder that Biden’s discovery of progressive politics did not come to him as a sudden revelation. He has always been roughly in the middle of the Democratic party. As the party moved left, so he moved with it. An old dog can learn new tricks but it takes some prompting.

That led him to Wednesday night’s once unthinkable menu of grand plans for coronavirus relief, building infrastructure and helping families, measured not in billions but trillions of dollars. In the choice between going big and going bipartisan, big is winning, remaking America with government at the centre.

“My fellow Americans, trickle-down economics has never worked,” he said, effectively sounding the [death knell for Ronald Reagan’s low-tax logic](#) that has been Republican religion for four decades and within which even Bill Clinton and Barack Obama operated. “It’s time to grow the economy from the bottom up and middle out.”



Biden is greeted by Senator Bernie Sanders as he arrives for the address.
Photograph: Michael Reynolds/AFP/Getty Images

Senator Bernie Sanders, sitting on the House floor, and Senator Elizabeth Warren, up in the balcony, visibly lapped it up. Both were forced to endure four years of Trump blasphemies in this very room. Their time has come and Biden is the unlikely vessel.

“The American Jobs Plan is a blue-collar blueprint to build America,” Biden said. “And it recognises something I’ve always said. [There are] good guys and women on Wall Street, but Wall Street didn’t build this country. The middle class built this country. And unions build the middle class.”

He talked about green energy and corporate tax reform and described healthcare as “a right, not a privilege”. Democrats were delighted by it all, rising to their feet and clapping with such enthusiasm that it almost compensated for their diminished numbers.

Republicans joined in when Biden warned of the threat posed by China (“deadly earnest on becoming the most significant, consequential nation in the world”) and struck some Trumpian notes about American products made in America. “There’s no reason the blades for wind turbines can’t be built in Pittsburgh instead of Beijing.”

But they were silent, stony faced and riveted to their seats on many of the applause lines. Senator Lindsey Graham frowned, a hand to his chin. Mitch McConnell, the Senate minority leader, clapped limply if at all.

Hours earlier, perhaps seeing Harris and Pelosi in his mind's eye, McConnell had warned: "Behind President Biden's familiar face, it's like the most radical Washington Democrats have been handed the keys, and they're trying to speed as far left as they can possibly go before American voters ask for their car back."

Biden did utter the word "bipartisan" several times but his pitch was framed about the costs of division and paralysis. "Doing nothing is not an option," he warned. "We can't be so busy competing with each other that we forget the competition is with the rest of the world to win the 21st century."

The members in attendance had, like children at Willy Wonka's chocolate factory, got golden tickets. Instead of the usual 1,600 people for a state of the union-style address, this time there were only 200 with no guests permitted (except virtually), because of coronavirus safety restrictions. Some tickets were decided on a first-come-first-served basis, others by lottery.



The second gentleman, Doug Emhoff, and first lady, Dr Jill Biden, applaud. Photograph: Michael Reynolds/EPA

Members greeted each other with fist bumps or elbow bumps. Chief Justice John Roberts was the only member of the supreme court present. The cabinet was represented by only two members, Antony Blinken, the secretary of state, and Lloyd Austin, the secretary of defense, meaning there was no need this time for a “designated survivor” – a senior official who typically stays away at a secure location in case catastrophe strikes.

Biden sought to end on a high note. “We have stared into an abyss of insurrection and autocracy – of pandemic and pain – and ‘We the People’ did not flinch. At the very moment our adversaries were certain we would pull apart and fail, we came together, we united,” he said.

They were stirring words but, like Sunday’s Oscars, [ended in anticlimax](#). Whatever respect they’ve had for Biden over the years, when Republicans looked up at the dais, they were triggered by the sight of Harris and Pelosi looming behind him.

“Boring, but radical,” was the verdict of Senator Ted Cruz who, as if to prove it, looked like he was dozing off.

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Media

Substack: the future of news – or a media pyramid scheme?

The company says it's creating a viable alternative for readers and writers – but is it trying to have its cake and eat it?



‘Are readers consumers or fans? How do we create a shared sense of reality in a media landscape comprised mostly of individual writers and their loyal followers?’ Photograph: Malte Mueller/Getty Images/fStop

‘Are readers consumers or fans? How do we create a shared sense of reality in a media landscape comprised mostly of individual writers and their loyal followers?’ Photograph: Malte Mueller/Getty Images/fStop

[Oscar Schwartz](#)

Thu 29 Apr 2021 12.17 EDT

Since launching in 2017, Substack has been touting itself as a “[better future for news](#)”. Their offering was simple: email newsletters with an option for

subscribers to pay monthly fees for content – like Netflix for newsletters.

[‘So. Much. Sex’: a beginner’s guide to the ‘hot vax summer’](#)

[Read more](#)

If you have something to write and a list of emails of people who want to read it, the thinking goes, there is nothing stopping you from making a living on your own. With a healthy Substack email list, freelancers are no longer beholden to flakey editors; staff reporters no longer have to be insecure about layoffs; small media companies no longer anxious about a tweak to an algorithm that would send them into oblivion.

All that the company asks for in return? A 10% cut of subscription dollars.

Substack’s vision is proving enticing. In the past 12 months, several high-profile journalists and writers have left jobs to go it alone with Substack: the New York Times’ [Charlie Warzel](#), Vox’s [Matthew Yglesias](#), New York Magazine’s [Heather Havrilesky](#).

The number of [poets](#), [essayists](#), hobbyists, [cooks](#), [advice-givers](#), [spiritual guides](#) who charge a modest amount for their newsletters is growing. In a year when US media [lost](#) thousands of newsroom jobs, the company emerged as a seemingly viable alternative for journalists and writers to earn money. But then, over the past months, several revelations about Substack’s policies have led many to question whether it ought to be entrusted with crafting a vision for the future of news.

The controversy began in response to reports that the company was luring writers to the platform through a program called [Substack Pro](#), which offered lump sums of money – as much as \$250,000 – for writers to leave their jobs and take up newsletter writing. Some writers were also offered access to editors, health insurance and a legal defender program.

On the face of it, Substack Pro was simply offering writers the benefits that usually come with full-time employment. But the program was seen as controversial for a number of reasons.

To begin, the cohort of writers selected by the company remained undisclosed. This created an invisible tiered system dividing those who were actively supported, and those who were taking a risk in trying to build their own subscriber base.

According to journalist Annalee Newitz, this made Substack into something of a [pyramid scheme](#). Some anonymous writers were destined to succeed while the vast majority were providing Substack with free content, hoping to one day be able to monetize. As the New York Times columnist Ben Smith [put it](#), Substack was surreptitiously making some writers rich and turning others into “the content-creation equivalent of Uber drivers”.

The second and perhaps more fundamental problem with Substack Pro was that it contravened the company’s claims to editorial neutrality. Since launching, Substack has [insisted](#) that it is not a media company but a software company that builds tools to help writers publish newsletters, the content of which was none of their business –like a printing press for the digital age. This differentiated the company from social media platforms, which organize content algorithmically to increase engagement, and media companies, which make active editorial decisions about what they publish.

In reality, though, Substack was doing both. They were using metrics from [Twitter](#) to identify writers with a proven ability to draw attention to themselves, and then actively poaching them. Substack’s founders, a journalist and two developers, said they wanted to provide an alternative to the instability of digital media companies and the toxicity of social media platforms. And yet, the company was actively choosing writers who had come to prominence through those channels.

Substack was, in other words, skimming the fat off the top of what they called a toxic media environment all while claiming to offer an alternative, and tried to avoid accountability for their selections by maintaining a veneer of neutrality, claiming to merely be a platform not a publisher. They were trying to have their media cake and eat it, too.

The revelations about Substack Pro led to a broader conversation about the company’s content moderation policies. At the very end of [last year](#) the company clarified their position: no porn. No spam. No doxxing or

harassment. No attacks on people based on race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sex, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, medical condition. But the company also took the opportunity to assert their commitment to free speech. “We believe dissent and debate is important,” co-founder Hamish McKenzie wrote. “We celebrate nonconformity.”

Substack was skimming off what they called a toxic media environment while claiming to offer an alternative

Some saw this a welcoming invitation in what they perceive as an increasingly “woke” media landscape. Dana Loesch, the former NRA spokesperson, [moved](#) her newsletter from Mailchimp to Substack, claiming that the former “deplatforms conservatives”. Writer Andrew Sullivan, who has been [criticized](#) for his views on race and IQ, [moved](#) his column from New York Magazine over to the newsletter format.

For others, though, Substack’s position on content moderation was alienating, demonstrating that the company had little interest in actively addressing some of the thorny questions about how to host healthy media communities online. Many have decided to [leave](#) and take their newsletters, and their email lists, elsewhere.

Of course, Substack Pro represents only a very small proportion of people using the platform to write. Most write brief letters for micro-communities from whom they ask for no payment. There is an intimacy in the newsletter format that is not available on social media. I love receiving the poet and essayist Anne Boyer’s [meditations](#) in my inbox every now and then. Likewise the occasional [musings](#) and book recommendations from writer and critic Joanne McNeil.

Substack does have an interest in helping these smaller-scale writers level up to taking payment from subscribers, though. Every dollar earned by a writer on the platform contributes to their revenue. For this reason, they have offered no-strings-attached grants, between \$500 and \$5,000 in cash, to help writers take more time to commit to building an audience.

The concept of creators earning money directly from a cohort of followers is certainly not new; Patreon, OnlyFans, Cameo, Clubhouse all work from a similar paradigm. Digital media might be moving away from a model where creators toil for free, trying to accumulate as many followers as possible and somehow earning a living through ad-revenue or product placement. We seem, rather, to be approaching what Kevin Kelly [calls](#) the 1,000 true fans principle: if you find 1,000 people who will pay you for what you create, you can make a living as an independent creator.

But the company wants to do more: they want to be the future of news. In this quest, the company has become the nexus for bigger questions that will define the future of digital media. What is the line between a journalist and an influencer? Are readers consumers or fans? How do we create a shared sense of reality in a media landscape comprised mostly of individual writers and their loyal followers?

Despite the controversy, Substack will be part of this conversation.

This article was amended on 29 April 2021. An earlier version erroneously said Jesse Singal and Glenn Greenwald had been signed by Substack Pro. This has now been corrected.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2021/apr/29/substack-news-writing-pyramid-scheme>

2021.04.29 - Opinion

- 'Sleaze' doesn't capture it: Boris Johnson is utterly careless of everyone but himself
- Two YouTubers, Count Binface and a man who drank his own urine. Who gets your vote as London mayor?
- Did homophobia lead to Arlene Foster's downfall?
- Sometimes waiting is better than bingeing. Ask the millions who watched Line of Duty.

Opinion**Boris Johnson**

‘Sleaze’ doesn’t capture it: Boris Johnson is utterly careless of everyone but himself

[Aditya Chakraborty](#)



Like one of Fitzgerald’s characters, the PM is so insulated by privilege that he will never see the wreckage strewn behind him



Illustration by Bill Bragg

Illustration by Bill Bragg

Thu 29 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

While writing his last novel, [F Scott Fitzgerald](#) reminded himself of one fundamental truth by putting it in big block capitals: ACTION IS CHARACTER. And through Boris Johnson's actions what has been exposed over these past few weeks is his character in office.

None of the usual talking points otherwise do justice to the display before us. Not “sleaze”, that quaint 1990s term with its chortlesome memories of David Mellor in a Chelsea kit. Not cod psychology about [Dominic Cummings](#), however thrilled tranches of the press are at the return of their favourite panto villain, alongside his remarkably quotable friends. And certainly not yawping about the lack of “cut-through” by commentators too focused on byelections to see this is squarely about the morality of the man who runs this country.

How else to see a leader who wastes public money [doing up one room](#) to hold White House-style press briefings, a vanity project that he scrapped last week? The cost of that one room, by the way, was £2.6m, enough to buy an entire house even in London's most oligarchic postcodes or, if we're being

boring, to recruit more than 100 newly-qualified nurses. How does one describe the actions of a prime minister who, amid a deadly pandemic, plots with advisers and public officials on how to drum up a reported £200,000 to [redecorate his temporary home](#) in Downing Street? This isn't some fever dream about soft furnishings; it is about who advanced money to our prime minister, and what they may have expected in return, which is why it is now [under investigation](#) by the Electoral Commission. From [Jennifer Arcuri](#) to a [£15,000 winter break](#) in Mustique, every decision smacks of a knowing recklessness and an assurance that the tab will always be picked up by someone else.

[Boris Johnson denies any offence after Electoral Commission announces investigation into flat refurb - live](#)

[Read more](#)

Whether or not Johnson bellowed about letting “[bodies pile high in their thousands](#)”, his actions helped ensure that outcome. He's the one who skipped five Cobra meetings a year ago, gave the go-ahead to the [Cheltenham festival](#) and to Atlético Madrid [playing Liverpool](#) last March, [blew £849m](#) of taxpayers' money on the “eat out to help out” stunt and laughed off scientific advice in order to assure the British public it was their God-given right to eat Christmas pudding together. And here we are, with more than 120,000 excess deaths in England and Wales.

This January, as Covid ripped through the country yet again, I spoke to a nurse who had spent decades working in intensive care. She told me about how her ICU ward had suddenly tripled in size, with row upon row of patients lying in silence, unable to breathe without ventilators. Up to half of them would not leave alive. Others would be sick for the rest of their lives.

“This is Christmas that we're seeing out here and it should never [have] happened,” she said, after weeks of slaving away for unimaginable hours, comforting teary nurses at the end of their tether, telephoning shellshocked relatives to tell them the worst. “The intensive care world was screaming: ‘Don't do this. Do not allow people to mix.’”

A chronicler of the first Gilded Age, Fitzgerald would have seen Johnson for what he is. His novels are studded with just his type: men and women so

thickly swaddled in money and privilege they can't see the wreckage strewn behind them. Consult your copy of *The Great Gatsby* and near the end of that 1925 novel you will find a one-sentence portrait of our 2021 prime minister and his set. "They were careless people ... they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made."

From Bullingdon to Brexit, that has always been Johnson's style. For years before entering No 10, he tried to convince us that what he did was not who he was. He wore a clown's nose, all the better to distract from his sneering at "bumboys" and "piccaninnies". He told tall tales, hoping we wouldn't mind the casual sprinkling of lies. He sported crusty fleeces and forlorn beanies, while half-joking that the [£275,000 a year](#) paid to him by the Telegraph was "chickenfeed".

When Vote Leave came along, the role of insurgent chieftain was seized upon by this Old Etonian Oxford graduate who's too posh for John Lewis. Brexit gave him necessary cover to smash up norms and undermine democracy, to prorogue parliament and set the hounds on judges and journalists and remainder MPs. It could all be passed off as being for a great cause.

Only now the fireworks are over, what remains is haggling over the small print on trade deals and the vast emptiness of Johnson's ambition: his greed for power without the foggiest sense of what to use it for. Pieties about "levelling up" don't cut it: this is a project without either definition or a policy programme. Its only metric of success will be whether it helps wins Johnson the next election.

People like Johnson have always been around, as Fitzgerald reminds us. The most troubling question is how he came to be prime minister. Part of the answer lies in the sociologist Aeron Davis's masterly study of the new power elites, [Reckless Opportunists](#). Based on 20 years of interviews with people at the top of Westminster, the City and the media, Davis's book argues that the new generation of leaders is "precarious, rootless and increasingly self-serving".

They reach the top sooner, career around scoring headlines or a few million quid, and then lurch off through the revolving door. They have neither ideology nor shame, and their chief legacy is to undermine the very institution they head. It is as true of George “[nine jobs](#)” Osborne and David “Greensill” Cameron as it is of Johnson.

What makes this so dangerous is that the UK has cricketing metaphors where a written constitution ought to be. Pit British democracy, with its reliance on good manners and fair play, against a landslide majority won by a smash-and-grab prime minister who drives out permanent secretary after permanent secretary and the fight is hardly fair. Stage it against the backdrop of a global pandemic, which requires decisions to be made without the usual scrutiny, and it stands no chance whatsoever.

Instead you get the [VIP lane](#) to provide expensive PPE that turns out to be unusable, texts from No 10 to tycoons offering favourable tax treatment for ventilators and a former prime minister messaging colleagues on behalf of his new employer. The same bunch who pretended to hate the state now try earnestly to leech off it. Careless people, as Fitzgerald portrayed them, although he could add one qualification. They care a lot – just not about you and me.

- Aditya Chakraborty is a Guardian columnist

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/apr/29/sleaze-boris-johnson-careless-privilege>

Opinion London mayoral election 2021

Two YouTubers, Count Binface and a man who drank his own urine. Who gets your vote as London mayor?

Joel Golby

All right, only two candidates have a cat in hell's chance of winning, but let's look at the runners and riders in all their glory



‘London needs the “mayor of London” more than it actually needs a mayor of London, if that makes sense.’ Photograph: I-Wei Huang/Alamy

‘London needs the “mayor of London” more than it actually needs a mayor of London, if that makes sense.’ Photograph: I-Wei Huang/Alamy

Thu 29 Apr 2021 04.00 EDT

A [London](#) mayoral election looms, then. It isn't “important” in the usual sense of the word – being mayor of [London](#), a position with little actual

political power, basically just involves doing sad eyebrows on the news when something bad happens in the city and making unconvincingly jovial hand gestures while opening a school or bridge. But mayor of [London](#) is an important role for [London](#) itself, giving it the validation it constantly craves. Despite being the biggest city in the country by an unsustainable margin, and despite being regularly listed as among the top 10 cities in the world, it constantly needs to be reassured: “You’re not just a load of Prets and swaths of developer-erased history! You’re a good city! Hey! Stop crying!” The regular appointment of a glamorous-sounding role serves to do exactly that. [London](#) needs the “mayor of London” more than it actually needs a mayor of [London](#), if that makes sense. For some reason, 20 entire people are in the running to do this non-job.

Realistically, it’s only going to be one of two of them – the incumbent mayor, Sadiq “no tie for me, thanks – I’m a bus driver’s son!” Khan, or Shaun “the only man in history who spent his mid-20s [sofa-surfing and signing on](#) and somehow came out of that radicalised into the Conservative party” Bailey, [polling](#) at 41% and 28% respectively. (It’s not really a contest; Khan will win.) After that there’s a grey wedge of serious-but-let’s-be-honest-about-it parties – the Liberal Democrats, Animal Welfare party, the Greens and the Women’s Equality party – then a handful of independents who all have the same forgettable energy (I just feel like David Kurten is really used to saying, “No – we’ve met before!” at his friends’ garden parties) and who all, for some reason, had £10,000 spare for a deposit and the impulse to cheerfully lose it. Also in the running: Laurence Fox, Ukip’s Peter Gammons (yes) and Count Binface.

Just a heads up before you spend the time reading through the leaflets that have dropped on most Londoners’ doorsteps by now: every manifesto is basically the same – everyone wants more housing, cheaper public transport and cleaner air. The only real deviations from this are Piers Corbyn, who expresses a bizarre preoccupation with “serious illnesses” in his leaflet, and Animal Welfare party’s Vanessa Hudson, whose party political video features footage of her walking slowly around Brick Lane while talking about “speciesism”, a profoundly bold attempt to add a whole new angle to the culture wars.

How do things look, policy-wise? Everyone has a housing policy of some sort, especially Bailey, who seems to have come up with his in the mid-90s (“I’ll build 100,000 houses ... costing £100,000 each!”). Most interesting, though, is (the very hench) Brian Rose, who looks more like a character killed without having a line in the opening scenes of a Kingsman sequel than a future mayor, and is most notable so far for being the [only candidate](#) to have gone on record as drinking his own urine. Rose promises to somehow build 50,000 homes by Christmas. This is, let’s say, ambitious, though if he’s just going to turn up to building sites and shirtlessly drink piss until they all start building faster than I do actually back him to do it.

We should probably talk about the YouTubers. There are two running for mayor this year, though both from slightly different angles. There’s [Niko Omilana](#), a glossy US-style vlogger who does bombastic stunts like opening a fake McDonald’s or filling his house with packing peanuts, and yes, written down it sounds uninspiring but imagine for a moment you are 14; and there’s [Max Fosh](#), a more homely domestic YouTuber, one of those posh boys you only get in the UK who seems broadly all right but always looks like he’s just come in from the cold. His whole shtick is trolling [Laurence Fox](#). Though they might scoop up a few votes for banter, that’s not what the masterplan is about – they’ve recognised a joke mayoral campaign can be a source of content and followers, and turned it alchemy-like into that. Fair play.

Finally, there’s the question of Lozza. Can you believe it’s been little over a year of Laurence Fox? It was barely last January that he pivoted from “actor from that ... no from that thing, you know?” to getting “FREEDOM” tattooed on his hand because he got too many Twitter followers at once, and now we have to endure an entire mayoral campaign because he’s sick of lockdown and wants to play squash again, or something. What scares me about Fox is that this gambit builds on the age-old play that put Ronald Reagan, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Boris Johnson and Donald Trump into power: a lot of people really do vote based on whether they’ve seen a guy’s face before or not.

Fox won’t win but, based on the fact that Johnson turned Have I Got New for You appearances into the highest office in the country and Trump pivoted from Home Alone 2 into the most powerful man in the world, this

all feels like sinister groundwork for something else. My fear isn't that Fox will be mayor of London: it's that trying to be mayor of London will make more people aware of him, and, long story short, in five years' time Commander Fox will change the national anthem to one of his hoary folksongs, and we'll all have to endure a 40-year reign of him conveying his profoundly, almost medically divorced energy through a series of croakingly posh national addresses. It's Laurence Fox's world, sadly. We are just chess pieces within it.

- Joel Golby is the author of Brilliant, Brilliant, Brilliant Brilliant

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Opinion**Arlene Foster**

Did homophobia lead to Arlene Foster's downfall?

Stephen Donnan-Dalzell

I live in a working-class, loyalist area with my husband – the DUP is wrong if it thinks an anti-gay leader will win votes



Arlene Foster answers questions on her leadership in Belfast on Tuesday.
Photograph: Liam McBurney/PA

Arlene Foster answers questions on her leadership in Belfast on Tuesday.
Photograph: Liam McBurney/PA

Thu 29 Apr 2021 05.00 EDT

I would hardly call Arlene Foster an ally to the LGBTQ+ community. However, a sense among the DUP's old guard that she softened the party's stance on gay rights is rumoured to be a factor behind her failure to retain support from the party, leading to her standing down. The DUP has always

been seen as the most powerful, most vehemently anti-gay political party in Northern Ireland. The late Rev Ian Paisley Sr was behind the [Save Ulster From Sodomy](#) campaign in the early 1980s at a time when homosexuality was being decriminalised in Northern Ireland. The DUP has voted against, or vetoed, almost every single pro-LGBTQ+ issue in the Northern Ireland assembly, at Westminster or at local government level. From the equalisation of the age of consent for gay sex to protection from discrimination when accessing goods and services – and, most recently, its unyielding fight to block marriage equality in Northern Ireland.

That being said, I think it's fair to assume that under her leadership, the DUP moved further away from the fire and brimstone rhetoric of the days of former first minister Ian Paisley and his successor, Peter Robinson. Arlene Foster's [recent abstention](#) on the vote to ban “conversion therapy” in Northern Ireland, despite her party putting forward an [amendment](#) to weaken the original motion brought by the Ulster Unionist party, has been seen by some as the straw that broke the camel's back for the party's more hardline, evangelical wing.

During Foster's tenure, the DUP lost its ability to [single handedly block](#) any legislative measure it didn't agree with, as it had been able to do with the petition of concern [mechanism](#). The DUP had wielded this veto over everything from reform of local government to the decriminalisation of abortion, and had used it to block every single manoeuvre to legislate for marriage equality in Northern Ireland.

The party was unable to [block Westminster](#) from legislating to introduce same-sex marriage in Northern Ireland during the absence of the devolved assembly. However, it was notable that while they put up a fight against abortion regulations (a fight that is [still being waged](#)), they completely dropped any opposition to marriage equality and seem to have purged the issue from their public statements ever since. Perhaps Foster understood the battle had been lost, and public sentiment was [against the DUP](#). When, after the 2017 Westminster elections, the DUP propped up Theresa May's government for a short time, [concerns were raised](#) that the DUP would trade their support for May's Brexit deal in exchange for a roll-back of human rights in Northern Ireland. However, that didn't come to pass.

[Arlene Foster has been thrown to the wolves by Johnson's Brexit games | Martin Kettle](#)
[Read more](#)

Foster also [attended](#) the first ever Pink News event at Stormont in 2018, and was widely praised for engaging with the LGBTQ+ community, despite her party's historical opposition to any substantive improvement in the legislative reality for its members. Much was made of the [DUP's selection](#) of Alison Bennington, an openly gay woman, as a candidate for local council. It marked a significant shift from the days when DUP representatives who were even suspected of being anything other than heterosexual were ousted from the party. The decision to endorse Bennington was derided by certain sections of the party, resulting in [resignations](#) and public condemnations.

I live in a working-class, predominantly loyalist area with my husband, and we have had nothing but support from our neighbours and community. If the evangelical wing of the DUP thinks that lurching further to the right on these issues will win back their voter base, they are more out of touch than I assumed. The electorate largely do not have an issue with LGBTQ+ people, and a significant majority of the public thinks the DUP's platform on this policy area is out of step with their own values.

It's hard to gauge whether this is what is driving voters away from the DUP in such large numbers, but the party cannot ride two horses at once. DUP reps are able to come out with [homophobic remarks](#) in the press, yet the leadership takes no action against them. On the other hand, Foster extends an olive branch to the community by disclosing that she is open to [meeting](#) LGBT sector organisations in the future. This mixed messaging from a party that was once seen as the natural home of anti-gay rhetoric in Northern Ireland could be what is pushing more [moderate voters](#) to the Alliance party and the more conservative [Traditional Unionist Voice](#).

Because there's plenty more room to the right of Foster on the subject, even within her own party. The evangelical wing of the DUP consists of potential leadership contenders like the agriculture minister Edwin Poots, MP Ian Paisley Jr, and Sammy Wilson MP. During his tenure as health minister,

Poots (who has a track record of making inflammatory statements about the LGBTQ+ community) spent a significant amount of [public money](#) challenging court decisions to legalise blood donations for gay and bisexual men and the decriminalisation of adoption by same-sex couples. Paisley has [described](#) gay people as repulsive and civil partnerships as perverse, while Wilson has [defended](#) his support for “conversion therapy”, and [refused](#) to wear a red ribbon in support of people living with HIV/Aids.

Whoever is pulling the strings may think that ousting Foster and replacing her with someone more hardline on all of these issues is the road to victory, but I suspect they have failed to read the room – particularly on social issues. The best thing the DUP could do is to distance itself from the hurtful and damaging homophobia of its past, make an apology to the LGBTQ+ community and move forward as adults, rather than foisting dogma on the population at large. But I suspect the party will take a very different road.

- Stephen Donnan-Dalzell is a writer and human rights activist based in Belfast

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[OpinionSociety](#)

Sometimes waiting is better than bingeing. Ask the millions who watched **Line of Duty**

[Adrian Chiles](#)



From TV shows to music to dates, instant gratification is now the name of the game. But let's not forget the pleasure of anticipation



‘If the BBC had dropped all the episodes at once, we would have gorged on them before sundown.’ Photograph: Steffan Hill/BBC/World Productions

‘If the BBC had dropped all the episodes at once, we would have gorged on them before sundown.’ Photograph: Steffan Hill/BBC/World Productions

Thu 29 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

We don’t want to wait for anything any more; we want stuff and experiences and feelings as soon as we first desire them. I once made a documentary about a fabulously wealthy Russian family living in a huge mansion set in a couple of hundred acres of Buckinghamshire. There was a mum and a dad and a couple of teenage children, who seemed surprisingly well adjusted. I didn’t see much of their father but spent a fair bit of time with the mother and the kids. I asked them what happened when it came to Christmas because, looking around, it seemed as if the kids could have exactly what their hearts desired on any day of the year. The mother shook her head and insisted they never got anything at the click of their fingers. “No,” she said, struggling for a word. “The want must ... I don’t know the word in English.”

She said a Russian word to her son.

“Ripen,” he said.

“Yes,” she nodded. “The want must ripen.”

This stuck in my mind over the years, as the time we allow our “wants” to ripen has got shorter and shorter. If there’s something you want to buy that’s deliverable, a well-known online shop will guarantee to have it with you the following day. Very often I’ve had the merest inkling that I want something and ordered it within seconds. Where’s the ripening time there? Whatever happened to the “allow 28 days for delivery” of my youth?

That was as much ripening time as I could bear. I can still access the feeling from 40 years ago awaiting the delivery of some red Kryptonics skateboard wheels. Every day my want ratcheted up a couple of notches until, oh blessed day, they were waiting for me when I got back from school. I spent hours admiring and caressing them in all their gloriously new redness. If I was 14 now and had the money to pay for them, I would have the wheels ordered, delivered and rolling within hours rather than weeks.

My 14-year-old self might well have then popped upstairs to listen to a record, doubtless Led Zeppelin. Let’s go for their fourth album, [the one with Stairway to Heaven on it](#); the fourth track on side one. I would have listened to that whole side, even though I didn’t much care for track three, The Battle of Evermore. By the time I had battled through that, I was ripe as you like for Stairway. None of this seems to exist any more; there’s no ripening or suffering required. You just go to the track you like, streamed in an instant, and off you go. No need to listen to the stuff you’re not mad on; why on earth would you? The logic is appallingly sound.

This applies to everyone and everything. If you want a date, apparently you can go on something called Tinder and get one straight away. If there’s something you want to watch on the TV, you just call it up there and then. You don’t even have to wait to get home; you can watch it on your phone. Want-ripening is a thing of the past. Our wants are like green bananas, rock-hard peaches or sour strawberries, unlike the perfectly ripe bananas, peaches and strawberries we can – but of course – get hold of whenever we like without troubling ourselves to wait for their seasons to come around.

The whole [football “Super” League nonsense](#) comes from the same place. Strip out The Battle of Evermore between Burnley and Sheffield United and

go straight up a Stairway to Heaven where you will be able to watch Barcelona and Liverpool play every other day.

And yet, mother of God, I see hope. The [success of Line of Duty's weekly episodes](#) may be only an exception proving the rule, but it's a joy to be reminded that we still have it in us to embrace our ripening desires. If the BBC had dropped all seven episodes at once, our goggle eyes would have gorged on them all before sundown the following day. As it is, we've all had six weeks to enjoy it together – even longer than my red Kryptonics took to arrive. Bingeing is all very well, but it's not as rewarding as waiting for the want to ripen.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/apr/29/sometimes-waiting-is-better-than-bingeing-ask-the-millions-who-watched-line-of-duty>.

2021.04.29 - Around the world

- ['America's on the move again' Biden lays out \\$1.8tn recovery plan](#)
- [Canada Indigenous chief to request UN peacekeepers to prevent lobster fight boiling over](#)
- [China First module of new space station launched](#)
- [Michael Collins Apollo 11 astronaut dies aged 90](#)

[Joe Biden](#)

‘Crisis into opportunity’: Biden lays out vision for sweeping change in speech to Congress

President pushes ambitious families and jobs plans, calling for a ‘blue-collar blueprint’ to rebuild America

04:24

Biden declares ‘America is on the move again’ in first congressional address – video

[Daniel Strauss](#) in Washington

[@danielstrauss4](#)

Wed 28 Apr 2021 23.58 EDT

Joe Biden argued that “America is on the move again” in his first address to Congress, where he unveiled a sweeping \$1.8tn package for families and education and pitched his “blue-collar blueprint” to re-build America.

[Flanked by two women](#) – Vice-President Kamala Harris and House speaker Nancy Pelosi – for the first time in US history, the president gave his speech on the eve of his 100th day in office as the country continues to fight the coronavirus pandemic.

It’s been “100 days since I took the oath of office – lifted my hand off our family Bible – and inherited a nation in crisis,” Biden said.

“The worst pandemic in a century. The worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. The worst attack on our democracy since the civil war,” he continued, referring to the [January 6 assault on the Capitol](#), when rioters stormed the House chamber where he delivered his address on Wednesday night.

“Now – after just 100 days – I can report to the nation: America is on the move again. Turning peril into possibility. Crisis into opportunity. Setback into strength.”



Biden speaks as Kamala Harris and Nancy Pelosi listen. Photograph: Doug Mills/AP

Due to social distancing measures, only 200 people, mainly politicians, attended rather than the usual 1,600 guests. The supreme court's chief justice, John Roberts, was the only member of the high court present.

The address centered on selling the administration's ambitious economic plans, but wove them together with foreign policy and efforts to combat the climate crisis, as well as a wide range of domestic policies from healthcare to police reform, paid family leave to child benefits, gun control to border security.

The tone was optimistic as Biden urged Americans to continue to get vaccinated against Covid-19 and pledged that his administration would enact broad changes that would create jobs, expand the social safety net and modernize the country.

The \$1.8tn [American Families Plan](#) Biden outlined on Wednesday is the second part of his administration's ambitious set of domestic reforms

spanning infrastructure, education, childcare and much more. The first part, dubbed the the American Jobs Plan, is focused on improving the nation's infrastructure and boosting the economy.

[Biden flanked by two women as he addresses Congress in historic first](#)
[Read more](#)

“Think about it, there is simply no reason that the blades for wind turbines can't be built in Pittsburgh instead of Beijing,” Biden said. “There's no reason why American workers can't lead the world in production of electric vehicles and batteries. The American Jobs Plan is going to create millions of good-paying jobs, jobs Americans can raise a family on.”

“The American Jobs Plan is a blue-collar blueprint to build America,” Biden continued. “And it recognizes something I've always said, in this chamber and the other. [There are] good guys and women on Wall Street, but Wall Street didn't build this country. The middle class built this country. And unions build the middle class.”

The 78-year-old president hit themes he has focused on throughout his decades in public office. Biden, who has long styled himself as an ally of working class Americans, urged Congress to pass the Pro Act to strengthen protections for unions and said lawmakers should pass legislation to raise the minimum wage.

He also emphasized issues of racial justice, calling on Congress to pass a policing reform bill before the anniversary of George Floyd's death next month.

“We have all seen the knee of injustice on the neck of Black America. Now is our opportunity to make real progress,” he said, adding that he believed the “vast majority of men and women in uniform wear their badge and serve their communities honorably”.

[White House announces sweeping \\$1.8tn plan for childcare and universal preschool](#)
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Biden's plans are effectively the final installment of the major policy proposals the administration can hope to comfortably pass through Congress before lawmakers turn more attention to the 2022 midterm elections and their re-election prospects, which will further stall Congress.

Biden and his team have made a point of saying they want to work with Republicans to craft legislation, but he cautioned that outreach would only last to a point.

"From my perspective, doing nothing is not an option," Biden said.

Some lines in Biden's speech won standing applause from both Republicans and Democrats. The Republican senator Ted Cruz of Texas could be seen clapping when Biden urged Americans to get vaccinated.

But when he laid out why and how he wanted to pay for his proposals – [by closing tax loopholes for the rich and raising other taxes for Americans](#) – the Republican senator Mitt Romney of Utah stayed in his seat silently.

"Unfortunately, the President has a lot of things he'd like to do, but he's spending like crazy," Romney said in a statement after the speech.



Biden elbow-bumps Pelosi after the speech. Photograph: Getty Images

Biden went on to knock the tax cut Republicans passed when Donald Trump was in office.

“Instead of using the tax savings to raise wages and invest in research and development, it poured billions of dollars into the pockets of CEOs,” he said. “My fellow Americans, trickle down economics has never worked and it’s time to grow the economy from the bottom up and the middle out.”

Biden also announced ways he wanted to improve the Affordable Care Act - commonly called Obamacare – through working with Congress.

“The Affordable Care Act has been a lifeline for millions of Americans – protecting people with pre-existing conditions, protecting women’s health. And the pandemic has demonstrated how badly it is needed,” Biden said. “Let’s lower deductibles for working families on the Affordable Care Act, and let’s lower prescription drug costs.”

On foreign policy, Biden said he had made clear to Vladimir Putin that the United States would respond to any acts of aggression. On Beijing, he warned Americans were “in a competition with China and other countries to win the 21st century”.

At another point Biden touched on domestic threats, saying: “The most lethal terrorist threat to the homeland today is from white supremacist terrorism.”

Biden, an enthusiastic gladhandler, lingered after the speech to talk with multiple lawmakers – Republicans and Democrats alike – before he left Capitol Hill. Earlier in the evening he had done a fist bump with Liz Cheney of Wyoming, a member of the House Republican leadership.

In its response to Biden’s address, the progressive wing of the Democratic party praised Biden for his handling of the Covid-19 crisis but urged the president to be bolder in tackling the climate crisis and economic inequality, and to do more to address structural racism.

The Republican senator Tim Scott, who delivered his party’s official response, said Biden “seems like a good man” but that his speech amounted

to a “liberal wishlist” paid for with “job-killing tax hikes”.

Scott said Biden wanted bipartisanship in name only. “Our nation is starving for more than empty platitudes,” he said.

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Indigenous chief to request UN peacekeepers to prevent lobster fight boiling over

Sipekne'katik chief Mike Sack says his First Nation plans to open a lobster fishery in Nova Scotia in defiance of government rules



Fishermen from the Sipekne'katik band work from a wharf after opposition from non-Indigenous fishers in Saulnierville, Nova Scotia. Photograph: Ted Pritchard/Reuters

Fishermen from the Sipekne'katik band work from a wharf after opposition from non-Indigenous fishers in Saulnierville, Nova Scotia. Photograph: Ted Pritchard/Reuters

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[*Cara McKenna*](#)

Thu 29 Apr 2021 05.30 EDT

After a violent clash over lobster fishing on Canada's east coast last year, a First Nations chief says he will request United Nations peacekeepers to keep his people safe on the water this summer – predicting tensions will reach a boiling point.

When the Sipekne'katik First Nation sought to harvest lobster outside of the fishing season defined by federal authorities, commercial harvesters

launched a series of protests that turned physical when traps were removed, harvesters assaulted and lobster pounds vandalized.

[Canada: hummingbirds succeed in halting controversial pipeline construction](#)

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The conflict was a microcosm of a larger trend of Indigenous communities attempting to uphold their historic rights to manage, harvest and sell fish in Canada.

The Sipekne'katik chief, Mike Sack, said his First Nation is moving forward with plans to again open a self-regulated lobster fishery in Nova Scotia this June in defiance of the commercial season enforced by Canada's fisheries department.

"We're going to send a letter off to the United Nations and hope that they can come and keep the peace ... and just ensure that our people are not mistreated," Sack said during a press conference last week.

Sipekne'katik first opened its self-regulated lobster fishery in St Mary's Bay last September, citing their right to support themselves through fishing under a treaty from the 1700s. This right was affirmed in a supreme court of Canada case more than two decades ago and interpreted as a right to fish for a "moderate livelihood", although that has never been properly defined.

In a statement this March, the fisheries minister, Bernadette Jordan, was supportive of rights to a moderate livelihood fishery, but said all lobster fisheries must operate within the established season, ending in May, for conservation reasons.

"All harvesters will see an increased and coordinated federal presence on water and on land this spring, including fishery officers, supported by Canadian coast guard vessels," her statement said, in part.

"Fishery officers have the difficult job of enforcing the Fisheries Act equally to all harvesters, in very complex and evolving conditions."

Sack said working in those established bounds has not worked for Sipekne'katik, and noted that while the commercial fishery only employs about 20 to 25 people from the community, the self-regulated fishery could employ as many as 200. He said the community will offer to return its nine existing commercial lobster licenses and will move forward with its plans for its own fishery.

“Once [Minister Jordan] came out and said no fishing out of season, to me she empowered commercial fisherman. What happened last year, it’s going to be a lot worse,” Sack said.

“The biggest thing we’re trying to do is have it so our people can fish and come out of poverty without being in danger,” he said. “The species are the last thing we want to harm, it’s not going to happen, our ancestors wouldn’t be happy with us.”

Sipekne'katik’s plan includes launching its own “extensive” conservation studies to ensure lobster stocks stay healthy, he said. Megan Bailey, a marine scientist with Dalhousie University, will be leading that research in coming months.

She said her team will focusing on collecting data about lobster populations between June and November – outside the commercial fishing season. She said there are also plans to look at best practices in places such as Maine where lobster fishing does take place year-round.

“I think what happened last fall, no one wants to see,” she said.

“So how do we have collaborative coexistence of a commercial and a treaty fishery? In [St Mary’s Bay] specifically, but I think this is obviously a much larger conversation.”

Meanwhile, the Unified Fisheries Conservation Alliance, a group of commercial fishery stakeholders in Atlantic Canada, put out a statement that said it is “concerned” by Sipekne'katik’s plan.

“[The Department of Fisheries and Oceans] has hundreds of dedicated and respected fisheries and conservation scientists and invests millions of dollars

annually to underpin the science-based rules and regulations that govern the sustainability of fisheries,” it said.

“UFCA will continue to advocate for the government of Canada to maintain clear, lasting, responsible regulatory oversight for all fisheries.”

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China launches first module of new space station

The space station is expected to become fully operational in 2022 after about 10 missions to bring up more parts and assemble them in orbit

01:13

Heavenly Harmony: China launches first module of new space station – video

Guardian staff and agencies

Thu 29 Apr 2021 00.46 EDT

China has launched the first module of its new space station, a milestone in Beijing's ambitious plan to place a permanent human presence in space.

The Tianhe or “Heavenly Harmony” unmanned core module, containing living quarters for three crew, was launched from Wenchang in China's Hainan province on a Long-March 5B rocket on Thursday.

The space station is expected to become fully operational in 2022 after about 10 missions to bring up more parts and assemble them in orbit.

[China and Russia unveil joint plan for lunar space station](#)

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Billions of dollars have been [poured into space exploration as China seeks to assert its rising global stature](#) and growing technological might, following in the footsteps of the US and Russia.

China's space program has also recently brought back the first new lunar samples in more than 40 years and expects to land a probe and rover on the surface of Mars later next month.

The space program is a source of huge national pride, and Premier Li Keqiang and other top civilian and military leaders watched the launch live from the control center in Beijing.

Live footage from state broadcaster CCTV showed space programme employees cheering as the rocket powered its way through the atmosphere billowing flames from the launch site.

Minutes after the launch, the fairing opened to expose the Tianhe atop the the core stage of the rocket, with the characters for “China Manned Space” emblazoned on its exterior. Soon after, it separated from the rocket, which will orbit for about a week before falling to Earth.

Once completed, the Chinese space station is expected to remain in low Earth orbit at between 400 and 450 kilometres above Earth for 15 years.

00:52

China begins construction of laboratory in space – video

At least 12 astronauts are training to fly to and live in the station, including veterans of previous flights, newcomers and women, with the first crewed mission, Shenzhou-12, expected to be launched by June.

When completed by late 2022, the t-shaped Chinese Space Station is expected to weigh about 66 tons, considerably smaller than the International Space Station, which launched its first module in 1998 and will weigh about 450 tons.

Tianhe will have a docking port and will also be able to connect with a powerful Chinese space satellite. Theoretically, it could be expanded to as many as six modules.

While [China](#) does not plan to use its space station for international cooperation on the scale of the ISS, Beijing has said it is open to foreign collaboration without giving details of the scope of that cooperation.

The country has come a long way since its first satellite in 1970.

It put the first Chinese “taikonaut” in space in 2003 and [sent a probe in to Mars’ orbit](#) earlier this year.

China [launched the Tiangong-1 lab](#), its first prototype module intended to lay the groundwork for the permanent station, in September 2011.

With Agence France-Presse and Associated Press

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[Nasa](#)

Michael Collins, Apollo 11 astronaut, dies aged 90

Collins, known as the ‘forgotten astronaut’, kept command module flying while Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin walked on the moon

01:05

'Not one iota lonely': Michael Collins on flying solo during Apollo 11 moon landing – video

Guardian staff and agencies

Wed 28 Apr 2021 16.03 EDT

The American astronaut Michael Collins, who was part of the Apollo 11 original moon landing crew and kept the command module flying while [Neil Armstrong](#) and Buzz Aldrin became the first humans to walk on the moon, has died at the age of 90, his family said on Wednesday.

Collins had cancer. He was sometimes known as the “forgotten astronaut” because he didn’t get to land on the moon, while Armstrong and Aldrin became household names.

But his role in the three-man mission in 1969 was just as crucial and his task to keep the module circling and piloting it as his team mates departed from the module in the Eagle lander and then returned safely, was just as crucial, nerve-racking and exciting for the mission as a whole.

[21 July 1969: Man walks on the moon](#)
[Read more](#)

“Not since Adam has any human known such solitude as Mike Collins,” the mission log said, referring to the biblical figure.

A statement released by Collins's family on Wednesday, including a tweet, said: "We regret to share that our beloved father and grandfather passed away today, after a valiant battle with cancer. He spent his final days peacefully."

It adds that the family hopes people will celebrate his joy, sharp wit and "his quiet sense of purpose, and his wise perspective, gained both from looking back at Earth from the vantage of space and gazing across calm waters from the deck of his fishing boat".

President Joe Biden said his prayers were with the Collins family.

"From his vantage point, high above the Earth, he reminded us of the fragility of our own planet, and called on us to care for it like the treasure it is," Biden said in a statement. "Godspeed, Mike."

Writing on Twitter, Aldrin paid tribute to Collins, saying: "Dear Mike, Wherever you have been or will be, you will always have the Fire to Carry us deftly to new heights and to the future."

A statement from the acting [Nasa](#) administrator, Steve Jurczyk, read: "Today the nation lost a true pioneer and lifelong advocate for exploration in astronaut Michael Collins. As pilot of the Apollo 11 command module – some called him 'the loneliest man in history' – while his colleagues walked on the Moon for the first time, he helped our nation achieve a defining milestone. He also distinguished himself in the Gemini Program and as an Air Force pilot."

Armstrong was 82 when he died in 2012. Aldrin is still alive and lives in New Jersey, at 91.

The world held its breath as Armstrong first stepped on the moon in July, 1969. All the while, Collins was in orbit, 60 miles above, extremely busy piloting the command module, and told Nasa back in Houston that the successful moon landing was "fantastic".

Post-mission he said: "The thing I remember most is the view of planet Earth from a great distance. Tiny. Very shiny. Blue and white. Bright.

Beautiful. Serene and fragile.”

[Mars helicopter Ingenuity: Nasa about to try historic flight](#)
[Read more](#)

At the time he was orbiting, he was always cut off from communications every time the Apollo 11 command module passed around the back side of the moon.

As he recalled in a 2016 NPR interview, he didn’t think of himself as being lonely in space. He said, “The fact that I was ... out of communications, rather than that being a fear, that was a joy because I got Mission Control to shut up for a little while. Every once in a while.”

“It’s a shame that when people are asked, ‘Can you name the Apollo 11 crew.’ Mike Collins is normally the name that doesn’t come to mind,” Francis French, of the San Diego Air and [Space](#) Museum and author of many books on the space program, told the radio network.

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