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London

Sarah Everard: serving Met officer arrested over disappearance

Woman also arrested at same address in Kent on suspicion of assisting an offender



Sarah Everard went missing after leaving a friend's house in Clapham at about 9pm on 3 March. Photograph: Richard Gardner/Rex/Shutterstock

Sarah Everard went missing after leaving a friend's house in Clapham at about 9pm on 3 March. Photograph: Richard Gardner/Rex/Shutterstock

[Nadeem Badshah](#) and [Matthew Weaver](#)

Wed 10 Mar 2021 02.13 EST

A serving Metropolitan police officer has been arrested in connection with the disappearance of Sarah Everard in south London.

The 33-year-old marketing executive went missing after leaving a friend's house in Clapham at about 9pm on Wednesday last week.

The officer was detained at an address in Kent on Tuesday and a woman was also arrested at the same location on suspicion of assisting an offender. They have each been taken into custody at a London police station.

Everard's family is being kept updated with developments, the force said, adding that the directorate of professional standards – the body responsible for investigating complaints against the professional conduct of officers – was aware of the case.

Assistant commissioner Nick Ephgrave said: "The arrest this evening is a serious and significant development. We will continue to work with all speed on this investigation but the fact that the arrested man is a serving Metropolitan police officer is both shocking and deeply disturbing.

"I understand there will be significant public concern but it is essential that the investigative team are given the time and space to continue their work."

DCI Katherine Goodwin said: "This is a significant development in our inquiry. This is a fast-moving investigation and we are doing everything we can to find Sarah.

"We have seen an overwhelming response from the public and I repeat my request for anyone with information that may be relevant to come forward, no matter how insignificant it may seem."

Everard has not been seen since she left a friend's home in Clapham, south-west London, on the evening of 3 March to walk home by herself to Brixton, about 50 minutes away by foot.



Police officers conduct a fingertip search of Poynders Road, London, where Sarah Everard was last seen. Photograph: Chris J Ratcliffe/Getty Images

The last known sighting of her was on Poynders Road, which links the two areas, where she was captured on film by a private door camera as she walked alone from the junction at Cavendish Road in the direction of Tulse Hill, south of Brixton.

Police put a cordon around a block of flats in south London on Tuesday near where she was last seen. The police cordon was around the Poynders Court housing estate on the north side of the road. But the Metropolitan police refused to confirm whether it was related to the search. Other officers were lifting covers and searching drains along Poynders Road.

The Met has issued new images of Everard and said the search for her is continuing “at pace”. On Tuesday two officers with sniffer dogs were seen searching outside the nearby Oaklands Estate and gardens in surrounding streets.

On Monday, searches continued in the area, with police examining a small park close to where Everard’s mobile phone signal was last registered.

Divers were searching the pond in Agnes Riley Gardens, while sniffer dogs scoured the area. Officers were also searching a housing estate close to

where Everard was last seen. Missing posters asking for information on her whereabouts have been pasted on lamp-posts in a wide radius around the area.

Everard moved to London about 12 years ago. She has a brother and a sister who also live in the city. Their parents have travelled down from York to join with the search.

Timeline of key events

Wednesday 3 March: Sarah Everard, 33, a marketing executive, goes missing after leaving a friend's house in Clapham, south London, around 9pm.

6 March: Metropolitan police raise the alarm, saying it was “totally out of character” for Everard not to be in contact with family and friends. Police release a CCTV image of her, saying she was thought to have walked through Clapham Common after leaving her friend's flat, heading towards her home in Brixton, a journey of around 50 minutes.

7 March: Police release footage taken from a private doorbell-type camera showing Everard was walking alone along the A205 Poynders Road towards Tulse Hill, just south of Brixton. Police say it is unclear whether or not she reached her house. She was last seen wearing a green rain jacket, navy blue trousers with a white diamond pattern and turquoise and orange trainers, and was thought to have been wearing green earphones and a white beanie hat. Scotland Yard says the investigation is being led by its Specialist Crime Command because of the “complex nature” of the probe, which combines searches with house-to-house inquiries.

8 March: Scotland Yard says it remains “open minded as to all possibilities”, while confirming a missing persons investigation. Specialist officers are drafted in from across the Met. Police say they have received more than 120 calls from the public on the case and ask anyone who may have relevant dashcam or other footage to come forward.

9 March: Police use sniffer dogs to search gardens in streets around the search site near Everard's envisaged route home and in the nearby Oaklands

Estate. Officers also search a pond in Clapham Common and drains along the A205. The Met sets up a cordon around the Poynders Court housing complex on Poynders Road as part of the search, with forensics officers seen examining the area.

11.59pm, 9 March: The Met says it has arrested a police officer at an address in Kent in connection with Everard's disappearance, with a woman arrested at the same location on suspicion of assisting an offender. The man and the woman are taken into custody. Detective Chief Inspector Katherine Goodwin says the force is still "doing everything we can to find Sarah".

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/mar/09/sarah-everard-police-cordon-flats-in-south-london>

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Sexual harassment

Almost all young women in the UK have been sexually harassed, survey finds

Exclusive: YouGov poll reveals extent of abuse and lack of faith in authorities' ability to deal with it



A UN Women UK survey found 80% of women of all ages said they had experienced sexual harassment in public spaces. Photograph: Montgomery Martin/Alamy

A UN Women UK survey found 80% of women of all ages said they had experienced sexual harassment in public spaces. Photograph: Montgomery Martin/Alamy

[Alexandra Topping](#)

Wed 10 Mar 2021 01.00 EST

Virtually all young women in the UK have been subjected to sexual harassment, according to a survey from UN [Women](#) UK, which warns that

most women have lost faith that the abuse will be dealt with.

Among women aged 18-24, 97% said they had been sexually harassed, while 80% of women of all ages said they had experienced sexual harassment in public spaces.

“This is a human rights crisis. It’s just not enough for us to keep saying ‘this is too difficult a problem for us to solve’ – it needs addressing now,” said Claire Barnett, executive director of UN Women UK.

“We are looking at a situation where younger women are constantly modifying their behaviour in an attempt to avoid being objectified or attacked, and older women are reporting serious concerns about personal safety if they ever leave the house in the dark – even during the daytime in winter.”

The YouGov survey of more than 1,000 women, seen exclusively by the Guardian, exposes a damning lack of faith in the UK authorities’ desire and ability to deal with sexual harassment – 96% of respondents did not report incidents, with 45% saying it would not change anything. Among those who said the event was not serious enough to report were women who had been groped, followed and coerced into sexual activity, said UN Women UK.

[Quarter of women and girls have been abused by a partner, says WHO](#)
[Read more](#)

As part of the [UN Women UK’s Safe Spaces Now](#) project, the organisation collected stories from 400 women and sent an [open letter to leaders](#), calling for better designed public spaces, improved reporting systems and education.

“We’ve seen really strong results elsewhere in the world. Our problem now is that sometimes in the UK, we think we are a leading light in terms of progress, and we forget to work on the gender-based violence that still happens every day at home, especially to women and marginalised groups,” said Barnett.

Laura Bates, founder of the Everyday Sexism Project, said women were recognising the abuse they faced as sexual harassment, but it was unsurprising they had no faith in an “utterly broken” system.

“If you talk about wolf-whistling or street harassment in the UK, you are liable to find yourself on the front page of a tabloid being called a ‘feminazi’ and accused of overreacting, so of course young women don’t think that they’ll be taken seriously if they come forward,” she said.

Bates pointed to [TUC/Everyday Sexism research](#) that found 52% of women had experienced [sexual harassment at work](#), and of the one in five who had reported it, three-quarters said nothing had changed, while 16% said they were treated worse as a result.

“At the root of all this is the normalisation of the idea that a woman’s body in a public place is simply public property and young women just have to put up with it. We have to shatter that normalisation through policy and in the press if we want to change the picture,” she said.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/10/almost-all-young-women-in-the-uk-have-been-sexually-harassed-survey-finds>

[Meghan, the Duchess of Sussex](#)

Meghan: MP behind letter of solidarity calls for action on press bullying

Exclusive: Holly Lynch calls for end to hounding of women in public life after letter praised by Harry



The Duchess of Sussex with Prince Harry in 2019. She telephoned Holly Lynch after the MPs' letter she coordinated was published. Photograph: Reuters

The Duchess of Sussex with Prince Harry in 2019. She telephoned Holly Lynch after the MPs' letter she coordinated was published. Photograph: Reuters

[Jessica Elgot](#)
[@jessicaelgot](#)

Wed 10 Mar 2021 02.24 EST

The hounding of the Duchess of Sussex shows that MPs must take further action against press bullying, the MP who organised a letter of solidarity for Meghan has said after [Prince Harry](#) suggested the act had given the couple more support than their own families had.

Holly Lynch coordinated the cross-party [letter from 72 female MPs](#) to Meghan in 2019. On Tuesday, the Labour MP for Halifax said the warning that MPs would not continue to accept an onslaught of negative coverage with “colonial undertones” had clearly not been heeded by the media.

Lynch said she had shared Harry’s fears of “history repeating itself” about the treatment of his mother, Princess Diana.

“Those were some of my concerns when we took the decision to put that letter together,” Lynch told the Guardian. “A lot of media outlets have not heeded those calls for a change, which is why we might start needing to think about a case to government about how we stop hounding women in public life and put them in a position where they feel suicidal.”

A number of MPs are understood to have made preliminary enquiries to see if a [House of Commons](#) debate could be held in response to the couple’s interview with Oprah Winfrey. The debate could tackle racism in the media and the mental health strains of persistent press coverage.

In the interview, Harry told Winfrey that he had felt more solidarity from those MPs than from members of his own family. “I guess one of the most telling parts, and the saddest parts, was over 70 ... female members of parliament, both Conservative and Labour, came out and called out the colonial undertones of articles and headlines written about Meghan,” he said. “Yet no one from my family ever said anything over those three years. And that hurts.”



Holly Lynch in The House of Commons. She said she had shared Harry's fears of 'history repeating itself' about the treatment of his mother, Princess Diana. Photograph: UK Parliament/Jessica Taylor/PA

The original letter highlighted that many MPs believed Meghan had been subject to racist treatment by the press. "We are calling out what can only be described as outdated, colonial undertones to some of these stories," it said.

Lynch has previously said Meghan phoned her after receiving the letter and the two discussed the loneliness women can feel in the public spotlight. The letter was sent in the wake of an emotional interview that Meghan gave to ITV when she described the pressure of media scrutiny.

Lynch said: "The letter clearly did not make the significant difference to the conduct of some members of the British press that we had hoped that it would," she said. "So it is a timely reminder to us to use our voices as women legislators to say – what next?"

She said there needed to be the beginnings of a conversation about further press regulation if there was not a culture change in how sections of the media were operating. "We are legislators – we should be able to work together to find solutions. We have a responsibility to intervene," she said.

Lynch said parliamentarians were more able to respond to concerns about the conduct of the media, which she could “very clearly evidence”, rather than about the royal family, where the allegations of racism had been made about private conversations involving unnamed individuals.

She said there would now be a discussion among the MPs who signed the letter about what further collective action could be taken in parliament. “We are going to come together to explore what the next steps might be in order to call on the government to take further action to ensure those people with a voice on print and broadcast media are using that influence responsibly,” she said.

The letter was signed by the now children’s minister, Vicky Ford, and the business minister, Gillian Keegan, as well as the former Tory minister Tracey Crouch and MP Lucy Allan.

It was mostly signed by Labour MPs, including now shadow chancellor, Anneliese Dodds, shadow home office minister, Jess Phillips, and shadow business minister, Lucy Powell, and the former shadow home secretary Diane Abbott.

Dodds said on Tuesday she was proud to have signed it and stood by its criticism of how the media had treated Meghan. “That letter was about the treatment of people like Meghan Markle and it has been very concerning very often to see how women have been treated by sections of the media,” she said. “Racism and mental health are issues that must be taken seriously but this is much bigger than the royal family.”

Phillips said she “fell off the sofa” when Harry mentioned the letter but said “it meant something to them, which showed the value of doing this and of speaking out about abuse against all women in public life, particularly women of colour”.

Powell also said she was “surprised but pleased” when Harry mentioned the letter – and that it showed acts of solidarity were worthwhile. “It shows that people need to speak up and call things out when they are wrong, and not stand by. It matters when we do.”

The Liberal Democrat MP Wera Hobhouse, who also signed the letter, said she had been “deeply concerned” about Meghan’s statements on her mental health. “I hope that this will be a turning point in the way we think about mental health in the media; there is always a person – a mother, a daughter, a friend – at the receiving end of the commentary.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/mar/10/mp-behind-meghan-letter-calls-for-action-on-press-bullying>

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[The Queen](#)

Buckingham Palace breaks silence on Meghan and Harry Oprah claims

Queen says ‘issues raised, particularly that of race, are concerning’ but adds they will be dealt with privately



The Queen and Prince Philip. ‘Harry, Meghan and Archie will always be much loved family members,’ the statement said. Photograph: Carl Court/AFP/Getty Images

The Queen and Prince Philip. ‘Harry, Meghan and Archie will always be much loved family members,’ the statement said. Photograph: Carl Court/AFP/Getty Images

[Caroline Davies](#)

Tue 9 Mar 2021 15.39 EST

The Queen has sought to draw a line under damaging racism claims made by the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, saying that issues will be dealt with

“privately” by the royal family.

The monarch expressed her “concern” over allegations of racism and her sadness on learning exactly how challenging the couple had found life as working royals, though she said some recollections of events differed.

Buckingham Palace finally broke its silence on Tuesday evening over the [claims made by Meghan and Harry](#), in an interview with Oprah Winfrey. Meghan revealed she was left feeling suicidal, while the couple said a member of the royal household had asked about how dark their unborn son’s skin would be.

After growing pressure to respond, a short statement issued on behalf of the Queen read: “The whole family is saddened to learn the full extent of how challenging the last few years have been for Harry and Meghan. The issues raised, particularly that of race, are concerning. While some recollections may vary, they are taken very seriously and will be addressed by the family privately.

[Society of Editors' claim that UK media not racist labelled 'laughable'](#)
[Read more](#)

“Harry, Meghan and Archie will always be much-loved family members.”

The statement followed two days of crisis talks among senior royals and palace aides over how best to handle the very public fallout from the interview.

Buckingham Palace had no advance warning of what the couple had said before the broadcast on CBS in the early hours of Monday, which was watched by more than 11 million UK viewers on Monday night, taking its transatlantic audience to almost 30 million.

The couple’s allegations, [particularly on race and mental health issues](#), led to calls for an investigation by the palace. The palace statement indicates the Queen favours private engagement with the couple as the best way forward.

The couple agreed to the Winfrey interview in order to share “their truth”. The wording of the Queen’s statement indicates other members of the royal family may have different truths, but there is no hint of criticism of the couple in it.

It is unclear which issues the Queen is referring to when she says “recollections may vary” but it could refer to remarks over Archie’s skin colour, or, perhaps, the fact the couple believed protocol was to be changed to deny their son the automatic title of prince when Charles accedes the throne.

The Queen stressed her affection for the couple, with warm affirmation that they would remain “much-loved” members of her family, as she has done in all her official statements on the subject of their departure as working royals.



The Duke and Duchess of Sussex during the interview with Oprah Winfrey. Photograph: Joe Pugliese/Harpo Productions/PA

The three-paragraph, 61-word statement did not contain any condemnation of specific events alleged to be racist, although the Queen did acknowledge race as one of the main issues raised. Nor did it state the couple’s “truth” as absolute, in effect suggesting the palace disputed some of the claims.

It came as Prince Charles was seen in public for the first time since the allegations aired. Visiting a pop-up vaccination centre in north London, he was asked by a journalist what he thought of the interview. He laughed and carried on walking without making any comment.

Boris Johnson has refused to comment on the debacle. However, on Tuesday Downing Street declined five opportunities to distance itself from a tweet by Zac Goldsmith, the minister, Conservative peer and ally of the prime minister, saying Harry was “blowing up his family” and adding: “What Meghan wants, Meghan gets.”

There had been mounting pressure for a Buckingham Palace response to the claims. The shadow health secretary, Jonathan Ashworth, told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme that “allegations and accusations have been made – they obviously need to be looked at”, adding it was a matter for the palace. Labour’s leader, Sir Keir Starmer, has said the issues raised were “bigger than the royal family” and “for too many years we’ve been too dismissive and too willing to put these issues to one side”.

[Piers Morgan to leave Good Morning Britain after Meghan row](#)
[Read more](#)

Charles Anson, the Queen’s former press secretary, said the statement was what he had expected. “It’s important to underline the fact that there is an understanding about what the debate’s about. To ensure the public knows that the family are taking this seriously, but that they wish to deal with them in the family context,” he told Sky News. Penny Junor, who writes about the royals, said it was a statement of “dignity” but also of “sorrow”.

Tony Blair’s former spin doctor Alastair Campbell said: “They were never going to get into a ‘he said, she said’ rebuttal.” Before the statement was released, Campbell, who advised the Queen in the aftermath of the death of Princess Diana, had said silence might be the best policy on this occasion.

“The situations are very different,” he said, adding that Diana’s funeral was a national event. “Whereas this, I think, is a pretty extraordinary and a pretty explosive media frenzy, but that ultimately is what it is. So I’m not sure I

would advise them to do anything much beyond what they are doing – which is not very much.”

Aides did not disclose on Tuesday if Harry and Meghan had spoken privately to other members of the royal family since their interview had aired. It is understood the palace’s delayed response was likely to be because it was waiting until after the interview was aired in the UK on Monday night.

The statement is, however, unlikely to be the end of the matter. The couple’s remarks, especially those on race and mental health , will be perceived to have caused long-term damage to the monarchy. A key part of the work of members of the family involves diversity, inclusion, equality and mental health, and the interview had raised questions about these very issues.

Among the most shocking claims in the two-hour TV interview was the allegation that a member of the royal family had raised with Harry “concerns and conversations” about what colour Archie’s skin would be when he was born.

Meghan suggested the fact Archie was mixed race meant he was denied the title of prince and the security protection that went with the title.

Of life inside the palace, Meghan said she “didn’t want to be alive any more”. Asked if she had contemplated suicide, she replied: “Yes, this was very, very clear, and very scary.” She had sought help from the “institution”, she said, but it was denied.

Meanwhile, Harry criticised his father, saying he felt “let down” by Charles and adding: “There’s a lot of hurt that happened.” He accused Charles of not taking his calls after the couple’s public announcement they were to step down as working royals, and claimed that the couple had been cut off financially.

The Sussexes said they would not divulge the name of the family member who made the remarks about Archie, though [Harry privately told Winfrey it was not the Queen or Prince Philip](#), the US presenter said.

After the interview, a snap YouGov poll found the British public split on whether the couple were treated fairly or unfairly by the royal family. It found 32% believed they were treated unfairly, while an equal proportion did not, and 36% did not know. Nearly half (48%) of 18- to 24-year-olds sided with Harry and Meghan, while 55% of over-65s supported the Queen.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/mar/09/buckingham-palace-breaks-silence-on-meghan-and-harry-oprah-claims>

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[Society of Editors](#)

Society of Editors in turmoil over its Meghan statement

Some board members ‘deeply angry’ about claim racism was not a factor in coverage of Duchess of Sussex



The editors of the Guardian and the Financial Times have said they disagree with the Society of Editors’ stance. Photograph: Facundo Arrizabalaga/EPA

The editors of the Guardian and the Financial Times have said they disagree with the Society of Editors’ stance. Photograph: Facundo Arrizabalaga/EPA

[Archie Bland](#)

Tue 9 Mar 2021 18.14 EST

The media industry body the [Society of Editors](#) was in turmoil on Tuesday night with some members of its board said to be “deeply angry” over a statement it put out claiming that racism was never a factor in coverage of the Duchess of Sussex.

More than 160 journalists of colour and the editors of the Guardian, Financial Times and HuffPost have objected to the statement, written by the SoE's executive director, Ian Murray, which argued that Meghan's claims that parts of the media were racist were "not acceptable".

Following the backlash, discussions were under way over the publication of a new statement intended to address the concerns. But the Guardian understands the SoE's board was split over the wording of that statement, with a dispute over the phrasing of a possible apology and some urgently demanding a clear change in tone.

There were calls for an emergency meeting to address the decision to release the statement, which one member said was "deeply unfortunate".

[Piers Morgan to leave Good Morning Britain after Meghan row](#)
[Read more](#)

The SoE draws members from nearly 400 national and regional outlets and says that while its members "are as different as ... the communities and audiences they serve", they "share the values that matter".

The board split came after 168 journalists, writers and broadcasters of colour from across the British media wrote an open letter describing the SoE's initial statement as "laughable" proof of "an institution and an industry in denial".

In the interview, Meghan summarised the couple's view of much of the British media by saying: "From the beginning of our relationship, they were so attacking and incited so much racism."

Murray said on Monday that the claims were "not acceptable" and made without "supporting evidence", insisting that the UK media "has a proud record of calling out racism". In a piece headlined "UK media not bigoted" he said the tone of tabloid coverage was simply driven by "holding a spotlight up to those in positions of power, celebrity or influence".

The signatories of the open letter – including staff and contributors at the Guardian, Metro, Grazia and Channel 4 – say they "deplore and reject" the

SoE's defence, which they argued "shows a wilful ignorance [of] not just the discriminatory treatment of Meghan ... but that of other people from an ethnic minority background".

The letter concluded: "The Society of Editors should have used the comments by the Sussexes to start an open and constructive discussion about the best way to prevent racist coverage in future ... The blanket refusal to accept there is any bigotry in the British press is laughable, does a disservice to journalists of colour and shows an institution and an industry in denial."

[Buckingham Palace breaks silence on Meghan and Harry Oprah claims](#)
[Read more](#)

The row reflects a fierce debate over the extent of the media's culpability in the issues raised by Harry and Meghan, with the Daily Mail most frequently cited. Articles raised as evidence of discriminatory treatment include those saying that Meghan is "[\(almost\) straight outta Compton](#)" and has "[exotic](#)" [DNA](#).

Murray's statement was immediately the subject of controversy on social media and in private. A tweet from Press Gazette linking to the statement was viewed more than 13m times, [the trade publication said](#), with most of more than 3,000 replies disagreeing with the defence of the industry.

Earlier, the organisation's board was divided on whether it was an appropriate reaction. "It's incredibly frustrating because that is far from a universal view in the media," one said. "It's tone-deaf."

The statement was not cleared with the board, although another member pointed out that statements were routinely issued without approval. "I don't think there was anything out of turn about this," they said.

The Guardian has requested an explanation for how the statement came to be published. Its editor-in-chief, Katharine Viner, said: "Every institution in the United Kingdom is currently examining its own position on vital issues of race and the treatment of people of colour. As I have said before, the media must do the same. It must be much more representative and more self-aware."

Roula Khalaf, the editor of the Financial Times, also disagreed with the statement. “There is work to be done across all sectors in the UK to call out and challenge racism,” she said. “The media has a critical role to play, and editors must ensure that our newsrooms and coverage reflect the societies we live in.”

In a BBC interview on Tuesday, Murray defended the statement and reiterated that he felt negative coverage of Harry and Meghan had been balanced by earlier positive coverage. He responded to the suggestion that the “straight outta Compton” headline was an example of the problem by saying: “I’m not au fait completely with areas of ... California.”

On Twitter, the HuffPost UK editor, Jess Brammar, wrote: “I’m aware I won’t make myself popular with my peers but I’m just going to stand up and say it: I don’t agree with statement from my industry body that it is ‘untrue that sections of UK press were bigoted’.” Charlie Brinkhurst-Cuff, the editor of gal-dem, said the SoE “simply deny there’s any issue”.

Others suggested that the statement suggested a failure to grapple with the underlying structural issues that some have identified as a factor in coverage that goes well beyond the royal couple. “Pains me to say that my industry has been in denial about its institutional racism for all the two decades I’ve been in it,” said Sathnam Sanghera, a columnist at the Times.

The Society of Editors did not respond to a request for comment.

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Piers Morgan

Piers Morgan quits Good Morning Britain after Meghan row

Decision to quit follows Ofcom launching investigation after receiving more than 40,000 complaints

- [Piers Morgan storms off set of Good Morning Britain in Meghan row](#)



Piers Morgan, who has decided to leave Good Morning Britain. Photograph: Mario Anzuoni/Reuters

Piers Morgan, who has decided to leave Good Morning Britain. Photograph: Mario Anzuoni/Reuters

[*Mark Sweney*](#)

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Wed 10 Mar 2021 02.20 EST

Piers Morgan has quit as co-host of ITV's breakfast show Good Morning Britain after critical remarks he made about the Duchess of Sussex's mental health prompted an on-air row with a colleague and an Ofcom investigation.

Pressure had mounted on Morgan since he made the comments on Monday's edition of the show, which followed the airing of Meghan and Prince Harry's tell-all interview with Oprah Winfrey in the US on Sunday night.

The Guardian understands that a formal complaint was lodged with ITV on behalf of the duchess after the broadcast.

By early evening on Tuesday, [Ofcom](#) had received more than 41,000 complaints about Morgan's behaviour, prompting the broadcasting regulator to launch an investigation into whether his comments broke the UK broadcasting code relating to harm and offence.

Just a couple of hour later, ITV released a statement saying: "Following discussions with ITV, Piers Morgan has decided now is the time to leave Good Morning Britain. ITV has accepted this decision and has nothing further to add."

[Buckingham Palace breaks silence on Meghan and Harry Oprah claims](#)
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In Winfrey's [interview](#), Meghan detailed how her mental health had deteriorated while she was pregnant amid a barrage of negative press and lack of support from "the firm" – the apparatus surrounding the royal household – which had repeatedly turned down her appeals for help and discouraged her from leaving the house for months.

[Piers Morgan storms off set of Good Morning Britain in Meghan row](#)
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"It was all happening just because I was breathing," Meghan said, breaking down in tears during the interview, which was broadcast on ITV on Monday night. "I just didn't want to be alive any more. That was a clear, real, frightening and constant thought."

She told Winfrey she had asked to go somewhere to get help with these suicidal thoughts, but was told it would not look good by one of the most senior people in the institution of the monarchy.

Morgan questioned on Monday's edition of GMB whether she was telling the truth. "Who did you go to?" he said. "What did they say to you? I'm sorry, I don't believe a word she said, Meghan Markle. I wouldn't believe it if she read me a weather report."

The remarks provoked a backlash, and it is understood that ITV executives wanted Morgan to apologise for them on-air. During Tuesday's programme Morgan said: "When we talked about this yesterday, I said as an all-encompassing thing I don't believe what Meghan Markle is saying generally in this interview, and I still have serious concerns about the veracity of a lot of what she said.

"But let me just state on the record my position about mental illness and on suicide. These are clearly extremely serious things that should be taken extremely seriously, and if someone is feeling that way they should get the treatment and help they need every time."

On the same show, Morgan [stormed off set](#) after a discussion about Meghan with his colleague Alex Beresford. The weather presenter defended the couple, telling Morgan: "I understand you've got a personal relationship with Meghan Markle, or had one, and she cut you off. She's entitled to cut you off if she wants to. Has she said anything about you since she cut you off? I don't think she has but yet you continue to trash her."

01:11

'I'm done with this': Piers Morgan storms off Good Morning Britain – video

As Beresford continued, Morgan got up and stormed out of the studio, saying: "OK, I'm done with this, sorry, no, can't do this." Beresford called his behaviour "pathetic" and "diabolical", while co-host, Susanna Reid, was forced to send the show to an early break.

Beresford later tweeted of the discussion, in which he had also shared some of his own experiences of racism: "I wish I had the privilege to sit on the

fence. In order for me to do that I would have to strip myself of my identity and that's not something I can do. It's not any of our places to pick apart claims of racism in order to make us to feel more comfortable."

ITV's chief executive, Dame Carolyn McCall, subsequently said the row was not "manufactured".

McCall added that ITV's managing director of media and entertainment, Kevin Lygo, had been in discussion with Morgan in recent days regarding his coverage of the Harry and Meghan interview. She said Good Morning Britain was a balanced show, adding: "ITV has many voices and we try and represent many voices every day. It's not about one opinion."

Among those reacting to Morgan's exit from GMB, where he has been co-host since 2015, was Lorraine Kelly, who presents the 9am show on ITV that follows it. She told the BBC's The One Show that Morgan had only just emailed her to break the news and said she had "no real details".

"It's certainly going to be quieter," she said. "We all wish him well ... Like I say, it will be calmer."

Piers Morgan [tweeted late on Tuesday](#): "Thinking of my late, great manager John Ferriter tonight. He'd have told me to do exactly the same thing. @GMB #TrustYourGut"

In the UK and Ireland, Samaritans can be contacted on 116 123 or by emailing jo@samaritans.org or jo@samaritans.ie. In the US, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is [1-800-273-8255](tel:1-800-273-8255). In Australia, the crisis support service Lifeline is 13 11 14. Other international helplines can be found at www.befrienders.org.

Local government

Swingeing cuts on cards as councils in England face funding crisis, watchdog warns

At least 25 councils nearly bankrupt as Covid puts pressure on finances, says National Audit Office



Bin collections are among the services that could be hit as councils in England try to balance their budgets. Photograph: Shaun A Daley/Alamy

Bin collections are among the services that could be hit as councils in England try to balance their budgets. Photograph: Shaun A Daley/Alamy

[Patrick Butler](#) *Social policy editor*

Tue 9 Mar 2021 19.01 EST

Residents face years more swingeing cuts to local services, from social care to libraries, bin collections and bus routes, as at least 25 councils teeter on

the brink of bankruptcy, the public spending watchdog has warned.

According to the National Audit Office, the vast majority of English councils (94%) expect to cut spending next year to meet legal duties to balance their budgets. The “scarring” of council balance sheets since the coronavirus pandemic began has been so fierce that half of town halls do not expect their finances to recover until at least the middle of the decade.

The watchdog said a decade of austerity for local government, which has reduced councils’ spending power [by a third](#) at a time when demand for services has soared, had left local authorities more vulnerable to the impact of the pandemic than they otherwise would have been.

[Guardian graphic](#)

Social care services for older and disabled adults are likely to be in line for cuts from April, along with special educational needs and homelessness spending, the NAO reported. Libraries, theatres and community centres face closure, bins would be collected less frequently, and subsidies propping up bus routes will shrink.

The warning of continued cuts to local services came as many councils prepare to [increase council tax bills](#) by up to 5% from April, and despite claims from ministers that [austerity is over](#). The NAO urged ministers to draw up a programme to stabilise councils’ battered finances in the long term.

[Covid has exposed dire position of England's local councils](#)

[Read more](#)

“Authorities’ finances have been scarred and won’t simply bounce back quickly,” said Gareth Davies, the head of the NAO. “Government needs a plan to help the sector recover from the pandemic and also to address the longstanding need for financial reform in the sector.”

The chair of the Commons public accounts committee, Meg Hillier MP, warned that local councils were “not out of the woods” despite billions of pounds in emergency funding in recent months.

She said: “Central government support has provided an important lifeline to keep local authorities’ heads above water. But the last year has taken its toll. Local authorities were already over-stretched and now, with reserves depleted, many will have to slash service budgets to balance their books.”

[Guardian graphics](#)

Councils have spent an estimated extra £6.9bn this financial year on Covid-related services, said the NAO. Authorities have seen [costs rise](#) as a result of social distancing and the need for personal protective equipment, especially in adult social care, while taking on extra responsibilities to house rough sleepers, support those shielding at home and help with testing, tracing and control of outbreaks.

In addition, they incurred £2.9bn losses from unpaid council tax and business rates, while lockdowns led to income losses of £695m from car parking fees, and £554m from leisure centres, theatres and museums.

Ministers have provided £9.1bn in emergency help but the resulting £600m funding gap has left a third of councils with significant holes in their budgets. This has led to authorities accusing ministers of breaking promises made early in the pandemic to [“do whatever is necessary”](#) to support councils.

The NAO said that while the government’s extra Covid funding had “averted system-wide financial failure”, the financial position of councils remained a concern, with many using increasingly depleted reserves and service cuts to shore up budgets. “The outlook for next year is uncertain,” the NAO concluded.

[Locals fight for youth activities at risk from Leeds budget cuts](#) [Read more](#)

Just one council – Croydon – [declared itself insolvent](#) in the past year, but five others – Wirral, Luton, Eastbourne, Bexley and Peterborough – have between them sought and received £109m in government bailout loans to keep them afloat. Ministers approved a £120m emergency loan to Croydon this week.

Both Slough and Nottingham have sought £10m and £30m respectively in bailout cash from the government, and are awaiting decisions. However, the government has refused to say how many other councils have approached it for emergency loans to avoid section 114 insolvency notices.

James Jamieson, chairman of the Local Government Association, said: “We continue to call on government to meet – in full – all cost pressures and income losses incurred by councils as a result of the pandemic. Public finances are undoubtedly under huge strain but investment in our local services will be vital for our national economic and social recovery.”

[Guardian graphics](#)

Steve Reed MP, Labour’s shadow communities and local government secretary, said: “The Conservatives cut council funding by 60% over the past decade so town halls were already on the brink of financial disaster even before the pandemic. Now the government is forcing local authorities to hike up council tax so hard-pressed families are left to pay the price of the Conservatives’ broken promises.”

A spokesperson for the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government said: “As the NAO acknowledges, the government acted swiftly and flexibly to ensure councils continued to deliver vital services throughout the pandemic. Councils continue to play a critical role and we have committed over £35bn to help them support communities and local businesses during this time.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/mar/10/swingeing-cuts-on-cards-as-councils-in-england-face-funding-crisis-watchdog-warns>

Local government

Covid has exposed dire position of England's local councils

The pandemic has wrecked finances as well as revealing deeper roots of a funding crisis in local government



Local government provides vital services from care homes to libraries, many of which have helped keep the UK functioning during the Covid crisis. Photograph: Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

Local government provides vital services from care homes to libraries, many of which have helped keep the UK functioning during the Covid crisis. Photograph: Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

[Patrick Butler](#) Social policy editor

Tue 9 Mar 2021 19.01 EST

The pandemic has a habit of bringing hidden social crises into the open. Now it reveals the precarious position of local government, the provider of

vital services from care homes to public health and bin collection, which has helped keep the show on the road in the UK's biggest national emergency since the second world war.

The National Audit Office (NAO) account of the near implosion of England's local councils during Covid is sobering: only by the government's swift, if grudging, injection of billions of pounds of emergency cash into council coffers over recent months did ministers avert what the auditors call "system-wide financial failure".

The watchdog rightly praises ministers for this: the consequences of scores of local authorities having to declare bankruptcy in the middle of lockdown are frightening. But it makes two other points: first, that 10 years of austerity made municipal finances structurally fragile; and second, that councils' budget crisis isn't over.

[Swingeing cuts on cards as councils in England face funding crisis, watchdog warns](#)

[Read more](#)

It makes clear successive Tory governments not only dismantled the town hall roof but failed to fix it by the time hurricane Covid blew in. Council spending was cut by a third, rising demand for social care was ignored and council budgets made reliant on the whims of local income, whether council tax or car parking charges.

Grand, [longstanding government](#) plans to reform local government and [social care funding](#) failed to materialise. For years, councils patched up their threadbare budgets by using up financial reserves and cutting frontline services. The more ambitious borrowed billions to spend on [risky office and retail](#) investments.

So when Covid arrived, council spending rocketed, income crashed and many found they had little in the way of rainy-day cash reserves. As the NAO puts it: "Funding reductions ... means that authorities' finances were potentially more vulnerable to the impact of the pandemic that they would have been otherwise."

Only one council – Croydon – [went bust](#) this financial year. Yet at least seven more have had or asked for government bailouts to head off insolvency. When the NAO surveyed councils in December, it assessed that 25 were at acute or high risk of financial failure, and a further 92 at medium risk of insolvency.

One bailout loan recipient, Luton, was reliant on a £33m-a-year dividend from its ownership of Luton airport to pay for its core services. When Covid brought air travel to an abrupt halt, so the council's finances collapsed. In July it pushed through [£17m of service cuts](#) to stay afloat. Even that, it seems, was not quite enough.

[Locals fight for youth activities at risk from Leeds budget cuts](#)
[Read more](#)

The government has encouraged councils to quietly come to it for help, rather than unilaterally declare insolvency. Wary perhaps of the alarming optics of a long line of council leaders queueing up for rescue funds, it refuses to say how many councils have approached it for emergency bailouts.

The NAO makes it clear the future is uncertain. Many councils have little confidence in the robustness of the 2021-22 budgets they have just voted through. Most expect to make more cuts – not least because the government has failed to fully compensate them for Covid spending – and to endure more years of financial uncertainty.

The NAO urges the government to draw up a long-term plan for councils to help them recover from the “financial scarring” caused by the pandemic. Until it does so, local authorities – and the services they provide – face more years of uncertainty and agonising cuts decisions.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/mar/10/covid-has-exposed-dire-position-of-englands-local-councils>

Wednesday briefing: 'Shocking' – policeman held in Sarah Everard search

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/10/wednesday-briefing-shocking-policeman-held-in-sarah-everard-search>

Pensions industry

Major UK pension funds worth nearly £900bn commit to net zero

Church of England, Lloyds and the National Grid among those pledging to meet 2050 target



Utility providers are among those expected to reduce their emissions to maintain inward investment from climate-conscious asset managers. Photograph: Morris MacMatzen/Getty Images

Utility providers are among those expected to reduce their emissions to maintain inward investment from climate-conscious asset managers. Photograph: Morris MacMatzen/Getty Images

[Jasper Jolly](#)

[@jjpjolly](#)

Wed 10 Mar 2021 01.00 EST

Major pension funds that own assets worth £870bn, including those of the Church of England, Lloyds Banking Group and the National Grid, have committed to cutting the carbon emissions of their portfolios to net zero by 2050 or earlier, in another sign of big investors' [increasing focus on the climate crisis](#).

Pension providers Scottish Widows, Royal London and Nest and a clutch of public sector pension funds from the UK to Scandinavia and New York were also among the investors that have pledged to align their portfolios to the Paris climate goals of limiting global temperature increases to 1.5C.

The pledges were coordinated by the London-based Institutional Investors Group on Climate Change as it launched a set of tools that lays out how investors can achieve net zero portfolios following months of work.

The United Nations and the UK government backed the scheme, which is also being adopted by leading investor climate action groups in North America, Asia and Australasia. In a written foreword, Prince Charles said he hoped large investors would publish detailed plans for net zero.

Increased focus on the climate crisis from clients and governments has forced investors to confront the carbon emissions of the companies that they fund. Some investment leaders have already promised to aim for net zero emissions, including a December pledge by [some of the world's largest asset managers](#) such as Legal and General Investment Management and UBS Asset Management.

The new framework lays out tools for investors to work out how to reach net zero by 2050 or earlier, removing an obstacle to climate action for investors. The framework includes setting regular targets for direct and indirect emissions reductions, disclosure recommendations, and making sure that all assets are net zero or are on that path by 2040 at the latest.

Patricia Espinosa, executive secretary of the UN's Framework Convention on Climate Change, said: "I encourage others to join investors already showing leadership in using the net zero investment framework. The race to a net zero future is on and the benefits it offers are critically important."

The UK government has identified the climate crisis as a key focus of diplomatic efforts [after the UK's departure from the EU](#). Glasgow will host the [United Nations Cop26 climate conference](#) in November.

Guy Opperman, the UK's pensions minister, said that national carbon reduction ambitions create “huge opportunities, but also risks, for institutional investors such as pension schemes”.

Some investors have remained wary of embracing climate action because of a belief that it will harm their financial returns. However, Craig Mackenzie, head of strategic asset allocation at Aberdeen Standard Investments, an investment manager, said that a detailed assessment of pension funds' portfolios and strategies for cutting emissions had shown that there was a marginally positive financial effect.

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“The key question a lot of big investors are asking about net zero is ‘can it be done safely?’” Mackenzie said.

“The conclusion of that work is very positive. We can achieve very significant carbon reductions without significantly disturbing the financial characteristics of the portfolios.”

About 60% of carbon emissions from global equities come from only 10% of companies by market value, Mackenzie said. If taken up by more large investors, the framework could also heighten pressure on large polluters such as oil companies, heavy industry and utilities to cut emissions. The framework formalises the steps – including [voting against companies or divesting](#) from the worst laggards – that investors will need to take.

This article was downloaded by calibre from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/mar/10/major-uk-pension-funds-worth-nearly-900bn-commit-to-net-zero>

Hong Kong

Help Hong Kong residents flee before it's too late, fugitive democracy figure urges

Ted Hui, who escaped to the UK while on bail before moving to Australia, says world must provide 'lifeboat plans' ahead of expected travel bans



Ted Hui is removed from Hong Kong's Legislative Council last year after protesting against powers that ban insulting China's national anthem. Photograph: Isaac Lawrence/AFP/Getty Images

Ted Hui is removed from Hong Kong's Legislative Council last year after protesting against powers that ban insulting China's national anthem. Photograph: Isaac Lawrence/AFP/Getty Images

[Helen Davidson](#) in Taipei, and [Daniel Hurst](#) in Canberra

Wed 10 Mar 2021 01.37 EST

Time is running out to help Hongkongers before the expected introduction of powers banning people from leaving as [China](#) tightens its grip on the city, a pro-democracy politician has warned after fleeing to the UK and then Australia.

Former legislator Ted Hui arrived in Australia on Tuesday, three months after he fled to the UK while on bail in [Hong Kong](#). Speaking from quarantine, Hui told the Guardian he had decided to move in order to expand the pro-democracy movement-in-exile, and lobby Canberra for increased [Hong Kong](#) support, including formal “lifeboat” plans to help dissidents and civilians flee.

The Hong Kong government recently unveiled proposed legislation to [give the immigration department “unfettered powers”](#) to stop people leaving. With no remaining opposition in Hong Kong’s legislature, the amendment is likely to pass and would take effect on 1 August.

“That’s quite a deadline for different nations to consider if they are going to provide lifeboat plans,” Hui said. “I personally believe many dissidents – and even civilians who have expressed dissent – could be banned from leaving Hong Kong.”

[‘Hong Kong is crumbling’: seven days that crushed city’s last resistance](#)
[Read more](#)

[Hui fled Hong Kong in December](#) while on bail for protest-related charges. He said the charges were unfair, often based on fake testimony from police, or – for those relating to contempt of the legislature – simply “ridiculous”. Hui has also been accused of “foreign collusion” under the national security law.

Hui said: “There’s nothing wrong speaking the truth and letting the world see what’s happening in Hong Kong, the human rights violations,” he said. “They are putting dissidents in jails. That’s why we need to continue to speak up.”

With the blessing of the Hong Kong government, Beijing is increasing its control over the city, having already introduced a sweeping and draconian

national security law and powers to disqualify “unpatriotic” legislators and public servants. On Thursday, Beijing is [expected to approve powers](#) to vet political candidates ahead of elections. [Most figures of opposition](#) are in jail, on trial, or in exile.

Hui said offering political asylum was “sensitive” and a narrow pathway, so he was urging foreign governments to expand existing visa programs and residency eligibility [as the UK has done](#). Australia has extended the visas of more than 2,580 Hong Kongers and approved 671 new temporary visas since June under its expanded program. But Hui said Australia’s pathways [were still limited](#), and many young people didn’t have the resources to leave Hong Kong, especially amid unprecedented global border closures.

The situation was “quite dangerous”, Hui said. “For those who need to leave and escape the terror of the CCP [Chinese Communist party], it seems the only option is the UK. So it’s limited many opportunities for exile.”

Hui’s arrival in Australia is a sign of the increasingly coordinated international [network of Hongkongers in exile](#). He told the Guardian he felt “more needed” in Australia, where there wasn’t as significant a presence. “Hongkongers already have [Nathan Law](#) and other prominent exiles in Europe doing advocacy work, and at the same time we have counterparts in North America,” he said.

Hui said he would be in Australia for a year on his existing visa before deciding whether to seek an extension. Claiming political asylum was “a last option” but a possibility, he said.

During that time he intended to lobby for sanctions against Hong Kong and Beijing officials, a reduction in Australian reliance on China trade, and a Magnitsky-style act to hold foreign government officials accountable for human rights abuses. However, he said, his priority was convincing the Australian government to provide Hongkongers with “reassurance like the British have provided”.

The Guardian sought comment from the Australian government, which has previously expressed concern about the crackdown in Hong Kong.

Kimberley Kitching, an opposition legislator and chair of the Australian Senate's foreign affairs, defence and trade references committee, called on the government to "consider welcoming Hongkongers who did nothing more than stand up to protect the democratic norms and institutions promised as part of the 'one country, two systems agreement'".

"Together with the international community, it would also be worth exploring a multilateral solution, whereby democratic countries create a right-of-abode agreement for those who wish to leave Hong Kong," Kitching said.

[Australia is operating strict border closures](#), and the significant assistance in granting Hui and his family visa exemptions on "compelling and compassionate grounds" and the provision of rare seats on a repatriation flight is likely to ruffle feathers in Beijing amid already low Australia-China relations.

Asked to comment, the Chinese embassy in Canberra pointed the Guardian to remarks made by the foreign ministry spokesperson, Wang Wenbin, in Beijing last week.

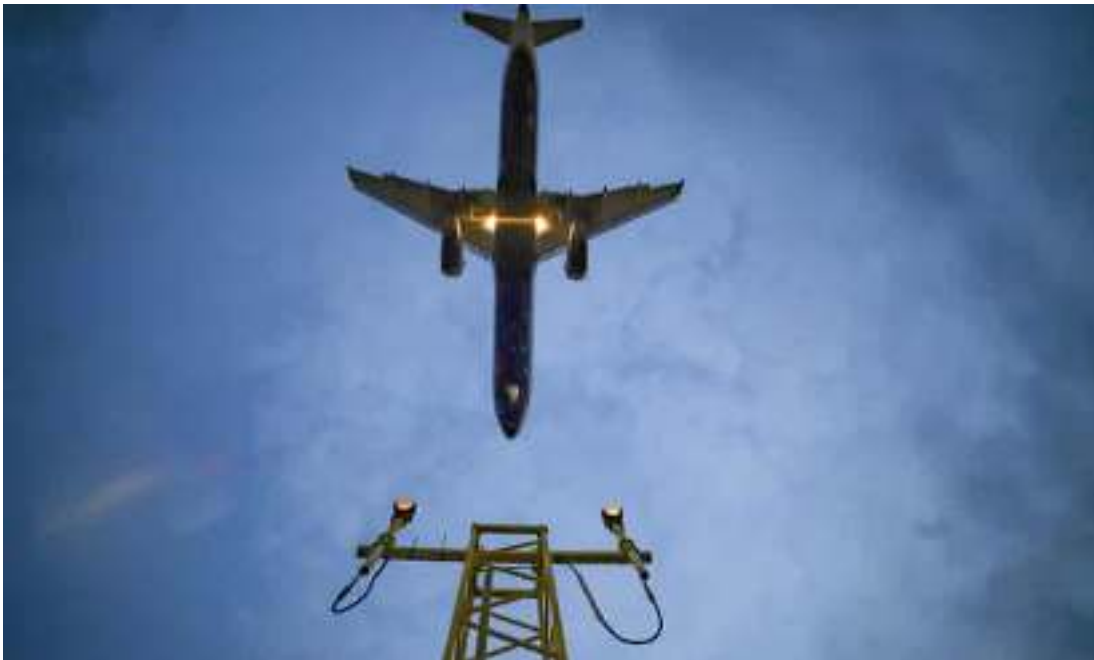
"The Chinese side urges the Australian side to stop meddling in Hong Kong's affairs and China's internal affairs in any way," Wang told reporters on Monday last week. "Otherwise the China-Australia relations will only sustain further damage."

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/10/help-hong-kong-residents-flee-before-its-too-late-fugitive-democracy-figure-urges>

[Airline industry](#)

UK set to cut air passenger duty on domestic flights

Green groups say move ‘beggars belief’ but cut will offer some relief to troubled aviation industry



A plane makes its final approach at London Heathrow. Photograph: Getty Images

A plane makes its final approach at London Heathrow. Photograph: Getty Images

[Gwyn Topham](#)

[@GwynTopham](#)

Tue 9 Mar 2021 19.01 EST

Air passenger duty is set to be cut on domestic flights after the prime minister signalled his support for reform to bolster air links around the UK.

Lower rates for UK internal flights or an exemption for return legs will be considered.

The news will come as some relief to the beleaguered aviation industry, whose complaints about the level of duty predate the Covid-19 crisis, but environmental groups said the move was “nonsensical” and “beggared belief” in the face of climate change.

Q&A

What is air passenger duty?

Show



Air passenger duty, or APD, is a British tax on aviation, introduced in 1994. It is charged on each passenger on flights departing from the UK, and set according to the distance of their final destination and the class of travel.

It is intended to incentivise passengers to seek alternative arrangements from flying, which is the most carbon-intensive form of transport. By reducing demand for flights, it seeks to decrease carbon emissions from the air industry.

Destinations are grouped into two bands, above and below 2,000 miles from London, and charged at three rates – effectively for economy class, premium economy and business/first-class seats. All short-haul flights to Europe, including domestic, are charged in the same band, rising from £13 in economy to £78 in first class. A long-haul first-class flight now attracts APD of £528.

Airlines have long lobbied against the tax, particularly after the rates were doubled in 2007.

Flybe has argued that it is especially hard hit as the tax only applies to UK departures, and is therefore applied to each leg of a domestic return flight. That means, for example, that a return flight from Cardiff to Manchester is taxed at £26, while an international return flight from the UK to Moscow pays £13 in APD.

Long-haul flights from Northern Ireland are exempt from APD, as well as departures from remote parts of Scotland.

Photograph: Pete Byrne/PA

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

The tax currently stands at a minimum £13 per passenger departing from a UK airport, and similar – but lower – levies only exist in a few other European countries.

The rate of APD was increased in [last week's budget](#) by £2 for economy long-haul flights to £84 per person, but frozen for all short-haul flights (including domestic).

The aviation industry has been increasingly outspoken about the lack of government support during the pandemic. Ryanair's Michael O'Leary repeatedly urged MPs to focus on reforming APD at a [select committee hearing](#) last week.

The duty has been seen as particularly unfair on domestic flying, as it means an internal return flight pays double the tax of the furthest European return –

putting a [particular burden on the likes of Flybe](#), the regional carrier which went bust at the start of the pandemic in 2020.

In a statement released by the Department for Transport (DfT), the prime minister, Boris Johnson, said: “I want to cut passenger duty on domestic flights so we can support connectivity across the country.”

Airport Operators Association chief executive Karen Dee welcomed the move. She said: “Domestic aviation suffered a double-hit in the last year, with the collapse of Flybe and the Covid-19 pandemic, and this offers a glimmer of hope for the future.”

But Dr Doug Parr, chief scientist for Greenpeace UK, said: “After the fuel duty freeze and rail fare rises, cutting duty on domestic flights would continue our nonsensical trend of the higher the carbon, the lower the tax.

“The government needs to face up to the unavoidable reality that the aviation industry has to be smaller than it was before the pandemic, and get on with the vital job of making that process as painless as possible for the workers, and with the lowest possible impact on the climate.”

Friends of the Earth climate campaigner Jenny Bates said: “It beggars belief that ministers would cut domestic air passenger duty and encourage more people to fly around the UK.

“Our climate has been paying the price for cheap air travel for far too long. A government committed to confronting the climate emergency should be taking steps to make public transport more affordable – not reducing the cost of high-carbon air travel.”

Paul Tuohy, chief executive of Campaign for Better Transport, said it was “enormously disappointing, especially coming a week after a rail fare rise and fuel duty freeze, and makes a mockery of our climate commitments”.

The DfT said it would “continue to decarbonise domestic aviation as part of our ambition to reach net zero, including through mandating the use of sustainable aviation fuels.” Unlike international flights, domestic aviation emissions are included in national carbon budgets.

The consultation on cutting APD for domestic flights will be launched in the next three months as part of a government drive to boost transport connectivity between the whole of the UK, which will also see it commit £20m to develop plans to upgrade rail, road, sea and air links between the four home nations.

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Johnson said the government would “harness the incredible power of infrastructure to level up parts of our country that have too long been left off the transport map”.

Sir Peter Hendy’s Union Connectivity Review, commissioned by Johnson, has published interim recommendations for a strategic transport network, which would include significantly faster rail links from England to Scotland, and rail improvements in southeast Wales based on the [Welsh government’s Burns Commission plans](#). The government said the environmental and social impact would be taken into account.

Investigations into [Johnson’s proposed bridge or tunnel](#) under the Irish Sea to link Northern Ireland to mainland Britain have been delegated by Hendy to former HS2 chairman Doug Oakervee.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/mar/10/uk-set-to-cut-air-passenger-duty-on-domestic-flights>

[China](#)

China summons UK ambassador over 'arrogant' article on media freedom

Caroline Wilson incurs wrath of Beijing for WeChat post described as full of 'lecturer arrogance and ideological prejudice'



Caroline Wilson, UK ambassador to China, has been summoned by officials in Beijing angered by an article about press freedom. Photograph: FCO/PA

Caroline Wilson, UK ambassador to China, has been summoned by officials in Beijing angered by an article about press freedom. Photograph: FCO/PA

Reuters

Tue 9 Mar 2021 21.51 EST

Britain's ambassador to [China](#) has been summoned for a dressing down by the authorities in Beijing over an "inappropriate" article she wrote defending recent international media coverage on the country, the foreign ministry said.

Caroline Wilson's article in Chinese was posted on the official WeChat account of the British embassy in Beijing last week, amid already [tense relations between Britain and China](#) over issues including Hong Kong, Xinjiang and the media.

[China could invade Taiwan in next six years, top US admiral warns](#)
[Read more](#)

Wilson sought to explain why foreign media criticism of the Chinese government did not mean the journalists responsible did not like China, but were in fact acting in “good faith” and playing an active role in monitoring government action.

In a statement, China's foreign ministry said on Tuesday the Chinese government and people had never opposed foreign media, rather those who make up “fake news” to attack China and its ruling Communist party under the banners of press freedom and freedom of speech. China would lodge “stern representations” with Wilson, it said.

“The whole article is full of ‘lecturer’ arrogance and ideological prejudice ... and is seriously inconsistent with the status of diplomats,” it added in remarks attributed to the head of the ministry's Europe department.

The UK Foreign Office did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Wilson, whose article was still accessible on WeChat on Tuesday but could not be shared on the platform, responded on Twitter, including a link to her article.

I stand by my article. No doubt the outgoing Chinese Ambassador to the UK stands by the 170+ pieces he was free to place in mainstream British media. <https://t.co/AgkynfJM36>

— Caroline Wilson (@CWilson_FCDO) [March 9, 2021](#)

“I stand by my article. No doubt the outgoing Chinese ambassador to the UK stands by the 170+ pieces he was free to place in mainstream British media,”

she tweeted, referring to Liu Xiaoming, who was based in Britain for around 11 years before leaving the country in January.

Media has emerged as an area of tension in Sino-British ties.

Beijing last month [banned BBC World News](#) from television networks in mainland China after finding it had “seriously violated” rules and undermined national unity. That came a week after Britain’s media regulator Ofcom barred Chinese state broadcaster CGTN from airing in the UK after it concluded that the Chinese Communist Party had ultimate editorial responsibility for the channel.

The BBC has run a series of reports alleging human rights abuses against Uighur Muslims in China’s Xinjiang region, which Beijing denies.

Tensions with London also flared over an offer of a path to British citizenship for residents of the former British colony of Hong Kong following the imposition of a national security law cracking down on dissent.

India’s foreign ministry said on Tuesday it had summoned the UK’s high commissioner over what it called “unwarranted and tendentious discussion” of Indian [agricultural reforms](#) in parliament.

A discussion among UK lawmakers on Monday has caused anger in New Delhi, which accuses the parliamentarians of interfering in India’s internal affairs.

At Tuesday’s meeting India’s foreign secretary, Harsh Vardhan Shringla, told Alexander Ellis, who was appointed as envoy earlier this year, the debate “represented a gross interference in the politics of another democratic country,” according to a ministry statement.

Japan

Female MP awarded Japan's most sexist comment after casting doubt on sexual assaults

Mio Sugita earns notoriety for accusations that women lie about sexual violence and LGBT community are 'unproductive'



Mio Sugita won the award for Japan's most sexist comment after accusing women of lying about sexual violence. Photograph: The Asahi Shimbun/The Asahi Shimbun via Getty Images

Mio Sugita won the award for Japan's most sexist comment after accusing women of lying about sexual violence. Photograph: The Asahi Shimbun/The Asahi Shimbun via Getty Images

[Justin McCurry](#) in Tokyo

Wed 10 Mar 2021 01.47 EST

Of all the candidates for Japan's most sexist comment of the year, there seemed to be only one possible winner – Yoshiro Mori, the former head of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic organising committee, who was forced to [resign](#) last month after complaining that women “[talked too much](#)” during meetings.

But even Mori was unable to compete with Mio Sugita, a conservative politician with a history of [insulting](#) women and members of the [LGBT community](#).

Sugita, an MP representing the ruling Liberal Democratic party (LDP), was named the winner this week after an online vote organised by Noaseps (No to all sexist public speeches), a group comprising academics and campaigners that highlights gender discrimination in [Japan](#).

[Japan's ruling party invites women to meetings – but won't let them speak](#)
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Sugita emerged as a contender in September last year when she told fellow LDP lawmakers at a private meeting that “women can lie as much as they like” about sexual violence.

The group said Sugita's remarks had received 1,995 votes among 6,031 cast by members of the public over a weeklong period from late February, with each voter able to select up to two from among eight comments made over the previous 12 months.

It said Sugita's remark had been “misogynistic as it questions women when they come forward with sexual violence claims as if they were false reports from the very beginning, without specifying justifiable grounds”.

Mori, a former prime minister, came second with 1,216 votes, according to Japanese media reports.

Third place went to Masateru Shiraishi, an assembly member in a Tokyo ward who complained that the area would be “wiped out” by depopulation if the rights of sexual minorities were protected by law.

While Mori resigned after his comments sparked uproar in Japan and overseas, Sugita – an ally of the former prime minister, Shinzo Abe – has survived calls for her to resign.

She finished second in the 2019 vote – after saying that members of the LGBT community were “unproductive” because they cannot have children.

Sugita wrote in a magazine article that same-sex couples “don’t produce children. In other words, they lack productivity and, therefore, do not contribute to the prosperity of the nation”, she said, while questioning the use of taxpayers’ money to support gay marriages.

Dozens of local governments in [Japan](#) have [recognised same-sex partnerships](#) in recent years, but same-sex marriages have yet to gain legal recognition.

Sugita was beaten in the 2019 vote by Taro Aso, Japan’s finance minister, who had attempted to blame the victim after Junichi Fukuda, the finance ministry’s most senior bureaucrat, was accused of [sexually harassing a female reporter](#).

Aso said the victim “could have left the scene” if she had objected to Fukuda’s behaviour, adding that the media could prevent a recurrence by assigning only male reporters to cover the ministry.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/10/female-mp-awarded-japans-most-sexist-comment-after-casting-doubt-on-sexual-assaults>

Energy efficiency

Tough new rules aim to make electrical goods last longer

Government to force firms to make spare parts available and create products that are cheaper to run



Making white goods easier to repair could extend their lifespan by up to 10 years. Photograph: Minerva Studio/Alamy

Making white goods easier to repair could extend their lifespan by up to 10 years. Photograph: Minerva Studio/Alamy

PA Media

Wed 10 Mar 2021 01.00 EST

Tougher rules are being introduced to make appliances such as fridges, washing machines and TVs cheaper to run and last longer, the government has said.

New legislation aims to tackle “premature obsolescence” in electrical goods – short lifespans built into appliances by manufacturers so that customers have to buy new ones sooner – and make them more energy efficient.

[Eco-homes become hot property in UK's zero-carbon ‘paradigm shift’](#)
[Read more](#)

The rules include a legal requirement on manufacturers to make spare parts available to consumers, which aims to extend the lifespan of products by up to 10 years and cut carbon emissions from the manufacture of new goods.

The measures, which apply to white goods such as washing machines, dishwashers and fridges, as well as items such as TVs, aim to reduce the 1.5m tonnes of electrical waste the UK generates a year.

Higher energy efficiency standards are also being set for electrical goods, which officials said would save consumers an average of £75 a year on bills overall and cut carbon emissions by using less electricity over their lifetimes.

The business and energy secretary, Kwasi Kwarteng, said: “Our plans to tighten product standards will ensure more of our electrical goods can be fixed rather than thrown on the scrap heap, putting more money back in the pockets of consumers while protecting the environment.

“Going forward, our upcoming energy efficiency framework will push electrical products to use even less energy and material resources, saving people money on their bills and reducing carbon emissions as we work to reach net zero by 2050.”

[Wood burning at home now biggest cause of UK particle pollution](#)
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New energy labels have also been introduced this week, to simplify the ratings, which had reached the point where most products were classed as A+, A++ or A+++ because of improvements in energy efficiency since the standards were first introduced.

The simplified system is based on an A-G scale, with the bar raised for each grade so that very few appliances will now be classed in the top A standard.

The head of international collaboration at Energy Saving Trust, Emilie Carmichael, said: “Simplifying the way energy efficiency is displayed on labels will help consumers to make more informed choices to reduce their energy consumption and bills.”

The new regulations, which the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy aims to bring into force in the summer, reflect what was agreed by the UK as an EU member state two years ago. They will apply in Great Britain, while EU rules will continue to apply in Northern Ireland.

A call for evidence, which explored the scope for introducing a more ambitious climate-friendly policy for electrical appliances after Brexit, will also feed into a forthcoming policy framework, officials said.

The environmental audit committee chairman, Conservative MP Philip Dunne, welcomed the move to crack down on planned obsolescence to tackle the “e-waste tsunami”. “There should be no contest: consumers should have every right to fix items they own,” he said.

“Making spare parts available is the first step in creating a circular economy where we use, reuse and recycle products. We must stop using and disposing quite so much: we must take action if we are to protect the environment for generations to come.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/mar/10/tough-new-rules-aim-to-make-electrical-goods-last-longer>

2021.03.10 - Coronavirus

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Coronavirus

No evidence £22bn test-and-trace scheme cut Covid rates in England, say MPs

Spending watchdog challenges ministers to justify the ‘staggering investment of taxpayers’ money’

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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Ministers previously justified the vast expenditure on preventing a second national lockdown. Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

Ministers previously justified the vast expenditure on preventing a second national lockdown. Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

[Rajeev Syal](#)

Wed 10 Mar 2021 01.00 EST

There is no evidence to show that the government's £22bn test-and-trace programme to combat Covid-19 in England contributed to a reduction in coronavirus infection levels, parliament's spending watchdog has concluded.

In a report which examined the rush to invest in the scheme, the cross-party public accounts committee has challenged ministers to justify the "staggering investment of taxpayers' money" and criticised the use of private consultants who are paid up to £6,624 a day.

The programme, which has a budget that exceeds that of the Department for Transport, is run by Dido Harding, who was appointed by the health secretary, Matt Hancock, last year. At the time, the prime minister, Boris Johnson, said the country would have as "world-beating" system.

[Whitty: revising plan to ease England lockdown would risk fresh Covid surge](#)

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The timing of the report's conclusions is an embarrassment for the government as it continues to refuse to give a pay increase of more than 1% to health workers.

Ministers had justified the vast expenditure on preventing a second national lockdown, but – questioning the programme's effectiveness – MPs who compiled the report noted that England is now living under its third.

Meg Hillier, the chair of the committee, said the enormous amounts spent on the scheme leaves the impression that the public purse has been used like a cashpoint.

"Despite the unimaginable resources thrown at this project, test and trace cannot point to a measurable difference to the progress of the pandemic, and the promise on which this huge expense was justified – avoiding another lockdown – has been broken, twice," she said. "British taxpayers cannot be treated by the government like an ATM machine. We need to see a clear plan and costs better controlled."

The committee said the NHS programme does publish a significant amount of weekly data, including some that shows compliance with the self-isolation rules relied upon by the scheme can be low.

But it criticised the data for failing to show the speed of the process from “cough to contact” and therefore not allowing the public to judge the “overall effectiveness of the programme”.

“There is still no clear evidence to judge NHS test and trace’s overall effectiveness. It is unclear whether its specific contribution to reducing infection levels, as opposed to the other measures introduced to tackle the pandemic, has justified its costs,” the report said.

MPs also criticised the scheme for struggling to consistently match supply and demand for the service, and therefore “resulting in either sub-standard performance or surplus capacity”. The programme remained “overly reliant” on contractors and temporary staff after having to initially act quickly to scale up the service rapidly.

“A range of stakeholders have queried why local authorities and NHS primary care bodies were not more directly involved in testing and tracing activities at the outset, given their existing networks, experience and expertise,” the report said

MPs said the scheme admitted in February that it still employs about 2,500 consultants, at an estimated daily rate of about £1,100, with the best-paid consultancy staff on £6,624. But the programme was still not engaging with teachers, the report said. “We are also concerned by a lack of engagement with school heads and education stakeholders in the roll-out of rapid testing, and the lack of general public health expertise at senior levels of NHS test and trace,” MPs said.

Commenting on the report, Harding said: “NHS test and trace is essential in our fight against Covid-19. After building a testing system from scratch, we have now carried out over 83m coronavirus tests – more than any other comparable European country – and yesterday alone we conducted over 1.5m tests.”

[England's test and trace repeatedly failed to hit goals despite £22bn cost](#)
[Read more](#)

As England's chief medical officer, Prof Chris Whitty, warned of another "surge" in the virus later in the year, the committee called for ministers to set out how the scheme will "cost-effectively maintain a degree of readiness".

Chancellor Rishi Sunak's Budget last week included an additional £15bn for test and trace, taking the total bill to more than £37bn over two years.

Trades Union Congress general secretary, Frances O'Grady, said the government's refusal to increase statutory sick pay had "massively undermined test and trace".

Experts advising the government in the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies said in September that the testing programme was only having a "marginal" impact on transmission.

Whitehall's spending watchdog, the National Audit Office, said in a report in December that not enough test results were delivered within 24 hours and too few contacts of infected people were being reached and told to self-isolate. Some call handlers were also said to have been busy for only 1% of their paid hours in the service's early days, rising to less than 50% in October.

An internal "business case" produced by the Department of [Health](#) and Social Care in September justified spending billions on the controversial service because it would be a "main driver" in preventing a new economic shutdown.

Reacting to the report, the chief executive of the Royal College of Nursing, Donna Kinnair, said nursing staff will be "furious" to hear of the millions of pounds being spent on private-sector consultants. "The public knows more nurses, not more highlypaid consultants, means better care," she said.

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Greece

Greece hopes to open to tourists from 14 May

Country to welcome people who are vaccinated, have antibodies or negative Covid test, minister says

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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Tourism is seen as vital to the Greek economy. Photograph: Nicolas Economou/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

Tourism is seen as vital to the Greek economy. Photograph: Nicolas Economou/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

[Helena Smith](#) in Athens

Tue 9 Mar 2021 15.42 EST

Greece hopes to reopen its doors to visitors on 14 May, the country's tourism minister has said as he announced a much-awaited date for the tourist season to officially begin.

Haris Theocharis told the IBT Berlin tourism fair, the world's largest, that Greece would after this date welcome anyone who had been vaccinated, had antibodies or had tested negative for coronavirus.

"We aim to open tourism by 14 May with specific rules and updated protocols," he said. "Until then, we will gradually lift restrictions if conditions allow."

[Overseas fans face ban from Tokyo Olympics, reports news agency](#)
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Athens is in a race against the clock to kickstart a sector regarded as vital for the nation's economy and has led calls for an EU-wide vaccination certificate to unlock holiday travel.

Despite initial reluctance, Brussels has slowly come round to the idea and on Tuesday the EU commission's vice-president, Margaritis Schinas, said he believed the digital pass would be ready by the summer.

"I think after the last summit there is convergence on the need for this digital certificate," the Greek politician told ERT, the state-run broadcaster, during a visit to Athens. "It will be a European product and will be the same throughout [Europe](#)."

But Ursula von der Leyen, the commission's president, has also warned about the dangers posed, legally and technically, in creating the certificate.

One in five Greeks works in tourism, the country's biggest foreign earner. With arrivals drastically reduced because of the pandemic last year, the Greek government has said it is aiming this year to attract at least 50% of the 31.3 million people who visited prior to the virus.

[EU indecision led Cyprus to allow in UK visitors, says minister](#)
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UK tourists, the country's second largest source market after Germany, are among those being courted by Athens with officials praising Britain's accelerated vaccination drive. Anglo-Greek teams have been discussing how to facilitate a travel corridor with a commonly agreed digital pass, echoing a similar accord reached with Israel last month.

According to the UK government's roadmap out of its third national lockdown, the [earliest possible date](#) for the resumption of international holidays is 17 May.

Theoharis said once elderly and vulnerable people had been vaccinated, it would begin inoculating employees in the tourism sector.

Everyone was in need of a holiday, he said, unveiling this season's tourist slogan as: "All you want is Greece."

The country has fared better than its EU counterparts in handling the pandemic although it has also failed to suppress a surge in coronavirus cases despite being in prolonged lockdown. Greece on Tuesday announced a record 3,215 new infections and 46 fatalities bringing the death toll to almost 7,000.

The Greek government has said it expects the country's inoculation programme to accelerate dramatically in April when it takes stock of more than 2m doses of the Johnson & Johnson and Pfizer vaccine.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/09/greece-hopes-to-open-to-tourists-from-14-may>.

Coronavirus

Vitamin D supplements may offer no Covid benefits, data suggests

Two studies fail to find evidence to support claims supplements protect against coronavirus

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A sign outside a chemist in Dorset extols the virtues of the so-called sunshine vitamin but research suggests there may be no benefit in taking the supplement when it comes to treating or preventing Covid-19. Photograph: Geoffrey Swaine/Rex/Shutterstock

A sign outside a chemist in Dorset extols the virtues of the so-called sunshine vitamin but research suggests there may be no benefit in taking the supplement when it comes to treating or preventing Covid-19. Photograph: Geoffrey Swaine/Rex/Shutterstock

[Natalie Grover](#)

Tue 9 Mar 2021 12.21 EST

The idea that vitamin D supplements can reduce susceptibility to, and the severity of, Covid-19 is seductive – it offers a simple, elegant solution to a very complex and lethal problem. But analyses encompassing large European datasets suggest the enthusiasm for the sunshine vitamin may be misplaced.

Two still to be peer-reviewed papers looked at the link between vitamin D levels and Covid-19 and both reached the same conclusion: evidence for a direct link between vitamin D deficiency and Covid outcomes is lacking.

Quick Guide

Let's get physical: how exercise could help boost your response to a Covid vaccine

Show

Could a short workout increase your protection from Covid-19? While many immunologists have been studying the role of stress in vaccine responses, some researchers have [turned their attention to exercise](#), with some intriguing results.

Consider the following experiment by Prof Kate Edwards at the University of Sydney, who asked a group of young adults to perform some bicep curls and lateral raises for 25 minutes, around six hours before they received an influenza vaccine. As hoped, these people showed [an elevated immune response to the injection](#) over the following 20 weeks, compared with participants who had rested on the day of the shot. Confirming these beneficial effects, Edwards later found [that exercise could also enhance responses for the pneumonia vaccine](#).

Besides increasing efficacy, a short workout could calm the side-effects of a vaccine. Performing 15 minutes of upper-body exercise – before or after the injection – has been shown to reduce the [swelling and fever that sometimes come from the HPV vaccine](#), for example.

How could this be? One possibility is that the slight wear and tear on our muscles, as we exercise, can itself trigger a mild reaction in the immune system. When the vaccine is delivered, the body is therefore well prepared to deal with the antigen within the injection more efficiently – boosting its vaccine’s benefits while reducing the potential discomfort.

Was this helpful?

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One set of researchers [mined a database](#) of hundreds of thousands of mostly white participants to understand whether giving them vitamin D could decrease their probability of having symptomatic or severe Covid.

Researchers looked at the records of people with certain genetic markers that make them predisposed to vitamin D deficiencies, something that is not influenced by factors such as age and other underlying conditions. They found no evidence for the idea that supplements protect against Covid.

Another [study](#) compared the prevalence of vitamin D deficiency in 24 European countries to Covid infections, recovery and mortality data.

Lead author, Dr Michael Chourdakis, from Aristotle University, [Greece](#), said the analysis avoided the methodological limitations of previous studies by only using recent data on vitamin D, and did not only include subsets of the population, for instance, people in nursing homes.

In addition, instead of using mean vitamin D levels, which can be distorted by certain parts of a population having very high or very low concentrations, they specifically looked at levels of deficiency.

“There is an overloading of information about vitamin D benefits ... vitamin D has been praised for too many things,” he said, “even though we have very limited data for that.”

He added that the study was methodologically solid and the data showed no significant correlation between vitamin D and Covid infections, recovery or mortality.

Those that traditionally exhibit vitamin D deficiency – older adults and minority ethnic populations – are the same groups that have been disproportionately affected by Covid-19. Protracted lockdowns and subsets of the population shielding has also enhanced time spent indoors away from sunlight. And in general, vitamin D has been implicated in helping the immune response to respiratory infections – so supplements feels like the intuitive answer.

But the evidence on Covid so far – although [some of it is positive](#) – is circumstantial. Some researchers argue it is not [robust enough](#) to favour a policy of giving the whole population supplements, particularly given the impact that might have on individual behaviour and possible negative physical side-effects from taking too much.

In a recent review, the National Institute for [Health](#) and Care Excellence (Nice) agreed, finding evidence for vitamin D supplementation with the aim of preventing or treating Covid was still lacking and that further research was needed.

“We’re scientists – we believe in data. We feel that the data today suggests that vitamin D will not protect against Covid outcomes. We would be happy to entertain any data that suggests otherwise,” Dr Brent Richards, a clinician-scientist from McGill University focused on endocrinology, epidemiology and biostatistics who is one of the authors of the genetic study.

“But it’s important to remember that in the field of vitamin studies there is a familiarity of the general public with vitamins and a high level of trust that we don’t see with other kinds of interventions. So, people very much want this solution to be a vitamin-based solution – and sometimes that’s not always the case.”

A recent case in point is a study from scientists from the University of Barcelona that suggested giving high-dose vitamin D to coronavirus patients when admitted to hospital could cut deaths by a staggering 60%, prompting calls by former Brexit secretary and [MP](#) David Davis for the therapy to be rolled out in hospitals.

But some scientists [pointed out](#) that while the data is presented as a randomised trial of vitamin D supplementation, it appears individuals were not randomised, wards in the hospital were. Different wards tend to take different patients depending on their level of illness and risk.

Eventually, the study – that had not been peer-reviewed – was [removed](#) from the server of the medical journal The Lancet as a result of concerns that kickstarted an investigation into the paper.

Meanwhile [randomised controlled trials](#) designed to definitively answer whether vitamin D status plays a direct role in Covid infections and outcomes are ongoing. “What we lack at the moment is really a definitive trial which demonstrates a cause and effect relationship,” said Adrian Martineau, a professor of respiratory infection and immunity at Queen Mary University of London, who is leading such a study.

“You can’t dismiss the circumstantial evidence ...[but] it’s not the highest level of evidence. I guess there’s a philosophical question – if you have an intervention that has a good chance of working and is completely safe, why not implement it, while you’re waiting to find out given the public health emergency?”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/09/vitamin-d-supplements-may-offer-no-covid-benefits-data-suggests>

Vaccines and immunisation

Raab summons EU official as anger grows over UK vaccine export claims

Foreign secretary accuses Brussels of falsely accusing UK of not sending vaccines abroad

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The foreign secretary, Dominic Raab, has written to the president of the European council, accusing him of publishing false information. Photograph: Simon Dawson/Reuters

[Dominic Raab](#) has summoned the EU's UK representative amid government fury over claims by the president of the European council that the UK has banned exports of vaccines, which the government says are entirely false.

In a row that threatened to reopen the rift between the UK and EU over vaccine policy, the foreign secretary wrote to Charles Michel expressing considerable concern at the statement he released on Tuesday and accused him of publishing false information.

Anger in Whitehall has been building for a number of days about the portrayal of the UK's export policy in Brussels by senior EU politicians, not just Michel, as well as worry that the claim is widely circulating in European media.

A government source said the claim had been repeated at various levels within the EU and the commission and the UK had repeatedly privately corrected the record on every occasion – but intimated that Raab now needed to “draw a line in the sand”.

A representative of the EU's delegation to the UK has since been summoned to a meeting at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

Michel made the claim in a fierce defence of the EU's vaccine policy published on Tuesday in his newsletter. He said the EU should not have been accused of hoarding vaccines via its export controls and said the UK had stronger prohibitions on exports.

“I am also shocked when I hear the accusations of ‘vaccine nationalism’ against the EU. Here again, the facts do not lie,” he wrote.

“The United Kingdom and the United States have imposed an outright ban on the export of vaccines or vaccine components produced on their territory. But the [European Union](#), the region with the largest vaccine production capacity in the world, has simply put in place a system for controlling the export of doses produced in the EU.”

A government spokesman said the claim was untrue. “The UK government has not blocked the export of a single Covid-19 vaccine. Any references to a UK export ban or any restrictions on vaccines are completely false,” the spokesman said.

“This pandemic is a global challenge and international collaboration on vaccine development continues to be an integral part of our response.”

The Guardian understands that Raab wrote to Michel on Tuesday afternoon after becoming alarmed at the repetition of the claim.

In his letter Raab wrote that the world was “facing this pandemic together”, and added: “I wanted to set the record straight. The UK government has not blocked the export of a single Covid-19 vaccine or vaccine components. Any references to a UK export ban or any restrictions on vaccines are completely false.”

The UK does have some limits on exports, which are focused on middlemen who buy medicines or PPE intended for patients in one country in order to profit from selling them somewhere else.

The Department of Health and Social Care has previously said that medicines and equipment that are manufactured and intended for markets abroad are not subject to the export restrictions.

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[Coronavirus live](#)

[Coronavirus](#)

Coronavirus live news: UK ministers asked to justify 'staggering' £20bn test and trace system cost

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[Coronavirus](#)

Whitty: revising plan to ease England lockdown would risk fresh Covid surge

Chief medical officer tells MPs lifting rules more quickly would lead to more hospitalisations and deaths

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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[Ian Sample](#) and [Aubrey Allegretti](#)

Tue 9 Mar 2021 08.45 EST Last modified on Tue 9 Mar 2021 23.37 EST

England's chief medical officer has warned MPs that revising the government's roadmap to emerge from lockdown sooner than planned would risk a more serious third wave of Covid infections.

Prof [Chris Whitty](#) said he expected a surge of infections once restrictions were lifted but that exiting lockdown faster, when fewer people are vaccinated, would send more people into hospital and lead to more deaths.

The roadmap for emerging from lockdown includes a five-week pause between each major step to give scientists time to gather and analyse data. Whitty said he would strongly advise against moves to shorten that time in an effort to unlock sooner.

“It is really important that we do not give any impression that what we are expecting is this just goes away and there are no further deaths,” Whitty said. “That is not realistic and I think to pretend that to the British public would be completely wrong.”

A third wave could arrive in late summer or be pushed back into the autumn and winter, Whitty said, depending on how prevalent the virus was when the

country unlocked and how effective the vaccine was, alongside other measures such as mask-wearing, handwashing and test and trace.

The Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage) has said it takes four weeks to be sure of the impact of the most recent step in easing restrictions. Ministers then want to give businesses and other organisations a week's notice of any changes to the roadmap.

While the vaccine rollout is going well in the UK, with a third of the population having received at least one shot, there are still many vulnerable people who will not be protected, either because they have not had the vaccine, or because the vaccine has not worked for them.

Experts on the modelling subgroup of Sage calculate that even under the most optimistic scenario, at least 30,000 more Covid deaths could occur in the UK.

“All the modelling suggests there is going to be a further surge that will find people either that have not been vaccinated, or where the vaccine has not worked, and some of them will end up in hospital and sadly some of them will go on to die, and that is the reality of where we are,” Whitty told MPs on the Commons science and technology committee.

“The modelling is just reflecting the fact that because this is such a common virus against a large number of people, even if you have a relatively small proportion of people still remain vulnerable, that still equates to a very large number of people overall.”

Under questioning from MPs, Whitty suggested it was highly unlikely that the situation would improve so dramatically in the coming weeks that major steps on the roadmap, such as reopening hospitality and meeting indoors, could be brought forward.

“It's very easy to forget quite how quickly things can go bad if you don't keep a very close eye on them,” he said. “What we don't want to do is to accelerate into trouble and then have to reverse straight back out again, open things up and immediately close them down.”

On whether positive data on deaths and hospitalisations might enable ministers to unlock more swiftly than the roadmap states, Whitty said: “It’s pretty doubtful you’ll be in a position where you’ll be able to say these data look so fantastically better, please take more risks. I think that seems a very unlikely situation given how large these blocks of activity already are.”

Whitty, who gave evidence with the government’s chief scientific adviser, Sir Patrick Vallance, said allowing indoor mixing of up to six people – a measure pencilled in for 17 May – involved “significant risks”.

He said he would “strongly advise” against efforts to “concertina” the five-week pause between steps, adding that the 12 April move to reopen shops and outdoor hospitality was “a very big block” of activity.

A growing number of Tory MPs are privately voicing concern at Boris Johnson’s refusal to indicate whether the roadmap out of lockdown could be sped up. Scottish first minister Nicola Sturgeon upped the pressure on the prime minister, after she said: “If the data allows us to relax more restrictions more quickly than we have previously indicated, we will not hesitate to do so”.

Some Conservative backbenchers want Johnson – who has claimed to be driven by “data not dates” – to acknowledge the possibility that the next three stages of unlocking could be brought forward. That is, if the vaccine rollout continues at a faster pace than what the original modelling was based on.

While most acknowledge the need to examine the effects of schools reopening fully in [England](#) this week and the rule of six coming back into force from 29 March, they hope the phases planned for later in the year could be brought forward.

“May and June is another country. It’s eight to 12 weeks away, imagine how different things were that far back,” one MP told the Guardian. Steve Baker, deputy chair of the Covid Recovery Group, said people accounting for 99% of deaths and 80% of hospital treatment cases from coronavirus should be “protected” with a jab by mid-April, calling for Johnson to base the roadmap out of lockdown “on data not dates”.

Meanwhile, the chancellor, Rishi Sunak, disputed a suggestion by an unnamed government science adviser quoted in the Times that his push to reopen the economy, such as with the “[eat out to help out](#)” scheme, made him responsible for the second wave of coronavirus that resulted in a second lockdown being ordered in England.

He was accused by Bridget Phillipson, the shadow chief secretary to the Treasury, of refusing to “follow the science by pitting public health against the economy”, which she claimed “led to worse outcomes for both”. Sunak said she should “be a little bit careful about what she reads in the newspapers”, adding that he and other ministers did follow the scientific advice they received. “Evidence was finely balanced and there were many things for ministers to consider,” he told the Commons during Treasury questions on Tuesday.

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[Animals farmed](#)[Environment](#)

Deadly pig disease could have led to Covid spillover to humans, analysis suggests

African swine fever led to mass cull of pigs in China and may have increased human-virus contact as people turned to other meat

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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African swine fever had spread across China – which produces half the world's pigs – by late 2019. Photograph: Jason Lee/Reuters

African swine fever had spread across China – which produces half the world's pigs – by late 2019. Photograph: Jason Lee/Reuters

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[About this content](#)

[Natalie Grover](#) *Science correspondent*

Wed 10 Mar 2021 02.15 EST

An outbreak of a deadly pig disease may have set the stage for Covid-19 to take hold in humans, a new analysis has suggested. African swine fever (ASF), which first swept through [China](#) in 2018, disrupted pork supplies increasing the potential for human-virus contact as people sought out alternative meats.

Pork is the main meat source in the Chinese diet, and the country produces half of the world's pigs, which generate roughly 55m tonnes of pork annually, forming an industry worth more than \$128bn (£98bn). The ASF outbreak had spread across most of China by the fourth quarter of 2019. The disease is untreatable and incurable. Once it takes hold, the only solution is to kill infected animals.

The dramatic drop in pork supply, after restrictions on movement of pigs and culling led to price rises, escalated demand for alternative sources of meat to be transported nationwide. These sources included wild animals, thus greatly increasing opportunities for human-coronavirus contact, a team of

researchers from China and the UK have suggested in a [yet to be peer-reviewed analysis](#).

“If more wildlife enters the human food chain, either through [individuals] hunting ... or going to market and getting different meat sources. If that increases, it could just increase the contact opportunity,” said the author of the study, David Robertson, professor of viral genomics and bioinformatics at Glasgow University. “You’re just increasing the opportunity for the [Sars-CoV-2] virus to get into humans.”

Key to averting another future zoonotic pandemic is the herculean task of figuring out how this one occurred. Disease detectives, including a team from the World Health Organization, are still following the trail, but many suspect Sars-CoV-2 probably [originated in bats](#) and spilled over into humans, possibly through an intermediary animal.



A woman smells the meat before buying at Xihua market in Guangzhou. The shortage of pork after the outbreak of ASF increased demand for other meat in China. Photograph: Alex Plavevski/EPA

The first cluster of Covid-19 cases was detected in Wuhan, but it is possible the disease originated elsewhere. In January 2020, Chinese scientists made public the genetic sequence of the virus that came to be named Sars-CoV-2.

Since then, scientists have shown the virus probably had at least its [distant ancestry in the horseshoe bats of China's Yunnan province](#).

Of a sample of 41 early confirmed cases of Covid-19, 70% of those infected were stall owners, employees or regular customers of the Huanan market, which sold seafood but also live animals, often illegally captured in the wild and slaughtered in front of customers. But the first confirmed case had no apparent connection to the market.

The newly published analysis, which implicates ASF as a driver of the spillover of Sars-CoV-2 into humans, presented a probable explanation of what occurred, said Robertson, noting that ASF could have caused a shortage of roughly 40-60% of China's total pig population, causing massive disruption to the country's meat industry.

“And so that potentially explains why there's no direct connection [to the market in previous research], why we're finding it hard to find the connection,” he said. “Because with that kind of a spillover, you would go to the market and you would expect to find infected animals still – and that's not happened. And so, there is a puzzle, there's a sort of a missing link.”

[A 12-storey pig farm: has China found the way to tackle animal disease?](#)
[Read more](#)

At the moment, the idea that a shortage of pork drove the spillover of Sars-CoV-2 into humans was only a hypothesis, he added. “We're showing disruption ... imagine a wall, it's just a brick in that wall of evidence. It's something that we think should be considered in the understanding of what unfolded.

“As is often the case in these kinds of investigations – it can take many years to disentangle the probable routes. [While] it is unlikely we'll ever know exactly what happened – it does seem likely that we will find a virus close to Sars-CoV-2 from a bat, [or] maybe another species,” he added.

“And then from that, you can start to say, well, how did that get into humans?”

Sign up for the [Animals farmed monthly update](#) to get a roundup of the best farming and food stories across the world and keep up with our investigations. You can send us your stories and thoughts at animalsfarmed@theguardian.com

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[House of Representatives](#)

US House poised to approve Joe Biden's \$1.9tn Covid relief plan

If passed, first major legislative initiative of Biden's presidency will send direct payments to most Americans and expand aid

- [Opinion: Joe Manchin runs this presidency](#)



Nancy Pelosi on Capitol Hill in Washington DC on Tuesday. Photograph: Michael Reynolds/EPA

Nancy Pelosi on Capitol Hill in Washington DC on Tuesday. Photograph: Michael Reynolds/EPA

[Lauren Gambino](#) in Washington

[@laurenegambino](#)

Wed 10 Mar 2021 02.00 EST

Sign up for the Guardian's First Thing newsletter

The [House of Representatives](#) is poised to give final approval to Joe Biden's sweeping \$1.9tn coronavirus stimulus and relief plan, a giant aid package the president has said is critical for lifting the US out of the pandemic and reviving its battered economy.

If passed by the House on Wednesday, as Democratic leaders expect, the first major legislative initiative of Biden's presidency will rush assistance to families struggling under a year-long public health crisis and provide the most generous expansion of aid to low-income Americans in a generation.

It will send direct payments of up to \$1,400 to most Americans, expand aid to state, local and tribal governments, provide federal subsidies for those struggling to afford health insurance, housing and food and deliver money to boost Covid-19 vaccine distribution and testing and to safely reopen schools.

[One in six jobs lost: the effect of the pandemic on childcare providers](#)
[Read more](#)

Economists predict that as one of the largest emergency rescue packages in American history, the American Rescue Plan (ARP) will accelerate economic recovery, boosting growth to levels not seen in recent decades and dramatically reducing numbers living in poverty.

According to one [estimate](#), the ARP could cut child poverty by as much as half, through an expansion of a tax credit for families with children that many Democrats want to make permanent.

House Democrats, who hold a slim majority, were confident the measure would pass on Wednesday morning, despite changes made in the Senate that threatened to alienate some progressives.

The New York congressman Hakeem Jeffries, the House Democratic Caucus chair, said he was "110% confident" of success. Once passed by the House, the bill will be sent to Biden for signature.

The Senate passed the bill on Saturday in a 50-49 vote, Democrats overcoming unified Republican opposition and a last-minute objection by [Joe Manchin of West Virginia](#), a member of their own party.

The package before the House on Wednesday was narrower than Biden's initial proposal, which included progressive priorities subsequently either stripped out or scaled back to appease moderates like Manchin, who echoed Republicans with concerns that the infusion of aid was too big in an economy showing signs of revival.

A provision to raise the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour was deemed inadmissible under a budget process Democrats used to bypass Republican opposition.

[Tom Cotton attacks relief payments to prisoners but backed them under Trump](#)

[Read more](#)

The Senate-approved version tightens eligibility for stimulus checks and restructures a proposal for unemployment benefits that Biden hoped to raise to \$400 a week. Under the new plan, unemployment benefits will remain at \$300 a week but will be extended through the beginning of September, rather than August. The first \$10,200 of supplements from 2020 will be made tax-free.

Though disappointed with some of the amendments, Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal, chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, called them “relatively minor concessions” and said the overall package remained “truly progressive and bold”.

Republicans say the plan is excessive and mismatched to the economic and public health outlook, as more Americans are vaccinated and states move to reopen businesses and schools. They have also revived concerns the package will grow the national debt, worries they set aside under Donald Trump.

“We know for sure that it includes provisions that are not targeted, they’re not temporary, they’re not related to Covid and it didn’t have to be this way,” said the Wyoming congresswoman Liz Cheney, House Republican Conference chair. “We could have had a bill that was a fraction of the cost of this one, it could have gotten bipartisan approval and support.”

The extraordinary price tag is just shy of the \$2.2tn coronavirus relief bill signed into law by Donald Trump at the onset of the pandemic last March. It will be the sixth spending bill Congress has enacted to address the devastation wrought by the twin public health and economic crises, and is poised to be the first to pass without bipartisan support despite Biden's campaign promise to work with Republicans.

Yet the lack of consensus in Washington belies its popularity with voters across the political spectrum and local and state officials of both parties. Encouraged by polling that shows broad public support for the bill, Biden and Democrats have argued that the plan is bipartisan.

Final passage of the bill will come a day before Biden is due to deliver his first primetime speech on Thursday, marking the first anniversary after the introduction of sweeping public health measures to try to control the spread of the Covid-19 virus that has killed nearly [525,000](#) Americans and battered the economy.

Although vaccine distribution is ramping up dramatically and the economy is showing some signs of improvement, Democrats say the recovery is precarious and uneven, and that low-income Americans still need help. Millions of Americans remain unemployed with the poorest hit hardest.

"This not only gets us to the other side of this crisis, it really starts healing the wounds that have been caused by this crisis," said Steny Hoyer, the House Democratic majority leader.

After Biden signs the bill into law, he and other top officials will continue to promote the plan to the American public, part of a push by the new administration to ensure Democrats receive credit for an economic recovery ahead of the 2022 congressional midterm elections.

"We certainly recognize that we can't just sign a bill," the White House press secretary, Jen Psaki, told reporters on Tuesday. "We will need to do some work and use our best voices, including the president, the vice-president and others, to communicate to the American people the benefits of this package."

In a departure from his predecessor, Biden's signature will not appear on the memo line of the stimulus checks sent to Americans, Psaki said. "This is not about him," she added. "This is about the American people getting relief."

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[Rupert Murdoch](#)

Rupert Murdoch at 90: what now for the media mogul?



Rupert Murdoch remains firmly in control of a formidably powerful media empire. Photograph: Mike Segar/Reuters

Rupert Murdoch remains firmly in control of a formidably powerful media empire. Photograph: Mike Segar/Reuters

Sun, Times and WSJ owner shows no sign of slowing down – and has big decisions to make, not least what to do with Fox

[Mark Sweney](#)

[@marksweney](#)

Wed 10 Mar 2021 01.00 EST

Rupert Murdoch may be set to join the tiny ranks of nonagenarians running global empires when he celebrates his 90th birthday on Thursday, but

according to associates who have met with the media mogul recently, he shows no sign of slowing down.

“Honestly, it’s the fittest I’ve seen him in years,” said one person who held a meeting with Murdoch, just prior to the latest lockdown, at Holmwood House, the Georgian property near Henley-on-Thames [he acquired for £11.25m two years ago with his former model wife Jerry Hall](#), and where he has spent most of his time during the pandemic. “I expected him to be, well, more tired. Instead he takes lots of meetings, when Covid restrictions have allowed, he is wanting to be engaged, talk about things, to keep on top of business.”

As executive chairman of News Corp, home to the Wall Street Journal, the Sun, the Times and the Australian, and co-chairman of Fox Corporation, broadcaster of [Fox News](#) and crown jewel NFL games, Murdoch remains firmly in control of a formidably powerful media empire.

Having weathered the [phone-hacking scandal that threatened to destroy his UK news operation](#) it is now Fox, which is run by eldest son Lachlan, which will shape the future of the Murdoch empire and play a key role in determining the dynastic struggle.

Fox is a commercial juggernaut, led by the right-leaning Fox News which enjoyed [supercharged ratings and notoriety during the Trump era](#), a must-have for pay-TV operators that has paid off handsomely for decades.

“I don’t think it is possible to have a cable subscription of any substance [in the US] without [Fox](#) News or [Fox](#) broadcast – as long as it has the NFL,” says Richard Greenfield, a partner and media and technology analyst at LightShed Partners.

Fox News faces issues. There is a [multibillion-dollar lawsuit over allegations it promoted the spread of theories the US election was rigged](#), and the pull of audiences to services further to the right, such as Newsmax and Donald [Trump’s new favourite One America News Network \(OANN\)](#). But they are unlikely to particularly concern the battle-hardened Murdoch.



Rupert Murdoch's Fox News backed Donald Trump's election, although the relationship between the two has cooled. Photograph: Carlo Allegri/Reuters

However, the long-term implications of the network's editorial stance, and that of a number of its news publishing assets, poses an increasing problem for Murdoch when power is ultimately transferred to his four eldest children.

Asked about whether Fox News had played a role in the Capitol riot in January, Murdoch's 48-year-old younger son James – once seen as the heir apparent – effectively rebuked the family business, saying that US media groups [“propagated lies” unleashing “insidious and uncontrollable forces”](#) – although he stopped short of naming Fox itself.

Last summer, James resigned from the board of News Corp, citing [“disagreements” over editorial content](#), severing his last formal link to the empire created by his father.

Quick Guide

Rupert Murdoch timeline: a lifetime of deals

Show

1953

Rupert Murdoch takes control of his father's Adelaide-based newspaper business after his death, eventually building it into the dominant player in the Australian market.

1968

Moves internationally, beating Robert Maxwell to buy the News of the World, the UK's highest-selling newspaper, from the Carr family.

1969

Extends influence in British media by buying the Sun and turns it tabloid. By 1977 it overtakes the Daily Mirror as the UK's highest-selling daily newspaper.

1981

Buys the Times and Sunday Times newspapers, resulting in calls of too much media control.

1985

Enters the world of broadcast, buying the film studio 20th Century Fox and a clutch of local TV stations, which will eventually become the Fox network.

1989

Launches Sky Television, the following year it merges with a rival to form BSkyB, and in 1992 changes the economics of UK sport and broadcasting for ever by taking the Premier League to pay-TV.

1996

A year after closing Today newspaper, which he had acquired from Tiny Rowland in 1987, Murdoch launches Fox News. He had made a failed run at acquiring CNN, which was snapped up by Time Warner. In 2016, Fox News became the US's most-watched channel on cable TV.

2007

Buys Dow Jones, the owner of the Wall Street Journal, for \$5bn, ending the 105-year ownership of the Bancroft family.

2011

Forced to shut News of the World as the 167-year-old title is sacrificed to try to stem the fallout of the phone-hacking scandal. Murdoch is hit with a shaving foam pie by a member of the public while answering questions about the hacking in front of a committee of MPs. The scandal scuppers Murdoch's first attempt to take full control of Sky, and results in his newspaper and broadcast assets being split into separate companies, News Corp and 21st Century Fox.

2017

Murdoch announces a \$71bn deal with Disney to buy most of 21st Century Fox, a move that in effect carves its chief executive, James Murdoch, out of the line of succession. Elder son Lachlan is left as executive heir to the remaining empire, News Corp and the newly formed Fox Corporation.

2018

Comcast outbids a Disney-backed Fox to take control of Sky across Europe for £30bn. Murdoch admits the pay-TV company is the asset he is most sad to relinquish.

2021

A voting technology company lodges a \$2.7bn legal action against Fox News, three of its top hosts and former lawyers including Rudy Giuliani, alleging they conspired to spread false claims that the company helped "steal" the US presidential election from Donald Trump.

Mark Sweney

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

Despite Fox's commercial success Murdoch faces a familiar problem: lack of scale. Fox is valued at \$22bn while rivals such as Disney and AT&T – which trumped Murdoch [following his failed \\$80bn bid in 2014 to take over TimeWarner](#) to bulk up 21st Century Fox enough to remain globally competitive – are valued at \$350bn and \$200bn respectively.

The traditional US TV market is rapidly shrinking as streaming redefines what consumers are willing to pay for content. A record 6m US households cancelled pay-TV subscriptions last year.

Meanwhile, [reports that Amazon is poised to snap up exclusive NFL games](#) for its Prime Video service is a timely reminder of the competition new deep-pocketed digital rivals are putting on winning prime programme rights, and the threat they pose to incumbent broadcasters such as Fox's sports networks.

“The key question as we look forward to 2022 and 2023 and beyond is that it is truly eat or be eaten,” says Greenfield. “Fox and many of their peers don't have scale. It is hard to believe that Fox stays as a standalone company five years from now. Fox is probably right now trying to work out how it evolves over time.”

In 2017, Murdoch recognised his limitations in the global entertainment battle and made the rare move to sell by offloading 21st Century Fox – home of assets ranging from The Simpsons to the X-Men and Avatar franchises – [to Disney for \\$71bn](#). Each of his six children banked \$2bn from the deal. Comcast [subsequently won the £30bn bidding war for Sky](#).

“Are we retreating? Absolutely not,” said Murdoch at the time. “We are pivoting at a pivotal moment.”

As a clause in the Disney deal which blocked Murdoch from making any more asset sales comes to an end this month, Murdoch now has the chance to assess whether to pivot again.

Multiple analysts believe there is no commercial logic in the oft-mooted recombination of Fox with News Corp, which is run by Murdoch's right-

hand man Robert Thomson, who shares a birthday with his boss and will celebrate his 60th on Thursday.

The view is that in the short term the well financed businesses are more likely to be buyers.

Lachlan, 49, has already acquired ad-supported streaming service Tubi for \$440m and is highly likely to increase its stake in betting firm Flutter – the parent company of Paddy Power, Skybet and Betfair. But over the longer-term there will be a wider reorganisation of the existing portfolio.

“Murdoch has displayed an extraordinary capacity to let go,” says Claire Enders, founder of Enders Analysis. “While I don’t see Fox News as saleable, like the Wall Street Journal and the Sun I can’t see anything happening with them while he is alive. He is a real news man, but no one says his children love the mandatory political elements of the news businesses the way their father does.”

Heir apparent Lachlan, who shocked his father by [abruptly leaving the family business in 2005](#) to move to Australia and pursue his own interests before being [enticed back a decade later](#), will have his own agenda – if he sticks with the family firm.

“There have always been questions over what Lachlan ultimately wants to do,” said one source. “When Rupert is in the room Lachlan certainly plays the supporting role to Rupert. But when Rupert leaves Lachlan definitely assumes that [leadership] role.”

When the Rupert-era eventually ends the power behind the family trust, which controls 40% of voting shares in News Corp and Fox Corporation, will be equally split between his four eldest children. His two youngest daughters, Grace and Chloe, are financial beneficiaries.

“Lachlan doesn’t have universal support across the family,” says one source. “James and Elisabeth get on very well. Prudence and Elisabeth get on very well. There is a route to potentially effect change if that’s what they want.”

But given Rupert's mother, Dame Elisabeth, lived until 103 that could still be some way off, giving the Australian-born mogul time to extend seven decades of deal-making, reshape the family empire to assuage division and ensure the next generation keeps the Murdoch legacy intact.

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[Books](#)

Interview

'They were treated terribly' – why 'lad lit' veteran Mike Gayle is finally tackling racism

[Alison Flood](#)



‘It’s lovely to be recognised’ ... Mike Gayle, who won an award that usually goes to major female writers. Photograph: Hodder & Stoughton

‘It’s lovely to be recognised’ ... Mike Gayle, who won an award that usually goes to major female writers. Photograph: Hodder & Stoughton

He just became the first male writer ever to win romantic fiction’s top award. The former agony uncle explains why his latest novel looks back at the ‘virulent’ prejudice of 1950s Britain



Wed 10 Mar 2021 01.00 EST

In the past, the Romantic Novelists' Association has bestowed its outstanding achievement award on some major names, among them [Jilly Cooper](#), Helen Fielding and [Joanna Trollope](#). But this month, a genre traditionally dominated by women presented its top prize to Mike Gayle. Not only is he the first ever male author to win, he's also the first person of colour to take home the gong.

"It's just lovely," says Gayle. "It's lovely to be recognised by anybody, and [the RNA](#) have been great to me ever since my first book came out. Back then, I had no idea how long this this thing would last. It took me ages to think of it as a career – because I could just imagine it sort of disappearing. To be here, 20 years later, I think that is a real achievement."

That first book was *My Legendary Girlfriend*, the story of incurable romantic Will Kelly, miserably unable to get over his ex, the inimitable Aggi. In a books market where such bestselling authors as [Fielding](#) and Catherine Alliot were providing an insight into romantic relationships from a female perspective – and landing the label "[chick lit](#)" for their efforts – Gayle joined the likes of Nick Hornby and Tony Parsons in giving a male view. This won them the "lad lit" moniker, although Gayle [has said he](#)

prefers “pop lit”, because his writing is “just like pop music in as much as it’s immediately accessible ... yet touching on all the great themes – love, laughter, hatred and jealousy – without feeling the need to take itself too seriously”.



‘Love, laughter, hatred and jealousy’ ... some of Gayle’s novels. Composite: Hodder & Stoughton

“Mike’s well-deserved success,” says RNA chair Imogen Howson, “comes from his unerring ability to create characters and tell stories that speak directly to readers. Many, if not all, authors face challenges. However, those challenges are not equal and commercial publishing has, for a long time, been dominated by white voices. Mike regularly centres black, mixed-race and working-class characters, who can often be overlooked.”

Everyone wanted to write for the Guardian or the Economist. I was the only one who wanted to go to Smash Hits or Just 17

Gayle is speaking to me via Zoom from his home town of Birmingham, where he lives with his wife, two daughters and a much-loved pet. “My dog’s name is Sail,” he says. “He’s a rescue greyhound. And yes, when we go to the vets, they do announce him as Sail Gayle!” He began writing his first novel when he was 23. Fresh from Salford University with a degree in

sociology, he'd moved to London to work in magazine journalism. "Everyone wanted to write for the Guardian or the Economist or the Times," he says. "I was the only one who wanted to work for Smash Hits or Just 17. When I was growing up, Smash Hits was everything to me."

He wrote for teen magazines for years, even becoming an agony uncle for the girls mag Bliss. "It was just explaining the mindset of teenage boys to teenage girls in a very nice, big brother sort of fashion," he says, demonstrating the "non-threatening male pose" he assumed for his photo byline. "It was a fantastic training ground for writing, because you won't get a tougher audience. I've written for broadsheets, and I've written for teens – and the hardest audience will always be teens. If they didn't like what you were writing about, they would just turn the page, and you'd be dead to them. So you had to be really entertaining."

Gayle eventually moved back to Birmingham, and spent a year splitting his time between freelance journalism and working on the novel. "I wanted to write a book about the male experience of romance. It wasn't something I'd ever seen in a novel. Normally, in novels where men talk about relationships, they all seem to be quite stoic – I wanted to write a character who wasn't at all like that. It was also about him having his quarter-life crisis, something I felt I could connect with. I wanted to talk about love and loss, that point in life when you really feel things."



‘If they didn’t like what you wrote, you’d be dead to them’ ... Mike Gayle’s column in Bliss. Photograph: supplied by Mike Gayle

When *My Legendary Girlfriend* was published in 1998, it immediately earned the moniker “the male Bridget Jones”. This no doubt helped with sales, but seemed to overlook the bleak humour at the novel’s heart. “It was a lovely hook, and don’t get me wrong – it was a great thing to be described that way. But it wasn’t necessarily true. If you were going to do a male version of Bridget Jones, you wouldn’t have done it with a character like Will.” Gayle skewers Will’s endless pining for Aggi with warmth and a great deal of humour. He writes: “‘It’s like that song,’ she said, completely straight-faced. ‘If You Love Someone, Set Them Free.’ I couldn’t believe it. It wasn’t enough that she was wrecking my whole life. She was quoting Sting.”

It's always on black writers to define themselves. But every time you do, you're making your world smaller

In the book, Gayle never specifies Will’s race. “It was interesting to hear people say, ‘Oh, I just assumed that he was white.’” He’d think: “Well, why would you do that? If you look in the back of the book, there’s a picture of me there.”

Over his last 15 novels – from *Turning Thirty* (a man splits up with his girlfriend and moves back in with his parents) to *The Stag and Hen Weekend* (two pre-wedding parties told as separate stories) – Gayle has generally steered clear of discussing race. This was a deliberate choice. “It’s always on black writers to define themselves,” he says. “White writers get to be whoever, and write whoever. But I always think every time you define yourself, you’re making your world smaller. Real freedom lies in not defining yourself – in just being who you are and getting on with what you’re doing.”



Meet Sail Gayle ... the author with his rescue greyhound. Photograph: Simon Weller

Gayle’s most recent novel, *All the Lonely People*, addresses race more directly, though. It follows Hubert Bird, a lonely, elderly man who has been inventing a colourful social life to stop his daughter in Australia worrying about him. Hubert is then forced to re-engage with the world when she announces she’s coming for a visit. The novel moves between the present, as Hubert tentatively starts to pick things up again with old friends and neighbours, and the past – the 1950s, when he first moved from Jamaica to London and experienced virulent racism.

Gayle's own parents relocated to the UK from Jamaica in the 1960s. "But I don't think I'd really been aware of the racism," he says, "until I did this research for the book. And it's absolutely shocking. The way they were treated was terrible." In the novel, Hubert is attacked by his fellow workers at a department store who tell him: "You're not even a proper human, are you?" Joyce, his white wife, is later abused by a childminder she had hoped would look after their daughter: "Having a baby with one of those darkies. You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

Says Gayle: "It is uncomfortable to read. But I think it's important, because it's not that long ago. It took something like [Black Lives Matter](#), and people making accusations, for companies to go, 'Oh, yeah, we haven't actually got any black people.' Suddenly ITV has just discovered black people! Somebody pointed out to them that they had no black presenters and so they've just carted in a whole load. Like, how can it have taken you so long to work this out?"

All the Lonely People, a heartbreaking and ultimately uplifting look at isolation, was written pre-pandemic. But, in a world that has for many been cut down to four walls, it feels extremely timely. "When you meet people who are quite clearly lonely," says Gayle, "you wonder how that situation comes about. I started with this idea of how a house fills up with people and then empties over time. That was the real backbone of it." So we see Hubert meet his partner, have a family, and then the children leave home one by one, until he loses his wife and is alone again. "That story is played out time and time again, in so many different lives. I didn't want it to be just about race. I wanted it to be about life."

After three decades of writing, there is one thing Gayle thinks he couldn't do: write My Legendary Girlfriend again. "I've just turned 50," he says, "and it feels like it's written by a different person. When you're that young, you really do feel things intensely. The older you get, the more hardened to life you become."

All the Lonely People is out now, from Hodder Paperbacks.

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The Queen

'Recollections may vary': how the papers covered Queen's response to Meghan interview

Some papers focus on the mild challenge to the Sussexes in palace statement, while others look at the privacy line, or claim support to strip couple of titles



Front pages of the UK papers on Wednesday as the royal crisis over the Meghan and Harry interview by Oprah Winfrey continued. Composite: Various

Front pages of the UK papers on Wednesday as the royal crisis over the Meghan and Harry interview by Oprah Winfrey continued. Composite: Various

[Martin Farrer](#)

Tue 9 Mar 2021 22.40 EST

The newspaper front pages have feasted on the royal crisis for a second day with several splashes focusing on the Queen's "recollections may vary" reaction to the Duke and Duchess of Sussexes' suggestions of palace racism.

The **Telegraph** goes with "Issue of race concerning, but recollections may vary, says Queen", while the **Times** splash handles the crisis carefully, with a headline reading: "Queen says racism claim will be handled in private".

Tomorrow's Telegraph front page: "Issue of race concerning, but recollections vary, says Queen"

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pic.twitter.com/uyOXm5PRKB

— The Telegraph (@Telegraph) [March 10, 2021](#)

Wednesday's TIMES: "Queen says racism claim will be handled in private" [#TomorrowsPapersToday](#) pic.twitter.com/GEf6zMf617

— Allie Hodgkins-Brown (@AllieHBNews) [March 9, 2021](#)

Amid questions about the [media's past treatment of Meghan](#), the **Mail** splashes on a poll claiming there is a "huge backlash" against the Sussexes and that a majority of Britons want them to lose their royal titles.

"Poll: now strip them of their titles", the splash headline says, above a story reporting that 51% of people surveyed want the couple sanctioned, with 28% against. The story also claims that a majority thinks the Sussexes were wrong to give the interview in the first place and that they had let the Queen down.

Wednesday's [@DailyMailUK](#) [#MailFrontPages](#)
pic.twitter.com/qPZygVAjaS

— Daily Mail U.K. (@DailyMailUK) [March 9, 2021](#)

The **Guardian** front-page story is headlined “Royals respond to race row: ‘We will address this in private’”, and also reports on the related departure of Piers Morgan: “ITV drama as Morgan storms off and quits”. But its main story is about a funding crisis in local government: “Revealed: true scale of the cash crisis facing councils”.

Guardian front page, Wednesday 10 March 2021: Revealed: true scale of the cash crisis facing councils pic.twitter.com/dCI6tT9End

— The Guardian (@guardian) [March 9, 2021](https://www.theguardian.com/news/2021/march/9/royals-respond-to-race-row)

The **Sun’s** front page is “Recollections may vary” beneath a picture of Meghan and the Queen in happier times, while the **Express** also has “Recollection may vary says Queen”.

Wednesday’s SUN: “Recollections may vary”
[#TomorrowsPapersToday pic.twitter.com/YycHomxUvw](https://pic.twitter.com/YycHomxUvw)

— Allie Hodgkins-Brown (@AllieHBNews) [March 9, 2021](https://www.theguardian.com/news/2021/march/9/royals-respond-to-race-row)

Wednesday’s Daily EXPRESS: “Recollections May Vary Says Queen”
[#TomorrowsPapersToday pic.twitter.com/OzEzVXvb2w](https://pic.twitter.com/OzEzVXvb2w)

— Allie Hodgkins-Brown (@AllieHBNews) [March 9, 2021](https://www.theguardian.com/news/2021/march/9/royals-respond-to-race-row)

The **Mirror** resists the temptation to splash on its former editor quitting his job on Good Morning Britain, but it does refer to it above its main story which focuses on a more upbeat line in the Queen’s statement on the Sussexes: “Queen: We will always love you”.

Tomorrow’s front page: Queen: We will always love you
<https://t.co/2K2xoaL9i7> [#TomorrowsPapersToday pic.twitter.com/0vdqb5LCXV](https://pic.twitter.com/0vdqb5LCXV)

— Daily Mirror (@DailyMirror) [March 9, 2021](https://www.theguardian.com/news/2021/march/9/royals-respond-to-race-row)

Elsewhere, the **i** leads on “NHS pay rise: public says 1% not enough” and the **FT** has “England’s £23bn test and trace programme condemned by MPs”.

Front page of the Financial Times, UK edition, on Wednesday 10 March 2021 pic.twitter.com/jkTlzVbjVC

— Financial Times (@FinancialTimes) [March 10, 2021](#)

North of the border the **Scotsman** leads with “Mother’s Day reunions as social restrictions eased”, while the **Herald** reports on sexual harassment allegations against SNP chief whip Patrick Grady, who has stood down pending an investigation by the party.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/mar/10/recollections-may-vary-how-the-papers-covered-queens-response-to-meghan-interview>

[Photography then and now](#)[Japan disaster](#)

Japan's 2011 tsunami, then and now - in pictures

Ten years ago one of the most powerful earthquakes on record triggered a devastating tsunami in Japan, killing more than 18,000 people and triggering catastrophic meltdowns at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant. Then and now photographs show the extent of the destruction and the enormity of the reconstruction work

Kazuhiro Nogi/AFP/Getty Images

Wed 10 Mar 2021 01.00 EST

[Ofunato in Iwate prefecture](#)

- Ofunato in Iwate prefecture. Photographs by Toshifumi Kitamura and Kazuhiro Nogi/AFP /Getty Images

[Otsuchi in Iwate prefecture](#)

- Otsuchi in Iwate prefecture. Photographs by Yasuyoshi Chiba and Kazuhiro Nogi/AFP/Getty Images

[Ishinomaki in Miyagi prefecture](#)

- Ishinomaki in Miyagi prefecture. Photographs by Philippe Lopez and Kazuhiro Nogi/AFP/Getty Images

[Ofunato in Iwate prefecture](#)

- Ofunato in Iwate prefecture. Photographs by Toshifumi Kitamura and Kazuhiro Nogi/AFP/Getty Images

[Minamisoma in Fukushima prefecture](#)

- Minamisoma in Fukushima prefecture. Photographs by Toru Yamanaka and Kazuhiro Nogi/AFP/Getty Images

[Kesennuma in Miyagi prefecture](#)

- Kesennuma in Miyagi prefecture. Photographs by Philippe Lopez and Kazuhiro Nogi/AFP/Getty Images

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- Kesennuma in Miyagi prefecture. Photographs by Philippe Lopez and Kazuhiro Nogi/AFP/Getty Images

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[Otsuchi in Iwate prefecture](#)

- Otsuchi in Iwate prefecture. Photographs by Yasuyoshi Chiba and Kazuhiro Nogi/AFP/Getty Images

[Miyako in Iwate prefecture](#)

- Miyako in Iwate prefecture. 2021 photograph by Kazuhiro Nogi/AFP/Getty Images

[Tagajo in Miyagi prefecture](#)

- Tagajo in Miyagi prefecture. Photographs by Kazuhiro Nogi/AFP/Getty Images

[Natori in Miyagi prefecture](#)

- Natori in Miyagi prefecture. Photographs by Mike Clarke and Kazuhiro Nogi/AFP/Getty Images

[Ishinomaki in Miyagi prefecture](#)

- Ishinomaki in Miyagi prefecture. 2021 photograph by Kazuhiro Nogi/AFP/Getty Images

[Tagajo in Miyagi prefecture](#)

- Tagajo in Miyagi prefecture. Photographs by Kim Ja-Hwan and Kazuhiro Nogi/AFP/Getty Images

[Natori in Miyagi prefecture](#)

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[Otsuchi in Iwate prefecture](#)

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[First Dog on the Moon](#)[Business](#)

Humans throw away TOO MUCH CRAP IT HAS TO STOP

[First Dog on the Moon](#)



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Wed 10 Mar 2021 01.10 EST

[throw away.](#)

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[Piers Morgan](#)

Piers Morgan: end of the road for the man who never knew when to stop

Analysis: being ‘ghosted’ by Meghan may be behind the harsh words that cost the presenter his Good Morning Britain job

- [Piers Morgan to leave Good Morning Britain after Meghan row](#)

01:11

'I'm done with this': Piers Morgan storms off Good Morning Britain – video

[Dan Sabbagh](#)

Wed 10 Mar 2021 02.15 EST

Once again, [Piers Morgan](#) has showed he simply did not know when to stop.

Seventeen years ago, he was fired as editor of the Daily Mirror after publishing faked Iraqi prisoner abuse photographs. A decade later, he was axed by CNN after he lost his US audience over a series of lectures over gun control.

Yet, until now, Morgan has found a way of bouncing back, able even to justify failures that would have killed other careers. But his persistent attacks on [Meghan, the Duchess of Sussex](#), appeared increasingly insensitive, to the point where even he could no longer justify them.

[Piers Morgan to leave Good Morning Britain after Meghan row](#)

[Read more](#)

Instead, the man so normally full of words simply stormed off the set of Good Morning Britain, the show he had hosted for six years. Facing criticism from co-presenter Alex Beresford, a visibly enraged Morgan could

only manage “I’m done with this” as he got up and as he headed out “See you later, sorry I can’t do this”.

A day earlier, Morgan attracted widespread criticism – and over 40,000 viewer complaints – after saying he didn’t believe Meghan’s disclosure that she had considered taking her own life. “I don’t believe a word she says, Meghan Markle. I wouldn’t believe her if she read me a weather report.”



Piers Morgan in Kensington on Tuesday morning after leaving Good Morning Britain. Photograph: MEGA/GC Images

It was a car crash that, in retrospect was easy to see coming. Morgan had been criticising Meghan in extraordinary terms for months. When she and her husband, Harry, announced they were stepping down as working royals he accused them of being “grasping, selfish, scheming Kardashian-wannabes”.

Once, remarkably, the two were even friendly – a disclosure that made the recent attacks harder to stomach. They met up in 2016 in a London pub after she had come to Wimbledon to watch another of her friends, multiple champion, Serena Williams, but he complained that she had dropped all contact with him once she had met Harry.

“I still like Meghan, notwithstanding her disconcerting tendency to ‘ghost’ people when they’ve served their purpose,” Morgan tweeted in 2018. It was something he sought to remind viewers of in the run-up to the [Oprah interview](#), complaining she had “ditched [him] like a sack of spuds” – suggesting his criticisms of her were driven largely by little more than personal animus.

It was far from the only row Morgan had been embroiled in in recent weeks. Just a month earlier, 1,200 TV executives signed an open letter accusing the presenter of being engaged in public bullying of Adeel Amini, who had worked with him as a researcher on Life Stories a decade earlier.

When Amini, now a producer, tweeted that he would not take the job today, Morgan hit back on the social network, claiming he would “rather employ a lobotomised Aardvark”.

Breakfast show co-host, Susanna Reid, recently admitted that in the early days working alongside Morgan made her cry. “I used to get a lot of targeted abuse because someone didn’t like what the person sitting next to me said,” she said. Relations had improved, she added, but the dynamic on the show was never easy, she said, in a recent interview. “We do fight like Punch and Judy, verbally.”

Last year, Downing Street boycotted GMB for months after Morgan had engaged in a couple of combative interviews with care minister Helen Whately, which critics described as bullying. In one she accused him of repeatedly interrupting her – he insisted that she “didn’t have any answers” over the numbers of Covid tests being carried out.

That led to something of a brief revival of Morgan’s reputation in some circles, as angry No 10 advisers refused to allow ministers to go on the breakfast programme and the presenter took the opportunity to lambast the government in its absence for its handling of the first wave of the deadly pandemic.

It was typical of a man who seemed to be addicted to getting into fights, and who was long ago described by Rupert Murdoch, his former boss at the

News of the World, where he was editor before the Mirror, as having “balls bigger than his brains”.

Some of the skirmishes along the way were legendary – including a punchup nearly two decades ago with Jeremy Clarkson following a particularly boisterous night at the British Press Awards. A drunk Clarkson punched Morgan, who had allegedly insulted his wife, at around half eleven – leaving visible bruises on the then tabloid editor’s forehead.

But there were many examples of other more serious misjudgments. At the Mirror he successfully survived one scandal, buying shares in a company subsequently tipped by the newspaper’s business columnists, the City Slickers, by claiming he knew nothing of their intentions.

An eight-year reign at the leftwing tabloid ended when he was sacked for publishing what turned out to be faked photographs that purported to show British soldiers abusing Iraqi detainees. Characteristically Morgan had refused to even apologise as it became clear his job was on the line. “If nobody knows the provenance of these photographs, why should we apologise?” he said on the day he was forced out.

Only Morgan could revel in the prospect of such falls from grace. His Twitter profile has long contained the quote “One day you’re cock of the walk, the next a feather duster” attributed to his grandmother. But his comments about Meghan put him in a position where he is at risk of being swept aside.

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Bringing up baby twins during lockdown - a photo-essay

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2021/mar/10/bringing-up-baby-twins-during-lockdown-a-photo-essay>.

Unforgotten: episode recapsTelevision

Unforgotten series four, episode three recap – when will Fiona fold?

There are flashbacks and cash lacks as as the crime drama continues and the pressure mounts on our four suspects



The flimsiest of the Ford Granada Four? Liz White as Fiona Grayson.
Photograph: ITV

The flimsiest of the Ford Granada Four? Liz White as Fiona Grayson.
Photograph: ITV

[James Donaghy](#)

Tue 9 Mar 2021 17.00 EST

The investigation

Matthew Walsh will soon be reunited with his head and hands and were he able to, he would offer a tip of the hat to that industrious team player Jake

for the assist. Perhaps just as important, midfield dynamo Fran unearths a corroborating witness to confirm that Walsh was being chased by two men – one Asian, one unusually tall. The fun really begins when we get our first face-to-face meeting between the suspects and plod. Cassie and Sunny show up friendly as you like – just a few questions, completely routine. No one is buying the good cop act though, least of all the Ford Granada Four.

Ram Sidhu

When chaos comes calling in life, this is how you take control. Ram puts the formal complaint against him to bed by surreptitiously recording his accuser racially abusing him (after apparently lowballing her with a frankly derisory £50 bribe). It is done with the steady hand and swagger of a true veteran. Ram has been fighting misconduct cases like [Vic Mackey](#) for years and is undefeated on the unforgiving grievance circuit. No wonder Sunny is swiftly dispatched from his office with “maybe you’re just one of their coconuts”. Charming.

We see his softer side when he and Anna discuss what to do if their child has Down’s syndrome. Anna can’t see herself raising a child with complex needs, possibly factoring in that Ram has a few complex needs of his own. He couldn’t be more supportive, though, expressing his desire to continue the pregnancy regardless while making it clear it’s ultimately her choice.

“There’s a crack in everything, Anna,” he tells her. “That’s how the light gets in.” Let’s see how he feels about that when the cracks appear in his 1990 timeline.

Liz Baidon

Liz gets unofficial confirmation that she will be the new chief constable of East Anglia. No champagne corks are popped, though, as Cassie’s visit triggers the first patented Unforgotten flashback of the series. There’s a shower head, an airborne graduation mortar board, a car air freshener, a pub table and a swing. It rattles her enough to give a deeply unconvincing performance for Cassie, only remembering the drink-driving incident after heavy prompting. With the eavesdropping Eugenia overhearing something

about a dead body in a car boot and [Mommie, Dearest](#) hovering upstairs, it looks like Liz's problems have only just begun.



Susan Lynch as Liz Baidon. Photograph: ITV

Fiona Grayson

I think we know now who is going to fold first under pressure. Fiona is all over the place during Sunny's visit and throughout the episode. Her panicked attempt to stop the mortgage deposit and subsequent visit to Geoff's brother Mark betray a frazzled mind. Her tale of a simple girl who joined the force just to please her daddy, then boozed her way through the misery is touching but hardly satisfying. She pleads with Mark to change her name on the mortgage forms to prevent a supposed criminal conviction from showing up. It all poses more questions than it answers.

Much more promising is her flashback: an intriguing montage of Mexican rum, broken glass on a car seat, blood spots on a certificate of accreditation for counselling and psychotherapy, and Fiona engaging in a drunken knee trembler.

It may even be with Ram, but I don't want him to get the BPA on to me so it's a John Doe for now.

Dean Barton

A smuggler (definitely), a killer (possibly), but above all Dean Barton is a father. His commitment to giving Jack the best life possible is showcased at the fundraiser. And, whatever amount they raise, Dean knows that Jack gave him something money can't buy, something he never thought possible: "An ease with the world." That ease quickly evaporates once Cassie shows up provoking his first flashback. We've got a passport stamp, a leather strap being wrapped around a fist, two people dishing out a kicking to a hapless victim and, most disturbingly of all, a packet of Opal Fruits ([Starburst](#) to younger viewers). I'm not sure what it is with this series and retro confectionery (remember the Marathon/Snickers wrapper from episode one?), but I'm comforted that we have our best people on the case.

Notes and observations

- Why is Liz apparently strapped for cash? A chief constable pockets a six-figure salary, so pennypinching over domestic staff doesn't add up. I don't buy Fiona's criminal past as a reason to withhold the mortgage deposit either – as if Cassie and crew missed that. Blackmail is always a possibility, but perhaps too obvious?
- Let's try again. Fiona's flashback sex gives credence to AvidViewer's [theory](#) of a baby being conceived on that fateful night. Might the money be going into a trust fund for said child?
- "And what would you do for me in return?" I don't think that's the kind of deposit she has in mind, Mark. Are we to believe he is willing to risk his career for a bunk up with his brother's girlfriend?
- Dean is not unusually tall, which leaves either Robert Fogarty or an unknown party chasing Matthew with Ram.
- "You were a proper dickhead." Jake silently removes "beloved prefect" from his LinkedIn endorsements.

- “You’re good.” Liz acknowledges a formidable opponent in Cassie. Game recognises game.

Who’s having sex with Fiona? Why is everyone broke? Who is the tall man? If you have a theory, please post it below

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2021.03.10 - Opinion

- Meghan and Harry v 'The Institution': another royal fairytale turned Grimm
- The British press isn't racist, say the editors. That just shows how long the problem will endure
- People with long Covid urgently need help. Why can't we access it?
- Make up isn't frivolous – it allows us to rebuild ourselves
- Cartoon Steve Bell on Harry saying Charles stopped taking his calls
- Myanmar's street protesters need the world's help to restore democracy
- UK should enjoy spillover from US growth forecast – but don't bank on it
- The Baftas' diversity push has been brilliantly vindicated

[Opinion](#)**Monarchy**

Meghan and Harry v 'The Institution': another royal fairytale turned Grimm

[Marina Hyde](#)



No one really cares about the HRHs doing their dull ribbon-cutting duties.
It's the drama, and the villains, that we're after



‘It’s fair to say the house of Windsor has failed to end its marrying-an-American-divorcee hoodoo.’ Photograph: Aaron Chown/PA

‘It’s fair to say the house of Windsor has failed to end its marrying-an-American-divorcee hoodoo.’ Photograph: Aaron Chown/PA

Tue 9 Mar 2021 10.55 EST

Well now: a “21st-century monarchy”. As an oxymoron to run a mile from, it’s up there with “fourth-century brain surgery”. Trying to clean up after the [Meghan and Harry interview](#) feels a little like asking a series of decapitated mafia soldiers if they can produce an email trail showing they raised their issues with their line manager.

The institution headed by the Queen, 94, is accused of racism, along with an [as yet unnamed](#) member of the royal family on whom the net of fevered suspicion is likely to close. A lot of people will have dealt with racist family members of their own, of course – but concerns about bloodline mean so much more coming from any royal house founded on intermarriage. Even so, it feels a little late for the royals to be taking an interest in genetics. A child being a quarter African American is somewhat less of a talking point than one side of that child’s family having repeatedly bred with its cousins for half the 19th and 20th centuries.

Still, on with the show. It's fair to say the house of Windsor has failed to end its marrying-an-American-divorcee hoodoo. As for the idea that there is some sort of [HR process](#) in train to investigate both Meghan's complaints and complaints against Meghan, I'm sure it's a nice idea, but ... do me a favour. The royal family can't even begin to pretend "the firm" is like "a firm". No firm I've ever worked for feels they still have to pay the [bezzie of an international paedophile](#), who himself has had to deny having sex with a trafficked 17-year-old. Actually, hang on – when I started as a secretary on the Sun, the paper's [chief reporter](#) had been allowed back to work after being convicted of strangling and drowning his wife. So yes: always good to hear from certain sections of Fleet Street on what counts as conduct beyond the pale. "Meghan's Baby Shower Shame", is it? Righto.

Unsurprisingly, the Duchess of Sussex is not the first person connected with this "firm" to feel suicidal. When the Queen and Princess Margaret's devoted nanny Crawfie wrote a discreetly adoring and anodyne memoir, *The Little Princesses*, the royal family effectively [destroyed her](#). Some kind of published reminiscences had initially been the Queen Mother's idea, but Crawfie was utterly cast out and demonised for the next 30 years – for ever parted from the two children she had effectively raised, at an age where she was now unable to have her own. Desperate for reconciliation, she bought a house on an Aberdeen road down which the family drove on their annual summer decampment to Balmoral. They never stopped. When she attempted to take her own life, as she did twice, Crawfie [left a note](#) which read: "I cannot bear those I love to pass me by on the road."

The more Harry and Meghan used the word "the institution" in their Oprah interview, the more it sounded once again like somewhere known locally as "The Institution". As in, a nightmarish place, with staff instructed not to speak to townsfolk about what happens there. Just assume the Queen has a wacky sign on her desk: "You don't have to be mad to work here – but you will be by the time you leave."

Moneywise, I'm sure it's unfortunate being "[cut off financially](#)" in your mid-30s, in a way that forces you to leave a taxpayer-funded house to purchase a \$14.5m (£10.4m) Californian mansion. But it feels even more so when Buckingham Palace advertises jobs at [below the living wage](#), given a lot of the duties sound like something you might be expected to perform if

you were being held without your passport in exchange for “room and board” in a shed.

Whenever the tasks of royal servants are itemised, I can only imagine them being listened to by a fictional police officer from a specialist unit, probably played by Sarah Lancashire. “And you say your job involved [squeezing toothpaste](#) on your master’s toothbrush ... ? OK. And what would happen if you put the toothpaste on wrong? ... Right. I see. And you’re saying you had to [hold the specimen bottle](#) when he gave a urine sample? No, it’s all right, love. I know it’s hard. Let’s take a break, get you a cup of tea.”

But we know all this. Perhaps the last truth some dare not speak about royal dysfunction is their own addiction to it. Speaking my own truth, I note I am writing another column about the drama – [the second](#) in three weeks. And for all the outrage yesterday, there was a sense of high excitement to many people’s engagement with the latest bombshells, as they condemned/supported the dramatis personae thrice hourly on social media. I was reminded of the [woman I met in Windsor](#) the day before Meghan and Harry’s wedding, who was one of those camping out to see the happy couple. “It’s terrible what they’ve done to her,” she fumed to me of the tabloids, three of which she had bought that morning and was working her outraged way through.

[As Meghan has learned, the monarchy is still built on breeding, ancestry and caste | Nadifa Mohamed](#)
[Read more](#)

There’s plenty of precedent here. Contrary to the pompous way in which it is often discussed, people loved the abdication crisis. The whole drama gave them quite the lift in otherwise depressing times. I’ve quoted a passage from Evelyn Waugh’s diaries here before, but let’s wheel it out again: “The Simpson crisis has been a great delight to everyone. At Maidie’s nursing home they report a pronounced turn for the better in all adult patients. There can seldom have been an event that has caused so much general delight and so little pain.”

The shock death of George VI was also luxuriated in, according to the Bloomsbury Group diarist Frances Partridge, who noted “bulletins of

thunderous gravity and richly revelled-in emotional unbuttoning”.

“The whole effect is of ham acting,” she continued, “and a lot of nonsense is being talked about the relief necessary to our tortured feelings. What the public is feeling is a sense of great drama, not at all unpleasant.”

My own long-held belief is that a sense of great drama is what people truly want from the royal family. It’s not what people SAY they want, of course. People say they want dutiful ribbon-cutters who speak in platitudes, and only biannually. They say they want fist-gnawingly dull copy about how the Queen is wearing a brooch she wore on her honeymoon to this or that engagement, and what that might mean. They say they want 1,500 words of torpid and painfully uneventful bollocks about William and Kate boarding an easyJet flight. But what they really want is high drama, pure mess, grotesque villains and a side to take.

They’ve certainly got one now. [Early polling](#) suggests sympathy for the Palace and the Sussexes is split deeply on generational lines – which is a problem if you’re in charge of something that has to get handed down the generations. It is increasingly clear that the Queen has constructed a monarchy which only works with her specific, unreplicable personage at the helm. Or to put it another way, if you want to tell a coming blockbuster horror story in just two words, try this pitch for size: “Charles III”. *Après ma’am, le deluge.*

- Marina Hyde is a Guardian columnist

OpinionMeghan, the Duchess of Sussex

The British press isn't racist, say the editors. That just shows how long the problem will endure

Joseph Harker



The kneejerk denial of Meghan's claims would not happen if the industry was open, honest and truly diverse



‘For the most part, the agenda-setting discussions about race, or religion, take place among a small group of white people: as people of colour, we are mostly spoken about, not to; and it’s a rare thing indeed when we get to lead the discussion.’ Photograph: Chris Jackson/Getty Images

‘For the most part, the agenda-setting discussions about race, or religion, take place among a small group of white people: as people of colour, we are mostly spoken about, not to; and it’s a rare thing indeed when we get to lead the discussion.’ Photograph: Chris Jackson/Getty Images

Tue 9 Mar 2021 11.55 EST

A few years ago, on the day singer Tom Jones revealed he may have Black ancestry, the Daily Mail’s chief cartoonist, Mac, went to work. How did [he depict](#) this Black lineage? With a couple of tribal figures, in the jungle: one a topless mother with a baby at her breast; the other a spear-carrying “savage” with three human heads dangling in front of him.

It was the most clearly racist depiction of Black people one could possibly imagine. It went in the next day’s paper.

By chance, on the day of publication the Daily Mail was hosting an event on behalf of the Journalism Diversity Fund, which gives aspiring journalists

from racial-minority backgrounds a helping hand with training courses. As someone who works on diversity in the press, I was invited.

A senior Daily Mail editor gave a fulsome speech about the fund's good work, and why the press needs more diversity. Afterwards, I asked him about the cartoon, and whether he saw any disconnect. I wasn't sure what reaction I would get but I was still shocked: "What the hell are you saying?" he fumed. "I see nothing wrong with it. You're simply trying to make trouble."

I'd expected him to be mildly embarrassed by the cartoon, and to try to laugh it off. Instead, despite the crudest of stereotypes it portrayed, he saw absolutely nothing wrong with it at all – and I became the accused.

Later, at the same event, I talked to one of the Mail's senior PR honchos. He told me: "Look what we're doing here tonight, hosting this diversity event. This is what really matters."

I told him he was wrong. That what matters is what goes in their product every day; that they can spend thousands on feelgood diversity events without it making a single difference to how their organisation operates.

I thought back to these conversations yesterday, when – in the aftermath of [Harry and Meghan's claims](#) about racism in the media – [the Society of Editors](#) issued an immediate rebuttal. "The press is most certainly not racist," it said, absolving itself immediately of even the slightest guilt over Meghan's coverage. According to the society, all the press does is hold the powerful to account.

That will be news to many people of colour in the UK. Not only have there been glaringly different takes on Meghan compared to Kate (the baby-bump-caressing; the avocados), but beyond the royal family there are stark contrasts in the way Black and white people are reported on. As footballer [Raheem Sterling](#) famously pointed out, these double standards apply to sportspeople too, and define the coverage of their personal lives, down to whether it's OK to spend your earnings on a new home for your parents, or not.

The Society of Editors represents the heads of national and local newspapers and magazines, among others, and claims its members “are as different as the publications, programmes and websites they create and the communities and audiences they serve”. Yet its management board is overwhelmingly white, and it’s unclear whether its Black members were consulted before making the statement.

The society also denied being “bigoted” – but as anyone with the most basic understanding of the issue knows, this is not the same as racism, which operates in far more subtle ways than name-calling or “No Blacks” signs.

[Meghan could help black women shed harmful 'strong' trope, says Diane Abbott](#)

[Read more](#)

Despite this, there’s [plenty of evidence](#) of the crude kind of racism within the British press: from the conflation of Asians with terrorism or grooming gangs, to the association of Black boys with gang violence.

And underpinning this is the long-running institutional racism which the press has never shaken off: the unthinking racism that makes change so snail’s-pace. It’s seen in the dominant culture of almost every national newspaper: middle-class, white, Oxbridge. You’ll find the occasional minority-ethnic person in a senior role, but nothing to seriously challenge the corporate thinking. For the most part, the agenda-setting discussions about race, or religion, take place among a small group of white people: as people of colour, we are mostly spoken about, not to; and it’s a rare thing indeed when we get to lead the discussion.

These are the issues at the heart of the racial disparity in news reporting: subtle biases come together in an in-group which reinforces them, and then key decisions are made, unchallenged by outsiders. It’s why a group of editors can all agree with themselves that the crudest racial stereotypes are just a bit of fun.

The first way to tackle this is to accept that there’s a problem: that racism may be an issue, given that [only 6%](#) of British journalists are ethnic-minority, and most of them are likely to be in the most junior roles. Instead,

the Society of Editors has come out with a kneejerk reaction saying there's no problem at all. Ironically, only last November it held a [Diversity in the Newsroom conference](#) "to discuss what more can – and should – be done". In one step, it has completely undermined all the warm words that were no doubt spoken at that event.

For if there's no problem about racism in the press, why should anyone care about diversity? Why not just leave it to the white folks running things at the moment, who are clearly doing such an excellent job? More fundamentally, if those in charge are so defensive about even the vaguest allegations of discrimination, then what are the chances of them ever admitting the need for real change?

One thing this whole episode shows is that for some British editors, box-ticking is fine: but don't you dare try to question the way their institutions truly operate. And don't expect any serious challenge to racism in the newsrooms anytime soon.

- Joseph Harker is the Guardian's deputy Opinion editor
- Join Joseph Harker, Alex Wheatle and Linda Bellos as they explore four decades of black protest and resistance. On Wednesday 31 March at 7pm BST | 8pm CEST | 11am PDT | 2pm EDT, Book tickets [here](#)

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[Opinion](#)[Long Covid](#)

People with long Covid urgently need help. Why can't we access it?

[Joanna Herman](#)

I had high hopes when Boris Johnson announced £10m for long Covid clinics. Five months on, I've yet to be referred to one



‘It feels as though all focus is now on the vaccine and the lifting of lockdown, while those living with long Covid have been largely forgotten.’
Vaccinations at Thurso High School. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

‘It feels as though all focus is now on the vaccine and the lifting of lockdown, while those living with long Covid have been largely forgotten.’
Vaccinations at Thurso High School. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

Wed 10 Mar 2021 02.00 EST

I have just finished a remote rehab class with a physiotherapist at my local teaching hospital. It's the first time I've attempted an hour of exercise since getting Covid nearly a year ago, and I managed a paltry 20 minutes of marching on the spot and strengthening exercises before I had to lie down. I used to be strong, fit and healthy, teaching yoga when I wasn't working as a consultant in infectious diseases. Since developing long Covid, my ability to manage daily activities is unpredictable. On good days I can manage a 45-minute walk, but on bad days I will struggle to make dinner.

The class is intended for those with chronic lung conditions, which I don't have. But by the time I was offered a place on the programme, I was so relieved for the opportunity of help that I was willing to try anything. I had high hopes back in October when Boris Johnson announced £10m to establish [long Covid clinics](#). Five months later, I've yet to be referred to one. Despite the government recently giving [£18.5m research funding](#) for the disease, it feels as though all focus is now on the vaccine and the [lifting of lockdown](#), while those living with long Covid have been largely forgotten.

Approaching the first anniversary of getting Covid, I feel I'm a member of a club that I never wanted to join – that of the “first-wave long-haulers”. My initial illness was, by definition, a mild case of Covid: no hospital admission and no risk factors for severe disease. Months later I found myself experiencing crashing post-exertional fatigue, sporadic chest pains and a brain that felt it was only half functioning. I've ended up abandoning shopping in the supermarket and needing to lie down in the park halfway through a walk. This debilitating fatigue can floor me for days.

And I'm not alone. According to [a study published last September](#) from researchers at King's College London, 60,000 people in the UK were likely to have been suffering from long Covid. The actual number is now probably far higher; more recent data from the [Office of National Statistics](#) suggests that as many as 10% of people who have had Covid may be experiencing ongoing symptoms.

[NHS may face a million long Covid patients after pandemic](#)
[Read more](#)

After months of waiting, I spoke to a respiratory consultant who referred me to a physiotherapist for rehab. Enquiring if there were any services tailored to long Covid patients, I was told by the physiotherapist that there weren't, explaining they didn't have the manpower, space or resources for such a service. I wondered where the £10m allocated to set up long Covid clinics had gone. There are now 69 clinics up and running across the country, according to the NHS England website. Yet I've not been able to access one – and neither have others I know with long Covid.

My reaction was to ask doctors in my field what was happening with long Covid clinics in their local areas. I contacted 18 infectious disease colleagues based in teaching hospitals around the country. Of the 16 who responded, six had formal long Covid clinics. Some said that provision for the disease was woefully inadequate, while others reported they only saw only patients who had been admitted to hospital with acute Covid-19. In my local teaching hospital, funding for long Covid patients is scattered across various departments and there is no dedicated team for these patients.

This isn't a representative survey – and I know that some long Covid clinics are offering excellent care to patients like me. The Leeds clinic, led by a rehabilitation consultant, seems to have the right approach: its multidisciplinary team provides guidance and support to those with long Covid, helping them manage their everyday lives with the symptoms they have. For a disease that has no specific treatment, and whose underlying processes are not yet known, such practical help is essential.

Yet it feels as though many long-haulers remain in a post-viral sea, looking for a mooring in the hope that something can be offered. We've known about this disease since last summer, and it has been officially recognised [since October](#), but we're only just starting to understand how to support those living with it. The yoga group I set up last spring for a few people with the disease has acted as a good sounding board. If anyone has an exacerbation of their symptoms, we ask what they were doing before, as it's often easier for others to objectively identify the cause.

Still, what I'd really like is an exercise physiologist to identify what is happening in my body when it crashes, and tell me what I might do to prevent it, and a physiotherapist to assess how I might use my limited energy

better. There are no common protocols or guidelines yet for physiotherapists managing this disease. But there are places to start: we know that for most people with long Covid, graded exercise therapy (whereby physical exercise is gradually increased over time) can be detrimental to recovery. Energy supply is limited, and it's crucial to learn how to pace yourself; if you spend the morning using brain power, you may have none left for physical activity, and vice versa.

After months of living with this illness, I've tried to let go of the frustrations that arise when I am not able to do things, and the crushing worry of when I'm going to be fit enough to return to work. But what I struggle to let go of is the lack of help and care that so many of us with long Covid are receiving.

- When fit to work, Joanna Herman is a consultant in infectious diseases in London, and teaches at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine

OpinionMakeup

Make up isn't frivolous – it allows us to rebuild ourselves

Deborah Frances-White

We've been conditioned to think feminine expressions of gender diminish women's authority, but re-making our own image is powerful



With makeup, you can conceal, reveal, accentuate and play. (Posed by a model.) Photograph: Maskot/Getty Images

With makeup, you can conceal, reveal, accentuate and play. (Posed by a model.) Photograph: Maskot/Getty Images

Wed 10 Mar 2021 02.00 EST

I don't understand why the patriarchy let women have makeup. It took most of the good stuff; why would it let us have the sparkle? Actually, everyone used to wear makeup (powder, beauty spots and wigs) but it went out of fashion because Queen Victoria thought it vulgar. When she was off

mourning Albert in Balmoral, a few brave women whispered, “If she’s not coming back, shall we crack out the rouge?” but the men never bothered. Now most men have to wake up in the morning, look in the mirror and think, “Well, that’s as good as I’m going to look all day.”

With makeup, you can conceal, reveal, accentuate and play. The game I play at the opening of my podcast, [The Guilty Feminist](#), is called “I’m a feminist but ...” It’s like feminist confessional – a playful admission of where our actions and values don’t meet: “I’m a feminist but if I saw Priti Patel leaving a public loo with her dress tucked into her knickers, I wouldn’t tell her.” Sometimes makeup gets put into the frivolous category by feminists guesting on the show: “I’m a feminist but if I had to give away all my Virginia Woolf books or my liquid eyeliner for ever, I’d really miss Mrs Dalloway.” We’ve all been socially conditioned to think feminine expressions of gender diminish women’s authority a little and put us in a submissive or sexually objectified role.

Men have traditionally held power, therefore replicating masculinity equals command. We are proud of small daughters who want to dress as Superman rather than Elsa from Frozen – although they are both kind people with superpowers. We are trained to look at young women giving makeup tutorials as risible, even though they’re probably earning more than we are and have a wider influence than most journalists. Hannah Gadsby said, in her hit show [Nanette](#): “There is nothing stronger than a broken woman who has rebuilt herself.” Makeup is simply a daily tool, for some people, to rebuild ourselves. It’s a quick-fire way to say, “What big eyes I have ...” and, “What big lips I have ...” All the better to stand my ground with. Every groundhog Zoom call I take, looking at my own tedious face once more, I bless makeup. Because I can rebuild myself any way I want. I can tell my own face I’m powerful. Don’t tell the patriarchy – they’ll want it back.

- Deborah Frances-White is a comedian, writer and host of the podcast [The Guilty Feminist](#).

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Steve Bell on Harry saying Charles stopped taking his calls — cartoon

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[Opinion](#) Myanmar

Myanmar's street protesters need the world's help to restore democracy

[Vasuki Shastry](#)

Sanctions against the coup plotters aren't enough – the US, China and south-east Asian nations should collaborate to help bring about change



A protest against the military coup in Yangon, Myanmar, on Monday.
Photograph: Aung Kyaw Htet/SOPA Images/Rex/Shutterstock

A protest against the military coup in Yangon, Myanmar, on Monday.
Photograph: Aung Kyaw Htet/SOPA Images/Rex/Shutterstock

Tue 9 Mar 2021 07.58 EST

Four weeks after he deposed Myanmar's democratically elected government, General Min Aung Hlaing must be getting that sinking feeling. His carefully orchestrated retirement plan (he was due to retire in July this year, before leading the coup on 1 February) has faced sustained protests from the street

and international condemnation, even from vocal members of the normally staid Association of South-east Asian Nations (Asean). The general has also over-played the army's tried-and-tested strategy of deploying [brutal firepower](#). The protesters are not backing down, and the time has come for the international community to call the general's bluff and insist on the restoration of the National League for Democracy's (NLD) rightful claim to power.

Achieving this will require an unusual degree of global cooperation and consensus, both in short supply at the moment. However, this may prove to be just the kind of global leadership that presidents Biden and Xi may wish to exercise, with the support of regional players Japan, India, Singapore and Indonesia.

During Myanmar's previous periods of military rule, the country's neighbours have either looked the other way (Asean, which held on to its stated policy of non-interference until some members [decided to break ranks](#) after the 1 February coup) or tacitly supported the generals (China notably) as they stripped a once rich country of mining resources and set back economic and political progress by decades. The army's architecture of terror was built on the brazen belief that they could carry on their repression because the street could be easily silenced, and the impact of the international community's outrage and sanctions was largely borne by ordinary people. By turning the clock back during successive decades of repression, the generals succeeded in making Myanmar one of the poorest countries in Asia.

Min Aung Hlaing's calculus may have been something similar when he assumed charge in early February, but he and his fellow generals have made a major miscalculation. They underestimated the positive impact that a decade of democracy and economic liberalisation has had on the country's 54 million citizens. Democracy, however flawed and tarnished it may be in Myanmar, has the notion of checks and balances, and the NLD's historic [election victory](#) last year was a rude wake-up call for Min Aung Hlaing and his cohort, fearful that their power and privileges would only reduce over a period of time.

This historical context is useful because restoring democracy in Myanmar is very different from previous (and futile) international efforts to do the same elsewhere. For a start, international [sanctions](#) led by the Biden administration, however targeted they might be, will simply not work in the Myanmar context. Reducing the [international travel](#) and banking access of a small group of generals will embolden them further to shun the world and take the country back to the dark times of the 1960s and 1970s. There is another approach possible, which will require the US to work closely with China and prominent Asean members. The fact that leading lights of Asean, such as [Indonesia and Singapore](#), have shunned contact with the new regime and are openly calling for dialogue and restoration of civilian rule should be a sign for Min Aung Hlaing that the game is up. Beijing could play a hugely constructive role by recognising that its long-term strategic interests are aligned with having a stable Myanmar on its borders.

[Police in Myanmar occupy hospitals as unions call for national strike](#)
[Read more](#)

How would such an international alliance work in practice? A possible model is the original six-party talks to negotiate and resolve the North Korean nuclear issue. [Myanmar](#) does not possess nuclear weapons and is not a geopolitical threat to its neighbours, as Kim Jong-un's murderous regime surely is. This fact alone should reduce the potential for regional rivalries and jockeying, which have plagued the North Korean process from the start. As strategic competitors, the US and China should regard [Myanmar](#) as an early test of their ability to collaborate on areas of common global interest, while competing fiercely on issues such as trade and security. The involvement of other countries in the process would send a powerful signal of resolve by the international community.

Min Aung Hlaing and his minions should face consequences for the coup and the killings of peaceful protesters, a legal process that should be led by the democratic government. At the same time, any international intervention should include a settlement for the return of the estimated 1 million [Rohingya refugees](#) and for a fair process to resolve longstanding disputes with other ethnic minorities in the country, many of whom have taken to the jungle in the last few decades.

What about [Aung San Suu Kyi](#) herself? It is clear she enjoys broad public support and is regarded by many in Myanmar as the guardian of newfound democracy and economic freedoms. During her last stint as a guest of the army, Daw Suu, as she is known, became an icon of democracy through her stubborn resistance and refusal to bend to the will of the generals. Democracy has exposed a different side to the leader, who is revered at home and reviled in many parts of the world. She has proven to be a calculating politician and has doubled down on a strategy to diminish the suffocating influence of the generals in all aspects of Myanmar society. This is a worthy cause for which she received much initial international support, until she sacrificed Rohingya rights to prove her credentials as a Bamar nationalist. Should the international community come to Myanmar's rescue, it will be interesting to see which Daw Suu will show up – the nationalist since 2011 or the defender of freedoms from an earlier phase.

- Vasuki Shastry is an associate fellow in the Asia Pacific Programme at Chatham House

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[Nils Pratley on finance](#)[Economic recovery.](#)

UK should enjoy spillover from US growth forecast – but don't bank on it

[Nils Pratley.](#)



Inflation and other uncertainties could take shine off OECD's strikingly optimistic prediction

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The OECD cannot predict the degree to which locked-down consumers will let rip on spending when given the chance. Photograph: Peter Summers/Getty

The OECD cannot predict the degree to which locked-down consumers will let rip on spending when given the chance. Photograph: Peter Summers/Getty

Tue 9 Mar 2021 15.29 EST

Big stimulus programmes can produce big economic effects. That insight is hardly revelatory, but it was still striking to see the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development plug President Biden's \$1.9tn package of tax cuts and spending commitments into its models and produce wildly different growth forecasts – even from three months ago.

In the US, the [OECD](#) had been expecting growth of 3.2% this year, merely a solid rebound from 2020. Now, with a shove from the “American rescue plan”, it predicts 6.5%, which would be the strongest annual expansion in the US in decades.

The UK should enjoy spillover effects which, coupled with a speedy vaccine distribution programme, will mean growth of 5.1% this year, almost a full percentage point better than predicted in December. For 2022, 4.7% is

pencilled in – again, a noteworthy increase from the previous forecast of 4.1%.

There are, of course, huge uncertainties around the predictions. The OECD's economists have no greater insight than anybody else into how the virus will mutate. They have assumed vaccines will be effective. Nor can they know the degree to which locked-down consumers will let rip on spending when given the chance.

The other big uncertainty is inflation, which has been financial markets' obsession since Biden's election. Is a \$1.9tn programme, or a colossal 8.5% of US GDP, too much for an economy entering recovery mode anyway? On that score, the OECD offered reassurance: there is plenty of slack in the US labour market, so any upwards pressures of prices should be temporary.

Strong growth with little risk of inflation sounds almost too good to true, which is why policymakers at the Bank of England should maintain their "all options open" stance for a while yet. But we can probably say this: the flirtation with the idea of negative interest rates can be put to bed. If, as the OECD thinks, it is credible that the UK economy can produce annual growth of 5.1% and then 4.7%, the next change in interest rates is most likely to be an increase.

Mike Ashley must explain zero-hours switch at Evans Cycles



Evans Cycles has boomed during the pandemic, yet Mike Ashley is cutting jobs and putting remaining staff on zero-hours contracts. Photograph: Philip Toscano/PA

Mike Ashley's timing was superb when his [Frasers Group](#) bought Evans Cycles out of administration in 2018. The pandemic has created a cycling boom and Evans will have enjoyed the same bumper trading conditions reported by Halfords.

Ashley's plan to cut 300 jobs at the 55-strong chain is therefore odd. Even stranger is the apparent demand that remaining store staff switch to zero-hours contracts. Didn't Ashley, after his encounter with MPs over working practices at Sports Direct, promise to phase out such contracts? He did – but it never really happened.

This would be a good moment for MPs to revisit the problem, because the pandemic has provided perfect cover for employers to downgrade terms and conditions. And if Ashley thinks his approach at Evans is not an opportunistic try-on, he would surely be happy to explain.

Cairn Energy and India reach endgame

An end was supposed to be in sight a year ago for Cairn Energy's tax dispute with the Indian government, which dates back to 2014. And resolution was definitely meant to have been achieved last December, when the Edinburgh-based oil and gas explorer was awarded \$1.2bn, plus interest and costs, by an international arbitration tribunal. [India](#) was found to have breached its obligations under the UK-India bilateral investment treaty.

Yet it is only now that the quarrel, which relates to the retrospective application of tax changes on Cairn's former assets in India, is approaching the endgame. With not a dollar received from Delhi so far, Cairn on Tuesday said it had identified Indian sovereign assets overseas that it could seize if necessary. Alternative tactics could include "monetisation", meaning selling the debt, which has reached \$1.7bn, to the corporate equivalent of a debt collector.

Either option would be a severe escalation, so Cairn emphasised it was also "engaging" directly with the Indian government. But, as \$1.7bn is a hell of a sum for a company worth £1bn, Cairn can hardly let it go. In any case, it has won in court at every turn.

The dispute has been low profile, probably because the plot has developed so slowly. But the UK and India are supposed to be signing an expanded trade partnership next month. Cairn is perhaps too small to alter the grand politics, but surely its position is not irrelevant. This affair should not still be rumbling on.

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[Baftas 2021](#)

Rocks on! The Baftas' diversity push has been brilliantly vindicated

[Peter Bradshaw](#)



A British coming-of-age drama about inner-city schoolgirls leads the lack of nominations and four female directors are shortlisted, meaning whatever Bafta has done behind the scenes has worked



Rocks, which has seven Bafta nominations. Photograph: PR Company Handout

Rocks, which has seven Bafta nominations. Photograph: PR Company Handout

Tue 9 Mar 2021 12.11 EST

The Bafta nominations seem this year to have answered two perennial objections: that they are not diverse enough and – perhaps paradoxically – not British enough. Four out of the six best director nominees are women: Chloé Zhao for the docufictional road movie *Nomadland*, Sarah Gavron for the explosively energetic social-realist [Rocks](#), Jasmila Žbanić for [Quo Vadis, Aida?](#), a gruelling reconstruction of the Srebrenica massacre during the Bosnian war, and Shannon Murphy for her family dysfunction drama [Babyteeth](#).

Bafta has also expanded the outstanding British film category to 10 entries, apparently in honour of the entrants' strength (although this is arguably an artificial bit of goalpost moving). The star of this category is *Rocks*, which jointly leads the pack with a handsome seven nods, level with *Nomadland*; [Florian Zeller](#)'s harrowing dementia drama [The Father](#) gets six, along with [Emerald Fennell](#)'s brilliant rape-revenge satire [Promising Young Woman](#).

The outstanding British debut section – long considered the beating heart of the Baftas, and the category where a nomination can launch a career – has a lot of duplications with outstanding British film, and it's great to see double-nods for Ben Sharrock's wonderful refugee movie [Limbo](#) and Rose Glass's outstanding horror [Saint Maud](#).

[Rocks stars: meet the teenage cast of the hot new British film](#)
[Read more](#)

As for snubs, I'm sorry to see Bafta pretty much turn its nose up at Christopher Nolan's colossal metaphysical thriller [Tenet](#) (a single nomination). The foreign-language category is a terrific list with Andrei Konchalovsky's [Dear Comrades!](#), Lee Isaac Chung's [Minari](#), Žbanić for [Quo Vadis, Aida?](#) and [Ladj Ly](#)'s [Les Misérables](#) – but I'm a bit mystified at the reverential adulation for Thomas Vinterberg's amusing but facetious and directionless booze comedy [Another Round](#), when there were better films like Alejandra Márquez Abella's [The Good Girls](#), Shahrbanoo Sadat's [The Orphanage](#) and Roy Andersson's [About Endlessness](#).

But Rocks really has scored a resounding success with its seven nominations: the Brit social-realist adventure written by [Theresa Ikoko and Claire Wilson](#), directed by Sarah Gavron, and starring newcomer [Bukky Bakray](#) as “Rocks” – a Nigerian-British girl in east London who has to look after her brother Emmanuel when her mum vanishes. It's a film fizzing with energy, creativity, love and fun and it would be great to see this film triumph on the night. As for Nomadland, Chloé Zhao's inspired generic hybrid film stars Frances McDormand playing a fictional “nomad”, one of the formerly prosperous US retirees financially stricken by the 2008 crash and forced to sell up and go on the road in their vans and RVs – McDormand plays opposite real nomads and Zhao's mix of real and imagined is masterly.

The massive reputation of Anthony Hopkins and Olivia Colman has clearly spread the word about The Father to Bafta voters well in advance of its planned June release date – its six nominations include best actor for Hopkins in the unforgettably harrowing role of “Anthony”, an ageing man succumbing to dementia and finding that his whole world is beginning to unravel into meaninglessness, to the horror of his daughter, played by Colman.

David Fincher's gorgeous monochrome [Mank](#), an alt-reality guide to the making of Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* and the role played by its co-writer Herman Mankiewicz, played by Gary Oldman, also has six nominations, though I wonder if the tally for this exquisitely made but non-crowdpleasing film will melt away on the night. Promising *Young Woman* is a fiercely confrontational and inspired satire though it is strange that Carey Mulligan, its star, has no nomination for best actress.

[The Dig](#), starring Ralph Fiennes and Mulligan, about the archaeological find of the 20th century, has been a word-of-mouth grower for Netflix, building a strong fanbase and it has five nominations – I wouldn't bet against Moira Buffini getting a Bafta for her adapted screenplay. Elsewhere, the Guantánamo drama [The Mauritanian](#) also has five nominations, including one for best film, but I think this rather fence-sitting liberal patriot drama is overblown.

One best actress nomination is really heartening: Alfre Woodard was overlooked in last year's Academy awards for her magnificent performance as the troubled prison governor who has to preside over a controversial death penalty in [Clemency](#). Its delayed UK release means that she is in line for a Bafta, and it would be wonderful to see her rewarded.

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[Fukushima](#)

Fukushima radiation did not damage health of local people, UN says

‘No adverse health effects’ detected despite three nuclear reactors being destroyed by an earthquake and tsunami in 2011



Fukushima power station after Japan's 2011 triple disaster. A spike in thyroid cancer among local children has been attributed to screening by ultrasound equipment. Photograph: Ho New/Reuters

Fukushima power station after Japan's 2011 triple disaster. A spike in thyroid cancer among local children has been attributed to screening by ultrasound equipment. Photograph: Ho New/Reuters

[*Justin McCurry*](#) in Tokyo

Wed 10 Mar 2021 00.07 EST

Radiation caused by the nuclear meltdown in [Fukushima](#) a decade ago has not damaged the health of local people, according to a UN report.

Gillian Hirth, chairwoman of the UN's scientific committee on the effects of atomic radiation (Unsear), said that "no adverse health effects among [Fukushima](#) residents have been documented that could be directly attributed to radiation exposure from the accident" in March 2011.

Unsear said the latest findings supported a 2013 report on the health impact of radiation released after three reactors suffered meltdown at Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

[Fukushima 50 review – simmering tribute to power-plant heroes](#)
[Read more](#)

The latest report was released as [Japan](#) prepared to mark 10 years since a powerful earthquake triggered a [tsunami](#) that killed more than 18,000 people and triggered the worst nuclear crisis since Chernobyl a quarter of a century earlier.

The incident forced the [evacuation](#) of about 160,000 people, many of whom have not returned to their homes 10 years later.

Concern over the potential health effects of the accident rose after reports of a high incidence of [thyroid cancer in children living in Fukushima prefecture](#) at the time of the disaster.

Unsear and other experts have attributed the higher rates to the use of highly sensitive ultrasound equipment and the large number of children who have been examined.

The first round of tests, conducted between 2011 and 2015, identified 116 cases of actual or suspected thyroid cancer among more than 300,000 people aged 18.

"On the balance of available evidence, the large increase ... in the number of thyroid cancers detected among exposed children is not the result of radiation exposure," Unsear said.

"Rather, they are the result of ultrasensitive screening procedures that have revealed the prevalence of thyroid abnormalities in the population not

previously detected.”

Gerry Thomas, director of the Chernobyl Tissue Bank and chair of molecular pathology at Imperial College London, said she was not surprised that Unsear and other bodies had ruled out a link between the thyroid cancer cases and radiation from Fukushima.

“The thyroid radiation doses post-Fukushima were about 100 times lower than after Chernobyl due to a number of factors”, Thomas said, adding that “all the evidence we have on levels of exposure and the data from the health screening programme in Fukushima suggests that it is very unlikely that we will see any increase in thyroid cancer in these children, who are now adolescents and young adults”.

But in a [report](#) released to coincide with the 10th anniversary of the triple disaster, Greenpeace Japan warned that large areas near the plant where evacuation orders have been lifted in recent years had still not been properly [decontaminated](#), leaving returning residents exposed to potentially harmful levels of radiation for decades.

“Successive governments during the last 10 years ... have attempted to perpetrate a myth about the nuclear disaster,” said Shaun Burnie, senior nuclear specialist at Greenpeace East Asia. “They have sought to deceive the Japanese people by misrepresenting the effectiveness of the decontamination programme and ignoring radiological risks.”

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Arkansas

Arkansas bans nearly all abortions in sweeping measure

Law, which supporters hope will force the supreme court to revisit Roe v Wade, does not provide exceptions for cases of rape or incest



Governor Asa Hutchinson said he was signing the bill because of its ‘overwhelming legislative support and my sincere and long-held pro-life convictions’. Photograph: Staton Breidenthal/AP

Governor Asa Hutchinson said he was signing the bill because of its ‘overwhelming legislative support and my sincere and long-held pro-life convictions’. Photograph: Staton Breidenthal/AP

Associated Press

Tue 9 Mar 2021 18.59 EST

Arkansas has passed a new law banning nearly all abortions in the state, a sweeping measure that supporters hope will force the US supreme court to

revisit Roe v Wade but opponents vow to block before it takes effect later this year.

The state's Republican governor, Asa Hutchinson, said he was signing the bill because of its "overwhelming legislative support and my sincere and long-held pro-life convictions".

[Republicans employ new 'extremely aggressive' tactics to ban abortion](#)
[Read more](#)

Hutchinson has signed several major abortion restrictions into law since taking office in 2015, but he had voiced concerns about the bill, which only allows the procedure to save the life of the mother and does not provide exceptions for those impregnated in an act of rape or incest. He repeated those concerns as he announced his decision.

"(The ban) is in contradiction of binding precedents of the US supreme court, but it is the intent of the legislation to set the stage for the supreme court overturning current case law," he said in a statement released by his office. "I would have preferred the legislation to include the exceptions for rape and incest, which has been my consistent view, and such exceptions would increase the chances for a review by the US supreme court."

Arkansas is one of at least 14 states where legislators have proposed outright abortion bans this year.

The bans were pushed by Republicans who want to force the supreme court to revisit its 1973 Roe v Wade decision legalizing abortion nationwide. Conservatives believe the court is more open to striking down the decision following Donald Trump's three appointments to the court.

Arkansas's legislation won't take effect until 90 days after the majority-Republican legislature adjourns this year's session. That means it can't be enforced until this summer at the earliest. [Abortion](#) rights supporters said they plan to challenge the ban in court before then.

The American Civil Liberties Union of Arkansas called the ban "cruel and unconstitutional".

“Governor Hutchinson: we’ll see you in court,” Holly Dickson, the ACLU of Arkansas executive director, said.

“This is politics at its very worst,” Alexis McGill Johnson, the president of Planned Parenthood Action Fund, said in a statement. “At a time when people need economic relief and basic safety precautions, dismantling abortion access is cruel, dangerous and blatantly unjust.”

Arkansas has some of the strictest abortion measures in the US and two years ago Hutchinson signed into law a measure that would ban the procedure if the Roe decision was overturned. Another measure Hutchinson signed in 2019 banning abortions after 18 weeks of pregnancy is on hold due to a legal challenge.

Several other restrictions are still being considered in the legislature, including one approved by the senate a day earlier that would require a woman having an abortion to first be shown an ultrasound.

Another sweeping abortion ban was signed into law by South Carolina’s governor last month but was quickly blocked by a federal judge due to a legal challenge by Planned Parenthood. Alabama enacted a near-total ban on abortions in 2019 that has been blocked because of court challenges.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/mar/09/arkansas-abortion-ban-supreme-court-roe-v-wade>

Global development

Caste aside: hide names to curb Dalit job bias in India, study says

Concealing candidates' surnames in the ultra-competitive civil service exam would help to overcome caste prejudice, report urges



A street in Ayodhya is swept ahead of a VIP visit. Jobs in sanitation and other menial work are often the only opportunities open to Dalits. Photograph: Prabhat Kumar Verma/EPA

A street in Ayodhya is swept ahead of a VIP visit. Jobs in sanitation and other menial work are often the only opportunities open to Dalits. Photograph: Prabhat Kumar Verma/EPA

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[Amrit Dhillon](#) in Delhi

Wed 10 Mar 2021 01.00 EST

The exam is considered to be the country's toughest – about a million people sit it every year vying for only a thousand or so vacancies in India's hallowed civil service. Now a report suggests that it would be much fairer if all the candidates' surnames were kept secret throughout the application process, as about 90% of Indian surnames reveal a person's caste.

Candidates' names are currently concealed, along with their religion, when they sit the written tests. But after the exam, the names of those who qualify for the final interview stage are used. And this, according to the report, scuppers the chances of [Dalits](#), the lowest Hindu caste once called "untouchables", because of the innate bias of interviewers.

[Coming out as Dalit: how one Indian author finally embraced her identity](#)

[Read more](#)

The recommendation to conceal surnames throughout the process has come in a report from the research wing of the Dalit Indian Chamber of

Commerce and Industry after it was asked to evaluate the position of Dalits in Indian society by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.

Urging the government to keep candidates' surnames concealed throughout, the researcher who worked on the study, PSN Murti in Hyderabad, said he was surprised to see how the recruitment process was organised.

Jobs in the civil service, ranging from the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) and the Indian Foreign Service to the police, are highly coveted for their security and social prestige. Only about 180 candidates out of some 1.1 million candidates who sit the civil service exam secure a job – a success rate of barely 0.01%.

The government recruiting agency, the Union Public Service Commission, has all the details of the candidates – name, religion and socio-economic background – because it needs the data to fulfil India's affirmative action policy for Dalits, for whom 15% of places in the civil service are reserved, along with quotas for other under-privileged groups.

This information is not accessible to the examiners of the written tests to avoid any bias creeping in, yet names are revealed for the interview.

“The same anonymity should prevail throughout the process to give everyone an equal chance, because India is not a society where you are taken on merit. It is ridden with discrimination. Over 90% of surnames reveal your caste and, once it is known, a whole chain reaction starts. Objectivity goes out of the window,” said Murti.



A protest condemning the gang rape and death of a Dalit woman in Uttar Pradesh last September. Dalits, formerly known as ‘untouchables’, are victims of thousands of attacks each year. Photograph: Aijaz Rahi/AP

Every year about a million Indians subject themselves to the gruelling and savagely competitive annual exam, sometimes year after year, often enrolling for months of special classes beforehand designed to help them crack it. Coaching for the exam and the all-important interview is an industry in itself, but few Dalits can afford this. A few state governments have started to offer help with the coaching fees to try to bring some equality to the process, but how upper caste candidates prepare for the exam and how Dalits prepare is merely one difference among many.

Swaran Ram Darapuri, a retired senior police officer in Lucknow, in northern India, knows that Dalits are at a huge disadvantage in the interview. Most come from rural backgrounds and may be the first generation in their family to be educated.

As one of the few Dalits to make it to the Indian Police Service through the exam, Darapuri says he has first-hand knowledge of discrimination. It is impossible, he says, for the invariably high-caste interviewers to be “caste-neutral” because the moment they hear a Dalit surname, their whole attitude shifts, subtly but significantly.

“Dalit candidates will never have spoken English at home or with their friends. They struggle to be fluent. They lack social confidence because of generations of oppression and exclusion. Then you have interviewers who, the moment they hear the caste from the surname, are going to be prejudiced against them,” said Darapuri.

Out of the 89 secretaries – the most senior bureaucratic post – at the federal level in India’s capital, Delhi, in 2019, only one was a Dalit, according to parliamentary data. Even in the lower echelons, representation is dismal and nowhere close to corresponding to the 200 million Dalits in India – 16% of the 1.3 billion population.



A shoemaker, from the *chamar* community, making thread for stitching soles in Uttar Pradesh. A job in the civil service is a way out of grinding poverty for Dalits. Photograph: Indian Photo Agency/REex/Shutterstock

Caste continues to persist in every little crevice of Indian society. It emerged last month that jobs in prisons in the northern state of Rajasthan – barbers, sweepers, cooks and gardeners – were being allocated on the basis of caste.

In December, the state of Maharashtra, in the west of the country that includes Mumbai, changed the names of neighbourhoods that reflected the

caste of the majority community. It said that it felt this was a “regressive” custom.

For Darapuri, concealing surnames would help more people from a rural, poor, marginalised and excluded background get a fair chance. He said: “For the state to look after all its citizens, you need a fair representation of every community. The civil service should be a mirror image of society because only then can India be a truly representative democracy.”

The ministry has yet to decide whether it will implement the recommendation.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/mar/10/caste-aside-hide-names-to-curb-dalit-job-bias-in-india-study-says>

India

Indian theatre festival forced to close after Hindu vigilantes object to satirical plays

Bajrang Dal hardliners in Madhya Pradesh threaten violence over plays ‘disrespectful to the Indian flag’



An earlier protest by Bajrang Dal activists in Jammu, India, in November 2020. Photograph: Channi Anand/AP

An earlier protest by Bajrang Dal activists in Jammu, India, in November 2020. Photograph: Channi Anand/AP

[Hannah Ellis-Petersen](#) in Delhi

Tue 9 Mar 2021 22.00 EST

Rightwing Hindu vigilante groups in the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh have forced the cancellation of an annual theatre festival, after threatening

violence over satirical plays they accused of being “anti-national”.

The annual theatre festival organised by the Indian People’s Theatre Association in the small town of Chhatarpur became the object of abuse and violent threats by Bajrang Dal, a hardline Hindu group linked with the ruling Hindu nationalist [Bharatiya Janata party](#) (BJP).

The festival has been running since 2015, with theatre groups from across India taking part in plays and workshops over five days. However, this year Bajrang Dal began a campaign, accusing the organisers of programming “anti-national” and “anti-Hindu” plays, despite only knowing the titles.

Their ire was directed at a production of the well-known satire Jati Hi Poocho Sadhu Ki, which translates as “ask only the caste of the [Hindu] holy man”, written by the playwright Vijay Tendulkar, and another, newer play with the satirical title Besharammev Jayate, translating as Shamelessness Alone Triumphs, a play on India’s national slogan Satyameva jayate, Truth alone triumphs.

After Bajrang Dal threatened “violent agitation” the festival organisers, who say the police failed to offer them protection, were forced to cancel, two days before the festival was due to begin.

[Indian comedian held over ‘indecent’ jokes at show where he did not perform](#)

[Read more](#)

Since the BJP came to power in 2014, cultural organisations have increasingly been under assault by hardline religious groups. This was the second recent cultural event in Madhya Pradesh Bajrang Dal vigilantes had shut down: a [Muslim comedian](#) Munawar Faruqui spent almost a month in jail in January for “anti-national” jokes he said he had never told, after Bajrang Dal members stormed his standup show, falsely accused him of insulting Hinduism, and had him arrested.

Shivendra Shukla, general secretary of the Indian People’s [Theatre Association](#), said the group had begun receiving unknown phone calls from Bajrang Dal after they put up posters for the event in early February.

“They were angrily asking why we were putting on plays with anti-Hindu, anti-national, anti-cultural titles,” said Shukla. “They had not even seen the play or read the script, they had just seen the name. I tried to explain to them it was satire, these plays are not against Hinduism or against India. But they would not listen and said it must not be allowed.”

Tendulkar’s play Jati Hi Poocho Sadhu Ki, written in 1978, is a dark satire on India’s post-Independence education system, about a man from India’s lower castes who gains a master’s degree and comes up against society, state and the government in his attempt to get a job.

Bajrang Dal sent a letter to the magistrate of Chhatarpur, stating that the play was “against Hindu culture and religion” and threatening violent action if it was not shut down.

Shukla went to the police, but they suggested only that the organisers change the names of the plays – and then that they drop them from the programme. Shukla said that, while “surprised”, he agreed to remove the plays “to avoid trouble and violence for everyone”. However, he still could not get assurances from the police that they would protect the festival from Bajrang Dal violence, he said, with the police superintendent suggesting the organisers and Bajrang Dal negotiate. With the police allegedly refusing to give the official go-ahead, Shukla had “no choice but to cancel, or put people’s lives at risk”.

[How Hindu supremacists are tearing India apart – podcast](#)
[Read more](#)

The police have denied they ever received the request for permission for the festival.

Surendra Shivharay, the head of Chhatarpur’s Bajrang Dal section, defended the group’s threats against the festival. “People like this want to divide India,” he said. “These play titles were very disrespectful to the Indian flag and to our holy men. How long should Hindus have to tolerate this, why are they putting on plays that target Hindus? Why not put on a play about Muslim autocracy or about the Christians?”

He said he had “not read the plays and I don’t need to. The titles of them is objectionable, that’s all we need to know”. He added: “Freedom of speech doesn’t mean you can do anything that you want and we will not tolerate this, at least not in my district.”

Shukla said that despite the threats, and although the cancellation had cost the theatre organisation more than 150,000 rupees (£1,500), it still intended to hold the festival at a later date, and perform all the plays.

“We will get the members of Bajrang Dal to sit and watch to show them there is nothing controversial or anti-Hindu or anti-national about them,” he said. “The cultural movement will not stop because we are afraid of them and their violence.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/10/indian-theatre-festival-forced-to-close-after-hindu-vigilantes-object-to-satirical-plays>

[The Pacific project](#)World news

Anger after Indonesia offers Elon Musk Papuan island for SpaceX launchpad

Biak island residents say SpaceX launchpad would devastate island's ecology and displace people from their homes



Biak Island, in Papua province, Indonesia, has been offered to Elon Musk as a site for a SpaceX launchpad. Photograph: imageBroker/Alamy

Biak Island, in Papua province, Indonesia, has been offered to Elon Musk as a site for a SpaceX launchpad. Photograph: imageBroker/Alamy

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Rory James

Tue 9 Mar 2021 18.22 EST

Papuans whose island has been offered up as a potential launch site for Elon Musk's SpaceX project have told the billionaire Tesla chief his company is not welcome on their land, and its presence would devastate their island's ecosystem and drive people from their homes.

Musk was offered use of part of the small island of Biak in Papua by Indonesian president Joko Widodo in December.

An Indonesian government representative told the Guardian this week the planned spaceport was being developed in consultation with the Papuan government and local communities, and that Biak's development as a "Space Island" would "bring positive economic impacts" for islanders.

[SpaceX: Mars ship prototype explodes after first intact landing](#)

[Read more](#)

But Papuans on Biak are fiercely opposed, arguing a space launchpad will drive deforestation, increase Indonesian military presence, and threaten their

future on the island. A tribal chief on the island, Manfun Sroyer, said he feared Papuans will be forced from their homes.

“This spaceport will cost us our traditional hunting grounds, damaging the nature our way of life depends on. But, if we protest, we’ll be arrested immediately.”

Russia’s space agency, Roscosmos, also aims to develop a large rocket launch site on Biak island by 2024.

“In 2002, Russians wanted our land for satellite launches. We protested and many were arrested and interrogated... now they’ve brought it back, and this harassment and intimidation is still going on,” Manfun Sroyer said.



A SpaceX rocket lifts off from Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Florida Photograph: John Raoux/AP

Biak is part of Papua province, where a secessionist campaign has run for decades against Indonesian rule. Biak’s eastern coast faces the Pacific ocean, and its location, one degree below the equator, is ideal for launching low-orbit satellites for communications, with less fuel needed to reach orbit. Its proximity to reserves of natural resources also makes it a prime candidate for a launch site.

Musk plans to launch 12,000 satellites by 2026 to provide cheap high-speed internet through internet service Starlink. A [SpaceX test rocket exploded](#) on the landing pad this month after landing, the third successive failure.

West Papua's vast natural resources include copper and nickel, two of the most important metals for rockets as well as the long-range batteries used in Tesla's electric vehicles (EV).

Widodo also aims to lure Tesla to Indonesia, promoting its nickel deposits, to make it south-east Asia's second-largest producer of EVs. If successful, Tesla and [SpaceX](#) operations could further accelerate resource extraction in Papua and West Papua.

Musk told Indonesian officials in July Tesla would offer a "giant contract for a long period of time if you mine nickel efficiently and in an environmentally sensitive way".



SpaceX owner and Tesla chief executive Elon Musk Photograph: Hannibal Hanschke/Reuters

But Papuans and environmental experts fear a launch site will further damage the island's delicate ecosystem.

“It’s a tiny island,” Benny Wenda the exiled leader of the United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULMWP) and interim president told the Guardian. “It’s already destroying ecosystems and threatening the survival of the people of Biak. They just want to live simply, without this destruction coming to the island.”

[The Raja Ampat Islands](#) in West Papua hold significant nickel deposits, and a coalition of Indonesian environmental non-government organisations, JATAM, has argued expanded [mining there will escalate deforestation](#), pollute a proposed Unesco marine world heritage site, and endanger the health of local people.

The Grasberg mine on Papua’s mainland is the [world’s second largest copper mine](#). Increased production there is likely to add to the 80m tonnes of mining waste it dumps into surrounding rivers each year, worsening environmental damage.

In July 1998, Biak island was the site of one of the [worst massacres](#) in the history of Indonesia’s occupation of West Papua, when scores of civilians were tortured and killed and their bodies dumped at sea, allegedly by Indonesian security forces, after activists had raised the West Papua Morning Star flag.

Biak elder Tineke Rumkabu, a survivor of that violence, said she wanted to tell Musk his space project was not welcome on her people’s island.

[West Papua independence leaders declare 'government-in-waiting'](#)
[Read more](#)

“As a South African you understand apartheid, the killing of black people. If you bring your business here you are directly sponsoring Indonesia’s genocide against Papuans.”

Biak is also strategically important to the Indonesian military, where it has built naval, troop and air bases that serve as a jumping off point for aircraft and troop deployments.

A spokesperson for the Indonesian government told the Guardian the Indonesian National Institute of Aeronautics and Space (LAPAN) had consulted extensively with the Papua provincial government on the spaceport plan for Biak.

“The Papua provincial government considers that the building of the spaceport in Biak will make the Biak Numfor District a hub and bring positive economic impacts for the regional government and the local community. The Indonesian parliament also sees that the building of Biak Island as a ‘Space Island’ will bring multiplier effect to the surrounding community.”

LAPAN will continue to consult intensively with local communities as the spaceport plan is developed, the government said.

SpaceX did not respond to questions from the Guardian.

Formerly the Netherlands New Guinea, Papua was invaded, and then annexed by Jakarta in 1963.

Indonesia formalised its control over the province in 1969 under the UN-supervised, but undemocratic and coercive, [Act of Free Choice](#). Jakarta regards Papua and West Papua as indivisible parts of the unitary state of Indonesia.

Papuans – Melanesians who are ethnically and culturally similar to the people of PNG, Solomon Islands, and Fiji – have consistently resisted [Indonesian rule](#), and waged a long-running campaign for independence that has cost an estimated 100,000 lives.

The moon

China and Russia unveil joint plan for lunar space station

Russian space agency Roscomos and Chinese counterpart CNSA to develop research facilities on surface of moon or in its orbit



Russia and China have agreed plans for a joint station either on the surface of the moon, or in its orbit. Photograph: Ye Aung Thu/AFP/Getty Images

Russia and China have agreed plans for a joint station either on the surface of the moon, or in its orbit. Photograph: Ye Aung Thu/AFP/Getty Images

Staff and agencies

Tue 9 Mar 2021 20.19 EST

Russia and China have unveiled plans for a joint lunar space station, with the Russian space agency Roscomos saying it has signed an agreement with China's National Space Administration (CNSA) to develop a "complex of

experimental research facilities created on the surface and/or in the orbit of the moon”.

The CNSA, for its part, said the project was “open to all interested countries and international partners” in what experts said would be China’s biggest international space cooperation project to date.

The Roscosmos chief, Dmitry Rogozin, wrote that he had invited the CNSA chief, Zhang Kejian, to the [launch of Russia’s first modern lunar lander](#), Luna 25, scheduled for 1 October. It is Russia’s first lunar lander since 1976.

[Tensions rise as rival Mars probes approach their final destination](#)
[Read more](#)

Russia sent the first human into space but in the post-Soviet era it has been eclipsed by China and the US, which have both made strides in space exploration and research.

This year Russia celebrates the 60th anniversary of its first-ever crewed space flight. It sent Yuri Gagarin into space in April 1961, followed by the first woman, Valentina Tereshkova, two years later. The US space agency Nasa launched its first crewed space flight a month after Russia, sending Alan Shepard up on Mercury-Redstone 3.

China – which has sought closer partnership with Moscow – in 2020 launched its Tianwen-1 probe which is now orbiting Mars. In December 2020 it brought rock and soil samples from the Moon back to Earth, the first mission of this type in over 40 years.

Chen Lan, an independent analyst specialising in China’s space programme, said the joint lunar space station was “a big deal”.

“This will be the largest international space cooperation project for China, so it’s significant,” Lan said.

Nasa’s Perseverance rover last week conducted its [first test drive on the planet](#). The US intends eventually to conduct a human mission to the planet, though planning is still preliminary.

Moscow and Washington are also collaborating in the space sector; however Russia did not sign the US-led Artemis Accord for lunar exploration spearheaded by Nasa. Under the Artemis programme announced in 2020 during the tenure of president Donald Trump, Nasa plans to land the first woman and the next man on the moon by 2024.

Roscosmos in 2020 lost its monopoly on crewed flights to the International Space Station (ISS) after the first successful mission of the US company SpaceX. Elon Musks's SpaceX has become a key player in the modern space race and has announced plans to fly several members of the public to the moon in 2023 on a [trip bankrolled by a Japanese billionaire](#).

With Agence France-Presse

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Uighurs

China breaching every article in genocide convention, says legal report on Uighurs

Thinktank publishes first non-governmental legal examination of China's actions in Xinjiang



A building believed to be a re-education camp where mostly Uighur people are detained, north of Kashgar in China's north-west Xinjiang region. Photograph: Greg Baker/AFP/Getty Images

A building believed to be a re-education camp where mostly Uighur people are detained, north of Kashgar in China's north-west Xinjiang region. Photograph: Greg Baker/AFP/Getty Images

[*Helen Davidson*](#) in Taipei

[@heldavidson](#)

Tue 9 Mar 2021 20.42 EST

The Chinese government has breached every single article of the UN genocide convention in its treatment of Uighurs in [Xinjiang](#), and bears responsibility for committing genocide, according to a landmark legal report.

The 25,000-word [report](#), published by a non-partisan US-based thinktank, is one of the first independent, non-government legal examination of China's [treatment of Uighurs](#) under the 1948 genocide convention.

The Chinese Communist party (CCP) has adamantly denied committing [atrocities and abuses](#) against the Uighur Muslim minority, despite a growing body of evidence.

Reports on the Uighurs have led to increasing international outrage and diplomatic and economic isolation. The US administration [has already described](#) the persecution of the Uighurs as a genocide.

[Chinese labour schemes aimed to cut Uighur population density – report](#)
[Read more](#)

In Beijing on Monday, China's foreign minister, Wang Yi, told reporters that claims of genocide in Xinjiang "could not be more preposterous". "It is a rumour fabricated with ulterior motives and a total lie," Wang said.

Under the UN convention, signed by 152 countries including China, a finding of genocide can be made if a party violates any one of five defined acts. Tuesday's report by the Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy found that the CCP had violated all of them and accused the party of clearly demonstrating an "intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group".

"The intent to destroy the [Uighurs](#) as a group is derived from objective proof, consisting of comprehensive state policy and practice, which President Xi Jinping, the highest authority in China, set in motion," the report said.

The five acts are: killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group

conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; and forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

Footage shows hundreds of blindfolded and shackled prisoners in China.

As evidence, the report cited reports of mass deaths, selective death sentences, and long-term imprisonment of elders, systemic torture and cruel treatment including [sexual abuse and torture](#), interrogations and indoctrination, the targeted detention of Uighur community leaders and people of childbearing age, [forced sterilisation](#), family separation, mass labour transfer schemes, and the transfer of Uighur children to state-run orphanages and boarding schools.

“The persons and entities perpetrating the above-indicated acts of genocide are all state agents or organs – acting under the effective control of the state – manifesting an intent to destroy the Uighurs as a group within the meaning of article II of the Genocide convention,” the executive summary said.

In creating the report, all available and verifiable evidence was studied by dozens of experts on international law, genocide studies, Chinese ethnic policies and China, the institute said. It made no recommendations.

The release of the report comes in the middle of the CCP’s most important annual political meetings, known as the [“two sessions”](#), when the major legislative body meets to approve new legislation, and when senior ministers front the press.

China’s premier, Li Keqiang, is scheduled to take questions on Thursday. However, all press conferences are highly managed, with questions vetted ahead of time.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/09/chinas-treatment-of-uighurs-breaches-un-genocide-convention-finds-landmark-report>

[Myanmar](#)

‘Shoot me instead’: Myanmar nun’s plea to spare protesters



Sister Ann Rose Nu Tawng pleading with the forces of the new junta not to shoot protesters in Myitkyina. Photograph: Myitkyina News Journal/AFP/Getty Images

Sister Ann Rose Nu Tawng pleading with the forces of the new junta not to shoot protesters in Myitkyina. Photograph: Myitkyina News Journal/AFP/Getty Images

Sister Ann Rose Nu Tawng is photographed begging armed police officers not to shoot ‘the children’

Agence France-Presse in Yangon

Tue 9 Mar 2021 07.26 EST

Kneeling before them in the dust of a northern [Myanmar](#) city, Sister Ann Rose Nu Tawng begged a group of heavily armed police officers to spare

“the children” and take her life instead.

The image of the Catholic nun in a simple white habit, her hands spread, pleading with the forces of the country’s new junta as they prepared to [crack down on a protest](#), has gone viral and won her praise in the majority-Buddhist country.

“I knelt down ... begging them not to shoot and torture the children, but to shoot me and kill me instead,” she said on Tuesday.

Her act of bravery in the city of Myitkyina on Monday came as Myanmar struggles with the chaotic aftermath of the military’s overthrow of the civilian leader, [Aung San Suu Kyi](#), on 1 February. As protests demanding the return of democracy have rolled on, the junta has steadily escalated its use of force, using teargas, water cannon, rubber bullets and live rounds.

01:41

Myanmar: nun begs police to spare protesters – video

Protesters took to the streets of Myitkyina, the capital of Kachin state, on Monday wearing hard hats and carrying homemade shields. As police started massing around them, Sister Ann Rose Nu Tawng and two other nuns pleaded with them to leave.

“The police were chasing to arrest them and I was worried for the children,” she said.

It was at that point that the 45-year-old nun fell to her knees. Moments later, as she was begging for restraint, the police started firing into the crowd of protesters behind her.

“The children panicked and ran to the front ... I couldn’t do anything but I was praying for God to save and help the children,” she said.

[Myanmar: stop military killing protesters, envoy tells security council](#)
[Read more](#)

First she saw a man shot in the head fall dead in front of her – then she felt the sting of teargas. “I felt like the world was crashing,” she said. “I’m very sad it happened as I was begging them.”

A local rescue team confirmed to AFP that two men were shot dead on the spot during Monday’s protest, though it did not confirm whether live rounds or rubber bullets were used.

On Tuesday, one of the deceased, Zin Min Htet, was laid in a glass casket and transported on a golden hearse covered in white and red flowers. Mourners raised three fingers in a symbol of resistance, as a musical ensemble of brass instrument players, drummers and a bagpiper in crisp white uniforms led the funeral procession.

Kachin, Myanmar’s northernmost state, is home to the Kachin ethnic group and is the site of a years-long conflict between armed groups and the military. Tens of thousands have fled their homes to displacement camps across the state, and among the organisations aiding them have been Christian groups.

Monday was not Sister Ann Rose Nu Tawng’s first encounter with the security forces – on 28 February she made a similar plea for mercy, walking slowly towards police in riot gear, getting on her knees and pleading for them to stop.

“I have thought myself dead already since 28 February,” she said of the day she made the decision to stand up to the armed police.

On Monday, she was joined by her fellow sisters and the local bishop, who surrounded her as she pleaded for mercy for the protesters. “We were there to protect our sister and our people because she had her life at risk,” Sister Mary John Paul told AFP.

Sister Ann Rose Nu Tawng said she would continue to stand up for “the children”.

“I can’t stand and watch without doing anything, seeing what’s happening in front of my eyes while all Myanmar is grieving,” she said.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/09/shoot-me-instead-myanmar-nuns-plea-to-spare-protesters>

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[US Congress](#)

Nancy Pelosi hails 'historic' Covid relief bill as House prepares to vote

Lawmakers poised to approve \$1.9tn measure on Wednesday, sending it to Biden for his signature



Nancy Pelosi speaks to the press about the Covid relief package.
Photograph: Rex/Shutterstock

Nancy Pelosi speaks to the press about the Covid relief package.
Photograph: Rex/Shutterstock

Guardian staff and agencies

Tue 9 Mar 2021 19.51 EST

The House speaker, [Nancy Pelosi](#), has hailed the massive \$1.9tn Covid relief bill as “historic” and “transformative” as the House stood poised to give the legislation final approval with a vote on Wednesday morning.

Joe Biden, who will mark a year since the pandemic brought shutdowns across the nation with a primetime speech on Thursday, has said he will sign the bill as soon as it lands on his desk.

The House vote on the bill, which includes checks for most American households, comes after the [Senate passed a modestly reworked version](#) of the package on Saturday and will clinch Biden's most significant early legislative achievement.

[Tom Cotton attacks relief payments to prisoners but backed them under Trump](#)
[Read more](#)

“It’s a remarkable, historic, transformative piece of legislation, which goes a very long way to crushing the virus and solving our economic crisis,” Pelosi said during a press conference with senior Democrats on Tuesday afternoon, who took turns extolling what they said was the historic nature of the legislation and its impact on reducing poverty in America. “I’m so excited, I just can’t hide it,” she added.

Several Democratic leaders compared it to the passage of the Affordable Care Act, saying the plan would not only “crush” the virus and the economic fallout but would look forward to tackle longstanding racial and gender inequalities in the economy.

Smiling under her mask, Pelosi expressed full confidence that [Democrats](#) had the votes to pass the bill.

Asked about possible defections from progressive members disappointed that the Senate had narrowed a version of the bill, initially proposed by Biden and passed by the House, Pelosi shook her head and said “no” repeatedly. The bill would head to Biden’s desk after the vote on Wednesday, she said.

Besides the fresh round of stimulus checks, the bill also extends emergency jobless benefits to early September, instead of 14 March. It spends huge amounts on Covid-19 vaccines, testing and treatments, while also aiding state and local governments and schools, assisting small businesses and

providing major expansions of tax breaks and programs for lower- and middle-income families.

Progressives suffered setbacks, especially the Senate's removal of a gradual [minimum wage increase](#) to \$15 hourly by 2025. But the measure carries so many Democratic priorities that final passage was not in doubt, despite the party's narrow 10-vote House majority.

Meanwhile a hefty majority of Americans – 70% – say they are in favor of the coronavirus relief package. Only a third of Americans said the legislation is too costly, according to [a poll](#) from Pew research.

Biden has said he will not be attaching his signature to the \$1,400 relief checks that are expected to be mailed soon, a break with his predecessor who last year had “President Donald J Trump” printed on the economic impact payments approved by Congress.

The next round of paper checks will bear the signature of a career official at the treasury department's Bureau of the Fiscal Service, the White House press secretary, Jen Psaki, said at a Tuesday briefing.

Psaki said the goal was to get the payments out quickly instead of branding them as coming from Biden.

“This is not about him, this is about the American people getting relief,” Psaki said.

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[HuffPost](#)

BuzzFeed lays off 47 HuffPost workers less than a month after acquisition

Jonah Peretti announced move in staff meeting on Tuesday while HuffPost's Canada operation was also closed



Jonah Peretti, BuzzFeed's chief executive, in Laguna Beach, California, on 18 October 2017. Photograph: Lucy Nicholson/Reuters

Jonah Peretti, BuzzFeed's chief executive, in Laguna Beach, California, on 18 October 2017. Photograph: Lucy Nicholson/Reuters

[Adam Gabbatt](#) in New York

[@adamgabbatt](#)

Tue 9 Mar 2021 16.59 EST

The news website [BuzzFeed](#) has laid off 47 HuffPost workers in the US, the majority of them journalists, and closed down HuffPost's Canadian

operation, reportedly without warning to staff, less than a month after purchasing the rival company.

Jonah Peretti, BuzzFeed's chief executive, [announced the move](#) in a virtual staff meeting on Tuesday, as the company also warned it could trim operations in the UK and Australia.

[Teen Vogue employees protest new editor-in-chief over anti-Asian tweets](#)
[Read more](#)

The job cuts amount to nearly 30% of HuffPost's US-based journalists, at a time when most news outlets across the country are shrinking or facing closure.

In the meeting – which employees said they had to use the password “spr!ngisH3r3” to enter – Peretti said HuffPost's Canadian edition will be shut down entirely, in an effort to halt two years of financial losses.

BuzzFeed, which [slashed its own news division](#) when it laid off 43 journalists in 2019, [announced](#) its plan to buy HuffPost from Verizon Media in November 2020, and the deal was finalized in February.

In [a statement](#) the HuffPost union said 33 members were being laid off.

“We are devastated and infuriated, particularly after an exhausting year of covering a pandemic and working from home,” the union said.

Noting that the layoffs came soon after the BuzzFeed deal, it added: “We never got a fair shot to prove our worth.”

A spokesperson for BuzzFeed said that in addition to the US job cuts and the [Canada](#) closure, HuffPost will be “moving away from local coverage in HuffPost Australia”.

“We will begin consultations in Australia and the UK to propose slimming operations in both places,” the spokesperson said.

In Tuesday's meeting Peretti told HuffPost staff that while BuzzFeed remains profitable, “we don't have the resources to support another two

years of losses”.

The news site [Defector reported](#) that HuffPost staff were told of the meeting at 10am local time on the US east coast. Once there, Peretti told employees that if they “don’t receive an email” by 1pm ET their jobs were safe.

HuffPost Canada was shut down immediately, even before staff at the website were informed, [according to](#) the site’s senior reporter Samantha Beattie.

Beattie posted an image of the closure message posted on HuffPost Canada’s website, and said employees had not been told in advance.

Without telling us they've shut down our site.
pic.twitter.com/3KEndpH82b

— Samantha Beattie (@Samantha_KB) [March 9, 2021](#)

“We want to ensure the homepage remains a top destination on the internet,” Peretti said as he announced the HuffPost cuts.

“We also want to maintain high traffic, preserve your most powerful journalism, lean more deeply into politics and breaking news, and build a stronger business for affiliate revenue and shopping content.”

The Huffington Post, as it was originally called, was founded by the media and business figure and author [Arianna Huffington](#) in 2005 and became a go-to destination for clickable content in the days before Twitter and Facebook began to dominate newsfeeds. It was [sold to AOL](#) for \$315m in 2011, with Verizon taking ownership of the news outlet when it [purchased AOL in 2015](#).

Peretti was chief technology officer at the Huffington Post before launching BuzzFeed, which grew into a powerhouse website famed for its “listicles” and quizzes before developing a widely praised news division.

The company has been criticized for laying off a slew of journalists in recent times, including 43 in one fell swoop [in January 2019](#), when BuzzFeed also

closed its entire national desk.

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Women's rights and gender equality

Quarter of women and girls have been abused by a partner, says WHO

Largest such study finds domestic violence experienced by one-in-four teenage girls with worst levels faced by women in their 30s



Banners on balconies in Beirut, Lebanon, protesting against domestic violence during a campaign dubbed #LockdownNotLockup in April last year. Photograph: Patrick Baz/Abaad/AFP via Getty

Banners on balconies in Beirut, Lebanon, protesting against domestic violence during a campaign dubbed #LockdownNotLockup in April last year. Photograph: Patrick Baz/Abaad/AFP via Getty

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Tue 9 Mar 2021 11.10 EST

One in four women and girls around the world have been physically or sexually assaulted by a husband or male partner, according to the largest study yet of the prevalence of violence against women.

The report, conducted by the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) and UN partners, found that domestic violence started young, with a quarter of 15- to 19-year-old girls and young women estimated to have been abused at least once in their lives. The highest rates were found to be among 30- to 39-year-olds.

When figures for non-partner violence are included, the WHO estimates that about a third of women aged 15 or older – between 736 million and 852 million – will experience some form of sexual or physical violence in their lifetime.

[About a quarter of women in all age groups worldwide will experience violence from an intimate partner during their lives](#)

The study analysed data on non-intimate – defined as perpetrated by a stranger or someone the victim knows – and intimate partner violence covering 161 countries, published between 2000 and 2018. It does not reflect the continuing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Last year, the UN predicted at [least 15m extra cases](#) of domestic violence around the world as a result of coronavirus restrictions.

The WHO report focused on physical and sexual violence, but noted that actual rates would be far higher if other types of abuse were included, such as online violence and sexual harassment.

Levels of violence were higher in low- and middle-income countries. South Asia and sub-Saharan [Africa](#) had some of the highest rates of intimate partner violence among women and girls aged 15 to 49. In five countries – Kiribati, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Bangladesh and Solomon Islands – more than half of women have been abused by a partner at least once.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo had the highest rate among this age cohort in sub-Saharan Africa, at 47%, followed by Equatorial Guinea (46%), Uganda (45%) and Liberia (43%).

The lowest rates of violence were found in southern and eastern [Europe](#) and central and eastern Asia. In the UK, 24% of 15-49 year olds have been abused by a partner.

[Rates by region](#)

“Violence against women is endemic in every country and culture, causing harm to millions of women and their families, and has been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic,” said [Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus](#), WHO director general.

“But unlike Covid-19, violence against women cannot be stopped with a vaccine. We can only fight it with deep-rooted and sustained efforts – by governments, communities and individuals – to change harmful attitudes, improve access to opportunities and services for women and girls, and foster healthy and mutually respectful relationships.”

Dr Claudia García-Moreno, who leads the WHO's work on violence against women, said the figures should be a "wake-up call" to governments about the urgency of the situation.

"There's an urgent need to reduce stigma around this issue, train health professionals to interview survivors with compassion, and dismantle the foundations of gender inequality," she said.

"Starting by making schools safe places, because in many countries and settings, unfortunately they are not," she said.

Comprehensive sex education and lessons on how to build healthy relationships, based on equality and mutual respect, were needed, she added.

Fundamentally, though, violence against women had to be treated as a societal problem, with men and boys involved in tackling it, said García-Moreno. "One of the challenges is that it is often shunted off to the side as a women's issue."

Anthony Davis, policy advisor for gender at the UK branch of the children's charity Plan International, agreed. He said it was important that girls had full access to resources and services to help prevent and [respond to cases of violence](#).

['Shadow pandemic' of violence against women to be tackled with \\$25m UN fund](#)

[Read more](#)

But he added that gender-based violence was a cause and consequence of gender inequalities that needed to be unpicked. "An important part of that is working with men and boys directly to understand their perspectives, why they have certain views and really work with them over the long-term to dismantle some of these hardcore beliefs, as well as support and empower girls and women to achieve their potential."

Funding to address violence against women has increased significantly over the past five years. Bilateral aid from OECD development assistance committee (DAC) donor countries rose from \$121m (£87m) in 2016 to

\$449m in 2019 – the majority coming from EU programmes – according to analysis by the funding trends website [Donor Tracker](#).

But this amounted to only 0.33% of the total DAC country budgets. “It’s a pittance when you consider the magnitude of the problem, when you consider the prevalence, when you consider the millions of women and their children that are affected,” said García-Moreno.

A costed draft blueprint to address violence against women and girls, put together by NGOs, government officials and business leaders, will be unveiled at the first of two [Generation Equality](#) forums, convened by UN Women later this month. It will include a call for a 50% increase in funding to women’s rights organisations to address violence over the next five years.

- *In the UK, call the [national domestic abuse helpline](#) on 0808 2000 247, or visit [Women’s Aid](#). In Australia, the [national family violence counselling service](#) is on 1800 737 732. In the US, the [domestic violence hotline](#) is 1-800-799-SAFE (7233). Other international helplines may be found via [www.befrienders.org](#)*

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[Tunisia](#)

Rescuers find 39 bodies off Tunisia after two boats sink

Coastguards were able to save 165 people before rescue called off due to bad weather and nightfall



The hospital in Sfax province, south-east Tunisia. It was coastguards in the port of Sfax who spotted the overloaded boats. Photograph: Xinhua/REX/Shutterstock

The hospital in Sfax province, south-east Tunisia. It was coastguards in the port of Sfax who spotted the overloaded boats. Photograph: Xinhua/REX/Shutterstock

AFP in Tunis

Tue 9 Mar 2021 17.08 EST

At least 39 migrants have drowned off [Tunisia](#) when two boats capsized, the defence ministry has said, as numbers risking the dangerous crossing to

Europe continued to rise.

Rescuers pulled 165 survivors from the foundering boats to safety on Tuesday.

Defence ministry spokesman Mohamed Zekri said later that the search had been “temporarily suspended due to nightfall and bad weather”.

It was not immediately clear what caused both boats to capsize, but vessels leaving the north African coast for Europe are often heavily overloaded makeshift crafts, departing at night even in rough weather to avoid detection from the coastguard.

[Migrant boat sinks off Lampedusa with one dead and 22 missing](#)
[Read more](#)

The defence ministry said 39 bodies had been retrieved, while Tunisian National Guard spokesman Houcem Eddine Jebabli said at least nine women and four children had died.

The boats left shore overnight carrying mainly migrants from sub-Saharan Africa aiming to reach Europe, but they were spotted by the coastguard off the Tunisian port of Sfax, according to the authorities.

Last year saw an upsurge of makeshift boats attempting to cross the central Mediterranean, the deadliest route for would-be migrants to Europe.

Such vessels have continued to take to the sea almost daily this year, despite frequent poor weather.

“Departures have continued to rise,” said Romdhane Ben Amor of the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights.

Since the beginning of 2021, 94 migrant boats have been intercepted, according to a count kept by his organisation, against 47 in the same period in 2020.

Meanwhile, 1,736 people have been arrested for attempting the crossing, around double the number in the same period last year.

Between 1 January and 7 March, 5,685 migrants arrived on Italian coasts illegally by sea, according to the UN refugee agency, including more than 1,500 via Tunisia, and 3,500 via neighbouring Libya.

The figures are more than double those from the same period last year.

Among illegal arrivals in Italy during 2020, Tunisian citizens constituted the biggest national contingent, numbering 12,000, UNHCR said.

But many foreign nationals have also used Tunisia as a jumping off point for Europe.

Since the start of 2021, over half of migrants arrested in waters off Tunisia were from sub-Saharan Africa, according to the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights.

Tunisia had been struck by [an economic crisis and high unemployment](#) even before the coronavirus pandemic.

“Job losses, precarious conditions that have hit Tunisians have hit foreign migrant communities even harder; many have lost their jobs,” said Matt Herbert from the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.

“For some migrants based in Tunisia, migrating to Europe is a decision they already have at the back of their mind.”

According to the UN, at least 252 migrants have died in the Mediterranean since 1 January, and around 1,200 perished last year.

US news

Papa John's founder says he's trying 'to get rid of this N-word' in his vocabulary

John Schnatter resigned as pizza chain's chairman in 2018 after Forbes report detailed conference call where he used word



John Schnatter in Los Angeles on 20 November 2011. Photograph: Danny Moloshok/Reuters

John Schnatter in Los Angeles on 20 November 2011. Photograph: Danny Moloshok/Reuters

[Alexandra Villarreal](#)

Tue 9 Mar 2021 14.06 EST

John Schnatter, the founder and former chief executive of Papa John's pizza, has been trying "to get rid of this N-word in my vocabulary" ever since he lost his role as the public face of the company for using it – more than two years ago.

Schnatter resigned as Papa John's chairman in July 2018, after [an explosive report by Forbes](#) detailed a conference call in which he "used the N-word" and "reflected on his early life in Indiana, where, he said, people used to drag African Americans from trucks until they died".

[Earlier this month](#), Schnatter told far-right TV network OAN he was the victim of a targeted coup perpetrated by a left-leaning sports and entertainment entrepreneur, business rivals and board members looking to profit from his demise.

"I used to lay in bed just goin', 'How did they do this?'" he said. "And we've had three goals for the last 20 months: to get rid of this N-word in my vocabulary and dictionary and everything else, because it's just not true; figure out how they did this; and get on with my life."

He also suggested that the Papa John's board took advantage of his problems, even though he said they knew he wasn't a racist.

"All the stars were aligned perfectly with one motive," he said. "And that is to get rid of me."

Schnatter later sought to clarify his comments, [telling news site Mediaite](#) in a statement his team members "often discuss our top goals", including "eliminating the false perceptions in the media".

"I tried to say, 'Get rid of this n-word in [the] vocabulary and dictionary [of the news media], and everything else because it's just not true' – reflecting my commitment to correct the false and malicious reporting by the news media about the conference call," he said.

He also claimed he said on the 2018 conference call that he "never used" the N-word and had simply been "[paraphrasing a third party](#)".

When news of Schnatter's use of a racist slur broke in 2018, he confirmed that "news reports attributing the use of inappropriate and hurtful language to me during a media training session regarding race are true".

He has since called his resignation a "[mistake](#)" but his face – once omnipresent in Papa John's marketing – was removed [from company](#) ads

and logos.

At the time of the infamous media training session, [he had](#) already stepped down as chief executive following another blunder many saw as racist.

[In November 2017](#), Schnatter blamed the NFL's "poor leadership" for effects on pizza sales, drawing a line between players kneeling during the anthem, to protest police brutality and racial injustice, and floundering ratings. Such rhetoric earned Papa John's an unwanted endorsement as the ["official pizza of the 'alt-right'"](#) – and incensed many customers.

His fateful training session "was designed as a role-playing exercise for Schnatter in an effort to prevent future public-relations snafus", Forbes reported.

Soon after his fall from grace, Schnatter said he was confident he could eventually return to the company's ads.

"My persona resonates with the consumer because it's authentic, it's genuine and it's the truth," he [told the Associated Press](#).

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