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Prime minister risks major rebellion over Covid jab passports, say Tory MPs

More than 40 Conservatives said to be ready to defy government over civil liberties concerns

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People dancing at Bar Fibre in Leeds after England's restrictions lifted on Monday. Photograph: Ioannis Alexopoulos/PA

People dancing at Bar Fibre in Leeds after England's restrictions lifted on Monday. Photograph: Ioannis Alexopoulos/PA

[Rowena Mason](#), [Jessica Elgot](#) and [Aubrey Allegretti](#)

Wed 21 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

Conservative MPs believe Boris Johnson faces a major rebellion over Covid vaccine passports but could be supported by Labour, who were on Tuesday night wavering over whether to back them.

Tory MPs opposed to the plan for Covid passes to enter nightclubs and other crowded indoor venues said more than 40 [Conservatives](#) were prepared to defy the prime minister over civil liberties concerns, particularly as No 10 has refused to rule out extending the passes to pubs and other sectors.

The scale of the rebellion could put any vote on a knife-edge if opposition parties also oppose the idea, which was proposed by Johnson on Monday in an extraordinary U-turn hours after clubs were allowed to open in England for the first time in 16 months.

At least 42 Tory MPs have signed a cross-party [Big Brother Watch declaration](#) against “Covid status certification to deny individuals access to general services, businesses or jobs” in recent months. More MPs privately told the Guardian they were unlikely to back such a move, especially if it remained a vaccine-only pass that did not recognise a negative test result or evidence of antibodies.

The issue is likely to be raised on Wednesday at a meeting of the new 1922 Committee of backbenchers, which is now led by three sceptics of Covid passports. Nusrat Ghani and William Wragg were elected as new vice-chairs on Tuesday, joining the longtime chairman, Sir Graham Brady. On Tuesday some Tory MPs threatened to boycott the Conservative party conference in October over fears Covid passports would be required.

However, Keir Starmer is still undecided about which way Labour will vote, despite the party leader having previously suggested Covid certificates would be [against the “British instinct”](#).

Labour shadow ministers were locked in talks on Tuesday about the party’s position and were expected to have made a decision by Wednesday morning. If they oppose the passports, Johnson could face defeat in the Commons as the Liberal Democrats are also opposed.

However, senior Labour figures are believed to have argued that the situation has fundamentally changed since the party first set out its position. Cases are soaring, and jabs are being offered to young people and pregnant women who otherwise might have been excluded, reducing the argument that they are discriminatory. Ministers have promised exemptions for those who cannot be vaccinated for medical reasons.

Asked on Tuesday whether access to pubs and transport could eventually be subject to Covid passports, Johnson's spokesperson said the government was "going to use the coming weeks to look at the evidence, particularly both in the UK and globally before making a specific decision".

Several Tory MPs spoke of their frustration. Sir Iain Duncan Smith, a former Tory leader, said the policy was "without logic", especially as having two jabs was currently not enough for people to avoid isolating after exposure to Covid.

Steve Baker, one of the main opponents of Covid passports, said: "There is nothing I can do or Conservatives can do if Labour continue to decline to oppose the government's illiberal policies. This is really now all about Sir Keir, who described this policy as un-British."

Many were also sceptical that the plan, proposed from the end of September, would come to pass. "I am considering voting against the whip for the first time in my life, but I'm also not going to worry about it too much over the summer as it does sound like No 10 using it as a stick to try and persuade young people to get jabbed," one Tory backbencher said.

A former minister is braced for another U-turn. "My sense about the government is that they've become a racing car that always ends up at the same spot they started at. Drifting to the right, on to the straight and back in to the stands again ... it's just reacting to this and that, a scientist or a public opinion poll. There is little sense that there's a clear plan. We've changed it so often," he said.

One MP said they had "no doubt" Johnson would insist on vaccine passports for the party's conference, and that "as a result, it shouldn't come as a surprise if a number of Conservative MPs and activists refuse to attend".

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Border officials told not to make Covid checks on green and amber list arrivals

Exclusive: officers in England no longer have to verify whether new arrivals have received a negative Covid test

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Border Force officers say the changes have been brought in because IT systems are struggling to cope with the number of checks. Photograph: Hannah McKay/Reuters

Border Force officers say the changes have been brought in because IT systems are struggling to cope with the number of checks. Photograph: Hannah McKay/Reuters

[Jamie Grierson](#) Home affairs correspondent
[@JamieGrierson](#)

Tue 20 Jul 2021 12.04 EDT

Border officials are no longer required to make basic Covid checks on people arriving in England from green and amber list countries, according to leaked instructions that have prompted claims that the government is turning a blind eye to the risk of importing Covid cases.

A change that came into effect on Monday means Border Force officers no longer have to verify whether new arrivals have received a negative Covid test, have booked a test within coming days, or have a [passenger locator form](#) showing an address where they will isolate if necessary.

Border Force sources contacted the Guardian on condition of anonymity to raise serious concerns with the shift in approach, meant to reduce queues as foreign travel restarts.

The government said it would not comment on leaked documents and stressed that airlines were legally required to conduct all the necessary checks.

Ministers' approach to the border has been one of the mostly heavily criticised aspects of the government's Covid-19 strategy. Critics claim the government was slow to act in shutting the borders to arrivals from India this year, ultimately allowing the more infectious Delta variant to take hold.

Reports have previously suggested the cabinet has been frequently divided over the best approach, with the home secretary, Priti Patel, understood to have called for tighter controls as far back as March 2020.

An instruction sent to Border Force staff, seen by the Guardian, explains that for arrivals from countries on the amber and green lists:

- Officers are not required to routinely check for a passenger locator form or pre-departure testing or tests to be taken on day two and eight after arrival.

- Where the IT system indicates a passenger locator form has not been found, officers are not required to check for the form, or question the passenger unless the passenger displays other “warning or behavioural indicators to suggest non-compliance”.
- Electronic gates (eGates) will no longer refer passengers to in-person checks by Border Force officers if a passenger locator form is not found.

The passenger locator form is designed to be used to trace individuals who may have come into contact with someone testing positive for Covid. It is also used to monitor self isolation of those individuals who have been abroad and returned to the UK and who are not exempt from quarantine measures.

Border Force officers told the Guardian the changes were brought in because the IT systems used at the border were struggling to cope with the number of checks and the new policy allowing fully vaccinated passengers to avoid self-isolation on return from amber list countries. There were fears of a surge in arrivals and significantly increased queue times, they said.

One officer said: “The only rationale for this change is to speed up queue times when travel is expected to increase. At a time when the country is unlocking, this is the time when we should be using every tool available to mitigate the risks, not turn a literal blind eye.”

Another officer challenged the government’s claim that checks conducted by the airline were sufficient. “The official line is the airlines are so good at checking forms that we can rely on them and we don’t need to check ourselves. However, empirical evidence is that we are getting passengers arriving with positive tests and being allowed to travel because no one has read their forms correctly,” they said.

The Liberal Democrat chair of the all-party parliamentary group on coronavirus, Layla Moran, said: “This beggars belief. Scrapping Covid checks at our borders will make it far harder to detect and keep out variants from abroad. It seems the government is intent on repeating the mistakes that allowed the Delta variant to become dominant in the UK.”

Double-vaccinated passengers returning from amber list countries, including much of Europe, are no longer required to isolate for 10 days but must still take a test before landing in England and on day two after arrival. Unvaccinated passengers must isolate and take the same tests, plus an additional test on day eight after arrival.

The testing regime has been criticised as being prohibitively expensive. Research [published by Which?](#) this month revealed the current cost of testing was likely to be too expensive for most people, especially families. An unvaccinated traveller on a return trip to Spain requires four tests totalling an estimated £233 per person, or for a family of four £932.

A government spokesperson said: “Our utmost priority is protecting the health of the public and our enhanced borders regime is helping reduce the risk of new variants being transmitted.

“All passenger locator forms are still being checked by carriers, as they are legally required to do, and to suggest otherwise is wrong. This legal requirement on carriers is underpinned by a robust compliance regime, which is overseen by regulators.

“Compliance with these rules is essential in order to protect the population from new variants of Covid-19, and so there will be tough fines for those who do not follow the rules.”

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No 10 rebuked for failure to list ‘critical workers’ exempt from quarantine

Ministers face repeated calls to clarify in which jobs people can avoid isolation if fully vaccinated

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Only railway signallers and air traffic controllers have been cited as examples of staff who can apply to leave isolation to go to work.
Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

Only railway signallers and air traffic controllers have been cited as examples of staff who can apply to leave isolation to go to work.
Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

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

Tue 20 Jul 2021 13.56 EDT

Ministers have been accused of sowing further confusion for councils and companies struggling to keep services running, as it was revealed no list will be published of “critical workers” who can leave isolation if double-vaccinated.

With cases rocketing and [hundreds of thousands of people forced into isolation](#), the government had faced pressure from Tory MPs to bring forward the date when those who have been fully vaccinated will not need to quarantine – currently [scheduled for 16 August in England](#).

There are fears the record-high number of infections is having a significant knock-on effect on the amount of people “pinged” by the Covid app or contacted by [NHS](#) test and trace, putting pressure on patient treatment in hospitals and on services such as bin collections due to a shortage of staff.

While the government on Monday announced that some people would be exempt a month before the rules change for everyone else, it faced repeated calls to clarify which critical workers who have had both jabs would qualify.

Pressed for the full list, Downing Street revealed on Tuesday that one would not be published, and said it would be up to businesses to apply for an exemption for their workers directly to the relevant Whitehall department, with all submissions coordinated by the Cabinet Office.

NHS staff, and those working in the food and medicines supply chain, as well as border staff, will be included, Boris Johnson’s spokesperson said, adding: “We are not going to be producing a list covering individual sectors.”

James Lowman, chief executive of the Association of Convenience Stores, said the government’s refusal to identify clearly those that counted as critical workers was “unhelpful and unworkable for the thousands of small businesses dealing with staff shortages as a result of being pinged by the Covid app”.

“The government needs to take action now by bringing forward the 16 August change to isolation rules, otherwise stores will be at risk of having to close over the next few weeks,” he added.

James Jamieson, chairman of the Local Government Association, said it should be up to councils rather than Whitehall to identify who is classed as a critical worker because local authorities should be able to change the definition to “reflect the changing staffing demands across services as they look to redeploy staff”.

One senior Tory MP said ministers were in a “mess” on the issue and the country would soon find itself at “breaking point” with many more firms unable to operate. Seema Malhotra, the shadow business minister, said the lack of clear advice illustrated “the chaotic decision making in government”.

She said it would “undermine business confidence, creating uncertainty for employers and the public about what they should be doing to tackle virus transmission” – adding it was bad for public health and the economy.

Layla Moran, chair of the all-party parliamentary group on Covid, said businesses had been “left in disarray” owing to “the lack of transparency” from the government about which critical workers would qualify for exemption.

“It feels like ministers have simply thrown in the towel in the fight against Covid, and are leaving businesses and the public to pick up the pieces,” she said.

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More than 1m school pupils in England absent last week due to Covid

Official figures reveal 14.3% of children were not in class because of coronavirus-related issues

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Schools in England have suffered a ‘huge drop’ in attendance as the summer holidays approach. Photograph: Akira Suemori/Rex/Shutterstock

Schools in England have suffered a ‘huge drop’ in attendance as the summer holidays approach. Photograph: Akira Suemori/Rex/Shutterstock

[Sally Weale](#) Education correspondent

Tue 20 Jul 2021 08.24 EDT

More than 1 million children in England were out of school last week for Covid-19-related reasons, with absence rates at a record level, government figures have revealed.

As state schools head towards the summer holiday, official figures released by the Department for Education (DfE) showed another huge drop in attendance with approximately one in seven pupils not in school (1.05 million), the highest rates of absence since schools fully reopened in March.

The statistics show that 14.3% of children were not in class last week because of Covid-related issues, up from 11.2% the week before. Secondary schools are again worst hit, with 17.9% of pupils absent compared with 17.5% a week earlier.

The number of schools forced to close entirely as a result of Covid has also gone up, while numbers self-isolating after a contact in school jumped significantly from 624,000 to 774,000. A further 160,000 pupils were self-isolating because of a contact outside school, up from 123,000 a week earlier.

Confirmed Covid cases among pupils jumped from 39,000 to 47,000 in the space of just a week, with a further 34,000 children off with suspected Covid infection and 35,000 absent owing to school closures.

The latest figures, which record attendance for 15 July, were published amid continuing confusion among school leaders over the decision by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation not to offer Covid vaccinations to all students over the age of 12 and the scrapping of isolation bubbles.

Paul Whiteman, the general secretary of school leaders' union NAHT, warned of continuing disruption to education without further measures to prevent transmission in schools.

“Schools have seen another huge drop in attendance as we near the end of term, with much of this absence due to pupils isolating. However, there has also been a sharp rise in the number of confirmed Covid cases in schools,” he said.

“The government’s own modelling predicts that the number of cases among children and young people is only going to get worse by the start of next

term. Parents and school leaders will therefore be looking to government to take urgent action to drive down case numbers among school-age children.”

With figures showing almost a quarter of all pupils in England and one in 15 teachers absent from school last week, the National Education Union called on ministers to explain how they would prevent further infections and continuing high levels of absence next term.

Kevin Courtney, the NEU joint general secretary, said: “This outcome was predictable and is a result of the government’s failure to heed warnings, or seemingly to learn any lessons at all over the 16 months of the pandemic.

“The news this week from JCVI that children generally will not be vaccinated means that the government must look all the harder at mitigations that can impede the spread of the virus in schools from September.”

Geoff Barton, the general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, called for substantial financial and practical support for on-site asymptomatic testing for students, high-quality air ventilation systems and robust outbreak management plans.

“This work cannot be done on the cheap and the government needs to stop counting the pennies and address the situation with a proper injection of support and funding to allow leaders to prepare properly,” he said.

Labour accused the government of “abandoning the nation’s children” and of failing to take action to turn the tide on rising cases in schools. The shadow education secretary, Kate Green, said: “Parents and schools have been crying out for help, but the Conservatives have washed their hands of their responsibility to keep children learning.

“The government must take action to keep children learning for the last week of term, and ensure that by September schools have the support they need to avoid further disruption to children’s education.”

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Sexual harassment

Public street harassment set to be made illegal in England and Wales

Strategy to stop violence against women and girls could also see non-disclosure agreements banned



A woman carries a placard during a protest against harassment of women in central London in April 2021. Photograph: Tayfun Salci/ZUMA Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

A woman carries a placard during a protest against harassment of women in central London in April 2021. Photograph: Tayfun Salci/ZUMA Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

[Alexandra Topping](#)

Tue 20 Jul 2021 17.30 EDT

Public street harassment is likely to be criminalised under plans being drawn up by the government as part of its long-awaited strategy to tackle violence against women and girls (VAWG) for England and Wales.

The use of non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) in cases of sexual harassment and abuse in higher education settings could be also be banned after a review.

It had been briefed that home secretary Priti Patel would not look to introduce [a new street harassment law](#) – called for by campaigners and the government's own adviser.

But before the publication of its VAWG strategy on Wednesday, the government said it was “looking carefully at where there may be gaps in existing law”.

Patel said she was “determined to give the police the powers they need to crack down on perpetrators and carry out their duties to protect the public whilst providing victims with the care and support they deserve”.

The VAWG strategy will also see the launch of a new “StreetSafe” app allowing women and girls to record where they feel unsafe, as well as a public health campaign which will focus on perpetrator behaviour.

A £5m “safety of women at night” fund will concentrate on “innovative” projects, such as the widely criticised pilot to put [undercover policemen in bars and nightclubs to keep women safe](#).

More than 180,000 people responded to a consultation on the new violence against women strategy, the majority of them [following the murder of Sarah Everard](#), who was killed while walking home from a friend’s house in Clapham, south London in March.

A new national police chief with overall responsibility for tackling violence against women and girls will also be introduced, while the Ministry of Justice will commission a 24/7 rape and sexual assault helpline.

The strategy also promises a review into offender management to enable police to target repeat offenders, while the government also confirmed it

would make virginity testing – the examination of the hymen – illegal.

Jess Phillips, the shadow minister for domestic violence, said there was much to welcome in the strategy, but added: “It has absolutely nothing in it about the sexual exploitation of adult women or any real sense about how it is going to ensure crimes like indecent exposure will be taken more seriously. Saying it on a document doesn’t make it so.”

Andrea Simon, director of the End Violence Against [Women](#) Coalition said the review into NDAs in higher education should be extended across all work places. “While the language is bold the funding detailed so far will not ensure the government can produce its promise: a radical change in the whole system,” she said.

Nimco Ali, independent adviser to the strategy said ending violence against women and girls would take “whole system” change. “The strategy aims to do just that, taking action through legislation and education, and I hope will be the foundation on which we can build a safer world for women and girls.”

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Online abuse

Cyberflashing should be new criminal offence, review suggests

Law Commission warns of ‘untold’ harm through online abuse such as unsolicited obscene images



Existing British laws do not always tackle harmful online behaviour yet can also interfere with freedom of expression, says Law Commission.
Photograph: Yui Mok/PA

Existing British laws do not always tackle harmful online behaviour yet can also interfere with freedom of expression, says Law Commission.
Photograph: Yui Mok/PA

[Haroon Siddique](#) Legal affairs correspondent

Wed 21 Jul 2021 01.01 EDT

Unsolicited sending of obscene images should be made illegal through the creation of a new offence of cyberflashing, a UK government-commissioned review recommended.

The [Law Commission](#) said that while the [Sexual Offences Act](#) criminalised exposure of genitals it was not sufficiently clear whether that covered images or video recordings.

In a report, published on Wednesday, the commission said: “Cyberflashing can cause serious harm. It is often experienced as a form of sexual harassment, involving coercive sexual intrusion by men into women’s everyday lives.”

British Transport Police recorded 66 reports of unsolicited photographs sent – through means such as the filesharing service AirDrop – in 2019, up from three in 2016. The commission described this increase as dramatic but likely to represent the tip of the iceberg.

Proposing other new listed offences, including pile-on harassment, knowingly sending false communications, and encouragement or assistance of serious self-harm, the commission said that the existing legislation could be ineffective at criminalising genuinely [harmful online behaviour](#). In other instances it could disproportionately interfere with freedom of expression.

It said the changes, if enacted, would involve a shift away from prohibited categories of communication such as “indecent” or “grossly offensive”, which could be “vague”, towards a focus on the harmful consequences of particular communications.

Prof Penney Lewis, criminal law commissioner at the Law Commission, said: “Online abuse can cause untold harm to those targeted and change is needed to ensure we are protecting victims from abuse such as cyberflashing and pile-on harassment.

“At the same time, our reforms would better protect freedom of expression by narrowing the reach of the criminal law so it only criminalises the most

harmful behaviour.”

The report said that more than 70% of UK adults had a social media profile and internet users, on average, spent more than four hours online each day. Analysis by the Alan Turing institute estimated that about a third of people in the UK had been exposed to online abuse.

Published less than a fortnight after [black football players were subjected to racist abuse on social media](#), after [England's defeat in the European Championship final](#), the report also highlighted the “corrosive” online abuse of football players.

Caroline Dinenage, minister for digital and culture, said the government would carefully consider the commission’s recommendations. “We are putting new legal responsibilities on social media companies to protect the British public. But we have to be confident we can hold the individuals using these sites to threaten, abuse and spread hate, accountable too.”

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[China](#)

Deadly floods hit central China, killing 12 and forcing thousands to flee homes

Torrential rainfall and burst rivers swamp Henan cities, with commuters trapped in underground trains in the capital Zhengzhou

01:46

Deadly rains hit central China as subways flood and tens of millions impacted – video

Vincent Ni China affairs correspondent, and Helen Davidson in Taipei

Wed 21 Jul 2021 00.57 EDT

Days of torrential rain and massive flooding have hit China's Henan province, bursting the banks of rivers, overwhelming dams and the public transport system and forcing thousands of people to evacuate their homes.



People swim in floodwater in Zhengzhou Photograph: Rex/Shutterstock

At least 12 people have been killed in the provincial capital, Zhengzhou. A year's worth of rain – 640mm – fell in just three days. The city's weather

bureau said more than 552mm of rain had fallen between 7pm Monday and 7pm Tuesday, including 202mm between 4 and 5pm on Tuesday.

About 200,000 people have been moved to shelters, state media Xinhua reported on Wednesday, citing local government. The rainfall flooded the city's subway system, collapsed roads, and prompted the suspension of inbound flights.

Zheng

Across social media, videos showed the severity of the flooding, with hundreds of cars floating down main streets, and crowds of people forming human chains to rescue each other from roads and flooded buildings.

In the subway system where many of the confirmed deaths are thought to have occurred, waist-high water gushed through the tunnels, submerging platforms and filling carriages. Other videos showed commuters trapped inside carriages holding on to handrails with water up to their chests. At least five lifeless bodies were visible in one clip, filmed at an unidentified Zhengzhou station.

“The water reached my chest,” a survivor wrote on social media. “I was really scared, but the most terrifying thing was not the water, but the diminishing air supply in the carriage.”

The death toll was expected to rise, with numerous social media posts by loved ones of people missing. In the nearby city of GongYi at least one person was reportedly killed and two reported missing.



Stranded cars in Zhengzhou. Photograph: Rex/Shutterstock

Zhengzhou's flood control headquarters said that water storage at the Guojiazui reservoir was at "major risk" of dam failure and the local government was ordering evacuations.

In the city of Luoyang, local authorities said the rainfall had caused a 20-metre breach in the Yihetan dam "could collapse at any time". Early on Wednesday a division of China's military were sent out to the site to carry out emergency blasting and flood diversion.

Other divisions were sent out across the province to fight the floods and carry out rescues, authorities said.

The heavy rain across Henan began on 17 July. On Tuesday, weather agencies issued the highest warning level for the province and Chinese weather forecasts expected further severe downpours.



Flooding in Zhengzhou. Photograph: Rex/Shutterstock

From Saturday to Tuesday, 3,535 weather stations in Henan, one of China's most populous provinces with 94 million people, reported rainfall exceeding 5cm. Among the stations 1,614 registered levels above 10cm and 151 above 25cm, the authorities said.

Footage on China's social media showed the world-renowned Shaolin Temple, known for martial arts, as well as other cultural sites, badly affected. Hundreds of trapped residents in Henan called for help online as flooding cut electricity to their homes.

7月20日晚，郑州暴雨地铁5号线一车厢多人被困，水位淹过肩膀。根据郑州地铁晚上发布的消息，受持续暴雨影响，郑州地铁全线网车站已暂停运营服务，消防人员正在救援。
pic.twitter.com/wCiz7TGhki

— The Paper 澎湃新闻 (@thepapercn) [July 20, 2021](#)

Floods are common in China's rainy season, but their impact has worsened over the decades, due in part to China's rapid urbanisation and the global climate crisis.

Extreme weather events have occurred in many parts of China this summer. Hundreds of thousands of residents in Sichuan province had to be relocated this month due to floods and landslides.

In June, Hotan city, in the far-west region of Xinjiang, had record-breaking rainfall, causing one resident to comment on social media that “the rainfall [this month] is equivalent to the combined rainfall of the past two years”.



Rescuers transfer stranded villagers in Longtou. Photograph: Xinhua/Rex/Shutterstock

Greenpeace said the risk of extreme weather was now highest in China in the densely populated city centres but that it was also growing fast for the outskirts of large cities because of rapid urbanisation.

Liu Junyan, of Greenpeace International, told Chinese media: “Because of the highly concentrated population, infrastructure and economic activity, the exposure and vulnerability of climate hazards are higher in urban areas. Cities are an important sector of global greenhouse gas emissions, which account for about 70% of the total emissions.”

Additional reporting by Jason Lu

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Dominic Cummings

Boris Johnson's aides plotted to oust him as PM, Dominic Cummings claims

BBC interview reveals people decided Johnson was unfit to be PM within weeks of 2019 election victory



Dominic Cummings suggested to Laura Kuenssberg that a new political party should be set up to 'kill' off the Conservatives. Photograph: Jeff Overs/BBC/PA

Dominic Cummings suggested to Laura Kuenssberg that a new political party should be set up to 'kill' off the Conservatives. Photograph: Jeff Overs/BBC/PA

Aubrey Allegretti Political correspondent

[@breeallegretti](#)

Tue 20 Jul 2021 13.32 EDT

Boris Johnson's closest aides decided he was unfit to be prime minister within weeks of his 2019 election victory and began plotting to oust him, [Dominic Cummings](#) has claimed.

In his first TV interview since [quitting as one of the most senior advisers in No 10](#), Cummings levelled repeated criticism of his former boss, saying aides feared Johnson had no plan to run the country and was only obsessed with "stupid" infrastructure projects.

He accused the prime minister's wife, Carrie, of trying to "appoint complete clowns to certain key jobs", claiming she wanted to be "pulling the strings" at the heart of government instead of the old Vote Leave team, and suggested a new political party be set up to "kill" off the [Conservatives](#).

Cummings has launched severe attacks on the government in the months since he stepped down, frequently [accusing Johnson of revelling in chaos](#), having little grasp of the Covid pandemic and ignoring calls to implement a second lockdown across England last autumn that led to many unnecessary deaths.

His blogs, leaked WhatsApp message exchanges posted to Twitter and seven-hour testimony to two parliamentary committees on the handling of the pandemic have all shone a light on the inner machinations of Johnson's administration. However, some Tory figures have questioned his trustworthiness given the infamous breach of Covid rules when he travelled to Durham and Barnard Castle during the first lockdown last spring.

Cummings said that until the general election where the prime minister won a landslide Commons majority of 80 on the back of a promise to "get [Brexit](#) done", Boris and Carrie had been happy to have veterans of the pro-Brexit campaign group he ran working in Downing Street.

But after that moment in December 2019, he said [Carrie Johnson](#) became frustrated that he was running the show inside No 10.

With his allies fearing for their positions by January 2020, Cummings said people inside government began privately speculating that “either we’ll all have gone from here or we’ll be in the process of trying to get rid of [Johnson] and get someone else in as prime minister” and discussed ways to oust Johnson.

He said they thought Johnson “doesn’t have a plan, he doesn’t know how to be prime minister and we only got him in there because we had to solve a certain problem, not because he was the right person to be running the country”.

Shedding light on his departure as one of Johnson’s most senior advisers, Cummings said the disagreements between him and the prime minister over how to tackle Covid grew, and that a “big argument” blew up over Carrie Johnson’s “interfering” with appointments in an “unethical and unprofessional way”.

Reflecting in his role in the run up to and years after the 2016 EU referendum, Cummings said that he did try to “provoke” some remainers – but that that was a “by-product” of them pushing for a so-called “people’s vote” or confirmatory ballot on the terms of Brexit.

Speaking to the BBC for a programme to be aired at 7pm on BBC Two on Tuesday, Cummings said: “Did we lean into that in various ways to try and disorientate the people on the other side, yes! But that’s … politics.”

He also said anyone who was sure about answers to questions on the issue of Brexit “has got a screw loose”, and added that “no one on earth knows” if leaving the EU was a good idea.

Cummings urged Brexiters to consider creating a new party to take on the Conservatives or do what he did and “take over an existing party and try and bend it to something that’s different” – but did not say he should necessarily be at the forefront of such a movement.

A No 10 spokesperson insisted Johnson had “taken the necessary action to protect lives and livelihoods, guided by the best scientific advice” throughout the pandemic.

They stressed that the UK had seen “the fastest vaccination rollout in Europe”, saved millions of jobs through the furlough scheme and “prevented the NHS from being overwhelmed”, adding: “The government is entirely focused on emerging cautiously from the pandemic and building back better.”

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The government wants to bring in vaccine passports from September for nightclubs and other crowded indoor venues. Photograph: Alberto Pezzali/AP

[Guardian morning briefing](#)

Wednesday briefing: Tory rebellion brews over vaccine passports

The government wants to bring in vaccine passports from September for nightclubs and other crowded indoor venues. Photograph: Alberto Pezzali/AP

Dozens prepared to defy PM as Labour mulls support ... UK funds fresh Channel crossing clampdown ... life of baby orca Toa hangs in balance

by [Warren Murray](#)

Wed 21 Jul 2021 01.33 EDT

Top story: Result may hinge on Labour votes

Good morning, Warren Murray here with your passport to the news.

Conservative MPs believe Boris Johnson faces a [major rebellion over Covid vaccine passports](#) but could be supported by Labour, who were on Tuesday night wavering over whether to back them. Tory MPs opposed to the plan for nightclubs, other crowded indoor venues and possibly more places, said more than 40 Conservatives were prepared to defy the PM over civil liberties concerns. The scale of the rebellion could put any vote on a knife-edge if opposition parties also oppose it.

In the US, an emboldened Dr Anthony Fauci has clashed with Rand Paul, a Republican senator for Kentucky and longtime opponent of mask-wearing. Paul suggested that Fauci had lied before Congress in May when he denied that the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) funded so-called “gain of function” research on viruses at the Wuhan virology lab in China.

02:49

Fauci to Rand Paul: 'You do not know what you are talking about' – video

Fauci told a Senate committee that a study cited by Paul referenced a different sort of virus entirely. “This paper that you are referring to was

judged by qualified staff up and down the chain as not being gain of function ... Senator Paul, you do not know what you're talking about, quite frankly. And I want to say that officially. [You do not know what you are talking about ... If anybody is lying here, senator, it is you.](#)" More coronavirus news at our live blog.

France paid to hold back boats – The UK taxpayer is to hand over a further €62.7m (£55m) to France to fund another [clampdown on small-boat crossings of the Channel](#), the Home Office has revealed. The home secretary, Priti Patel, agreed to pay the sum as part of a deal reached with the French interior minister, Gérald Darmanin, on Tuesday. At least 430 people crossed the Dover Strait on Monday, a record for a single day. On Tuesday more than 287 migrants succeeded in reaching the UK, bringing the total for the year to at least 8,452 according to available official data compiled by PA Media.

Carrie's 'clowns' – Boris Johnson's closest aides decided he was unfit to be prime minister within weeks of his 2019 election victory and began plotting to oust him, Dominic Cummings has claimed. On the BBC, in his first TV interview since quitting as one of the most senior advisers in No 10, Cummings told how disagreements grew between him and the PM over how to tackle Covid. He also accused the prime minister's wife, Carrie, of trying to "appoint complete clowns to certain key jobs". He urged Brexiters to consider creating a new party to take on the Conservatives or do what he did and "[take over an existing party and try and bend it to something that's different](#)" – but did not say he should necessarily be at the forefront of such a movement.

Midweek catch-up

> Boris Johnson has called on the EU to "address the serious issues that have arisen" as he publishes a blueprint aimed at re-engineering the Northern Ireland Brexit protocol, including [eliminating checks on goods ranging from car parts to fresh food including sausages](#).

- > Men's spending on goods [causes 16% more climate-heating emissions than women's](#), despite the amount of money being very similar, a Swedish study has found. The biggest difference was men's spending on petrol and diesel for cars.
 - > Rishi Sunak is poised to usher in [cuts to public services of up to £17bn](#) compared with pre-pandemic plans unless he takes action this summer to increase funding, the Institute for Fiscal Studies has said.
 - > Labour's ruling body has gone ahead and [banned four far-left factions](#) that were vocal supporters of Jeremy Corbyn's leadership. The NEC also altered its complaints process to address its handling of complaints about antisemitism.
 - > Unsolicited sending of obscene images should be made illegal through the creation of [a new offence of cyberflashing](#), a UK government-commissioned review has recommended. Separately, [street harassment is to be outlawed in England and Wales](#).
 - > After Jeff Bezos and friends went just over the edge of space in his Blue Origin rocket, experts have addressed [why the spacecraft has a very particular shape](#).
-

Trump ally on foreign influence charge – The chair of Donald Trump's 2017 inaugural committee, Tom Barrack, has been arrested for allegedly conspiring to [influence Trump's foreign policy positions to benefit the United Arab Emirates](#) and commit crimes striking at what prosecutors described as "the very heart of our democracy". Barrack, 74, of Santa Monica, California, was among three men charged in federal court in Brooklyn, New York, with conspiring to act as an unregistered foreign agent as they tried to influence foreign policy while Trump was running in 2016 and later while he was president.

'We crave a Disney ending' – Time could be running out for a stranded baby killer whale named Toa, who has charmed New Zealand but needs round-the-clock care to stay alive. The young calf, thought to be between two and six months old, became stuck in rocks 10 days ago. A cast of

hundreds, from experts to volunteers, have been [caring for Toa while the search for his pod continues](#).



A rescuer with baby orca Toa. Photograph: Eva Corlett/The Guardian

Dr Karen Stockin, a marine biologist, said internationally recognised practice for separated cetaceans this young was either lifelong human care or euthanasia: “New Zealand has no captive or rehabilitation facility that could support Toa.” The conservation department’s marine species manager, Ian Angus, said that while the rescue operation was entering into a delicate stage, Toa’s health remained good and the focus was on reuniting him with his pod.

Today in Focus podcast: Cartels, corruption and cyber-weapons

Pegasus Project part 3: In the latest part of our mini-series, Michael Safi hears from Nina Lakhani on how 15,000 Mexicans including [journalists and politicians appeared on a list of possible targets for surveillance](#).

Today in Focus

Pegasus project part 3

00:00:00

00:24:43

Lunchtime read: China's plans for Syria

War may be winding down, but the Syrian economy lies in ruins. And with Bashar al-Assad in charge for seven more years, the country remains splintered. After the president was sworn in following a poll described by Britain and Europe as “neither free nor fair”, his first foreign guest was China’s foreign minister, Wang Yi.



Wang Yi and Bashar al-Assad. Photograph: Xinhua/REX/Shutterstock

China's high-visibility stake in postwar Syria is straight from its playbook elsewhere in the Middle East, as well as in Asia and Africa: [windfall investments in return for local access and global cover, writes Martin Chulov.](#)

Sport

Our Tokyo 2020 newsletter brings you the best of the Olympic and Paralympic buildup and competition. [Get ahead of the field by signing up here!](#)

England ended their white-ball summer with [yet another series victory](#) after clinching a final-over thriller in this T20 decider against Pakistan by three wickets. Alistair Brownlee has backed the International Olympic Committee's decision to proceed with the rescheduled Games amid the Covid-19 pandemic, saying a stripped-back Games [will be better than none at all](#). Giannis Antetokounmpo ended one of the greatest [NBA finals](#) ever with 50 points and a championship after his [Milwaukee Bucks beat the Phoenix Suns 105-98](#). The British & Irish Lions have been [given a major boost](#) following confirmation that all three Test matches against South Africa will now be played at sea level. Anthony Joshua will defend his WBA, IBF and WBO heavyweight titles [against former undisputed world cruiserweight champion Oleksandr Usyk](#) as the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium hosts a boxing event for the first time on 25 September. And revelations made in Monday's Panorama documentary have raised urgent questions for horseracing, [writes Greg Wood](#), and urgent action is needed from the sport's authorities in Britain and Ireland.

Business

The price of bitcoin has dipped below \$30,000 for the first time in a month after regulators in the US and Europe [signalled stricter oversight for cryptocurrencies](#). The European Commission wants to make companies handling cryptos for clients register their name, address and bank account details, matching rules designed to stamp out money-laundering. US regulators said they were planning tighter rules for stablecoins, digital currencies that are pegged to conventional money. The dollar itself has been stronger, sending the pound to \$1.362, while sterling has slipped to €1.156. The FTSE100 is set to rise 0.2% this morning.

The papers

The **Guardian**'s front page story is that [Emmanuel Macron and 13 other heads of state and government](#) are on the leaked Pegasus database. It also reveals that border officials in England are "[turning a blind eye](#)" to Covid border checks. The **Daily Telegraph** leads on the NHS app, with "PM urged to expand Covid app exemptions". It also gives a prominent spot to the UK's

decision to pay £55m to French border officials to fund a further clampdown on migration. You can read our story [here](#).



Guardian front page, Wednesday 21 July 2021.

The **Times**' headline on the French border patrols is "Migrant crossings into Britain hit new record". The Daily Express has "Migrant crisis: Patel pays French £54m to do their job". The **FT** leads on Brexit as the UK prepares to unveil new demands on trading arrangements. The **Independent**'s headline is "Industry leaders hit out at 'ping' exemption chaos".

The **i** reveals that England has three weeks "to avoid new Covid restrictions", reporting that "Sage scientists have urged ministers to bring back rules early". "Pandemic Pandemonium" is top of the **Mirror**, as "One million kids off school". **Metro** leads on the France migration deal with "Gunboat diplomacy" as does the **Daily Mail**, with "Now Priti channels £54m to France".

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Meat

Eating processed meat raises risk of heart disease by a fifth

Oxford University researchers urge people to reduce consumption by three-quarters or give it up



Bacon, ham and sausages increased the heart disease risk but chicken and turkey did not. Photograph: Rick Wilking/Reuters

Bacon, ham and sausages increased the heart disease risk but chicken and turkey did not. Photograph: Rick Wilking/Reuters

Rachel Hall

@rachela_hall

Wed 21 Jul 2021 02.00 EDT

Eating processed meat raises the risk of heart disease by a fifth, according to the largest ever analysis of research into the impact of meat consumption on

cardiac health.

Researchers at the [University of Oxford](#) are urging the public to cut their red and processed meat consumption by three-quarters, or to give it up entirely, to lower their risk of dying from coronary heart disease.

The team found that eating 50g of processed meat, including bacon, ham and sausages, increased the risk of heart disease by 18% owing to its high salt and saturated fat content.

This fell to 9% for unprocessed red meat, such as beef, lamb and pork, but there was no link found between heart disease and eating poultry, such as chicken and turkey, which are lower in saturated fat.

Anika Knüppel, a co-lead author of the study, said: “We know that meat production is a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions and we need to reduce meat production and consumption to benefit the environment. Our study shows that a reduction in red and processed meat intake would bring personal health benefits too.”

She added that there was no agreement on what constituted a safe level, and instead recommended consuming as little as possible, with once a week a possible maximum. She urged policymakers to strengthen public health guidelines to encourage more people to limit their processed red meat intake.

While the research did not establish the reasons for the link, it is thought that high intakes of saturated fat increase levels of harmful low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol, while excess salt consumption raises blood pressure, both of which are present in high quantities in processed meat and are well-established risk factors for coronary heart disease.

Nearly 9 million people die every year globally of coronary heart disease, which is caused by narrowed arteries that supply the heart with blood. In the UK, 10% of people are expected to die from coronary heart disease eventually, a figure the researchers estimate could be reduced to 9% if people cut their red meat intake by three-quarters or stopped consuming it.

Previous work from the same research team has indicated that even moderate intakes of red and processed meat are associated with an increased risk of bowel cancer.

Researchers at Oxford's Nuffield Department of Population [Health](#) analysed all the available evidence, including 13 cohort studies tracking the health of more than 1.4 million people for up to 30 years, to establish definitively the link between coronary heart disease and red meat consumption. Most studies were based on white adults living in Europe or the US, with more data required on other populations.

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Labour

Labour votes to ban four far-left factions that supported Corbyn's leadership

Party also votes to overhaul complaints process after frustration with handling of antisemitism allegations



Jeremy Corbyn with Keir Starmer in 2019. Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

Jeremy Corbyn with Keir Starmer in 2019. Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

[Rowena Mason](#) Deputy political editor

Tue 20 Jul 2021 17.42 EDT

Labour's ruling body has voted to ban four far-left factions that were vocal [supporters of Jeremy Corbyn](#)'s leadership and to overhaul its complaints process.

The National Executive Committee moved on Tuesday to proscribe Resist and [Labour](#) Against the Witchhunt, which claims antisemitism allegations were politically motivated, and [Labour](#) in Exile Network, which expressly welcomes expelled or suspended members.

Socialist Appeal, a group that describes itself as a Marxist voice of Labour and youth, will also become a banned group. Anyone found to be a member of any of these groups could be automatically expelled from the Labour party.

The NEC also backed a new complaints process that will make sure grievances relating to protected characteristics will be subject to independent veto or independent verification.

The process was designed to address years of frustration about the party's handling of [complaints about antisemitism](#), which Labour leader Keir Starmer had vowed to address.

A new review panel of independent lawyers will make decisions on complaints, and a new independent appeal board will hear appeals against decisions.

Anneliese Dodds, Labour party chair, said: "We are acting decisively to put our house in order and show that Labour is – and always will be – the party of equality.

"We are getting on with the job of making sure the Labour party is a safe and welcoming space for the benefit of all our members.

"This will be the fairest, most robust process of any political party that we know of.

"We will continue to consult groups and individuals, especially those who have been subject to harassment, abuse and discrimination, as we finalise these proposals ahead of our conference."

A report on Labour's functioning in Liverpool was also accepted by the NEC, which will mean all prospective candidates for the party must get training on dealing with antisemitism from the Jewish Labour Movement.

A Labour spokesperson said the NEC decided to ban the four organisations because "these organisations are not compatible with Labour's rules or our aims and values."

"Labour is a broad, welcoming and democratic party and we are committed to ensuring it stays that way," she added.

However, the move angered some leftwing members who believe this may be part of a wider purge of the party.

Several left-leaning groups took part in a picket of the NEC meeting at Southside, Labour's headquarters in Victoria, central London, to protest against the proposals.

Socialist Appeal is strongly opposed to Keir Starmer's leadership, and organised a campaign to remove him which involved putting forward a rule change to this year's Labour conference that would allow members to vote out the leader of the Labour party through a vote of no confidence. This rule change has been submitted to conference by several CLPs.

Rob Sewell, editor of Socialist Appeal, said: "This is a blatant, politically motivated attack on the left by the Labour right wing. It is clear that Starmer and the right wing are determined to expunge socialism from the Labour party. Their aim is to return the party to Blairism, and make Labour a safe pair of hands for capitalism."

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Institute for Fiscal Studies

UK public services face cuts of up to £17bn, says IFS

Government on track to spend billions less than planned before pandemic, warns thinktank



Rishi Sunak, in March: IFS says chancellor must tackle growing demands on public finances head on. Photograph: Tolga Akmen/AP

Rishi Sunak, in March: IFS says chancellor must tackle growing demands on public finances head on. Photograph: Tolga Akmen/AP

Richard Partington Economics correspondent

@RJPartington

Tue 20 Jul 2021 19.01 EDT

Rishi Sunak is poised to usher in cuts to public services of up to £17bn compared with the government's pre-pandemic plans unless he takes action this summer to increase funding, a leading thinktank has warned.

The [Institute for Fiscal Studies](#) said the government was on track to spend between £14bn and £17bn less each year on a range of public services from April 2022 than had been earmarked prior to Covid-19.

As the chancellor prepares to allocate funding for government departments against a backdrop of rising Covid-19 infections, the leading tax and spending thinktank warned that there were growing demands on the public finances that needed to be tackled head on.

It comes after Sunak was forced to push back the formal launch of the Treasury's spending review as part of the continuing fallout from his and the prime minister's [requirement to self-isolate](#).

The spending review process – which is used to set out budgets for Whitehall departments – had been due for an official launch by the chancellor this week before parliament breaks up for the summer recess on Thursday. However, sources said it was now delayed until later this year after MPs return to the Commons in September.

Treasury sources said preparatory work for the review had already begun and would continue over the summer.

In a report setting out the economic backdrop for the chancellor's spending review, the IFS said Sunak was on course to be handed a £30bn windfall by the [Office for Budget Responsibility](#) (OBR) for the public finances this year amid a much faster recovery than first feared.

The Treasury watchdog had forecast a budget deficit – the shortfall between public spending and revenue – of £234bn this year. However, the IFS and economists from the US bank Citi said a shortfall closer to £203bn could be expected after the Covid vaccine paved the way for a [rapid rebound in the economy this spring](#).

Despite this, the thinktank warned that the improvement was unlikely to persist, with Britain expected to incur lasting economic damage caused by the pandemic, rising debt interest costs and pressure to maintain higher levels of spending on key public services as the crisis continues.

Reflecting the longer-term damage, which will have an impact on the public purse, it said the UK economy was forecast to be 3% smaller by the middle of the decade than official pre-Covid estimates.

The IFS said that the chancellor therefore had little if any additional scope for increasing public spending if he was to maintain his medium-term target to balance day-to-day government spending with tax receipts, with a rule to only allow public borrowing to invest in long-term projects.

However, the thinktank warned that the government's existing spending plans implied cuts to some unprotected government departments worth up to £17bn, and made no allowance for additional virus-related spending – which is set to be cut to zero after the end of the current financial year in March 2022, despite the ongoing crisis.

It comes after the [OBR warned Sunak](#) he would need to find an additional £10bn a year for the next three years to fund the cost of the government's Covid response, including maintaining the NHS test-and-trace programme, providing vaccination boosters, and responding to the health impact of the pandemic.

Isabel Stockton, a research economist at IFS, said any higher spending to meet the demands and cost pressures from Covid, or to meet pre-existing spending demands such as for social care, could require spending cuts elsewhere, tax rises, or higher levels of borrowing.

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“Our forecasts suggest the chancellor has almost no additional wiggle room for permanent spending giveaways if he is to remain on course to deliver current budget balance. This suggests a very difficult spending review,” she said.

The Treasury said departmental budgets had not yet been confirmed for future years, adding: “It is therefore speculative to describe policy pressures at this stage.

“As we continue to recover from the pandemic, we remain committed to investing in our vital public services, and will continue to do so at the upcoming spending review.”

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Health

English coastal towns have some of country's worst health, report says

Prof Chris Whitty's report finds resorts have low life expectancy and high concentrations of chronic disease



Clacton in Essex has the second highest demand for mental health services in England, and also suffered from high rates of Covid-19 deaths.
Photograph: Nick Ansell/PA

Clacton in Essex has the second highest demand for mental health services in England, and also suffered from high rates of Covid-19 deaths.
Photograph: Nick Ansell/PA

[Patrick Butler](#) Social policy editor

Tue 20 Jul 2021 19.01 EDT

Striking beaches and fresh sea air may make coastal towns some of England's most desirable places – but their attractiveness hides some of the country's poorest health outcomes, which leave many residents “old before their time,” according to a report by the country’s chief medical officer, [Prof Chris Whitty](#).

Whitty has called for a national strategy to address the disproportionately high concentrations of chronic disease, mental illness and poor life expectancy in some of England’s most popular holiday destinations, including Blackpool, Hastings, Skegness, [Clacton](#) and Torbay.

Rates of mental illness, [heart disease](#), and kidney disease are roughly 10% higher than the national average, even after deprivation and their relatively older population is taken into account. According to one director of public health cited in the report, in coastal areas “far shorter lives are spent in far poorer health”.

“Coastal areas are some the most beautiful, vibrant and historic places in the country. They also have some of the worst health outcomes with low life expectancy and high rates of many major diseases,” said Whitty.

He said Covid-19, which has had disproportionately negative effects on people with chronic health conditions, had reinforced the need to tackle concentrations of ill-health in certain communities. “It is important we do not lose sight of these enduring health challenges as we face the largest pandemic for a generation.”

Coastal towns had tended to be overlooked by policymakers because their high densities of deprivation and ill-health were obscured by being lumped with nearby affluent communities. [Blackpool](#), he said, had more in common health-wise with Hastings 250 miles away, than with Preston just 18 miles inland.

Standards of [NHS](#) care were also poorer, including in cancer care, while services can be hit by major shortages of health and social care staff. There

were 15% fewer postgraduate medical trainees, 15% fewer consultants and 7% fewer nurses per patient in coastal towns compared with the national average

Whitty urged investment in education, jobs, housing and transport, as well as action to tackle [NHS staff shortages](#). “If we do not tackle the health problems of coastal communities vigorously and systematically there will be a long tail of preventable ill health, which will get worse as current populations age.”

Paradoxically, the report noted that notwithstanding their poor health, coastal areas were intrinsically healthier places to live compared with urban areas, with both physical and [mental health](#) benefits including better access to outdoor spaces for exercise and lower [air pollution](#).

The predominantly older populations found in coastal towns, coupled with sub-par and hard-to-access health services, high levels of poverty, deprivation and poor housing had helped create a distinctive negative “coastal effect” on population health, the report said.

Clacton, in Essex, reported the second highest mental health need in the country, while in Morecambe Bay, patients were 20% more likely to have depression than the national average. Rates of self-harm among 10- to 24-year-olds were also higher in coastal communities compared with those further inland.

Health risk factors such as smoking and drinking were also higher in coastal communities: in Hartlepool and Blackpool for example, almost one in four women [smoked in pregnancy](#) compared with a national average of 10%. Blackpool had the highest rate of hospital admissions for alcohol-related harm in England.

“While the focus nationally over the summer may be directed towards visitors, with many opting to stay in one of the UK’s many beautiful coastal towns, it is important to remember that the coast is also home to millions of people and that the health and wellbeing of these populations has been long neglected and overlooked,” the report said.

The health and social care secretary, [Sajid Javid](#), said: “I welcome this report from Prof Chris Whitty, which raises important points on inequalities that we must tackle to improve the health of coastal communities – and I will carefully consider these recommendations.

“Those living in coastal areas clearly face different sets of challenges to those inland but everybody, no matter where they live, should have similar opportunities in education, housing, employment and health.”

The coastal effect: Five coastal towns experiencing poor health

Blackpool

The Lancashire seaside resort is not only the UK’s most deprived local authority area. It is also notorious as the place where local GPs privately identified a chronic health condition afflicting residents combining emotional, social, financial and physical problems they called “[Shit Life Syndrome](#)”.

The chief medical officer for England’s report doesn’t mention this syndrome but notes Blackpool has some of the highest rates of health risk factors – poor diet, excess weight, alcohol and drug use, and smoking – in the country. The town is economically fragile, and the workforce highly dependent on low-paid, seasonal jobs.

Torbay

A patch of the Devon coastline on England’s south-coast that includes the towns of Torquay, Paignton and Brixham, Torbay has higher rates of cardiovascular disease, respiratory disease, and diabetes than the national average.

Its ageing housing stock – it has high numbers of former guest houses converted into relatively cheap houses of multiple occupation, and caravan parks – is identified as a key environmental factor in poor health outcomes in the area.

Hartlepool

The north-east town has endured many of the health problems associated with the collapse of heavy industry and consequent high unemployment. Poverty is a driver of poor health, and Hartlepool has higher than average levels of children living in low-income families.

Its poverty and poor health outcomes put the town at higher risk from the Covid- 19 pandemic, the report said. At its peak in January 2021, Hartlepool had a seven-day case rate of 889 per 100,000. The long term health impact of this, the report says, will be “significant”.

West Somerset

The West Country coastal area has a high proportion of residents living with chronic health problems: nearly a quarter of residents aged over 16 have a long-term condition; among those over the age of 65, nearly two-thirds have been diagnosed with a chronic health condition. The area also has shortages of health staff.

Improving the health of West Somerset’s coastal communities needs to take account of their unique characteristics, said Trudi Grant, Somerset county council’s director of public health. “We must recognise one size does not fit all and listen to their needs and wants.”

Hull

In common with many of England’s poorest areas, improvements in life expectancy have stalled in the city on the Humber estuary in Yorkshire. On average, residents spend more than a quarter of their lives in poor health (25% for men and 29% for women).

Covid-19, the contraction of Hull’s fishing industry, and the mechanisation of its ports have all hit the local economy hard, with a long term impact on health inequalities. “Far too many people living in these communities have far shorter lives spent in far poorer health,” said Julia Weldon, Hull city council’s director of public health.

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Men cause more climate emissions than women, study finds

Both spend similar amounts of money but men use cars much more, Swedish analysis shows



The biggest difference, in the study, was men's spending on petrol and diesel for their cars. Photograph: Sudipta Das/Pacific Press/REX/Shutterstock

The biggest difference, in the study, was men's spending on petrol and diesel for their cars. Photograph: Sudipta Das/Pacific Press/REX/Shutterstock

Damian Carrington Environment editor

[@dpcarrington](https://twitter.com/dpcarrington)

Wed 21 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

Men's spending on goods causes 16% more climate-heating emissions than women's, despite the sum of money being very similar, a study has found.

The biggest difference was men's spending on petrol and diesel for their cars. The gender differences in emissions have been little studied, the

researchers said, and should be recognised in action to beat the climate crisis.

The analysis compared single men and women in [Sweden](#) and found that food and holidays caused more than half of all emissions for both men and women. The scientists found that swapping meat and dairy for plant-based foods and switching to train-based holidays, rather than using planes or cars, cut people's emissions by 40%.

[Men's spending results in more emissions than women's](#)

"We think it's important to take the difference between men and women into account in policy making," said Annika Carlsson Kanyama, at the research company Ecoloop in Sweden, who led the study.

"The way they spend is very stereotypical – women spend more money on home decoration, health and clothes and men spend more money on fuel for cars, eating out, alcohol and tobacco."

The research, published in the [Journal for Industrial Ecology](#), did not include fuel for work vehicles such as taxis or plumbers' vans. Previous research found that in families with one car, men used it more often to go to work with women more likely to use public transport.

Holidays accounted for about a third of emissions for both the men and women. "That is a lot more than I expected," said Carlsson Kanyama. They used data for single people because figures for individuals living in families were not available.

The changes to diet and holidays to reduce personal emissions were chosen because they do not require extra spending, such as buying an electric car. "These are substantial changes of course, but at least you don't need to get yourself another job, or borrow money from the bank," she said. "So it's something within reach here and now. You just use the same money you have and buy something else."

A study in 2017 found that the greatest impact individuals can have in fighting climate change is to [have one fewer child](#), followed by not using a

car and avoiding flying.

Studies in 2010 and 2012 showed that men spent more on energy and ate more meat than women, both of which cause high emissions. But Carlsson Kanyama said: “I’m surprised more studies have not been done about the gender differences in environmental impact. There are quite clear differences and they are not likely to go away in the near future.”

The EU’s green deal was criticised last week for failing to include the intersection between gender and the environment.

“The climate crisis is one of the key challenges of our time and affects men and women quite differently,” said Leonore Gewessler, Austria’s climate minister. “For instance, the majority of people impacted by energy poverty are women. It is, therefore, crucial to take gender differences into the equation, if we want to develop solutions and a transformation that works for everyone.”

“The European Green Deal policies are, at best, gender-blind and, at worst, widen gender inequalities,” said Nadège Lharaig, at the European Environmental Bureau, which published a report – [Why the European Green Deal needs ecofeminism](#) – on Friday.

The spending data in the analysis was from 2012, the latest available. Carlsson Kanyama said it was unlikely to have changed sufficiently today to change the overall conclusions.

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[Coronavirus](#)

Covid has caused ‘hidden pandemic of orphanhood’, says global study

1.5 million children lost a caregiver during pandemic, including thousands in the UK



Sisters from Sao Paulo state, Brazil who have lost their mother, father and grandfather to Covid-19. Photograph: Sebastião Moreira/EPA

Sisters from Sao Paulo state, Brazil who have lost their mother, father and grandfather to Covid-19. Photograph: Sebastião Moreira/EPA

[Helen Pidd](#)

Tue 20 Jul 2021 19.00 EDT

An estimated 1.5 million children worldwide under the age of 18 have lost a parent, grandparent or caregiver due to Covid-19, according to a global

study.

Of those, more than 1 million experienced the death of one or both parents during the first 14 months of the pandemic, leading to what one researcher called “the hidden pandemic of orphanhood”.

Another half a million experienced the death of a grandparent or caregiver living in their own home, according to [a study published in the Lancet](#).

Researchers extrapolated Covid-19 mortality data and national fertility statistics for 21 countries to produce the global estimates.

Dr Susan Hillis, one of the lead authors on the study, from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Covid-19 response team, said: “Our findings highlight the urgent need to prioritise these children and invest in evidence-based programs and services to protect and support them right now and to continue to support them for many years into the future – because orphanhood does not go away.”

The HIV and [Ebola](#) epidemics have shown how to help bereaved children, said co-author Prof Lucie Cluver, from Oxford University and the University of Cape Town. “We need to support extended families or foster families to care for children, with cost-effective economic strengthening, parenting programs, and school access. We need to vaccinate caregivers of children – especially grandparent caregivers. And we need to respond fast because every 12 seconds a child loses their caregiver to Covid-19.”

Countries with the highest rates of children losing their primary caregiver (parent or custodial grandparent) included Peru (1 child per 100, totalling 98,975 children), South Africa (5 children per 1,000, totalling 94,625 children), Mexico (3 children per 1000, totalling 141,132 children), Brazil (2 children per 1,000, totalling 130,363 children) and the US (>1 child per 1,000, totalling 113,708 children).

For almost every country, [deaths were greater in men than women](#), particularly in middle and older ages. Overall, up to five times more children lost their fathers than lost their mothers.

The researchers estimate that in England and Wales, 8,497 children have been made orphans during the pandemic, either as a direct result of Covid or because of “excess deaths”.

Tracey Boseley, [Child Bereavement UK](#)’s national development lead for the education sector, said her organisation had been inundated with requests from schools asking for help to support bereaved pupils.

About 20,000 teachers and other school staff have taken part in [Bereavement UK](#) webinars since April 2020, said Boseley.

It is important to talk honestly to children who have experienced Covid loss, she said. “We are trying to empower staff in schools to be able to have honest conversations about death and grieving, because it is still a bit taboo. There’s this idea that we want to protect children, but that unfortunately means that children don’t get access to the truth and the answers that they need and they end up filling the gap with their imaginations.”

Avoid euphemisms, she counselled. “Children get very confused and muddled by those. They are told a family member who died has become a star, and then they want to know: well, how did that happen? Which star are they? Sometimes they sit up all night looking out of the window waiting. If children are told someone has been ‘lost’, they think: why aren’t we looking for them?”

[‘My dream was buried’: the children of India orphaned by Covid](#)
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In addition, many children are traumatised at not getting a chance to say goodbye, unable to attend funerals and struggling to comprehend what has happened. “Quite a few Covid patients went to hospital with breathing difficulties but were still mobile, so there are reports of children looking out of windows watching a parent or grandparent walking into the ambulance, and then not being able to see them again and then suddenly being told they are dead,” said Boseley.

Dr Seth Flaxman, one of the Lancet study’s lead authors, from Imperial College London, said: “The hidden pandemic of orphanhood is a global

emergency, and we can ill afford to wait until tomorrow to act. Out-of-control Covid-19 epidemics abruptly and permanently alter the lives of the children who are left behind.”

There is no quick fix, warned Boseley. “With the right support, children will learn to manage their grief, but it’s not something that goes away in six months, or a year or two years. There’s no time limit on it.”

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Coronavirus

Does warm weather mean you are less likely to catch Covid?

According to epidemiologists, meeting outside helps minimise infection risks but heat itself has a negligible effect on the virus

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People enjoy the summer weather at Wells-next-the-Sea on the north Norfolk coast. Photograph: Matthew Chattle/Rex

People enjoy the summer weather at Wells-next-the-Sea on the north Norfolk coast. Photograph: Matthew Chattle/Rex

[Alexandra Topping](#)

Tue 20 Jul 2021 13.10 EDT

With the recent rising temperatures and more people now mixing outdoors as restrictions have been lifted in England, and eased in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, experts explain how much of an effect the weather has on Covid-19.

Does the hot weather have an impact on Covid?

Studies show that the season, and the temperature, does have an impact on the spread of the coronavirus but that impact is not significant.

Prof John Edmunds, a member of the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage), said the [evidence showed that warmer temperatures affected transmission](#), but the impact was small as most transmission occurred inside.

“Transmission outside is minimal,” said Edmunds, an epidemiologist at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine. “Most transmission happens in enclosed settings. If it’s sunny outside viruses will die quicker, but they wouldn’t have lasted very long in any case.”

A recent [study led by Imperial College](#) and conducted on US data found higher temperatures were associated with lower transmission rates, if there were no other measures in place such as lockdowns and mask wearing. The Imperial study found that a 20 degree difference – typical between summer and winter – would probably see a change in the reproduction number of 0.8.

“From an epidemiological perspective this change can be significant,” said one of the study’s co-authors, Dr Ilaria Dorigatti. “[But] in presence of interventions climatic factors play a negligible role.”

So why do other viruses such as the flu flourish in winter?

Because even a small increase in a relatively low R number can make a difference, according to Edmunds.

“Vaccination or [natural] immunity will bring the reproduction number right down or immunity in the population. So a small change can allow the reproduction number to go slightly above one, or slightly below one. In the winter if it is slightly above one you get winter epidemics, and if in summer it is slightly below one, less so.”

Do UV rays kill the coronavirus?

Yes, but as most transmission of Covid was indoors, again the difference was slight, said Edmunds. “UV does kill viruses. So higher UV is bad for the virus, but that only really matters outside. And given that almost no transmission occurs outside anyway, it doesn’t make a lot of difference,” he said.

Dorigatti said the Imperial study focused on temperature and did not specifically look at UV but other studies by the Yale professor Yiqun Ma and others had [found higher UV rates](#) could have a role to play in reducing transmission rates.

Does the type of heat impact transmissibility?

One study by scientists in China, yet to be peer reviewed, suggested [mortality rates were lower](#) on days when the humidity levels and temperatures were higher. Dorigatti said other studies by [Mohammad M Sajadi](#) and [Yiqun Ma](#) had found a role for humidity, with lower humidity associated with higher transmission rates, implying that humid heat may reduce transmission more than dry heat.

Can we worry less about Covid in warmer weather?

In short, no. Dr Will Pearse, another researcher on the Imperial study, said the critical message was that the weather was only a small factor in the spread of Covid.

“I would really strongly encourage people to not think: ‘OK, it’s warm weather outside, so I don’t need to worry about Covid,’” he said. “We’ve

seen what the situation looks like in places warmer than the UK and in places colder than the UK. Warm weather is no substitute for mitigation.”

Kathleen O'Reilly, an epidemiologist with the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, said: “Hopefully most people will be sensible and pragmatic; meeting outdoors will minimise Covid-19 infection risk but staying out of direct sunlight, especially at midday, is still important. Meeting indoors but ensuring good ventilation will be good to minimise infection risk and also to keep cool,” she said.

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[Coronavirus](#)

Infectious nightclubs: Covid outbreaks serve as risk alert

Nightclubs across the world have been linked to outbreaks, leading some countries to open up to vaccinated clubbers only

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People wait to be vaccinated against Covid-19, at the Santo Spirito hospital, Rome, 3 July 2021. Photograph: Giuseppe Lami/EPA

People wait to be vaccinated against Covid-19, at the Santo Spirito hospital, Rome, 3 July 2021. Photograph: Giuseppe Lami/EPA

[Angela Giuffrida in Rome](#)

Tue 20 Jul 2021 14.21 EDT

They only wanted to enjoy themselves on the sunny Sardinian coast last summer after a tough two-month lockdown. But instead, young Italians who had frequented nightclubs returned home either with Covid-19 or laden with feelings of guilt, regret or anger at the authorities.

Nightclubs, including venues in [Spain](#), [France](#), the UK, Austria and Thailand, have triggered coronavirus outbreaks since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic.

One holidaymaker, Martina, returning from a break on the island, wrote in a letter published by Corriere della Sera in late August 2020: “For the sake of an evening at a nightclub, I infected my entire family. My dad is fighting for his life.”

Francesco, a 21-year-old from Rome who also caught the coronavirus after clubbing in Sardinia, told Il Giornale: “They told us we could go to clubs and all we needed to do was wear a face mask. We followed the rules ... it’s obvious that us 20-somethings couldn’t wait for our social lives to return. But please don’t blame us if infections are rising.”

Nightclubs were also a key factor in last year’s big coronavirus outbreak at the Austrian ski resort of [Ischgl](#).

A few months later there was an outbreak linked to the nightclub district [in Seoul](#), sparking condemnation against gay clubbers.

More recently, [Bangkok authorities](#) closed 196 nightlife venues amid a coronavirus resurgence.

Yet while some governments have hesitated over reopening clubs, others have allowed such venues to fling open their doors. In the UK, where new Covid infections have reached an average of about 50,000 a day, nightclubs reopened on Monday for the first time in 17 months.

People visiting clubs in England are [not obliged](#) by law to wear face coverings or to maintain social distancing, despite a [study early in June](#) showing that nearly three-quarters of coronavirus cases among University of Cambridge students last autumn were traced to a single nightclub.

Although Boris Johnson's government is now planning to ban people from entering nightclubs or other venues with large crowds unless they are fully vaccinated, the measure will not take effect for another two months, at the end of September.

In Italy, spooked by outbreaks [last summer](#) believed to have contributed to the country's Covid-19 second wave, which started in [early autumn](#) 2020, the government is expected to announce a reopening date this week but with the requirement for [clubbers to be fully vaccinated](#).

Although nightclub outbreaks were just as severe in other Italian holiday hotspots, Sardinia, which until August had been [relatively Covid-free](#), came under the spotlight due to the contagion that occurred at Billionaire, the venue on the Costa Smeralda owned by the former Formula One boss Flavio Briatore. The nightclub [now faces charges](#) of "epidemic negligence".

Briatore was admitted to hospital in Milan in late August after becoming infected, as was his friend Silvio Berlusconi, a former Italian prime minister. Berlusconi was confirmed to have the coronavirus in early September, shortly after returning from his villa on the Costa Smeralda. The 84-year-old had been pictured with Briatore outside his Sardinia holiday home; neither was wearing face masks.

Covid-19 infections among footballers, celebrities and other clubbers were also traced back to Billionaire. Two other Sardinia nightclubs, Phi Beach and Country Club, have been accused of negligence after failing to properly protect staff.

Walter Ricciardi, a scientific adviser to the Italian health ministry, said this July that nightclubs were "particularly dangerous environments" for spreading the virus. "It only takes a few seconds to become infected. Discos should only open under very strict controls with access allowed only to those who are vaccinated, who have already had Covid-19, or who present a negative test."

But after last summer, some young Italians are not so desperate to rush back to nightclubs.

“It’s made me really afraid,” said Francesco, who, with his girlfriend, tested positive after a holiday in Sardinia. “We only went to outside bars [on the Costa Smeralda] and I’m not entirely sure how we got coronavirus, as the friends we were with didn’t get it. But one thing is for sure – I’m avoiding nightlife venues.”

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Australia's PM defends Covid vaccine rollout as half of population awakes in lockdown

Prime minister Scott Morrison faces growing frustration amid sluggish vaccination rate and growing list of coronavirus hotspots across the country

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Australian prime minister Scott Morrison has refused to apologise for the Covid vaccine rollout, and accepted only that the government has 'had problems' as half of the population awoke in lockdown on Wednesday.
Photograph: Lukas Coch/EPA

Australian prime minister Scott Morrison has refused to apologise for the Covid vaccine rollout, and accepted only that the government has ‘had problems’ as half of the population awoke in lockdown on Wednesday. Photograph: Lukas Coch/EPA

Helen Sullivan in Sydney

@helenrsullivan

Wed 21 Jul 2021 01.58 EDT

The Australian prime minister, Scott Morrison, has refused to apologise for his government’s handling of the coronavirus vaccine rollout, amid testy exchanges during a radio interview as more than 13 million Australians – or half of the population – awoke in lockdown conditions.

Morrison carried out a whistle-stop tour of radio stations on Wednesday as Covid measures spread further into the state of New South Wales, while Victoria reported a record one-day increase in cases and South Australia began its first full day of a week-long lockdown.

The opposition Labor party has ramped up its pressure on the government, saying the latest restrictions were only necessary because of a lack of vaccine supplies.

Despite repeatedly being pushed to apologise for the “nightmare” vaccine rollout during an interview on Kiis FM, Morrison refused, saying only that the government was focused on “fixing the problems”. To date just over 11% of Australians are fully vaccinated.

“We have had our problems, there is no doubt about that, and they are problems that are not always things within our control, that is the nature of Covid 19,” Morrison said.

The host, Jason Hawkins, said: “I’m not trying to have a go, I think it is just frustration, we are in lockdown. Can you just say ‘sorry Jase’? It will make me feel so much better and then I feel like I can move on.”

Later, that frustration was not helped by a request that only vaccinated reporters attend the prime minister’s afternoon press conference.

[Scott Morrison refuses to apologise for Covid vaccine rollout in clash with Kiis FM host](#)

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In New South Wales, the state premier, Gladys Berejiklian, announced [110 further cases](#), crediting the high number to a record 84,000 tests being carried out in the state, where the Greater Sydney region is in lockdown until at least the end of July.

“We’re scooping up all the cases we can find and making sure we get to those chains of community transmission. Thank you. Thank you again,” she said.

On Tuesday night, the state’s lockdown area grew, with the regional shires of Orange, Blayney and Cabonne added to the list, affecting about 50,000 people.

Pressed on whether the government was aiming to have zero cases before lifting restrictions, New South Wales authorities stressed the transmissibility of the Delta variant, saying that whereas in the last outbreak, one infected person in a household had, on average, infected 30% of the household, the Delta variant meant every household member was becoming infected.

The number that the state government wanted to see was zero cases who were infectious in the community. On Tuesday, 60 people were not in isolation for at least part of their infectious period.

The state of Victoria also saw record testing, and announced its highest one-day case total in 10 months, with 22 infections confirmed in 24 hours. Victoria extended its lockdown this week until at least midnight 27 July. “We could not be more thankful and with could not be more indebted to you,” said the Victorian health minister, Martin Foley.

South Australia’s Covid cluster grew to five, and the state premier, Steven Marshall, thanked the people as the state entered a week-long lockdown.

Later on Wednesday, Morrison was pressed on the vaccine rollout, and in particular hesitancy among Australians to get the AstraZeneca vaccine.

Asked whether he would consider appealing to experts at the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation to change their advice and allow under-40s to receive AstraZeneca, he responded: “It’s a constant appeal. I can assure you: it’s a constant appeal.”

Australia hit 1m vaccine doses in seven days for the first time on Wednesday, he said. The US, by comparison, hit one million doses a day in January.

01:33

Scott Morrison says vaccine rollout delays ‘regrettable’ as he provides Covid-19 update – video

Earlier, on another radio station, Morrison was asked if he regretted saying “it’s not a race” in March, when asked about vaccines. In response he claimed that he had been talking about approving the vaccines. “I don’t think Australians wanted us to cut corners when it comes to the vaccines that were put in people’s arms that affect their health, I think they would have wanted us to have followed every proper process.”

However, Morrison’s comments about the vaccine program not being a race were made after the Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccines were approved in January and February respectively.

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Covid-19 antibodies detected in 67% of India's population

The figure compares with 24% in January and shows how the Delta variant has ripped through the nation of 1.3bn

- [Coronavirus – live global coverage](#)



A shopkeeper in Bangalore waits for customers after being allowed to reopen after a Covid shutdown. Photograph: Jagadeesh Nv/EPA

A shopkeeper in Bangalore waits for customers after being allowed to reopen after a Covid shutdown. Photograph: Jagadeesh Nv/EPA

[Hannah Ellis-Petersen in Delhi](#)

Wed 21 Jul 2021 02.09 EDT

Covid-19 antibodies have been detected in 67% of the population of [India](#), according to a new survey, indicating how widely the virus spread through communities during the second wave.

India's fourth national sero-survey, which examines the prevalence of Covid-19 antibodies either through infection or vaccination, found that 67.6% of the population of more than 1.3 billion has coronavirus antibodies.

The survey also demonstrated the slow pace of India's vaccination programme. Of those surveyed, 62.2% had not been vaccinated, 24.8% had taken one dose and 13% were fully vaccinated.

[India's excess deaths during Covid 'could be 10 times official toll'](#)

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The survey result marks a significant rise from the last such survey which was conducted in December and January and found that just 24% of the population had antibodies. This recent survey was carried out in the final weeks of June and beginning of July, just as the second wave had abated, interviewing almost 29,000 people across India.

“The findings clearly show that there is a ray of hope but there is no room for complacency,” said Balram Bhargava, director general of the Indian Council for Medical Research.

Bhargava warned that the survey showed 400 million Indians still did not have antibodies, and so were vulnerable to the third wave that experts are predicting will hit India within the next few months. In states such as Kerala and Assam, there has already been a severe spike in cases in recent days.

The high prevalence of antibodies was mainly attributed to the virulent second wave which struck India in April. The virus spread like wildfire through both urban and rural areas, overwhelming hospitals and leading to a widespread shortage of oxygen. The government has been widely condemned by opposition politicians this week for claiming there was not a single death in India due to a lack of oxygen, despite [hundreds of reports](#) to the contrary.

'The system has collapsed': India's descent into Covid hell

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Prior to the second wave hitting India, the government was accused of creating a “culture of complacency” by loosening Covid restrictions and allowing mass religious and recreational gatherings where the virus was able to spread, fuelled by the highly transmissible Delta variant which emerged in India.

India's official death toll from Covid-19 is more than 400,000 but that is believed to be a huge undercount, particularly when taking into consideration the results of the latest serosurvey. [A new report released](#) by the Centre for Global Development this week concluded that excess deaths in India during the pandemic could be as high as 4.7 million, 10 times the official toll.

In the latest sero-survey, the age group with the highest prevalence was the 45-60 bracket, where over 77% had Covid-19 antibodies, while 66% of those between 18 and 44 were found to have antibodies.

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[Rand Paul](#)

'If anybody is lying here, it is you': Fauci turns tables on inquisitor Rand Paul

The senator bit off more than he could chew when he accused Biden's top health adviser of lying about US-funded virus research

02:49

Fauci to Rand Paul: 'You do not know what you are talking about' – video

David Smith in Washington

[@smithinamerica](#)

Tue 20 Jul 2021 16.26 EDT

Anthony Fauci has a reputation for plain speaking, as a senator who accused him of lying discovered to his cost on Tuesday.

A congressional hearing on the coronavirus pandemic was electrified when Fauci, the nation's top infectious diseases expert, [clashed with Rand Paul](#), a Republican senator for Kentucky and longtime opponent of mask-wearing.

Paul suggested that Fauci had lied before Congress in May when he denied that the National Institutes of Health (NIH) funded so-called "gain of function" research – the practice of enhancing a virus in a lab to study its potential impact in the real world – at a virology lab in Wuhan, China.

"Dr Fauci, knowing it is a crime to lie to Congress, do you wish to retract your statement of May 11 where you claimed that the NIH never funded gain of function research in Wuhan?" the senator demanded.

Fauci, speaking in his now instantly recognisable Brooklyn accent, fired back forcefully: “Senator Paul, I have never lied before the Congress and I do not retract that statement.”

He also told the Senate health, education, labor, and pensions committee that a study cited by Paul referenced a different sort of virus entirely from the one responsible for the coronavirus pandemic. “This paper that you are referring to was judged by qualified staff up and down the chain as not being gain of function.”

[Rand Paul points finger at 80s pop star after receiving suspicious powder](#)
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Paul interrupted, Fauci insisted “Let me finish,” but Paul went on, pointing his finger as the exchange became more heated.

Fauci said angrily: “Senator Paul, you do not know what you’re talking about, quite frankly. And I want to say that officially. You do not know what you are talking about.”

The sparring continued as the men repeatedly interrupted each other and the committee chairperson struggled to retain control. Fauci concluded: “If anybody is lying here, senator, it is you.”

Critics say Paul is grandstanding for an audience on the right, where Fauci has become a boogeyman, targeted by media commentators and subjected to “Lock him up!” chants at Donald Trump’s rallies.

The director of the [National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases](#) has previously said he deals with such criticism partly by turning to Mario Puzo’s 1969 novel The Godfather with its philosophy: “It’s not personal, it’s strictly business.”

Fauci also told Tuesday’s hearing that the Delta variant of the coronavirus was the cause of more than 80% of new US Covid-19 cases, but the authorised vaccines remain more than 90% effective in preventing hospitalizations and deaths.

Biden in late May called on aides to investigate the origins of the virus and to report back to him within 90 days. The more prevalent theory is that the virus originated in animals, possibly bats, and was passed on to humans.

Tina Smith, a Democratic senator for Minnesota, asked Fauci if there was anything else he would like to say to “counteract these attacks on your integrity that we’ve all just witnessed”.

He responded: “This is a pattern that Senator Paul has been doing now at multiple hearings based on no reality. He was talking about gain of function, this has been evaluated multiple times by qualified people to not fall under the gain of function definition. I have not lied before Congress. I have never lied. Certainly not before Congress. Case closed.”

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Music

Interview

Self Esteem: ‘I was tired of being this sweet heterosexual lady in a band’

[Rachel Aroesti](#)



Warts-and-all honesty ... Self Esteem. Photograph: Olivia Richardson

Warts-and-all honesty ... Self Esteem. Photograph: Olivia Richardson

Once an earnest indie singer with Slow Club, Rebecca Lucy Taylor is now a take-no-prisoners pop diva. Can her patriarchy-smashing anthems conquer the charts?



Wed 21 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

In a [comedy sketch](#) that was released to promote her 2019 debut [Compliments Please](#), Rebecca Lucy Taylor is grilled about the imagined impact of the album 20 years on (it was so great, it “destroyed music as we know it”). With a transatlantic accent, impeded facial movement and wearing a tiara over a turban , she faces a hostile male interviewer who attempts to sum up her revolutionary sound: it is “melodic complaining”, “poor-me periodcore”, and “menstrual madness set to music”.

“That’s what it is!” cackles Taylor, two years on. “Can’t deny it!” It’s true that the 34-year-old – better known by her nom de disque, Self Esteem – makes music packed with warts-and-all honesty and, yes, a certain amount of justified complaining. Topics include toxic relationships and the insidious effects of the patriarchy. But her songs are also maximalist, danceable and infectiously fun – a wholesale rejection of the restrained indie-folk of her previous band Slow Club. “I’m trying to do a Trojan horse thing,” explains Taylor over a cup of coffee in her PR team’s dazzlingly white offices. “You think you’re getting this sugary injection of a pop song but it’s going to leave you with something more.”

Compliments Please did not have the seismic effect Taylor joked about, but it did establish Self Esteem as an exciting new pop star. Hers is not the kind of ruthlessly commercial pop that is machine-tooled for chart domination. Instead, it's pop as an aesthetic and a mood – big-chorused but experimental too. "My friend said it's art-pop," recalls Taylor. "I was like: 'Yes!' It means there's more layers to it." One of those layers is camp – Taylor performed at Glastonbury 2019 in a minidress made of Boots Advantage cards – but there is also sincerity. Brilliant recent single I Do This All the Time chronicles the thought process behind not wanting to go to somebody's birthday drinks in a droll *sprechgesang* over a hypnotic beat – think Arab Strap's The First Big Weekend but fuelled by social anxiety instead of youthful hedonism.



On stage ... at All Points East festival in 2019. Photograph: Burak Cingi/Redferns

That song is taken from Self Esteem's forthcoming second album, Prioritise Pleasure. On its cover, she poses in a cowboy hat and extremely high-cut leotard. Its title is a rallying cry against a society that has convinced its female population they should put other people's needs before their own. "We've been trained to be submissive and secondary and all I'm doing with this is going, what if we're not?"

“Don’t be intimidated by all the babies they have / Don’t be embarrassed that all you’ve had is fun / Prioritise pleasure,” goes one of I Do This All the Time’s most memorable lines. Women, she says, are not encouraged to indulge in “true mindless relaxation” in the way that men are, via video games and football, for example. “What’s the version of that for me?” (We agree that shopping and perfecting makeup techniques are too much like self-optimising work to count.) Has Taylor got any advice for an interviewer who is dangerously obsessed with productivity? “Have a bath with a nice candle! It sounds daft but it really is a good little intro to it,” she grins. “I’m really at the start of it as well, but saying prioritise pleasure every day for the next year is going to help me remember to.”

Taylor’s dispatches from the frontline of millennial womanhood began life in 2017 as an Instagram account. Back then, she was still in Slow Club; she used the account to free herself from the restrictive image she felt people had of her. “This sweet, heterosexual lady in a band. I just wanted to prove I was a whole being that had other stuff going on.” (Taylor came out as bisexual in 2013.) Early on, she used the platform to post “a picture of me in my pants with a box of Dominos, which is nothing, but if I’d represented myself in that way via the Slow Club channels it would have been like, ‘What the fuck are you doing?!’” she laughs, comparing her transition to Miley Cyrus’s brash emergence from the cocoon of kids TV.

At that point, Slow Club had dominated Taylor’s life since she was a teenager in Rotherham. She met co-founder Charles Watson on the Sheffield gig circuit, where she was playing with her high school outfit the Devlin Project. “I could die thinking about how cringe it was,” she says. “I’m in skinny jeans oversinging the fuck out of a Smiths song.” In her late teens, Slow Club won a small indie record deal: cue a decade of critical praise, moderate success and frequently miserable touring. “We said yes to everything, apart from one Wombats support tour. We did one show with them and everyone [in the crowd] was shouting ‘Get your tits out’ at me. We got loads of laddy shit. It was before it was cool to be not a dickhead.”

I’m still processing the times men have made me feel like I’m too much, which makes me angry every night of my life

The gigging wore Taylor down. “It was always ear infections, throat infections, exhausted. My menstrual cycle rages through me every month, all these things made it loads more difficult for me. The boys loved being in the van for hours, I fucking hated it.” Without any financial reward (“I was skint”), and increasingly disenchanted with the band’s creative direction – she wanted to go bigger and more bombastic, the others refused – she began plotting her exit. She recorded her own demos in secret, and sent some to [Jamie T](#), whom the band had toured with. “I’m the biggest Jamie T fan ever and he said it was good. I was like, if he thinks it’s good then it must be.” She laughs at the implication: “I needed a man to tell me it was good before I did it, which is the sad thing!”

Slow Club’s gradual demise became the subject of a 2018 documentary called [Our Most Brilliant Friends](#), and today Taylor views their protracted breakup as a symptom of her own people-pleasing tendencies. “I was so scared of pissing [Watson] off – not because he inspired that in me, that’s just what I’m like.” She also worried that leaving the band would disappoint her parents, her label and “everyone I’d ever made music with”. Taylor is very funny when talking about her desperation to be liked – “I’ll be like, ‘Do you want a tenner? Please take this tenner off me so you don’t dislike me’” – but it’s a trait Self Esteem has helped her come to terms with. (Not that she’s relinquished it: at the end of our conversation she returns my mug to the kitchenette and then wipes down the worktops.)



Stifled ... in Slow Club. Photograph: Andrew Benge/Redferns via Getty Images

Eventually Taylor bit the bullet, partly spurred on by [RuPaul's Drag Race](#), which she describes as “my religion. It actually changed my shit and helped me get out of the band because I was like: I could lip sync to pop songs in a dress and be happier.” She describes the decision to leave Slow Club as “the best risk I ever took. I really struggled with my mental health for my whole 20s, and a massive knot has untied via being able to truly, authentically express myself.”

Much of this self-expression doubles as a way of processing toxic relationships from Taylor’s past. “They were pretty abusive emotionally, in that way where you don’t notice it’s happening and then you feel like you’ve gone mad,” she explains. “It’s insidious and frightening.” The specific dynamic, she says, is one of “you’ve embarrassed me, behave, be smaller, be quieter. I’m still processing the times that men have made me feel like I’m too much, that they’d pick me if I was just a bit less, which makes me angry every night of my life, thinking about it.” On her latest single, also called Prioritise Pleasure, she recalls how she “shrunk, moved and changed / And still you felt the same.” But Taylor is also keen to point out her own mistakes. “I’ve been a right arsehole to some people, I’ve been dreadful.” This kind of nuance, detectable in her songs, means at times Taylor’s work

feels like it is part of a post-#MeToo rumination, drilling down into problematic relationships where blame is complex and mistreatment often subtle.

Lorde: ‘I’m not a climate activist. I’m a pop star’

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At the other end of the seriousness spectrum, Self Esteem has also allowed Taylor to indulge what she calls her “West End Wendy” side. She is currently working on a theatre production revolving around the new record – “it’s immersive, you’re in the studio watching me trying to finish the album” – and plotting her return to the indie venue circuit she navigated with Slow Club, albeit with a very different kind of show. “I’ve been blasting the most daft choreography ever,” she enthuses. “I want to do Gaga, half-time Super Bowl standard, but I’m in the Bristol Fleece.” She’s getting there, she says, but has “already pulled a nerve in my neck”.

For all her palpable excitement about the future, Taylor still experiences some self-doubt about the frankness she deals in. “Sometimes I think if I’d been more mysterious, would I be more successful? I want to be like Christine [and the Queens] and she’s not burping on Instagram. But I also think it is too late, there’s no going back: my USP is that it’s me and this is unfortunately what I am.”

- The singles Prioritise Pleasure and I Do This All the Time are out now on Fiction Records. The album Prioritise Pleasure is released 22 October. A UK and Ireland tour begins on 1 November.



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A moment that changed me: meeting the rescue dog who comforted me through unfathomable loss

When I first held my dog Veela in my arms, I was grappling with my mother's dementia, which was followed much too soon by her death. The teachings of my little red dog helped me survive



‘To the exclusion of all others’ ... Shirley Manson with her rescue dog Veela.

‘To the exclusion of all others’ ... Shirley Manson with her rescue dog Veela.

Shirley Manson

Wed 21 Jul 2021 02.00 EDT

The first time I rescued an animal was almost 15 years ago, while I was on hiatus from [my band](#), [Garbage](#), in 2007. Shuffling around Los Angeles with

little to occupy my time and my catastrophic imagination, my husband suggested we might consider adopting a rescue dog from one of the local shelters. I was a little hesitant at first. It struck me as a massive undertaking (I was not wrong) and I was unsure I had the emotional capacity to engage in the love of a small, defenceless, living thing.

My mother had just been [diagnosed with Pick's disease](#), a criminally aggressive form of dementia that can take a person, as it did my mother, out of the game in less than two years from the day of diagnosis. I was deeply disturbed by the course her disease was taking and finding it hard to connect with life in any joyful, meaningful way.

One evening, my husband slyly showed me a picture online of an irresistibly cute litter of terrier puppies that were up for adoption at a local pet store. “Let’s go and get one,” he suggested.



‘Hot, soft and comforting’ ... Veela with Shirley Manson’s mother.
Photograph: Courtesy of Shirley Manson

By the time we arrived at the PetSmart Charities adoption centre, the puppy that had most caught my eye had been rehomed, but there were three others squirming and squealing in a nearby pen. “You can lift them up if you want,” I was told. I eagerly complied but despite enjoying the heat of their

tiny wee bodies and admiring their adorable faces, I didn't experience any real connection. One by one, I put each puppy back in the pen. My husband looked crestfallen. "Not feeling it?" he asked, with obvious disappointment.

The lady in charge of adoption quickly asked if we might be interested in an "older" dog as the mother of the pups was also up for adoption. She brought over a scrawny, ginger little thing and dropped her in my arms. I turned to my husband, grinning. "This is my dog," I said.



Puppy love ... Manson's rescue dog Veela with her offspring.

We had exchanged something deeply profound in that moment, me and this dog. A vow had been made. For life, we agreed. To the exclusion of all others, we said.

Her name was Veela and she was not so very old after all. Our vet reckoned she was aged between six and nine months. She had been found wandering the streets of South Central LA, homeless and heavily pregnant, by a teenager whose parents agreed to let her keep Veela in a little cardboard box at their home until she had given birth.

Shortly after we officially adopted her, my parents came over from Scotland. It was a fraught visit as my mum's illness was progressing fast and she appeared extremely diminished and vulnerable.

Veela sensed this. She kept close to my mother, squeezing up next to her on the couch, in the car, in the garden. I treasure a slew of photographs from this time with the two of them intertwined.

One afternoon, my mother and I were watching TV together with Veela on my mother's lap. An advert featuring an elephant came on. "What kind of an animal is that?" asked my mother, her cornflower blue eyes drilling into me with alarm and confusion. "Mum, that's an elephant," I said gently. She looked confused and scared. I reached out and held Mum's hand in mine, brushing up against a sleeping Veela. A coiled little croissant. Hot, soft and comforting. My mother smiled. I smiled back as reassuringly as I could. Breathe, I thought, matching Veela's deep breaths. Breathe.

When my mother died, less than 12 months later, it was Veela who spoke directly and most effectively to the pain I was experiencing. Around that time, I was filming a sci-fi television show in which I played an almighty and powerful Terminator who experienced no human emotions. In real life, I was struggling to process my mother's death but whenever I came home from work there would be Veela, dancing on her hind legs, demanding to be walked, to be fed, to be cuddled, to be engaged with. Slowly, I began to heal.

[On my radar: Shirley Manson's cultural highlights](#)

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Losing a mother, losing a great mother, is to experience unfathomable loss. I doubt I would have survived without the profound teachings of my little red dog: live your life, humans. Live curiously. Eat well. Exercise. Take a nap. Stay enthusiastic. Don't be afraid to express your love. Be silly. Have fun. And go, go, go.

I continue to adhere to Veela's philosophy as best I can. I don't always get it right, but I don't always get it wrong. Despite her advanced years, she remains the greatest teacher and I continue to learn from her as I move through my own life and all of my seasons.

Go, human.

Go.

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Sun, swimming, smoking and seagulls: a day in the life of beach hut Britain



Bonny Holland with her dog in her Hove beach hut. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

Bonny Holland with her dog in her Hove beach hut. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

Across the UK, there are long waiting lists for a beach hut – and prices go up and up. A day on Hove promenade reveals why they are so popular and the problems that persist (mainly locks)



Sirin Kale

Wed 21 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

Everyone who meets Bonny Holland says the same thing: she really loves beach huts. “Bonny posts in our Facebook group about four times a day,” says the Hove and Portslade councillor Robert Nemeth, who founded the Hove Beach Hut Association. “I have to approve the posts.”

Inside Holland’s beach hut, the 62-year-old retired headteacher keeps a double-ring stove, a frying pan, a griddle pan, graffiti removal wipes, and, best of all, a loo. “You sit on this,” Holland says merrily, unfolding a portable toilet seat for my benefit, “and go in here.”

In Hove, rows of beach huts line the promenade like multicoloured teeth. Six-foot square, they have no sanitation, electricity or heating. You can’t lie down in them, either, although – if you have Holland’s ingenuity – you can cook a meal, or go for a wee.



Bonny Holland in Hove. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

All are painted identically, but the doors can be any colour the owner chooses.

These wooden sheds hold their value about as well as a new car driven off a forecourt straight into a motorway pile-up. Blustery winds and sea salt spray batter them and corrode them. In winter, there is black mould, and mice are a common problem. Sometimes, the huts are blown off the promenade by stormy winds. A well-made hut will last a decade before it needs replacing, but requires repainting and resealing every year.

If all of this appeals, and you live in Brighton or Hove, a beach hut can be yours for between £25,000 and £35,000 – plus £416 a year in rent. Since Covid, demand has risen dramatically. “It has been ridiculous this year,” says Heather Hilder-Darling of [Callaways](#), which handles all sales. “Beach huts have been like gold dust.” For the first time ever, buyers have been putting in blind offers. It is a similar story elsewhere: earlier this year, a beach hut in [Mudford Sandbank sold for £320,000](#). Owners renting out their beach huts on Airbnb have easily doubled, even tripled, their fees. Lengthy waiting lists for huts across the UK are now commonplace.

Holland's hut is called Rose's Rest – after her mother. "I've wanted a hut since I was eight," Holland says. "We were walking along the promenade, and my mum said, 'What do you want for Christmas?' I said, 'A beach hut.'" But it took until last June for Holland to fulfil her life's desire – buying her hut for £25,000. During the pandemic, it has been a safe haven. "Life slows down when you sit inside" she says. "Hours go by, hardly noticed. I might arrive here with lots of things to do and end up doing none of them."

Holland presses a slice of rocky road on me. We look out at the sea on the first sunny day for weeks. People are paddleboarding in the still, cerulean waters. Hut owners arrive in flip-flops, carrying wine coolers and hampers. Everything is peaceful, until Holland suddenly leaps from her folding chair. "EEEEddiie," she yowls, waving as if she is marshalling a jumbo jet in to land. Eddie is Holland's pet seagull. Today, he is not stopping.



Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

Hut owners, Holland says, debate one thing constantly: locks. They corrode from the sea water and often seize up. "Some people say you must put Vaseline on them," she says. "Then there is a breakaway splinter group that thinks you should wrap them in tinfoil, to stop the ionisation. Other people use jiffy bags. And some people get a milk bottle, cut a section out, and

hook it over the lock.” During lockdown, Holland gave a lecture on beach huts to a local architecture group. She had 20 slides on proper lock maintenance. “They were falling off their chairs in laughter,” she says. “I didn’t intend it to be funny.”

The hut owners are a community. “It’s like a village.” But they also fall into categories. “This is a lifestyle hut,” says Holland. “You write your journal, sunbathe, chill. The next three along; they’re all sports. Guys turn up and pump up their paddleboards. That one is a swimmer’s hut. This amazing lady turns up in the morning, goes for a swim, smokes some Gauloises and goes home. She’s a French academic in her 80s. Very interesting. She talks about Sartre and De Beauvoir. She’s not talking about Love Island. You’re having a proper conversation. There might be a test at the end.”

As if on cue, her neighbour, 60-year-old joiner Gerry Dalton, arrives. They begin comparing huts. “Mine is so much bigger than yours,” Holland crows. “That’s because yours is the wrong size!” he responds. I leave their heated, but good-natured discussion about whether the lettering of Holland’s sign, which is numbered 100, looks like the word “loo”. (It does.)

“Locks,” says Nemeth seriously. “Locks are an issue. You have to spend a lot of money on decent ones or they just rust up. And if you buy high-strength ones they’re hard to cut off.” Nemeth, a Conservative who has represented Wish ward since 2015, is taking me on a tour of Hove’s beach huts.

We are standing at the [Brighton](#) end of the beach. This used to be the more desirable, due to its proximity to the Regency architecture of Hove Lawns, and [Brighton](#), but in recent years, huts towards the western end have become popular with families, thanks to the redevelopment of cafes and playgrounds around Hove Lagoon.

In 2018, Nemeth successfully organised the beach-hut owners to overturn a council proposal to impose a 20% tax on any beach-hut sales. I ask Nemeth what was so unfair about this – after all, some of the hut owners bought their huts for a few thousand pounds, and now find them worth tens of thousands.

“There were almost accusations of beach huts being a preserve of the wealthy,” says Nemeth of the confrontation with the council. “It was based on a complete misunderstanding of the reasons people buy beach huts.” He tells me that many owners don’t have gardens, and this is their outside space. Plus, the huts cost a fortune in upkeep, offsetting any increase in value. “You’ll easily spend £10,000 on maintenance in a decade,” he says.

These are all fair points. But, if not the preserve of the wealthy, beach huts, here at least, appear to be the preserve of the affluent. The owners I meet are all lovely – but they’re not exactly people on a low-income. There is one woman who retired in her 40s, and there’s a man who talks about flying light aircraft to the Loire Valley for lunch. There are council-owned beach huts, known as chalets – brick, with electricity and running water – but the waiting list is closed, and those on it have scant chance of reaching the top within their lifetimes.



Beach huts at Hove. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

The council also recently announced that the open-ended leases on the chalets would end, so tenants will no longer have one for life. Nemeth voted in favour of this. “We looked at the issue of how to fix these infinitely long lists,” Nemeth says. Outside one, Nemeth talks to a man who looks as if he

is in his 70s, eating a sandwich. “I’m sorry it didn’t go your way,” he tells him. The man waves us away with a sour expression.

Traipsing up and down the promenade with Nemeth, it is clear everyone has an opinion about how the beach huts should be managed. Nemeth is accosted by a couple angry that the public toilets aren’t being properly maintained. As they list their grievances, I slope off to hut 175, which is owned by Peter Revell, a 57-year-old semi-retired solicitor and his partner, Gerard Phillips, 59, a cybersecurity programme manager. Their hut is on the best part of the promenade: there are no walls or railings obstructing the view, with only 10 metres or so of pebble beach between them and the lapping sea. “We love this stretch,” says Revell.

They kindly pour me a glass of wine. Some friends pop by for a drink. “It’s a very sociable thing,” says Phillips. “Three of our neighbours have keys. We like it being used.” Talk turns to the latest threat to the beach huts: a proposed £3.5m Surf Life Saving Centre on the seafront, which would train first aiders and lifeguards. If approved, huts will have to be moved, to make space. The association is against it. “The idea of a Surf Life Centre is not a bad idea,” says Revell. “But it’s the position, the height of it. We’ll have to move beach huts. We don’t like the precedent it will set.”

He turns to me with an apologetic smile. “You could say we’re a bit nimby,” Revell admits.

An hour later, a visibly sunburned Nemeth rejoins me. The irritated couple are friends now, he says. They have invited him round for drinks. He doesn’t mind. Nemeth sees the beach-hut owners as custodians of the seafront. “They’re taking a very high-profile part in looking after Hove’s heritage,” he says. “The beach huts are an iconic part of Hove.”

And there is perhaps no better custodian than 63-year-old homemaker Alexandra Wickett. She is Hove beach’s longest-standing beach-hut owner. Her hut used to belong to her parents, Ken and Jane. By coincidence, we meet on what would have been their wedding anniversary.

“Mum and Dad met on the beach,” says Wickett, who is fashionably dressed in lime green trousers and a matching necklace. “My mum was a little young

thing sitting on the wall, and my dad walked past and went, *phwoar*; and the rest was history.” Jane died three years ago; Ken a year later. Both had dementia in their final years. “Even when mum was not in a good place,” says Wickett, “you’d get her down here and she’d sit in the seat, and somehow those memories would just pop back in, and chill her out.”

Ken was a sea-swimmer. When he returned from the second world war, he came down to swim every day during his lunchbreak. “He was so physically fit,” says Wickett. She was an August baby, and her parents brought her to the beach on the day she was born. “My family was all the other people who had huts on the beach,” she says. Continuing the family tradition, Wickett brought her children down to the beach hut the day after they were born.

“Back then,” says Wickett of the postwar period, “no one really wanted the huts. There were loads that were empty. Now people are desperate for them.” Huts evolved from the bathing machines first used by swimmers in the 1750s. People would change into bathing suits in them, before they were rolled down the beach. After their swim, they’d be rolled back up.



Alex Wickett’s parents at their beach hut in Hove in the 1950s. Photograph: Courtesy of Alex Wickett

At that time, swimming was not recreational. “When the rich went to these resorts initially,” says Dr David Jarratt, an expert in the tourism economy at the University of Central Lancashire, “it was seen in a medicinal way.” Elites frequented spa towns such as Scarborough and Bath in the 17th century, to drink the waters, believed to protect people from diseases such as cholera and TB. By the 18th century, focus switched to the health-promoting qualities of the seaside.

Where the rich went, ordinary people followed. The construction of the railways in the 19th century supercharged this process, making it easier for the aspirational middle classes to travel to Blackpool, Morecambe and Skegness. The working classes, meanwhile, visited the coast to escape the smog of rapidly industrialising cities.

But, in the 1960s, as air travel became more accessible, seaside towns lost their glamour. Cheap package holidays to Spain and Greece became popular, leaving the British seaside to fall into terminal decline. “In the 80s, we were all going abroad,” Holland remembers. “We didn’t want to be hanging out by the sea.”

But Covid has forced Britain to look again; to wobble once more down pebbled beaches, wrists sticky with ice-cream, protecting our chips from the marauding gulls. “We haven’t had a holiday and we’re not likely to this year,” says Wickett. “But I don’t need it when I’ve got this. It’s like a refuge.”

Once more, Britons are flocking to seaside towns, to escape diseased air, and enjoy a place that invigorates as much as it relaxes. “In between lockdowns,” says Jarratt, “there’s been a clear movement of people going to rural and coastal settings. It’s about escaping the crowds and breathing fresh air.”

Sundown on Hove beach. The waters are choppier. The seagulls emboldened. People on the promenade hold takeaway pints in plastic cups. A father chastises his son for throwing stones at his face. Outside a rainbow-striped hut towards the Brighton end of the beach, three men sit on an artificial lawn, drinking and laughing. This is Hove Pride Hut.

“It’s become a bit of a feature on the seafront,” says Clive Sanders, 55, a financial controller. He owns it with his partner, 54-year-old brand strategist Neil Cavalier-Smith. They are with their friend Martin. “It’s funny,” says Sanders, “because when Neil decided to buy it, I wasn’t 100% sure. And then it was so much better than I ever imagined.” Cavalier-Smith chips in: “We just love it. It’s weird.”



Clive Sanders (left) and Neil Cavalier-Smith outside their #HovePrideHut.
Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

Cavalier-Smith painted it himself. Above the hut is a decal, reading #HovePrideHut. He ducks into the hut, and emerges with the decal he considered instead. “#Big ... Gay Beach Hut,” I read as he unfurls it. “I like it.” Cavalier-Smith grins. “I’ve also got some new hinges that swing both ways,” he says.

In summer, it’s a social hub, he says. The worst thing about hut ownership, he laughs, “is the people pissing on the hut. Unquestionably.” (Antisocial behaviour is a particular problem during warm weather, with people sometimes practising parkour along the hut roofs, or breaking in, looking for valuables.) Cavalier-Smith breaks off as a woman approaches him from a neighbouring hut. Inevitably, she wants to talk about locks.

I wind my way down the beach, past parents packing inflatables and overtired children into sedans that smell of baked metal. It is curious, this ardent devotion to these expensive, mildewing, salt-scraped sheds. “This is *our* little patch here,” Sanders said earlier, fumbling to explain.

But I understand. There is something deep in the British psyche that makes us want to stake a claim to a little piece of the coastline that is ours alone. To have a place to sit, to laugh, to socialise, to think, in front of an endlessly advancing and receding sea, while, above, the seagulls squawk and swoop, and life’s problems seem but a distant flag, waving on the horizon.

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New Zealand falls for stranded baby orca, but dilemma looms over ‘life support’

Time could be running out for killer whale named Toa, who has charmed the nation but depends on round-the-clock care to stay alive



A volunteer with Toa the baby orca in his makeshift pen at Plimmerton near Wellington. Rescuers are trying to reunite Toa with his pod. Photograph: Eva Corlett/The Guardian

A volunteer with Toa the baby orca in his makeshift pen at Plimmerton near Wellington. Rescuers are trying to reunite Toa with his pod. Photograph: Eva Corlett/The Guardian

Eva Corlett in Wellington

Tue 20 Jul 2021 23.35 EDT

When Toa, the orphaned baby orca, sees food coming he sticks his large pink tongue out of his wide gummy mouth in happy anticipation. He gurgles and belches as he hungrily tugs at the specially designed latex teat. Four

volunteers in wetsuits and beanies cradle him and coo that he is “a good boy” as he feeds. When he is done, he rolls over, revealing his cream white skin, and nudges a volunteer for a belly rub. If they dare stop, he nudges them again. When he is excited he zooms about his holding pool, playing with the volunteers, and when a large tentacle-like piece of kelp is heaved into the water, he snuggles under it, as though it were a blanket, or the protective weight of his missing mother.

The young calf, thought to be between two and six months old, [became stranded in the rocks near Plimmerton](#), north of Wellington 10 days ago with minor injuries.



Toa the baby orca plays with kelp in his makeshift pen at Plimmerton near Wellington, New Zealand. Photograph: Eva Corlett/The Guardian

Since then, a cast of hundreds, including the Department of Conservation (DOC), whale rescue teams and the local iwi (tribe) Ngāti Toa Rangatira, along with a revolving door of volunteers, have been caring for Toa, which means brave or strong in Maori, while the nationwide search for his pod continues.

[The whale sentinel: two decades of watching humpback numbers boom](#)
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Volunteer and Plimmerton local, Brianna Norris, 21, is into her eighth day volunteering. She, and her 17-year-old brother Ben, who found Toa on the rocks, have formed a special relationship with the calf.

"He is really affectionate and really gentle. It's super special, but we are just desperate for him to get back to his family. One day with him would have been plenty."

The collective efforts have been considerable but fraught with difficulties. Last week, a once-in-a-decade storm ripped through the Wellington region, bringing winds up to 140km/h, four-metre swells and flooding. The teams were forced to move Toa out of the sea-pen they had created in the harbour, into a 32,000-litre seawater holding pool set-up in the carpark of the Plimmerton boating club. Keeping him in the ocean could have caused injury to both whale and staff during the wild weather.

Toa remains there still. Flooding from the storm put pressure on the wastewater pipes, causing sewage to spill out into the harbour and rendering it a health and safety hazard for staff. With another storm forecast in the coming days, rescuers have decided it is better to limit the number of times Toa is moved between sites.



Crowds have gathered to watch Toa in its makeshift pen in Plimmerton.
Photograph: Marty Melville/AFP/Getty Images

His life may have become reduced to a small pool while the search for his family endures, but the story of his plight has captured the nation's imagination, with hundreds of volunteers scouring the shorelines hoping to spot his missing pod. There have been a number of unverified sightings and some that are credible, but the storm prevented rescuers from investigating further.

For the most part, Toa's health is good, aside from some stomach upsets, while the vets try to find the right balance for his milk formula, DOC said.

So far, the rescue operation has cost the taxpayer NZ\$10,000 but other expenses are being paid for by the Orca Research Trust, and countless hours of volunteer time.

[Killer whales spotted near Cornwall coast in rare UK sighting](#)

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It is an exercise in devotion, but some scientists are questioning whether keeping an infant whale on a type of human life-support for this long is ethical.

Dr Karen Stockin, a marine biologist, said internationally recognised practice for separated cetaceans this young is either lifelong human care or euthanasia.

“New Zealand has no captive or rehabilitation facility that could support Toa. Of course, we all crave a Disney happy ending, but what matters most here is not our understandable human sentiment and emotion, but notably the viability and welfare of Toa.”

Annie Potts, a professor in human-animal studies at the University of Canterbury, highlighted the incongruence between how humans treat a whale calf compared with, say, the farming of bobby calves for veal.

“We reserve our love, compassion and empathy for ‘extraordinary species’ like whales which we can celebrate ‘saving’.”

Dr Ingrid Visser has been at the site, coordinating care for Toa, since the beginning. She is rugged up in layers of warm clothing with a hot water bottle held close to her chest. Despite her intermittent sleep, she is constantly alert to what is happening in Toa’s pool, and gently offers volunteers directions over what to do with him.



Dr Ingrid Visser, an expert on orcas, at Plimmerton in New Zealand where rescuers are working to keep baby killer whale Toa alive. Photograph: Eva Corlett/The Guardian

Visser is the only person in the country with a Phd in New Zealand Orca and is frequently called upon to offer expert advice internationally. She is using her own network of international orca and stranding experts to assist her in Toa’s care.

She said there is no doubt that DOC will take into account perspectives from other scientists, but that her focus is not on “the naysayers, but doing what is right for Toa”.

DOC’s marine species manager Ian Angus said while the rescue operation is entering into a delicate stage, the focus remains on reuniting Toa with his

pod. The team has at least a few more days up their sleeves to attempt this, Angus said.

“We are optimistic that we may find the pod, and the orca’s health is still stable, but we are also being realistic as we consider the ongoing welfare of this animal – that has to be our number one concern.”

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A man stands next to the Olympic rings at dusk in Yokohama. Photograph: Philip Fong/AFP/Getty Images

Olympic Games highlights: your day-by-day guide to the best bits in Tokyo

A man stands next to the Olympic rings at dusk in Yokohama. Photograph: Philip Fong/AFP/Getty Images

From the spectacular opening ceremony to the final gold in the marathon, via the pool, the beach and the stadium, your indispensable guide to the Games

by [Ian Malin](#)

Wed 21 Jul 2021 03.00 EDT

Friday 23 July

- The opening ceremony in the Olympic Stadium will be spectacular but has been shrouded in secrecy so far. Because of Covid restrictions fewer athletes than usual will be joining the parade of nations. As usual Greek athletes will lead the march behind the flags with the Americans and French last before the entry of the host Japanese team. Like the final event of the Games it will be a marathon and a lump in the throat is inevitable.
- That opening ceremony does not leave a lot of time for events on the first real day of competition although Britain's rowers are quickly into action on the Sea Forest Waterway. The women's quadruple sculls, Mathilda Hodgkins-Byrne, Hannah Scott, Charlotte Hodgkins-Byrne and Lucy Glover are a strong combination and Team GB expect another healthy haul of medals.
- The other events on the first Friday are the individual ranking rounds for men and women in archery at Yumenoshima Park. The six-strong British team includes Naomi Folkard who is competing in her fifth Games with the 18-year-old James Woodgate competing in his first Olympics. India will be hoping to build on their recent impressive World Cup displays.

[Think the Tokyo Olympics are a bad idea? St Louis 1904 set the bar high](#)

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Saturday 24 July

- The start of the men's and women's tennis competition at Ariake Tennis Park and all Britain will begin to will Andy Murray on to a third successive gold medal. Since Rio, of course, Murray has been beset by injury problems and his hip surgery two years ago means that winning gold will be a monumental task but with Murray nothing seems impossible. Win or lose, expect plenty of tears.
- Back on the Sea Forest Waterway the women's pairs heats feature two-time Olympic champion Helen Glover who is seeking to become the first British rower to compete at an Olympics after having children. Glover partners Polly Swann, who won silver in the women's eight in Rio. The 35-year-old Glover gave birth to twins in January last year and to a boy in 2018.
- Charlotte Dujardin, who began riding horses as a two-year-old, is the most successful British dressage rider in history. The team event begins today and the 36-year-old is hoping to add another gold to the two she won in London and the one in Rio. Her horse Valegro has retired and Dujardin will be riding Renai Hart in Tokyo.

Sunday 25 July

- Britain is sending a team of 11 boxers – seven men and four women – to Tokyo and all expect to win medals. The women's middleweight competition starts today and 2019 world champion Lauren Price has every chance of picking up a gold. “It has been my dream to compete at the [Olympic Games](#) since I was eight years old,” said the former Wales international footballer, who took gold in the 2018 Commonwealth Games, “so to finally have the opportunity is amazing.”
- Weather permitting, this day also sees the introduction of a new sport to the Games. Forty surfers from 17 different countries are taking part in the surfing competition at Tsurigasaki Beach. Kanoa Igarashi and Hiroto Ohhara are the home hopes in the men's event and Mahina

Maeda and Amuro Tsuzuki in the women's. Not surprisingly, Americans and Brazilians are favourites for medals with Brazil's Gabriel Medina looking hard to beat.

- Britain's men's eights won gold in Rio five years ago and on Sunday morning they begin their quest for a repeat as the heats begin. Mohamed Sbihi, one of those medallists in Brazil, is competing in his third Games. It will be a difficult achievement to repeat Rio but the British team are confident they can triumph in what has been a successful event in the past.



Team GB's men's eight (Joshua Bugajski, Jacob Dawson, Thomas George, Mohamed Sbihi, Charles Elwes, Oliver Wynne-Griffith, James Rudkin, Thomas Ford and Henry Fieldman (cox)) begin their quest for gold on Sunday 25 July. Photograph: Justin Setterfield/Getty Images for British Olympic Association

Monday 26 July

- When Adam Peaty won in Rio it was the first gold medal at an Olympics by a male British swimmer for 24 years. The 26-year-old Peaty is a red-hot favourite to successfully defend his 100m

breaststroke title at the Tokyo Aquatics Centre. Peaty is the world-record holder and an eight-time world champion.

- In the pool we will also get the chance to see Ariarne Titmus, a 20-year-old from Tasmania. Titmus is known as “The Terminator” and at the Australian trials swam the 200m and 400m freestyle faster than the great Katie Ledecky. As ever, the main rivalry in swimming will be between the Australians and the Americans, who have chosen the youngest squad in their history.
- Yorkshire’s Tom Pidcock celebrates his 22nd birthday during the Games and he has high hopes in the cross-country mountain bike event. He has returned to racing after breaking his collarbone in a training crash. Pidcock recently won a World Cup event in the Czech Republic, comfortably ahead of rival Mathieu van der Poel, who has been making a name for himself in the Tour de France.

Tuesday 27 July

- The football tournament started two days before the opening ceremony and the women’s match against Canada will be a stiff test for a Great Britain squad under new coach Hege Riise. Riise won gold as a player with Norway in Sydney in 2000 and has a strong squad that includes 11 players from Manchester City, including Fifa’s 2020 player of the year Lucy Bronze. Gold for Bronze is a headline waiting to be written though the Americans may have something to say about that.
- Great Britain’s men’s hockey team have only four players who competed in a disappointing Rio campaign and their captain, Adam Dixon, says they are ready to “ruffle some feathers”. The meeting with Germany in a Pool B game at Oi Hockey Stadium will be an acid test for the British men who famously won gold in 1988.
- Who can defeat the all-conquering Chinese at table tennis? This day in the Metropolitan Gymnasium sees the men’s and women’s singles round of 16 and Britain are represented by Chesterfield’s Liam Pitchford, who is in his third Olympics, and Tin-Tin Ho who is in her

first. Ho is a 22-year-old medical student at the University of Nottingham and the pair have played mixed doubles for England, winning silver at the last two Commonwealth Games.

Wednesday 28 July

- Katie Ledecky is the world's best female swimmer and her best event, the 1500m freestyle, is now in the Olympic programme. The American will not be as dominant as she was in Rio but, at 24, she will still be the overwhelming favourite in the 1500m and in the 800m which she won by an astonishing 11 seconds back in 2016.
- Tao Geoghegan Hart did not defend his Giro d'Italia title this year. One reason was that he wanted to compete in Tokyo. Today he and former Tour de France winner Geraint Thomas compete in the men's time trial. The 26-year-old Londoner has recovered from a bad crash in the Paris-Nice race and expects to be at the peak of fitness in time for Tokyo.
- Naomi Osaka missed Wimbledon but the No 2-ranked woman in the world, who was born in Japan to a Haitian father and Japanese mother, would not miss Tokyo for the world. It would be a major shock not to see her reach the quarter-finals, especially in the absence of other leading women such as Serena Williams. It would be a shock too if Osaka didn't go on to win gold.



Japan's Naomi Osaka is set to be one of the icons of the Games. Photograph: Christian Hartmann/Reuters

Thursday 29 July

- Simone Biles, America's phenomenon, is trying to become the first female gymnast in more than half a century to win consecutive all-around Olympic golds. This is expected to be one of the real spectacles of Tokyo and the 4ft 8in Biles, who won four medals in seven days in Rio, is set to be the biggest star of the Olympics.
- Great Britain's women kick off their Rugby Sevens programme at the Tokyo Stadium with high hopes of success although New Zealand, who they meet in the pool stages, will be favourites for the event. The Wasps pair Meg Jones and Celia Quansah are in the British squad. They are a same-sex couple but not the first to compete for Team GB – Kate and Helen Richardson-Walsh won hockey gold in Rio.
- Great Britain's women hockey players face a pivotal match in the competition against the strong Netherlands team in their quest to defend that gold medal. The British team includes Laura Unsworth, whose 276 caps make her the most experienced player in her country's history. The

young 16-strong British squad contains nine players making their first Olympic appearances but they look powerful enough to fight for medals.

Friday 30 July

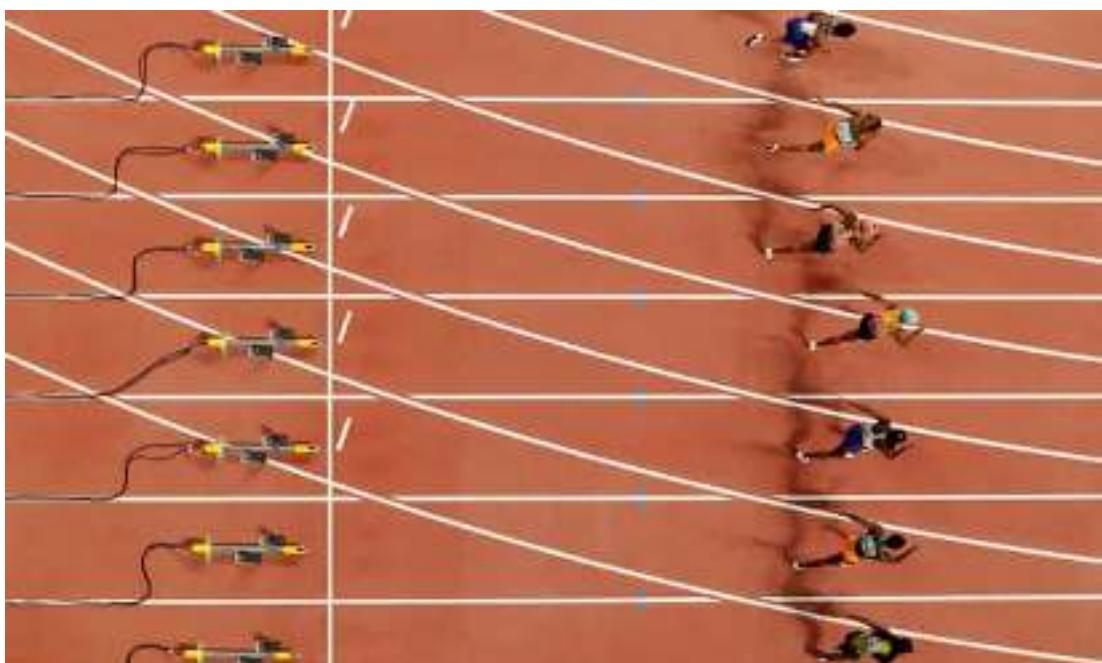
- The business end of any Olympics is track and field. It begins with a highlight, the men's 10,000m final. Sam Atkin, from Grimsby, is Britain's sole representative but Mo Farah has gone and his title is certainly Africa-bound. The Ugandan Joshua Cheptegei is the world champion and firm favourite.
- Back in the pool Freya Anderson, a 20-year-old from Birkenhead, is a freestyle sprinter who has attracted plenty of attention since her 100m win in the world juniors in Indianapolis four years ago. Anderson won five golds at the Europeans in Budapest last year and will be eyeing at least a place in today's 100m final.
- It may be a good opportunity to watch one of the Olympic greats at the Nippon Budokan. Teddy Riner, who was born in Guadeloupe, is France's star judoka. The 32-year-old Riner won gold in London and Rio in the +100kg category. Kokoro Kageura, one of the few to have beaten Riner, is the world champion and will have the whole of Japan in his corner.

Saturday 31 July

- The race to decide who is the world's fastest woman, the 100m final, pitches Jamaica's Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce, the second quickest woman in history after her recent 10.63 run in this event, against the likes of Britain's Dina Asher-Smith, the 200m world champion. The flamboyant American Sha'Carri Richardson [is banned and misses out](#).
- The Olympic Stadium will also see the final of the 4x400 mixed relay. Doha in 2019 was the first event of its kind. The men usually start and end the relay but that is not compulsory. In Doha the world-record

holders USA beat Jamaica to gold. That will be a pointer in Tokyo with Britain hoping to mount a challenge in this fascinating event.

- Team GB, as usual, have medal prospects in sailing. This day sees the men's and women's finals of the RS:X class. Both British windsurfers Tom Squires and Emma Watson are Olympic newcomers with 20-year-old Watson the youngest in the British squad. Britain have won 28 golds since sailing made its Olympic debut in Paris in 1900 and this team can ride that wave.



The women's 100m final is likely to pit Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce against Dina Asher-Smith. Photograph: Richard Heathcote/Getty Images

Sunday 1 August

- Hideki Matsuyama will be a poster-boy in Japan after donning the Green Jacket in April following his win in the Masters. The final round in the men's stroke play takes place at the Kasumigaseki Country Club and a nation is expectant. The first Japanese man to win the Masters and the first to win an Olympic golf gold would be a film script come to life.

- The BMX freestyle finals for men and women will see Britain's Declan Brooks and Charlotte Worthington competing for medals at the Ariake Urban Sports Park. Worthington, from Manchester, is a real hope for a medal. She has won British and European titles in this freestyle event that is included in an Olympics for the first time.
- Nine days of fencing come to an end with the men's foil gold medal match at the Makuhari Messe Hall. The United States, France and Italy are the favourites for medals in the climax to the fencing programme. Londoner Marcus Mepstead hopes to make progress in the earlier individual event.

Monday 2 August

- Britain's Emily Campbell won three golds at the recent European Weightlifting Championships and competes in the 87kg category. The 2018 Commonwealth Games bronze medallist is in the same category as New Zealander Laurel Hubbard [who becomes the first transgender athlete](#) at a Games.
- Back in the Olympic Stadium the final event of the day sees the women's 5,000m final. Jess Judd, Amy-Eloise Markovc and Eilish McColgan are the strong British contingent with Judd and McColgan doubling up in the 10,000m. Liz McColgan's 30-year-old daughter is in her third Olympics and has an outside chance of a medal in the shorter event.
- The women's doubles and the men's singles finals bring an end to the badminton competition. Lauren Smith and Chloe Birch are the doubles partnership. The pair are hopeful in a competition expected to be dominated by Japanese players.

Tuesday 3 August

- Scotland's Laura Muir has been the standout British hope in the 800m for some time but she has a new rival in a 19-year-old from

Manchester, Keely Hodgkinson, who powered past her to win in the British Championships in her home city earlier this summer. The pair are likely to be medal contenders in this final.

- This will also be the moment Dina Asher-Smith hopes she can run into the history books. The world 200m champion is the fastest British woman ever with national records in both the 100m and 200m. The competition will be fierce and the margins for success and failure wafer-thin but the 25-year-old Blackheath & Bromley Harrier can provide Britain with one of its highlights in Tokyo.
- Away from the athletics stadium, British eyes will turn to the Enoshima Yacht Harbour where Giles Scott will be hoping to repeat his dominant display in Rio and retain the gold medal in the Finn class. Scott won in Rio with a day to spare and has six world titles as evidence that he will be a favourite again.



Great Britain's Giles Scott will hope repeat his golden performance in Rio.
Photograph: Bernat Armangue/AP

Wednesday 4 August

- The beginning of an eagerly-awaited heptathlon sees Britain's Katarina Johnson-Thompson compete in her third Olympics. The Liverpudlian scored a British record 6,981 points on her way to a world title two years ago but has been hampered by injury problems which will put her gold-medal prospects in the balance.
- Who will be the next Usain Bolt? The American Noah Lyles is convinced it will be him. Lyles has the stats to back him up. He is the reigning 200m world champion and his 19.74sec the fastest time this year. This day sees the final of the 200m and the 23-year-old from Florida looks unbeatable. Team GB's Adam Gemili is an outside prospect for a medal.
- Some of the top women golfers in the world are in the first round of the women's individual stroke play. Nelly Korda's first major win in the Women's PGA Championship put the American on top of the Tokyo rankings ahead of the South Koreans Ko Jin-young and Inbee Park. Melissa Reid and Jodi Ewart Shadoff are the British challengers in a field of 60.
- Skateboarding takes its bow in the Olympics and Sky Brown is Team GB's great hope. The 12-year-old Brown is set to become Britain's youngest ever summer Olympian. Only a year ago she suffered a head injury after a fall in training but she has recovered and is joined in the Ariake Urban Sports Park by 15-year-old Bombette Martin.

Thursday 5 August

- Wayde van Niekerk of South Africa is the Olympic champion and world record-holder in the 400m and near the end of the day this prestigious event has its final. Despite tearing an anterior cruciate ligament playing in a charity rugby game in 2017 he still thinks he can run below 43sec after shattering Michael Johnson's record in Rio. It could be one of the great comeback stories.
- The beach volleyball at Shiokaze Park enters its semi-final stage. This was one of the most joyous events in Rio. This summer because of

Covid restrictions on crowds it may be less fun. The Brazilians are expected to challenge for medals again with the Canadian pair Sarah Pavan and Melissa Humana-Paredes favourites for gold.

- Karate at the Nippon Budokan is sure to be a big draw for Japanese spectators but perhaps has only novelty value for the rest of the world. This new Olympic sport may, though, see a Spanish winner in Sandra Sánchez, a current world and European champion in the discipline of kata which has its women's final bout.

Friday 6 August

- Tom Daley is a 27-year-old veteran now and about to compete in his fourth Olympics. Daley suffered a shock semi-final elimination in the individual 10m platform event in Rio. He is in the preliminaries on this day and will line up alongside Matty Smith in the synchronised event. The 16-year-old Andrea Spendolini-Sirieix is also expected to make a splash – hopefully not too big a one.
- Britain expects medals in the velodrome and Laura Kenny, who already has four Olympic golds, is thankfully back after breaking her shoulder last year. She should be in the madison final after also winning a place in the team pursuit and omnium.
- Kate French is the world No 2 in the modern pentathlon and she will be hopeful of a place on the podium at the end of the women's competition after considering leaving the sport in protest at changes in format for the Paris Olympics. The 30-year-old was fifth in Rio and is joined in the British team by James Cooke who in 2018 became the first British man in more than a quarter of a century to become a world champion.



Spanish world champion in karate kata Sandra Sanchez will hope to reach Thursday's final. Photograph: Pierre-Philippe Marcou/AFP/Getty Images

Saturday 7 August

- The men's gold medal game in basketball at the Saitama Super Arena is always a major event at any Olympics but one of the most predictable. It would be a shock if the USA didn't repeat their gold performance in Rio. Since the door was opened to NBA players at the Barcelona Olympics in 1992 men's "Dream Teams" have won six of the seven golds. Even without LeBron James the Americans look too strong although World Cup champions Spain can dream.
- Adam Burgess is Britain's first under-23 world champion in the canoe singles and has won silver in the European Championship and World Cup. The men's finals take place and Britain complete a campaign spearheaded by Liam Heath, a reigning Olympic champion in the K1 200m.
- The men's 1500m final should be one of athletics' most thrilling spectacles. The American Matthew Centrowitz Jr won in Rio and should be among the medals again but he was beaten in the US trials by

a university freshman Cole Hocker and the man from Maryland will have his work cut out to strike gold again.

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Sunday 8 August

- The final of the super-heavyweight boxing comes on the last day of competition and Frazer Clarke is looking to follow in Anthony Joshua's footsteps. The 29-year-old captain of the British team is from Swadlincote in Derbyshire, oddly the birthplace of former British heavyweight Jack Bodell. Surely an omen there.
- Jason Kenny already has six Olympic gold medals, a figure only matched by Chris Hoy. The final day of the Olympics can see Britain add to their medal tally and in the men's keirin final Kenny could be stepping back on the middle of the podium.
- The traditional end of the Olympics sees the men's marathon final at Sapporo Odori Park with the medals presented during the closing ceremony at the Olympic Stadium. Kenya's Eliud Kipchoge is the greatest marathon runner of the modern era and, at 36, can successfully defend his crown.

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Saving the bacon: will British pig farmers survive a ban on cages?

An end to UK pig confinement is in sight, but producers fear they will be left carrying the cost of high-welfare options in the face of cheap imports



A sow looks out from a farrowing crate, in Italy. The crates are used to confine expectant sows until their piglets are weaned after four weeks.
Photograph: Jo-Anne McArthur/Essere Animali/We Animals Media

A sow looks out from a farrowing crate, in Italy. The crates are used to confine expectant sows until their piglets are weaned after four weeks.
Photograph: Jo-Anne McArthur/Essere Animali/We Animals Media

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[Tom Levitt](#)

Wed 21 Jul 2021 02.58 EDT

After more than a decade trialling the removal of pig cages on her Yorkshire farm, Vicky Scott has lost confidence in being able to make it permanent.

Doing so would require building a new shed to create enough space to freely house all her pigs, she says. “No one will pay for this. They [the retailers] want products as cheap as chips and consumers want cheap meat.”

Yet, the UK and EU are expected to ban all forms of confinement in pig rearing.

In June, the European Commission confirmed it would table a proposal to [phase out](#) the use of farrowing crates, which are used to confine sows before and after birth, by the end of 2023. The UK – and [Boris Johnson himself](#) – have [made clear](#) that the long-term aim is to do the same.

Crates are used to confine expectant sows until their piglets are weaned after four weeks. They restrict the sows’ movement, reducing the risk of crushing the piglets.

However, as well as restricting sows' natural behaviour and movement, including nest-building and interacting with her piglets, there is also evidence the crates [increase the risk](#) of stillbirth.

[The pig whisperer: the Dutch farmer who wants to end factory farming](#)
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Piglets are vulnerable to being crushed by sows if they are not in a crate, but the overall mortality rates can be managed, says pig specialist Emma Baxter, from Scotland's Rural College. Outdoor pig systems, where pigs are not confined, consistently return average piglet mortality rates similar to indoor ones where the pigs are confined, she says.



Piglets suckling on a free-range farm in Yorkshire. The sow can interact freely with her piglets, but the piglets are vulnerable to being crushed by sows if they are not in a crate. Photograph: Murdo Macleod/The Guardian

Given the majority of pigs in the UK are reared indoors because outdoor rearing is limited by soil type, producers will need to be able to adopt high-welfare indoor alternatives to farrowing crates, says Baxter.

“Indoor farrowing without crates is workable, but usually requires more space per sow place, so that has cost implications. It also needs better

husbandry skills, and ideally the right type of sow – ie good maternal traits and sensible litter size,” says Jeremy Marchant-Forde, a research animal scientist with the US Department of Agriculture.

But the industry trend towards bigger litters could make it harder to shift away from confinement.

“There remains a push [from the pig industry] for larger and larger litters, and even though this means more piglet losses, birth to weaning, the end result is a steadily increasing number weaned each litter,” says Marchant-Forde. “However, what the impact of crate-free farrowing on piglet mortality in large litters might be, is a bit of an unknown.”

For Scott, the only viable option to phase out the use of crates is a costly upgrade to her indoor system. Moving outdoors is not feasible, given the wet climate and unsuitable soils for keeping pigs in Yorkshire.

“I wouldn’t want to give birth knee-deep in mud. There is no way my [piglet] mortality is better outdoors. The higher-welfare system for me is indoors,” she says.

A more workable solution, Scott says, is a system of temporary farrowing crates where the sow is only confined for a day before giving birth and three or four days afterwards. “I think it’s the right way to go. The [mother] pigs are happier and the piglets are safer.”

Baxter believes confinement before the birth is stressful for the sow because of the impact on instinctive nest-building behaviour.

“If you are going to confine her at all to protect the piglets then you do it in the first few days after birth when the piglets are most vulnerable,” Baxter says. “But it needs careful management to reduce disturbance and disruption of important early suckling behaviour.”

It’s better welfare for the sow to get up and wander around and interact with her piglets

Zoe Davies, chief executive, National Pig Association.

Making any change for her 1,700 herd would be a hugely expensive endeavour for Scott. And one that retailers, she says, are refusing to support producers to do. They say consumers won't pay more for pig meat from indoor systems.

Unsurprisingly, that makes producers like Scott wary of change, especially given fears of a [flood of cheaper US pork](#) produced to lower standards in the event of a free trade deal between Britain and the US.

Many pig producers remember the UK government introducing a ban on the use of gestation crates in 1999. Bringing in the new rules while [allowing imports of cheaper](#) pig meat from the Netherlands, Denmark and Germany, where no ban was in place, contributed to a halving in the number of UK pig producers. The UK now imports about 50% of its pig meat.



Sows in [gestation crates](#) at a farm in Italy. The UK banned the crates in 1999 but allowed imports from countries where no ban was in place. Photograph: Stefano Belacchi/We Animals Media

Farming groups say the support of the government and retailers is vital to the transition away from crates and confinement, to protect against sub-standard imports and a collapse in domestic pig production.

“A lot will depend on the timeline to transition. We don’t want an exodus. We just want a managed transition so the industry isn’t just exported overseas,” says Zoe Davies, chief executive of the National Pig Association.

“It’s better welfare for the sow to get up and wander around and interact with her piglets. If the supply chain supports the transition then it will be viable and we’ll attract new people to the industry and keep improving.”

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Split city: Michael Schmidt's Berlin – in pictures

Fourth-grade pupil, elementary school. Berlin-Wedding, 1976-78
Photograph: Michael Schmidt

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Why does Jeff Bezos's rocket look like that? An inquiry

Experts weigh in on the ‘anthropomorphic’ design of New Shepard, the Amazon CEO’s Blue Origin rocket

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Jeff Bezos and crew lands safely after first Blue Origin flight to space – watch live

[Matthew Cantor](#)

[@CantorMatthew](#)

Tue 20 Jul 2021 21.11 EDT

Jeff Bezos’s [11-minute trip](#) aboard a Blue Origin rocket to the edge of space on Tuesday left the world’s richest man feeling “unbelievably good” and his crew “very happy”. But afterwards, as he wondered aloud how fast he could refuel, the rest of the world was left pondering just why the New Shepard rocket had such a distinctive shape.

As social media erupted with innuendo, we contacted a few experts to find out why it looked, in the words of one astrophysicist, so “anthropomorphic”. At one major research institution, the press officer referred us to the gender studies department, but Jonathan McDowell, an astronomer at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics, was able to shed some light on the topic.

[Bezos blasted for traveling to space while Amazon workers toil on planet Earth](#)

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New Shepard consists of a mushroom-like crew capsule that flares out over a long shaft, called a booster. The rounded top appears more bulbous than that of many other rockets, but it's not unique. "There's a long history of what we call hammerhead rockets," on which the capsule's diameter is wider than the booster, said McDowell. "If you're careful, it actually has perfectly fine aerodynamics."

Just like the tips of passenger and military jets, capsules come in all different shapes, New Shepard's interior is designed to "maximize the interior volume" to hold six passengers, said Laura Forczyk, the owner of Astralytical, a space analytics company. It also needs a "big, flat bottom" for stable re-entry, McDowell said.

"They went through a lot of iterations coming up with the perfect shape to give them the most volume, the best windows, and [a design that] wouldn't kill anyone onboard," said the astrophysicist Scott Manley in a private video shared with the Guardian. "And this is the shape they came up with, this dome shape."

As for the booster, engineers work to minimize its mass, making it as small as possible. "It is easier to balance a long and skinny cylinder than it is to balance a thicker, fatter cylinder," Forczyk said.

[How the billionaire space race could be one giant leap for pollution](#)
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These competing concerns can lead to a capsule that is a bit wider than might originally have been envisioned. "It comes down to optimizing two different things and not being able to make them quite match," McDowell said. He pointed to other examples of rockets with slightly flared tops, including the Atlas V Starliner, expected to launch next week.

Adding to those "anthropomorphic" qualities is a ridge near the top that is "very, very obvious", Manley said. That's there to accommodate a "ring-shaped fin" that is fundamental to the re-entry process, counteracting the effects of the fin at the bottom as the booster travels in reverse.

All this adds up to some particularly memorable optics. Was there any subtle aesthetic messaging involved? “I don’t know if I would have made the design this way, but I’m sure it was driven entirely by physics” as well as cost savings, said Forczyk.

Still, “they can’t not have noticed,” McDowell said. “You’ve got to imagine there was a meeting where someone went, ‘Do you really want to fly looking like this?’ But I’m guessing an engineer got up and said, ‘This is what the math says. This is the optimum configuration. So this is what we’re gonna fly.’”

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Britain's rivers are suffocating to death

[George Monbiot](#)



Water that should be crystal clear has become a green-brown slop of microscopic algae because of industrial farm waste



‘The River Wye is covered by every possible conservation law, but in just a few years it has spiralled towards complete ecological collapse.’
Photograph: Pepkats Images/Alamy Stock Photo

‘The River Wye is covered by every possible conservation law, but in just a few years it has spiralled towards complete ecological collapse.’
Photograph: Pepkats Images/Alamy Stock Photo

Wed 21 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

There’s more below the surface than we thought – something even worse than the water companies’ disgusting habit of filling our rivers with [raw sewage](#). After a deep dive into the data, the team that made [Rivercide](#) last week discovered that while sewage now dominates our perceptions of river pollution, it’s not their major cause of death.

On the border between Wales and England, we found a great river dying before our eyes. The Wye is covered by every possible conservation law, but in just a few years it has spiralled towards complete ecological collapse. The vast beds of water crowfoot, the long fluttering weed whose white and yellow flowers once bedecked the surface of the river, and which – like mangroves around tropical seas – provide the nurseries in which young fish and other animals grow and adults hide and breed, have almost vanished in recent years. Our own mapping suggests a loss of between 90% and 97%.

They have been suffocated. With increasing frequency, warm weather brings algal blooms. Water that should be crystal clear becomes a green or brown slop of [diatoms](#) (microscopic algae). The diatoms shut out the light the crowfoot needs; and at night, as they respire, they draw oxygen from the water, stressing and sometimes killing the remaining fish and insects. Any crowfoot that survives this onslaught may then be colonised by sewage fungus and [green slime](#), which also smothers the fronds, preventing photosynthesis.

Similar things are happening across Britain. Scarcely a river in England and Wales is unaffected by plagues of algae or sewage fungus, caused by an excess of nutrients. But the main culprit is not human excrement.

So what is it? Farming. This is now the biggest cause of river pollution in the UK. There are various reasons, including soil erosion, fertilisers and pesticides, but the most intense and extreme cause, especially in the west of Britain, is industrial livestock units.

Over the 21st century, livestock units have consolidated into giant factories. Vast buildings now house hundreds of dairy cattle, thousands of pigs or tens of thousands of chickens. Regions now specialise in particular animals. The catchment of the River Wye is the UK's chicken capital.

These factories gather nutrients from a wide area and concentrate them into a small one. The chicken units draw soya from huge tracts of Brazil and Argentina, with devastating consequences for rainforests and savannahs, and pour it into chickens housed along the Wye and its tributaries. The nutrients in the feed then come out in their dung.

Animal dung is high in water and low in value, so it can be shifted economically across only short distances. This means, if you are not to spend more on diesel than the manure is worth, spreading it in the catchment of the river. The soil soon saturates. The nutrients in the dung from then on wash into the river whenever it rains. It doesn't matter whether farmers illegally pump the dung directly into the river or follow the rules to the letter in spreading it on their fields. Eventually the phosphate, nitrate and other pollutants it contains end up in the water.

So once a certain number of chicken, dairy or pig units have been built in a catchment, rivercide is inevitable. Even if there were effective government monitoring and enforcement, which there isn't, it would make little difference.

The crucial decision point is the granting of planning permission for industrial livestock units. The local authorities granting it, and the regulators issuing environmental permits, sign the river's death warrant. Astonishingly, from their responses to our questions, we discovered that neither the two county councils giving these permissions (Powys and Herefordshire), nor the Welsh and English regulators (Natural Resources Wales and the Environment Agency), appear to have any idea how many chickens are now housed in the catchment or even how many factories there are. This task was

left, as so much crucial data gathering has been, to citizen scientists. Alison Caffyn, an academic researcher, and Christine Hugh-Jones, a retired GP, set out to [map the factories](#), and estimated that they house, at any one time, [20 million chickens](#).

Because none of the authorities have kept score, they cannot assess the cumulative impact of these factories. In granting permission for new units, they treat each one as if it were built in isolation, with no attempt to determine what the extra increment of dung will do to an overloaded river. Worse still, in many cases no environmental decision is made at all, because below a very high threshold (40,000 chickens or 2,000 pigs) a livestock unit does [not require an environmental permit](#). It's a scandalous regulatory failure.

So the only way of saving many of our most beautiful rivers from this shitstorm appears to be to shut down many, perhaps most, of the industrial livestock units in their catchments. In our film, when I pressed the Welsh minister for rural affairs, Lesley Griffiths, on this matter, she appeared to [commit to do so if necessary](#). Through campaigns such as [River Action](#), we should hold her to it, and pressurise her English counterparts, who flatly refused to speak to us, to do the same.

In the meantime, our lovely rivers are being transformed by industrial livestock farms into stinking drains. Let's stop taking this shit.

- George Monbiot is a Guardian columnist
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Troubles ‘amnesty’: how much contempt does this government have for Northern Ireland?

[Susan McKay](#)

Hard tears have been shed by people who felt they had no more left, as families are denied truth and justice



Irene Connolly at home in Belfast as secretary of state for Northern Ireland Brandon Lewis makes his announcement. Irene's mother, Joan, was killed in the 1971 Ballymurphy massacre. Photograph: Charles McQuillan/Getty Images

Irene Connolly at home in Belfast as secretary of state for Northern Ireland Brandon Lewis makes his announcement. Irene's mother, Joan, was killed in the 1971 Ballymurphy massacre. Photograph: Charles McQuillan/Getty Images

Wed 21 Jul 2021 02.00 EDT

In the early hours of a summer morning in 1991 Tom Oliver, a 43-year-old father of seven children, left his home in the border county of Louth in the Republic of Ireland to attend to a calving cow in a field on his farm in the Cooley mountains. Hours later, his body was found on a remote rural road across the border, in south County Armagh. He had been shot in the head. The IRA claimed it had killed him, alleging that he had informed the security forces about arms it had stored on his land. According to them he was, in the ugly language of the time, “a tout”.

His family rejected the slur, and said he had nothing whatsoever to do with politics or paramilitarism. No one was ever brought to justice for his murder, which was widely condemned at the time. Now, exactly 30 years later, a detective investigating the activities of a suspected British army agent in the IRA has found [fresh DNA evidence](#) opening up lines of inquiry that could extend from Ireland to Australia. Jon Boucher, who heads Operation Kenova – an investigation into claims of state involvement in the kidnap, torture and murder of more than 50 individuals – says he now has a good understanding of what happened and who was involved. After three decades of grieving silently, the Oliver family has welcomed this breakthrough. They have a renewed longing that justice will at last be done.

But there is a problem. Last week the secretary of state for Northern Ireland, Brandon Lewis, [announced](#) that the government is to ban all legal investigations into Troubles-related murders and atrocities in Northern Ireland in the years before the Good Friday agreement was signed in 1998. Tom Oliver’s body was found in the north. We do not yet know where he was killed. His car was never found. If the government has its way, this investigation will be going nowhere.

[Police find new forensic evidence in case of farmer murdered by IRA](#)
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Expressions of anger, grief and despair have been reverberating around [Northern Ireland](#) since Lewis made his announcement. Relatives of the dead and injured, who thought they could not be hurt any more than they already

had been, have discovered that fresh pain is indeed available. Hard tears have been shed by people who felt they had no more tears left. Well used to obstacles and setbacks, they have nonetheless struggled to find words strong enough to express their disgust. Sandra Peake, who runs the Wave organisation for victims and survivors, said simply: “To tell people who have suffered unimaginable grief and trauma that what happened to their loved ones is no longer of any interest to the state is perverse and obscene.”

It has long been obvious that the government is sick of Northern Ireland, with its costly neediness, its fractious politicians, its intractable issues. Let’s not forget that in [2019 a poll](#) showed a majority of Conservative voters would be willing to let Northern Ireland go for the sake of Brexit, and that Boris Johnson has repeatedly and blatantly lied about his intentions towards the “precious union”. Last year, Lewis agreed that the government’s amendments to the Brexit trade deal in relation to Northern Ireland had broken international law – but only “in a limited and specific way”.

This new breach cannot be minimised. Darragh Mackin, the solicitor representing the Oliver family, said, “What the government is trying to do is frightening, but I am confident it will be found to be in breach of the European convention on human rights. Citizens have a right to have recourse to law and to have fair investigations especially when lives have been lost.” Around 3,000 killings carried out during the Troubles have never been solved. Many were not investigated. Some families never even got a visit from the police.

In 2019, a Northern Ireland Office [consultation](#) found that “a clear majority” opposed any form of amnesty or statute of limitations, believing this could damage the process of reconciliation, and that the government said it would “move forward sensitively and with as much consensus as possible”. The government had also previously claimed that when Northern Ireland’s executive was reinstated after a three-year collapse, the Stormont House agreement, dating back to 2014, would be implemented within 100 days. This hard-won deal included a range of measures to deal with legacy issues. The government has already used the agreement as part of its defence in pending legacy cases at the European court of human rights.

Yet now the government wants to introduce an amnesty for murderers within the British army and the security forces, as well as those in loyalist and republican paramilitary organisations. There will also be a ban on all “current and future” legal investigations, including civil cases, tribunals, inquests and inquiries. This will include the 1,500 cases on the Police Service of Northern Ireland’s legacy investigation books. It will include legacy investigations by the police ombudsman. The former director of public prosecutions for Northern Ireland, Barra McGrory, said he was shocked by the proposals. The government was seeking, he said, “to abolish completely all meaningful and judicial accountable processes”.

[Northern Ireland victims’ families condemn plan to end Troubles prosecutions](#)

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The prime minister claims this new statute of limitations is required to deal with “vexatious” attempts to prosecute former soldiers, and is in the interests of reconciliation. Imagine how that would sound if your child had been shot in the back by an army sniper as she walked along a country lane, or your father had been shot in the head by a paratrooper for attending a civil rights march. But it appealed to the Tory tabloids which celebrated with headlines last week about “justice for our troops”. In reality, there have been hardly any prosecutions against soldiers, and of the few that were pending, most have collapsed.

Maybe it is about keeping the dirtiest of the state’s secrets. As well as Operation Kenova, forthcoming investigations include one into the Glenanne gang, a loyalist gang that murdered many Catholics, among whose members were Ulster Defence Regiment British army personnel as well as members of the police. Last year, the government refused to conduct an inquiry into the 1989 murder by the loyalist Ulster Defence Association of solicitor Pat Finucane, a murder that former prime minister David Cameron admitted revealed “shocking levels of collusion”. It did so in defiance of a supreme court ruling that found previous investigations had been in breach of international law. Most of those who will suffer, however, will do so as collateral damage. Kathleen Gillespie’s husband, Patsy, was turned by the IRA into a “human bomb” – chained to a van carrying explosives – killing him and five soldiers in Derry. She said the government obviously felt that

“we’re just the ordinary common people so it’s alright to push us to one side”.

Some patronising British commentators appear to think the government should get away with this, since what Northern Ireland needs is to move on and leave its past behind. However, Boutcher of Operation Kenova says he “does not necessarily take no for an answer”. Sandra Peake says the government wants to draw a veil over the past but “there isn’t one thick enough to hide the blood and bones of thousands of victims or muffle the cries of their families”.

Everyone knows prosecutions are unlikely in most historical cases. Many people would settle for a measure of truth. You can’t legislate against hope, though you can destroy people by trying. We need to know our history, not erase it. There has never been a British government that has shown more contempt for the people of Northern Ireland than this one.

Susan McKay is an Irish writer and journalist whose books include Northern Protestants – On Shifting Ground

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[The politics sketch](#)[Dominic Cummings](#)

Dominic Cummings pulls back the curtain and declares his genius

[Zoe Williams](#)



PM's former adviser tells BBC's Laura Kuenssberg how he had planned to get rid of Boris Johnson from the start



Dominic Cummings: like ‘a nine-year-old explaining The Godfather’
Photograph: Jeff Overs/BBC/EPA

Dominic Cummings: like ‘a nine-year-old explaining The Godfather’
Photograph: Jeff Overs/BBC/EPA

Tue 20 Jul 2021 15.48 EDT

Dominic Cummings had clearly given his interview with [Laura Kuenssberg](#) some careful consideration, because he was dressed in recognisable clothes rather than his normal sartorial enquiry, “what would happen if Anya Hindmarch designed a prison jumpsuit?”

But had he thought this all the way through? We all know about the multidimensional chess, but had the man really nailed down the implications of what he was about to say?

Having tried and failed to get the people of Britain interested in the fact that their prime minister lacks any human empathy – “OK, it’s not great,” we shrugged from our different pockets of the political spectrum, “but also, we already knew that” – Cummings decided to try a new tack: radical openness. What if everyone could see what was really going on behind the curtain? Would we still be using words like “yawn” and “priced in” then?

So he revealed that, within days of the 2019 election, he and the rest of the Vote Leave team were already discussing how to get rid of [Boris Johnson](#) and get someone else in as prime minister. There's no reason to disbelieve his version of events; it's not as though there's a queue of more credible sources lining up to dispute it. But it does sound a bit like a nine-year-old trying to explain the plot of The Godfather.

So, there's the civil service, and there's Dom and the Vote Leave team, and one of them has to be in charge, and Carrie chooses Dom because he's more likely to get her into Downing Street where she believes there's some urgent decorating to do (I'm just trying to flesh out her motivation, there), but then once Dom's triumphed Carrie is immediately thinking "why shouldn't it be me pulling the strings?"

She had sucked him dry of his wisdom and now needed somewhere to discard his desiccated bones; we're invited to think of her as a cross between Martha Stewart and a praying mantis. The words "Lady Macbeth" come up a lot around Carrie, but the latter does, from at least some angles, appear to have loved Macbeth, whereas Carrie thinks her husband is an absolute idiot.

This is also what Cummings thinks. "I had a plan, I was trying to get things done, he didn't have an agenda, you know the prime minister's only agenda is buy more trains, buy more buses, have more bikes and build the world's most stupid tunnel to Ireland, that's it."

It's a shame Carrie and Dom couldn't have got along better, being of such similar mind.

Back to those implications, though. It feels almost vulgar to point out but doesn't this amount to something like a coup? A shadowy group of ideologues orchestrates the ascent of a man they know to be inadequate to this or any task, to the highest office of state, and within the week are discussing who to elevate to this not-insignificant role next? Does that sound very much like a functioning democracy?

It didn't help that Cummings' eyes were so wild as he described it. Our nine-year-old Godfather narrator has reached the bit about the decapitated horse in the bed, and now you're a bit worried about his levels of arousal.

Kuenssberg didn't call it a coup, she went with "con". By his own description he had scammed the British public. "I don't think it's a con," he replied, "we were trying to solve very hard problems in the order that we can solve them in."

Her words were very harsh, but the exchange was not, it felt as though he had said ahead of time, "you'll have to go in very hard on me, here", and was relishing the experience, not because this fierce questioning wasn't well-founded but because yet another person was taking his advice.

As for those very hard problems; this is where it all gets metaphysical with Cummings, however many words of his blog you choke through. What are they?

There's Brexit of course, and anyone who's sure that's a good idea "has got a screw loose", he said, poking himself in the eye – unfortunately only with his finger not a burnt stick. Yet, for his own part, he said: "Obviously I think that Brexit was a good thing." Ambivalence is for little people, any of whom would be insane to state as certainty a thing of which he himself is certain.

So let's just leave aside any very hard problem that Dominic himself has caused. What are the others? It's never plain, not in the interview, not ever. He is nothing but a revolutionary Oakeshottian. Michael Oakeshott, you'll remember of course, infected the conservative worldview for decades in the middle of the last century with his deep cynicism and profound lack of purpose. Politics is no great project, but rather the men in it "sail a boundless and bottomless sea ... There is neither harbour nor shelter, neither starting place nor appointed destination".

Cummings takes this one intoxicating step further. Not only is there no vision for change or betterment, not only is the entire purpose just to keep the thing afloat, but everyone steering it is an idiot. That's his very hard problem that he can only solve one nefarious step at a time – that everyone is stupid apart from him.

You can see why that problem would seem rather insurmountable, and see, too, why Boris Johnson would look like some kind of an answer. Cummings is the two-eyed king in the kingdom of the blind, he could poke one clean

out and still have more eyes than you. From his point of view, one blind person is as bad at seeing as any other.

“That’s OK?” Kuenssberg asked, of his grand con.

“That’s politics.”

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[Opinion](#)[Peppa Pig](#)

Peppa Pig or Boris Johnson? I know which one best represents Britain

[Arwa Mahdawi](#)



American children are so besotted with the cartoon character they are speaking in British accents. In fact, she's the perfect replacement for our current prime minister



Peppa Pig: ready to admit to mistakes. Photograph: Channel 5/PA

Peppa Pig: ready to admit to mistakes. Photograph: Channel 5/PA

Wed 21 Jul 2021 02.00 EDT

Looks like the sun hasn't quite set on the British empire. While Britain may not wield the influence it once did, we still have some soft – and rather stout – power. We have Peppa Pig. While the cartoon has always been incredibly popular, the pandemic has caused American kids to tune in at record rates. All that Peppa time, according to the Wall Street Journal (WSJ), "[has American children acting British](#)". That doesn't mean they are going on a colonising spree; it means tiny Yanks are now speaking the Pig's English. According to the WSJ, [parents across the US](#) are reporting that their kids are speaking in a British accent (whatever that is). They are saying things like "mummy" instead of "mommy" and pronouncing tomato "to-mah-to" instead of "to-may-to".

I won't accuse [the WSJ](#) of telling porkies but you don't need to be a linguist to suspect that this story might be just a little bit overblown. Still, you've got to take your wins where you can get them, and I'm going to class the Pepparing of the US as a national victory, one that is much needed since English politicians seem to be doing their best to drag the country's name through the mud. Public health experts around the world are looking on in

bewilderment and dismay as England lifts all coronavirus restrictions amid rising Covid cases. On Monday, the US state department even urged Americans not to travel to Plague Island if they can help it.

Peppa Pig, I think it's fair to say, is doing a rather better job of representing Britain on the global stage at the moment than Boris Johnson. Which leads me to advance a modest proposal: Peppa for prime minister. For those who may be sceptical, I'll be the first to admit that Peppa isn't perfect. Rather naughtily, she didn't wear a seatbelt in the first two series of the show. However, after people complained about the terrible example she was setting, the animation company behind Peppa admitted its error, expressed remorse and changed its ways. Wouldn't it be nice if our leaders were as ready to admit they were wrong and do the right thing instead of just U-turning whenever it is politically convenient? You say "to-mah-to", I say: "Is holding the British prime minister to the standard of an animated pig really too much to ask?"

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Central banks can't reduce inequality – it's time for ministers to act

[Howard Davies](#)

Central bank policies have enriched the wealthy – bold politicians must start redistributing wealth



The ECB HQ in Frankfurt, Germany. Photograph: Ronald Wittek/EPA

The ECB HQ in Frankfurt, Germany. Photograph: Ronald Wittek/EPA

Wed 21 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

In the Forbes list of the [World's Most Powerful People for 2012](#), Ben Bernanke, the then chair of the US Federal Reserve, held the [sixth position](#), while Mario Draghi, the then president of the European Central Bank, came in at number eight. They were both ranked above the Chinese president, Xi Jinping. As the global economy struggled with the aftermath of the global financial crisis that began in 2008, and its European cousin, the eurozone crisis, central banks were in the driving seat, easing quantitatively like there

was no tomorrow. They were, it was often said, “the only game in town”. Even at the time, some thought there was an element of *folie de grandeur* in their elevation.

This time is different. Although central banks continue to buy bonds incontinently, fiscal policy has been the key response to the Covid-19 pandemic. In the US, President Joe Biden and Congress have led the charge. In the EU, the European Commission’s recovery and resilience facility is at the heart of the €750bn (£650bn) next generation EU plan, while in the UK, the chancellor, Rishi Sunak, is signing the cheques.

So are central bankers’ noses out of joint as they play second fiddle to the finance ministries, a position in the orchestra to which few aspire?

It seems that they are, as during the last 18 months there has been a remarkable expansion of the central banks’ fields of activity, largely driven by their own ambitions. So they have moved into the climate change arena, arguing that financial stability may be put at risk by rising temperatures, and that central banks, as bond purchasers and as banking supervisors, can and should be proactive in raising the cost of credit for corporations without a credible transition plan. That is a promising new line of business, which is likely to grow.

[Has Brexit fatally dented the City of London’s future?](#)

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Central banks are also trying to move into social engineering, specifically the policy response to rising income and wealth inequality, another hot-button topic with high political salience. In part, this new interest in inequality is a defensive move. Central banks have been stung by growing criticism that their policy mix of low or even negative interest rates, combined with quantitative easing, has given the wealthier members of society huge uncovenanted gains by pushing up asset prices.

Those fortunate members of society with money to invest in stocks, high-end property and expensive artworks have seen their net worth grow rapidly as funds flowed into appreciating assets. So central bankers have been forced to defend their actions and to try to prove that, taken in the round, the

chosen policy mix has also benefited poorer families by sustaining jobs. Some have been convinced by that argument; others not so much.

The mixed reaction has drawn a further response from monetary authorities. One element has been rhetorical. In 2009, less than 0.5% of all central bankers' speeches recorded on the Bank for International Settlements (BIS) database mentioned inequality, or the distributional consequences of their policies. In 2021, the figure is 9%, almost 20 times as many.

[Rising inequality? Don't blame the rich](#)
[Read more](#)

But talk is cheap. Is there any evidence that a concern for inequality has influenced policy? Indeed, is there any evidence that monetary policy can be used to moderate or reverse growing inequality?

The chief economist of the BIS, Claudio Borio, [believes there is](#). He argued at the end of last month: "There is a lot that monetary policy can do to foster a more equitable distribution over business cycles." Part of the argument is traditional, drawn from the textbook of central banking 101. He refers to "the havoc that high inflation can wreak on the poorer segments of society" and shows that income inequality tends to decline when inflation averages less than 5%. So far, so conventional.

But he accepts that there can be a problem if interest rates are kept low for a long time to fight off recession. In those circumstances, "there may be a trade-off in terms of wealth inequality". That is particularly true, he thinks, in the case of financial recessions, which can be more long-lasting, and where interest rates need to be held down for a long period to allow credit excesses to be worked off. So, what is the answer? It is "a more holistic macro-financial stability framework". Oh dear.

I have nothing against holism, I should add. But it can be vague as a guide to policy. In this case, what it primarily means is that governments should offset the impact of loose monetary policy on income and wealth inequality by the use of fiscal policy to ensure that post-tax inequality is moderated. They should also work on labour-market regulation to rebalance bargaining power in favor of employees. And they should invest more in education.

These are all, of course, Good Things, but they take us away from central banking.

Can central banks really do no more than pass the buck to the ministries of finance and economy? Not quite: if they are financial regulators, they can help promote financial inclusion and literacy, but that takes decades to have an impact. It may be, too, that macro-prudential policies can be used to smooth credit booms and busts, which may reduce the scale of the problem low interest rates are designed to resolve. It is too soon since their introduction after the financial crisis to know whether that will turn out to be the case.

The slightly depressing conclusion is that the current monetary policy settings in the world's developed economies are likely to create greater wealth inequality, and that in the short term there is not a lot monetary and regulatory authorities can do about it, save mentioning it in speeches. If the problem is to be resolved, we will need to see finance ministers with a strong political mandate to implement redistributive policies, rather than Fed chairmen and governors featuring prominently in this decade's power lists.

Sir Howard Davies, the first chairman of the UK's Financial Services Authority, is chairman of the NatWest Group. He was director of the LSE and served as deputy governor of the [Bank of England](#) and CBI director general.

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Guardian Opinion cartoon

Boris Johnson

Ben Jennings on Boris Johnson's 'get Covid and live longer' message — cartoon

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[Opinion](#)[Jeff Bezos](#)

Why is Bezos flying to space? Because billionaires think Earth is a sinking ship

[Hamilton Nolan](#)

He and his fellow space-obsessed billionaires are exactly like the rich men aboard the Titanic who pushed others aside to jump into lifeboats



‘It is not a coincidence that the richest people in America are funding a new space race.’ Photograph: Blue Origin/Reuters

‘It is not a coincidence that the richest people in America are funding a new space race.’ Photograph: Blue Origin/Reuters

Tue 20 Jul 2021 09.26 EDT

Jeff Bezos is the most reptilian of billionaires. His heart has never shown evidence of a drop of warm blood. Despite all of the public relations that money can buy, his discomfort with normal human emotion shines through every time he is forced to contort his face into a squinting, uncomfortable smile. It seems overwhelmingly likely that once he gets to space, he will

peel back the skin from his bald pate like the creatures in [V](#) and exclaim to his fellow aliens: “I’m here!”

[Bezos blasted for traveling to space while Amazon workers toil on planet Earth](#)

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Few men in history have been able to match his icy ability to simultaneously accumulate grotesque mountains of wealth while showing no impulse to even pretend to have an obligation to the greater good. A century ago, Andrew Carnegie hired private armies to smash and shoot his employees when they went on strike. Yet he also had the good sense to build a bunch of public libraries, to create the appearance of some redeeming qualities. Bezos, thus far, has nothing on the humanitarian side of his ledger. His logistics-addled brain has never been able to process the kindergarten concept “To whom much is given, much is required”. In the space of a single year, his ex-wife has become an infinitely greater [philanthropist](#) than Bezos himself has in the past quarter-century. This is a conclusive demonstration of the fact that if you want the Bezos fortune to do any good, the first thing you must do is to take it away from Jeff Bezos.

The most revealing quote from any rich person in the past decade came out of Bezos’s mouth in 2018, when he [told](#) an interviewer: “The only way that I can see to deploy this much financial resource is by converting my Amazon winnings into space travel. That is basically it.” I admire the honesty of the sheer inhumanity this quote displays. What would you do with \$200bn? Cure diseases? End hunger? Eradicate poverty in an entire nation? Nah. Build a bunch of space rockets! I simply can’t see *any other way* to get all of these cumbersome gold bars out of my personal vault.

This, from a man who has bulletproof glass in his office and a seven-figure [tab](#) for personal security, seems rather disingenuous – I’m sure that leaving all that cash piled up in an unlocked room open to the public would get rid of it quite efficiently. Imagining Bezos as a lizard person incapable of feeling human emotion is actually the *most* generous interpretation of his behavior. His true motivations, I’m afraid, are more sinister.

Extremely rich people, as a rule, have come to believe that everything is for sale

Extremely rich people, as a rule, have come to believe that everything is for sale. The one thing they cannot accept is being told that they cannot buy something. And once you've bought everything else, the most alluring prize is life itself. This is why billionaires are so obsessed with funding technology to extend their own lifespans. It's difficult to spend all those billions in only a hundred years on Earth. Why give your fortune to others when you could instead increase the amount of time that you have to luxuriate in your own revolting wealth, a brain in a vat being endlessly stimulated by an army of servants who exist only for your own all-important pleasure?

It is not a coincidence that the richest people in America are funding a new space race. They are not motivated by a love of technology, or even a belief in the universe as a business opportunity. Let's call this what it is: they are making plans to *get the hell out of here*. In the same way that every good billionaire has an armored escape room in each home and a helicopter on call to whisk them away from any sinking yacht, so too do they expect to have a way off Earth if things go bad here. It may sound absurd to us, the little people without an Ultra Success Mindstate, who have accepted that our fate is bound to the fate of this planet. But it is perfectly in line with the sort of thinking that drives men to become billionaires in the first place. Looming climate change disaster is not a reason to come together and recognize that our destinies are linked with those of all living things; rather, it is a sign that the time has come to build the escape vehicle.

This, my friends, is what Jeff Bezos meant when he said that his rocket company is “the most important work I’m doing”. He and his fellow space-obsessed billionaires are exactly like the rich men aboard the Titanic who pushed the women and children aside to jump into the lifeboats when they realized that the ship was sinking. As the public gawks and smiles at the neato spectacle of the space tourists blasting off, what we are really witnessing is the dry run of a getaway plan – the pure, distilled embodiment of the concept of selfishness, brought to life in fiery spectacle.

When Bezos announced he was going to space, many people joked that he should stay there. Absolutely not. He must be returned to Earth at all costs. The problems of the world that he is escaping were created by rich people just like him. We're not going to let them get away from us that easily.

- Hamilton Nolan is a writer based in New York
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Tory plans to raise national insurance won't tackle Britain's social care crisis

[Torsten Bell](#)

Taxes will have to go up to address rising costs, but this plan unfairly targets young people and low earners



‘Our social care system has been a national disgrace for years, leaving thousands without the care they need.’ Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

‘Our social care system has been a national disgrace for years, leaving thousands without the care they need.’ Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

Tue 20 Jul 2021 09.39 EDT

The government intends to increase social care spending. It is 100% right to do so. It is apparently considering plans to [raise national insurance](#) (NI) to make that possible. It is 100% wrong to do so.

Our social care system has been a national disgrace for years, leaving thousands without the care they need and many others facing financial ruin because of the misfortune of needing healthcare in specific areas the NHS

does not cover. If anyone thought the status quo was acceptable pre-pandemic, the past 18 months have hopefully changed their minds. Starting to put this right will cost in the region of £10bn a year.

The government is to be applauded for confronting that bill, and for taking seriously the need to raise taxes to pay for it. After all, it has seen the political pain suffered by Gordon Brown and Theresa May for proposing solutions that were branded as death or [dementia taxes](#) respectively by their opponents. No one should pretend this is easy.

But the clapping should stop if the government really does intend to raise NI, because it would indefensibly place the burden on young people and low earners. The only thing raising NI has going for it is that it would relatively easily raise serious sums. A 1% rise in all NI rates would raise around £13bn. But even ex-Treasury civil servants like myself know there's more to good tax policy than bringing in the cash.

[Higher taxes look like only way to fix UK's social care crisis](#)

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We often think of NI as being just another form of income tax, but it's a long way from that. The key difference is that some people, and some kinds of income, aren't covered. Here are four problems that creates.

First, younger people bear more than their share because NI is paid only by the working-age population. Once you reach the state pension age (currently 66) you pay nothing. So those already over that age wouldn't be asked to contribute anything towards the costs of social care reform that they would be the immediate beneficiaries of. This includes at least 68 MPs who are aged 66 or over. And, unsurprisingly, the typical member of the House of Lords would also be exempt.

Second, lower earners pay more than they would from an income tax rise. Someone earning under £10,000 would be affected by a NI rise, while only those earning more than £12,570 pay income tax.

Third, the focus on lower and younger earners is made worse by the fact that all other sources of income apart from earnings are exempt. The generally

wealthier minority who get their income from renting out property, owning a business or being rich enough to have lots of investments won't contribute a penny. And pension income is also not covered. The overall result is that an NI rise is significantly less progressive than an income tax rise – although it would still be progressive overall.

Here's a case study. A 1% NI rise would see a 21-year-old earning £50,000 pay more (£400) than one earning £20,000 (£100). But both would be paying more than a 66-year-old with an income of £50,000 – who would pay precisely nothing.

Lastly, if the government's plan is to raise the NI paid by employers as well as employees it would deepen one of the big problems facing our tax system: the ludicrous tax gap between employees and the self-employed. In fact the tax rise on employees would ultimately be double that for the self-employed, because employer NI isn't paid if a worker is self-employed but for employees it eventually gets passed on in the form of lower wages.

And remember, the self-employed already get a [f5.9bn-a-year NI tax break](#). This problem also creates a strong incentive for firms to opt for bogus self-employment and for individuals to set up firms so they can take their pay as dividends or capital gains. This has been driving up the share of workers not covered by employment law in recent decades and costing the Treasury billions in tax avoidance. The chancellor, Rishi Sunak, promised only [last year](#) to address this problem, not to make it worse.

These four reasons should be an open and shut case against an NI rise. An increase in income tax would be fairer between rich and poor, young and old. The fact that NI is still being considered reflects one view of the politics. An NI rise is less visible to most workers (if employers' rates rise) and the public has historically seen the connection between NI and funding the health service.

But the government is taking a gamble if that static view of the politics dominates its thinking. This tax rise will be by far the most controversial one it puts in place this parliament. It will give Labour, now desperate for some policy, an easy route to demonstrate that the funds could have been raised more fairly with higher income households paying more of their fair share.

No 10 is kidding itself if it thinks it'll be an easy ride. In contrast a straight income tax rise, with a slightly higher increase for the very top, would be something the opposition would have to support – taking a lot of the political pain out of doing the right thing.

Our social care system is a national disgrace, so the government is right to recognise it needs more funding and to say that means higher taxes. But raising national insurance is a terrible way to go about it. It asks younger and lower paid workers to contribute more than older and wealthier people, compared to a fairer rise in income tax. Why we would do that, having just lived through a pandemic that has increased wealth but hit young low earners hard, is a question to which no one has a good answer.

- Torsten Bell is chief executive of the Resolution Foundation
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After 32 years, Rio Tinto to fund study of environmental damage caused by Panguna mine

Three decades after leaving Bougainville as the island descended into civil war, the mining giant will assess impact of its former mine



The Panguna mine was the catalyst for a decade-long civil war on Bougainville, a now autonomous region of Papua New Guinea. Photograph: Ilya Gridneff/AAP

The Panguna mine was the catalyst for a decade-long civil war on Bougainville, a now autonomous region of Papua New Guinea. Photograph: Ilya Gridneff/AAP

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Tue 20 Jul 2021 23.49 EDT

Thirty-two years since it fled [Bougainville](#) island, Rio Tinto has promised to fund an independent assessment of the ongoing environmental damage caused by its Panguna mine, a move landowners have welcomed as “a start” towards repairing decades of contamination.

The mining giant has committed to a multi-million dollar “environmental and human rights impact assessment” of its former copper and gold mine in Panguna, which was the flashpoint for Bougainville’s decade-long civil war.

The commitment has come in response to a formal complaint filed last September by 156 residents of local communities downstream of the mine, who allege that more than one billion tonnes of mine waste dumped into the Kawerong-Jaba river delta [continues to wreak catastrophic environmental damage and is putting their lives and livelihoods at risk](#).

[Rio Tinto accused of violating human rights in Bougainville for not cleaning up Panguna mine](#)

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The communities, represented by the Melbourne-based Human Rights Law Centre, have been in discussions with [Rio Tinto](#) since December, in negotiations facilitated by the Australian government.

The assessment of Panguna will be conducted by an independent third party and will identify environmental and human rights impacts and risks posed by the mine and develop recommendations for remediation.

Rio Tinto has not yet committed to funding the mine clean-up; this will be the subject of further discussions after the assessment is completed.

Panguna was once one of the world's largest and most profitable copper and gold mines, at one point accounting for 45% of all of PNG's exports. But less than 1% of profits from the mine went to Bougainville and landowners say the mine left them with political division, violence, and environmental degradation.

In 1989, amid rising community anger at the environmental damage and the inequitable division of the mine's profits, customary landowners forced the mine closed, blowing up Panguna's power lines and sabotaging operations.

The PNG government sent in troops against its own citizens to restart the foreign-owned mine, sparking a decade-long civil war that led to the deaths of as many as 20,000 people.

A peace settlement was brokered in 2001. In 2019, the province voted overwhelming - 98% in favour - for independence.

Rio Tinto has never returned to Panguna, claiming it is unsafe for its staff, and divested from the mine in 2016.



Theonila Roka Matbob, the member for Ioro, standing in the pit of the Panguna mine where polluted water has discoloured the land and river beds.
Photograph: The Guardian

[Bougainville MP Theonila Matbob](#), whose constituency includes Panguna and whose father was killed in Bougainville's civil war, said the environmental problems caused by the mine needed urgent investigation so "clean-up can begin".

"This is a start ... this is an important day for communities on Bougainville. Our people have been living with the disastrous impacts of Panguna for many years and the situation is getting worse. The mine continues to poison our rivers with copper.

"Our kids get sick from the pollution and communities downstream are now being flooded with mine waste. Some people have to walk two hours a day just to get clean drinking water. In other areas, communities' sacred sites are being flooded and destroyed."

Rio Tinto chief executive Jakob Stausholm said the assessment commitment was "[an important first step](#)" to dealing with the legacy of the Panguna mine.

"Operations at Panguna ceased in 1989 and we've not had access to the mine since that time. Stakeholders have raised concerns about impacts to

water, land and health and this process will provide all parties with a clearer understanding of these important matters, so that together we can consider the right way forward.

“We take this seriously and are committed to identifying and assessing any involvement we may have had in adverse impacts in line with our external human rights and environmental commitments and internal policies and standards.”

Keren Adams, legal director at the Human Rights Law Centre, said the assessment will need to be followed up by comprehensive remediation work.

“Communities urgently need access to clean water for drinking and bathing. They need solutions to stop the vast mounds of tailings waste eroding into the rivers and flooding their villages, farms and fishing areas. They need their children to be able to walk to school without having to wade through treacherous areas of quicksand created by the mine waste. This is what remediation means in real terms for the people living with these impacts.”

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Bitcoin

Bitcoin price slides amid EU call to make transfers traceable, and rise of ‘stablecoins’

European regulator want banks to hold personal details of cryptocurrency clients, while US wants swift work to establish less volatile ‘stablecoins’



The price of Bitcoin has struggled amid calls for further regulation from the US, Europe and Asia. Photograph: Camilo Freedman/SOPA Images/REX/Shutterstock

The price of Bitcoin has struggled amid calls for further regulation from the US, Europe and Asia. Photograph: Camilo Freedman/SOPA Images/REX/Shutterstock

[Martin Farrer](#)

Tue 20 Jul 2021 22.09 EDT

Bitcoin has slipped below \$30,000 as calls grew among regulators in the US, Europe and Asia for tighter checks on cryptocurrencies, and the less volatile digi-currency known as “stablecoins”.

Bitcoin, the world’s largest cryptocurrency fell as much as 5% to \$29,300, its lowest since 22 June, and investors said it was likely to test the \$28,600 level touched last month, its lowest since early January, as it faced a variety of regulatory headwinds. Smaller cryptocurrencies such as ether and XRP also lost around 5%.

On Tuesday, European regulators outlined plans to make cryptocurrencies more traceable as part of a wider crackdown on money-laundering in the bloc.

The European Commission said companies handling virtual assets, such as bitcoin, should become subject to anti-money laundering rules, along with transparency requirements for transfers of crypto assets.

For example, a company such as a bank handling cryptocurrencies for a client would be required to include their name, address, date of birth and account number, and the name of the client. Anonymous crypto-asset wallets would also be outlawed. The proposals could take two years to become law.

[Currency and control: why China wants to undermine bitcoin](#)

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Part of a wider crackdown on money laundering, the European Commission said: “Given that virtual assets transfers are subject to similar money-laundering and terrorist-financing risks as wire funds transfers ... it therefore appears logical to use the same legislative instrument to address these common issues.”

On Monday, US Treasury secretary, Janet Yellen, told regulators the US government must move quickly to establish a regulatory framework for stablecoins, a rapidly growing class of digital currencies.

A meeting of the nation’s top regulators agreed that stablecoins – a type of digital currency that is pegged to established currencies such as the US

dollar – had the potential to be a useful means of payment. However, more regulation would be needed to protect stablecoin users and the wider financial system.

“The secretary underscored the need to act quickly to ensure there is an appropriate US regulatory framework in place,” the Treasury reported.

Neil Wilson, strategist at CMC Markets in London, said the price signals on bitcoin were “horrid” and he expected the currency to fall further after “taking a beating” on Tuesday.

Bitcoin has been locked in a relatively tight trading range in recent weeks, after investors sold heavily in May and June following [a crackdown by China on cryptocurrency mining and trading](#).

But Tuesday’s fall took its losses for the month to around 15%. It has fallen by more than half since hitting a peak of almost \$65,000 in April.

Bob Seeman, a tech entrepreneur and author of the book Bitcoin: Unlicensed Gambling, said governments would begin to use existing licensing laws to combat what he called the bitcoin “Ponzi scheme”.

“I believe that regulation will eventually overwhelm bitcoin,” he said. “Some governments may soon realise that they already have gambling license requirements in place to regulate and collect tax as a result of every bitcoin transaction having any connection to the government’s jurisdiction.”

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[Donald Trump](#)

Capitol attack committee chair vows to investigate Trump: ‘Nothing is off limits’



Bennie Thompson's move comes at the same time as many Republicans have been seeking to downplay the attack on the Capitol. Photograph: J Scott Applewhite/AP

Bennie Thompson's move comes at the same time as many Republicans have been seeking to downplay the attack on the Capitol. Photograph: J Scott Applewhite/AP

Bennie Thompson tells Guardian he will pursue wide-ranging inquiry to uncover root causes of January 6 attack

Hugo Lowell in Washington

Wed 21 Jul 2021 02.00 EDT

Congressman Bennie Thompson, the chairman of the new House select committee to scrutinize the Capitol attack, says he will investigate [Donald Trump](#) as part of his inquiry into the events of 6 January – a day he sees as the greatest test to the United States since the civil war.

[Trump supporter sentenced to eight months in prison for role in Capitol riot](#)

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In an interview with the Guardian, Thompson said that he is also prepared to depose members of Congress and senior Trump administration officials who might have participated in the insurrection that left five dead and nearly 140 injured.

“Absolutely,” Thompson said of his intent to pursue a wide-ranging inquiry against the former president and some of his most prominent allies on Capitol Hill. “Nothing is off limits.”

The aggressive move to place Trump in the crosshairs of the select committee underscores Thompson’s determination to uncover the root causes of 6 January, even after Senate Republicans, fearing political damage, [blocked the creation of a 9/11-style commission](#).

The move comes at the same time as many [Republicans](#) have been seeking to downplay the attack on the Capitol – in which five people died – or, in the case of Trump himself, cast its protagonists in a more positive light.

But there is no doubt in Thompson’s mind of the seriousness of the event. Addressing some of the key questions at the heart of the select committee’s investigation into the attack, Thompson characterized the inquiry as an undertaking to safeguard the peaceful transition of power and the future of American democracy.

“The issues of January 6 are one of the most salient challenges we have as a nation, to make sure that this democracy does not fall prey to people who don’t really identify with democracy,” Thompson said.

The central thrust of the investigation will focus on [the facts and circumstances surrounding the Capitol attack](#), Thompson said, and the first

hearing scheduled for 27 July will feature current and former US Capitol police and DC Metro police officers.

But in pursuing a broad mandate to also examine the root causes of the insurrection, Thompson reiterated that he remains prepared to issue subpoenas to compel testimony from an array of Trump officials connected to the attack should they refuse to appear voluntarily.

Trump and McCarthy among top witnesses

Thompson indicated that Trump and the House minority leader, Kevin McCarthy, are among the top witnesses for his investigation, in large part because McCarthy was on the phone with the former president as the riot unfolded.

McCarthy called Trump in a panic as rioters breached the Capitol and begged him to call off his supporters, only for Trump to chastise the top Republican in the House for not doing more to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election.

“There will not be a reluctance on the part of the committee to pursue it,” Thompson said of McCarthy’s call. “The committee will want to know if there is a record of what was said.”

The exchange between McCarthy and Trump is of singular importance, since it provides a rare window into what Trump, sequestered in the West Wing, was privately thinking and saying as the Capitol was invaded.

But Thompson went further, and said that he expects anyone – whether a sitting member of Congress or former White House official – who may have spoken to Trump on 6 January to become the subject of the select committee’s investigation.

That prospect took on added significance on Monday, after McCarthy named House judiciary committee chairman Jim Jordan as one of his picks for the panel. Jordan has previously suggested he may have also spoken to Trump as the assault took place.

“If somebody spoke to the president on January 6, I think it would be important for our committee to know what was said. I can’t imagine you talk about anything else to the president on January 6,” Thompson said.

He also warned Republicans against attempting to stymie the committee’s investigation, saying that it had no deadline to furnish a report and as a result, would be immune to delay tactics previously deployed during the first Trump impeachment inquiry.

“Notwithstanding elections next year, we will not stop until our investigation is complete,” Thompson said.

Subpoenas to be enforced in court

Against that backdrop, Thompson said he expects to demand testimony from senior Trump administration officials who were in the Oval Office as the riot unfolded, from the then White House chief of staff, Mark Meadows, to Trump’s daughter Ivanka.

If Trump administration officials refuse to appear before the committee, citing executive privilege, Thompson said he would issue subpoenas and launch lawsuits to enforce his congressional oversight authority.

“We will pursue it in court,” he said.

Thompson added that he expects the select committee and senior House investigators to meet with the attorney general, Merrick Garland, and expressed optimism for conducting his investigation in close coordination with the justice department.

He was adamant that his investigation would not overlap with existing criminal probes opened by the justice department and the US attorney for the District of Columbia. Still, he said he hoped the DoJ would cooperate with his inquiry.

“We don’t want to get in the way of indictments,” Thompson said. “But I think there could be some sharing of information that could be germane to our investigation, just like other committees have negotiated in the past.”

Thompson said that although no date has been set for a meeting with the attorney general, it will involve the 6 January select committee's members and senior staff. The senior staff may be named as soon as this week, according to a source familiar with the matter.

To emphasize his seriousness, Thompson said the select committee would draw on legal counsel and investigative staff from existing House panels as well as the US intelligence community – including the NSA, CIA and FBI.

Thompson also said he expects the National Archives, the agency now in possession of records from the Trump White House, to make materials available for his investigation. “That should not be an issue,” he said, though he left open the possibility of subpoenas in the event of noncompliance.

And he vowed to refer criminal charges should Trump White House records, covering the period from the November election through 6 January, be missing or destroyed – [a persistent worry among Democrats](#) as Trump grew increasingly unhinged in the final weeks of the administration.

“That violates the law,” Thompson said. “I don’t see any hesitation on our part to pursue that. If the respect for the rule of law is not adhered to, that’s even more reason for this select committee to exist.”

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Donald Trump inauguration

Chair of Trump's inaugural committee arrested for conspiring to boost UAE

Tom Barrack, 73, among three men charged in New York

Billionaire allegedly tried to influence US foreign policy



Tom Barrack sought ‘to advance the policy goals of a foreign government without disclosing [his] true allegiances’, according to acting assistant attorney general Mark Lesko. Photograph: David J Phillip/AP

Tom Barrack sought ‘to advance the policy goals of a foreign government without disclosing [his] true allegiances’, according to acting assistant attorney general Mark Lesko. Photograph: David J Phillip/AP

AP in Los Angeles

Tue 20 Jul 2021 18.29 EDT

The chair of Donald Trump's 2017 inaugural committee was arrested on Tuesday on charges alleging he conspired to influence Trump's foreign policy positions to benefit the [United Arab Emirates](#) and commit crimes striking at what prosecutors described as "the very heart of our democracy".

Tom Barrack, 74, of Santa Monica, California, was among three men charged in federal court in Brooklyn, New York, with conspiring to act as an unregistered foreign agent as they tried to influence foreign policy while Trump was running in 2016 and later while he was president.

[Trump inauguration took money from shell companies tied to foreigners](#)
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Besides conspiracy, Barrack was charged with obstruction of justice and making multiple false statements during a June 2019 interview with federal agents. Also charged in a seven-count indictment were Matthew Grimes, 27, of Aspen, Colorado, and Rashid al Malik, 43, of the United Arab Emirates.

"The defendants repeatedly capitalized on Barrack's friendships and access to a candidate who was eventually elected president, high-ranking campaign and government officials, and the American media to advance the policy goals of a foreign government without disclosing their true allegiances, acting assistant attorney general Mark Lesko said in a release.

Prosecutors said Barrack not only agreed to promote UAE foreign policy interests through his unique access and influence, but also provided UAE government officials with sensitive information about developments within the Trump administration – including how senior US officials felt about the Qatari blockade conducted by the UAE and other Middle Eastern countries.

"Worse, in his communications with Al Malik, the defendant framed his efforts to obtain an official position within the administration as one that would enable him to further advance the interests of the UAE, rather than the interests of the United States," prosecutors wrote in a letter seeking his detention.

Authorities said Barrack served as an informal adviser to Trump's campaign from April 2016 to November 2016 and chair of the Presidential Inaugural

Committee from November 2016 to January 2017. Beginning in January 2017, he informally advised senior US government officials on Middle East foreign policy, they added.

Authorities cited several specific instances when Barrack or others allegedly sought to influence US policies, noting that, in May 2016, Barrack inserted language praising the UAE into a campaign speech Trump delivered about US energy policy and emailed an advance draft of the speech to be delivered to senior UAE officials.

“Similarly, throughout 2016 and 2017, the defendants sought and received direction and feedback, including talking points, from senior UAE officials in connection with national press appearances Barrack used to promote the interests of the UAE,” authorities said in a statement.

They said that after one appearance in which Barrack repeatedly praised the United Arab Emirates, Barrack emailed al Malik, saying: “I nailed it … for the home team,” referring to the UAE.

Phone and email messages sent to the UAE embassy in Washington were not immediately returned.

Barrack will plead not guilty, according to a spokesperson.

“Mr Barrack has made himself voluntarily available to investigators from the outset,” the spokesperson said.

Grimes also was arrested on Tuesday in southern California. A message seeking comment was sent to his attorney.

Bill Coffield, an attorney for al Malik – who was not in custody on Tuesday – said his client had cooperated extensively with the office of special counsel Robert Mueller and that there was “nothing new here”. He said that al Malik had simply tried to foster a good relationship between the country where he was born “and the country in which he lives and works, both of which he loves”.

Barrack appeared at an initial appearance in federal court in Los Angeles, where prosecutors were to ask a US magistrate judge to bring him to New

York.

Noting that Forbes estimated his net worth at \$1bn in March 2013 and his access to a private plane, prosecutors called him “an extremely wealthy and powerful individual with substantial ties to Lebanon, the UAE, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia” who poses a serious flight risk in a letter filed before his appearance.

Barrack is the latest in a long line of Trump associates to face criminal charges, including his former campaign chair, his former deputy campaign chair, his former chief strategist, his former national security adviser, his former personal lawyer and his company’s longtime chief financial officer.

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[Russia](#)

‘Everything is on fire’: Siberia hit by unprecedented burning

Locals fear for their health and property as smoke from raging forest fires shrouds an entire region of eastern Russia

- [‘Airpocalypse’ hits Siberian city as heatwave sparks forest fires](#)

01:13

Siberia hit by unprecedented heatwave and forest fires – video report

[Andrew Roth in Moscow](#)

Tue 20 Jul 2021 13.01 EDT

Every morning and evening for the last few days, shifts of young villagers have headed out into the taiga forest around Teryut with a seemingly impossible task: to quell the raging fires that have burned closer and closer for a month, shrouding this remote eastern Siberian village in an acrid haze.

So far, little has worked. Amid the worst wildfire season in memory, locals have vowed to defend their village to the last, sending away small children for their protection from the smog while they stay on to fight back the flames.

“For a month already you can’t see anything through the smoke,” said Varvara, a 63-year-old pensioner from Teryut, a village in the Oymyakonsky district. “We have already sent the small children away. And the fires are very close, just 2km [1.2 miles] from our village.”

The extraordinary forest fires, which have already burned through 1.5m hectares (3.7m acres) of land in north-east Siberia have released choking smog across Russia’s Yakutia region, where officials have described this summer’s weather as the driest in the past 150 years. And that follows five years of hot summers, which have, according to villagers, turned the surrounding forests and fields into a tinderbox.

I don't know how the locals could stand it. People are both depressed and angry

Ivan Nikiforov

Varvara said their main hope was that this week brought heavy rains to their region, which is located more than 400 miles from the city of Yakutsk across mostly impassable taiga, or snow forest.

"Emergency workers have come and villagers are also fighting the fires but they can't put them out, they can't stop them," she said by telephone. "Everything is on fire."

More than 50 settlements have been covered in smog, which has periodically halted operations at Yakutia's main airport and disrupted river traffic.

The unprecedented scale of the fires has prompted locals to join auxiliary fire brigades.

"These are our homes, our forests, and our people," said Ivan Nikiforov, a resident of Yakutsk, the capital of Yakutia, who has joined a volunteer fire brigade for the first time this year. "Our relatives are breathing smog. I couldn't stand by."

"It's a thick smoke, yellow," said Nikiforov, describing the fires near Magaras, a village about 100km from the capital Yakutsk. "I don't know how the locals could stand it. It will probably have health effects for them in the future. People are both depressed and angry. This situation should not have been allowed to take place."

00:34

Volunteer appeals on Instagram for help tackling forest fires in Siberia – video

Grigory Mochkin, who runs several Crossfit gyms in Yakutsk, said he had spent the last few days volunteering to build firebreaks and helping set up controlled burns to try to stop the spread of the flames.

“The fires have touched absolutely every single person’s life in Yakutia,” said Mochkin. “The fires are very large this year. And since the smoke has gotten to Yakutsk, people are very vocal on social networks because every person’s life has been affected. In past years, the smog has covered the city for at most a day.”

The smoke has been seen as a health hazard for young children and the elderly in particular. “It’s like standing next to a campfire,” said Aytalina, a 26-year-old from Yakutsk. “This year you open a window and the stench just fills the room. People are feeling very poorly.”

The choking smog has hovered for days over the city of more than 280,000, where residents have been warned to stay at home. “The level of air pollution went down [on Monday] for three hours thanks to the wind,” Aytalina said. “We went out to the store for 15 minutes for groceries. That was our first time outside of the apartment since [Friday].”



Smoke from forest fires engulfs Yakutsk. Photograph: Yevgeny Sofroneyev/AP

Locals have blamed various factors for the fires, from the climate crisis to poor government preparedness, to a ban on purging dry grass, budget cuts to forestry services, alleged arsons, and, in particular, the hot summers.

“There never used to be summers with such large fires,” said Nikolai Verkhovov, a native of Srednekolymsk, a village on the River Kolyma more than 750 miles from Yakutsk. “But last year a village in my district nearly burned down.” He suggested that budget cuts to forest ranger services and corruption could play a role in the fires.

“In Yakutsk itself the fire season has been growing exponentially since 2018,” he said. “This year has been unbelievably awful. Enormous parts of the forest are on fire. It’s so smoky it is hard to breathe and your eyes tear up.”

Many of those contacted sent screenshots from IQAir, an air quality app that showed that the concentration of pollutants in the air in downtown Yakutsk was so high that it was accompanied by an icon of a man in a gas mask and the description “life-threatening”.

Some people from Yakutsk have sought to leave the region during the wildfire season or considered emigrating permanently. One young woman said that as she got off a flight to Moscow from Yakutsk, she realised that her hair and clothing stank of smoke.

Others fear for those at risk in the region.

“Here in Yakutsk I have many elderly relatives, we are all worried for them,” said Verkhovov. “Some are also sick with coronavirus. My aunt was in the hospital for a month, she finally managed to get her temperature down and then the smoke has just made it worse and slowed down her recovery.”

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‘Airpocalypse’ hits Siberian city as heatwave sparks forest fires

Monitoring suggests toxic smoke in Yakutsk is one of world’s worst ever air pollution events

- [‘Everything is on fire’: Siberia hit by unprecedented burning](#)

by [Jonathan Watts](#) Global environment editor

Tue 20 Jul 2021 13.02 EDT

A heatwave in one of the world’s coldest regions has sparked forest fires and threatened the Siberian city of Yakutsk with an “airpocalypse” of thick toxic smoke, atmospheric monitoring services have reported.

High levels of particulate matter and possibly also chemicals including ozone, benzene and hydrogen cyanide are thought likely to make this one of the world’s worst ever air pollution events.

Local authorities have warned the 320,000 residents to stay indoors to avoid choking fumes from the blazes, which are on course to break last year's record.

01:13

Siberia hit by unprecedeted heatwave and forest fires – video report

Satellite analysts say regional levels of PM2.5 – small particles that can enter the bloodstream and damage human organs – have surged beyond 1,000 micrograms a cubic metre in recent days, which is more than 40 times the recommended safe guideline of the World Health Organization.

On Tuesday, [live air quality monitors](#) for Yakutsk measured PM 2.5 levels of 395 micrograms. This fell into the extreme category of “airpocalypse”, which is defined as “immediate and heavy effects on everybody”. Russian social media accounts have shown images of [readings](#) that are more than 17 times worse than the average in even the most polluted cities of India and China.



Volunteers prepare to douse a forest fire in the republic of Sakha also known as Yakutia, in Russia's far east. Photograph: Ivan Nikiforov/AP

Scientists see human-caused climate disruption as an important factor. Yakutsk, the capital of Russia's north-east Sakha Republic – also known as Yakutia – is the coldest winter city on the planet, but due to global heating, summer temperatures here have been rising at least 2.5 times faster than the world average.

Last year, during an unusually prolonged heatwave in the wider Siberian region temperatures remained more than [5C above average](#) from January to June, causing permafrost to melt, buildings to collapse, and sparking an unusually early and intense start to the forest fires season. Scientists said this was made [600 times more likely](#) by exhaust fumes, industrial emissions, deforestation and other human activities.

The record-breaking trend resumed this spring, earlier than usual and slightly further south than last year, near more populated areas such as Yakutsk. Much of the surrounding area is dense taiga forest, which ignites more easily when hot and dry.

The [Siberian Times](#) reported the first fire in the beginning of May outside Oymyakon in north-east Yakutia, which is known as “the pole of cold” for its record low temperatures. As the blazes widened, more than 2,000 firefighters were deployed across the region and drafted in from outside.

[Graphic](#)

Military planes have been used to douse forests with water and [seed clouds](#) with silver iodide and liquid nitrogen to induce rainfall. Some desperate communities have reportedly even [drafted children](#) into the fight to hold back the flames. Overall, this has been described as the biggest fire-fighting operation in the region since the end of the Soviet Union.

Despite these efforts, dozens of fires rage out of control. Horrifying [video](#) from the region shows dense black smoke and red flames alongside the Kolyma highway, which was known as the Road of Bones during the Soviet era. This trunk road has since [been closed](#). Tourists on a boat on the Lena River have posted phone clips of their cruise past burning hillsides.

Last week Sakha's emergencies ministry said more than 250 fires were burning across 5,720 sq km – an area about twice the size of Luxembourg. [Satellite images](#) from the US space agency Nasa have shown vast plumes rising into the atmosphere.

Based on satellite observations, the European Union's [Copernicus Atmosphere Monitoring Service](#) reported that forest fires in the Sakha Republic have released 65 megatonnes of carbon since 1 June, which is well above the average for 2003-2020. This is already the second highest total ever and it could beat last year's record if the current trend continues until the usual end of the fire season in late August.

The forest smoke contains more toxins than even the most polluted urban centres. Mark Parrington, a senior scientist at Copernicus, said analysis of atmospheric aerosols from Sakha's fires suggested surface levels of PM2.5 levels above 1,000 micrograms a cubic metre of air, in addition to other potential constituents such as ozone, ammonia, benzene, hydrogen cyanide and organic aerosols. By comparison, the annual average in famously smoggy cities like Beijing, Hotan, New Delhi and Ghaziabad is between 100 and 110.

Parrington said climate change was helping to create the conditions for more fires in northern boreal forests in Siberia, Canada, and northern Europe – all of which are heating faster than the global average. This is in keeping with a [broader global trend](#) of fires moving from grasslands to fuel-rich forests, which emit more carbon.

Alexey Yaroshenko, head of the forest department in Greenpeace Russia, said poor forest management, weak regulation and budget cuts had compounded the fire risks. "For many years, propaganda has made people think that the climate crisis is a fiction, and if not fiction, that it will only benefit Russia, since it will become warmer and more comfortable. Now the situation is starting to change," he wrote in an email.

"Little by little, people are beginning to understand that the climate is really changing, and the consequences are really catastrophic. But the majority of society and the majority of politicians are still very far from understanding the real scale of the problem."

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[Space](#)

Enormous balloon could help astronomers get clear view of space

SuperBIT project will suspend telescope under balloon the size of a football stadium 25 miles above surface of Earth



SuperBIT telescope. Its final test flight in 2019 demonstrated ‘extraordinary pointing stability’. Photograph: SuperBIT

SuperBIT telescope. Its final test flight in 2019 demonstrated ‘extraordinary pointing stability’. Photograph: SuperBIT

Alex Hern

@alexhern

Tue 20 Jul 2021 19.01 EDT

A balloon the size of a football stadium could help astronomers get crystal-clear shots of space for a fraction of the cost of an orbital telescope like

Hubble.

The secret weapon behind the SuperBIT project is a simple helium balloon – albeit one that floats up to 25 miles (40km) above the surface of the Earth and expands to a football-stadium size when fully inflated.

Developed by a consortium of researchers from the UK, US and Canada, SuperBIT (the Superpressure balloon-borne imaging telescope) is an attempt to combine the best of both worlds of orbiting and earth-bound astronomy.

Conventional ground-based telescopes have to deal with the fact that the atmosphere is very good at sustaining all human life, but annoyingly bad at letting through light from space without distorting it, making it hard to take clear pictures of astronomical objects. Orbital telescopes, like the [Hubble space telescope](#), avoid that problem, but cost billions of dollars to assemble, launch and operate.

Graphic

By placing a telescope on a platform suspended underneath an enormous balloon, the SuperBIT team hopes to get pictures as clear as a space telescope, but all for a budget of just \$5m (£3.7m). “New balloon technology makes visiting space cheap, easy, and environmentally friendly,” said Mohamed Shaaban, a PhD student at the University of Toronto, and one of the researchers behind the project.

A superpressure is similar to a conventional weather balloon, but rather than using an elastic skin which can expand and contract with the contents, it keeps the helium within ever so slightly pressurised compared with the external environment. That allows the balloon to stay aloft for months, with very little vertical movement – perfect for an astronomical programme.

Its final test flight in 2019 demonstrated “extraordinary pointing stability”, the SuperBIT team says, “with variation of less than one thirty-six thousandth of a degree for more than an hour”. That should allow a telescope to obtain images as sharp as those from the Hubble space telescope.

When the SuperBIT's balloon is launched from Wanaka, New Zealand, next April, it will circumnavigate the Earth several times, taking pictures all night before recharging its batteries during the day. Eventually, it will return to Earth, but even that brings benefits: the design can be tweaked and improved over time, where conventional orbital telescopes are prohibitively expensive to upgrade.

"SuperBIT can be continually reconfigured and upgraded," Shaaban added, "but its first mission will watch the largest particle accelerators in the universe: collisions between clusters of galaxies." Those collisions should cast some light on the properties of dark matter, thought to make up most of the mass in the universe but impossible to identify except by its gravitational affects on conventional matter.

"Cavemen could smash rocks together, to see what they're made of," added Prof Richard Massey of Durham University, another of the project's members. "SuperBIT is looking for the crunch of dark matter. It's the same experiment, you just need a space telescope to see it."

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Harvey Weinstein

Harvey Weinstein extradited to Los Angeles for sexual assault charges

Convicted rapist is wanted on trial for charges of attacking five women between 2004 and 2013



Harvey Weinstein arrives at a Manhattan courthouse in February 2020. If convicted as charged in California, he will face up to 140 years in state prison. Photograph: Seth Wenig/AP

Harvey Weinstein arrives at a Manhattan courthouse in February 2020. If convicted as charged in California, he will face up to 140 years in state prison. Photograph: Seth Wenig/AP

[Maya Yang](#)

Tue 20 Jul 2021 14.16 EDT

Harvey Weinstein has been handed over for [extradition](#) from New York to Los Angeles to face more sexual assault charges, New York authorities said on Tuesday.

[Zelda Perkins: ‘There will always be men like Weinstein. All I can do is try to change the system that enables them’](#)

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The disgraced film producer is wanted for trial on charges of attacking five women between 2004 and 2013. In [Los Angeles](#) county, he faces 11 counts of sexual assault: four of forcible rape, four of forcible oral copulation, two of sexual battery by restraint and one of sexual penetration by use of force.

Last February, Weinstein was convicted in New York for sexual assault and rape and sentenced to 23 years in prison. If convicted as charged in California, he will face up to [140 years](#) in state prison.

On Tuesday, the New York department of corrections [said](#): “This morning at approximately 9.25 custody of Mr Harvey Weinstein was handed over to the appropriate officials for transport to the state of California per a court order.”

In addition to appealing against his New York conviction and sentence, which his legal team calls a “[de facto life sentence](#)”, the 69-year-old has fought extradition on medical grounds.

“We will be fighting so that Harvey can receive his needed medical care and of course, so that he can be treated fairly,” his spokesperson Juda Engelmayr [said](#) on Tuesday. “Due process, presumption of innocence and a fair trial are all still his right.”

Weinstein denies the Los Angeles charges.

“Harvey Weinstein has always maintained that every one of his physical encounters throughout his entire life have been consensual,” Engelmayr added. “That hasn’t changed.”

The Los Angeles county district attorney [said](#) earlier this month it was ready to bring Weinstein to trial within four months.

Following investigations from the New Yorker and the New York Times in 2017, more than 80 women have accused Weinstein of sexual misconduct. The accusations helped spark the global #MeToo movement.

Earlier this year, Weinstein's former production company agreed to pay \$17m to women who allege sexual abuse.

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Space

Wally Funk fulfills lifelong dream to go to space with Blue Origin flight

The 82-year-old became the oldest person to go to space, six decades after being denied by the US government

- [Bezos hails ‘best day ever’ after successful Blue Origin flight](#)



Wally Funk, right, emerges from a capsule after the flight aboard Blue Origin's New Shepard rocket. Photograph: Blue Origin/Reuters

Wally Funk, right, emerges from a capsule after the flight aboard Blue Origin's New Shepard rocket. Photograph: Blue Origin/Reuters

[Adam Gabbatt](#)

[@adamgabbatt](#)

Tue 20 Jul 2021 14.02 EDT

Wally Funk, a pilot who was denied the chance to go into space in the 1960s because she was a woman, said “I want to go again, fast”, after returning from [a successful flight](#) with the Amazon founder, Jeff Bezos.

With Bezos’s brother, Mark, and an 18-year-old Dutch student, Oliver Daemen, the pair [spent 11 minutes on Tuesday on a suborbital flight](#) conducted by Blue Origin, Bezos’s space flight company.

[Why is Bezos flying to space? Because billionaires think Earth is a sinking ship | Hamilton Nolan](#)

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Funk, 82, became the oldest person in space, six decades after she took part in US government testing to become an astronaut, a program the government abandoned in 1962.

“I’ve been waiting a long time to finally get up there, and I’ve done a lot of astronaut training through the world – Russia, America – and I could always beat the guys on what they were doing because I was always stronger and I’ve always done everything on my own,” Funk said at a news conference after the flight.

01:40

Jeff Bezos successfully completes space flight – video

Bezos’s craft, New Shepard, took off from the Blue Origin launch site in west Texas and [touched down 11 minutes later](#). Blue Origin reported that the craft reached 351,210 ft (107,046 metres), well above the 62-mile (100 km) Kármán line which the Fédération Aéronautique Internationale, a Switzerland-based world body, defines as space.

“We had a great time,” Funk said. “It was wonderful.”

Funk was one of the [Mercury 13](#) group of female pilots, also referred to as “First Lady Astronaut Trainees”, who underwent psychological screenings and rigorous physical testing with a view to taking part in Nasa’s early space efforts.

The program was canceled in 1962 when the US government said the women were not allowed to use military facilities required for training.

[Bezos blasted for traveling to space while Amazon workers toil on planet Earth](#)

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None made it into space until Funk's flight on Tuesday. Describing the experience, Funk said: "When I went up this morning the noise wasn't quite as bad [as expected] and we went right on up and I saw darkness. I thought I was going to see the world but we weren't quite high enough.

"I felt great, I felt like I was just laying down and I was going into space."

After the disappointment of the early 1960s, Funk went on to become an instructor. She said she had taught more than 3,000 people to fly. She also thanked Bezos for inviting her on his first Blue Origin flight, and said it capped a career in aviation.

"I've always done everything on my own," she said. "I didn't do dolls, I did outside stuff and I flew airplanes, 19,000-something hours. I loved it."

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Tallest apartment building in EU finally completed in Benidorm

After 17 years of setbacks, it is hoped Intempo skyscraper will help transform resort into Miami of the Mediterranean



With 47 storeys Intempo towers over nearby blocks. Photograph: Heino Kalis/Reuters

With 47 storeys Intempo towers over nearby blocks. Photograph: Heino Kalis/Reuters

[Stephen Burgen](#) in Barcelona

Tue 20 Jul 2021 10.33 EDT

To some it is a grotesque eyesore, to others, a key step on the road to transforming Benidorm into the Miami of the Mediterranean.

In any case, after 17 years of setbacks, the gargantuan Intempo skyscraper has finally been completed. At 187 metres, it is the tallest apartment building in the European Union. Its twin towers also boast Spain's fastest lift, which rises at a rate of 4.2 metres a second and can reach the top floor in 52 seconds.

The Costa Blanca resort's skyscrapers can rival those of Manhattan or Hong Kong, with 80 blocks over 25-storeys high, but Intempo's 47 storeys leave them all in the shade.

The towers are linked at the top by a diamond-shaped structure where the price of a penthouse apartment is around €2m (£1.73m). Elsewhere in the building prices start at €257,000.

The timing would appear disastrous, as resort towns such as Benidorm have borne the brunt of drastic falls in overseas visitors. And yet, according to the promoter Uniq Residential, 100 of Intempo's 256 apartments have been pre-sold – about 60% to Spaniards and the remainder to Russians, Scandinavians, Germans and Belgians.

British people, who account for 40% of Benidorm's visitors, will not be moving in however.

“I don't think that Brits who have that kind of money would spend it in Benidorm,” said Michelle Baker of the YouTube channel Benidorm Forever. “It would be too incongruous.

“People with a lot of money don't frequent Benidorm. Unless you rebrand it, you'd struggle to attract those high-ticket customers. Fast-forward 50 years and it might be a different story.”

Benidorm's raison d'être is tourism and the pandemic has had a disastrous effect on its economy. But, as Baker points out, there are really two Benidorms: one for the wealthy, on the Poniente beach, where Intempo stands, and one for the less well-off, on the Levante.

Baker said she admired the new development and rejected claims that it was ugly. “As well as the Intempo, there's the Sunset Beach building and the

Delfin Tower,” she said. “The prediction is the Poniente area will become the Miami of Benidorm ... To me they are outstanding pieces of architecture, absolutely gorgeous.”

Intempo has been through many hands and its current owner, the SVPGlobal fund, paid €60m to acquire the building’s debts from Sareb, the so-called “bad bank” established to mop up the tens of thousands of unfinished properties after Spain’s real estate bubble burst in 2008.

The resort features as a setting in Batman: The World, an anthology due to be published by DC Comics in September. The award-winning Spanish graphic artist Paco Roca said he chose it because, with all its skyscrapers, it looks like “somewhere between Las Vegas and Gotham”.

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[Netflix](#)

Netflix blames pandemic as it misses growth forecasts

Company adds only 1.54m subscribers in last quarter, citing post-lockdown decline in interest and Covid-related production hitches



Analysts had predicted that Netflix would add 1.75 million subscribers in the last quarter but the company fell short. Photograph: Thiago Prudencio/Sopa Images/Rex/Shutterstock

Analysts had predicted that Netflix would add 1.75 million subscribers in the last quarter but the company fell short. Photograph: Thiago Prudencio/Sopa Images/Rex/Shutterstock

*Dominic Rushe
@dominicruru*

Tue 20 Jul 2021 17.11 EDT

Netflix missed its growth forecasts in the last quarter, blaming a post-lockdown decline in interest in the streaming service and a Covid-related slowdown in new productions.

The company added 1.54 million new subscribers, below the 1.75 million analysts had expected and a fraction of the 10 million it added in the second quarter a year earlier, when much of the world was in lockdown.

[Netflix to court older viewers as flow of young fans slows down](#)

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Covid had created some “lumpiness in our membership growth (higher growth in 2020, slower growth this year), which is working its way through”, the company said in a statement.

Covid-related production delays in 2020 also meant it had fewer new offerings in the first half of 2021 but its slate of new programming “will build through the course of the year”, the company said.

The company ended the quarter with more than 209m paid memberships and last week received 129 Emmy nominations for shows including The Crown, Bridgerton and The Queen’s Gambit.

Netflix also confirmed its [intention to move into gaming](#). “We’re excited as ever about our movies and TV series offering and we expect a long runway of increasing investment and growth across all of our existing content categories, but since we are nearly a decade into our push into original programming, we think the time is right to learn more about how our members value games,” the company said.

The shift comes as the changing viewing habits of people coming out of lockdown and intense competition pose a threat to its dominance in streaming.

Analysts are warning that Netflix’s lead is slipping as audiences shift toward rivals including Amazon Prime Video, HBO Max and Walt Disney

Company's Disney+.

According to research from [Parrot Analytics](#) Netflix's share of global demand – a measure of the popularity of its shows – fell below 50% for the first time in the second quarter of the year.

Netflix's "lack of new hit original programming and the increased competition from other streamers is going to ultimately have a negative impact on subscriber growth and retention", Parrot said in a news release.

The company's share price dipped 1% after the news.

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Erdoğan plan to unilaterally revive Cyprus ‘ghost town’ condemned by EU

Diplomat warns of law breach as Turkish president promotes two-state solution for island and scheme for abandoned town Varosha



Turkey's president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, left, with the Turkish Cypriot leader, Ersin Tatar, at a military parade on Tuesday marking the 47th anniversary of Ankara's invasion of the northern portion of Cyprus following a coup by the Greek military. Photograph: Nedim Enginsoy/AP

Turkey's president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, left, with the Turkish Cypriot leader, Ersin Tatar, at a military parade on Tuesday marking the 47th anniversary of Ankara's invasion of the northern portion of Cyprus following a coup by the Greek military. Photograph: Nedim Enginsoy/AP

The EU's foreign policy chief has criticised Turkey's president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, for his statements while reopening the town of [Varosha](#) in Cyprus.

On Tuesday the EU's top diplomat, Josep Borrell, said plans announced by Erdogan and the Turkish Cypriot leader, Ersin Tatar, to further open the former resort, abandoned since Ankara's invasion of the island in 1974 and viewed as a ghost town, constituted an "unacceptable unilateral decision".

"The EU once again underlines the need to avoid unilateral actions in breach of international law and renewed provocations, which could raise tensions on the island and compromise a return to talks on a comprehensive settlement of the [Cyprus](#) issue," Borrell said in a statement.

[Unease in the air as Cyprus 'ghost town' rises from the ruins of war](#)
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He added that the EU bloc would monitor how a closed-door consultation on Cyprus went at the UN security council on Wednesday and "decide on next steps accordingly".

Erdogan vowed that life would restart in Varosha as he took an uncompromising stance during a visit to mark 47 years since the invasion that split the island of Cyprus.

The east coastal resort of Varosha, once the playground of celebrities and nicknamed a "jewel of the Mediterranean", was left as a fenced-off ghost town, with luxury hotels abandoned to the weeds. The invasion emptied the town of its Greek Cypriot residents.

Turkish troops had seized the northern third of Cyprus in response to an aborted coup in Nicosia aimed at attaching the country to [Greece](#). The island has since been divided between the Greek Cypriot-run Republic of Cyprus and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, which is recognised only by Ankara.

Tatar, standing by Erdogan's side, announced the second phase of a plan to expand the reopening of Varosha.

The Turkish army last year restored public access to parts of the Varosha beachfront, and a main thoroughfare, Demokratias Avenue, has been cleared.

The internationally recognised government in Nicosia has stressed that Varosha is “a red line not to cross”, and strongly condemned Erdogan’s visit to northern Cyprus last November.

Erdogan, in his speech on Tuesday, insisted on a two-state solution for the island, an idea firmly rejected by the republic of Cyprus and Brussels.

Borrell said in the statement: “The EU remains fully committed to the comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem on the basis of a bi-zonal, bi-communal, federation with political equality.”

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Coronavirus

UK children will not be offered Covid jab unless vulnerable

Sajid Javid accepts JCVI advice that jab should only be offered to clinically at-risk children over age of 12

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01:14

Nadhim Zahawi says vulnerable children will be offered Covid vaccine first – video

[Rowena Mason and Natalie Grover](#)

Mon 19 Jul 2021 11.47 EDT

Children in the UK will get a Covid vaccine only if they are over 12 and extremely vulnerable, or live with someone at risk, as scientists raised concerns about inflammation around the heart linked to the Pfizer jab.

Sajid Javid, the health secretary, said he accepted the advice of scientific advisers that only children over 12 with severe neuro-disabilities, Down's syndrome, immunosuppression and multiple or severe learning disabilities should be allowed to get the Pfizer vaccine. Children over 12 who live in the same house as people who are immunosuppressed will also be eligible for jabs.

The opinion of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) expands the eligibility for children, after a previous decision that vulnerable 16- and 17-year-olds could get vaccinated.

Some ministers had signalled that all over-12s could start a programme of being vaccinated from September, contributing to population-wide immunity against Covid.

However, the advisory body said: “The health benefits in this population are small, and the benefits to the wider population are highly uncertain. At this time, JCVI is of the view that the health benefits of universal vaccination in children and young people below the age of 18 years do not outweigh the potential risks.”

The Pfizer vaccine has been authorised for people aged 12 years and over in the UK by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency.

However, the JCVI highlighted “emerging reports from the UK and other countries of rare but serious adverse events, including myocarditis (inflammation of the heart muscle) and pericarditis (inflammation of the membrane around the heart), following the use of Pfizer/BioNTech BNT162b2 and Moderna mRNA1273 vaccines in younger adults”. The scientists also said the risk of long Covid was “very low in children”.

Javid said he had asked the NHS to prepare to vaccinate those eligible as soon as possible and wanted the JCVI to keep vaccination for children under review.

The decision has split scientists, many of whom had expected the Pfizer vaccine to be given the green light for over-12s.

Dr Stephen Griffin, a virologist from the University of Leeds, said: “It’s unclear what the JCVI knows that the MHRA doesn’t,” noting that many countries had begun vaccinating children aged 12 and above.

“There does seem to be a link with vaccines and myocarditis but it’s very mild and very rare – but with Covid, there is a risk of long Covid,” he said.

Gabriel Scally, a visiting professor of public health at the University of Bristol and a member of Independent Sage, said the JCVI decision was “not logical”, noting that the vaccine had been authorised as safe and effective for

over-12s by the MHRA and was being used in this age-group in a number of countries.

“Yes, there are some side-effects, but they are treatable,” he noted, highlighting that there was no evidence that the vaccine had caused any deaths in this age group, while Covid has in rare instances.

But Prof Adam Finn, a professor of paediatrics at the University of Bristol and a JCVI member, said there was pretty much “incontrovertible evidence” emerging that the heart inflammation was a real safety signal, although the number of serious cases was “very, very small”.

Overall, instances of this heart inflammation are about one in 100,000, said Jeremy Brown, a professor of respiratory infection at UCL and a JCVI member, cautioning that there was not a lot of data at the moment. However, he said, the incidence of these types of side-effects was more prevalent in boys than girls, and at the older end of the adolescent spectrum than younger.

School leaders warned of more disruption to education next autumn. Geoff Barton, the general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, acknowledge the need for caution but said it “leaves us with the potential for very high numbers of infections among children in the autumn term particularly given the relaxation of wider restrictions in society”.

“This could mean yet more educational disruption as well as causing wider public health concerns. It is therefore imperative that the government places an intense focus on supporting schools and colleges with Covid protection measures.”

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Questions grow over pilot scheme after Johnson and Sunak isolation U-turn

No 10 accused of sowing confusion and creating ‘special rule’ for ministers on eve of England’s Covid reopening

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Rishi Sunak and Boris Johnson pictured in April. The PM and chancellor initially said they would continue with ‘essential government business’ while having daily tests. Photograph: Dan Kitwood/AFP/Getty Images

Rishi Sunak and Boris Johnson pictured in April. The PM and chancellor initially said they would continue with ‘essential government business’ while having daily tests. Photograph: Dan Kitwood/AFP/Getty Images

[Ben Quinn, Rajeev Syal and Gwyn Topham](#)

Sun 18 Jul 2021 14.03 EDT

Boris Johnson’s plan to lift England’s remaining lockdown restrictions was overshadowed by a furious backlash against the prime minister and his chancellor on Sunday, triggering a hasty U-turn and prompting questions about a pilot scheme designed to let them avoid isolation.

Downing Street was accused of sowing confusion and a sense of “one rule for them” on the eve of so-called “freedom day” by saying Johnson and [Rishi Sunak](#) would continue with “essential government business” while having daily rapid tests.

They about-turned less than three hours later, with one Whitehall source suggesting the chancellor put pressure on No 10 to back down. “Sunak knew how this would go down with businesses, which are having to shut because their staff are being pinged,” the source said.

[‘Selfish-isolation’: how politicians and public reacted to Boris Johnson’s U-turn](#)

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Johnson, Sunak and the health secretary, Sajid Javid, are in quarantine – along with more than 1 million people estimated to have been told to self-isolate – as England completes the final stage of reopening and UK new infection rates climb to among [the highest in the world](#), behind Indonesia and Brazil.

On Sunday night, Downing Street emphasised that measures could return. “Data will be continually assessed and contingency measures retained if needed during higher risk periods, but restrictions will be avoided if possible,” it said.

The prime minister has been under growing pressure to either bring cases under control or change the rules for isolation, with up to 10 million people expected to be told to isolate by mid-August.

After Javid [tested positive](#) for the virus on Saturday, Downing Street said Johnson and Sunak would escape the need for 10 days' isolation despite them being contacted by NHS test and trace after meeting face-to-face with Javid.

An incensed response from bereaved relatives and MPs, and promises from social media users to delete their Covid-19 apps in protest, prompted Downing Street to reverse, two hours and 37 minutes later.

Questions are growing over the workplace pilot scheme, which allows certain government departments and other public bodies to avoid isolating after exposure to Covid, after transport networks said they were not involved.

One minister lauded the participation of Transport for London in the scheme as evidence that “it’s not just available for politicians”. The communities secretary, Robert Jenrick, told Sky News: “The scheme is a well-known and longstanding one. It’s not just available for politicians if you like. It’s being used by 20 organisations in the public sector, including large ones like TfL, that runs the transport network in London, and Border Force.”

But TfL said it was not yet taking part in the pilot. “The government has indicated that we could be part of a trial whereby daily tests would replace the need for self-isolation. We are still waiting for formal notification from them that we are part of this trial so that we can brief our trade unions and put this into effect,” a spokesperson said.

[Unions deny rail and tube staff in scheme to skip self-isolation](#)

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A health official said the ongoing pilot of daily contact testing in workplaces began in December but Downing Street joined in May. He claimed TfL has two sites registered as part of the workplace pilot scheme.

The RMT transport union warned against creating widespread confusion before reopening. The RMT general secretary, Mick Lynch, said: “We were consulted last year on a limited pilot at specific locations for critical signalling operations. This was never developed into a general agreement for Network Rail, TfL, the wider rail sector or for transport in general.

“For the government to claim there is an agreed scheme or system is totally untrue. The government has once again demonstrated its incompetence with the wholly bogus statements it has made today. The consequences of those actions will be serious.”

Border Force staff in Manchester and Dover have been offered the pilot testing scheme, a source told the Guardian, but it has been under review by health department officials as so few staff members volunteered. “The scheme proved very unpopular because staff who put their names forward had to go into work even on their days off to be tested. So we expected to see it closed down,” source said.

Little further [detail on the scheme](#) was available on Sunday, despite a series of questions put to Downing Street. It said a full list of organisations taking part would be published after the results were recorded. The scheme is separate from a randomised controlled trial to let 40,000 participants take daily rapid tests instead of isolating.

In May, the Cabinet Office minister, Michael Gove, [benefited](#) from the workplace pilot scheme after being “pinged” by the Covid-19 app after a trip to Portugal for the Champions League final. Sources said he had since left the trial.

From 16 August, fully vaccinated people will be allowed to avoid isolation if contacted by NHS test and trace but there have been warnings that, with cases soaring, up to 10 million people could be told to isolate before that date, hitting hospitals, businesses and council services.

Against the backdrop of people reporting they would delete the NHS Covid-19 app, which alerts them to potential exposure and tells them to isolate, Johnson said in a statement posted on Twitter: “We did look briefly into the

idea of us taking part in the pilot scheme which allows people to test daily, but I think it's far more important that everybody sticks to the same rules.

"I really do urge everybody to stick with the programme and take the appropriate course of action when you're asked to do so by NHS test and trace." He will isolate at Chequers, his countryside retreat, until 26 July.

Backbench Tory MPs and former ministers had been among those who had criticised what Labour said would be regarded by many people across the UK as a "special, exclusive rule" for Johnson and Sunak.

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[Boris Johnson](#)

What is the Covid workplace testing scheme Downing Street is part of?

Boris Johnson and Rishi Sunak were due to be part of a pilot trialling tests instead of self-isolation

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Boris Johnson and Rishi Sunak have been forced into a U-turn and will self-isolate after coming into contact with the health secretary, who has contracted Covid-19. Photograph: Kirsty Wigglesworth/AP

Boris Johnson and Rishi Sunak have been forced into a U-turn and will self-isolate after coming into contact with the health secretary, who has contracted Covid-19. Photograph: Kirsty Wigglesworth/AP

[Ben Quinn](#) and [Rajeev Syal](#)

Sun 18 Jul 2021 14.12 EDT

Could Boris Johnson and Rishi Sunak have avoided the need to self-isolate for 10 days despite being contacts of the health secretary, Sajid Javid, who tested positive for Covid-19? On Sunday morning, Downing Street claimed they were due to be part of a workplace pilot scheme trialling tests instead of isolation. However, an abrupt [U-turn in the face of public anger](#) means the prime minister and chancellor will now self-isolate.

What pilot scheme is Downing Street enrolled in?

Ministers have claimed they are part of a “workplace testing” scheme involving 20 public bodies that have set up asymptomatic testing sites. Individuals from those organisations who have had contact with someone who has tested positive for Covid can go to work on the basis that they are using lateral flow tests, but must self-isolate when not at work.

How can someone join the scheme, and who has benefited?

According to the communities secretary, Robert Jenrick, organisations on the scheme include government departments, Transport for London, Network Rail and Border Force.

But a spokesperson for TfL has denied being part of the scheme, saying the organisation is still waiting to join.

The RMT union has claimed [that no such scheme has been set up](#) in Network Rail or TfL.

Border Force sources claim a pilot scheme has been set up at offices in Manchester and Dover but say it is under review because it has proved to be unpopular with staff.

Downing Street did not divulge the other bodies taking part as they had not given consent, but a spokesperson claimed a full list would be published after results were in.

Jenrick described the scheme as “well-known and longstanding” although there is no obvious mention of the scheme online. Downing Street insists it is “totally separate” from another project, the [“daily contact testing study”](#), which was set up in May and splits participants at random into two groups. One cohort, a control group, has to self-isolate, while the other – numbering up to 40,000 people when the pilot was established – takes daily rapid tests.

The Cabinet Office minister, Michael Gove, [benefited](#) after being “pinged” by the Covid-19 app after a trip to Portugal for the Champions League final in May.

He went on to and then came off the pilot scheme in May, a source close to the minister said.

When is it necessary to self-isolate?

In England, it is a legal requirement to self-isolate if you are identified as a contact and told to self-isolate by NHS test and trace. Those who are “pinged” by the app as a contact of another user who has tested positive for Covid-19 are “advised” – but not legally obliged – to isolate for 10 days.

[Separate guidance](#) is in place for health and social care workers. Those providing direct care to a patient or a resident with Covid, and who have been wearing the correct PPE, are not considered to be a contact for the purposes of contact tracing and isolation. The government has been coming under pressure to make more key workers, including those in meat-processing plants, exempt from isolation after contact with a Covid case.

From 16 August, double-vaccinated people who have had their second jab at least two weeks earlier and under-18s in England [will not have to isolate](#).

Who is bearing the brunt of directions to self-isolate?

Up to 1.6 million people [were told to isolate](#) in a single week, Guardian analysis found, including more than 520,000 contacted by the Covid-19 app

– up 46% in a week. But the government said the app was likely to remain unchanged for weeks.

Rubbish bins in parts of England are going uncollected, [West End theatre shows have been cancelled](#) and some health workers have been urged to postpone holidays because of staff shortages. The situation, branded a “pingdemic”, has led to demands from [industry leaders](#) for help amid [widespread staff shortages](#) as workers are forced to isolate en masse.

Soaring cases are responsible, with more than one in 100 people in England estimated to have Covid, and the situation is expected to worsen after further reopening on Monday. Test and trace does not yet take account of vaccination status.

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Are enough people vaccinated in time for England's 'freedom day'?



Unlocking in England: walking a tightrope between vaccination and Covid infection. Illustration: Guardian Design

Unlocking in England: walking a tightrope between vaccination and Covid infection. Illustration: Guardian Design

Four charts that show why the big unlocking could be coming too soon

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[Anna Leach](#)

Mon 19 Jul 2021 03.00 EDT

The government has technically hit its 19 July target of offering all adults in the UK a Covid-19 vaccine.

But although all adults have been offered a first dose, not all of them have had it, and a significant number have had only one dose, not two. Only 68% of UK adults are fully vaccinated. If you include under-18s, only 54% of the total population is fully vaccinated.

For this reason, some scientists say 19 July is too soon for “freedom day”, when the government will lift almost all restrictions on mask use and social distancing in England.

Authorities should wait [until more people are vaccinated](#) before lifting public health restrictions, says Christina Pagel, director of UCL’s Clinical Operational Research Unit. “There is no disadvantage to more people being vaccinated.”

She suggests a different target: that before England unlocks all adults and over-12s should be offered two doses, not just one. “We should wait until at least we’ve finished our primary vaccination programme and offered two doses to adolescents too,” she says.

Others, however, back the government’s decision to unlock now. “This virus is not going away,” says Paul Hunter, professor in medicine at the University of East Anglia. “We will most likely see a surge whenever we lift restrictions now, in the autumn or next spring, it has to be one of these three options.”

Hunter, like the UK government, points to lower rates of hospitalisation and severe disease as the key benefit of the vaccination programme. He also cites the potential for immunity to wane six months after vaccination as a reason to unlock now, rather than wait.

As things stand, less than one in four of the under-30s will have full vaccine protection on 19 July. Many younger groups have only recently become eligible for vaccines, so have not been able to get a second dose.

Older age groups were jabbed first, so have much higher rates of vaccination. However, even in groups that have been eligible for vaccines for months, there remains a proportion of people who are not fully vaccinated. This is lowest among the over-70s: only 6% of those aged 70-79 in England have not had both doses. However, for 50- to 54-year-olds, who have been eligible for vaccines since mid-March, the number not fully vaccinated stands at 19%.

As it takes two weeks for vaccines to become effective, we have used vaccination figures from two weeks before 19 July.

Has vaccine take-up slowed?

Vaccine take-up was high during the second Covid wave in the early months of 2021, with older age groups getting the jab in large numbers.

But there is concern that younger people, who are less worried about serious illness, will not get vaccinated as quickly. The chart below shows first dose take-up flattening out at a lower level for younger age cohorts.

What vaccines do, and don't do

Full vaccination of every adult and adolescent in England will not get rid of coronavirus as vaccines are not 100% effective: they reduce but do not remove the effects of the disease. As the diagram below shows, people who are fully vaccinated can still become sick with coronavirus.

A single dose of any vaccine does not offer much protection against getting symptoms of coronavirus but it does significantly reduce the risk of hospital admission.

[Vaccine effectiveness against symptomatic infection and against hospitalisation](#)

For Hunter, the fact that we cannot fully vaccinate our way out of coronavirus means that we need to allow natural infections in an “exit wave”

to top up vaccine immunity. He believes it is now safer to do so because the most vulnerable people are vaccinated and at much less risk.

“Like the other coronaviruses we will find an equilibrium, with or without vaccines, and then suffer reinfections every few years for the rest of our lives, though within a few years [infections will be] mostly either like the common cold or completely asymptomatic. Each reinfection will act like a booster dose, in effect.”

But for Pagel, the fact we cannot rely only on vaccines means that we should supplement vaccines with public health measures such as restrictions. “You can’t rely on only vaccination to keep infections in check. You could still keep some measures, such as masks, or contact tracing, or heavily invest in ventilation etc. Together they might well be able to reach herd immunity if you have enough people vaccinated.”

Even if the government ploughs on with its current “exit wave” strategy, a delay to allow more vaccination (and possibly a booster programme for vulnerable people) will make that wave smaller and less dangerous, Pagel says. “That [exit wave] would be much smaller with more people vaccinated.”

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Quarantine to be waived for NHS staff in England in ‘exceptional circumstances’

Fully vaccinated frontline workers will be permitted to go on working if ‘pinged’ by Covid app to relieve pressure on service

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The move comes amid concerns that rising staff absences are putting unsustainable pressure on health care services. Photograph: Nick Moore/Alamy

The move comes amid concerns that rising staff absences are putting unsustainable pressure on health care services. Photograph: Nick

Moore/Alamy

PA Media

Mon 19 Jul 2021 01.01 EDT

Frontline NHS staff in England who are fully vaccinated will, in “exceptional circumstances”, be permitted to carry on working if they are “pinged” by the Covid contact tracing app, the government has announced.

The move – which also applies to frontline social care workers – comes amid concerns that rising staff absences due to the need to self-isolate are putting unsustainable pressure on health care services.

The Department of Health and Social Care said the exemption would only apply in cases where the absence of staff could lead to a “significant risk of harm”.

Staff who are contacted by NHS Test and trace and told to quarantine because they have been in contact with someone who has tested positive for the virus will still need a negative PCR test before they can resume work and will then need to take daily lateral flow tests.

Decisions on which staff qualify will be made on a case-by-case basis following a risk assessment by the management of the health or social care organisation concerned.

Health secretary Sajid Javid said: “As we learn to live with this virus, it’s important that we ensure frontline staff can keep providing the best possible care and support to people up and down the country.

“These new rules will fortify our collective defences against this awful virus, by allowing fully vaccinated frontline NHS and social care staff to continue to work when needed.”

UK Health Security Agency chief executive Dr Jenny Harries, said: “With the number of cases continuing to rise, it is imperative that we do everything we can to manage this virus and support our NHS and social care services under the strain of increased demand and sustained pressure.

“We have provided specific guidance to NHS and social care settings for circumstances where there is a significant risk to health or safety resulting from staff absence or a critical service cannot run.”

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‘I’ll be wearing a mask’: businesses and staff wary as England unlocking begins

Bira chief says guidelines fail to reflect rise in coronavirus cases, as workers fear employers won’t protect them

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These customers in Bracknell, Berkshire, will no longer be legally required to wear masks in shops from 19 July. Photograph: Maureen McLean/REX/Shutterstock

These customers in Bracknell, Berkshire, will no longer be legally required to wear masks in shops from 19 July. Photograph: Maureen McLean/REX/Shutterstock

[Sarah Marsh](#)

[@slooumarsh](#)

Mon 19 Jul 2021 02.09 EDT

At a public library in London, staff members are filled with nerves about “freedom day” on 19 July. Billed as the big unlocking and an end to social distancing rules and mandatory face coverings in [England](#), they fear for their safety as Covid cases grow daily.

“I will still be wearing a mask and so will lots of colleagues. We will still be washing and sanitising our hands and trying to keep a distance, but it is hard as a lot of people just walk straight up to you,” said Alan Wylie, a 55-year-old librarian.

While many business owners are glad to have fewer restrictions on numbers, they and thousands of frontline workers are worried about the backdrop of soaring infections, which exceeded 50,000 daily UK cases on Friday.

Andrew Goodacre, the chief executive of the British Independent Retailers Association (Bira), said there were mixed feelings and anxiety. “There is concern some staff may say Covid-19 is a risk and their employer is not doing enough to protect them.”

Unlike in previous instances of lockdown measures being lifted, Goodacre said that the loosening of rules was coming at a time of rising cases. Bira advised that businesses should, by all means, change their messaging to “politely request shoppers wear face coverings” but said they “cannot insist on it” due to the risk of discriminating against people with disabilities.

[Britain’s economic confusion reflects the mess of Covid’s ‘freedom day’ | Larry Elliott](#)

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Goodacre said more specific guidance for smaller shops would be helpful, and that guidelines at the moment did not reflect the fact that cases were high.

Gregor Woods, a partner at the international law firm CMS, said employers' legal duty had not changed and that they still had to protect their staff and do risk assessments. He added that it would be "challenging" but they have a "duty of care".

Wylie, the librarian, is classed as clinically extremely vulnerable due to his medical history and said a lot of staff were in a similar position. He is double vaccinated but still worries.

He said that the protection for staff was dependent on which council they worked for and how seriously they took health and safety, as well as how strong the union branch was. "Anyone can walk into a public library and that is part of the uniqueness of them, but it means they can also become a hub for community transmission," he said.

In Petersfield, Hampshire, Shirley Leader, who runs a small clothing boutique called Velvet and Rose, said she also had staff who were vulnerable. "Some are worried about their personal safety, some are young and have not had their two jabs, and some have had health scares so they will be wearing masks."

Another big concern for her is the possibility of staff members being contacted by test and trace, prompting the shop to close its doors. "It would be good if the government offered more advice to small shops specifically," she said. "For example, it talks about restaurants and certain venues where there may be poorer ventilation. But should we wear masks in small shops? If you have a crowd in there, should we be wary? They need to be clear on the guidance rather than keeping it general."

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[Biden administration](#)

US surgeon general: Covid misinformation ‘spreading like wildfire’ on social media

- Vivek Murthy: rise seen ‘among the unvaccinated in particular’
- Biden administration renews attack on Facebook



Surgeon General Vice Admiral Vivek Murthy during the daily White House Briefing in Washington on Thursday. Photograph: Samuel Corum/UPI/REX/Shutterstock

Surgeon General Vice Admiral Vivek Murthy during the daily White House Briefing in Washington on Thursday. Photograph: Samuel Corum/UPI/REX/Shutterstock

[Richard Luscombe in Miami](#)
[@richlusc](#)

Sun 18 Jul 2021 12.36 EDT

Joe Biden's administration renewed its assault on social media companies spreading Covid-19 misinformation, as new infections continued to surge across the entire US.

Vivek Murthy, the US surgeon general who has accused companies including Facebook of "[poisoning information](#)" about coronavirus vaccines, said they were not doing enough to check the online proliferation of false claims.

"The reality is that misinformation is still spreading like wildfire in our country aided and abetted by technology platforms," he said on Fox News Sunday.

"I'm worried about what is to come because we are seeing increasing cases among the unvaccinated in particular. It's so important people have the information they need about the vaccine ... it is our fastest, most effective way out of this pandemic."

New cases of Covid-19 in the US, fueled by the highly transmissible Delta variant, have surged by 70% in a week, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported on Friday, to more than 26,300 a day.

Cases were rising in 48 states and stagnant in the other two, the CDC said. Four states, California, Florida, Missouri and Texas, were responsible for 46% of the new cases, with one in five coming in Florida.

"This is becoming a pandemic of the unvaccinated," the CDC's director, Dr Rochelle Walensky, said on Friday, noting that only [48.5% of US adults](#) were fully vaccinated, and that 99.5% of new hospitalizations from Covid-19 were people who had not received a shot.

Murthy's comments on Sunday came after a [spat between the government and Facebook](#), sparked by Biden's statement last week that the company was "[killing people](#)" by failing to curb the spread of misinformation over vaccines. Meanwhile, prominent Republican politicians and rightwing TV

personalities have been [publicly skeptical](#) about vaccinations, leading to a [reluctance among their supporters](#) to receive them.

Facebook hit back on Saturday with a [blog post](#) highlighting the steps it has taken, including the removal of more than 18m pieces of “misinformation”.

In interviews, company officials have accused the administration of [“seeking scapegoats”](#) for its own failure to reach Biden’s target of having 70% of US adults at least partially vaccinated by the 4 July holiday, and say that, privately at least, Murthy had praised the company’s efforts.

On Sunday, however, the surgeon general said his view of social media companies was unchanged.

“Some have worked to try to up-promote accurate sources, like the CDC and other medical sources. Others have tried to reduce the prevalence of false sources in search results. But what I have also said to them, publicly and privately, is that it’s not enough, that we’re still seeing a proliferation of misinformation online,” he told CNN’s State of the Union.

“And we know that health misinformation harms people’s health. It costs them their lives. Health misinformation takes away our freedom and our power to make decisions for us and for our families. The platforms have to recognize they have played a major role in the increase in speed and scale with which misinformation is spreading.”

Senator Amy Klobuchar said on Sunday that she believed Facebook should face consequences, and referred to a so-called [“dirty dozen”](#) online personalities that a study said was responsible for 65% of Covid-19 misinformation generally, and 73% on Facebook.

“Look at the numbers from the Kaiser Foundation, two-thirds of people who have not gotten vaccinated say [it’s] because they have got something off of social media,” she told CNN.

“For months I have been taking on the dirty dozen, some have been taken off of their accounts. But there’s more to do. We also should look at changing the liability standards when it comes to vaccine misinformation. There’s

absolutely no reason they shouldn't be able to monitor this better and take this crap off of their platforms.”

A [CBS News poll](#) published Sunday showed growing hesitancy to receive a vaccine. 53% of respondents said they worried about side effects, up from 43% in June, and 45% said they “don’t trust the science” behind the vaccines, a rise of 12% from the previous month.

In Missouri, one of the states with the lowest vaccination rates, a spike in cases has led to hospital officials taking to Twitter to urge residents to get a shot.

Ken McClure, the mayor of Springfield, said circulating misinformation was at least partly responsible for the rise.

“People are talking about health related fears, what it might do to them later on in their lives, what might be contained in the vaccinations,” he told Face the Nation on CBS.

“That information is just incorrect. And I think we as a society and certainly in our community are being hurt by it. The surge is coming, the Delta variant will be there, it’s going to spread, it’s already spreading throughout Missouri. Hopefully people can learn what we’ve been experiencing here in Springfield.”

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[Rhik Samadder tries something new](#)[Extreme sports](#)

Rhik Samadder tries ... wakeboarding: ‘I scream underwater with every faceplant’

Everyone needs some novelty right now, so our writer is tackling a new activity each week. First, he gets dragged perilously quickly around a lake



Getting the hang of it ... Rhik takes to the water. Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian

Getting the hang of it ... Rhik takes to the water. Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian



Rhik Samadder

@whatsamadder

Mon 19 Jul 2021 02.00 EDT

I used to ride bendy buses without holding on to the poles, pretending I was in Point Break. Pathetic. Yet the fantasy returned recently, after I decided to stop taking life for granted and try something new every week. To kick off, I wondered if it was possible for a hapless urbanite to learn to surf, ideally in less than an hour. No, said a few professionals, suggesting I try wakeboarding instead. I didn't know what that was. Neither did anyone I know. "Is that when they pour water over your face to extract information?" asked my girlfriend, with insufficient concern.

"No, but it is an extreme sport," chuckles Dave Novell, the water sports manager at Liquid Leisure in Windsor, the largest aquapark in Europe. Banana boats zip around us at a large freshwater lake set in lush countryside. How so? Wakeboarding involves being strapped to a plank, then towed by what looks like a coat hanger, attached to either a speedboat or an overhead cable system that whips you around at 19mph (30km/h).



Rhik takes instruction from Denis. Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian

Panic rises. For me, a walk to the big shop is extreme. I picture the next hour as an alpha-male hazing, in which I get beasted for not “[hanging 10](#)” or being able to whoop with sincerity. “Wakeboarders are actually quite Zen,” Novell says. “So, are they like the surfers of the water?” I ask. There is a pause, the kind that happens when someone has said something extremely stupid.

The surface of the water is calm; my mind less so. After a spot of wetsuit bother, I strap myself into booties screwed on to the streamlined board. Having fixed legs is a claustrophobic feeling. Novell explains fins and grooves, talks rockers and flex. He is wasting his breath: I will be happy if my spine remains inside its sausage casing.

I’m introduced to a handsome cable operator, Denis, who drills a few moves on the astroturf jetty. I notice he has a tattoo of a UFO beaming a man up his calf. Denis tells a funny story about how he was knocked unconscious by his wakeboard last week while attempting a backwards rail, whatever that is. Floating on my back in the water, I feel out of my depth. Coming here was a mistake. I don’t believe man was meant to aquaplane, like a hubristic [pond skater](#). Should have stuck to buses.



Practice makes perfect ... Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian

“He put his wetsuit on backwards, then he put his lifejacket on backwards, *then he put his helmet on backwards*,” I hear an awestruck Denis whisper to Novell. At this motivational moment, the cable jerks to life. I grip with all my strength as it rapidly accelerates, dragging me through the water on my buttocks. Remembering the drills, I draw my bottom to my heels, which brings me up into a crouch. The board is still horizontal, scudding against the water. But I’m on top of it. The feeling is unbelievable. I’m Johnny Utah, I’m Aquaman, [I’m Marty McFly, hitching a hoverboard ride.](#)

The board’s lip dips fractionally, breaching the surface. It instantly slams to a stop. My body stretches mid-air as the handle flies away, ripping off my fingernails and leaving me face down in the water.

‘This last lap, take it one-handed!’ He might as well have said: ‘This last lap, file your tax return’

In fact, the fingernails are present and correct. But that is how it feels each time. I hunch, fearful. I lean back, the board rearing like a cobra. I veer like a drunkard. My limbs ache and fail. Each mistake means swimming to the distant handlebar, using only my arms. The cable whips me relentlessly up and down the lake, tower to tower. It is exhausting.

Every faceplant, I take the opportunity to scream underwater. Unconnected thoughts bubble up as I float face down, in a kind of delirium. “Liquid Leisure at Windsor” is a very off-putting address, I think. Perhaps Prince Andrew is a patron. Back to the Future Part II was set in 2015 – how is that for disappointing? Luckily, every year since then has been a waking nightmare. A wakeboarding nightmare! Ha!

“What’s the most important skill in wakeboarding?” shouts Denis from the bank. A concrete head and a death wish? “Listening! That’s why you’re good.” I’m … good? Denis praises as frequently as he instructs – and is the sole reason I persevere. I learn to crouch. I learn to use my hips to pivot the board, lining it forwards, centring my weight. And finally – yes! – I stand. Poised yet relaxed, brain in my body. I have broken a horse in an aquatic rodeo and the horse is me. An hour ago, I didn’t know what wakeboarding was; now I’m the Peckham Poseidon. I fall over after six seconds, but what a six seconds.



Smile like you mean it ... Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian

“This last lap, take it one-handed!” I would walk to the gates of hell for Denis, but this sounds mad. He might as well have said: “This last lap, file your tax return.” Yet, miraculously, I find myself letting go – one hand flying behind, standing tall like Ben Hur. “It opens the chest, makes it easier

to balance,” he says. I know what he is really saying. He is Bodhi to my Johnny Utah. Where we’re going, we don’t need roads.

Is it possible to ride the water after less than an hour of teaching? Yes. Will I be going back? No. I believe in quitting while you are behind. Evolution favours the cowardly.

Who is this for?

Anyone surf-curious who lacks upper-body strength, vocal fry or the ability to get up early.

Smugness points

Whoop! There it is. **4/5**

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'I don't give a damn about being ridiculous' ... Jean Paul Gaultier at his company's headquarters in Paris. Photograph: Magali Delporte/The Guardian

[The G2 interview](#)

Jean Paul Gaultier on couture, conical bras and condoms: “No sex please, we’re British?” Au contraire!

‘I don’t give a damn about being ridiculous’ ... Jean Paul Gaultier at his company’s headquarters in Paris. Photograph: Magali Delporte/The Guardian

After 50 years in fashion, the designer is having new adventures. He discusses love, work, Madonna – and why Eurotrash couldn’t be made now

by [Kim Willsher](#)

Mon 19 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

Jean Paul Gaultier is waving his hands and talking nineteen to the dozen in French with a smattering of heavily accented English. I’ve only been with him for a few minutes, and already he is tearing through his thoughts on love, life, death and London, punctuated with self-deprecating comments and shrieks of laughter, as if we have known each other for ever.

We are supposed to be talking couture; he is after all fashion’s anointed “enfant terrible”, the designer celebrated for dressing [Madonna](#) in a conical bra corset, popularising skirts – well, kilts – for boys and turning the French navy’s famous *marinière* striped T-shirt into a wardrobe classic.

First, though, Gaultier wants to say how much he loves Britain and the British in all their eccentricity, quirkiness and humour: punk rock and Portobello Road, he says, have been particular inspirations. “When I first went to London, it was a *coup de foudre* – love at first sight,” he says.

“It’s been said that my great-grandmother was English, and I’d be delighted if this were true. I once did one of those stupid DNA test things ...” he wipes his finger around the inside of his mouth. “The results came back with very little English and lots of Italian. I know I speak with my hands, but

even so. Italian? No, no, no, not possible,” he says, adding: “I joked that it must have been because I’d had a pizza the night before.”

He erupts into infectious laughter. Ha ha ha ha. It’s impossible not to join in. Gaultier is delightfully amiable, without artifice; if he has a large ego, he is keeping it well hidden.

We are sitting in his atelier in what is now known as the Haut Marais, a stone’s throw from Paris’s once disreputable but now increasingly gentrified Saint-Denis district. It is an elegant belle époque building commissioned in 1912 by the *Avenir du Proletariat* (Future of the Proletariat) society. Outside, the tall, arched windows are topped with carved faces designed to see off evil spirits. Gaultier, who has been here for 17 years, redecorated the entrance hall with striking silver metro tiles, and the massive galleried ballroom is used for his runway shows. In previous incarnations, the building was a ribbon factory, a boxing hall, a nightclub and a presidential campaign headquarters.

I’ve been told Gaultier, who officially retired after his 50th-anniversary haute couture show in January 2020, wants to talk about what he later calls his forthcoming “adventures” in cinematic fashion and television. Instead, the interview zigzags through a swath of subjects faster than a pattern-cutter’s shears.



Gaultier and model Naomi Campbell in 2015. Photograph: Pascal Le Segretain/Getty Images

Fashion aside, many British people will remember Gaultier for Eurotrash, the cult late-night TV series he co-hosted in the 1990s with another Frenchman, Antoine de Caunes: 30 minutes of weird news stories, innuendo and what De Caunes described as “the best of bad taste”. At one point, it had 3 million viewers a week, making it Channel 4’s most popular show at the time. The pair are still friends: Eurotrash was revived for a [Brexit special in 2016](#), and when Gaultier staged his autobiographical revue [Fashion Freak Show](#) at the Folies Bergère – due to be reprised at some point – De Caunes had a cameo as a beer-drinking Queen.

I suggest that the smutty silliness of Eurotrash would probably not get past TV commissioners these days. Gaultier looks incredulous. “Not even in England? Has it really become no-sex-please-we-are-British? I don’t believe it,” he says. “But we probably couldn’t do it now because everything gets criticised by the haters so quickly on social media. It’s terrible, terrible, terrible. It’s a shame to have to think about what you can and cannot say, especially if you are spontaneous like me and have a tendency to say stupid things. Ha ha ha ha.”

Gaultier says he loves speaking English. He could not care less if, as De Caunes once said, his grasp of the language “is really crap”.

“I realise I have an accent and I don’t speak well at all, but my desire to express myself is stronger than the idea it has to be perfect,” Gaultier says. “In French we have a saying that ‘*le ridicule tue*’ – ridicule kills – but I don’t give a damn about being ‘ridiculous’, and that’s why I like English humour so much. You rise above it.”

Gaultier is the perfect interview subject if you have limitless time and not, as in this case, one hour. His brain is as hyperactive as his hands, producing answers that whirl off in unexpected directions until he stops to ask: “What was the question again?” Today, the trademark spike-top hair is more grey than bleached blond, but Gaultier appears to have reached the age of 68 without growing up or losing a sense of childlike wonder at living his “childhood dream”. He is particularly excited to “announce” he is joining the jury of the French version of Strictly Come Dancing, and is deflated when I say I already read that somewhere.

I saw Madonna singing Holiday on Top of the Pops and thought she was absolutely my style – I adored her

“Oh you know. It’s supposed to be a secret,” he says, looking crestfallen for a fraction of a second before another burst of laughter. “Of course, this wasn’t a childhood dream, but it reminds me of my father who taught me to dance. I love The Voice, too, but thankfully nobody asks me to sing, even if I once made a record [he means the 1988 dance single How To Do That], and it only sold 30,000 copies. I was happy with the publicity, but in truth it wasn’t great. I don’t have a voice. Ha ha ha ha.”

Gaultier, who struggled at school and was painfully shy, grew up on a council estate in the Paris banlieue, the only child of an accountant father and a mother who worked as a cashier in an office canteen. He says he was an awkward child, who did not feel “comfortable in my skin”.

“Looking back, I don’t think I’d like myself as a child at all because I was really a small adult. I was an only son who was spoiled rotten by my

grandmother and my parents. I was an outcast at school because I wasn't a fighter, I didn't play football, and I had a dispensation to miss gymnastics; sometimes I was called a *fille manquée* [a tom-girl], although I wasn't effeminate."

A black-and-white family photograph shows a young Gaultier hugging his adoring grandmother, Marie Garage, a nurse, beautician and purveyor of alternative medical treatments. It was Garage's cache of corsetry, which the young Jean Paul discovered while rifling through her belongings when she was with clients, that inspired him to make a conical paper bra for his teddy bear.



Madonna on the Blond Ambition Tour. Photograph: Gie Knaeps/Getty Images

"I wanted a doll, not a bear, but I did its hair and used my grandmother's makeup on it. And I made a conical bra for it: it was the first conical bra, even before Madonna's. I grew up on television, not books, and I'd also seen this programme that showed you could cut a circle out of a circle to make a skirt, so I made a hole in one of my grandmother's lace mats and turned it into a skirt for the bear."

Gaultier says he realised he was gay as a teenager after seeing [Franco Zeffirelli's 1968 film Romeo and Juliet](#) and dreaming of Olivia Hussey and Leonard Whiting, before deciding he was more attracted to Whiting. He came out to his parents when he was in his early 20s. “I was lucky because they were very open and free-thinking. We didn’t talk about it before, but I think they knew. My father didn’t care and didn’t say anything. My mother said: ‘Ah, now we understand why you are so often in London,’ which was much better [for gay men] than Paris back then. All this ‘no sex please, we’re British’ is completely fake. Au contraire!” Cue more raucous laughter.

It was another film, Jacques Becker’s 1945 classic *Falbalas*, in which Micheline Presle falls in love with a fashion designer, that inspired him to become a couturier. A large black-and-white photograph of Presle, who is now 98, hangs on the wall outside Gaultier’s atelier. “I saw *Falbalas*, and said: ‘I want to do that,’” he says. Gaultier had already been drawing for some time and had sent his sketches to several Paris fashion houses. On his 18th birthday, Pierre Cardin’s atelier called the Gaultier home asking Jean Paul to come in immediately for an interview. He was employed on the spot, part-time at first, so he could finish school. “I knew Jean Paul had talent the day he arrived,” Cardin would say later.



‘I owe him everything ...’ Gaultier and Pierre Cardin. Photograph: Bertrand Rindoff Petroff/Getty Images

“I owe him everything,” Gaultier said after Cardin’s death last December. “I dreamed of working in fashion and Pierre Cardin made that dream possible.” After his grandmother and Cardin, perhaps the greatest influence of Gaultier’s life was Francis Menuge, his personal and professional partner. Gaultier was 22 when he met Menuge, then 20, through a school friend. It was, he says, another *coup de foudre*. “He saw my work, and he helped me and supported me. I already knew I would have a career in fashion, and I knew that one day I would do a collection, but I thought it would probably be for one of the big houses. Instead, we did our own prêt-à-porter collection,” he says.

The collection was thrown together on a shoestring in 1976, with the help of Menuge, family members including cousins who knitted sweaters and even the local concierge who did some sewing. The show at the Paris Planetarium was chaotic, featured nine models who were friends and was attended by a similar number of journalists, but caught the fashion world’s attention. “We were only able to do it because of Francis. I was shy, I didn’t dare do lots of things, but he would say: ‘Why not? Go on, just do it.’ He was also extremely direct and would tell me when he thought a piece of clothing or a collection was just rubbish.”

In 1987, Menuge was diagnosed as being HIV positive. He died three years later, by which time the couple had been together for 15 years. Gaultier was bereft and briefly considered giving up designing. “It was terrible, and at that time a total taboo. You didn’t say Aids, you said ‘*la maladie*’ but even then you said it discreetly because everyone knew what ‘*la maladie*’ was, and everyone died from it. It was a terrifying period. Francis died three months before they discovered the drugs to extend the life of those with Aids. I didn’t want him to die in hospital, so I brought him home and he died there.

“Afterwards, I said to myself: ‘OK, I can stop now. I don’t want to be a celebrity and this is bigger than my career.’ But that thought lasted about three seconds before I said to myself: ‘No, we continue, because we, Francis Menuge and Jean Paul Gaultier, have done something special together.’ In any case, I couldn’t do anything else.” Later, Gaultier apparently told a French journalist: “My only regret is not having invented the condom, the most beautiful item of clothing.” Yes, I said that, he says. “And it’s true.”

It was around this time Gaultier created one of his truly iconic outfits: the pink conical bra corset that was one of a series of designs for Madonna's 1990 Blond Ambition tour. When Madonna first called him in 1989, he thought his assistant was playing a prank on him. "I'd seen her singing Holiday on Top of the Pops and thought she was absolutely my style – the jewellery, the crucifixes, the way she dressed, her look – this was what I was doing with my collection. I adored her."

He has also worked with Carla Bruni, the former model who became France's first lady, Eva Herzigová, Nicole Kidman and Beyoncé, and says he is very fond of Naomi Campbell. "She has an exceptional grace and beauty. Even if she does always arrive very late, she is really someone special."

Gaultier presented his first haute couture collection to acclaim in 1997. He says he did it "for pleasure, not for the establishment". He worked for himself – as opposed to one of the major fashion houses – because it gave him freedom. And today, what he wants is not to be a slave to producing collections but to commission young designers to "reinterpret" Jean Paul Gaultier. The day before we meet, the Japanese creator Chitose Abe has presented a "reinterpreted" collection. Gaultier is delighted with it, and thanks staff for their hard work as he walks around the atelier.

For now, Gaultier says he will be sticking to fashion-adjacent projects; one of these is [CinéMode](#), which will run from October to January at the Cinémathèque in Paris, and is an exhibition of 100 film costumes that have left their mark on fashion, from those of Marlene Dietrich to James Bond via Superman. Gaultier has always loved big films and has designed for the directors Pedro Almodóvar and Luc Besson (*The Fifth Element*).



With Antoine de Caunes in their Brexit Eurotrash special. Photograph: Stuart Thomas / Channel 4

He insists he will not miss the punishing rhythm of producing several couture collections a year. “Fashion has changed. Before, if a star wanted a piece of clothing they had to buy it, and that’s normal, non? Then it became a loan, then we will give it to you, then we will give you the entire wardrobe. Now, it’s: not only will we give you the entire wardrobe, but we will pay you a contract to wear it. And not even an exclusive contract.

“I was happy when people like Boy George and George Michael were wearing my clothes, and when Mick Jagger asked me to do his show ... that was real work. But today couture is all about contracts and money.”

We could go on and on, but the photographer is waiting and Gaultier has a lunch appointment followed by a flight to Spain where he is holidaying. While Gaultier’s PR frets about what the photographer is asking him to do, the designer himself is delighted. “She really has an eye; very artistic,” he says afterwards.

Then it is time to go. It has been huge fun. As a last question, I ask if he is happy. “Yes, I am happy. I realised my childhood dream and I continue to do so. What is my work is also my amusement, and I am amused all the time.”

He laughs one last laugh. “I didn’t do this as a career to be rich or famous. I wanted to work. And I wanted to be loved. At the end of the day, perhaps it is this kind of honesty that made me the enfant terrible of fashion.”

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Games

Think, fight, feel: how video game artificial intelligence is evolving

AI in games has long been geared towards improving computer-controlled opponents. Will it soon create diverse characters we can talk to instead of just shoot?



Life stories and relationships ... Watch Dogs Legion. Photograph: Ubisoft

Life stories and relationships ... Watch Dogs Legion. Photograph: Ubisoft



[Keith Stuart](#)

[@keefstuart](#)

Mon 19 Jul 2021 04.30 EDT

In May, as part of an otherwise unremarkable [corporate strategy meeting](#), Sony CEO Kenichiro Yoshida made an interesting announcement. The company's artificial intelligence research division, Sony AI, would be collaborating with PlayStation developers to create intelligent computer-controlled characters. "By leveraging reinforcement learning," he wrote, "we are developing game AI agents that can be a player's in-game opponent or collaboration partner." Reinforcement learning is an area of machine learning in which an AI effectively teaches itself how to act through trial and error. In short, these characters will mimic human players. To some extent, they will think.

Sign up to Alex Hern's weekly technology newsletter, TechScape.

This is just the latest example of AI's evolving and expanding role in video game development. As open world games become more complex and ambitious, with hundreds of characters and multiple intertwined narratives, developers are having to build systems capable of generating intelligent, reactive, creative characters and emergent side quests.

For its Middle-earth games, developer Monolith created the acclaimed Nemesis AI system, which lets enemies remember their fights against the player, creating blood feuds that flare up throughout the adventure. The recent [Watch Dogs: Legion](#) generates life stories, relationships and daily routines for every London citizen you interact with – so if you save a character's life one day, their best mate may well join you the next. The experimental text adventure [AI Dungeon](#) uses [OpenAI's natural language modeller GPT-3](#) to create new emergent narrative experiences.



Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor. Photograph: Warner Bros

But the field of AI has a problem with diversity. Research [published by New York University in 2019](#) found that 80% of AI professors speaking at major events were men, while just 15% of AI researchers at Facebook were women and only 10% at Google. Statistics for people of colour in tech are worse: just 2.5% of Google's workforce are black; 4% at Facebook. The risk of such a homogeneous working culture is that gender and racial biases can feed unchecked into AI algorithms, producing results that replicate entrenched imbalances and prejudices. There have been numerous examples over the past five years, from [facial recognition systems that discriminate against people of colour](#) to AI recruitment tools that [favour male applicants](#).

Now that the games industry is exploring many of the same AI and machine learning systems as academia and the big tech giants, is the diversity problem something it should be tackling? We know that video game development has presented similar issues with homogeneity, both in its work force and in its products – it is [something the industry claims it is keen to address](#). So if we're going to see AI-generated characters and stories about diverse backgrounds and experiences, don't developers need to be thinking about diversifying the teams behind them?

We'll see new forms of play that leverage feelings of creativity, love and joy more so than triumph or domination

Uma Jayaram, general manager of SEED, the innovation and applied research team at Electronic Arts, certainly thinks so. [As a tech entrepreneur](#) she has worked in cloud computing, VR and data-at-scale as well as AI, and says she has sought to comprise her global team – based in Sweden, the UK, Canada and the US – of different genders, ethnicities and cultures.

“A diverse team allows for multiple points of view to coalesce and creates possibilities for a more representative outcome and product,” she says. “It also enhances opportunities to create awareness, empathy and respect for individuals who are different from us. A video game is in a way an extension of our physical world, and a place where people spend time and form rich experiences that loop back into the collective sense of self and community. As such, it is a great opportunity to bring in diversity in two ways: in the teams designing and architecting these worlds, and in the worlds being created and the denizens that inhabit them.”

Electronic Arts is currently looking into developing systems that can use machine learning to replicate facial expressions, skin types and body movements from video and photos, rather than having to bring actors into a mo-cap studio. In theory, this should expand the range of genders and ethnicities that can be produced in games, and Jayaram says EA is committed to using diverse data in its R&D projects. The company is also looking at employing user-generated content in games, and allowing players to make a unique avatar by capturing their own likeness and expressions on a smartphone or webcam and uploading it into the game.



Caves of Qud is a ‘roguelike’ fantasy game with deep simulation and AI components. Photograph: Freehold Games

The emphasis on diverse data is important, because it highlights a misconception about AI: that it is somehow objective because it is the result of computation. AI algorithms rely on data, and if that data is coming from a single demographic, it will reflect that group’s biases and blind spots. “We’re used to thinking about AI like physics engines or multiplayer code – something technical that happens behind the scenes,” says AI researcher and game developer Michael Cook. “But AI today is a part of the whole creative work. It controls how little AI people behave and treat each other in The Sims; it generates cultures and religions in games like Caves of Qud and Ultima Ratio Regum; it’s part of political statements in Watch Dogs: Legion. AI engineers have as much responsibility to the player as the writers and designers. They create part of the experience, and they have a huge capacity to harm. We’ve seen recently how AI Dungeon is generating stories that are [potentially traumatic for the player](#), without warning.”

At Microsoft, the company’s [AI research team](#) in Cambridge have several ongoing studies into machine learning and games, including [Project Paidia](#), which is investigating the use of reinforcement-learning in game AI agents that can collaborate with human players. The company’s recent virtual summit included [several talks on ethical considerations in games AI](#).



Microsoft's research team in Cambridge is using the game Bleeding Edge to investigate reinforcement learning. Photograph: Microsoft

“AI agents can be built to develop, grow and learn over time, and are only as good as what you are putting in,” says Jimmy Bischoff, director of quality at [Xbox](#) Game Studios. “Being culturally appropriate in terms of dialogue and content comes down to how it is trained. We want to build games that everyone wants to play and that everyone can relate to, so we need to have people that can represent all our players.”

Microsoft also sees potential in player modelling – AI systems that learn how to act and react by observing how human players behave in game worlds. As long as you have a wide player base, this is one way to increase the diversity of data being fed into AI learning systems. “Next will be characters that are trained to provide a more diverse, or more human-like range of opponents,” says Katja Hofmann, a principle researcher at Microsoft Cambridge. “The scenario of agents learning from human players is one of the most challenging – but also one of the most exciting directions.

“At the same time, I want to emphasise that AI technologies will not automatically give rise to diverse game experiences. Technology developers and creators need to make choices on how to use AI technologies, and those

choices determine whether and how well the resulting characters and experiences reflect different genders and heritages.”

Amanda Phillips, the author of *Gamer Trouble: Feminist Confrontations in Digital Culture*, is similarly cautious about placing the impetus for change solely on diverse people in AI teams. “Having a diverse team is absolutely necessary for ensuring more design angles are being considered, but I think it’s important not to fetishise underrepresented and marginalised individuals as the solutions to problems that often have very deep roots in company and industry practices,” says Phillips. “It puts a tremendous amount of pressure on folks who often have less job security, clout and resources to educate their peers (and supervisors) about issues that can be very personal. This is what is popularly called an “add diversity and stir” approach, where companies bring in “diverse” individuals and expect them to initiate change without any corresponding changes to the workplace.

“Teams need to diversify, but they also need to hire consultants, audit their own practices, make organisational changes, shake up the leadership structure – whatever is necessary to ensure that the folks with the perspectives and the knowledge to understand diversity and equity in a deep way have the voice and the power to influence the product output.”

One of the most fundamental elements set to unconsciously shape AI is the games industry’s inclination to think about video games purely as adversarial systems, where AI’s role is to create allies or enemies that are more effective in combat. But if we look outside the mainstream industry, we do see alternatives. Coder and NYU professor Mitu Khandaker set up her studio [Glow Up Games](#) with technologist Latoya Peterson to make social narrative games for diverse audiences. The team is currently working on *Insecure: The Come Up Game*, a smartphone life sim based around the hit HBO series, which explores the relationships between characters.

“What I’m really interested in as a designer is, how do we build tools that let players construct fun AI systems or AI agents for other people to play with?” says Khandaker. “I’ve been saying this for ages – there’s a broader cultural point around how important it is to create a legibility of AI – creating a way for people to understand how AI even works – and we can do that by exposing them to it in a playful way. It’s effectively just computers

doing some calculations and trying to predict stuff it should do. It's not magic, but certainly what it produces can be delightful."

The development studio Tru-Luv, which created the hugely successful Self-Care app, is working on AI technologies that reflect the company's own diverse, progressive and supportive studio culture. "Our company is currently one-third BIPOC [black, indigenous and people of colour] and two-thirds women," says studio founder Brie Code. "Our executive team is 100% women, and our board is one-third BIPOC and two-thirds women. We work with consultants and partner organisations from emerging development communities such as those in Pakistan, Tunisia, and Morocco."



SelfCare by Tru-Luv

Like Khandaker, Code argues that a diverse workforce won't just eliminate problematic biases from conventional games, it will allow for the development of new interactive experiences. "The games industry has focused on a narrow subset of human psychology for several years," she says. "It is very good at creating experiences that help people feel a sense of achievement or dominance. Game AI created by a diverse workforce will bring life to NPCs and experiences that represent the breadth and depth of the human experience. We'll see more non-zero-sum experiences, more compassion, more emotional resonance, more insight, more transcendence.

We'll see new forms of play that leverage feelings of creativity, love and joy more so than triumph or domination.”

As developers begin to understand and exploit the greater computing power of current consoles and high-end PCs, the complexity of AI systems will increase in parallel. Developers will explore elements such as natural language processing, player modelling and machine learning to develop imaginative, reactive AI characters, facilitated by emerging AI middleware companies such as [Spirit AI](#) and [Sonantic](#); worlds will begin to tell their own stories to augment those penned by game designers and writers. But it's right now that those teams need to think about who is coding those algorithms and what the aim is.

“[We have] a golden opportunity to create a ‘new normal’,” says Jayaram. “We can reject stereotypes in portrayal, source diverse data for the machine learning models, and ensure that the algorithms powering the games promote fairness and respect across gender and ethnicity.”

Mike Cook agrees. “Right now, the field of game AI is overwhelmingly male and white, and that means we’re missing out on the perspectives and ideas of a lot of people,” he says. “Diversity isn’t just about avoiding mistakes or harm – it’s about fresh ideas, different ways of thinking, and hearing new voices. Diversifying game AI means brilliant people get to bring their ideas to life, and that means you’ll see AI applied in ways you haven’t seen before. That might mean inventing new genres of game, or supercharging your favourite game series with fresh new ideas.

“But also, diversity is about recognising that everyone should be given a chance to contribute. If Will Wright were a Black woman, would The Sims have gotten made? If we don’t open up disciplines like Game AI to everyone, then we are missing out on every Black genius, every female genius, every queer genius, we’re missing out on the amazing ideas they have, the huge changes they might make.”

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A new start after 60: ‘I handed in my notice – and opened my dream bookshop’



Carole-Anne Warburton at her shop, The Book Rest, in Ilminster, Somerset.
Photograph: Simon Leigh/The Guardian

Carole-Anne Warburton at her shop, The Book Rest, in Ilminster, Somerset.
Photograph: Simon Leigh/The Guardian

She always loved reading. So at 65, when Carole-Ann Warburton finally opened her own shop, she had 8,000 books ready to fill it

[Paula Cocozza](#)

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Mon 19 Jul 2021 05.00 EDT

All her life, Carole-Ann Warburton kept a little hope glowing at the back of her mind. “You’re living your life. And every now and then you think: ‘I have a dream.’” Warburton’s dream was to work in a bookshop.

It took an experience of terrifying disorientation to find her way to it.

In 2010, she collapsed at home. Her legs didn't know what to do and she was "vomiting all over the place". The hospital eventually diagnosed an inner-ear infection. Warburton had to learn to walk again. Recuperating for weeks at her daughter's farm in Ilminster, Somerset, she was "a captive audience".

She had worked for 15 years in an administrative post at the South West Regional Development Agency. Her daughter felt it was time to retire. "'Here are some bungalows and houses for sale,' she said. It was pure coincidence that she showed me details for a little shop with a flat above it."

The barber shop had been on the market for years. Warburton viewed it on her new walking sticks. "It was a godawful place. I fell in love with it."

At work, she handed in her notice. "They said: 'What are you going to do?' I said: 'I'm going to have a bookshop.'" It was the first time she had said her dream aloud.



'I am so happy standing here in the middle of a pile of books.' Photograph: Simon Leigh/The Guardian

“It took fewer than 12 weeks for everything to happen and everything just sailed through,” she says. She sold her house, bought the shop and, a few weeks after her 65th birthday, [The Book Rest](#) opened.

Warburton has always loved books. As a child, any spare sixpence went on Enid Blyton’s Mary Mouse. Every Saturday morning, she and her parents would “do a gentle shop, then go to the library in Ashby-de-la-Zouch … However many books we got out, we read.”

At university in Cambridge (she studied maths), she began to buy books – a habit that, in adult life, yielded a hoard.

“Our house was absolutely chock-a-block,” she says. Her ex-husband shared her passion. “Most rooms had boxes of books and bookshelves of books. We had a four-bedroomed house and all the rooms consisted of small walkway passages between piles of books.” Her three daughters “hated it”.

By the time The Book Rest came along, Warburton had 8,000 to 9,000 books with which to fill it. But although she dreamed of working in a bookshop, she hadn’t reckoned on selling her own books. “That took a bit of psychological talking-to,” she says.

Her first sale was hard. “I sort of held on to the book. I said: ‘You’ll enjoy this. I enjoyed it very much and it’s a little bit difficult to let it go.’ We had a laugh. And I did let it go.

“It still feels, when a special book goes out, like a bit of a loss – as if some little part of me has been taken away. And then I make common sense come back to me and say: ‘Let someone else learn from it.’ It’s a growing up, if you like, an acceptance.”

This year, The Book Rest celebrates its 10th anniversary; soon after, Warburton will turn 75. While the shop makes neither profit nor loss, it brings other rewards, including friendship. “There are lots of people who stick their head round the door and say: ‘Are you all right, Carole-Ann?’”

If the days are quiet, no matter. “I am so happy standing here in the middle of a pile of books. I can walk around the shop, pick up a book and sit down

and read it ... I would like to keep doing this until I no longer can. It's a wonderful feeling. Someone can walk in tomorrow and say: 'I have been looking for that for an awfully long time!'"

So while Warburton's dream came true, what about those of others? "All the dreams are in the books," she says. "They are all there waiting to be picked up."

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[OpinionPlastics](#)

Covid has made us use even more plastic – but we can reset

[Christian Dunn](#)

Lockdown has highlighted the versatility of this everyday material, while creating a mountain of waste



‘Single-use face masks, surgical gloves, tiny bottles of hand sanitiser and antiseptic wipes have become as common as cigarettes butts were a few years ago.’ Photograph: Artur Widak/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

‘Single-use face masks, surgical gloves, tiny bottles of hand sanitiser and antiseptic wipes have become as common as cigarettes butts were a few years ago.’ Photograph: Artur Widak/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

Mon 19 Jul 2021 04.00 EDT

Every time you do a lateral flow coronavirus test, you throw away around 10g of plastic. If every adult and secondary school student in the UK did the recommended two tests a week, it would produce more than 1,000 tonnes of

rubbish every seven days. In less than a month this would fill an Olympic-size swimming pool.

Those of us who before the pandemic were involved in campaigns to cut our dependence on plastic, encouraging our communities to become “plastic free”, may feel like criticising such consumption. Should we stop these tests, knowing what we do about the [plastic pollution crisis](#)?

Absolutely not. They are at the forefront of our ability to control the virus and help our country return to a form of normality. So too are the countless tonnes of plastic used in the development, production, transportation and delivery of the vaccine, not to mention all the single-use medical consumables essential to help those unfortunate enough to end up in hospital.

Plastic has shown yet again what a wonderful, versatile and lifesaving product it can be. Without it, the pandemic would be going very differently. However, it is all too easy to forget this when stepping over the Covid cast-offs littering our streets. Single-use face masks, surgical gloves, tiny bottles of hand sanitiser and antiseptic wipes have become as common as cigarettes butts were a few years ago.

An interesting aspect of all this is a recently identified phenomenon called “[hygiene theatre](#)”. That is, individuals and businesses that make sure they look like they’re fighting the pandemic, but perhaps not doing very much of real effect. From repeatedly incorrectly changing single-use face masks to the use of disposable laminated menus in restaurants and metre-high plastic dividers between tables in rowdy pubs, there has arguably been an abundance of this behaviour throughout the various stages of the pandemic. And as we now approach the great unlocking on 19 July, some measures and behavioural changes are likely to remain – not least our desire to be personally protected, and our increased dependence on takeaway food and online shopping, both great generators of plastic. But the question is, how can we achieve safety and convenience in our post-lockdown world in a more balanced way?

The most visible symbol of the pandemic also presents us with an excellent case study for how necessary this rethinking is: face masks. A single-use

disposable face mask can be 10 times more damaging to the climate than a reusable cotton one. Most of us, most of the time, when we're nipping into shops do not need to use a disposable surgical-type face mask. Yet still 53m are being [sent to landfill](#) every day in the UK, which doesn't cover all those that make up the bulk of Covid cast-offs on our streets.

A significant proportion of people are using them because of our accepted cultural insistence on convenience, or perceived convenience. We think it's easier to pick up a throwaway mask when we're entering a shop than it is to remember our own, in the way it was once more convenient to use free plastic bags in a supermarket than remember our own. But shifting our reliance away from single-use plastic doesn't have to mean the end of convenience – far from it. Instead it just means we need to move towards “considerate convenience”: giving a little more consideration to our actions, and being a bit more considerate towards each other and the planet.

There have been reports of takeaway sales surging by [up to 600%](#) during lockdown. This, in turn, brings a mountain of single-use plastic to landfill. A great example of considerate convenience in this sector is the [Shrewsbury Cup scheme](#), whereby the town's cafes all use the same type of reusable take-out cup. Customers pay a deposit for the cup which can be returned to any of the businesses serving drinks. It's then washed and reused. Yes, it may require a tiny bit more effort than just throwing a used cup in the bin, but it's far better for the environment. The Shrewsbury Cup scheme is part of a wider move among increasingly environmentally conscious takeaway providers to find [plastic-free ways](#) of delivering food, including, for example, making deliveries in sturdy packaging customers can take away with them again.

Little known too is that Amazon will reduce the plastic packaging used in your deliveries – but you have to contact customer services to ask for the option to be applied to your account. Hope is also provided by a growing amount of biodegradable plastic coming on to the market.

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Improving plastic recycling is another area that needs investment to ensure it's both efficient and viable. Less than 10% of plastic is currently recycled and this is usually downgraded to poorer quality plastic. Alternatives to plastic need to be considered wherever possible. Moves are being made to make the polluter pay, which could see companies such as Coca Cola take responsibility for the plastic rubbish they produce. It's also clear that the traditional take-make-waste model for our plastic use must be replaced with a more circular system – designing products and consumer processes differently.

The pandemic has highlighted the good and the bad of plastic use, showing more clearly than ever that plastic consumption is all about balance. Wasteful use of virgin plastic turns our oceans into plastic soups. This was part of the message many of us were trying to get out before the pandemic hit. Now that we're being urged to "build back better" as we come out of lockdown, let's seize the opportunity to change our thinking about plastic. Let's appreciate what a wonderful resource it can be – and crucially let's realise that, like all resources, it must be used wisely and not wasted.

- Dr Christian Dunn is a senior lecturer in zoology at Bangor University and an environmental campaigner
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The right is winning the culture war because its opponents don't know the rules

[Nesrine Malik](#)

A few weeks of football heroics have forced the Tories into a tactical retreat – but fighting back will take more than optimism

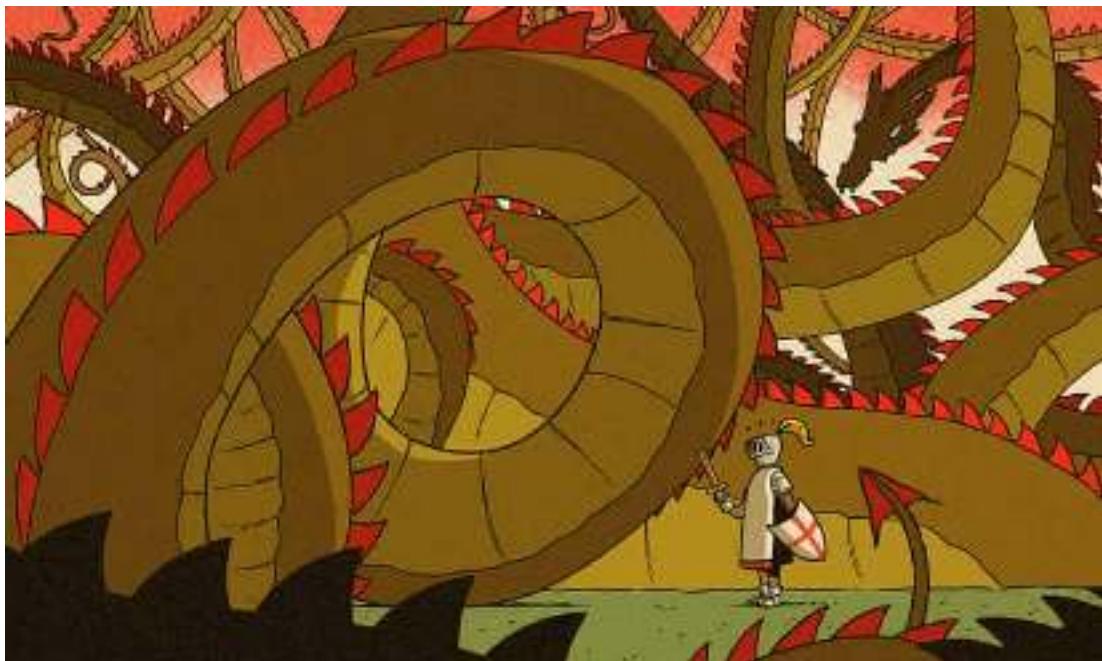


Illustration: R Fresson/The Guardian

Illustration: R Fresson/The Guardian

Mon 19 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

Early last week, it looked like the England football team had lost to Italy but scored against Downing Street. As the abuse of England's black footballers poured forth on Sunday and Monday and public outrage mounted, senior Tories had to shimmy away from their [tacit approval](#) of the racism that the England team had taken the knee against. Both [Priti Patel](#) and Boris Johnson [distanced themselves](#) from the earlier comments by Priti Patel and Boris

Johnson, stressing that there would, of course, be zero tolerance for racism and 100% support for our brave boys.

By midweek, after Tory hardliners [began to side with Tyrone Mings](#) against Patel, and Keir Starmer rattled Johnson a bit at PMQs, there was a growing sense of excitement that the all-conquering Tory culture-war machine might be running out of steam – finally stopped in its tracks by the courage of England’s football heroes and the overwhelming decency of the majority that cheered them.

But this happy narrative misunderstands the purpose and aims of the culture war – which has hardly been halted by this undoubtedly grave error of targeting. What we are about to see is not a ceasefire, but a brief and temporary tactical retreat. The government can afford a strategic pause: the culture war has been a huge success, insofar as it has helped to forge an electoral bloc that backs the Tories against [their “woke” enemies](#), real and imagined.

The right’s culture warriors have profited enormously from their opponents’ failure to understand the nature of the war and the means by which it is fought. A number of recent reports from thinktanks and pollsters that promise to defuse the culture wars by reassuring us that the actual public [isn’t really so divided](#), may in fact deepen this misunderstanding. The error here is to believe that the culture war consists of a debate about the “real England”, one that can be resolved by facts and data – rather than a battle between manufactured narratives that seek to mould an England in their own image.

Gareth Southgate’s [celebrated “Dear England” letter](#) depicted one version of this story, elegantly and aspirationally redescribing the country in the likeness of those who *represent* it on the football pitch. The culture warriors of the right have their own story, crafted and sold by the government and most of the press, in which England is the victim of those who unfairly cry racism at every opportunity. The common mistake made by those who prefer Southgate’s version is not the belief that the culture war is conflated; it is the belief that simply calling it a confection is some kind of victory.

For all the backlash against the Black Lives Matter movement since last summer, the protests did have one lasting effect on public discourse. They shifted our conversations about racism away from a notion of personal and intentional moral failure, and toward a conception of racism as something structural and institutional. But when it comes to these debates about the “real England”, this lesson has gone unlearned; we argue about the country and its intentions as if it’s a boorish uncle. We are trapped – to borrow the words of an actual culture war fracas – between “[England is racist, 100%](#)” (Stormzy) and the retort that this claim is “[100% wrong](#)” (Sajid Javid).

A perfect example of this fruitless approach to discussing racism played out over the past few weeks, where support and abuse of the [England](#) team were both a canvas on which to sketch the soul of the country as the culture war insists we must imagine it. On the heads of a few brave young men and their manager was placed the hope of achieving that elusive liberal dream, “progressive patriotism”. Finally, we cheered, here was the “real England” we knew was out there all along. Set aside the years of deliberately cruel austerity, the resentful chaos of Brexit, the bungled “libertarian” pandemic disaster, Grenfell, Windrush, Yarl’s Wood – this team was supposed to show us that another [England](#) was ready to be born.

The speed with which that hope was daubed with racist graffiti and monkey emojis is not “proof” that England Is Racist, just as the outrage that followed does not prove the reverse. It is simply a reminder that we have not shed the mistaken idea that racism, like some stubborn relic from our past, can simply be worn away by the slow accumulation of new realities – of passing time, of shifting demographics, of intermarriage and integration. And so we conclude, glass half full, by declaring that England Has Changed, But [Not Enough](#).

As we wait passively for this new, inclusive England to arrive, the Conservatives have successfully connected race to patriotism in the public mind. The government has invested a lot of time and uncharacteristic effort into making the allegation of racism an insult and bullying institutions and organisations that dare to interrogate it. It commissioned a report [whitewashing the existence of structural racism](#) in the country. It deployed its own black and ethnic minority members to [deny racism was an issue](#). It positioned itself early on [in opposition to](#) the Black Lives Matter protests,

and made political hay out of [criticising](#) taking the knee. The goal of this rhetoric has been achieved: anyone who talks about racism is simply doing Britain down, smearing white people, forcing a woke agenda “down our throats”. The Times columnist Melanie Phillips, invited on to the BBC on Wednesday to discuss the horrific abuse suffered by three young black footballers, simply explained that taking the knee was actually the “racist gesture”, and that Black Lives Matter was “[fundamentally anti-white, anti-west, anti-Jew](#)”.

These are the weapons of the culture war. But we are also prevented from understanding the potency of the culture war by [optimistic progressives](#) who are keen to explain that it’s all a [big misunderstanding](#). These polite incrementalists believe that even if progressive patriotism once again failed to fully materialise, the groundwork is nonetheless being laid. But the right is creating its own new stories. Because culture war is not about winning a debate about what constitutes England through factual disputes about its character, its statues, its football team or its history of empire. It is not a peripheral indulgence, or a mere confection. Culture war is an aggressive political act with the purpose of creating new dividing lines and therefore new and bigger electoral majorities. It aims to create its own truth, and its own England, through what Nietzsche called a “mobile army of metaphors”.

In the right’s mobile army, race and identity have played a central role, painting an England that is under assault from uppity minorities and their woke backers who can only be kept at bay by the Conservatives. In our “[This is England](#)” excitement about the football team, what we don’t seem to have learned is that what is true of individuals is also true of England. England, like a person, can behave in idiosyncratic ways when it comes to race. Optimists misread the positives in those idiosyncrasies as a sign – if we just keep our eyes trained on the encouraging trends, we will be closer to the truth, which is that things are getting better.

The only certain truth about England is that it is a creation, not a reality whose essence can be revealed or discovered once and for all. Things getting better has not equipped us in any way with the ability to protect our minorities, to defend them against being savaged for sport or vilified and used as pawns for political gain. That is as much a failure of liberals as it is a success of conservatives.

- Nesrine Malik is Guardian columnist
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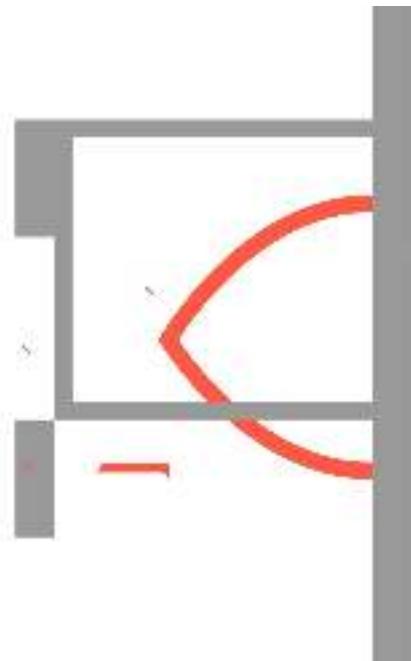
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[The Pegasus projectSurveillance](#)

Spyware can make your phone your enemy. Journalism is your defence

[Laurent Richard](#) and Sandrine Rigaud

The Pegasus project poses urgent questions about the privatisation of the surveillance industry and the lack of safeguards for citizens



The scale of the scandal could only be uncovered by journalists around the world working together. Photograph: Stanislav Kogiku/Sopa Images/Rex/Shutterstock

The scale of the scandal could only be uncovered by journalists around the world working together. Photograph: Stanislav Kogiku/Sopa Images/Rex/Shutterstock

Sun 18 Jul 2021 19.01 EDT

Today, for the first time in the history of modern spying, we are seeing the faces of the victims of targeted cyber-surveillance. This is a worldwide scandal – a global web of surveillance whose scope is without precedent.

The attack is invisible. Once “infected”, your phone becomes your worst enemy. From within your pocket, it instantly betrays your secrets and delivers your private conversations, your personal photos, nearly everything about you. This surveillance has dramatic, and in some cases even life-threatening, consequences for the ordinary men and women whose numbers appear in the leak because of their work exposing the misdeeds of their rulers or defending the rights of their fellow citizens.

All of these individuals were selected for possible surveillance by states using the same spyware tool, Pegasus, sold by the NSO Group.

[FT editor among 180 journalists identified by clients of spyware firm](#)

[Read more](#)

Our mission at Forbidden Stories is to pursue – collaboratively – the work of threatened, jailed or assassinated journalists. For the Pegasus project, we investigated this new threat against press freedom for months, working alongside more than 80 journalists from 16 media organisations.

Quick Guide

What is in the Pegasus project data?

Show

What is in the data leak?

The data leak is a list of more than 50,000 phone numbers that, since 2016, are believed to have been selected as those of people of interest by government clients of NSO Group, which sells surveillance software. The data also contains the time and date that numbers were selected, or entered on to a system. Forbidden Stories, a Paris-based nonprofit journalism organisation, and Amnesty International initially had access to the list and shared access with 16 media organisations including the Guardian. More than 80 journalists have worked together over several months as part of the Pegasus project. Amnesty's Security Lab, a technical partner on the project, did the forensic analyses.

What does the leak indicate?

The consortium believes the data indicates the potential targets NSO's government clients identified in advance of possible surveillance. While the data is an indication of intent, the presence of a number in the data does not reveal whether there was an attempt to infect the phone with spyware such as Pegasus, the company's signature surveillance tool, or whether any attempt succeeded. The presence in the data of a very small number of landlines and US numbers, which NSO says are "technically impossible" to access with its tools, reveals some targets were selected by NSO clients even though they could not be infected with Pegasus. However, forensic

examinations of a small sample of mobile phones with numbers on the list found tight correlations between the time and date of a number in the data and the start of Pegasus activity – in some cases as little as a few seconds.

What did forensic analysis reveal?

Amnesty examined 67 smartphones where attacks were suspected. Of those, 23 were successfully infected and 14 showed signs of attempted penetration. For the remaining 30, the tests were inconclusive, in several cases because the handsets had been replaced. Fifteen of the phones were Android devices, none of which showed evidence of successful infection. However, unlike iPhones, phones that use Android do not log the kinds of information required for Amnesty's detective work. Three Android phones showed signs of targeting, such as Pegasus-linked SMS messages.

Amnesty shared “backup copies” of four iPhones with Citizen Lab, a research group at the University of Toronto that specialises in studying Pegasus, which confirmed that they showed signs of Pegasus infection. Citizen Lab also conducted a peer review of Amnesty's forensic methods, and found them to be sound.

Which NSO clients were selecting numbers?

While the data is organised into clusters, indicative of individual NSO clients, it does not say which NSO client was responsible for selecting any given number. NSO claims to sell its tools to 60 clients in 40 countries, but refuses to identify them. By closely examining the pattern of targeting by individual clients in the leaked data, media partners were able to identify 10 governments believed to be responsible for selecting the targets: Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Morocco, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Hungary, India, and the United Arab Emirates. Citizen Lab has also found evidence of all 10 being clients of NSO.

What does NSO Group say?

You can read NSO Group's [full statement here](#). The company has always said it does not have access to the data of its customers' targets. Through its lawyers, NSO said the consortium had made “incorrect assumptions” about

which clients use the company's technology. It said the 50,000 number was "exaggerated" and that the list could not be a list of numbers "targeted by governments using Pegasus". The lawyers said NSO had reason to believe the list accessed by the consortium "is not a list of numbers targeted by governments using Pegasus, but instead, may be part of a larger list of numbers that might have been used by NSO Group customers for other purposes". They said it was a list of numbers that anyone could search on an open source system. After further questions, the lawyers said the consortium was basing its findings "on misleading interpretation of leaked data from accessible and overt basic information, such as HLR Lookup services, which have no bearing on the list of the customers' targets of Pegasus or any other NSO products ... we still do not see any correlation of these lists to anything related to use of NSO Group technologies". Following publication, they explained that they considered a "target" to be a phone that was the subject of a successful or attempted (but failed) infection by Pegasus, and reiterated that the list of 50,000 phones was too large for it to represent "targets" of Pegasus. They said that the fact that a number appeared on the list was in no way indicative of whether it had been selected for surveillance using Pegasus.

What is HLR lookup data?

The term HLR, or home location register, refers to a database that is essential to operating mobile phone networks. Such registers keep records on the networks of phone users and their general locations, along with other identifying information that is used routinely in routing calls and texts. Telecoms and surveillance experts say HLR data can sometimes be used in the early phase of a surveillance attempt, when identifying whether it is possible to connect to a phone. The consortium understands NSO clients have the capability through an interface on the Pegasus system to conduct HLR lookup inquiries. It is unclear whether Pegasus operators are required to conduct HRL lookup inquiries via its interface to use its software; an NSO source stressed its clients may have different reasons – unrelated to Pegasus – for conducting HLR lookups via an NSO system.

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

[This investigation](#) began with an enormous leak of documents that Forbidden Stories and Amnesty International had access to. In this list of more than 50,000 phone numbers identified in advance of potential surveillance by clients of NSO Group, we even found the names of some of our colleagues – journalists we had worked with on past investigations.

But the scale of this scandal could only be uncovered by journalists around the world working together. By sharing access to this data with the other media organisations in the Forbidden Stories consortium, we were able to develop additional sources, collect hundreds of documents and put together the harrowing evidence of a surveillance apparatus that has been wielded ferociously against swaths of civil society – outside of all legal restrictions.

Among those whose phone numbers appear in the data: human rights defenders, political opponents, lawyers, diplomats, and heads of state – not to mention more than [180 journalists](#) from nearly two dozen countries. Some are local reporters, others renowned television anchors. Many investigate corruption and political scandals that threaten the highest levels of power. Most already face censorship and intimidation. But few of them could have imagined having been selected by their governments for possible targeting by such an invisible and invasive form of surveillance.

The list of journalists targeted using Pegasus is long: award-winning Azerbaijani journalist Khadija Ismayilova; reporter Szabolcs Panyi from Direkt36, a Hungarian investigative media outlet; freelance Moroccan journalist Hicham Mansouri; the director of the French investigative site Mediapart, Edwy Plenel; and the founders of the Indian independent media the Wire, one of the few news organisations in the country that does not rely on money from private business entities.

[What is Pegasus spyware and how does it hack phones?](#)

[Read more](#)

For NSO Group's government clients, Pegasus is the perfect weapon to “kill the story”. Invasive surveillance of journalists and activists is not simply an attack on those individuals; it is a way to deprive millions of citizens of independent information about their own governments. When they hack a journalist's phone, they are able to extract the most sensitive information

that it holds. What was that journalist working on? Who are their sources? Where are they stashing their documents? Who are their loved ones? What private information could be used to blackmail and defame them?

Q&A

What is the Pegasus project?

Show

The Pegasus project is a collaborative journalistic investigation into the NSO Group and its clients. The company sells surveillance technology to governments worldwide. Its flagship product is Pegasus, spying software – or spyware – that targets iPhones and Android devices. Once a phone is infected, a Pegasus operator can secretly extract chats, photos, emails and location data, or activate microphones and cameras without a user knowing.

Forbidden Stories, a Paris-based nonprofit journalism organisation, and Amnesty International had access to a leak of more than 50,000 phone numbers selected as targets by clients of NSO since 2016. Access to the data was then shared with the Guardian and 16 other news organisations, including the Washington Post, Le Monde, Die Zeit and Süddeutsche Zeitung. More than 80 journalists have worked collaboratively over several months on the investigation, which was coordinated by Forbidden Stories.

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

Journalists have long thought that new technologies – the armada of encrypted communications that they rely on – are their allies, critical blockades against censorship. With the existence of cyber-surveillance tools as advanced as Pegasus, they have been brutally awoken to the fact that the greatest threats are hiding in the places they once thought to be the safest. The Pegasus project poses important questions about the privatisation of the surveillance industry and the lack of global safeguards for everyday citizens.

When a threat as large as this emerges, imperilling fundamental rights such as the right to free speech, journalists need to come together. If one reporter

is threatened or killed, another can take over and ensure that the story is not silenced. Forty-five years ago, the first collaborative journalism project was launched after the murder of Don Bolles, a journalist in Phoenix, Arizona. In 2018, Forbidden Stories coordinated the Daphne project in the wake of the assassination of Daphne Caruana Galizia in Malta. We have continued to pursue the work of journalists who have been murdered for their work – whether that was investigating environmental scandals or tracking Mexican drug cartels – alongside dozens of news organisations.

The collaboration of journalists from around the world is without a doubt one of the best defences against these violent attacks on global democracy.

- *Laurent Richard is the founder and director of Forbidden Stories, a consortium of journalists that was awarded the 2019 European press prize and the 2021 George Polk award for its work continuing the investigations of threatened reporters. Sandrine Rigaud is the editor-in-chief of Forbidden Stories.*
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Why are Tory councillors in Essex censoring artwork?

[Tim Burrows](#)

A boorish section of the UK right doesn't get that you don't have to be left wing to appreciate art, even art you disagree with



An English Garden by Gabriella Hirst in Gunners Park, Shoeburyness, before it was removed. Photograph: Connor Turansky

An English Garden by Gabriella Hirst in Gunners Park, Shoeburyness, before it was removed. Photograph: Connor Turansky

Mon 19 Jul 2021 03.00 EDT

From my house in Southend I can hear giant explosions reverberating along the flat [Essex](#) fringe. These blasts, from the Ministry of Defence-owned Foulness Island at the mouth of the Thames estuary, sometimes sound like a car boot the size of a small town being repeatedly shut. Other days they make my desk vibrate and the window frames click. Recently my daughter finally asked the dreaded question: "Daddy, what is making these

explosions?” I decided to level with her as best I could. The army was testing weapons, I said, but it was nothing to worry about (for us at least).

It seems some of Southend’s local councillors don’t treat their constituents with the same maturity as I do my four-year-old. [An English Garden](#) – a contemplative artwork in the form of a rose garden and some benches installed in a park next to a former British army garrison in Shoeburyness, near Foulness – has been removed earlier than scheduled after a handful of local Conservative councillors objected to what it said about activities on nearby MoD land and their wider implications.

Created by the Australian artist Gabriella Hirst, the artwork was launched in May as part of the celebrated [Estuary festival](#). For the artist, it was the culmination of years of meticulous work reviving the rare modern breed floribunda rose Atom Bomb, which was introduced to the market in 1953, and examining the “violent legacies and historical traumas of atomic armament”. Hirst found one of the few Atom Bombs left in the world in a botanical garden in Tuscany and had it grafted and then sent to Britain. The roses used in An English Garden were carefully grafted and cultivated over two years in Southend.

These flowers are now in storage, thanks to the councillors’ objection to the wording of a plaque in the installation that detailed the fact that nuclear weapons were assembled at Foulness ([a matter of record](#)) before being shipped to Australia, where they were detonated. The most vocal of the offended councillors, James Moyies, has said he objected to the artist’s view that by [increasing its nuclear armament by 40%](#), the UK government was directing “considerable resources towards industries of violence instead of those of care”, and by the suggestion that “Britain had a historical and ongoing identity as a colonial nuclear state”.

The councillors emailed the local arts charity Metal, which commissioned the work jointly with the artists’ charity the Old Waterworks, saying that it constituted “a direct far leftwing attack on our History, our People and our Democratically Elected Government”. They claimed that residents had complained, although Metal said its staffed information desk based a couple of metres from the artwork received no complaints – and many locals have since spoken out in support. An ultimatum was issued to change the plaque’s

wording. The artist, the curator and Metal all agreed they would do no such thing.

A standoff over two days ensued as threats increased that if Metal didn't change the plaque's wording by 6pm on 23 June "action" would be taken against the work, and it would be brought to "national attention", according to [a statement by Metal](#). Hirst said she wanted the work to stay no matter what. Metal feared the piece's nuances would be lost if it became the latest site of a culture war skirmish, and also wished "to protect the wellbeing and mental health of a small team of staff and volunteers in Southend", so decided to remove it.

Moyies was elected as a Ukip councillor in West Shoebury in 2014 and became Vote Leave regional director in 2016 before defecting to the Tories in 2017. He is now, a little predictably, a Johnson loyalist. He declined to comment to the Guardian, other than to say that he believed the whole story was "concocted". He has [denied](#) allegations of threatening or bullying behaviour. He also [took to Twitter](#) to say that the British Nuclear Test Veterans Association, which said the [work's removal](#) was an insult to the veterans and their families, "is now tied up in defending a far left artistic movement".

How did we get here? The seeds of all this were partly sown in 2016, not just by the politics emboldened by the leave vote, but also by smaller changes to the nation's cultural politics – specifically, the publication the same year of a [cultural white paper](#) put together by the then culture secretary, John Whittingdale, part of which talked up the idea of Arts Council-funded "placemaking". "We want our national cultural institutions and funders – in the public, private and charitable sectors – to work together and back the vision of local leaders, local authorities, local businesses, local communities, cultural organisations and others," it said. While this can be read as a commonsensical approach to using arts funding wisely, it could result in local arts trusts and artists being required to talk up the positive image of a place instead of critiquing or challenging it.

Once the furore over the plaque's removal [started to build online](#), Moyies told BBC Essex radio that he objected to the work as it didn't "celebrate" the people of Shoeburyness, using the Estuary festival's claim that it

“celebrates the lives, landscapes and histories of the spectacular Thames estuary” against it. In this way, “placemaking” becomes the pretext for a kind of soft, cultural authoritarianism.

Despite the Conservative councillors’ success, the amount of local support for the work before and after its removal has been clear. Southend borough council’s portfolio holder for culture has conveyed, in an email to Metal, dismay that the organisation was put in such a position. While alarming in the short term, the affair – like the government’s self-generated row over taking the knee – might be a small-scale example of how Johnsonian populists are starting to overplay their hand.

What this boorish section of the UK right do not understand is that you don’t have to be left wing to appreciate art, even if you do not agree with it. After Moyies took to local radio to explain his objection to the work, a man who said he was a local Royal Engineers nuclear veteran and served in the Christmas islands during five tests between 1952 and 1962, called in to reply. “I think it’s ridiculous taking [An English Garden] away. To start pulling up rose bushes just because of a plaque that wasn’t running anybody down,” he said. “It was telling the truth. It’s history, it’s gone.”

- Tim Burrows writes about society, culture and place. He is currently working on a book about Essex
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[Space](#)

How the billionaire space race could be one giant leap for pollution

One rocket launch produces up to 300 tons of carbon dioxide into the upper atmosphere where it can remain for years



A SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket launches at Cape Canaveral in Florida.
Photograph: Joe Marino/UPI/Rex/Shutterstock

A SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket launches at Cape Canaveral in Florida.
Photograph: Joe Marino/UPI/Rex/Shutterstock

Katharine Gammon

Mon 19 Jul 2021 02.00 EDT

Last week [Virgin Galactic](#) took Richard Branson past the edge of space, roughly 86 km up – part of a new space race with the Amazon billionaire Jeff Bezos, who aims to make a similar journey on Tuesday.

Both very wealthy businessmen hope to vastly expand the number of people in space. “We’re here to make space more accessible to all,” [said Branson](#), shortly after his flight. “Welcome to the dawn of a new space age.”

Already, people are buying tickets to space. Companies including [SpaceX](#), Virgin Galactic and Space Adventures want to make space tourism more common.

[Half of emissions cuts will come from future tech, says John Kerry](#)

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The Japanese billionaire Yusaku Maezawa spent an undisclosed sum of money with SpaceX in 2018 for a possible future private trip around the moon and back. And this June, an anonymous space lover paid \$28m to fly on Blue Origin's New Shepard with Bezos – though later backed out due to a "[scheduling conflict](#)".

But this launch of a new private space industry that is cultivating tourism and popular use could come with vast environmental costs, says Eloise Marais, an associate professor of physical geography at University College London. Marais studies the impact of fuels and industries on the atmosphere.

When rockets launch into space, they require a huge amount of propellants to make it out of the Earth's atmosphere. For SpaceX's Falcon 9 rocket, it is kerosene, and for Nasa it is liquid hydrogen in their new [Space](#) Launch System. Those fuels emit a variety of substances into the atmosphere, including carbon dioxide, water, chlorine and other chemicals.

The carbon emissions from rockets are small compared with the aircraft industry, she says. But they are increasing at nearly 5.6% a year, and Marais has been running a simulation for a decade, to figure out at what point will they compete with traditional sources we are familiar with.



The rocket motor on Richard Branson's Unity 22 burns as it heads toward space. Photograph: Virgin Galactic/Zuma Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

“For one long-haul plane flight it’s one to three tons of carbon dioxide [per passenger],” says Marais. For one rocket launch it’s 200-300 tonnes of carbon dioxide carrying 4 or so passengers – close on two orders of magnitude more, according to Marais. “So it doesn’t need to grow that much more to compete with other sources.”

Right now, the number of rocket flights is very small: in the whole of 2020, for instance, there were 114 attempted orbital launches in the world, according to Nasa. That compares with the airline industry’s more than 100,000 flights each day on average.

But emissions from rockets are emitted right into the upper atmosphere, which means they stay there for a long time: two to three years. Even water injected into the upper atmosphere – where it can form clouds – can have warming impacts, says Marais. “Even something as seemingly innocuous as water can have an impact.”

Closer to the ground, all fuels emit huge amounts of heat, which can add ozone to the troposphere, where it acts like a greenhouse gas and retains heat. In addition to carbon dioxide, fuels like kerosene and methane also

produce soot. And in the upper atmosphere, the ozone layer can be destroyed by the combination of elements from burning fuels.

“While there are a number of environmental impacts resulting from the launch of space vehicles, the depletion of stratospheric ozone is the most studied and most immediately concerning,” wrote Jessica Dallas, a senior policy adviser at the New Zealand Space Agency, in an analysis of [research on space launch emissions](#) published last year.

Another [report from 2019](#) penned by the Center for Space Policy and Strategy likened the space emissions problem to that of space debris, which the authors say creates an existential risk to the industry. “Today, launch vehicle emissions present a distinctive echo of the space debris problem. Rocket engine exhaust emitted into the stratosphere during ascent to orbit adversely impacts the global atmosphere,” they wrote.

“We just don’t know how large the space tourism industry could become,” says Marais.

A new market report estimates that the global suborbital transportation and space tourism market is estimated to reach \$2.58bn in 2031, growing 17.15% each year of the next decade.

“The major driving factor for the market’s robustness will be focused efforts to enable space transportation, emerging startups in suborbital transportation, and increasing developments in low-cost launching sites,” the [report](#) says.

In the past, most space transportation has been focused on cargo supply missions to the International Space Station and satellite launch services, but currently, this focus has shifted to in-space transportation, planetary explorations, crewed missions, suborbital transportation and space tourism.

Several companies, including SpaceX, Blue Origin and Virgin Galactic, have been focusing on developing platforms such as rocket-powered suborbital vehicles that will enable the industry to carry out suborbital transportation and space tourism.

People have pointed out that the money these billionaires have poured into space technology could be invested in making life better on our planet, where wildfires, heatwaves and other climate disasters are becoming more frequent as the globe warms up in the climate crisis.

“Is anyone else alarmed that billionaires are having their own private space race while record-breaking heatwaves are sparking a ‘fire-breathing dragon of clouds’ and cooking sea creatures to death in their shells?” the former US Labor Secretary Robert Reich [tweeted](#) last week.

Marais says that there is always an element of excitement to new developments in space – but it’s still possible to be responsible while doing something exciting. She urges caution as the space tourism industry grows, and says there are currently no international rules around the kinds of fuels used and their impact on the environment. “We have no regulations currently around rocket emissions,” she says. “The time to act is now – while the billionaires are still buying their tickets.”

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Tokyo Olympic Games 2020

Toyota scraps Olympics TV adverts amid lukewarm support in Japan

- Tokyo 2020 sponsor's executives pull out of opening ceremony
- Czech beach volleyball player tests positive in Olympic Village



A man wearing a face mask walks by the logo of Toyota Motor Corp. at its showroom in Tokyo. Photograph: Koji Sasahara/AP

A man wearing a face mask walks by the logo of Toyota Motor Corp. at its showroom in Tokyo. Photograph: Koji Sasahara/AP

[Sean Ingle](#) in Tokyo

[@seaningle](#)

Mon 19 Jul 2021 05.33 EDT

One of the biggest sponsors of the Olympics, [Toyota](#), has announced it will not run Tokyo 2020-related adverts on TV during the Games because of the lacklustre public support in Japan. Toyota's chief executive, Akio Toyoda, and other senior executives will also not attend Friday's opening ceremony in a further blow to these troubled Olympics.

[There are risks but it would be unfair if Tokyo Olympics did not go ahead |](#)

[Greg Rutherford](#)

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“It is true that Toyota will not be attending the opening ceremony, and the decision was made considering various factors including no spectators,” a

Toyota spokesperson said. “We will not be airing any commercials related to the Games in [Japan](#).”

Toyota had not only planned to showcase its driverless cars at the Games but had also designed robots for the new Olympic stadium that, among other things, could take – and then bring – food and drinks orders to spectators using wheelchairs.

The Games suffered a further blow on Monday when the Czech beach volleyball player Ondrej Perusic was named as the third athlete to test positive in the Olympic village. It means Perusic and his partner David Schweiner will miss their opening match on 26 July and could be ruled out of the entire event.

However the Czech Olympic Committee said it was seeking a postponement of the players’ first game in the hope Perusic, who is fully vaccinated and has no symptoms, can still play. Martin Doktor, the COC chef de mission, said the organisation was looking at “other options that would allow the boys to enter the tournament later, according to the rules”.

Meanwhile organisers face an anxious wait to see if the 60 Japanese corporations who have paid more than \$3bn for sponsorship rights follow Toyota in untying their brands from an event that has so far failed to win public support.

[Japanese people cower from Games they don't want and should not be happening | Barry Glendenning](#)

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“These partners and sponsors must have been struggling to support Tokyo 2020,” said the Tokyo 2020 spokesperson Masa Takaya. “Of course, there is mixed public sentiment towards the Games. There must be a decision by each company in terms of how they should be able to convey their messages to the public from its corporate perspective.”

With only four days before the opening ceremony, 68% of respondents in an Asahi newspaper poll expressed doubt about the ability of Olympic

organisers to control coronavirus infections, with 55% saying they were opposed to the Games going ahead.

However the IOC president, Thomas Bach, has repeatedly said there is “[zero risk](#)” of participants at the Games spreading the virus to the Japanese public because of the strict measures in place at the event.

Three-quarters of the 1,444 people in the telephone survey said they agreed with a decision to ban spectators from events.

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[India](#)

Dozens dead in Mumbai after ‘monstrous’ monsoon rains cause landslide

Thunderstorm that caused the intense rainfall in Indian city was described as ‘uncommon’ for the time of year



National Disaster Response Force personnel recover a body from the rubble in the aftermath of a landslide at a Bharat Nagar slum in Chembur, Mumbai, India. Photograph: Divyakant Solanki/EPA

National Disaster Response Force personnel recover a body from the rubble in the aftermath of a landslide at a Bharat Nagar slum in Chembur, Mumbai, India. Photograph: Divyakant Solanki/EPA

[Hannah Ellis-Petersen in Delhi](#)

Mon 19 Jul 2021 02.05 EDT

More than 30 people have died in the Indian city of Mumbai after an intense burst of rainfall caused a landslide and wall collapse, as changing monsoon patterns due to climate change lead to more extreme rains across [India](#).

Heavy rainfall, described by meteorologists as “monstrous”, hammered down on India’s financial capital over the weekend causing mass devastation. In the eastern suburb of Chembur, the collapse of a wall in the night led to a landslide that enveloped homes as people were sleeping and killed at least 21, according to the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF).

At least 10 people were also killed in the suburb of Vikhroli in the city’s north-east, when a landslide hit several homes, and three others in the city were killed in separate incidents.

The rain also inundated a water purification plant, leaving part of the city without drinking water. Mumbai residents were advised to boil water from the tap before consuming it.

With heavy rainfall predicted for the next five days, the city is bracing itself for further casualties.



A wall collapsed on some shanties in Chembur’s Bharat Nagar area due to a landslide after heavy rainfall in the city Photograph: Divyakant Solanki/EPA

The coastal city of Mumbai is always badly hit by the monsoon, and suffers flooding every year but it is feared that the changing patterns of the rains due to climate change will lead to even more extreme flooding and damage. In recent years, the monsoon has shifted towards long dry spells broken up by burst of extreme rainfall, which are more likely to flood drains and overwhelm infrastructure in the over-populated city.

The thunderstorm that caused the intense rainfall was described as “uncommon” for this time of year. On Sunday morning, some areas of Mumbai experienced over 20cm of rainfall in the space of just a few hours.

State environment minister Aadtiya Thackeray said: “We have been talking about climate change and it is happening.”

Current monsoon modelling systems also struggle to forecast such heavy downpours, meaning it is harder to give people prior warning of potential flooding or landslides. On Sunday, it was only at 1am that a warning was put out about extreme rains.

Prime minister Narendra Modi tweeted his condolences to victims, and offered compensation to the families of those who had died in the landslides.

Mumbai, which is on the coast and is home to more than 12 million people, is also under threat from rising sea levels.

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Thailand

Thai police fire rubber bullets at protesters as Covid failures fuel anti-government anger

Long-running rallies against Thailand's prime minister have morphed into wider anger at coronavirus vaccine failures amid a surge in cases

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00:47

Thai police clash with anti-government protesters amid expanded covid lockdown – video

Associated Press

Sun 18 Jul 2021 19.35 EDT

Thai police have used teargas, rubber bullets and water cannon to disperse hundreds of anti-government protesters who held a rally in Bangkok despite coronavirus restrictions banning gatherings of more than five people.

In an effort to avoid the spread of infection, many of the protesters drove cars or rode motorbikes, instead of marching as they had in previous protests. About 1,500 riot police were deployed, along with water cannon trucks.

The demonstrators were demanding prime minister Prayuth Chan-ocha's government step down, that the budget of the monarchy and the military be cut during the pandemic, and the importation of mRNA coronavirus

vaccines that have yet to be brought to Thailand on a large scale to [fight a growing surge in cases](#).



Riot police spray water cannon at protesters outside Government House in Bangkok. Photograph: Chaiwat Subprasom/SOPA Images/REX/Shutterstock

Sunday's rally came as [Thailand](#) recorded its largest single-day jump in virus infections – nearly 11,400 – and as fresh restrictions were announced such as the shutdown of most domestic flights. Many parts of the country, including Bangkok, are already under some form of lockdown that includes restrictions on gatherings and business operations as well as a night-time curfew.

As infections and deaths climb and as more people face economic hardship, disapproval of the government's handling of the pandemic has grown.

[Thailand bans public gatherings as Covid cases hit record high](#)
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Criticism of Prayuth's government for failing to secure early and adequate vaccine supplies is widespread. Thailand mostly relies on two vaccines, including China's Sinovac shot, which some studies indicate is less effective against the Delta variant, which is [causing havoc across south-east Asia](#).

Thailand's other main vaccine is AstraZeneca, which a Thai company owned by the country's king has been producing, but only since June and in smaller than expected quantities.

Sunday's rally was led by Free Youth, a student protest group that drew tens of thousands to its protests last year, when it had three main demands: that Prayuth's government step down, the constitution be amended to make it more democratic and the nation's monarchy become more accountable.

Jutatip Sirikhan, one of Free Youth's main activists, said in a phone interview that many people have died from Covid-19 because of the lack of transparency and mismanagement of Prayuth and his cabinet.

"If we don't come out now, we don't know how long we shall survive and whether we will have a chance to do it again," she said of the virus and the protests.

Thailand has recorded a total of 403,386 confirmed Covid-19 cases and 3,341 related deaths since the pandemic started. More than 90% of cases and deaths have occurred since April this year. At the weekend, daily virus deaths rose above 100 for the first time.

The protesters gathered at the capital's Democracy Monument in the early afternoon, where organisers distributed N95 masks, medical gloves, sanitiser spray and raincoats before attempting to go to Government House, which hosts the prime minister's offices.



A protester makes a three-finger salute as they burn effigies signifying coronavirus victims. Photograph: Sirachai Arunrugstichai/Getty Images

Organisers also handed out mock corpses in white burial shrouds representing Covid-19 victims, which were later placed on the ground and set alight atop an image of Prayuth at an intersection near Government House. The eerie figures also evoked images of the bodies of several Thai activists who had apparently been kidnapped in 2019 from where they lived in exile in neighbouring Laos.

Deputy national police spokesperson Kissana Pattanacharoen acknowledged that the authorities used water cannon, teargas and rubber bullets to disperse the protesters after several warnings were given.

Reports of injuries were not complete, but the city's Erawan medical centre emergency services said two people were sent to the hospital from the protests, which the organisers called an end to before nightfall.

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Dominic Cummings

Dominic Cummings tells BBC Johnson denied Covid would overwhelm NHS

Former aide says Boris Johnson held out on October lockdown because those ‘dying are essentially all over 80’



Dominic Cummings, during an interview with Laura Kuensberg, first broadcast on BBC2 on 20 July 2021. The former chief adviser also released WhatsApp messages from October. Photograph: Jeff Overs/BBC/PA

Dominic Cummings, during an interview with Laura Kuensberg, first broadcast on BBC2 on 20 July 2021. The former chief adviser also released WhatsApp messages from October. Photograph: Jeff Overs/BBC/PA

[Jessica Elgot](#) Chief political correspondent

[@jessicaelgot](#)

Tue 20 Jul 2021 02.14 EDT

Boris Johnson denied the NHS would be overwhelmed and said he was not prepared to lock down the country to save people in their 80s, texting his adviser “get Covid and live longer,” according to new WhatsApp messages released by [Dominic Cummings](#).

In his first TV interview, the prime minister’s former chief adviser said Johnson held out on reimposing Covid restrictions because “the people who are dying are essentially all over 80.”

Cummings also told the BBC that Johnson had been determined to go to see the Queen in person, despite people in Number 10 already falling ill with Covid in March 2020. Downing Street denies the account.

In WhatsApp messages, shared with the BBC, that were sent to aides in mid October, Johnson appears to say: “I must say I have been slightly rocked by some of the data on Covid fatalities. The median age is 82 – 81 for men 85 for women. That is above life expectancy. So get Covid and live longer. Hardly anyone under 60 goes into hospital (4 per cent) and of those virtually all survive.

“And I no longer buy all this NHS overwhelmed stuff. Folks I think we may need to recalibrate.”



Dominic Cummings, during an interview with Laura Kuenssberg.
Photograph: Jeff Overs/BBC/PA

Johnson also appears to text aides “There are max 3 m in this country aged over 80” and says “it shows we don’t go for nationwide lockdown.”

The new messages will cast further doubt over the actions of the prime minister in the run-up to the November lockdown, a time during which Cummings and other senior scientists have said the prime minister was fiercely opposed to lockdowns.

Cummings told the BBC that Johnson, who came close to death after he was hospitalised with Covid in April 2020, told meetings in Number 10 that he should never have agreed to the first lockdown.

He said Johnson referred to the Telegraph as “my real boss” and was extremely concerned about the reaction of the right-wing press and the Conservative party.

“He then basically reverted and said, actually the whole thing was a disaster, we should never have done it, I was right in February, we should basically just ignore it and just let the thing wash through the country and not destroy the economy and move on,” he said.

Cummings said Johnson had repeatedly ignored the advice of his chief scientific and medical advisers.

“When you get to the week of around about 15 to 19 September, by that point the data was clear about what was happening and Patrick Vallance and Chris Whitty came to Downing Street and said erm, it’s clear where this is going, we think that you should consider hitting it hard and early … the prime minister said no, no, no, no, no, I’m not doing it.”

In the BBC interview, Cummings claims that he had to stop [Boris Johnson](#) going to see the Queen in person at the beginning of the Covid pandemic, when staff in Number 10 were already falling ill and the prime minister had already instructed the public to avoid all unnecessary contact, especially with elderly people.

“I said, what are you doing, and he said, I’m going to see the Queen and I said, what on earth are you talking about, of course you can’t go and see the Queen. He said, ah, that’s what I do every Wednesday, sod this, I’m gonna go and see her,” Cummings said.

Downing Street denied that this incident took place. Buckingham Palace declined to comment.

Cummings said he eventually convinced Johnson not to take the risk. “I said to him, there’s people in this office who are isolating, you might have coronavirus, I might have coronavirus, you can’t go and see the Queen. What if you go and see her and give the Queen coronavirus?

“You obviously can’t go … I just said if you, if you give her coronavirus and she dies what, what are you gonna, you can’t do that, you can’t risk that, that’s completely insane. And he said, he basically just hadn’t thought it through, he said, yeah, ‘holy shit, I can’t go.’”

A Number 10 spokesperson told the BBC: “Since the start of the pandemic, the prime minister has taken the necessary action to protect lives and livelihoods, guided by the best scientific advice.

“The government he leads has delivered the fastest vaccination rollout in Europe, saved millions of jobs through the furlough scheme and prevented the NHS from being overwhelmed through three national lockdowns. The government is entirely focused on emerging cautiously from the pandemic and building back better.”

Cummings has launched multiple attacks on his former boss after leaving Downing Street in December, including at [a seven-hour committee meeting with MPs](#) and through a new subscription blog.

The former chief adviser was subject to [vociferous public criticism](#) after the Guardian revealed he had travelled to Durham with his family, and later to Barnard Castle, during the national lockdown.

Cummings repeated his explanation that he had left London because of threats against his family – which he told MPs in May but declined to say at a press conference he gave about the incident. “Everything that I said in the Rose Garden was true … but I didn’t go into all of the security concerns in the background,” he said.

“The way we handled the whole thing was, was wrong on the Monday. What I should have done is either just resigned and said nothing about anything, or I should have spoken to my family and said, listen we’re just gonna have to come clean about the whole thing.”

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Health

Lockdowns do not harm health more than Covid, say researchers

Little evidence that social restrictions during the pandemic have added to rates of death and ill-health

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Doctors meet ambulances arriving with patients at the Whitechapel hospital in East London Photograph: Mark Thomas/REX/Shutterstock

Doctors meet ambulances arriving with patients at the Whitechapel hospital in East London Photograph: Mark Thomas/REX/Shutterstock

Natalie Grover, Science correspondent

@NatalieGrover

Tue 20 Jul 2021 02.00 EDT

Since early in the coronavirus pandemic, critics of unprecedented lockdown measures seen worldwide have argued that these interventions cause more harm than the disease itself. But an analysis of global health data suggests there is little evidence to support the idea that the cure is worse than the disease.

The analysis, [published](#) in the journal BMJ Global Health, considered claims that lockdowns cause more health harms than Covid-19 by examining their impacts on measures including death rates, routine health services and mental health.

As part of their study, researchers examined countries which imposed heavy restrictions with few Covid cases to assess whether the intervention was triggering excess mortality, said author Prof Gavin Yamey, from the Duke Global [Health](#) Institute at Duke University.

[What were some of the collateral effects of lockdowns? | David Spiegelhalter and Anthony Masters](#)

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Using an international dataset of all-cause mortality from 94 countries, the researchers found that countries such as New Zealand and Australia experienced no excess mortality last year. In contrast, places with few Covid restrictions such as Brazil, Sweden, Russia and at times parts of the US had large numbers of excess deaths over the course of the pandemic.

“It is ... one of the most compelling pieces of evidence to support the notion that the cure was not worse than the disease,” said Yamey. “It does seem that countries that acted quickly and aggressively often had fewer deaths than in

previous years. One study showed that lockdown may have reduced annual mortality by up to 6% from eliminating flu transmission alone.”

The excess-mortality data could not rule out harms caused by lockdown or conclude whether lockdowns have a net benefit, however, especially given very high excess mortality in many nations that did pursue such strategies such as the UK, the researchers [wrote](#).

Another avenue of inquiry was healthcare services. Although data suggests a clear reduction in attendance for vital non-Covid health services during lockdowns, overwhelmed health services or a high perceived risk of infection at health facilities would also disincentivise people from accessing care, the researchers suggested. “With current evidence, it is simply not possible to support either causal assertion adequately,” they concluded.

The relationship between mental health and lockdowns is often highlighted but the link between large-scale Covid outbreaks and depression and anxiety is often overlooked, the researchers noted. “Missing school clearly affects children’s mental health, but so does losing a loved one to Covid-19.”

[Yes, lockdown was bad for mental health. Not to do it would have been worse | Lucy Foulkes and Dirk Richter](#)

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The paper, which does not include economic considerations, argues that it is likely that lockdowns have negative effects. However, “the fact that there are no locations anywhere in the world where a lockdown without large numbers of Covid cases was associated with large numbers of excess deaths shows quite convincingly that the interventions themselves cannot be worse than large Covid outbreaks, at least in the short term”.

Dr Dean Burnett, honorary research associate at Cardiff University, who was not involved in the analysis, said the study suggests many problems attributed to lockdowns cannot be easily distinguished from those caused by the pandemic itself.

“The main takeaway is that ‘deciding’ between lockdown or pandemic is a very flawed premise,” he said. “The pandemic exists, whether there’s a

lockdown or not. While lockdown may have a number of negative consequences for mental health, there's little or no evidence to say that these consequences are any worse than what we'd see in the same situation in the absence of lockdown. It's far more likely that the opposite would be true.”

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Covid vaccine certificates to be compulsory for crowded venues in England

Ministers hope move for venues such as nightclubs will boost vaccine uptake among young people

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01:27

Two jabs mandatory for English nightclubs from end of September, says PM – video

[Heather Stewart](#) Political editor

Mon 19 Jul 2021 15.12 EDT

Vaccine passports will be compulsory to enter packed venues such as nightclubs in an extraordinary U-turn announced by Boris Johnson hours after clubs were allowed to open for the first time in 16 months.

In a move that provoked an immediate backlash from Conservative backbenchers and the entertainment sector, the prime minister said that from late September, once all adults have had the chance to receive two jabs, [Covid vaccine certificates](#) would be made mandatory in England.

[How will England's domestic Covid vaccine passports work?](#)

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“I should serve notice now that by the end of September, when all over-18s will have had their chance to be double-jabbed, we are planning to make full vaccination the condition of entry to nightclubs and other venues where large crowds gather,” he said.

Unlike at pilot events, where customers have been allowed to show evidence of a negative test, they will have to prove they have been double-jabbed amid concerns in government about vaccine uptake among young people. Approximately 35% of 18- to 30-year-olds are unvaccinated, he said.

Addressing younger people directly, Johnson said: “Some of life’s most important pleasures and opportunities are likely to be increasingly dependent on vaccination.”

Less than 18 hours after almost all Covid restrictions were formally scrapped, allowing clubs to open and putting an end to mandatory masks and social distancing, the prime minister expressed concern about what he called the “continuing risk posed by nightclubs”. From just after midnight on Sunday, thousands of revellers were pictured dancing at clubs across the country as they celebrated “freedom day”.

Johnson was delivering a press conference from Chequers, where he is self-isolating after contact with the health secretary, Sajid Javid, who has tested positive for Covid.

The prime minister spoke alongside England’s deputy chief medical officer, Prof Jonathan Van-Tam, and the chief scientific adviser, Sir Patrick Vallance, both of whom struck a sombre tone about the challenges ahead.

Vallance said hospitalisations could rise “quite a lot higher” than 1,000 a day as the lifting of restrictions allows more socialising, while Van-Tam repeatedly underlined the risks of unvaccinated people gathering in crowded indoor venues.

Asked what would happen if the NHS struggles to cope over the summer, Van-Tam said the Scientific Advisory Committee on Emergencies (Sage) would have to make recommendations, which could focus on “close contact indoors”.

As ministers scramble to manage the fallout from surging Covid cases, Johnson also announced that “a very small number of named, fully vaccinated, critical workers” would be allowed to return to work after being ordered to self-isolate.

These workers, in sectors such as the police, energy supply, food production and transport, will be allowed to leave quarantine, solely to work, if they take a negative PCR test and continue to have daily rapid tests.

Their employer will have to consult with the relevant government department before allowing them to return.

Conservative backbenchers were quick to criticise the new plans to make vaccine certificates compulsory for some venues. Former Brexit secretary David Davis said: “Vaccination is sensible. But it is entirely wrong to try to coerce people into having them.”

Mark Harper, a Tory MP and former chief whip who leads the lockdown-sceptic Covid Recovery Group, suggested the government could struggle to win support for the measures among other Conservatives in parliament.

He said: “I have to say I don’t welcome the minister’s statement, particularly vaccine passports for crowded venues, which is effectively moving to compulsory vaccination. I do however look forward to the debate and the vote in parliament when he will bring forward the evidence because I don’t think that is supported by the pilots that have taken place.”

Ministers had previously backed away from the compulsory use of coronavirus certificates – which involve customers using the NHS app to show their vaccination status – in part because of backbench Tory hostility. In a recent vote on compulsory vaccinations for care workers 31 Conservatives rebelled.

Labour and the Liberal Democrats oppose the plans, raising the possibility that Conservative rebels could defeat them when they come to parliament in the autumn.

Justin Madders, shadow health minister, said: “This make-it-up-as-you-go-along government is causing more chaos when what people and businesses need is certainty. How can it be safe to go to nightclubs now, with no protective measures, if in September it will require double jab status? It makes no sense.”

The Lib Dem home affairs spokesperson Alistair Carmichael said: “Vaccine passports are Covid ID cards: unworkable, expensive and divisive.”

Businesses reacted with fury. Michael Kill, chief executive of the Night Time Industries Association, said: “What an absolute shambles ... The government’s own report into vaccine passports found they were more trouble than they’re worth – so what could possibly explain the about-turn, just as millions across the UK experience their first taste of a night out in a year and a half?”

The latest survey from the Office for National Statistics, carried out in the month to 20 June, found that about 10% of all people aged 16-29 reported being hesitant to get the Covid vaccine, dropping to 5% for those aged 30-49 and 1% for over-50s.

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Communities

‘The hospitals are very near to not coping’: UK health workers speak out



Hospitals say they are facing a perfect storm of rising coronavirus cases, staff shortages due to self-isolation and a backlog of operations. Composite: Guardian Design

Hospitals say they are facing a perfect storm of rising coronavirus cases, staff shortages due to self-isolation and a backlog of operations. Composite: Guardian Design

Six healthcare workers share their stories from the frontline amid rising Covid cases

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Rachel Obordo and Jedidajah Otte

Tue 20 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

On Monday, for the first time since the early days of the vaccination programme in the UK, new Covid cases outnumbered the number of daily doses administered. As England lifts most restrictions, six healthcare workers from paramedics to paediatricians speak about what the reality is like amid rising coronavirus infections.

The paramedic, east of England

“The hospitals are very near to not coping”

It’s horrendous: the hospitals are very near to not coping and our ambulance service is near to declaring REAP level 4 [extreme pressure]. We are seeing a lot more Covid now with cases rising. We’re taking more people into hospital who are really unwell because they’ve had to wait for treatment during lockdown. Their conditions could have been managed if they were seen earlier but now they’re deteriorating and in the acute phase. When you hear about the lifting of restrictions, people seem to forget that it’s not just about people dying of Covid: it’s the cancer patients and the ones on kidney dialysis. I totally understand people’s frustrations but we’re not in a good enough place. What’s frightening is when the media calls us “heroes” – that’s really dangerous as heroes don’t need to be protected because they don’t die, but we’re just humans, like everyone else. I still have night terrors of taking people away from their loved ones knowing they’re going to die. I’m having therapy but quite often I think: “Shit I can’t do this. I don’t want to do this any more.” I think there’s a lot of that among colleagues as mental health cases are through the roof and people can’t cope.

The paediatrician, north of England

We have seen winter levels of admissions in the emergency department”

For the last few weeks we have seen winter levels of admissions in the emergency department. Modelling suggests numbers have yet to reach their peak. We’re seeing mainly viral respiratory-tract infections in children, and it’s expected that these numbers are going to get worse. It’s because the kids normally would have been exposed to these in the winter, but they were locked down and are therefore not immune now. Another concern is rising cases of children with PIMS, which is a post-infectious viral infection that is quite rare but can be very serious, with some children needing intensive care treatment. There are also insufficient numbers of psychiatric beds for children, which means we have significant numbers of kids with mental health issues presenting in acute medical paediatric units, where they’re now stuck. Overall, it’s unsustainable working in this environment, and made worse with staff absences due to self-isolation. Because of such high levels of admissions, elective surgical cases are being cancelled. An elective non-urgent case will at some point become urgent if not dealt with in a timely fashion. I think the decision not to vaccinate children is reckless. They should all be offered vaccines.

The GP, Isle of Wight

We’ve had families testing positive with the Delta variant”

We are lucky in that not a single clinical member of staff has had CovidSince May, however, we’ve had families testing positive with the Delta variant and lots of children have had to self-isolate. We’re also still working through the same backlog we had in May. Even though people are being vaccinated, it takes three weeks to work so I think we will continue to see the number of cases rise as restrictions ease. For us, the biggest concern is masks no longer being compulsory and getting rid of that is something we just don’t feel we’re ready to do. In our view it’s not just a concern around Covid but viral illnesses we’re seeing in children. Masks are for both patients and staff and I think we may still insist people wear them because of

the healthcare setting we work in. I understand lifting restrictions in the summer as we tend to be quieter with other illnesses as we're outdoors more, but with cases rising you just question whether we should have a few more weeks to allow people's immunity to kick in. Everyone talks about the flu in winter but we are already seeing winter illnesses in children.

The midwife, Greater Manchester

A lot more staff are having to isolate due to family members having Covid”

I'm working more than 60 hours a week to cover sickness because a lot more staff are having to isolate due to family members having Covid, or they've come into contact with someone who has tested positive. We've also seen an increase in women and their partners testing positive too. We have to isolate them when that happens and we only have a certain number of side rooms that are normally for women who are septic or who have high blood loss. If cases rise to 100,000 a day then we'll have to put them in bays because there's nowhere else. I've met some women who don't want to be vaccinated as they're worried about how it might affect their baby before it's born. Most of them book in for a jab after giving birth but pregnant women are vulnerable and Covid is still a danger to them. Lifting the restrictions might be a little too much at once. There are people in hospital who have had two vaccinations so it's not foolproof, and the more people who catch Covid the more likely it will mutate.

The ICU Nurse, London

Right now we can manage”

We've had Covid patients throughout the year, they never stopped coming, and at all times at least one intensive care patient with Covid, though since the last peak in January a maximum of four at any given time. Before the younger people were offered vaccinations, we regularly had Covid patients in their twenties in the ICU.

Sadly, we're already seeing that people are slacking on taking precautions, such as washing hands and wearing face masks. They walk into the hospital not thinking about the dangers. Right now we can manage, but we do wonder: "will it go off the charts again?". I will certainly still be wearing face masks and hope people will continue being cautious. I hope people will be sensible in public, stay at home when unwell – even if it's just a cold – and keep on getting vaccinated. I'm quite apprehensive about the winter.

The cardiac physiologist, Birmingham

Lots of patients with long Covid have been referred to us”

Lots of patients with long Covid have been referred to us to see if it's affected their heart. We don't know much about it and we want to see if it has an effect on other parts of their bodies, not just their lungs. Referrals have increased as services that were closed have now reopened. Some patients stayed at home with their problems and were too scared to go to hospital or see their GP. Only now are they being referred for all these tests and that's why we're seeing an increase. I think the lifting of restrictions is difficult. The number of cases in the community is going up, so on paper it doesn't seem like the right time. My main worry is people travelling. While we might be safe here, we don't want to bring variants from other parts of the world, especially if other countries have not had such good vaccine programmes. We've got a responsibility not just nationally but globally to tackle it.

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‘Step one to normality’: shoppers and workers test ‘freedom day’

From Stockport to Westminster, people in England ventured back out – masked or maskless – on the first day of reopening

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Tracey Draycott, her daughter Jessica Taylor, great granddaughter and her mother Wendy shopping in Stockport on the government’s Freedom Day.
Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

Tracey Draycott, her daughter Jessica Taylor, great granddaughter and her mother Wendy shopping in Stockport on the government’s Freedom Day.
Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

[Maya Wolfe-Robinson](#), [Kevin Rawlinson](#) and [Gwyn Topham](#)

Mon 19 Jul 2021 13.18 EDT

“It’s so nice – step one to normality” is how Tracy Draycott, 55, framed the government’s much-vaunted “freedom day”. Four generations of one family – Draycott, her daughter, her granddaughter and her mother – were enjoying a day out in sweltering weather at the Merseyway shopping precinct, Stockport.

Draycott, a pharmacy manager, said she would still be wearing a mask at work to protect vulnerable patients, but would be ditching all other restrictions. “We need to start going again,” she said, adding that she was planning a big barbecue for the extended family after a difficult pandemic. Her daughter, Jessica Taylor, 27, had given birth to her first baby a week into the first lockdown, and Tracy’s mother had found the isolation “really hard”.

The family is unconcerned about rising cases – Stockport currently has 483.9 positive coronavirus cases per 100,000 people compared to the UK average of 376.1, with a jump of 33% in cases from last week. Draycott compares it to the seasonal rise in flu, “and we don’t stop our lives for that,” she said.

However, not everyone shares the feeling of liberation. “I came on the bus, and I was the only person not wearing a mask,” added Wendy Draycott, 78.



Bus passengers in Stockport on ‘freedom day’. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

About eight in 10 bus passengers arriving at Mersey Square, Stockport, had their faces covered. Some were through express choice, although a few were unaware of any change to the legal requirement. One bus driver said there had been no palpable difference, although he was relieved he would no longer have the difficult job of trying to implement a compulsory policy.

Transport for London said mask compliance on buses and tubes had been observed at about 85%, roughly unchanged from earlier rates. Travellers leaving London Bridge station were largely in favour of maintaining mask-wearing. “I will still be wearing mine in shops, on the underground – anywhere I feel I should be,” said 64-year-old Janet Rands.

[Test and trace is still crucial to curbing Covid, but can it cope with ‘freedom’?](#)

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She and Tracey Kerr, 49, were in London for a short trip from Hull and were keen that people be allowed to still move freely around the UK. Neither saw mask-wearing as particularly negotiable. “My friend came down to London

for the England match and she, her husband and everyone else all got Covid,” Kerr said.

For 24-year-old Victoria Woodwards, the motivation had more to do with other people. “To be honest, I just wear it to keep them happy,” she said as she stood at an entrance to London Bridge station.

And she was critical of the government’s strategy, saying: “I don’t feel like we should be wearing masks. Now clubs are open, what are people going to do – wear their masks inside? It’s stupid. But you let people out and we will have thousands of cases and go back in again.”



Ben Mitchell, a trainee at Dry hair salon. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

As well as clubs, many hair salons have fully embraced the unlocking. Ben Mitchell, a trainee stylist at Dry salon in Stockport, said it felt “amazing” to have removed masks and screens. “I feel like everyone will feel a bit more free now – and hear a bit better,” he said.

Ilyess Guebra agreed, saying he had found it difficult to breathe with a face covering, particularly on hot days. The IT specialist was most excited about being able to return home to Italy.

In the majority of shops and banks, however, there was no grand ripping down of Perspex screens. The company that owns Merseyway had advised its 100 or so tenants to retain regular cleaning procedures, floor graphics promoting social distancing and signs encouraging customers to sanitise hands and wear masks.

Alison Jackson, who works in Card Express, said mask wearing was up slightly if anything and that by mid-morning not a single customer had come in unmasked. “We’ve got young ’uns who work here, who have first vaccinations but not the second, so we’ll keep our masks on for them,” she said.



Ilyess Guebra in front of the Merseyway shopping centre, Stockport.
Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

Seventeen-year-old Lauren Adams is also thinking of others. The college student has only recently recovered her taste and smell after a bout of Covid-19, and worries about her mother, who is vulnerable. She will keep her mask on inside and continue only meeting up with two of her friends at a time, preferably outside.

Boris Johnson had “got a bit too excited” by unlocking while cases were so high, she said. “I think he’s silly … but I can’t stop him,” Adams added.

Among office workers in the City of London, there was a buzz among people who felt they could see the end in sight. One worker, Vicky Mahan, said she had been exempt from wearing masks, but was aware that a lot of her colleagues had had a difficult time with them.



Vicky Mahan: ‘People want to move on.’ Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian

“I think people had a moment where they were getting excited,” the 30-year-old said, adding that she felt many had discarded their masks since the law changed. “Not only is it getting hotter, but people also want to move on.”

Meanwhile, the Commons speaker, Lindsay Hoyle, said he was “very worried” about the spread of the disease across parliament and revealed a “large number of people” working there had been pinged or contacted by test and trace.

He also urged MPs to carry on wearing a mask when the chamber was packed, though many were seen having already shed their face covering since some Covid measures were removed from the room, including signs notifying MPs which seats they can sit in.

Other rules are also being relaxed across the parliamentary estate, with one of the most popular bars, Strangers, due to open its doors for the first time

since the coronavirus outbreak began last March. The twice-daily briefing of political journalists in Downing Street that has also been conducted remotely for the last 16 months will also restart again in person from Tuesday.

One of those recently forced to isolate was the deputy speaker Dame Rosie Winterton, who has been temporarily replaced by the Labour MP Judith Cummins.

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China reports highest number of Covid cases since January

Confirmed cases doubled compared to a day earlier, with most imported from neighbouring Myanmar

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China has recorded its highest daily number of Covid cases since January.
Photograph: Xinhua/REX/Shutterstock

China has recorded its highest daily number of Covid cases since January.
Photograph: Xinhua/REX/Shutterstock

Reuters

Tue 20 Jul 2021 00.54 EDT

China has reported the highest daily tally of new confirmed Covid-19 cases since January, driven by a surge in imported infections in southwestern Yunnan province, which shares a border with [Myanmar](#).

Mainland [China](#) recorded 65 new confirmed cases for 19 July, compared with 31 a day earlier, the National Health Commission said in a statement on Tuesday. That was the most since 30 January, when 92 new cases were reported.

Imported infections accounted for most of the new cases reported for 19 July, with Yunnan reporting 41 new cases originating from abroad, all of whom were Chinese nationals who recently returned from Myanmar.

The current bout of cases in Yunnan started on 4 July, and has been concentrated in Ruili and Longchuan, two small cities on China's border with Myanmar, which has been hit by a sharp uptick in infections since June.

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Ruili, battling its fourth outbreak since the pandemic started, reported seven new locally transmitted cases for 19 July, while Longchuan had one.

Ruili is a key overland transit point for Yunnan, which has a 4,000 km (2,485-mile) border with Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam.

The Yunnan outbreak marks the second cluster of infections in [China](#) involving the highly contagious Delta strain, after an [outbreak in southern Guangdong province](#) in May through June.

Yunnan vice-governor Zong Guoying promised on Sunday to establish a “fortress of iron” to stop further transmissions as he visited Ruili.

In the prefecture of Xishuangbanna, which also shares a long and porous border with Myanmar, police have set up checkpoints on all roads to inspect all incoming and outgoing traffic.

Travel outside Xishuangbanna’s urban centre of Jinghong was discouraged, and special permits were also required to enter neighbouring cities of

Lincang and Puer, as well as Ruili, police told Reuters during a recent visit.

For mainland China, 19 asymptomatic coronavirus cases were detected on 19 July, compared to 17 a day earlier. China does not count asymptomatic infections as confirmed cases.

China's total of Covid-19 cases has now reached 92,342, with deaths unchanged at 4,636.

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Muslims across Indonesia mark grim Eid al-Adha as Covid crisis deepens

Government bans large gatherings and toughens travel restrictions in world's most populous Muslim country

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Indonesian Muslims perform Eid Al-Adha prayer at the Sabilul Khoirot mosque in Surabaya amid a devastating Covid outbreak. Photograph: Robertus Pudyanto/Getty Images

Indonesian Muslims perform Eid Al-Adha prayer at the Sabilul Khoirot mosque in Surabaya amid a devastating Covid outbreak. Photograph: Robertus Pudyanto/Getty Images

[Gemma Holliani Cahya](#) in Jakarta and agencies

Tue 20 Jul 2021 02.35 EDT

Muslims across Indonesia marked a grim Eid al-Adha festival for a second year on Tuesday as the country [struggles to cope](#) with a devastating new wave of coronavirus cases.

Three weeks of surging infections and deaths have resulted in [Indonesia](#) replacing India as Asia's Covid-19 hotspot, with the most confirmed daily cases. In response to the new wave, the government had banned large gatherings and toughened travel restrictions. Religious leaders have also urged the faithful to pray inside their homes and children were told to not go out to meet friends.

Every year on the Eid al-Adha holiday, Muslims in Indonesia usually gather at their local mosque for mass prayers, and hold family gatherings to enjoy food together. People gather in front of mosques to watch as goats and cattle, donated by devotees, are killed as sacrificial animals. The meat is then distributed to the poor to celebrate the Islamic day of sacrifice.

However, on Tuesday, the Eid al-Adha celebrations in Jakarta were quieter than ever, as many families in the capital decided to stay at home. Most are praying inside their houses, and greeting their relatives and families by calling them on the phone.

[Indonesia coronavirus cases](#)

Last week, the country [reported more daily Covid-19 infections than India and Brazil](#) for three days running. More than 72,000 people have died, according to official records. These figures are thought to be an underestimate owing to a lack of testing.

Most of Indonesia's cases are on the densely populated island of Java, where more than half of the country's 270 million people live.

Last year, the government allowed Eid al-Adha prayers to go ahead in regions that did not record many Covid cases. However, this year, after the imposition of emergency public activity restrictions, the religious affairs

ministry banned mass prayers in public places in regions classified as orange zones, where there is a medium risk of infection, and red zones, areas with a very high risk of infection. All of Jakarta's regencies are classified as red zones, except the Thousand Islands regency.

Other areas are permitted to hold mass prayers but with strict restrictions.

[Making coffins, giving shelter: volunteers step in as Covid overwhelms Indonesia](#)

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While most decided to stay home, several mosques across Jakarta reportedly held the mass prayers, including in Jami At-Taqwa, in Kalideres, West Jakarta.

In the conservative province of Aceh, hundreds of people gathered at the Grand Mosque of Baiturrahman, located in the centre of the city of Banda Aceh. There was little physical distancing, and many did not use face masks.

Indonesia's health ministry reported 34,257 new coronavirus cases and 1,338 deaths on Monday, making it the country's deadliest day since the start of the pandemic.



Muslims pray spaced apart as a precaution against the coronavirus outbreak during an Eid al-Adha prayer at Zona Madina mosque in Bogor, Indonesia. Photograph: Tatan Syuflana/AP

President Joko Widodo appealed to Muslims to perform Eid prayers and recitation of “God is great” at home with their families.

“In the midst of the current pandemic, we need to be willing to sacrifice even more,” Widodo said in televised remarks on the eve of Eid. “Sacrificing personal interests and putting the interests of the community and others first.”

[‘An accumulation of weakness’: the flaws fuelling Indonesia’s Covid surge](#)
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Police set up highway checkpoints and blocked main roads for non-essential vehicles. Domestic flights and other modes of transportation were suspended, blocking people from making traditional family visits.

“This is unfair … but we should follow for the sake of people’s safety,” said Eka Cahya Pratama, a civil servant in the capital, Jakarta. He said several of his relatives had died from Covid-19, including his aunt and two uncles. “I feel really sad, I really miss them on the day of Eid.”

The government has been criticised for failing to prevent travel and gatherings during the Eid al-Fitr festival in May. Activities associated with the holiday, as well as the emergence of the Delta variant, have been blamed for Indonesia’s current crisis. Hospitals are overwhelmed with patients and have reported shortages of oxygen, while many are dying at home, unable to access treatment.

Other Asian countries are also struggling to contain rapidly rising infections amid sluggish vaccination campaigns and the spread of the Delta variant. Among them are Muslim-majority places such as Malaysia, Bangladesh and the southernmost four provinces of Thailand.

Unlike Indonesia’s restrictions, Bangladesh controversially paused its coronavirus lockdown for eight days to mark Eid al-Adha, and millions of

people are shopping and travelling this week, raising fears the holiday will cause a virus surge that will collapse its already struggling healthcare system.

Malaysia also has struggled to control its outbreak, which has worsened despite being under a lockdown since 1 June. Total cases have soared by 62% since 1 June to more than 927,000. Hospitals, especially in the state of Selangor, have been overwhelmed, with some patients reportedly being treated on the floor due to a lack of beds, and corpses have been piling up in mortuaries. Vaccinations, however, have picked up, with nearly 15% of the population fully inoculated.

The Malaysian prime minister, Muhyiddin Yassin, urged Muslims to stay home and celebrate the holiday modestly.

Indonesia began vaccinating aggressively before many countries in south-east Asia. About 14% of its population have had at least one dose, primarily China's Sinovac. But that may leave them susceptible, since Sinovac may be less effective against the Delta variant. Indonesia and Thailand are planning booster shots of other vaccines for their Sinovac-immunised health workers.

Associated Press contributed to this report

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Zarlasht Halaimzai. Photograph: Sarah Lee/The Guardian

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‘We tried to be joyful enough to deserve our new lives’: What it’s really like to be

a refugee in Britain

Zarlasht Halaimzai. Photograph: Sarah Lee/The Guardian

As a child, I fled Afghanistan with my family. When we arrived in Britain after a harrowing journey, we thought we could start our new life in safety. But the reality was very different

by [Zarlasht Halaimzai](#)

Tue 20 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

During the summer I turned 15, I fell into a prolonged depression that lasted well into my 20s. My mother, my two brothers and I had just arrived in London, and because we were seeking asylum as refugees, we were moved into a hostel for vulnerable families on Fitzjohn's Avenue in the affluent north-west of the city. The journey to London had been so difficult that we had separated from my father, one of my brothers and my sister a few months earlier. The hostel was situated on a tree-lined avenue that connects Swiss Cottage to Hampstead village. A pleasant walk north takes you to Hampstead Heath and Keats House, to the south is Regent's Park, where my family would walk around the park's ornate rose garden and sit by the fountain, our favourite spot.

Four years earlier, in autumn 1992, my family had left our home in Kabul when the sudden [withdrawal of US interests](#) from Afghanistan left militias fighting for power, making ordinary life impossible. Once-frequent family gatherings had been reduced to funerals attended by a few. Food and water were scarce. We rarely left our home – the adults only went out on the most essential errands. My uncle sometimes cycled across the city to bring us drinking water as rockets fell around him. We would be worried sick until his return.

My parents wanted to stay. For a year, they had talked about peace in [Afghanistan](#) as if they could make it happen with sheer force of will. Occasionally, they talked about leaving, but these were hypothetical plans that would only be pursued if all other options failed. My mother still went to work as a teacher, tended our garden and made plans for an imagined

future in [Afghanistan](#). In the end, the decision was made in haste. After a bomb hit the bakery at the end of our street and split the baker's son in two, my mother became terrified that one of her children would be maimed or killed.

The morning we left Kabul for Mazar-e-Sharif, a city in north Afghanistan, my mother told my grandmother that we would see her soon. Something in my grandmother's stoic face told me that she didn't really believe this but she held my mother and reassured her that we would be reunited. In the early 90s, before the internet joined up the world, and before Facebook groups would help migrants avoid the most dangerous routes, travel in Afghanistan was still shrouded in mystery. We didn't know where we would sleep once we got to the city or what our next step would be. Our only plan was to get away from the violence.

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It was late afternoon when we arrived in Mazar-e-Sharif after a difficult, long journey from Kabul. The road was heavily mined – it remains so to this day – and the route was bordered with muddy graves marked by headstones with no names – victims of the mines. Each time we passed a grave or the bus drove over a bump, the passengers would pray collectively for the souls of the dead. Mostly, though, they asked for their own safe arrival.

The first night away from home was the longest in my life. I'd slept next to my grandmother all my life and now, separated from the person who made me feel safest, I felt adrift and alone. My father took us to a halfway house where a dozen other families had found a bed for the night. My family, which included my uncle, his wife and their newborn baby, huddled together and went to sleep on sheetless mattresses that had seen many other guests. In the night, I could hear my mother whispering to my father for what seemed to be hours. I lay awake all night, only falling asleep at dawn – a pattern that continues to this day.

We crossed a bridge into Uzbekistan the following night. A clunky blue and white bus carried 20 passengers at a time. From the Afghan side of the border the Uzbek town of Termez glimmered in the dark. "They have

“electricity,” my mother whispered to my aunt. They both took a breath in their excitement. It almost felt like an adventure.

The next four years were a blur of trains, towns and cities, people opening their door to us when we had nowhere else to go and people scowling with hostility as my family made our way westward – four adults followed by six little children. I was the eldest and not yet 11.

When we moved into our room on Fitzjohn’s Avenue four years later, it was with the promise that we were finally safe. It had been a devastating journey and here we were in London about to begin a new life. But our expectations of London were impossible. We imagined a life that was easier – that somehow as soon as we arrived here we would put all that had happened behind us and move on – that the uncertainty we felt would evaporate as soon as we landed. So much depended on this fantasy. To survive the journey, we needed stories of hope. For us, that story was safety in London, but the reality was very different.

Once the excitement of arriving in a new place had worn off, the exhaustion set in. At first, it was physical. The four of us would sleep well past noon and wake up feeling heavy and unrested. Some time later came grief, like a wave, heavy and very, very sudden. It would be years before any of us came up for breath.

It was my mother’s responsibility to make sense of our new home. We depended on her for everything. She had briefly studied English and could get by in a supermarket or catching a bus, but anything more than that was a struggle. She had the arduous task of navigating the bureaucracy of claiming asylum in the UK. Everything required a form. Our lives suddenly required that we keep track of paperwork so we would be able to present the necessary form on demand – if we needed a card to access the library or the local youth club, a travel pass or a doctor’s appointment.

Every time, my mother had to fill in forms and provide proof of identification, which was difficult since we were essentially stateless. As the post office was something of a new phenomenon for us, she would hand deliver as many forms as she could.

More often than not, she was rewarded with a new set of forms to fill in. She would get exasperated trying to follow the instructions. “PLEASE WRITE IN BLOCK CAPITALS” – what did it mean? The dictionary didn’t help. We would look up “block” and “capitals”, but together they didn’t make much sense. Sometimes, the instructions sounded like a threat. The words “STAY INSIDE THE BOXES OR YOUR APPLICATION MAY BE REJECTED” filled my mother with terror.

The Home Office demanded that we justify over and over again why we had fled our home. Proving that you deserve asylum is a tricky business. It is not enough that the news is reporting that civilians in Afghanistan, Syria or Iraq are under constant attack – you have to prove that *your* life was in danger at a *specific moment*. For us, establishing this proof was a long, exacting process and it would be years before we could relax about our status in the UK. My mother would wake us at dawn to take an early morning train to Croydon to stand in line for an interview at the Home Office, joining scores of scared and sullen people waiting to plead their case to stay in England.



Civilians in Kabul, Afghanistan, February 1994. Photograph: Terence White/AFP/Getty Images

Like any place where matters of life and death are decided, the atmosphere in the immigration centre hung heavy and awkward, with little room for

anything other than dread. We would queue up outside until it opened, and once allowed in, we followed our mother to a machine that dispensed numbered tokens. We'd sit under the white glow of the lights and listen for our number. When it was called, my mother would try to explain our situation to someone behind a sheet of glass who rarely showed any expression on their face, least of all sympathy. Once a person in a cubicle asked my mother "Why here? Why the UK?" My mother was shocked into silence. The three of us quinted at her, recognising the urgency of the question, until she got the words out: "It's all God's Earth." The case worker said nothing in return, just made extensive notes in our file, which perturbed us even more. After these sessions, we'd return to our room on Fitzjohn's Avenue and my mother would spend the rest of the day in bed with a migraine.

In those early days, when England was not yet home, we wandered around our neighbourhood with the hallucinatory feeling that everyone was watching us. There is something about feeling out of place that furnishes everything with eyes that follow you wherever you go. In the supermarket, if the cashier glanced in our direction, we would all draw a breath, wondering if we were doing something wrong.

It didn't help that we couldn't speak to explain our imagined wrongdoings. Overnight, on arriving in the UK, my garrulous family lost its speech. My brother, who usually offered his opinions on everything, was rendered mute and took to following our mother very closely wherever we went. I felt exhausted at the thought of learning another language. All I knew how to say in English was "thank you" and "hasta la vista baby" – Terminator was a favourite film then – not realising that it wasn't even English.

When we had to ask for something in the shop, like, "where is the basmati rice?", the whole family would strategise to try to spread the dread fairly among us. Who would ask? Who would we ask, who looked friendliest? What to do if anything went wrong? The task would inevitably fall to my mother, who could speak more than any of us, and the three of us would form a circle around and offer our scrawny bodies as protection.

Most people were indifferent and completely unaware of the significance of each interaction for a family like mine. I paid attention to every word, every

gesture, trying to remember the sounds, memorise the way my mouth felt when I tried to pronounce *th*. To survive, we needed not only to speak a different language, but to learn new gestures, new stories and, most important, understand the currency that gave you access to society. In a country where your social capital is bound up in class and race, learning the social codes could determine the trajectory of your life.

It's difficult to describe the feeling of dislocation. People who are born in places that protect them from the misery of displacement find it hard to understand. Pictures of brown and black people on the news or on charity fundraising advertisements make them seem as if they are suspended in this one event – a famine, a war – as if nothing preceded the hunger or the violence and nothing will. People find it hard to relate to such wretchedness because, looking at those pictures, you feel as though this person's fate is inevitable.

In our case, there was a whole world before the violence came. Our home in Kabul, to my mind, was the best place a girl could hope to grow up. The house itself was small – a few rooms and a kitchen – and on the outside, yellow paint faded and peeled with every passing year. We spent most of our time in the main room where my grandmother would gather us around her for every meal and where we'd sit by the radio listening to the [BBC World Service](#). The radio was indispensable because it worked despite the continuous power cuts – with just a few fat batteries we could sit around and listen to the stories of One Thousand and One Nights on BBC Persian.

I remember these images with painful nostalgia – a time when my family was still together – but it's the garden that holds the most magic in my mind: a green, open space surrounded by trees and flower beds. In summer my grandmother would grow roses and purple basil, and their scent would perfume the sheets on our beds on the porch where we slept for some respite from the heat. We had apple and pear trees, grape vines, a kitchen garden where we grew spring onions and tomatoes, and in the middle of the garden there was an old and sturdy almond tree in whose branches I spent most of my time in the warmer months. In spring, it flowered with delicate blooms of white and a subtle fresh fragrance that signalled the coming of summer. With every year that passes this picture feels more vivid, more permanent.

I grew up in a family that took citizenship seriously. My parents had a strong sense of their role in society and actively took part in trying to address the injustices they saw. My mother's work as a teacher occupied a great deal of her time – she got to know her students and would do anything in her power to keep them in school. Sometimes, when she would do a round of family visits, I would accompany her to her students' homes where she would patiently try to convince the parents to support their children's education. I remember how afraid they seemed. It was mostly violence or poverty that frightened people into making choices that we'd find difficult to understand, but it was never because they didn't care.

My father, an avid reader, educated us all on our history, our identity and the world. His was, and still is, a collectivist ideology. I grew up listening to his sermons ("for the benefit of many not the few") and feeling eager to do my bit. I imagined a life in Kabul where, like my mother, I would be a participant in society – maybe a writer or a doctor, I thought. But all that was suspended when the war took over every part of our life, and our identity was reduced to people on the run – people without.

That first summer in London, I found it hard to remember home without an element of magical thinking. Memories of Kabul and our home were skulking somewhere in my subconscious, feeding my nightmares and taking away my sleep. I could remember only impressions, nothing came through with edges or corners or lines, just a mess of colour and emotion. My mental state oscillated between exhaustion and inertia. Now that we were supposed to make a new home, our other home wanted back in – it wanted attention like a dead child or a lover, and I didn't know how to put it to rest.

Our new home was supposed to be a "safe" place, but most things made us anxious and disoriented. London was the first place where I could safely go to school. In her good moments, my mother would give us pep talks about getting a British education. She would say, "you're very lucky" or, "you can go on to do whatever you want". I found both these ideas bewildering. How could we claim luck as any part of our lives? And being able to do anything I wanted seemed a distant fantasy.

School turned out to be difficult for a girl with an unconventional childhood and without language. Nothing fit, including our clothes. On my first day in

school, arriving in a purple and fuchsia shell suit, I immediately had the uneasy feeling that I stood out in a crowd of teenagers wearing combat jeans and dark T-shirts. In line for my school lunch, I felt like a bunch of fake flowers placed in a dentist's waiting room to distract people from the pain to come.

I sat in the back of a science class, not understanding a word. Being without language is like watching a foreign film without subtitles – however dramatic it may be, you drift off into your own thoughts. I would sit in class and retreat into the past, wading through memories of our journey and contemplating our lives. There were so many questions about what had happened. If you take out the violence, war is like a pantomime – nonsensical and absurd. To make sense of it, people living in the midst of violence learn to tell stories that keep the pain at bay. At the time, it seemed almost pathological to me that human beings are so intent on finding a silver lining, no matter their situation. I'd heard a woman say: "Thank God, my son's body was found – at least I know where he is resting," and I couldn't understand how you can be cornered into gratitude when what you should be feeling, I thought, is anger. I felt puzzled when people would ascribe this attitude to something like courage – in my teens I thought it a cowardly way. Now I understand, we need stories to survive. We seem unable to confront humanity as it is – undressed and full of terror.

When survival is your main occupation, other things fall by the wayside. While we were on the road, celebrations and family rituals started to disappear from our lives. In Islam, if you're travelling you're exempt from fasting, and since religious festivals are very much about community, it was hard for us to mark them when we were in transit. Getting to London meant that, technically, we had arrived at our destination and life could resume.

London's sizeable south Asian community had carved its own place in the city. After a few months in north London, by late summer we had moved east, close to Green Street market in West Ham. The vibrant market offered sweets and spices that we had almost forgotten about. Halal butchers, rows of shops selling south Asian food and stalls laden with Indian sweetmeats stirred our senses. After surviving four years in places where pieces of fruit were sold individually, my mother delighted at the abundance of fruits and

vegetables on offer. Bowls of apples, oranges and tomatoes were sold at one pound a pop. A shop playing an old Bollywood song stopped my mother in her tracks – she stood outside holding my brother's hand and listening intently until the song finished. "I haven't heard that song in years – since I was a young girl," she told us.



Stalls on the Green Street market in London. Photograph: Graham Turner/The Guardian

We did our best to make the new house our home. It was a small place on a residential road between Plaistow and West Ham and my mother tried to cheer it up as much as she could. We bought a strawberry printed tablecloth for the dining table and having just started my own lifelong obsession with Bollywood, I bought a poster of [Shah Rukh Khan](#) for my bedroom. We bought sweets from Ambala, the best Indian confectioners in London. But improvements to our new home were always overshadowed by the grief we felt. Every family meal was tinged by sadness and though we all tried to be joyful enough to deserve our new lives, joy was always out of reach. For the first time in my life I could retreat to another room, away from my family, and as days and weeks passed I did this more and more. Families riven by war rarely find their unity again. There is too much to hold, too much to bear and sometimes it's easier to retreat into a new setting rather than try to heal together.

The new neighbourhood was very different from the first. West Ham and Plaistow had a complicated history we knew nothing about. Although the population as a whole was diverse, communities were divided into different sections. The area where we were housed was predominantly white, a fact that we didn't pay much attention to when we arrived. Ours was a multi-ethnic and multilingual community in Kabul – my parents came from different ethnicities and spoke different languages, so we were used to being around people that didn't share our identity. Plus, we were in a white majority country – why shouldn't the neighbourhood be all white?

But there was something off from the very beginning. It started with minor acts of aggression that my hypervigilant mother noticed straight away. The feeling that we were being watched heightened. When my mother tried to explain our anxiety to an effulgent young teacher who had taken an interest in our family, she couldn't immediately understand it. She tried to reassure us that it was the natural anxiety of settling into a new place and that we would feel comfortable in no time. Experience told us otherwise, so my mother stopped us from going out without her and insisted we do as many things as possible together. We went to the market together, we tried to walk to school together even though my brothers' school was nowhere near mine. We stayed at home as much as possible and avoided going to the local park.

This didn't stop the hostility from the neighbours. One day, not long after we had moved in, as we were walking back from Sainsbury's in Stratford a young man shouted "Pakis" in our direction. The rest of his company burst out in laughter. We hurried past them towards our front door. It happened again the next day and a few days after. My mother, not knowing what to do, called on our nextdoor neighbour, who was a friendly old man, and asked him about it. He tried to reassure her that this was just the behaviour of bored teenagers and that we should ignore it as much as we could.

We had of course experienced racism on our journey, but this was the first time it had been overt, and no one seemed to bat an eyelid that it was happening. The hostile intent turned into action and soon we were waking to find piles of trash that had been pushed though our mailbox as we slept. It was such a pitiful sight when one of us would get down on our knees to clean it. It triggered in all of us the low-level panic we'd felt for years about how unsafe we were. Surviving makes it difficult to discern between

paranoia and genuine premonitions of disaster, until anxiety erodes your sense of self. Being the eldest of my siblings, I felt a sense of dread about their safety.

One day, my mother and I were attacked on our street. The attacker took out his belt and started to hit my mother. Seeing this was more than I could bear and something in me snapped. I screamed as hard as I could and tried to punch him. I didn't do much damage but my screaming did catch the attention of his friends and soon I was being chased by a group of them. I ran as hard as I could and somehow, as I was running, a police car that was driving by saw what was happening and intervened.

At the police station my mother and I were interviewed and the police officer who spoke to us took detailed notes and told us to wait. The attackers had been brought to the same police station. I felt exhausted and upset but I was glad that the attack had ended in the arrest of the culprits. My mother sat expressionless – neither of us said anything as we waited. I can't remember how long we sat there but after a while the police officer came back and offered to take us home. My mother asked him about what would happen next and what could we expect. He sat down and explained to us that they had let the attackers go because there wasn't sufficient reason for them to be held. Besides, he added they are young and stupid, and will grow out of this behaviour. Tears rolled down my mother's face. The police officer tried to reassure her, "You can call us right back, Mrs Halaimzai, if they come again," he said, but she just sat there crying.



Internally displaced Afghans, who have fled fighting between the Taliban and Afghan security forces, at a camp near Mazar-e-Sharif, Afghanistan, July 2021. Photograph: Rahmat Gul/AP

Back at home, I went up to my room and lay in bed. My body was convulsing with pains I couldn't understand. I thought about our lives and began to understand some of my father's reluctance to leave Afghanistan. You feel differently about the land you're born into compared to the one you've ended up in. It isn't a question of patriotism, or loyalty to one versus the other. It's about the feeling, when you're in the place you were born, that no one can doubt you have the right to be there. Seeking asylum makes you feel self-conscious about your very existence. There is a feeling that pervades all your interactions, as if you constantly need to justify your presence. Lying there, I thought about whether I had any right to expect the police to protect me and my family and I couldn't work it out. I didn't yet understand racism enough to feel resentment for what was happening – I just felt shame for who we were.

It wasn't long before I learned to speak. First it was a smattering of mispronounced words, "veesh" instead of wish, or "beech" instead of bitch, but slowly it developed into sentences. Soon enough I could have rudimentary conversations with my classmates. I discarded the shell suit for combat jeans and very short hair and by the time my father found his way to

London, a few months later, I'd discovered drum'n'bass. The sound, alarming to my parents, somehow made perfect sense to me. I'd retreat to my room and listen to tapes of raves I couldn't go to.

As my siblings and I learned to find our way, my mother's role started to change in our lives. We went from copying down English words with her, to correcting her pronunciation. While we were forming a distinctly British identity, it remained hard for her to see herself as part of this society, even though she did her best to integrate. She signed up to English classes at the local college and enthusiastically entertained the Jehovah's Witnesses who would visit us every week, dismissing my warnings about their proselytising. The two women and my mother would sit for hours, answering each other's questions – they were as interested in Afghanistan as my mother was in the UK – and lamenting the state of the world while my mother fed them figs and walnuts and samosas. Looking back, I think all three women found solace in each other's company.

It took me a long time to understand why it had been so hard for my mother to sit through those interviews at the Home Office. When we arrived, I was so consumed by my own anxiety that I couldn't pay attention to hers. Here was a woman who had lost everything that helped her make sense of life – her family, her community, her livelihood and her language. All her friends were either far away or dead, and as she sat in Croydon trying to convince a case worker that we were unable to return home because our lives were in danger, the Taliban wreaked havoc in Afghanistan, banning everything from music to white socks. Anyone who defied their barbaric rule was threatened with public execution in Kabul stadium, where justice had been reduced to a blood sport. Women and girls had been decreed invisible and worthless.

What could be more terrifying for someone like my mother, who had spent her career educating girls and encouraging them to stand on their own two feet? How could she go back to that? But this was not immediately obvious to our case worker, so my mother endured hours of questioning, trying to explain in broken English that her children needed a chance to live their lives without violence, and in that process lost some of her shine.

These days, almost three decades after fleeing Afganistan, I run a charity in Greece that works to help refugees deal with trauma, and I have seen the pain and anxiety suffered by other families trying to navigate the asylum process. Greece has created a system deliberately designed to be hostile, to reduce the allure of setting up home in Europe. In groups that we run for men, women and children, participants describe the feelings of panic and despair they experience when they engage with bureaucracy. A woman in one group was so anxious about her asylum interview that she started self-harming. She told me that cutting herself comforted her, as though, when she pressed a razor against her skin, she was releasing the pressure she felt. It was too much for her to think that her claim would be denied, and that she would be sent back to her half-destroyed town that was still at war.



Zarlasht Halaimzai working in a refugee camp in Idomeni, Greece.
Photograph: Zarlasht Halaimzai

Young people in a theatre group we ran for refugees in Greece often talked about the sense of betrayal they felt when seeing images and headlines about refugees. It was as if this one event, this circumstance, had erased all their identities and histories. They continued to refer to “my future”, as fully imagined and attainable, and this present suspension of their hopes and dreams was purgatory. Even worse, they said, was the pity. No one wants

pity when they've experienced the humiliation of violence. What they needed was for people to try to understand.

When I speak to Afghan mothers in Greece who are just as determined to secure a future for their children as my mother was, I can see the same quiet suffering in their eyes. I know what it takes to hold a family together in their situation.

[Cruel, paranoid, failing: inside the Home Office](#)

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It doesn't help that [Afghanistan is now going back to the Taliban](#). History is repeating itself as they take over the country and issue the same barbaric decrees against the people, confining women and girls in their homes. Afghans still reeling from decades of violence are powerless against the forces that decide their fate. The past few years have seen some of the worst civilian casualties for a decade. I froze in horror at the news of an [attack on a maternity hospital](#). Pictures of dead newborn children in their dead mothers' arms made me feel dizzy. Scores of people are dead but those who try to flee are sent back, since countries including Greece, the UK and Germany deem Afghanistan safe for people to return. It is as though we deserve all this violence.

I call my mother. I can hear in her voice the same stoicism that I heard in my grandmother's. I tell her about my hopelessness and despair at what keeps happening to people like us. I tell her about the Afghan man who is facing prison in Greece because his child drowned as they approached the Greek shore on an overcrowded boat, to seek asylum. She listens intently to my half-English and half-Farsi speech, and when I have finished, she says, "No matter what they face, people have to survive. We have no other choice."

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Sunbathers at a beach in Chipiona, Cádiz, Spain. Photograph: Emilio Morenatti/AP

[My best shot](#)

Sun, sand, saints and sharks: the best summer photographs

Sunbathers at a beach in Chipiona, Cádiz, Spain. Photograph: Emilio Morenatti/AP

Escapees from lockdown, naked beer-swilling on a dinghy and pagan rituals in the nude ... top photographers pick their best summer shot

by [Imogen Tilden](#), [Michael Segalov](#) and Ash Adams. Selected by [Sarah Gilbert](#).

Tue 20 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

‘By day it was bacchanalian, at dusk otherworldly’

Parklife: Danielle and Iyanna, 2020, by Sophia Spring

I began my series Parklife, a love letter to London’s green spaces, back in 2019, but with a baby daughter and commissioned work to juggle, found little time to focus on it. Last summer, as all my professional work completely disappeared and the world came to a standstill, was a perfect time to pick it up again.

The River Lea runs through Hackney marshes, in London. During the day, the area felt bacchanalian – lots of flesh, music and drinking – but at dusk, it took on a magical, otherworldly quality. This was shot in June. The weather had been beautiful but things still were quite green. Danielle and her daughter Iyanna had been on the marshes all day, with friends, paddling, relaxing. It was sunset and they were packing up to go home. I had first spotted one of their friends – drawn by her amazing pink hair – and was talking to her when I saw these two on the river bank standing almost exactly in this very pose, perfectly framed. Don’t move! I said.



This is one of my favourite shots from the whole series. I love its gentle and timeless quality. Those early summer months of lockdown felt like a special time as people flocked to their local parks for a little respite from the monotony of lockdown. I believe passionately in the healing abilities of nature. Studies have shown how being near trees and open spaces can reduce cortisol levels and bring down blood pressure. Last year we all found ourselves suffering from a kind of collective anxiety and depression, and I think we intuitively flocked to these green spaces seeking comfort and calm.
(IT)

‘I could see him having so much fun’

Shark Attack, 2018, by Agnieszka Maruszczuk



The weather is becoming increasingly unpredictable in our region of Wielkopolska (Greater Poland). It's an area that has historically been home to many lakes. Now we're seeing some start to dry up, a major problem and a consequence of climate change. As temperatures go up, though, us locals are still making the most of them. They are places to escape to at the heat's height, when temperatures can hit 40C.

It was one of those sweltering summer weekends in 2018 when my husband, son and I drove down to Powidz Lake from our home in Poznań. At more than 1,000 hectares (2,470 acres), it's one of the country's cleanest and largest. We parked up and walked down. The beach was busy, as was the water.

My son is an only child; he brought this huge inflatable shark along for company. I could see him having so much fun with it as he swam, throwing it in the air and making up games with it. There was so much going on all around him, but he found his own fun.

That's when I got my camera out. Not that it's unexpected – I've been photographing Jan since he was a little boy. This picture is part of a series called *Boyhood*. I'm photographing his childhood from a mother's perspective. And neither this place – nor this moment – were particularly

special. It was one day of many. And in childhood, I think, that is what summer is about. (MS)

‘She’s a lawyer, working from home’

Alexandra, 2020, by Olivia Harris



As the UK hunkered down for its first national lockdown last year, London enjoyed a stunning early summer. Like many city dwellers, I took to my bike to enjoy the empty roads. As I cycled around east London, I noticed people had colonised spaces that are never occupied otherwise – areas between their front door and their gate, or little patches of the road outside their homes. Front yards became makeshift offices, sunseekers embraced the concrete, and neighbours gathered in the streets for cold beers and birthday celebrations.

There was a dreaminess to it all. You could hear the birds – there were no planes, no traffic, no music – and everyone suddenly had time, masses and masses of time. People were scared and fearful, but they were also coming together .

I wanted to capture what was happening. I loaded my camera equipment into my panniers and cycled north to Tottenham and down as far south as the river and Tower Hamlets – to photograph a broad spectrum of people and of building backgrounds. I cycled round one corner and there was Alexandra, stretched across her front steps. She's a lawyer but was working from home. "I don't want to sit in the park, but this feels OK," she said.

Everyone I shot was really welcoming. I think everyone was so isolated in those months that they craved connection. The project has become an exhibition and now a book that feels like a time capsule – a glimpse back at a unique moment. We're normally such a busy city you can't get five seconds with somebody, but last summer, everyone had time to talk. (*IT*)

Days on Repeat is at Haggerston Park, E2 8NG until 5 August, order the book at olivia-harris.co.uk.

'It felt like a modern-day Eden'

Down by the Hudson Watering Hole Three Boys Floating, 2018, by Caleb Stein



The watering hole in Poughkeepsie, upstate New York, is on the outskirts of town next to the movie drive-in theatre and across the bank from the American Legion. You can't get more American than that, and the town is typical of so many small US towns struggling with post-industrial decline. In the 2016 election it was neck and neck between Trump and Clinton, and that sense of tension was palpable in the years following.

This watering hole offered this amazing counterpoint to all that. It felt like a modern-day Eden. Everything softens. People from a wide range of backgrounds go there during the summer. It's a place where they let their guard down and relax, barbecue, play and swim. It's not that everyone immediately becomes best friends, but they acknowledge each other's presence as human beings and treat each other with respect.

These kids are Matthew, Jackson and Oden. They reminded me of my brothers. I like to make photographs that could have been taken 100 years ago, or tomorrow. There's something about black and white that immediately gets us into the mindset of memory. It has become a sort of shorthand for the past, and for me it's a way of updating and revisiting the mythology of the small American town. (*IT*)

‘People gather to worship the pagan gods’

Latvian midsummer, 2006, by Espen Rasmussen



Midsummer is big in Scandinavia and the Baltic countries. Here in Norway we light fires and sing and dance. For Latvians, the summer solstice is one of the most important events of the year. The longest day and shortest night are marked with a national holiday, as people gather to worship the pagan gods through rituals, music, eating and drinking. I went to a small town in Latvia to capture the summer solstice festival one year. Everyone takes part – young and old.

According to tradition, the shortest night of the year must be spent staying awake. As the sun set, we gathered on a hilltop in front of a huge bonfire. The women carried herbs collected from the forest; many people were dressed in traditional costumes, some with garlands in their hair. At midnight the men took off their clothes, lit their torches and processed down to the water's edge. There was a raft on the shore that was set alight and the men waded out into the lake carrying their torches, as the burning vessel drifted out into the deeper water. I was shooting using just the brightness of the fires and what little light there was – that night it never gets truly dark. Being naked was not something anyone was self-conscious about, it's simply part of what they do every year.

Returning back up the hill, the men dressed, and the dancing and feasting continued into the night and as the sun rose. The festival may be named Jāņi

after St John, but, like midsummer celebrations across Europe, it has deep and ancient pagan roots that honour the sun, the coming harvest, fertility and nature herself. (*IT*)

‘People can relate to her emotional turmoil’

Pregnant friend by Lauren Withrow



I’m from a really small town in Texas. It’s not a place I ever felt I belonged – it’s very southern, very conservative. But in my late 20s I went back to be with my mom, who was dealing with some health issues, and, returning I felt that I wanted to better understand where I came from. I became good friends with a group of people and documented them in what I call their natural state. They knew me as the friend who took cool photos; at some times they could be performative, almost comic, but this photo was different.

It was late one night when two girlfriends and I were hanging out at a pool drinking beers. Nobody was around and we didn’t have swim clothes with us so we decided to go naked. The scene felt – and looks – hedonistic, but I didn’t know at the time that my friend was pregnant, and very confused and conflicted about it. Had I known I would have had reservations about taking the photo – it makes you read the image completely differently, and maybe

some will condemn her recklessness in drinking beer – but I’m glad I did as I think people can relate to her emotional turmoil. She was only 20 or 21, not from a wealthy background, and she just wanted to live her life – instead she was having to deal with this incredibly difficult situation. (*IT*)

“‘This is the real life,’ they said, leaning back and smoking’

Sunbathers at Chipiona, 2021, by Emilio Morenatti



There had been a horrible wind all day in Cádiz, so I had found a sheltered beachin Chipiona, a small town popular with locals. While most of the beaches in the area are golden and blissful, the rocks are more dramatic here.

I was on holiday, but that doesn’t stop your eye seeing something. As the light dropped and dusk approached, I noticed the colours were really special: dark ground and water’s reflection; bright side light from the slowly setting sun. The scene felt cinematic, or like an oil painting. Thankfully, on holiday or not, I carry my camera at all times.

I went over to these three women to say hello. “We are enjoying ourselves; this is the real life,” said one, leaning back and smoking. I told them I was

from Barcelona. That's not the real life, she replied.

She puffed; we talked. Turns out she had spent plenty of time in Catalonia. From what she had heard about the unrest around independence, she had assumed my city was a war zone now. I assured her it's safe, that I live the life, too. (MS)

'My son confidently walked into the frame and threw the sheet aside'

Hasselbald self-portrait with my son, 2014, by Ash Adams



Anchorage summers are manic and magical. For over a month, the sun does not set; twilight holds over until the next sunrise, just a few hours after sunset. We mark the light because in Alaska, we live by the seasons. Flowers bloom; the city remarks on the appearance of fireweed and cotton. Warmth brings freedom, emergence. In summer, we shed winter's layers and open the doors and windows, and every light hour feels like a calling.

This self-portrait, part of an ongoing body of work called You Are the Color of Memory, is one I made during my pregnancy with my daughter. When

looking at this image now – my son and my pregnant silhouette, both naked on a balcony in the Alaskan summertime – I’m glad that my son so confidently walked into the frame and threw the sheet aside, although that was certainly unplanned. For me, the boldness of his gesture remarks on the intimacy of raising young children and how little stands between us, which is something I was looking to convey about the pregnancy itself along with the mystery of it all.

My children, now six and nine, and I are in the height of another Alaskan summer, planning for fish and spending long days half-dressed in the mudflats. This summer, like others, has the quality of revival and return. Especially after the past year, which was difficult both personally and globally and during which I experienced a pregnancy loss with devastating after-effects, we are basking in the freedom of the season together. (*Ash Adams*)

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Music

HMV at 100: ‘I worry they will go bust for good. It’s not going to get easier’



Michael Kiwanuka performing in-store at HMV. Photograph: James McCauley

Michael Kiwanuka performing in-store at HMV. Photograph: James McCauley

In July 1921, HMV opened and brought pop culture to the high street. It has weathered the arrival of downloads and streaming – but is vinyl enough to keep it going?

[Matt Charlton](#)

Tue 20 Jul 2021 03.00 EDT

A once-illuminated sign featuring a Jack Russell called Nipper sits above some hoardings on Oxford Street in London. Head cocked to one side, he appears disappointed that there's no music emerging from the gramophone he's quizzically scrutinising. There's still a poster claiming it's been the

“home of entertainment since 1921”, but it’s reportedly now home to squatters, including [Piers Corbyn](#).

HMV’s 363 Oxford Street branch is shuttered, the remnants of a once famous high street presence still lingering on its facade. The company celebrates its centenary this month, and after soldiering on through store closures and bankruptcy in recent years, had almost become profitable in its May 2020 financial results – despite, at that point, three months of Covid-enforced closure. Given the ride that the record industry and the high street has experienced since the beginning of the 21st century – including during the pandemic – reaching this anniversary seems miraculous.



HMV at 363 Oxford Street in the mid-1920s. Photograph: EMI Archive

The centenary marks the opening of this very store. On 20 July 1921, The Gramophone Company which, since 1902, had been making 78s displaying on their inner labels a variant of a painting by Francis Barraud called His Master’s Voice, decided to take their unofficial name and open the first HMV Shop in a former men’s clothing store. Composer Edward Elgar was on hand to mark the opening, and HMV – via Blur on the roof of 363 in the 90s to One Direction packing out the Manchester store in 2011 – has had in-store appearances ever since. “It virtually invented the idea,” says Gennaro Castaldo, director of communications for the British Phonographic Industry

and former long-term HMV employee. “They always prided themselves on giving access to popular culture.”

When Bill Haley and Elvis kickstarted a cultural phenomenon with rock’n’roll, fans flocked to HMV branches to hear it. “On Saturday mornings, I’d be off to the HMV shop to listen in a booth to the latest records,” says Diane Humphrys, a Lewisham teenager at that time. “It was a big event: I dressed in the latest fashion – billowing skirts, wide elasticated belt – and I’d spend my pocket money on one or two 45s: Frankie Vaughan, Pat Boone, Buddy Holly … LPs were too expensive. I played them non-stop on my Dansette record player.”

After the manager of a certain Merseybeat four-piece crossed the threshold, its place in history was sealed. In February 1962, Brian Epstein popped into 363 to have some acetate discs made for the band’s Decca demo. The disc-cutter mentioned the group to publisher Sid Colman, who in turn mentioned them to George Martin. The Beatles signed their recording contract in front of a portrait of Nipper. When, in 2000, 363 finally gave way to the much larger 150 Oxford Street, Martin was on hand to unveil the blue plaque marking HMV’s most famous location, shortly before it was turned into a Foot Locker.

“When recorded music was rarely heard on the wireless, HMV Oxford Street was heaven on earth,” recalls Alan Johnson – former home secretary, author, and life-long mod. “[In the 60s], if you wanted fashionable clothes you went to Carnaby Street, and if you wanted a record by an obscure R&B artist who’d been mentioned by Jagger or Clapton, you went to Oxford Street. Just to be seen there was a mark of sophistication.”



Customers in HMV's 363 Oxford Street branch. Composite: EMI Archive

Branches sprang up across the south east, and by the 70s, with singles sales for that decade reaching 540m, HMV – despite young pretenders such as Our Price and Virgin – was opening stores across the UK.

The 1980s will remain the halcyon days. Many will remember the pink and blue neon adorning the entrances; impressive window displays; Hacienda-like darkened interiors punctuated by bright blocks of colour; Bros, Duran Duran, the latest Now! compilation or Madonna blaring out at an obscene volume. “As a sales rep for Island Records back in the 80s, I saw HMV stores as the muscle on the high street,” recalls Phil Barton, now the owner of indie store Sister Ray, a Soho institution. “Better run than Virgin, cooler than Our Price and staffed at manager level by people who knew about music.”

Someone else you might have bumped into, when he wasn’t record shopping in “creepy music warehouses”, was broadcaster Trevor Nelson. “I loved killing half a day getting lost in the vastness of HMV Oxford Street. I used to go there during my peak years as an R&B and hip-hop DJ, so people were surprised to see me flicking through the classic rock section. It was the perfect place to listen to what the rest of the world was doing.”

You may even have seen the odd mislaid international superstar. Simon Winter, now the head of events and PR at HMV, recalls “In the early 90s, I was on ground floor tills, and Michael Jackson walked into the store – completely alone – up the famous spiral staircase to the video floor. Turns out Sony had arranged for Michael to make a visit, the taxi had been told to deliver Michael to HMV Oxford St, and had dropped him at 363 – not 150 where his team were waiting. Word got out, and within 10 minutes, 200 people were ramming the store. We had to get him into the manager’s office until he could be collected.”



Take That at a signing event at HMV in April 1992. Photograph: HMV

By the mid-90s, HMV had experienced sustained growth for three decades; there were 300 branches across the globe, from Tokyo to Sydney and New York; it was gobbling up other chains such as bookstores Ottakar's and Waterstones, and even arrived in Tunbridge Wells, just as I started secondary school there. “If you lived in a provincial town where not too much was happening, that tapped you into pop culture and music consciousness,” says Castaldo.

The faint drumbeat of dial-up internet did not sate HMV’s hunger for expansion. In 2001, Apple launched the iPod, but as late as 2009, HMV was acquiring 14 stores vacated by the recently collapsed Zavvi. “When a

company's driving force is to become bigger and bigger, it can tend to lose focus," says Winter. Castaldo adds: "One of the great strengths of HMV was also potentially its Achilles' heel. People had so much belief in the idea of a record store and the interaction – they couldn't comprehend a different world where you would order online and have something sent to your home."

With a double-pronged attack from Amazon and iTunes, and the failure of [Get Closer](#) – a blend of downloading and social networking – the bubble burst. In 2011, HMV announced it would close 40 stores due to falling sales. Two years later, it called in the administrators. Restructuring company Hilco bought the chain, and in 2014 HMV regained its crown from Amazon as top seller of music and DVDs, but it was a brief reprieve. The company filed for bankruptcy again, a relaunched 363 closing just after Christmas 2018.

Enter Doug Putman, CEO of similar Canadian chain Sunrise Records, who purchased HMV in early 2019. One hundred and eight stores were rescued, and Europe's largest entertainment store, HMV Vault, was launched in Birmingham. Though three stores closed in 2020 and 363 Oxford Street remains shuttered, Putman says there's a "95% chance" of a new flagship: "I want to have a London store really badly."



HMV's owner Doug Putman, outside Birmingham's HMV Vault.
Photograph: Fabio De Paola/PA

"To me, the HMV experience is having great music playing, discovering new artists, and talking to like-minded people," Putman adds. "Trying to be everything to everyone alienates your core customer, so you double down on what your customers actually want – and they wanted vinyl." He's referring to records, but the bug-eyed Funko Pop vinyl figurines of characters, from the likes of Marvel, Friends, and Pokémon, must also be important.

When stores reopened in April following the winter lockdown, footfall was up by 150% in comparison to when they reopened post-lockdown in June 2020; 10 new stores are planned for this year, and Ed Sheeran is marking the 100th birthday with a free concert at the HMV-sponsored Empire in Coventry. But creating a bricks and mortar entertainment chain fit for the 21st century might seem an insurmountable challenge. It somehow has to be competitive with both Amazon and cooler indie shops, and despite vinyl sales having risen 11.5% in 2020 compared with the previous year, the format remains a niche part of the overall music market. "Vinyl masks a downward trend in every other format HMV, and everyone else, stocks," says Phil Barton. "How much longer for the CD or DVD?" There is now no other national entertainment retailer – even Sainsbury's are phasing out selling CDs. Barton is concerned, despite those heartening financial results last year. "I worry HMV will go bust for good next time. The current owner must have deep pockets and an unshakable belief in the brand, because it is not going to get any easier."

From a business perspective, HMV is great. I am unshakable about it.
Not because I'm an idiot

Doug Putman

I put this to Putman, who lets out either an amused or nervous chuckle. "From a business perspective, HMV is great," he insists. "I am unshakable about it. Not because I'm an idiot – deep pockets or not, you either believe in the business or you don't. The fact that we've got through Covid is a testament to HMV and the customer." Putman wants to create well-curated shops we can immerse ourselves in, and thinks friendly, informed staff –

and, yes, Funko Pops – will be key to HMV becoming top dog once again. “My goal is to get it to a place to last another hundred years.”

The company supports the music economy by bringing business to distributors, record labels and more, but also in a more general way, by continuing to champion music as social and tactile in the age of streaming. “We all need a strong HMV on the high street,” concludes Barton. “They need to discover the untapped talent in their retail staff, stop selling sweets and mugs, tighten up their website, and then they will be able to celebrate with an eye on the future. Happy birthday, HMV – I’m rooting for you.”

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Mental health

‘Virulent microbes everywhere’: how can anxious people fend off reopening panic?

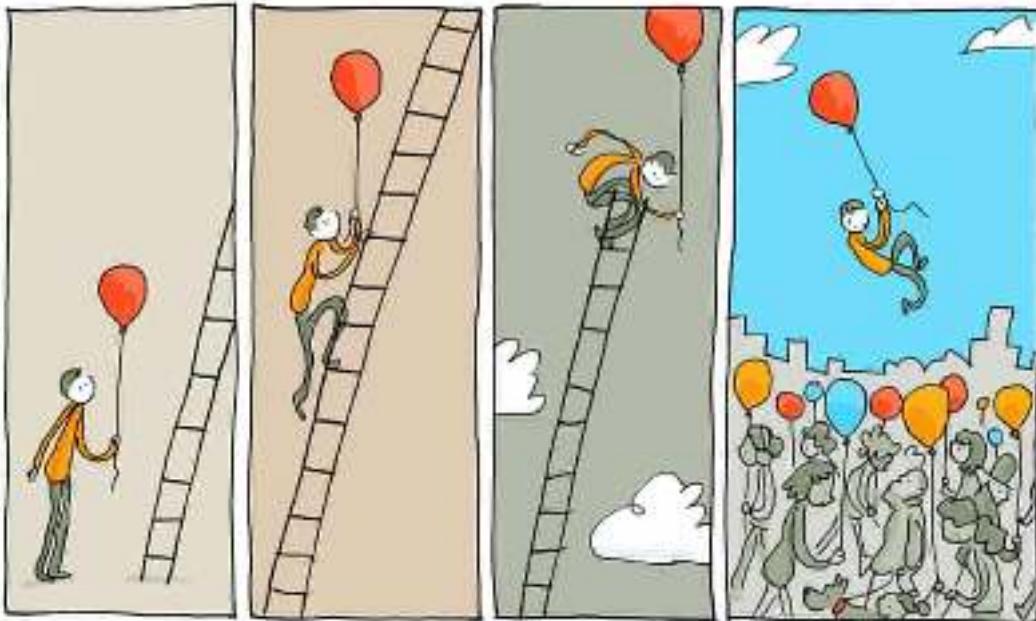


Illustration: Grant Snider/The Guardian

Illustration: Grant Snider/The Guardian

Re-emerging from lockdown can feel fraught with danger, especially for people with a history of anxiety

[Matthew Cantor](#)

[@CantorMatthew](#)

Tue 20 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

I recently took my first flight since the pandemic began. As I arrived at the airport, I prepared for a scene of utter carnage: people everywhere, all of them insisting on breathing; virulent microbes reveling in a field of unsuspecting targets.

As someone with a history of anxiety, I took a deep breath – figuring it would be my last opportunity to do so before landing – and entered the fray.

The masks were the only sign the pandemic had ever happened, as crowds swelled at check-in and security. I kept my distance and moved quickly, doing my best to mute the part of my brain screaming at me to dive out the nearest window. If no one else is worried, you must be OK, I told myself, without believing it. And if this is the end, you've had a decent run.

[I've spent years taming the OCD monster. Coronavirus has ruined everything](#)
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I was headed across the US to see my parents and I was terrified by the risk Covid posed to them, although we were all fully vaccinated. I'd picked a window seat, having [read online](#) that it was slightly safer, and I vowed not to remove my mask. Onboard, that meant minimal food and water and maximum anxiety, a perfect recipe for the ensuing migraine.

After a five-hour flight, the descent seemed interminable as the nausea grew. Finally, we landed and I grabbed my bag and dashed outside, where my parents were pulling up. I greeted them for the first time in 15 months by throwing up at the curb.

Many lucky people can mentally equate reopening with a return to normal, but reopening, of course, doesn't mean Covid has disappeared. Anxious people like me – who have had the privilege of working from home – are keenly aware of that fact and now find ourselves in a bind.

For more than a year, we've been conditioned to see our fellow humans as disease vectors

Social pressure is building to venture out. Workplaces are beginning to summon staff, friends are texting to hang out, families are planning gatherings. But re-emerging can feel fraught with danger, especially for people with significant anxiety. For more than a year, we've been conditioned to see our fellow humans as disease vectors. Even before the Delta variant took hold, the question loomed: how can we return to the world without panicking?

The visit home brought these anxieties to a head, since my parents are in a demographic at higher risk from the disease. I returned to my early pandemic habits of wiping down surfaces and washing my hands until they were raw; the Happy Birthday song will probably be triggering for the next decade.

I wanted to see childhood friends – but first had to delicately inform them that I was neurotic and needed us all to keep wearing masks and stay outside, despite everyone being vaccinated. After such gatherings, I felt contaminated, as if my body were crawling with unseen invaders that required dousing in the shower. Trips to pick up food were worse. When I stood in a shop, I imagined Covid particles swirling around my head and a clock ticking ominously: stay in here for more than 10 minutes, I warned myself, and your family has breathed its last.

I knew all this was irrational. I didn't really believe any of my friends were sick or even at particular risk; they're not the types who proclaim they're “being safe” while holding choir practice on exercise bikes in windowless basements. I knew that surfaces were no longer considered a major source of danger. The area's case numbers didn't support my fears, and my parents themselves were far less worried than I was.

The trouble is that, for people with brains like mine, the pandemic seems somehow distinct from the case numbers. It feels like a fantasy novel: as though some nebulous evil has descended upon the land, and it will go where it chooses, laughing maniacally. When the threat seems so abstract, it becomes difficult to imagine that we are safe just because the local statistics have improved.

Precautions against Covid, whether wearing masks or staying home, have become rituals to ward off the darkness, offering a measure of comfort simply in their performance – with a fear that failing to observe the rules magically summons an infection, regardless of whether there are actually pathogens nearby.

All this gets at a central problem for anxious people: uncertainty. Yes, intellectually we are all aware that vaccines have changed the landscape. But before I emerge from hibernation, I want an expert to proclaim that the danger is zero, that the forces of good have entirely vanquished that spreading evil – which, of course, will never be the case. So it becomes a matter of either staying home for ever, or determining what level of risk we are each willing to tolerate.

It becomes a matter of either staying home for ever, or determining what level of risk we are each willing to tolerate

In that sense, reopening will be a sort of global psychological exercise.

I was [diagnosed with OCD as a child](#), and I've tackled it through cognitive-behavioral therapy, using a process known as exposure and response prevention (ERP). In this procedure, a patient works with a therapist to create a “ladder” of anxiety-provoking behaviors, starting with easier ones – perhaps going an hour without hand-washing – and growing more difficult – perhaps going a day without washing, or deliberately getting one's hands dirty. The goal is to gradually increase the patient's tolerance for these activities and the associated uncertainty, without the futile effort of trying to prove that there is no risk – perhaps there is, the patient might think, but I can live with it.

Reopening will, in a way, be ERP on a giant scale. Anxious or not, we will all feel a bit out of our element during our first interactions with the outside world. Our first exposures might be visits with one or two vaccinated friends, then perhaps an uncrowded outdoor restaurant. As time goes by and cases rise and fall, we will climb our individual ladders – as slowly or quickly as feels safe.

The world right now reminds me of how I perceived the ocean as a child: beckoning and beautiful but ruthless, with an undertow that could haul me away any moment. I'm in no rush to share air with strangers.

My own ladder, if I had my way, would probably start with a gas mask and a Lysol bottle in each hand. As it is, I have begun by occasionally removing my mask during outdoor walks. Tasting unfiltered air for the first time in a year has been a revelation, perhaps even worth the brief sense of impending doom when the sound of a cough echoes from a nearby home. I don't see Coachella, or even TGI Friday's, in my immediate future. But it's been getting easier to meet friends at well-spaced outdoor gathering places, and soon I expect to be able to leave my yardstick at home.

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How a proposed secrecy law would recast journalism as spying

[Duncan Campbell](#) and [Duncan Campbell](#)

Home Office plans would remove the public interest defence for whistleblowing, and could put reporters in jail



‘Endorsed by the home secretary, Priti Patel, the consultation into secrecy argues that press disclosures can be worse than spying.’ Photograph: Jessica Taylor/Reuters

‘Endorsed by the home secretary, Priti Patel, the consultation into secrecy argues that press disclosures can be worse than spying.’ Photograph: Jessica Taylor/Reuters

Tue 20 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

Here we go again. Nearly 50 years ago one of us was arrested under the Official Secrets Act for working on a story for Time Out magazine, where the other one of us was the news editor. This led to the so-called ABC case, named after fellow reporter [Crispin Aubrey](#), a brave ex-soldier

whistleblower called John Berry, and the aforesaid Campbell. A lengthy Old Bailey trial followed in 1978 and, with it, a major discrediting of the use of the act against the press.

Soon after, the power of the pre-first world war, empire-era secrecy laws sank further when a jury acquitted the late [Clive Ponting](#), a senior civil servant who sent MPs information about government deception during the Falklands war. A hasty law reform flopped in 2004 when evidence against the [GCHQ whistleblower Katharine Gun](#) had to be withdrawn at the last minute. The government feared her trial would reveal that it had been told the Iraq war would be illegal.

The [Home Office](#) now wants harder and more extensive secrecy laws that would have the effect of deterring sources, editors and reporters, making them potentially subject to uncontrolled official bans not approved by a court, and punished much more severely if they do not comply. In noisy political times, a government consultation issued two months ago has had worryingly little attention. Although portrayed as countering hostile activity by state actors, the new laws would, if passed, ensnare journalists and sources whose job is reporting “unauthorised disclosures” that are in the public interest.

Endorsed by the home secretary, Priti Patel, [the consultation](#) argues that press disclosures can be worse than spying, because the work of a foreign spy “will often only be to the benefit of a single state or actor”.

Calling for parliament to consider “increased maximum sentences”, the Home Office claims that there is now not necessarily a “distinction in severity between espionage and the most serious unauthorised disclosures”, including “onward disclosure” in the press. Journalism could even create “far more serious damage” than a spy. Yet the 66-page document does not mention “journalism” once, and refers only to “onward disclosure ... without authorisation”.

A new proposal for so-called civil orders would create “a power of last resort that would enable [the government] to impose a range of restrictions on particular individuals”. The orders “could include a range of restrictive and preventative measures, including measures to prevent an individual

associating with certain people or from visiting specified sensitive locations” and ought to “be imposed by the executive rather than the courts”. The orders would create “a significant deterrent against those who may be vulnerable and susceptible to foreign state coercion and influence”.

The process began in 2016 when the Law Commission – a statutory body that reviews the law in England and Wales – started work on “protecting official data”, [claiming reforms were needed](#) “to bring the law into the 21st century”. Changes were, supposedly, justified because of the ability of “hostile states” to conduct cyber-attacks and because the potential impact of spying and leaks had increased.

Initial proposals by the commission in 2017 did not attract much attention until [an article in The Register](#), the online technology publication, told readers that “proposals in the UK for a swinging new Espionage Act that could jail journalists as spies have been developed in haste by legal advisers”. The article pointed out that the proposals would put leaking and whistleblowing in the same category as spying for foreign powers – and that leakers and journalists could face the same extended jail sentences as foreign agents. Sentences would apply even if – like [Edward Snowden](#) or [Chelsea Manning](#) – the leaker was not British, nor in Britain, or was acting in the public interest.

The Law Commission had neglected to consult widely with either media or freedom of expression organisations. After the article appeared, there were protests in the press across the political spectrum, from the Daily Telegraph to the Guardian to the Daily Mail. An avalanche of criticism from NGOs and press and media organisations, such as the National Union of Journalists, followed; public consultation was extended.

Slowed further by the impact of Covid-19, the Law Commission [published revised proposals](#) last autumn. They recommended that “a statutory public interest defence should be created for anyone ... including civilians and journalists, that they can rely upon in court”. Journalists and sources should not be convicted if it was in the public interest for the information disclosed to be known by recipients. An independent, statutory whistleblower commissioner “should be established to receive and investigate allegations of wrongdoing or criminality”.

The Home Office wants to junk these proposals as not “the right balance in this area”. The idea that any unauthorised disclosure of official data could be in the public interest should not be possible, it says. It derides the idea of whistleblower protection, asking for “any evidence ... why existing government whistleblowing processes would necessitate the creation of a statutory commissioner?”

Nor, it says, should a whistleblower be allowed to argue that they acted in the public interest. One of the main changes is to widen the scope for prosecutions. “For public servants,” according to proposals, “offences should not continue to require proof of damage, as is currently the case. Instead, they should require proof of a sufficiently culpable mental state, by which we mean, for example, proof of the defendant’s knowledge or belief that the disclosure would cause damage.”

Maximum prison sentences that could be imposed on publishers or sources – currently two years under the [Official Secrets Act](#) for unauthorised disclosures – would be multiplied to an unspecified higher level.

Responses to the new proposals are being sought by 22 July. If editors and journalists and advocates of an open society do not highlight the dangers and call a halt, the current gung-ho, authoritarian approach of the government could allow press freedom to be clamped into silence.

- [Duncan Campbell](#) is a former Guardian journalist. The second [Duncan Campbell](#) is the author of the 2017 Register article referred to above and an investigative journalist specialising in civil liberties and surveillance, and was a defendant in the 1978 trial



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Who is to blame for the sweltering weather? My kids say it's boomers – and me

[Zoe Williams](#)



My children are not enjoying the current British heatwave. And they think they know the culprit



‘At some point, I am always moved to argue that I didn’t make the weather.’
Photograph: fizkes/Getty Images/iStockphoto

‘At some point, I am always moved to argue that I didn’t make the weather.’
Photograph: fizkes/Getty Images/iStockphoto

Tue 20 Jul 2021 02.00 EDT

I thought there was nothing about hot weather I couldn’t handle with a piña colada and a positive attitude, but I had reckoned without peak teenager. It is not technically my fault that the temperature hit 28C, nor that it doesn’t seem to get cooler overnight, and while arguably it’s my fault that nobody has a working fan, the link is only tangential: I bought a rabbit, and the rabbit ate through the wires. Even that wasn’t my idea.

Yet from the moment consciousness spreads across the house, it’s an opera of 13-year-old complaint, gripes harmonising from room to room, reaching their crescendo roughly every 25 minutes.

It starts like a Tripadvisor review for a poorly managed B&B. Why is the airflow so poor, and the bed so hot, and the chair no cooler than the bed, and how, crucially, has the management allowed the temperature to rise so steeply and made no attempt to intervene?

Then it builds to a series of more metaphysical questions: what is the point of summer? How can a mind occupy itself thinking of nothing but heat? [What if the whole summer is like this](#) and there's no possible escape, and nobody can do anything for six weeks, and that'll be six weeks wasted?

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At some point, I am always moved to argue that I didn't make the weather, whereupon it takes on a political tilt. In fact, I did, because of climate change, which sure as hell wasn't their idea. Then I duck and blame it all on boomers, which cues an argument about how old a boomer is and whether or not I am one. So at least that makes a change.

The non-verbal stage of the protest is when the kids start napping. I cannot tell you how much I disapprove of sleeping during the day, even when it's me doing it. On the other hand, it's now so quiet that it amounts to a state of active bliss. But returning to the first hand, I am choking on my own indignation, which leaves me no option, really, but to try to wake everyone up. Then it's back to the chorus of Tripadvisor reviewers. But don't get me wrong, *I'm* not complaining.

- Zoe Williams is a Guardian columnist
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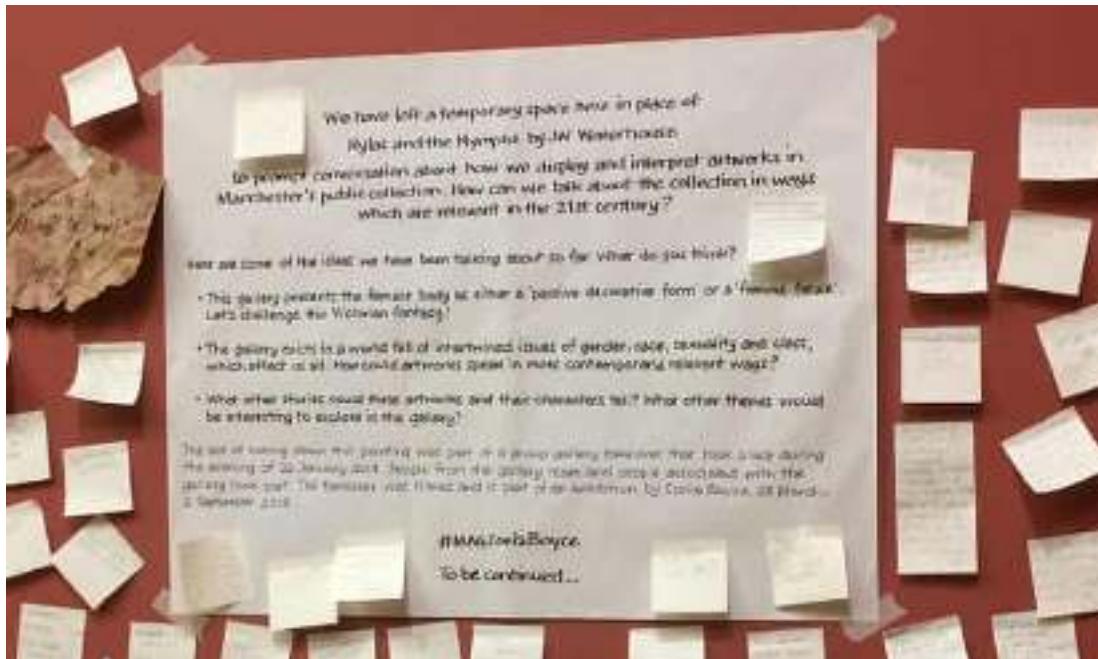
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Freedom of speech? Not these days, if you're an artist in Britain

[Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett](#)



Following two chilling actions against artworks, the right is revealing a disturbing autocratic tendency



'The temporary removal of John William Waterhouse's *Hylas* and the *Nymphs* as part of Sonia Boyce's residency at the Manchester Art Gallery took place during a performance art piece.' Photograph: Manchester Art Gallery

'The temporary removal of John William Waterhouse's *Hylas* and the *Nymphs* as part of Sonia Boyce's residency at the Manchester Art Gallery took place during a performance art piece.' Photograph: Manchester Art Gallery

Tue 20 Jul 2021 03.00 EDT

One of the many things that studying history taught me, and which I have never forgotten, is how to recognise the typical characteristics of fascism. It's become a sort of mental list to which I turn from time to time when considering our current political situation. "Powerful and continuing nationalism" (tick); "disregard for human rights" (what was that about offshore asylum camps?); "rampant cronyism and corruption" (you bet).

Then, of course, there's "disrespect for intellectuals and the arts" – something that had been festering long before the Brexit vote but became even more explicit then, with ministers' contempt for "experts".

It seems people have had enough of artists too, if two recent incidents are anything to go by. First, we had a [police raid on Antepavilion](#), an east London arts complex. Footage emerged of black- and navy-clad helmeted police (some of the helmets had union flags on them, a nice touch) forcing entry to the building. The venue's best known exhibit is a rooftop bamboo and cable structure called All Along the Watchtower. The structure resembles those that were used during Extinction Rebellion (XR) protests last year when the environmental campaigners [blockaded the printing presses](#) of Murdoch papers (XR were planning further protests at the time, which likely explains the motives behind the raid).

However, the [artist Damien Meade](#) says this sculpture was part of an architectural competition and was not affiliated to XR. Moreover, it took six weeks to install, so could not play any role in a protest at short notice. [Five people were arrested](#) and then released without charge.

The second incident involved a group of Conservative councillors in Southend-on-Sea, who succeeded in [removing the installation](#) How to Make a Bomb: An English Garden by the artist Gabriella Hirst.

The work, situated in Shoeburyness in Essex, centres on a nearly extinct species of rose that was created and registered under the name Rosa floribunda Atom Bomb in 1953. It took the form of a rose garden with benches adorned with plaques detailing Britain's nuclear history, and containing statements such as: "The garden is a reminder that the red rose of England is entangled with an Imperial past of 'gardening the world', which has continued into a dangerously over-armed present".

The councillors objected to one such plaque, which highlighted the devastating impact of British nuclear tests on Indigenous lands in Australia in the 1950s and 60s. They asked for it to be removed or reworded, with one councillor calling it "a direct far left wing attack on our History, our People, and our Democratically Elected Government" (authoritarians just love an unnecessary capitalisation), and threatened to contact the media. As a result of the councillors' campaign, the artwork has been taken down, with Metal, the organisation that co-commissioned the work (alongside artists' charity the Old Waterworks), saying it did so to protect its staff.

Both of these incidents are chilling. For all their proclamations about protecting freedom of speech, in their interactions with artists the Conservatives are revealing a disturbing autocratic tendency. The same is true of the government's attitude towards academics, as the latest [higher education \(freedom of speech\) bill](#) demonstrates. The Tories have been convincing large parts of the electorate that *they* are the true custodians of British history, and that the “woke brigade” will tear down every statue in the land if it has its way. It’s blatant hypocrisy.

In 2018 there was a furore over the [temporary removal](#) of John William Waterhouse’s Hylas and the Nymphs – which depicts nude girls – as part of the artist Sonia Boyce’s residency at the Manchester Art Gallery. Amid the row, barely anyone seemed to care that the takedown took place during a performance art piece.

Instead, the action was framed in the media as censorship and taken entirely in bad faith, by rightwing and liberal commentators alike. The latter seemed to give scarcely any thought to the damage wrought by going along with an argument set by the cynical and the reactionary.

[The limits of the Tories' 'war on woke' are becoming ever more apparent |](#)

[Hugh Muir](#)

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The original intent behind the act of removal, a conversation about what and who hangs in a gallery and why, was completely lost. By reframing Boyce’s attempts at discussion and contextualisation as censorship, the right was winning an early battle in the culture war. Yet who is really attacking artists and cultural institutions?

There’s a longstanding joke, as popularised by The Young Ones, that leftwing people go around calling other people fascists all the time. Perhaps there are times when we are overzealous, but sometimes it feels as though, while everyone was busy guarding the statue of Winston Churchill, a separate agenda was cranking into gear about other works of art. As Meade wrote in the aftermath of the police raid, historical statues are protected by laws that give offenders up to 10 years in prison, but if the artwork is deemed subversive, “the full muscle of the state comes knocking”.

Call me a doomsayer if you want, but I'll keep ticking off that list.

- Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett is a Guardian columnist
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Boris Johnson's 'freedom day' isolation tells us the virus is everywhere

[Polly Toynbee](#)



The prime minister had planned a Churchill-style speech. But his U-turn reveals the true cost of his Covid bungling



Boris Johnson announces his isolation at Chequers on Sunday. Photograph: Boris Johnson/Twitter

Boris Johnson announces his isolation at Chequers on Sunday. Photograph: Boris Johnson/Twitter

Mon 19 Jul 2021 13.50 EDT

How was “freedom day” for you? On the stroke of midnight a photogenic few leapt on to the dancefloor and raved into the small hours; but the [NHS](#), social care, schools, supermarkets, hauliers, hospitality and transport sectors rumbled and raged with incomprehension at the chaos and hypocrisy unleashed by our leaders. Not even Boris Johnson’s Houdini magic may prevent these U-turns, dishonesties and panics turning his second anniversary at No 10 into his Black Monday turning-point.

The prime minister’s glory day was such a disappointment. He had planned an event to declare his own VE Day – virus victory – “by summoning the spirit of Churchill with appropriately stirring rhetoric” at “an historic venue associated with the wartime leader”, according to a government source. In a rare wise move, Downing Street quietly [cancelled it](#).

His advisers panicked over soaring Covid case numbers, [predicted](#) to rise to 100,000 or even 200,000 daily, the third-worst level in the world. What

political idiocy, that the PM and chancellor thought they could skive off self-isolation on a nonexistent VIP “pilot scheme” – the same one Michael Gove had invoked to [avoid quarantine](#) after taking his son to the Champions League final in Portugal. Far too late, Downing Street announced that No 10 and the Cabinet Office had pulled out of this “pilot”, refusing to publish its results.

Leadership in this time of plague has been absent, so it’s no surprise to find Prince Charles boasting that he’d wear no mask as he breathed and hymned through Exeter cathedral today, with the Daily Mail [adding](#) that “the Duchess of Cornwall is known to dislike wearing a mask”. Well, yes: masks are a minor nuisance, itchy, muffling, stuffy. But in this antisocial defiance, the royals are deliberately allying themselves with a raving right that uses the harmless mask as a symbol of tyranny.

Meanwhile, the chairman of the 1922 Committee, Graham Brady MP, declared in a Sunday paper: “I believe the real purpose of masks is social control.” The public, he swore, had been seized by “Stockholm syndrome”, the government using “fear to manipulate the population of a free democratic country”. “How far a proud nation has allowed itself to fall!”

There’s no space here to discuss how “freedom” has been purloined and perverted by the right – but what breathtaking frivolity to refuse to wear masks that can [reduce](#) transmission by 25%. Now get set to watch the public frustration and friction over swaggering macho men and defiant anti-vaxxers refusing masks, putting other passengers and shoppers at risk. Churchillian Johnson might have said, “Never in the field of human viruses was so much infection due to such an irresponsible few.” Polls this week have [again shown](#) that the public understands the precautionary principle better than their leader does.

“The warning light on the NHS dashboard is not flashing amber, it’s flashing red,” the health committee chair Jeremy Hunt [told](#) the Today programme on Saturday. There’s no better alarm signal than the double-jabbed new health secretary immediately contracting Covid, with unknowable long Covid effects, risking its spread through a care home he visited and pinging half the cabinet after close contact with them. That’s the story: the virus is everywhere, disease-inducing and still deadly to VIPs and little people alike.

“Please, please, please be careful,” Boris Johnson urged in full U-turn, but that’s not what his lot practise. His “irreversible” pledge has vanished because, right here and now, disaster has already struck an exhausted NHS all over again.

But so as not to spoil freedom day, the public was not supposed to know about it. The Health Service Journal [reports](#) that three NHS chief executives have been banned from speaking to the media about the “unsustainable pressure” their hospitals are facing, and banned from commenting on the reckless removal of masks, social distancing and indoor gathering limits. They confirmed that NHS chiefs’ WhatsApp group has “quite a few angry people” commenting on leaders’ failure to signal the present danger. “There is a sense that we are expected [by government] to pretend it’s all over.”

Silencing the NHS is absurd, and it never works. Some un-cowed souls will always speak out – especially seasoned seniors such as Nick Hulme, a well-respected troubleshooter, now chief executive of East Suffolk and North Essex trust. “We are breaking every previous A&E record every day,” and not in a good way, he tells me. Covid cases are filling beds. “This is still a major crisis and we expect a third more cases for the rest of this year as they relax the rules.”

What Hulme calls the “Covid hangover” is each day bringing in between 16 and 20 seriously ill people whose cases were missed, such as “stage 3 and stage 4 cancers, presenting with a far worse prognosis”, needing speedy, complex care. Sending out medics in scrubs to beg triaged A&E patients to go away and see their GP doesn’t necessarily work: they don’t go if they can’t get a GP appointment.

“The test-and-trace debacle has caused a crisis,” he says. He has lost 32 staff who’ve been pinged by the NHS Covid app and told to isolate for 10 days. “Two senior consultants pinged off for 10 days means we have lost 200 outpatient appointments and 200 operations, leaving an entire team redundant.” A great relief to him is the announcement today [exempting](#) pinged health and care staff from quarantine. But unions are up in arms, defending NHS soldiers on the frontline taking the Covid bullets. Their pay review reward, possibly to be announced this week, may be only a one or two percentage points above the sub-inflation 1% government offer.

No wonder No 10 has tried to silence the voices of the NHS. Hulme's waiting list is the highest since records began: "and we're doing well," he says. Back in 2010, the NHS had virtually no one waiting for more than 18 weeks; now Hulme has 4,500 patients waiting for more than 52 weeks. The government has also quietly dropped the 18-week measure from its NHS bill. The national list had risen to 4.5 million people before Covid struck, caused by a decade of NHS austerity when funding per capita fell: now Sajid Javid is [warning](#) that waiting lists may reach 13 million.

New cases among vaccinated people are set to outstrip cases among unvaccinated people within days, [according](#) to the non-profit ZOE Covid study group. Those who have been vaccinated may be less likely to die, but why the complacency about surging long Covid cases? Boris Johnson's "Do what I say, not what I do" freedom day won't be remembered for Churchillian declarations, but for foolish boasting, toxic politics, and calamitous health policy misjudgment.

- Polly Toynbee is a Guardian columnist
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Interview

Turkish Cypriot leader: ‘The only way forward is a two-state solution’

[Helena Smith](#) in North Nicosia

Self-avowed nationalist Ersin Tatar in ebullient mood despite embargos, isolation and political restrictions



The Turkish president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan (left), and the Turkish Cyprus president, Ersin Tatar. Photograph: Turkish President Press Office Handout/EPA

The Turkish president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan (left), and the Turkish Cyprus president, Ersin Tatar. Photograph: Turkish President Press Office Handout/EPA

Tue 20 Jul 2021 05.56 EDT

It's been nine months since Ersin Tatar assumed the presidency of the self-declared Turkish republic of Northern [Cyprus](#) and, like his predecessors, he has found little has changed.

Embargos, international isolation and political restrictions remain perennial problems for his unrecognised state. Even today, nearly 38 years after the territory proclaimed independence, foreign dignitaries pass through his colonial-era office and still object to being photographed next to the flags on his desk.

"They're afraid of the Greek Cypriots telling them off," said the self-avowed nationalist, pointing to the Turkish and Turkish Cypriot ensigns positioned either side of a portrait of Kemal Ataturk behind him. "Our friends in the south will do everything they can to stop us from being able to prosper ... their policy is to stifle us until we give up."

Still, Ersin is in ebullient mood.

Ahead of his mentor, Turkish president [Recep Tayyip Erdogan](#), visiting the territory on Tuesday to commemorate Turkey's 1974 invasion – a "peace operation," he contends, that saved his people from "certain extermination" – he appears to be on a roll. "In Turkey he's treated like a pop star," one aide said. "People come up to him in the streets. He loves it."

At 60, the Cambridge-educated politician attributes the public displays of enthusiasm to Erdogan himself. Ankara, he insists, has not only stood by the statelet through some "hard and lonely" times; from the outset the Turkish president has embraced his proposal of a two-state solution to the Cyprus problem after years of failed peace talks aimed at uniting the Mediterranean island in a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation.

"People think [he] instructed me to follow his policy. That is not true. I am the man who convinced Erdogan that after all these federation opportunities had been exhausted we should go for this two-state solution," he told the Guardian, downplaying the EU's refusal to discuss a settlement along such lines.

“He supported me and is very happy to do so because Turkish public opinion has bought it ... For 85 million Turks, Cyprus is a very high-powered national issue. I have always said that the only way forward to a realistic solution is a two-state solution.”

Turkish Cypriots, he says, are not only indebted to a motherland that intervened militarily to safeguard the minority in 1974 – following an Athens-inspired coup aimed at union with [Greece](#) – but a protector that has also bankrolled them to the tune of about \$300m annually. To this day, Turkey is the only country to recognise the entity.

“We obviously have people like Mustafa Akıncı [his moderate predecessor] and others who think otherwise but they are not in power,” said Tatar. “I am now in power ... and I am the president of Turkish Cypriots all over, here, in [Turkey](#), in England, Canada and Australia.”

The invasion in 1974 resulted in Turkish troops seizing 37% of Cyprus in the name of what was then 18% of its population. Ever since, both communities have been forced to live either side of a UN-patrolled ceasefire line, symbolic of the inability of mediators to solve the west’s longest-running diplomatic dispute. At the height of the conflict, about 250,000 Greek Cypriots were displaced from their homes, pushed into what is now the internationally recognised south.

In 2004 Turkish Cypriots voted in favour of a reunification deal brokered by the UN seen as the closest yet to ending the dispute. It still irks Tartar, a former prime minister, that while Greek Cypriots rejected the plan they were allowed to join the EU.

“Whether Greek Cypriots like it or not, Turkish Cypriots are co-owners and co-founders of the [1960] Republic of Cyprus. Numbers are irrelevant ... there have been times in the past when probably there have more Turkish people here than Greeks,” he said. “A lot of water has flown under the bridge, so why don’t they just wake up to the reality of the new Cyprus so that we can have peace? We are two states anyway.”

In the history of the breakaway republic, no election has been as contentious as that of Tatar elevated to the post after garnering only 4,000 votes more

than the leftwing Akıncı , a vocal opponent of policies his own supporters have long feared will lead to the north's annexation by Turkey.

Turkish Cypriots opposed to a settlement that would seal the island's permanent division, claim that without Ankara's flagrant interference in the run-up to the October poll, victory would never have been secured for the conservative National Unity party leader. A recent report, released after months of inquiry by lawyers, academics, activists and researchers, concluded the ballot had been riddled with irregularities, including bribes-for-votes and threats against Akıncı, his family and close associates.

"Tatar was handed the election on a plate," said Mine Atli, a Turkish Cypriot lawyer who was among the report's authors. "The Turkish embassy in [northern] Nicosia was turned into an election campaign headquarters. Tatar is merely a puppet of the Erdoğan administration ... we are the real owners of this island, not them, and so we will decide its future."

Celebrations marking the 47th anniversary peaked on Tuesday with Erdoğan confirming that steps would be taken to resettle the ghost town of Varosha, a Greek enclave that for decades had remained untouched until Ankara controversially announced it would reopen parts of the resort in a move also thought to have swung the vote in his protégé's favour.



Varosha has recently reopened to tourists. Photograph: Danil Shamkin/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

Lashing out at [Europe](#) and vowing to “do what we need to do,” the leader declared that with further demilitarisation of the zone – long under Turkish army oversight - a new era had began in what will be seen as intensified efforts to exploit an area of the occupied north that had remained an emblem of hope for Greek Cypriots.

The move, in violation of UN resolutions along with the hardening of Ankara’s stance more generally on Cyprus, has been derided as a stunt aimed at currying favour with nationalists back home at a time of domestic problems for the strongman. “He will use Cyprus like Margaret Thatcher used the Falklands,” said Atli, who was raised in Britain.

Opposition MPs, many appalled by Erdogan’s authoritarianism, boycotted parliament when the leader unveiled plans for the construction of a government complex to help boost the state ‘s international standing in an address before lawmakers on Monday.

For Turkish Cypriots who support reunification under the roof of a shared federation and have taken to the streets in the past in protest over the territory’s creeping Islamisation, the softly spoken Tatar, who trained as a chartered accountant and logn worked in the UK, is their worst nightmare. Many have applied for Republic of Cyprus passports – issued by the south – and fled, leaving the north to become inhabited by socially conservative settlers from Anatolia.

The visit is being watched closely by the EU. But while the European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, says the bloc will “never, ever” accept a solution that would legitimise the permanent partition of a member state, the Turkish Cypriot leader remains seemingly unperturbed.

If there is no solution, ties with Turkey will inevitably deepen, he says, even if he also cherishes the idea of his people one day joining Europe.

“I want to be in Europe and Turkey has not told me there is no such policy ... but unless we recognise the realities on the island, we won’t reach an

agreement and the status quo will prevail,” he said. “Turkish Cypriots will still be under embargo and isolation, restricted and without a recognised state ... but we will adjust accordingly.”

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Baghdad suicide bombing: dozens killed, scores injured in blast at packed Iraq market

Islamic State has claimed responsibility for the deadly attack in Sadr City neighbourhood

00:38

Iraq: market explosion in Baghdad kills dozens – video

Reuters

Mon 19 Jul 2021 20.07 EDT

A suicide bomber has killed at least 35 people and wounded more than 60 in a crowded market in the Sadr City neighbourhood of Baghdad on Monday, the eve of the Eid al-Adha festival, security and hospital sources said.

Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack, the group's Nasheer news agency said on Telegram. It said one of its militants blew up his explosive vest among the crowds. Hospital sources said the death toll could rise as some of the wounded were in critical condition.

['They will never let go': Isis fighters regroup in the heart of Iraq](#)
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The prime minister, Mustafa al-Kadhimi, held an urgent meeting with top security commanders to discuss the attack, the premier's office said in a brief statement.



People and security forces gather at the site of a bombing in Wahailat market in Sadr City, Iraq. Photograph: Khalid Mohammed/AP

President Barham Salih posted a tweet saying: “With an awful crime they target civilians in Sadr city on the eve of Eid ... We will not rest before terrorism is cut off by its roots.”

In April, the Sunni Muslim militant group Islamic State claimed responsibility for a car bomb attack on a market in Sadr City, Baghdad's main Shia Muslim neighbourhood, that killed four people and wounded 20.

Islamic State also claimed responsibility for a [bomb attack in January](#) that killed more than 30 in the crowded Tayaran Square market in central Baghdad – Iraq's first big suicide bombing for three years.

Large bomb attacks were once an almost daily occurrence in the Iraqi capital but have dwindled since an Islamic State invasion of northern and western Iraq [was defeated](#) in 2017.

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Haiti

Haiti minister says ‘big fish’ behind president’s killing still at large

New prime minister announced as elections chief says current suspects were probably not ringleaders



Police officers guard outside the residence of the late president, Jovenel Moïse, while FBI agents inspect the property in Port-au-Prince last week.
Photograph: Ricardo Arduengo/Reuters

Police officers guard outside the residence of the late president, Jovenel Moïse, while FBI agents inspect the property in Port-au-Prince last week.
Photograph: Ricardo Arduengo/Reuters

[Tom Phillips](#) Latin America correspondent

Tue 20 Jul 2021 05.30 EDT

The “big fishes” who masterminded the assassination of Haiti’s president, Jovenel Moïse, remain at large, a senior government minister has admitted, as the Caribbean country unveiled a new prime minister in a bid to defuse a burgeoning struggle for power.

Police have named two Haitian citizens as key suspects in the murder: a Florida-based pastor called Christian Emmanuel Sanon and the former intelligence officer Joseph Felix Badio. On Friday Colombia’s police chief, Gen Jorge Luis Vargas, claimed Badio might have given the order for two retired Colombian soldiers to assassinate Moïse in the early hours of 7 July for reasons that remain obscure. Sanon was arrested in Haiti last week, and Badio’s whereabouts are unknown.

[The assassination of Haiti’s leader remains shrouded in mystery: ‘We may never know’](#)

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But speaking to the Guardian, Haiti’s elections minister, Mathias Pierre, said he doubted Sanon and Badio were the main architects of a brazen crime some fear could plunge the Caribbean country into a new chapter of volatility.

“Such a plot for an assassination is not the work of the two people [alone],” Pierre said, referring to the pair.

“We know that there are big fishes out there that wanted the death and are part of the plot to kill the president … There are more powerful people behind this,” the 54-year-old politician added.

Pierre admitted the identity of those conspirators remained unknown: “But we do believe that the president had a lot of enemies – people who didn’t agree with his plan and programs, and certainly with his agenda. And we believe they might be linked to this crime.”

Sanon, a 63-year-old pastor, was arrested in Haiti on 11 July after reportedly flying into its capital, Port-au-Prince, the previous month on a private jet. Reports suggest he harboured half-baked dreams of leading a multibillion-

dollar reconstruction of his homeland and becoming one of Haiti's top leaders.

[According to the Washington Post](#), two US-based companies – Worldwide Investment Development Group and CTU Security – had planned to assemble a private security team to protect Sanon as he returned to Haiti and began working to achieve those objectives.



Claude Joseph, above, the acting prime minister, has announced he will step aside in favor of Ariel Henry. Photograph: Ricardo Arduengo/Reuters

However, Pierre said he believed Sanon was not the murder's chief architect but rather had been "used by certain people" with a grudge against Moïse. The precise nature of that grudge is unclear but Pierre claimed there were influential Haitian figures "feeling that their personal interests were in danger and they wanted to do everything to get rid [of the president]".

"But we would never have thought assassination was part of the game plan," Pierre added on Monday as Haiti's acting prime minister, Claude Joseph, announced he was stepping aside in favour of the politician Moïse had named as his new prime minister shortly before being killed.

Ariel Henry, who was due to be installed as prime minister on the day of Moïse's murder, has received the backing of foreign governments including

the US, Brazil, Canada and the EU.

[Guns, gangs and foreign meddling: how life in Haiti went from bad to worse](#) [Read more](#)

“There is no power struggle,” Pierre said after Joseph’s decision to step down, which followed days of speculation over who was in charge of Haiti.

Moïse is due to be buried on Friday in the northern city of Cap-Haïtien. His wife, who was wounded in the attack on their home, returned to Haiti last Saturday after being rushed to the US for emergency treatment following the killing.

Pierre said Moïse had repeatedly spoken of supposed plots to murder him, “but there was no immediate threat”.

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Defendants including Ali Bukeni, Daniel Brenny Oyerwot, Eddy Ssebuufu at a bail hearing. Photograph: Katumba Badru Sultan/The Guardian

Ugandan activists describe months of physical abuse in prison

Defendants including Ali Bukeni, Daniel Brenny Oyerwot, Eddy Ssebuufu at a bail hearing. Photograph: Katumba Badru Sultan/The Guardian

Reports by supporters of opposition politician Robert Kyagulanyi will increase pressure on president over human rights

by [Samuel Okiror](#) in Kampala and [Jason Burke](#)

Tue 20 Jul 2021 03.13 EDT

Opposition activists who spent months behind bars in [Uganda](#) have described systematic physical abuse, denial of basic legal rights and appalling conditions as they waited for trial on charges they claim were fabricated.

The experiences of the activists, revealed to the Guardian after their release last month, will increase pressure on Uganda, a key western ally in east [Africa](#), over human rights failings that have grown significantly worse since the country's president, Yoweri Museveni, started to face a significant political challenge in recent years.

Since campaigning opened last year for elections held in January, hundreds – possibly thousands – of supporters of the opposition politician, Robert Kyagulanyi, have been [arrested and illegally detained for months](#) in the worst wave of repression for decades.

Others, snatched off the streets by security services in a series of abductions, have disappeared into secret jails. More than 50 [people were killed during protests](#) in November. Most were shot by security forces.

Among those arrested in the past seven months were more than 120 activists working with Kyagulanyi – who is a former reggae singer also known as Bobi Wine – [detained on 30 December on charges of inciting violence after protests](#) following their leader's arrest for breaking Covid regulations.

Though many were released or bailed, 49 detainees, including many of Kyagulanyi's close aides, were subsequently diverted from civilian courts to

a military barracks before being charged with the serious crime of possessing four rounds of live ammunition.

The men said they were pepper-sprayed and beaten by police while handcuffed during their arrests in December, and then, once confined to a cell, forced to strip naked and perform exercises while being hit with cables and wires by men who appeared to be soldiers. At least one had severe pressure applied to his genitals.



Ali Bukeni, Daniel Brenny Oyerwot, Eddy Ssebuufu and others at a bail hearing. Photograph: Katumba Badru Sultan/The Guardian

“The military officers had these electric cable wires and batons,” said Ali Bukeni, Kyagulanyi’s musical and political partner. “These guys made our colleagues who were handcuffed to frog jump while caning and kicking them. Many of them got injuries.”

Eddy Ssebuufu, Kyagulanyi’s head of security and bodyguard, said guards told him to prepare to die. “They asked me to say my last prayers. I told them, you can’t kill me ... We are in a struggle for liberation,” he said.

Conditions in detention were poor, the released men said. While held at the Kitalya maximum security prison, they were forced into cells so overcrowded that men slept on their sides, urinating where they lay to avoid

losing their place on the ground. Months spent in a military detention in Masaka in the south-west were no better.

“They gave us a bucket to put on the corner. That’s where we used to urinate and defecate,” Ssebuufu said. “We had to endure the bad smell the whole night. We would pour it in the morning. We would rotate to sleep. Some would sleep and others would stand.”

The detainees said they had been denied access to lawyers and family for most of their six-month detention, and were held in complete isolation. No newspapers were allowed and the only television showed children’s cartoons.

“We were locked out of the world,” said Bukeni, who described the denial of contacts as “psychologically torturing”.

Museveni, 76, has been in power for 35 years and has strong support in some rural areas, as well as among the military, security services and police. The US and UK have given billions of dollars of development and security assistance to [Uganda](#) in recent years. Both have made their deepening concerns at recent human rights abuses clear.

Though the jailed men were in detention at the time of the alleged offence, they were held until mid-June, when they were bailed at Uganda’s military general court martial in the capital, Kampala.

[Museveni claimed victory in the election](#) in January, which was marred by allegations of fraud and the harassment of opposition activists.



Robert Kyagulanyi joins supporters after their release from detention.
Photograph: Katumba Badru Sultan/The Guardian

Kyagulanyi's National Unity Platform has [listed more than 600 members](#) and activists said to have been detained. NUP officials believe the true figure is likely to be more than 1,000. Some of those snatched from the streets have [been sentenced after cursory hearings in the courts](#). Many are not brought to court at all.

On release, many reported systematic torture, detention in harsh conditions in often secret prisons and the denial of access to relatives or lawyers.

“Five military men came. They called us one by one,” said Ssebuufu. “You are taken into a small room and told to undress. They told me to remove my shirt, mask, stockings and trousers. I remained in my boxers. They ordered me to take off the boxers too. I asked why. One soldier cocked his gun and asked: are you refusing? So I had to take them off. They told me to stand in the corner and bend [over]. The guy started squeezing my genitals. The pain was unbearable. I was crying.”



A woman take a selfie with Daniel Brenny Oyerwot after his release from detention. Photograph: Katumba Badru Sultan/The Guardian

Daniel Brenny Oyerwot, Kyagulanyi's music producer and sound engineer, said he had been driving to a campaign meeting in December when his vehicle was stopped by a combined force of ordinary soldiers, special forces commanded by Museveni's son, and police.

"We were forcefully pulled out of the cars. Some of the car windscreens were smashed ... We were handcuffed and severely beaten. They [security operatives] stepped on our heads and some of them hit our backs using batons," the 28-year-old said.

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[Rights and freedom](#)[Colombia](#)

Colombia under fire for backing Cuba protests while stifling dissent at home

Government calls for freedom of expression in Cuba as police mount brutal response to local activists



National police at Plaza de Bolívar in Bogotá, Colombia, on Monday. Officers have killed at least 44 protesters, according to watchdogs.
Photograph: Iván Valencia/AP

National police at Plaza de Bolívar in Bogotá, Colombia, on Monday. Officers have killed at least 44 protesters, according to watchdogs.
Photograph: Iván Valencia/AP

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Joe Parkin Daniels in Bogotá

[@joeparkdan](https://twitter.com/joeparkdan)

Tue 20 Jul 2021 05.00 EDT

Colombia's government has been accused of hypocrisy after calling for solidarity with [protesters in Cuba](#) even as it [cracks down harshly on mass demonstrations](#) against economic inequity and human rights abuses.

Colombia is bracing for another round of anti-poverty demonstrations and unrest, with large marches planned for Tuesday 20 July, Colombia's independence day, after taking a monthlong hiatus during a [surge in Covid-19 cases](#).

Colombia's rightwing government, led by President Iván Duque, has said the marches are the result of "terrorist" agitators and are supported by illegal armed groups.

But the Colombian government's tone towards dissent at home jars with its support for mass marches in Cuba, with Colombia's foreign ministry calling on communist rulers there to "guarantee the freedom of expression" and "respect the right" to peaceful protest.

[‘This is a revolution’: the faces of Colombia’s protests](#)

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Protests in Colombia began in late April in response to an unpopular and since-axed tax reform, and they quickly spread across the country, morphing into a wider howl of outrage against deepening economic disparity and human rights abuses.

In the unrest, police kiosks and bus stations were vandalized and protesters threw up roadblocks around the country.

The police response was brutal, with officers routinely using teargas and billy clubs to quell disturbances. In some cases, authorities fired on demonstrators with live rounds. At least 44 protesters have been killed by police and dozens are still missing, according to local watchdogs.

A recent human rights commission to Colombia made up of delegates from 13 countries found that authorities used counter-insurgency tactics against protesters.

“The Duque government has zero credibility commenting on the Cuban protests,” said Gimena Sánchez-Garzoli, Andes director at the Washington Office on Latin America, a thinktank. “Its unwillingness to address the systemic abuses that took place in the context of the protests shows that it only considers human rights when it benefits its political agenda.”

Duque announced on Monday some reforms to the national police, including new uniforms and human rights training for anti-riot officers. Critics say the changes are cosmetic rather than practical.

And ahead of Tuesday’s planned demonstrations, police ramped up a crackdown on protesters, arresting 12 members of the so-called “frontline”, an amorphous group of mostly young protesters who have skirmished with police at marches in cities nationwide.

Celebrating the arrests as though they were a huge drug seizure, Colombia’s defense minister, Diego Molano, [tweeted](#) images of the suspected agitators and their seized equipment, including hard hats, respirators and what

appeared to be homemade grenades, photographed next to a bandana emblazoned with the words “SOS Colombia, they are killing us”.

Nearly 3,000 soldiers have been dispatched to Bogotá, the capital, where they will monitor bus stations and protest hotspots on the edges of the city. In Cali, a major city in Colombia's south-west that quickly became the center of unrest in April, a curfew and ban on liquor sales has been announced, while the surrounding Valle del Cauca province is under lockdown. Police have announced that they'll confiscate any “shields, helmets, goggles and respirators” from protesters.

But those sympathetic to protesters say the government is fearmongering, as part of a campaign of repression against protesters.

“They’re trying to whip up fear, they’re detaining people arbitrarily. The police don’t come out to control crowds, they come out with rifles raised – they’re preparing for large-scale repression,” said Laura Guerrero, whose son Nicolás Guerrero was killed at a protest in Cali. “The right to protest exists but the police don’t respect it.”

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