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2021.04.04 - Opinion

- The Observer view on the Sewell commission's race report
- The Observer view on Boris Johnson's plans to increase nuclear weapons
- Clothes that last should become a fashion trend that isn't just a passing fad
- Boris Johnson is the Easter bunny – cartoon
- How is it possible that the number of deaths is now so low?
- May I have a word about… the abominable lexicon of lockdown
- With Joe Biden's own audacious New Deal, the democratic left rediscovers its soul
- Unforgotten a fitting epitaph for Nicola Walker's brilliant Cassie
- For the record
- Letters: pastoral care is essential in schools
- At Easter, I can cope without church and chocolate. But how I miss people
- Undermining the AstraZeneca jab is a dangerous act of political folly

OpinionRace

The Observer view on the Sewell commission's race report

Observer editorial

The government has reversed progress and betrayed black Britons with this divisive and politically motivated document

Demonstrators take part in a Black Lives Matter protest in London on 12 July 2020. Photograph: Henry Nicholls/Reuters

Demonstrators take part in a Black Lives Matter protest in London on 12 July 2020. Photograph: Henry Nicholls/Reuters

Sun 4 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

The publication of the 1999 Macpherson report into the murder of Stephen Lawrence was a watershed moment. The inquiry forced the establishment to accept that institutional racism existed in contemporary Britain; it elevated

its definition above the political fray and took it away from those who sought to defend the Metropolitan police at any cost. It illustrated how damaging it is when racial prejudice and stereotyping are allowed to go unchallenged in powerful institutions that exert control over people's lives. It set a precedent that we should measure institutional racism – the "collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin" – not by the presence or absence of intent to cause harm, but by the impact on people's lives.

This is the history within which the Sewell Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities needs to be located. The report, commissioned by the government in light of high Covid death rates among some ethnicities, and concern about the treatment of black people by police, is blighted by two serious failings that render it harmful to a constructive debate about racial inequality almost 30 years after Stephen Lawrence was murdered.

The commission accuses unidentified people of devaluing the term "institutional racism" through "linguistic inflation" . Yet even as it claims to affirm the Macpherson definition, it dilutes it from the first pages. It argues the term should be used only when "deep-seated racism can be proven on a systemic level" and implies that acts that are "well-meaning" cannot be racist. This enables it to bat away perhaps the most egregious example of institutional discrimination in recent decades – the Windrush scandal – because it did not "come about by design" and was "certainly not deliberately targeted". Black Britons who moved here legally as children were unlawfully deported as adults, refused re-entry to the UK, denied access to lifesaving healthcare they had paid for through their taxes, and impoverished through employment bans. The report does not even mention that the courts have found that the "right to rent" policy that requires landlords to check the immigration status of tenants to be racially discriminatory. It passes no comment on the fact that the government is continuing to take decisions that put children born in the UK at risk of deportation as adults.

> The commission also caricatures mainstream antiracist discourse beyond recognition

These omissions can only be explained by understanding the political motivations of this report. This is no independent review of the evidence on racial disparities: it is driven by an ideological belief that racial inequalities are down to individual failures rather than structural factors or institutional discrimination. This explains why the review waters down the definition of institutional racism, because to find instances where it still exists would interfere with its apparent belief that people of colour should stop complaining and be grateful for their lot.

It also explains the report's second serious failing: the highly partial analysis of racial inequalities. From health to education, employment to criminal justice, the report ignores decades of research to assert that disparities arise primarily as a product of poor choices, rather than a complex mix of structural factors and individual agency. So it tells us that educational failure is chiefly a product of family breakdown. Poor employment outcomes are mainly a product of bad choices and ignorance. On health outcomes, experts have highlighted how the commission cherrypicked data to support a misleading narrative. On crime and policing, it ignores the Lammy review's finding of "overt discrimination" in the criminal justice system and does not even mention that police were twice as likely to issue fines to black and Asian young men under lockdown regulations as their white peers.

The report caricatures mainstream antiracist discourse beyond recognition. To take it at face value would be to accept that everyone who thinks there is structural discrimination in the UK also believes that British people of colour are defined primarily through victimhood, or that no pockets of ethnic minority success exist, or that nothing has got better since the 1960s. The irony is that the commission commits the very sin it tries to tar mainstream antiracism with: it sloppily ignores evidence and reality in service of ideology.

Any good-faith analysis of racial disparities in Britain would acknowledge things have got better on many measures. But it would also explore why the disproportionate use of stop and search on black people has increased significantly since the Lawrence inquiry; why families of black victims complain they are not taken seriously by the police; why black women are

four times more likely to die in pregnancy or childbirth; and what links exist between someone's ethnicity and their likelihood of being poor, living in bad housing and suffering ill health.

Historian David Olusoga joins academic criticism of No 10's race report Read more

But that is not what this government wanted. It pre-released headline conclusions that it knew would provoke the greatest upset. Boris Johnson's race adviser resigned ahead of its publication, having criticised the government for pursuing a "politics steeped in division". Doreen Lawrence, the mother of Stephen Lawrence, was right to say this damaging report has moved the race debate backwards. The sad reality is that this is something Johnson and his colleagues have actively cultivated for their own political ends.

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OpinionNuclear weapons

The Observer view on Boris Johnson's plans to increase nuclear weapons

Observer editorial

As the US and Iran prepare for talks on reviving a crucial deal, the prime minister’s expansionism is reckless and dangerous

Arak heavy water nuclear facilities, near the central city of Arak, 150 miles southwest of Tehran, Iran. Photograph: Hamid Foroutan/AP

Arak heavy water nuclear facilities, near the central city of Arak, 150 miles southwest of Tehran, Iran. Photograph: Hamid Foroutan/AP

Sun 4 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

The announcement that US and Iranian negotiators will join talks in Vienna this week to resurrect the 2015 nuclear deal with Tehran is a rare advance at

a time when global efforts to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons are going backwards.

The meeting takes place against the backdrop of what has been described as a new nuclear arms race, principally involving the US, Russia and China. Britain joined in last month when Boris Johnson unveiled unnecessary plans to expand the UK's arsenal.

Joe Biden, the US president, deserves credit for grasping the Iran nettle despite fierce opposition from Republicans, and some in his own party, to any relaxation of Donald Trump's "maximum pressure" sanctions policy.

Trump did his best to wreck the 2015 deal, withdrawing the US from the pact. Iran responded by increasing uranium enrichment, moving it closer to making a bomb, even though it insists that is not its aim.

Biden is attempting to restore the status quo while raising the prospect of follow-on talks about Iran's ballistic missile capabilities, its alliance with Syria's regime and backing for anti-Israel groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas.

The Iranian government, or at least that part not controlled by anti-American hardliners, also deserves credit for making this first step. Iranians have suffered terrible privations under the sanctions and Biden has yet to ease them.

It's not entirely clear what Tehran wants in return for compliance. The lifting of the US and international blockade, certainly. There have also been demands for reparations and a refusal to discuss regional issues.

In short, not too much of substance should be expected from these initial talks, not least because, as Tehran sees it, the modernisation and expansion of threatening nuclear capabilities by its putative enemies is neither propitious nor confidence-inspiring.

The US is in the midst of a trillion-dollar-plus upgrade of its nuclear deterrent, begun by the Obama administration and accelerated by Trump. It

includes a new generation of intercontinental ballistic missiles and a new, submarine-launched cruise missile.

Of more immediate concern to Iran, perhaps, is a major expansion of Israel's Dimona nuclear facility in the Negev desert. Israel has never revealed its capabilities, but is estimated by the Federation of American Scientists to have about 90 warheads.

There are persistent reports, meanwhile, that the Saudi regime, another Iranian foe, is interested in acquiring nuclear weapons know-how and has been helped by China and by US nuclear technology sales licensed by Trump.

Russia's president, Vladimir Putin, frequently boasts about his new, advanced nuclear weapons. As with the low-yield Trident warheads deployed by the US, and "battlefield nukes", these and similar developments are increasing the likelihood of nuclear warfare.

To the relief of arms control experts, Biden and Putin recently extended the 2010 New Start treaty, which limits deployed strategic arsenal to 1,550 warheads each. But several other key cold war era treaties have lapsed, leaving a gaping hole in the nuclear safety net.

With China also expanding its arsenal, and North Korea again test-firing missiles towards Japan, the proliferation environment has rarely been more volatile. Yet that did not stop Johnson jumping in with both feet.

The government's decisions to increase Britain's warhead stockpile by 40%, reversing decades of cuts, and reduce transparency over operational deployments, were damaging enough. They broke numerous solemn promises.

More dangerous still was Johnson's assertion of the right to use nuclear weapons in response to non-nuclear attacks, such as a cyber-attack. This obviously increases the chance of nuclear first-use. It harms global counter-proliferation efforts. It goads non-nuclear states. It makes Britain less secure. It is reckless. Iran's foreign minister, Javad Zarif, condemned Johnson's "utter hypocrisy". He is right to do so.

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| Section menu | Main menu |

NotebookFashion

Clothes that last should become a fashion trend that isn’t just a passing fad

Rachel Cooke

Longevity is thankfully becoming more important than novelty

‘Elegancy is refusal’: Diana Vreeland in New York in 1974. Photograph: New York Times Co./Getty Images

‘Elegancy is refusal’: Diana Vreeland in New York in 1974. Photograph: New York Times Co./Getty Images

Sun 4 Apr 2021 02.45 EDT

The problem with a lot of fashion writing is that it is just a shopping list fleshed out with adjectives. Its engine, noisy and restless, is acquisition. It couldn’t give a damn that the single most precious item in your wardrobe is not the modish dress on which you lavished far too much cash only the other week, but the square-cut shirt with a jungly pattern and buttons the size of dinner plates that your granny stitched for your mother in the 1950s.

But perhaps this is about to change. I sense the ground is shifting, and not only because of the pandemic, which has made sequins temporarily redundant and waistbands strictly optional. In *Loved Clothes Last*, Orsola de Castro’s new manifesto for mending, the words “caring for polyester” are written without irony. In *Worn Stories*, a Netflix documentary series, powerful narratives are woven from old coats, not new ones. My strong hunch, as someone who loves clothes immoderately and thinks about them far more than she should, is that fashion may shortly experience a

correction; that it will soon have no choice but to consider longevity as well as novelty; that in the coming months, it will find many new and creative ways to deploy Diana Vreeland's ever helpful edict "elegance is refusal".

Arbiter of bad taste

Jonathan Meades in Marseille. Photograph: France Keyser/The Observer

Pedro and Ricky Come Again, a new collection of essays and reviews by the writer and film-maker of genius, Jonathan Meades, is as big as a breeze block: not exactly one for the tote bag, let alone the evening clutch (if only). But since it contains multitudes – among its subjects are Julian Barnes, brutalism, Bob Monkhouse, Elizabeth David, department stores, Essex, Indian restaurants and tripe (the food, not the rubbish people speak) – the shoulder pain is almost worth it. So extreme is its capaciousness, in fact, that even I stroll briefly across its pages.

Some years ago, I went to interview Meades in Marseille, where he lives, in fabulous style, in Le Corbusier's La Cité Radieuse, and there I was invited to feast my slowly blinking eyes on his collection of Vallauris night lights, made of coloured glass and shaped mostly like fish. In a piece called Desert Island Objects, Meades recalls my unaccountably rude response to this

monstrous array of kitsch (I've no memory of what I said). "What are they?" I asked. I then pronounced them "hideous".

Naturally, Meades thought this tediously predictable; I fear now that I was a great disappointment to him in that moment. Bad taste, he instructed me, is perfectly acceptable. It is no taste – "beige insipidity and mimsy coyness" – that is reprehensible.

A talisman of hope

Maria Fitzherbert's lover, the Prince of Wales, received a tiny painting of his eye. Photograph: Royal Collection Trust/Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II/PA

After no little amount of wavering, I spent the small amount of money I managed to save during lockdown on a keepsake that I hope will forever remind me of these strange, sad months: a lover's eye ring. Such jewellery was all the rage in the late 18th century, a craze that had its beginnings in 1785, when Maria Fitzherbert opened a letter from her admirer, George, the Prince of Wales, and found a tiny painting of the future king's right eye; for the next 50 years, this was how the lovestruck and the painfully separated stayed close to one another (alas, the Victorians favoured hair over miniatures and the fad died out).

I bought my ring from a jeweller called Badger’s Velvet and besides being very beautiful it makes for surprisingly good company. As I type, its level gaze reassures me that it surely won’t be long before I’m able to put my arms around those I’ve missed so much.

Rachel Cooke is an Observer columnist

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Observer comment cartoon
Boris Johnson

Boris Johnson is the Easter bunny – cartoon

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The weekly stats uncoveredCoronavirus

How is it possible that the number of deaths is now so low?

David Spiegelhalter and Anthony Masters

The weekly death toll in England and Wales from all causes is below every year in the past decade

The funeral of a victim of coronavirus in Edinburgh. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Observer

The funeral of a victim of coronavirus in Edinburgh. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Observer

Sun 4 Apr 2021 01.45 EDT

In the week ending 19 March, 10,311 deaths were registered in England and Wales. Every one of these events is a cause of sadness and mourning. But, from a statistical perspective, this is a remarkably low total, the lowest since

2014 for that week. Furthermore, 740 registrations had Covid-19 as the underlying cause and the remaining non-Covid deaths are running below every year in the past decade. So why are there so few deaths?

There are many potential reasons. First, the weather is fairly mild. Second, the current restrictions have the collateral benefit of far fewer road casualties – last year's lockdown saved more than 20 deaths a week on the roads. Third, and far more important, is Public Health England's report that flu hospitalisations are near to nil. Flu is much less infectious than Sars-CoV-2. The distance we are all keeping from each other means, like countries in the southern hemisphere during their respective winters, we appear to have skipped our flu season entirely. That has saved many thousands of lives.

Fourth, there is fortunately no sign yet of increased deaths from, say, cancer, despite disruptions to hospital services and treatments over the past year.

Finally, there is the sad fact that some vulnerable people who died in the first wave would otherwise have survived another year and be dying now. This "mortality displacement", also known by the graphic but unfortunate term "harvesting", often shows when a period of extreme heat or cold is followed by a dip in mortality rates.

A year ago, at the start of the first wave, one of us (David Spiegelhalter) was quoted as saying that "many people who die of Covid would have died anyway within a short period", while others estimated this proportion could be more than half. We were wrong: the true figure looks more like his later estimate of 5% to 15%.

As the pandemic virus comes under some control, this lower level of mortal risk is revealing itself. Of the deaths that we are not seeing, many are the shadows of those who were taken early.

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

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| Section menu | Main menu |

The shifting patterns of EnglishCoronavirus

May I have a word about… the abominable lexicon of lockdown

Jonathan Bouquet

Hats off to a fellow columnist for skewering one of the most irritating phrases to emerge from the pandemic

Vote of thanks: Sarah Vine. Photograph: Mark Thomas/REX/Shutterstock

Vote of thanks: Sarah Vine. Photograph: Mark Thomas/REX/Shutterstock

Sun 4 Apr 2021 01.30 EDT

I'd like to start this week by offering a big vote of thanks to *Daily Mail* columnist Sarah Vine. Oh please, don't be like that. Come back and let me explain why. In a recent column, she wrote: "Lockdown has generated a lexicon all of its own, most of it deeply irritating. My new pet hate is 'being remoted into', as in, 'Clive is self-isolating, but he's being remoted into via Zoom for the 11 o'clock.'" I'm glad to say that this one is quite new to me

but what an abomination and I'd like to thank Vine for bringing it to my attention. Clearly a woman after my own heart. Well, up to a point.

I've had occasion in the past to rail against the practice of making certain words into plurals. You know the sort of thing - behaviours, outcomes, actions, mitigations. Always unnecessary and tiresome. But just when I thought it couldn't get any worse... In the recent kerfuffle about whether sheet music is colonialist (an argument I shan't be drawn into, as I'm sure the readers' editor already has quite enough on her plate), part of the Oxford professors' report talked of "giving privilege to white musics". I think I would be wise to leave that one there or it will do something quite unpleasant to my blood pressures.

I hope that you, like me, enjoyed last week's declaration, couched in delicious diplomatic speak, from Boris Johnson, Emmanuel Macron and Angela Merkel on the need, post pandemic, for a new global settlement. I particularly liked the talk of "more mutual accountability, shared responsibility, transparency and co-operation within the international system and its rules and norms". I trust that after the continental AstraZeneca shenanigans and sabre rattling that that wasn't the sound of hollow laughter on your part.

Anyway, until next time and a panegyric to Priti Patel...

Jonathan Bouquet is an Observer columnist

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from https://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/commentisfree/2021/apr/04/may-i-have-a-word-about-the-abominable-lexicon-of-lockdown

OpinionJoe Biden

With Joe Biden's own audacious New Deal, the democratic left rediscovers its soul

Will Hutton

After Trump's ruinous tenure, the new president is seizing a unique moment to act

Joe Biden speaking about new infrastructure spending in Pittsburgh last week. Photograph: Evan Vucci/AP

Joe Biden speaking about new infrastructure spending in Pittsburgh last week. Photograph: Evan Vucci/AP

Sun 4 Apr 2021 03.00 EDT

‘It’s bold, yes, and we can get it done.” So declared President Joe Biden launching his $2tn plan last week to overhaul US infrastructure – ranging from fixing 20,000 miles of roads to remaking bridges, ports, water systems and “the care economy”, care now defined as part of the country’s infrastructure. Also included is a vast uplift in research spending on eliminating carbon emissions and on artificial intelligence. And up to another $2tn is to follow on childcare, education and healthcare, all hot on the heels of the $1.9tn “American Rescue Plan”, passed just three weeks ago.

Cumulatively, the scale is head-spinning. Historians and politicians are already comparing the ambition with Roosevelt’s New Deal or Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society programme. In British terms, it’s as though an incoming Labour government pledged to spend £500bn over the next decade with a focus on left-behind Britain in all its manifestations – real

commitments to levelling up, racial equity, net zero and becoming a scientific superpower.

Mainstream and left-of-centre Democrats are as incredulous as they are joyful. Bernie Sanders, congratulating Biden, declared that the American Rescue Plan "is the most significant legislation for working people that has been passed in decades". It was "the moment when Democrats recovered their soul", writes Robert Kuttner, co-editor of the progressive magazine the *American Prospect*, ending a 45-year embrace of "Wall Street neoliberalism". He concludes: "I am not especially religious, but I am reminded of my favourite Jewish prayer, the Shehecheyanu, which gives thanks to the Almighty for allowing us to reach this day."

What amazes the party and commentators alike is why a 78-year-old moderate stalwart such as Biden has suddenly become so audacious. After all, he backed Bill Clinton's Third Way and was a cheerleader for fiscal responsibility under both him and Barack Obama, when the stock of federal debt was two-thirds of what it is today.

> Covid-19 has exposed the precariousness of most Americans' lives. It has re-legitimised the very idea of government

Now, the debt is no longer to be a veto to delivering crucial economic and social aims. If Trump and the Republicans can disregard it in their quest to cut taxes for the super-rich, Democrats can disregard it to give every American child $3,000 a year.

It is not, in truth, a complete disregard. Under pressure from centrist Democrats, the infrastructure proposals over the next 15 years are to be paid for by tax rises, even if in the first stages they are financed by borrowing. Corporation tax will be raised progressively to 28%, a minimum tax is to be levied on all worldwide company profits, along with assaults on tax loopholes and tax havens.

If others have better ideas, says Biden, come forward, but there must be no additional taxing of individual Americans whose income is below $400,000 a year. It's an expansive definition of the middle class, witness to the

breadth of the coalition he is building. But even these are tax hikes that Democrats would have shunned a decade ago.

It is high risk, especially given the wafer-thin majorities in both the House of Representatives and Senate. With implacable Republican opposition, it requires a united Democratic party, which Biden is orchestrating with some brilliance, his long years in Washington having taught him how to cut deals, when and with whom. He judiciously pays tribute to Sanders, on the left, for "laying the foundations" of the programme and flatters a conservative Democrat centrist such as West Virginia's Joe Manchin, who insists on tax rises to pay for the infrastructure bill. What will be truly radical is getting the programme into law.

Yet, still: why, and why now? The answer is the man, the people round him, the gift of Donald Trump and, above all, the moment – the challenge of recovering from Covid. Biden's roots are working class; beset by personal tragedies, charged by his Catholicism, his politics are driven by a profound empathy for the lot of ordinary people. He may have surrounded himself with superb economists – the treasury secretary, Janet Yellen, Cecilia Rouse and Jared Bernstein at the Council of Economic Advisers, Brian Deese at the National Economic Council, Lina Khan at the Federal Trade Commission – who are the intellectual driving forces, but he himself will have been influenced as much by the Catholic church's increasingly radical social policy, represented by Pope Benedict XVI's revision of the famous encyclical Rerum Novarum.

'I knew they were hungry': the stimulus feature that lifts millions of US kids out of poverty
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What makes the politics work so well is Trump's legacy in uniting Democrats as never before while dividing Republicans. Biden knows the danger of the midterm elections in 2022, having seen his Democrat predecessors lose control of the Senate, House or both, so introducing gridlock. His bet is that his popular programme, proving that big government works for the mass of Americans, rather than wayward government by tweet, will keep divided Republicans at bay. Better that than

betting, like Clinton and Obama, on the merits of fiscal responsibility, which Republicans, if they win power, will torch to serve their own constituency.

But the overriding driver is the pandemic and the way it has exposed the precariousness of many Americans' lives. It has re-legitimised the very idea of government: it is government that has procured and delivered mass vaccination and government that is supporting the incomes of ordinary Americans. Unconstrained US capitalism has become too monopolistic; too keen on promoting fortunes for insiders; too neglectful of the interests, incomes and hopes of most of the people. An astute politician, Biden has read the runes – and acted to launch a monumental reset. Expect more to come on trade, company and finance reform and the promotion of trade unions.

The chances are he will get his programmes through and they will substantially work. The lessons for the British left are clear. Left firebrands, however good their programmes, may appeal to the party faithful. But it takes a Biden to win elections and then deliver. With that lesson learned, we, too, may one day be able to invoke the Shehecheyanu.

Will Hutton is an Observer columnist

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Names in the newsNicola Walker

Unforgotten a fitting epitaph for Nicola Walker’s brilliant Cassie

Rebecca Nicholson

I thought about complaining to Ofcom about the devasting end to ITV’s dogged detective

Nicola Walker as DCI Cassie Stuart in Unforgotten. Photograph: ITV

Nicola Walker as DCI Cassie Stuart in Unforgotten. Photograph: ITV

Sat 3 Apr 2021 12.30 EDT

Over the years, *Unforgotten* has turned into one of the finest shows on British television. By the time it reached its fourth series, which attracted more viewers than ever before, thanks, I suspect, to its growing reputation as a sure bet, it was as lean as an elite athlete. Each episode was perfectly paced and plotted, satisfyingly knotty without being absurd, and the interlaced web of characters always felt human as they juggled their many issues.

One woman held it all together. As DCI Cassie Stuart, Nicola Walker put in a career-best performance and that's saying something. Cassie was a brilliant copper, dogged and determined, a bit distracted when it came to family matters, but not in that maddening, TV-world, overwritten "fatal flaw" way, and she made solving historical murder cases look easy. She was also, if you will allow me to quote her backpack-toting right-hand man Sunny, his "friend and I loved her".

There are spoilers ahead, which I think is OK, considering it has been a few days now. If you are an *Unforgotten* fan and have yet to see the season finale, then I can only assume you're on holiday somewhere that ITV doesn't reach, which is still illegal, and Cassie would not be pleased. The penultimate episode ended with a car crash that came so unexpectedly that I genuinely and audibly gasped, and in the finale, as the murder case was finally wrapped up, Cassie, the best fictional detective since Sarah Lund, only went and bloody died, in hospital, after a random accident, leaving Sanjeev Bhaskar's Sunny to deliver a devastating, brilliant eulogy that had viewers in pieces.

In my house, there was talk of writing a letter to Ofcom. (If people can complain about jokes or dance routines in their droves, then I can complain about being emotionally ravaged by the demise of a major fictional character.) Worse, Bhaskar tweeted a picture of Sunny's famous backpack, into which Walker had slipped a note saying she loved him, signed "Cassie". When he opened it on set, he wrote, he "cracked". Sorry, I've got something in my eye again.

I realise that I am taking this all very seriously for a TV show, but not as seriously as the *Mirror*, which put a picture of Walker in character on its front page on Wednesday with the headline "Never forget her". It felt sufficiently deferential. The day after the series finale aired, ITV announced that *Unforgotten* would return for a fifth series, with a new partner for Sunny. I am glad that the show will live to solve another thorny old crime, even if Cassie did not.

Ernest Hemingway: the old man and the fridge magnet

Ernest Hemingway: magnetic. Photograph: Central Press/Getty Images

Ernest Hemingway is the subject of the latest Ken Burns and Lynn Novick documentary series, putting the writer in the company of previous grand topics that include the Vietnam war, jazz and baseball. The series begins in the US this week and, as a Hemingway lover, I hope it will end up in the UK at some point soon.

There are few great authors who feel so ill-suited to the current age as Hemingway, who has come to stand for a certain kind of what we would now call toxic masculinity. “We’re aware of the fact that he’s a controversial figure,” Novick told the *New York Times*.

I once went to a writing class, where we were assigned his short story Hills Like White Elephants, and the discussion became a raging argument about whether it was misogynistic or not. I have never felt that should be a barrier to reading him.

Years later, I went to an exhibition filled with the ephemera of his writing life. I bought a fridge magnet (it’s what he would have wanted), a knitted finger puppet of a generic fisherman that is now stuck right at the top of the fridge. It turns out that the dog, too, has a taste for Hemingway.

Lil Nas X: so it's true – the devil has the best shoes

Lil Nas X: sweet sole music. Photograph: MSCHF

Last week, Lil Nas X slid down a long pole into hell and gave the devil a lapdance. When the gloriously exuberant video for the rapper's Montero (Call Me By Your Name) single was released, it gleefully tossed fuel on to the fire of American conservatives, in part, as one rightwing preacher breathlessly admitted, because they had enjoyed the "cool beat" in Old Town Road. He had deceived them with his take on country music and now, here he was, using patchwork denim as a fan.

The art of the pop star as provocateur seemed to be fading in a seen-it-all-before world, with the exception, perhaps, of Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion, whose WAP shocked the shockable, at least. Lil Nas X, too, is reviving it. Last week, the conversation honed in on Satan himself. The rapper had collaborated with an art collective, MSCHF, to release 666 pairs of Nike trainers, modified to include a pentagram, an inverted cross and, apparently, a drop of human blood in the soles. Nike sued to stop MSCHF selling the shoes, with the inadvertently amusing statement that the "unauthorised Satan Shoes are likely to cause confusion".

Nike won the case, though all pairs but one had already been shipped. It's hard to see who loses here. Lil Nas X remains in the news and the Montero video has more than 70m views at the time of writing. Conservative commentators have plenty of fodder to gorge on. But it's those attempting to resell the shoes online who have triumphed: one optimistic eBayer is trying to shift a pair that cost £740 for more than £18,000.

Rebecca Nicholson is an Observer columnist

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For the recordUK news

For the record

This week’s corrections

Sun 4 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

Alex Salmond lost his seat in the 2017 general election to Colin Clark, not Douglas Ross, as a Comment piece said (“Alex Salmond’s back in town and guess what: it’s still all about him”, 28 March, page 68)

Other recently amended articles include:

‘Protest is a human right’: one long week in Bristol, a city with a history of dissent

Johnson poised to appoint Paul Dacre chair of Ofcom

Decade of social care cuts in England leaves many elderly £1,000 worse off

Now school is back, I quietly resume my quest for self

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

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Observer lettersSchools

Letters: pastoral care is essential in schools

The days of dedicated school nurses and educational psychologists are gone, to the detriment of children and society

Today’s schools are deprived of ‘hope, vision and investment’. Photograph: redsnapper/Alamy

Today’s schools are deprived of ‘hope, vision and investment’. Photograph: redsnapper/Alamy

Sun 4 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

Sonia Sodha’s article should be cut out and pinned up in every politician’s kitchen, where the day begins and ends (“The kids aren’t all right – and the government has stopped caring”, Comment). She establishes clearly how the 21st century began with hope, vision and investment, all three of which are now consigned to the dustbin by Boris Johnson’s so-called government.

During the 1970s, I was a deputy head in a comprehensive school in north Hackney, London, and remember how, under the Inner London Education Authority, we were resourced to have a school nurse on site, two independent learning centres for children in difficulties, a reading centre for pupils who needed extra personal tuition, a scheme of health and sex education tuition for all 14-year-olds, placements for students on work experience, and we built a careers centre that the then prime minister, James Callaghan, opened.

Alongside the school was the John Scott health centre, whose foundation stone had been laid by Aneurin Bevan, from which the school received weekly visits by a child and educational psychologist. All this was possible with a well-funded local authority, the ILEA, but this was demolished by Mrs Thatcher in 1990. For a while, that nexus of support was continued by Hackney, until the demise of the Labour government in 2010.

The cost of all that provision and support for families and children needs to be set against the greater cost of the damage of Tory policy since 2010.
Simon Clements

Former HM inspector of schools
Sheffield

Flying the flag

Divisions over the union jack date back even further than Tim Adams suggests ("Patriot Games", Focus). In his short story The Flag of their Country, Rudyard Kipling describes how an MP invited himself to give a lecture on patriotism in about 1880 to a school clearly based on Kipling's own, the United Services College in Devon, where the majority of the boys were the sons of military officers and destined for the armed services.

At his peroration, the speaker produced a union jack and waved it before the audience, expecting a thunder of applause; he was greeted with silence and disgust by the boys, who disapproved of what we would now call "virtue signalling". For his pains they christened him a "jelly-bellied flag flapper" (the speaker was on the plump side), a description it may now be

timely to recycle.
Michael Bell
London SW16

Deportation shadow looms

Charitable organisations, government intervention, the targeting of homeless immigrants, fears of deportation… these were all elements in the attempt (built on good intentions) to remove the "black poor" from the streets of London in 1786-87. The relaunch of Home Office plans targeting rough sleepers may be alarming but they are not, therefore, unique ("Home Office revives plan to deport rough sleepers", News). They have an eerie historical echo in the fiasco that ended in the deaths, within five years, of most of the 400 or so who set sail for the west coast of Africa.

Today's rough sleepers will not meet such a fate but, at a time when the shadows of our history have never loomed so large, it is worth reminding ourselves that the continuing "hostile environment" for migrants has an older, and even more scandalous, pedigree than is generally known; homeless charities, particularly, have good reason to be suspicious of government assurances, motives and actions, given its shameful precedents.
Paul McGilchrist
Colchester, Essex

A crying shame

Rachel Cooke, I sat down and cried ("A trip to Sheffield's John Lewis was the most intense childhood treat. I'll mourn its passing", Comment).
Linda Aizlewood
Sheffield

Our proud history of protest

It was so refreshing to read Tom Wall's take on the recent Bristol protests, which have been the subject of a flurry of reactionary statements by politicians jumping to conclusions ("'Protest is a human right': one long week in a city with a history of dissent", News). I am proud of Bristol's

history of protest and our passion for civil liberties, the environment and true democracy. Peaceful protest may at times have been hijacked by trouble-seeking agitators who serve us badly, but, time and again, history has proved us right.

There was widespread praise for the police restraint over the toppling of the Edward Colston statue, which identified Bristol across the world as a city that really does care about black lives. The danger lies in the provocative police and crime bill, which is another incremental step by the Johnson government to politicise our police and muzzle legitimate protest.
George Ferguson

Former mayor of Bristol
Bristol

Animals need homes, too

Your correspondent from Cambridge is quite right to champion the cause of families who desperately need homes (Letters). But she is mistaken to interpret concern over the possibility of housing development around the rewilded farm at the Knepp estate as nimbyism. A recent international study found dramatic rates of decline in insect populations that may lead to the extinction of 40% of species over the next few decades. Yet pollination by flying insects is essential to the sustenance of global agriculture and ecosystems.

Biodiversity at Knepp has burgeoned since the estate was rewilded. It is earnestly to be hoped that the West Sussex planning authority is not as ignorant of the importance of insects as your correspondent. Birds and insects need suitable corridors to move around, as do other creatures; they are all part of a complex, interactive ecological system. We need planning decisions that recognise and balance the need for both plentiful decent homes and thriving nature.
Teresa Belton
Norwich

No need to confront China

When Simon Tisdall asks: “Whose side is Johnson on?”, he implies that a country such as the UK must pick sides in this tardy attempt by the US and other European powers to kickstart a new cold war (“Outraged by Uighur genocide, Europe picks fight with China. And loses”, Foreign Affairs Commentary). Boris Johnson is right to refuse to “utter the word genocide”, as Tisdall puts it. Heightening international tensions is of no benefit to us or the rest of the world.

The rationale behind confronting China is that the west must stand up for “our values”, a much-used and tarnished euphemism for the right to interfere in the affairs of other nations. The presumption is one of superiority, that “our values” are superior to those of other countries and that we have the right to insist other nations adopt them. We are a trading nation; force-feeding “our values” on others is of no interest to us. After all, we trade with semi-feudal and feudal regimes; the likes of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states are our best friends.

Fawzi Ibrahim
London NW2

Wot, no kataifi pastry?

My local shops have so far coped very honourably in the face of Covid-19, Brexit and the recent Suez canal debacle, but I fear customer requests for camone, marinda and iberico tomatoes, coolea, kataifi pastry and fresh za’atar (20 best cheese recipes, Food Monthly) might be the last (cheese?) straw.

Martine Pillette
Moulton, Northamptonshire
past

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OpinionEaster

At Easter, I can cope without church and chocolate. But how I miss people

Barbara Ellen

A second year in lockdown reminds us this is a time to appreciate others

Michael Sheen performs in the Passion play in Port Talbot, Wales. Photograph: Tim Ireland/PA

Michael Sheen performs in the Passion play in Port Talbot, Wales. Photograph: Tim Ireland/PA

Sat 3 Apr 2021 13.00 EDT

Hands up everybody who's been thinking about the meaning of Easter. Apart from the church, and other than true Christian believers, has anybody thought of Easter at all? I had to be reminded that it was Good Friday. Even in non-pandemic times, I probably wouldn't even remember Easter if it weren't for school holidays and chocolate eggs appearing in shops. If you're not devout, Easter just doesn't cut through as a religious event.

Christmas has long been scorned as a grotesque display of vapid commercialism, but even the irreligious play along with festive rituals. They go to church services, sing along misty-eyed to carols, explain to children that it isn't all about presents. Forget all that with Easter. The crucifixion and resurrection barely register. It says it all that Jewish people have complained about the Church of England giving advice (now withdrawn) for a "symbolic" meal that sounded suspiciously like the

Passover Seder ritual. Has the church given up trying to get across the message of Easter?

Unlike the Christmas nativity, maybe it's tricky getting the bloodthirsty Easter narrative into the school/family dynamic. You can't really have kids enacting crucifixions on each other in front of cooing parents: "I've got a lovely photo of Joshua driving the nails in." Still, this alone doesn't explain the essential blankness of our relationship with Easter.

For most people, Easter is about chocolate eggs, bank holidays and plotting routes to avoid traffic jams. The traditional Easter debate is not about Christ dying for our sins, but whether it will rain and spoil our picnics. Nor does this ecclesiastical void seem to upset people in the same way as trashing the meaning of Christmas. Say what you like about the festive season, but the branding is powerful. Easter as a branding exercise is a failure; when spiritual meaning trails behind moulded chocolate shells and a weird bunny fixation in the collective "Easter" consciousness, you know something has gone wrong with the messaging. So who's to blame? The church? Society? We, the faithless heathen hordes? Or perhaps no one at all.

It could be that it's taken a pandemic to teach people that the true meaning of Easter is… being with other people. This isn't a criticism of the church, which is grounded in community. Just as with Christmas, people are mainly upset about not seeing relatives this Easter or not being able to go away with their families for a break. The focus is on the humanist principle that such occasions, with or without a religious element, give or take a chocolate egg, are fundamentally meaningless without people. Maybe think of that as we grind our way through our second Easter lockdown. Easter may have been cancelled yet again, but people haven't.

This Easter, learn to love a narcissist. No, really

Echo and Narcissus after the painting by J W Waterhouse.
Photograph: Classic Image/Alamy

Aw, poor narcissists, it appears they hate themselves almost as much as we do. A New York University study says that narcissism isn't always about excessive self-love – it can also be about self-loathing. So there are "grandiose" narcissists, who believe their own hype, but also "vulnerable"/"proper" narcissists who don't and flail around desperately seeking status to make up for the void within.

Sympathy for narcissists is a hard sell, because, frankly, they get on everybody's nerves. You'd need to be a saint to come away from an encounter with a posturing narcissist, thinking: "Poor soul, I hope they get the help they need." Such is their unpopularity that it has become quite common for people to solemnly diagnose others as suffering from narcissistic personality disorder, a condition that seems remarkably prevalent among people's exes, especially immediately after the split.

It's odd how narcissism has become one of the few psychological conditions where people don't even pretend to have sympathy, merrily stigmatising, and consider themselves to possess astute diagnostic powers with no formal training. Perhaps we ought to think more carefully about

how mean we are to narcissists – it appears that some of them truly can't help it.

No Michelle Obama, the pandemic is not a blessing

Michelle Obama: 'clunking'. Photograph: Ritzau Scanpix Denmark/Reuters

I consider myself a shameless Michelle Obama fan girl but, after all this time, has the former first lady finally said a Very Stupid Thing?

To mark the young reader edition of her memoir, *Becoming*, Obama spoke by video link to London schoolgirls whose schools she'd previously visited as first lady. Addressing past and present pupils of the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson school in Islington and the Mulberry school for girls in Tower Hamlets, Obama said that the girls should look on the pandemic as an opportunity to grow as people. She said: "I would view this as a great blessing to all of you… you're learning how to get through something hard and uncomfortable and unpredictable."

A "great blessing". Was this appropriate? This isn't about twisting what Obama meant. Clearly, she wasn't referring to the pandemic as a blessing in

itself. It was rather that she wanted the girls to recognise that such terrible situations can be survived and that even young people can find strength they didn't realise they possessed.

Still, it came across a bit clunking. Had Donald Trump said something similar, in his own inimitable style ("This pandemic has been the greatest test of loser-kind…"), we'd have all been up in arms. If Boris Johnson had tried to run this past us, he'd hardly have stepped away from the microphone before being pelted with critical headlines. It's the inference that a pandemic – full of the dead and the suffering, exacerbated by appalling political mismanagement on an international scale – could ever be spun as a "teaching moment" for those who've managed to survive.

As I say, this clearly wasn't Obama's intention and she's banked more than enough trust and goodwill for this one to slide. Still, had anyone other than Obama said this, would more people have taken umbrage?

Barbara Ellen is an Observer columnist

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OpinionVaccines and immunisation

Undermining the AstraZeneca jab is a dangerous act of political folly

Robin McKie

Spreading fears over the Oxford vaccine undercuts science and public health

A scientist tests antibody responses to the AstraZeneca vaccine in Oxford, England. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

A scientist tests antibody responses to the AstraZeneca vaccine in Oxford, England. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

Sat 3 Apr 2021 14.00 EDT

It has been a disquieting week for those concerned about the lifting of Covid restrictions. Numbers of cases and deaths may be declining but the news that the AstraZeneca vaccine has been linked to cases of rare blood

clots and has been suspended for use in younger people in Germany and the Netherlands is a disturbing development. The AstraZeneca jab is the prime hope we have of clearing Britain of this disease and is now, once again, under hostile scrutiny. Not for the first time, this vaccine has become enmeshed in geopolitics and its usefulness questioned. It is a grim story.

In this case, fears have been raised that the vaccine may be linked to seven deaths among a total of 30 rare blood-clotting cases that arose after administration of the vaccine. That is of obvious concern, but a quick look at the arithmetic puts those fears into perspective. Those 30 cases occurred among 18 million recipients of the AstraZeneca jab, a risk of less than one in 500,000. Now run this simple thought experiment and ask what would happen if we stopped the vaccination of 500,000 middle-aged people, say, for a month? About 85 would be hospitalised and about five would die from Covid, it is estimated. Those figures reveal the power of vaccinations that have already prevented more than 6,000 Covid deaths in the UK, with tens of thousands of lives likely to be saved this year.

> Crucially, the chances of getting a clot through infection with Covid are several orders of magnitude more likely

Nor is it clear a causal link exists between the AstraZeneca vaccine and clots (of which most are a variety called cerebral sinus venous thrombosis, CSVT). However, even if such a connection exists, we should note that among Covid's many impacts, clotting events are included. Crucially, the chances of getting a clot through infection with the Covid virus are several orders of magnitude more likely than are the chances of getting a clot from the vaccine. Hence the robust defence of the AstraZeneca vaccine by most UK doctors and scientists.

Nevertheless, swaths of Europe continue to restrict its use at a time when many nations are suffering third waves of Covid-19 cases and have said they are desperate for vaccine supplies. It is a baffling response. Consider Germany. It initially decided not to give the AstraZeneca vaccine to elderly people because of safety fears. Then it approved it for all its citizens. And then Germany changed its mind again last week and plumped for giving it only to the elderly and to refuse its use for younger people.

Such vacillation is absurd and harmful. Public confidence in vaccines will be crucial in extricating the world from its Covid nightmare. The signals sent by Germany – and the Netherlands and many other European nations – are worrying. In the UK, it has triggered fears among senior public health officials that growing numbers of younger people, particularly women who have raised risks of developing these blood clots, may shun the AstraZeneca jab.

Uptake of Covid jab remains high in UK despite blood clot fears
Read more

It is the one approved vaccine that can be easily shipped and does not need complicated refrigeration. But if its safety is constantly undermined by individual national regulators across Europe, developing countries will be hesitant to use it. Why should they accept a vaccine at which western society turns up its nose?

Just why the AstraZeneca vaccine has been subject to constant undermining is hard to determine. Kate Bingham, who led Britain's highly successful Vaccine Taskforce, has described the UK-Swedish company as "heroes" for the way it stepped up to provide a safe, effective, easily deployed vaccine, first developed at Oxford University, and indicated her regret that it has been "caught up in geopolitics". Certainly, it is strange that the one vaccine to be sold at cost price, and which has eschewed the typical high-pricing plans of big pharma, is the one that has been subjected to the greatest vilification.

The world needs – as a matter of urgency – more than 11bn doses of vaccine to provide the 5.8 billion adults on our planet with double jabs that will free humanity from Covid-19, with further doses needed in future to counter virus variants. To date, more than 600m doses have been administered. The 3bn doses that have been promised by AstraZeneca this year will make a huge difference in protecting humanity. Yet it is being shunned for questionable motives.

> As the slogan goes: nobody is safe until everyone is safe. It's trite but right

It might be tempting to indulge in a bout of vaccine schadenfreude. Once derided for its initial Covid responses – late lockdowns, poor test-and-trace programmes – the UK has triumphed with its vaccine rollout programme while the EU has floundered. But as Covid continues to spread across Europe, Britain's borders will have to remain closed. As the slogan goes: nobody is safe until everyone is safe. It's trite but right and that is why we need all the vaccines we can get.

Forty years ago, when the Aids zoonotic pandemic first appeared, it took scientists four years to develop a test that could determine if people were infected, a crucial first step if you want to track and contain a disease. With Covid-19, scientists developed a test in less than a month, while vaccines were approved within a year. Dramatic scientific improvements have made it possible to survive this pandemic, and not just in medicine. Without Zoom calls, PCR testing, the internet and genome sequencing, our global lockdown would have been impossible.

The trouble is that science and technology on their own are inadequate for tackling catastrophes such as Covid-19. The world also needs politicians, health services and civil services that can use these gifts with skill and wisdom. Supplies of these attributes have been inconsistent in most western countries. Britain has done well with its current massive, rapid vaccine rollout but that is no guarantee it will not return to the chaos of last year's Covid responses. We are not yet out of trouble.

Robin McKie is science and environment editor for the Observer

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Headlines friday 2 april 2021

- **Taiwan train crash Dozens dead after express service derails in tunnel**
- **Windrush scandal Campaigners alarmed by omissions of No 10 race report**
- **Live Covid: England bans travel from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Kenya and the Philippines**
- **Coronavirus Senior Tories join Jeremy Corbyn to oppose Covid passports**
- **England Action launched to challenge trip ban for care home residents**

Taiwan

Taiwan train crash: dozens dead after express service derails in tunnel

At least 50 people die as train crashes near Hualien City at the start of holiday weekend

01:19

Dozens killed after train carrying about 350 people derails in eastern Taiwan – video report

Helen Davidson in Taipei
@heldavidson
Fri 2 Apr 2021 11.35 EDT

Dozens of people have been killed in a train derailment on the east coast of Taiwan, the island's worst rail disaster in decades.

The 408 Taroko Express was travelling south on the first day of a long weekend, carrying hundreds of passengers towards Taitung, when it crashed inside a tunnel just outside Hualien City at about 9.30am local time, authorities said.

Dozens of people were trapped for hours as rescuers sought to access the "deformed" carriages stuck inside the tunnel.

At least 50 people, including the train's 33-year-old driver and a six-year-old girl, were reported by the transport ministry to have died. More than 150 were taken to hospitals with injuries, two of whom later died, and 15 were discharged after examination. Of the dead, 40 people are yet to be identified. The train driver was a recently married young man from Taipei, Taiwan's United Daily News (UDN) reported.

Authorities revised the death toll down from 51, and said a French national was among those killed, while two people from Japan and one from Macau were among those injured.

00:23

Aerial footage shows scene of Taiwan train crash – video

One passenger told the official news agency CNA that he heard a loud noise and then fell unconscious. When he woke, it was dark and people were using their phones to light the carriage. “I could not bear to look. Many people were lying down,” he said.

The cause of the crash is under investigation, but police said early indications suggested a maintenance vehicle parked incorrectly on a road above the tracks slipped down an embankment, hitting the back carriages of the train. Most of the fatalities were in the front two carriages, authorities said.

Map of accident location in Taiwan

Footage and photos of the incident reveal scenes of devastation, with one carriage torn apart, and others flipped on their side or crushed against the tunnel walls. An upturned yellow truck, believed to be the maintenance vehicle, was leaning wrecked against the side of the hill.

In a video posted on social media, one man who filmed the immediate aftermath, said: “Our train has hit the truck, the truck has fallen down. The train is deformed now, I’m lucky I didn’t lose my arms … Lucky that I was in carriage four, there must be casualties.”

The driver of the maintenance vehicle was not in it when it slid down the slope, a police spokeswoman said. He was taken to Chongde police station for questioning.

Taiwan’s president, Tsai Ing-wen, said emergency services had been mobilised to rescue and assist passengers and staff, and that she had ordered hospitals to prepare for mass casualties. “We will continue to do everything

we can to ensure their safety in the wake of this heartbreaking incident," she added.

Passengers are helped out of the derailed train. Photograph: AP

Hundreds of emergency and military personnel, vehicles and aircraft were dispatched to the scene, where at least 70 people were trapped for hours. The final two passengers were freed by 4pm.

Footage from local news broadcasts showed people climbing out of carriages and walking along the roofs to escape from the tunnel. Some passengers were carried away on stretchers, while many walked out of the less damaged carriages along the tracks and out of the tunnel.

One woman told UDN they broke a window to climb on to the roof of the train to escape. "It felt like there was a sudden violent jolt and I found myself falling to the floor," she said of the crash.

The crash occurred on the morning of the first day of a four-day weekend, marking the traditional Tomb Sweeping holiday when people attend to the graves of loved ones and honour the dead. It typically coincides with increased travel across Taiwan, and the BBC reported the train was thought to be carrying about 490 people.

Timeline

Global rail disasters since 2011

Show
31 October 2019
Rahim Yar Khan, Pakistan

At least 70 people killed, 30 injured due to a fire on a passenger train.

5 September 2019
Tanganyika province, Congo

More than 50 people killed when a passenger train derailed.

19 October 2018
Amritsar, India

More than 50 people killed and more than 200 injured when a train ran into a crowd celebrating a festival.

25 November 2016
Semnan, Iran

Forty-nine people killed, 103 injured when a derailed passenger train ran into a broken down passenger train.

20 November 2016
Pukhrayan, India

One-hundred-and-fifty people killed, and 150 injured when a passenger train derailed.

21 October 2016
Eséka, Cameroon

Seventy-nine people killed, and more than 550 injured when a train derailed.

24 July 2013
Santiago de Compostela, Spain

At least 79 people killed, and 140 injured when a high speed train derailed on a curve.

17 November 2012
Manfalut, Egpyt

At least 50 children killed when a school bus was hit by a train.

22 February 2012
Buenos Aires, Argentina

Fifty-one people killed, and more than 700 injured when a train crashed into a buffer stop at a station.

10 July 2011
Fatehpur, India

Seventy people killed and more than 300 injured when a mail train derailed.

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

The 408 is one of the fastest on Taiwan's regular train network, reaching speeds of up to 130km/h (80mph). It runs along the popular east coast region, including through the dramatic mountains and gorges near Taroko national park, via tunnels and bridges.

Friday's crash is Taiwan's worst rail disaster in decades. In 2018, 18 people died and 175 were injured when a train derailed in Yilan, about 60 miles (100km) north of Friday's crash site. A collision in northern Taiwan in 1981 killed 30 people.

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Race

Windrush campaigners alarmed by omissions of No 10 race report

As scandal is mentioned twice in 258 pages, some of those affected question government's understanding of it

Elwaldo Romeo: 'There's no compassion and no understanding of what we have gone through. Of course they want to sweep it under the carpet.' Photograph: Martin Godwin/The Guardian

Elwaldo Romeo: 'There's no compassion and no understanding of what we have gone through. Of course they want to sweep it under the carpet.' Photograph: Martin Godwin/The Guardian

Amelia Gentleman
@ameliagentleman
Fri 2 Apr 2021 03.00 EDT

Campaigners for the rights of those affected by the Windrush scandal expressed concern that the issue was raised just twice in the controversial 258-page racial disparity report commissioned by the government.

The report concludes Britain is no longer a place where "the system is deliberately rigged against ethnic minorities", despite the scandal providing one of the clearest examples in recent history where government decisions caused catastrophic, racially discriminatory outcomes.

Patrick Vernon, whose campaigning helped force the government to take action on Windrush, said: "I can see why they haven't included it. If they had focused on the scandal they would have had to admit that there was a systematic, structural failure in how the Home Office targeted the Windrush generation."

Doreen Lawrence says No 10 report gives 'racists the green light'
Read more

The report by the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities mentions Windrush, alongside Grenfell, in its foreword, as an instance "where ethnic minority communities have rightly felt let down", but continues: "Outcomes such as these do not come about by design, and are certainly not deliberately targeted."

However, an independent investigation into the causes of the Windrush scandal published last year, the Lessons Learned review, found that the Home Office had displayed "institutional ignorance and thoughtlessness" on race issues, "consistent with some elements of the definition of institutional racism". The report's author, Wendy Williams, also highlighted a lack of understanding among officials about the nature of racism, concluding: "There seems to be a misconception that racism is confined to decisions made with racist motivations … This is a misunderstanding of both the law and racism generally."

The second, and only other, reference to the scandal comes in the conclusion, when it is mentioned in passing as an exceptional example of things going wrong. The report's conclusion maintains a determinedly upbeat tone, and hints that to dwell on it further would be unhelpful.

Despite Windrush, the report concludes "incremental progress is being made as our report has shown beyond doubt. Through focusing on what matters now, rather than refighting the battles of the past, we want to build on that progress."

Anthony Brown, who runs the Windrush Defenders Legal group in Manchester, and who was himself affected by Windrush problems, said he was frustrated by the suggestion that the scandal had been dealt with and it was time to move on. "I don't feel that the government has fundamentally taken on board what the Windrush scandal means. A whole cohort of people were marginalised," he said.

In places, the report blames family structures rather than government policies for race disparities, stating: "In many areas of investigation … we were led upstream to family breakdown as one of the main reasons for poor outcomes. Family is also the foundation stone of success for many ethnic minorities."

Vernon said this line contained an implicit subtext, blaming individuals for things that go wrong. "The narrative of the report is that it is up to the individual to succeed: if you work hard, keep your head down, you will achieve and be successful in Britain, and if you don't then, that's your fault. The policies of the hostile environment took away people's rights, but the report tries to say: actually you have all the rights you need."

Satbir Singh, the chief executive of the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, said it was remarkable that Windrush attracted barely a passing mention in the report. "To suggest that these are solved problems that do not need addressing is to gaslight millions of people who know the difference between their own lived experiences and the fictions the government would prefer us all to believe," he said.

Community activist Desmond Jaddoo, who helps run the Windrush National Organisation to secure justice for thousands of people who were wrongly classified as immigration offenders by the Home Office, was disappointed by the report. "There was a culture of not believing members of the Windrush generation, who had to jump through hoops to prove that they were telling the truth."

Elwaldo Romeo, who was told he was in the UK illegally and faced detention after 59 years in the country, said he was disappointed by what he had heard of the report. “There’s no compassion and no understanding of what we have gone through,” he said. “Of course they want to sweep it under the carpet. Is there racism within the government and the Home Office? Yes.”

Halima Begum, the chief executive of the Runnymede Trust, said the report tried to reference racism as a historical matter, despite the recent evidence. “The hostile environment still operates and victims of the Windrush scandal still do not have justice,” she said.

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Coronavirus live
Coronavirus

Brazil records 70,238 new cases; Netherlands halts AstraZeneca jab for under 60s - as it happened

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Health policy

Senior Tories join Jeremy Corbyn to oppose Covid passports ahead of trials

More than 70 MPs on right and left oppose domestic use of certificates, as testing pilots are planned for football matches

Iain Duncan Smith is one of four former Tory cabinet ministers to have signed a letter against the use of Covid-status certification. Photograph: UK Parliament/Jessica Taylor/PA

Iain Duncan Smith is one of four former Tory cabinet ministers to have signed a letter against the use of Covid-status certification. Photograph: UK Parliament/Jessica Taylor/PA

Jessica Elgot *Deputy political editor*
@jessicaelgot
Fri 2 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

More than 70 MPs including 40 Conservatives, the former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn and Liberal Democrat members have forged a parliamentary alliance to oppose Covid identity documents.

It came as Boris Johnson suggested the government would move ahead with the scheme and it was announced that pilots of mass testing at large events would take place this month.

Four former Tory cabinet ministers including Iain Duncan Smith and Andrew Mitchell are among the group, along with key Labour leftwingers such as John McDonnell, Clive Lewis, Diane Abbott and Rebecca Long-Bailey.

The coalition of MPs is backed by the civil liberties groups Liberty, Big Brother Watch, the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (JCWI) and Privacy International.

Johnson has noticeably warmed to the idea of the documents in recent weeks. Government sources have suggested the certificates could be used by businesses as a way to relax social distancing measures inside venues.

An interim report on the measure is due to be published on Monday but a pilot event is already planned for 18 April with residents near Wembley invited to apply for 4,000 tickets to the FA Cup semi-final between Leicester and Southampton.

Speaking on a visit to Middlesbrough, Johnson said a certificate could be used to prove a person was safe in a number of ways, not just vaccination. For the Wembley event, Brent council said each attender had to return a negative lateral flow Covid-19 test 24 hours before the game and show proof to gain entry. They will also need to take a PCR home test after the event.

Johnson suggested businesses would welcome the idea of Covid certificates. “When it comes to trying to make sure that we give maximum confidence to business and to customers here in the UK, there are three things: your immunity, whether you’ve had it before, so you’ve got natural antibodies anyway; whether you’ve been vaccinated; and then, of course,

whether you've had a test. And so those three things working together will, I think, be useful," he said.

The Labour leader, Keir Starmer, has hinted at Labour's unease about the system, saying it goes against "British instinct" to show documents to gain access to venues such as pubs, but he has not directly said his party will oppose the idea.

The number of Tory MPs opposing the measure would put Johnson at risk of losing his majority, as long as Labour also opposes. Those opposing include Mark Harper and Steve Baker, the leading MPs of the lockdown-sceptic Covid Recovery Group, as well as the chair of the 1922 Committee, Sir Graham Brady, and the former ministers Esther McVey, Harriett Baldwin and David Jones. However, the use of tests, rather than vaccines, to gain certificates could address some concerns.

Brady said life should be returning to normal. "Covid-status certification would be divisive and discriminatory," he said. "With high levels of vaccination protecting the vulnerable and making transmission less likely, we should aim to return to normal life, not to put permanent restrictions in place."

Shami Chakrabarti, the former shadow attorney general and ex-director of Liberty, said the group were opposed to the domestic use of Covid certification.

"International travel is a luxury but participating in your own community is a fundamental right," she said. "So internal Covid passports are an authoritarian step too far. We don't defeat the virus with discrimination and oppression but with education, vaccination and mutual support."

Jonathan Djanogly, the former Tory frontbencher who has been aligned with the party's centre-right, said he was concerned about the impact on young people and about the legal implications. "It is beset with legal and human rights minefields," he said. "It's also going to be all but ignored by large numbers of traders. And it will mainly affect the same young people who will be last to be inoculated but first to go to pubs."

The Lib Dem leader, Ed Davey, will whip his MPs to oppose the measure and said it was time to turn the tide on "creeping authoritarianism" from the government.

"As we start to get this virus properly under control we should start getting our freedoms back. Vaccine passports – essentially Covid ID cards – take us in the other direction," he said. "Liberal Democrats have always been the party for civil liberties. We were against ID cards when Blair tried to introduce them and we are against them now."

Silkie Carlo, the director of Big Brother Watch, said: "We are in real danger of becoming a checkpoint society where anyone from bouncers to bosses could demand to see our papers. We cannot let this government create a two-tier nation of division, discrimination and injustice."

Starmer told the Daily Telegraph he believed domestic use for Covid certification would become largely redundant. "My instinct is that … [if] we get the virus properly under control, the death rates are near zero, hospital admissions very, very low, that the British instinct in those circumstances will be against vaccine passports," he said.

Michael Gove, the Cabinet Office minister, who is leading deliberations on the policy, met a series of MPs this week before the publication of the interim findings of the panel on vaccine passports, which is due on Monday.

Gove is generally seen as a strong supporter of the scheme. But officials and ministers are said to be divided between whether the certification should apply only to mass events, for which there is broad support, or additionally to smaller venues, which is more controversial.

As well as the FA Cup semi-final there will also be a pilot on 25 April at the Carabao Cup final at Wembley between Manchester City and Tottenham which is set to have a limited number of fans of the clubs.

If the scheme becomes widespread the plan is to make the certification available on a modified NHS app, which would detail whether a person has had a vaccination, or a recent test, or has antibodies to the virus, having previously tested positive.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/apr/02/senior-tories-join-jeremy-corbyn-to-oppose-covid-passports-ahead-of-trials

Social care

Action launched to challenge trip ban for England care home residents

People in care homes are being treated as if they are ‘different species’, says John’s Campaign

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An ambulance arrives at a care home in Dorset, UK. Photograph: Geoffrey Swaine/Rex/Shutterstock

An ambulance arrives at a care home in Dorset, UK. Photograph: Geoffrey Swaine/Rex/Shutterstock

Ben Quinn
@BenQuinn75
Fri 2 Apr 2021 05.02 EDT

People living in care homes are being treated by Public Health England as if they are “different species”, according to a campaigner whose organisation has launched a challenge to a ban on residents making trips.

The action is being taken by John’s Campaign, which says official guidance fails to accurately express the law and to advise care homes on their legal obligations to people aged 65 and over.

The campaign, which advocates for the rights of people with dementia, wrote to the Department of Health and Social Care, in December to warn it was considering a challenge to the lawfulness of guidance on visits out of care homes, published on 1 December 2020.

Now it has launched a legal action, arguing that any decision on whether persons can go on a visit outside a care home should be based on individual risk assessments. It is also fighting to overturn rules on self-isolation, which stipulate that anyone who leaves a care home must self-isolate for 14 days upon return.

Julia Jones, a co-founder of John’s Campaign, said residents had been “comprehensively ignored” during the pandemic.

She told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme: “People living in care homes are people very often living towards the end of their lives, or they are people living with a learning disability, for whom their wellbeing is dependent on their routines. These people have been comprehensively ignored.

“We understand this guidance was prepared very hastily, we sent a message back at the time. They have had almost a month to make it better, they haven’t done so. We’re just not going to wait – this is unlawful and wrong.”

The campaign has said that the Equality Act 2010 prohibits indirect discrimination, but the guidance on care home visits “permits (indeed, requires) just such a discriminatory approach to be taken”.

England’s care home operators warn against compulsory Covid jabs
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A letter to the DHSC by the campaign's solicitors, Leigh Day, said the guidance must balance the Covid-19 risk against the harm caused by keeping people away from their families.

It said elderly care home residents' increased risk of catching coronavirus "do not displace the requirement for specific risk assessments which also balance the harm to a care home resident of not visiting outside of the care home".

The letter added: "That risk being particularly stark where many individuals in care homes have suffered from prolonged separation throughout this year."

Those aged 64 and under may be permitted to leave the home, even if they have a condition that makes them extremely vulnerable, it said, but those above that age who are otherwise healthy are not.

The DHSC has said it is looking at changing guidelines as the country moves out of lockdown and will act whenever data supports a particular course of action.

A DHSC spokesperson said: "Residents over 65 can make visits outside of care homes in exceptional circumstances and all decisions in relation to visiting should be made on the basis of a risk assessment centred around the individual. This is made clear in our guidance.

"As we move along the roadmap, we are looking to open up more opportunities for visiting both into and outside of care homes – wherever this can be done safely and is supported by data."

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/apr/02/action-launched-to-challenge-trip-ban-for-england-care-home-residents

2021.04.02 - Coronavirus

- 'We're in a really good place' Is Israel nearing the Covid endgame?
- Travel Overseas destinations 'to be ranked using traffic light system'
- US States may be in early stages of fourth wave as Covid cases rise, reports say
- Pfizer vaccine Jab has 91% efficacy for up to six months, trial shows

'We're in a really good place': is Israel nearing the Covid endgame?

Coronavirus

'We're in a really good place': is Israel nearing the Covid endgame?

Vaccination centres are winding down and infections continue to fall as country reopens

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Oliver Holmes and Quique Kierszenbaum in Jerusalem

Fri 2 Apr 2021 05.47 EDT Last modified on Sat 3 Apr 2021 00.09 EDT

Women sit in a cafe overlooking the Mediterranean in Tel Aviv. Israel has delivered two Covid shots to more than half its population. Photograph: Ariel Schalit/AP

At the peak of Israel's Covid vaccination drive, the halls of a huge basketball arena in Jerusalem were filled with people, each anxiously waiting up to two hours until their number was called. More than 3,000 people a day were being vaccinated here in January.

On Monday, no more than 15 people lingered around long rows of empty chairs. Some barely had time to sit down before they were called to receive a jab. "They wait about 10 seconds," said Shani Luvaton, the head nurse at the vaccination centre. She only uses half her booths for just a few hundred people a day.

Among the adult population, only vaccine-hesitant stragglers, roughly 1 million people, are yet to be inoculated. "Everyone who wanted to get vaccinated has already come," said Luvaton.

Behind her workstation, boxes of syringes and disposable gloves have been piled up in a kiosk that used to sell snacks to people attending games. Special fridges containing the Pfizer/BioNTech vials sit under signs that offer deals for mustard-covered hotdogs and Coca-Cola.

Fast food may be sold here again very soon. On some days during the past two weeks, the vaccination centre had to close early because basketball games with limited crowd sizes have restarted. The country is slowly getting back to life, said Luvaton.

Israel, which has run the world's fastest Covid vaccination campaign, may be reaching a point other countries take months or years to get to: an endgame scenario for the pandemic.

The country of 9 million people has administered both shots to more than half its population and infection rates have consistently dropped. That has continued even though daily life has returned almost completely to a pre-pandemic situation.

Israelis sit at a restaurant in Tel Aviv last month. Photograph: Corinna Kern/Reuters

In January, during the country's third and most intense wave of Covid-19, there were 10,000 confirmed infections a day at one point. But now the total number of active cases is less than that figure. According to health ministry statistics, fewer than 130 new infections were confirmed on Sunday.

Eran Segal, a computational biologist at Israel's Weizmann Institute, said in a presentation to the Stanford department of medicine that Israel's coronavirus death rate had dropped by more than 90% since the mid-January peak.

He compared what happened after Israel's second wave last year – before vaccines were available – with the third wave this year, which occurred while the country was vaccinating.

Graphic

After a lockdown during the second wave, infection rates soon increased and never dropped until another lockdown was imposed. But after the third wave, "the effect of the vaccines kicked in", he said. The R number (the

growth of infections) has since dropped to its lowest level in the pandemic, he said, even though the economy is more open than it has been for a year.

Entry to gyms, hotels, theatres and concerts is available to people who have a "green pass", an app that proves people have been fully inoculated or have presumed immunity after contracting the disease.

In the coastal city of Tel Aviv, beaches have been packed for the Passover holiday. When the sun sets, thousands of people head to bars and restaurants. While indoor locations are supposed to scan people's green pass, which has a QR code, many bars appear to assume their customers are immunised.

Covid cases in Israel – graph

The green pass, launched last month and eyed as a potential strategy by countries such as Britain, has been credited with helping motivate unvaccinated Israelis to get the jab. At the Jerusalem arena, Avishag Buskila, 26, said the app was why she finally decided to do so.

"My parents were divided. My dad got vaccinated three months ago but my mum wanted to wait and see," she said. Buskila, a law student, said she wanted to wait, but her university campus will open next week to students with green passes and she did not want to miss out.

"If I'm not vaccinated, I can't go back to school. I'm sorry I didn't do it earlier."

If clinical trials show it is safe for under-16s to get vaccinated, Israel is expected to start inoculating that demographic. However, with the vast majority of at-risk and older people already immunised and infection rates steadily dropping, the sense of urgency is lessening.

The main visual sign that Israel remains in a pandemic situation is the masks, which remain mandatory indoors in shops and outdoors everywhere. Still, many people have stopped wearing them.

Sharon Alroy-Preis, the head of Israel's public health department, told local television the government was considering scrapping the rule on wearing masks outside.

However, she said the health ministry remained concerned about more lethal or vaccine-resistant Covid variants. For that reason, Israel has kept tight restrictions on incoming international travellers, limiting the number allowed in. "We're in a really good place and it's important to protect this achievement," said Alroy-Preis.

Adi Niv-Yagoda, an expert in health policy at Tel Aviv University and a member of the health ministry's Covid-19 advisory panel, said he believed Israel may have almost reached an endpoint in the pandemic.

"We still have some [Covid] positive people in the country but it could be possible to get to zero infected in the community," he said. "But we never know what might be the next variant to attack us."

An ultra-Orthodox Jewish man rests after receiving his second dose of the Pfizer vaccine at a synagogue in Bnei Brak, Israel. Photograph: Oded Balilty/AP

He said that while there was a lot of focus on variants entering the country via the airport, there was a similar risk that virus mutations could arrive from the Palestinian territories. “There is no control [of the virus] in those areas,” he said.

Israel has faced international condemnation over its decision not to vaccinate millions of Palestinians who live under its military control. During the past couple of months, the government agreed to donate several thousand doses. It also completed a programme to immunise 100,000 Palestinian workers who regularly enter Israel and Jewish settlements for work.

Still, Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza are expected to spend further weeks or months under strict restrictions and are experiencing relatively high infection rates. They are partly relying on a World Health Organization initiative to deliver vital doses.

Niv-Yagoda said it was “in Israel’s interest to vaccinate the Palestinians and to help them”. He was encouraged that the government was taking some steps even though they were “a little late”.

Authorities in Israel should focus on making sure the spread of variants is caught early, he said. That could be done by monitoring places where large numbers of people gather, such as schools and sports stadiums.

While he said a vaccine-resistant mutation was not inevitable, now was the time to prepare.

“The big lesson of this pandemic is that we don’t know everything,” he said, “because the virus was constantly surprising us.”

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Coronavirus

Overseas holiday destinations 'to be ranked using traffic light system'

Countries to be graded green, amber or red based on Covid rates and vaccination rollouts, reports say

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Overseas holidays are banned but Boris Johnson plans to make an announcement on Monday about lifting restrictions in England. Photograph: Image Professionals GmbH/Alamy

Overseas holidays are banned but Boris Johnson plans to make an announcement on Monday about lifting restrictions in England. Photograph: Image Professionals GmbH/Alamy

PA Media
Thu 1 Apr 2021 19.18 EDT

Foreign holiday destinations will be ranked under a traffic light system, with fewer restrictions tied to the places boasting the lowest coronavirus rates and high vaccination take-up, it has been reported.

Countries will be graded either green, amber or red, according to how well they are coping with the pandemic, it was claimed.

Quiet Easter expected on UK roads as Covid rules deter most from travelling
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Hesitancy towards the vaccine across parts of mainland Europe may mean that favoured continental destinations among British holidaymakers are deemed more high-risk than the likes of the US and Israel, where vaccination rates are good.

Overseas holidays are currently banned due to the UK's coronavirus lockdown measures, but Boris Johnson plans to make an announcement on Easter Monday about lifting restrictions in England.

The Times reported that travel to and from so-called red-list countries would be banned, although the Sun newspaper said those arriving back in the UK from such destinations would have to pay to stay at quarantine hotels, as is the current set-up for the worst affected countries.

Both newspapers said green-listed countries would be exempt from quarantine measures.

Any restrictions could put further pressure on Britons to shun international travel in favour of a domestic holiday, amid concerns leaving the UK could increase the risk of introducing mutant coronavirus strains.

Scientific experts have repeatedly said summer breaks within the UK should be encouraged over foreign holidays this year.

Dame Anne Johnson, professor of epidemiology at University College London, said the importation of new coronavirus variants is "one of the biggest risks" facing the UK.

She told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme on Monday: “This is a risk where you’ve got high rates of infection. I’m for staycations.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/02/oversea-holiday-destinations-will-be-graded-using-traffic-light-system

US news

US may be in early stages of fourth wave as Covid cases rise, reports say

US has tallied on average 63,000 new cases daily over the past week while only five states have seen declines in new infections

A worker holds up a biohazard bag containing a coronavirus test swab in New York City. This new rise in cases is most pronounced in Michigan and New York. Photograph: Carlo Allegri/Reuters

A worker holds up a biohazard bag containing a coronavirus test swab in New York City. This new rise in cases is most pronounced in Michigan and New York. Photograph: Carlo Allegri/Reuters

Victoria Bekiempis
Thu 1 Apr 2021 12.41 EDT

The US could be in the early stages of a fourth wave of the Covid-19 pandemic that is taking renewed hold across the country, with coronavirus

cases increasing in 25 states, according to reports.

The US has tallied, on average, 63,000 new cases daily over the past week– an increase of 17% from the week prior, news website Axios reported. Only five states have recently seen declines in new cases. The third wave of the pandemic, which peaked in January, saw about 250,000 people daily testing positive for Covid-19, the Hill reported.

Batch of Johnson & Johnson vaccines 'can't be used' after ingredient issues
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This new rise in cases is most pronounced in Michigan and New York but is becoming widespread across large swaths of the country. The threat of a fourth wave comes as many states have loosened Covid-19 restrictions – disregarding public health officials' many warnings that doing so was premature.

Dr Rochelle Walensky, the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) director, said Monday that a fourth wave is all but guaranteed, remarking: "I'm going to lose the script, and I'm going to reflect on the recurring feeling I have of impending doom."

"We have so much to look forward to, so much promise and potential of where we are, and so much reason for hope. But right now I'm scared," Walensky also said during an emotional moment of a White House briefing.

Joe Biden has implored regional officials to keep or reinstate mask their mandates, because of the alarming trend in US case numbers.

"I'm reiterating my call for every governor, mayor, and local leader to maintain and reinstate the mask mandate," the president said hours after Walensky's comments. "Please, this is not politics. Reinstate the mandate if you let it down."

Any fourth wave is likely to be less deadly than previous waves, especially amongst the elderly where 73% of seniors have received at least one dose of coronavirus vaccine. But a fresh surge of the virus can easily thwart progress in fighting the pandemic. Even with fewer fatalities, millions of

people will remain at risk of illness and death and a new surge will strain the overburdened US healthcare system.

Meanwhile, millions of younger Americans with health conditions that put them at higher risk have still not received vaccination despite a US vaccine rollout that has largely won wide praise for its speed. Covid-19 hospitalizations have gone up amid the virus's apparent resurgence, albeit less than before.

The ongoing pandemic also sets the stage for the emergence of variant strains of the virus. The variants presently driving this outbreak are more contagious than Covid-19's initial strain. The Covid-19 vaccines now available might also be less effective against these variants.

The loosened restrictions and increasingly lax behavior among pandemic-weary Americans have further fanned the flames of Covid-19's resurgence. Some states, including Texas, have abandoned their mask mandates. Even states which historically imposed stronger restrictions during the pandemic have loosened regulations despite this uptick.

Wan Yang, professor of epidemiology at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health, told the New York Times that shifting habits might cause an continued rise in coronavirus cases in New York City and state. More New York residents are interacting inside buildings, given increased access to indoor dining and group fitness classes.

In Rockland county, New York, which is north of the city, teenagers, as well as persons between the ages of 20 and 49, have led the increase in cases. "They are kind of done with this, they want to go out," the county's health commissioner, Dr Patricia Schnabel Ruppert, told the Times.

New Jersey, which has seen one of the highest coronavirus case rates across the US, noted a 20% surge over the past 14 days. Despite this, the New Jersey governor, Phil Murphy, on Monday said he would relax seating capacity restrictions on sports venues, as well as indoor catered events.

Although case data are increasingly dire, vaccination efforts have expanded dramatically. Biden said Monday that up to 90% of US adults would be

eligible for a Covid-19 jab by 19 April.

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Coronavirus

Pfizer vaccine has 91% efficacy for up to six months, trial shows

Findings based on two doses three weeks apart are first to show shot remains effective for many months

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US navy personnel prepare doses of the Pfizer vaccine for administration. Photograph: Jonathan Ernst/Reuters

US navy personnel prepare doses of the Pfizer vaccine for administration. Photograph: Jonathan Ernst/Reuters

Ian Sample *Science editor*
@iansample
Thu 1 Apr 2021 12.27 EDT

The coronavirus vaccine developed by Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech protects against symptomatic Covid for up to six months, an updated analysis of clinical trial data has found.

In a statement released on Thursday, the companies reported efficacy of 91.3% against any symptoms of the disease in participants assessed up to six months after their second shot. The level of protection is only marginally lower than the 95% achieved soon after vaccination.

The findings are the first to demonstrate that the vaccine remains effective for many months, an outcome that doctors and scientists had desperately hoped for because it suggests that people being vaccinated now should be protected at least until the autumn when boosters may be ready.

Analysis of participants in the phase 3 trial, which has enrolled 46,307 people, identified 927 symptomatic Covid cases. Of these, 850 were in the placebo arm of the trial and 77 in the vaccine group. There were 32 cases of severe Covid, as defined by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in the placebo group, and none in the vaccinated group. More than 12,000 people vaccinated in the trial have now been followed for at least six months after their second dose.

More striking still are results from the South African arm of the trial where nine Covid cases were observed among 800 participants. All of the cases were in the placebo group, and six were confirmed to be the new "variant of concern", B.1.351, which has worried scientists because of its ability to partially evade antibodies produced in response to vaccines or past infection. Public Health England said on Wednesday that it knew of 469 confirmed or probable cases of the South African variant in the UK.

Quick Guide

How does the Pfizer/BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine work?

Show

The Pfizer/BioNTech Covid jab is an mRNA vaccine. Essentially, mRNA is a molecule used by living cells to turn the gene sequences in DNA into the

proteins that are the building blocks of all their fundamental structures. A segment of DNA gets copied ("transcribed") into a piece of mRNA, which in turn gets "read" by the cell's tools for synthesising proteins.

In the case of an mRNA vaccine, the virus's mRNA is injected into the muscle, and our own cells then read it and synthesise the viral protein. The immune system reacts to these proteins – which can't by themselves cause disease – just as if they'd been carried in on the whole virus. This generates a protective response that, studies suggest, lasts for some time.

The two first Covid-19 vaccines to announce phase 3 three trial results were mRNA-based. They were first off the blocks because, as soon as the genetic code of Sars-CoV-2 was known – it was published by the Chinese in January 2020 – companies that had been working on this technology were able to start producing the virus's mRNA. Making conventional vaccines takes much longer.

Adam Finn, *professor of paediatrics at the Bristol Children's Vaccine Centre, University of Bristol*

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With cases in the South African arm of the trial so low, more evidence is needed to confirm the vaccine's protection against the new variant, but scientists were still delighted by the result. "I do regard this as a really positive indication," said Danny Altmann, a professor of immunology at Imperial College London.

He said scientists had become "terribly worried" about the variant's ability to evade immunity from previous infection or vaccination. "Studies like this confirm our sense that the vaccine gives such massive protective headroom that even with some loss of immunity, you're still safe," he said.

The chairman of Pfizer, Albert Bourla, said the latest data put the company in a position to apply to the US Food and Drugs Administration for full approval of the vaccine. The jab is currently approved under emergency use authorisation.

The results came as scientists in the UK reported strong immune responses in older people who had received two shots of the Pfizer vaccine. Blood tests on 100 people aged 80 to 96 years old revealed that 98% produced strong antibody responses after two doses of the vaccine given three weeks apart. Antibody levels more than tripled after the second shot.

The findings, released in a preprint that has yet to be peer-reviewed, will boost confidence that the Pfizer vaccine can be highly effective against Covid even in the most vulnerable older people, who tend to generate far weaker immune responses to vaccines and natural infections. Pfizer trialled its vaccine with a three-week gap between shots, but the UK leaves a three-month gap, meaning it is unclear whether the same level of protection is achieved.

Paul Moss, a professor of haematology at the University of Birmingham who led the study with Dr Helen Parry, also at Birmingham, said the team was surprised and very pleased to see the results, which tallied with the "excellent clinical protection" the Pfizer vaccine appears to provide. The first major real-world study of the Pfizer vaccine, in Israel, found that two shots prevented 94% of symptomatic cases across all age groups.

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Share your stories

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The scientists went on to examine another branch of the immune defences raised by the vaccine, known as the T-cell response. Antibodies protect against infection by gumming up the virus and preventing it from infecting cells, but T-cells destroy human cells that are already infected, and may also support antibody production over time. After both shots of the vaccine, two-thirds of the participants had detectable T-cell responses. “We know that as people age their cellular immune responses are more difficult to elicit,” said Moss. “So that is something that we will need to keep an eye on very closely.”

Further work at Public Health England’s Porton Down lab showed that blood serum taken from the volunteers after two shots of vaccine strongly neutralised the original coronavirus that spread around the world last year. But it was on average 14 times less effective against the P.1 variant first seen in Brazil, and which has now reached the UK and elsewhere.

“The variant from Brazil reduces neutralisation response, but at this early stage after the vaccine where we’re seeing such high antibody levels we are still quietly confident that this should still provide valuable protection against this variant of concern,” said Parry.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/01/pfizer-vaccine-has-91-efficacy-for-up-to-six-months-trial-shows

2021.04.02 - Spotlight

- **‘There were pitched battles, fist fights’ How Britfunk overcame racism to reinvigorate UK pop**
- **Play nicely! The fun and frustrations of gaming with your partner**
- **On a roll Skating booms in lockdown London – photo essay**
- **'Citrusy aroma' How feijoas baffled a New Zealand immigrant – and polarise a nation**

Pop and rock

‘There were pitched battles, fist fights’: how Britfunk overcame racism to reinvigorate UK pop

‘Without Hi-Tension, Light of the World, Central Line, you guys wouldn’t be here …’ A Hi-Tension publicity publicity photograph. Photograph: Gerald Mclean

‘Without Hi-Tension, Light of the World, Central Line, you guys wouldn’t be here …’ A Hi-Tension publicity publicity photograph. Photograph: Gerald Mclean

Blending jazz-funk, glam rock and punk energy in the late 1970s, Britfunk crash-landed into the charts and inspired club culture. The musicians relive one of the first homegrown Black music scenes

Alexis Petridis
Fri 2 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

Last year, a few weeks before lockdown began, Gilles Peterson was watching the Brit awards when the American musician Tyler, the Creator won the international male solo artist award. In his acceptance speech, he said something deeply unexpected: “Shoutout to all the British funk of the 80s that I’ve tried to copy.”

Peterson was startled. He had been an aspiring teenage DJ during what has become known as the Britfunk era – a period from 1976 to 1982, when London spawned a succession of homegrown bands putting their raw spin on the sound of funk – and could vouch for its impact and importance. There’s a convincing argument that Britfunk was the UK’s first homegrown Black – or at least multiracial – musical genre: certainly, it’s neck and neck for the title with lovers rock.

Moreover, Peterson thinks it spawned modern UK club culture. “All the energies came together at the same time: DJs, bands, pirate radio, record shops selling white labels, clubs,” he says, calling from his London home. “It grew into rave and acid house, and acid house became a global phenomenon, which is still creating new variations. Britfunk is an

incredibly important part of something that's become normalised in terms of music." But Peterson was used to Britfunk being forgotten: as he says, it wasn't as if it attracted a lot of media attention even at the time. "It was a big scene, but it was lost on the media, at the time, which was controlling the radio and the newspapers, Melody Maker and NME. All that's left is the records and a bit of grainy film on YouTube."

Freeez … Paul Morgan, Andy Stennett, Peter Maas and John Rocca in 1980. Photograph: Courtesy of Beggars Banquet

And now, here was a huge 21st-century star at an award show on prime-time television, giving the scene some props. "For the first time, someone announced that he was inspired by Britfunk," says Peterson. "I was like: 'Fucking hell, they've got it.'"

Further inspired by hearing young underground DJs slipping old Britfunk tracks into their sets – "not the really obvious ones, the ones that weren't quite as well-made, the ones that are really expensive on Discogs" – Peterson rang his old friend Jean-Paul "Bluey" Maunick, best known as the driving force behind the acid jazz band Incognito, but once the guitarist in Britfunk pioneers Light of the World. "I said: 'Mate: let's make a Britfunk record.'"

Uniting as STR4TA, they made Aspects, a (largely instrumental) riot of slap bass, jazzy synthesiser and scratchy funk guitar that perfectly captures the genre's essence: the sound of US jazz-funk given a distinctly British makeover; a little rougher and more urgent-sounding than its superslick US counterpart. It's an album that could have come out in Britfunk's heyday, when Light of the World, Hi-Tension, Beggar and Co and Central Line all appeared on Top of the Pops, and the biggest Britfunk hit of the lot, Freeez's Southern Freeez, made the Top 10, sharing rarefied air with Ultravox, Adam and the Ants and Kim Wilde's Kids in America.

Gilles Peterson's Britfunk playlist – stream Spotify

Shining a spotlight on Britfunk feels overdue for such a groundbreaking scene. These days, Paul McLean tours with the Brit Funk Association, but in 1976 he co-founded Hi-Tension, the first Britfunk band to make any commercial headway: they scored two hit singles in 1978 with their eponymous theme song and British Hustle. When he meets young artists at festivals who want to know his story, "I say: 'Right, this might sound horrible to you, but without Hi-Tension, Light of the World, Central Line, you guys wouldn't be here.' And they go: 'Uh?'"

"I say to them: 'Let's just put it this way – imagine you've just got a hit, No 8 in the charts, you've been invited on to Top of the Pops once again, at a time when you don't see faces like these on Top of the Pops, especially if they were British [he gestures to himself and his brother Patrick, Hi-Tension's sax player, who's sitting beside him on a Zoom call]. And then the floor manager comes into your dressing room, shuts the door behind him and goes: "Did you boys enjoy that? Yes? Good. Because we're not letting any more of you on."' He didn't actually say the word, but we knew what he meant."

Patrick nods. "There were a lot of things that happened with Hi-Tension when we were told: 'You're not allowed to play here – you're not allowed to do that.' And we did it. So when I look at people who've come along afterwards – we took the beating. We're not going to hold you to ransom for it, but give us the respect we're due."

It was a scene born out of London and the south-east's vibrant mid-70s soul clubs – Crackers and the 100 Club on Oxford Street in London, Royalty in Southgate, Frenchies in Camberley, the Lacy Lady in Ilford and Canvey Island's Goldmine. Racially and sexually mixed dancefloors were presided over by some of Britain's first club DJs to become celebrities: Mark Roman, George Power, Greg Edwards, Steven "DJ Froggy" Howlett, Robbie Vincent and Chris Hill. Hill was perhaps the scene's biggest and most controversial name, with a divisive penchant for onstage wackiness that doubtless contributed to the scene's posthumous reputation as a hopelessly naff world of Ford Capris with fluffy dice dangling from their rear-view mirrors, Essex boys in white socks and novelty DJs. Certainly, the footage of him in the short 1978 film British Hustle – playing Swanee whistle over the records and encouraging dancers to form human pyramids – hasn't dated terribly well. But Peterson is a staunch defender. "There are a few clips where he's spraying people with shaving foam or wearing an American GI's uniform, and everyone just makes fun of him, but musically, he was an amazing DJ, the British Larry Levan."

Freeez.

"The clubs were a real mix of Black kids and white kids getting on in a surrounding that they all enjoyed, where they could be themselves," says Maunick, wistfully. "For me, those soul clubs broke down the barriers like no other movement has. I came to this country from Mauritius when I was 10, and I saw the foolishness that was going down: me and my mum knocking on doors and not being able to get a place to stay. So when that movement came out, it was amazing to be beyond racial barriers, really uniting."

The music in the clubs was strictly American soul, jazz and funk, but the British bands were fuelled by a DIY, enthusiasm-over-ability attitude they shared with London's other burgeoning musical scene of the era, punk. "I'd been listening to Herbie Hancock, Stevie Wonder, George Duke, funk bands like Slave," says Maunick. "But when we came to do it, we had no knowledge – I was making music for the first time in my life. You're hearing punk, the energy of that, and although you love a funk riff, you're

not getting that kind of slick funk sound – you're somewhere between that and a guy that's just thrashing a guitar."

Rocca, who graduated from working in record shops and delivering jazz-funk imports in a van to fronting Freeez, agrees. "My brother was a punk rocker, so I went with him to the Marquee, and it was fantastic. I saw people there who were at the dance clubs I went to. It was similar – the Britfunkers were young kids who found this foreign music that inspired us, picked up guitars and drumsticks."

This rawness set the new bands apart. There had been British funk before – Cymande, the Average White Band, Gonzalez, the Real Thing and Heatwave – but the Britfunk bands were marked out by, well, their Britishness. Hi-Tension declined to sing in fake American accents. "A lot of players on the Britfunk scene have Caribbean backgrounds," says McLean. "That had a lot of influence on it: a looser rhythm, hints of reggae in the sound."

Bluey Maunick with Tessa Niles at Clink studios, Lonond, in September 1981. Photograph: David Corio/Redferns

Occasionally more unexpected influences crept in. "Our songs had a lot of chants – 'Hi-Tension! That's what we are!'" says Patrick with a smile. "And

that came from being Black British, growing up in this country and absorbing everything that was going on, all the pop stuff back in the day: Slade, Gary Glitter. You were never really sure what was coming out in your sound."

The bands' commercial expectations were low, but they found themselves accepted, playing clubs alongside DJs rather than the traditional gig circuit. The growing popularity of the underground soul scene – 12,000 people turned up to a 1980 all-dayer at Knebworth, at which Light of the World performed – meant that bands secured record deals despite a lack of media interest. Beyond a handful of pirate stations, Vincent's Radio London show was the solitary radio outlet; the BBC attempted to launch a British version of Soul Train called, alas, Black Current, but it never made it beyond a pilot featuring Hi-Tension. Yet as Peterson puts it, "without any of the structure and the support behind it, this music still managed to get to the charts".

Light of the World scored a string of minor hits before splitting in two: Maunick formed Incognito, other members Beggar and Co, who ended up performing their debut single, Somebody Help Me Out, on the same edition of Top of the Pops as Freeez. Thanks to Southern Freeez, Rocca had unexpectedly found himself a pop star, despite the fact that he had chosen to sign to Beggars Banquet, a punk/new wave label that "had no idea of what was going on", and that Freeez's new lead singer, Ingrid Mansfield Allman, was moonlighting from her day job as an east London social worker.

> People come up to us and the first words out of their mouths are: 'You don't know what you did for me'

Despite its commercial success, not everyone was delighted by the rise of Britfunk. Rocca remembers being locked in the Royalty club by police: the National Front had turned up outside to attack the multiracial crowd. When Light of the World toured, Maunick says, they regularly discovered "this wasn't really an accepted thing".

"We went up to the Lake District early on, and they tore our motors apart when we were inside playing the gig. There was nothing left of our vehicles when we came out. We went to Margate and the locals were like: 'What's

this? Black people mixing with white people?' They stoned the building. Every piece of glass got put through with a rock. But this movement had some spunk: we went out there and tore into them. There were pitched battles, fist fights, to protect what we had. We were proud of who we were. We weren't going to put up with it."

In the end, however, it was a shift in musical eras that brought about the end of Britfunk. The career of Freeez is the perfect illustration of these changing tastes. In the wake of Southern Freeez's success, Rocca decamped to New York where he encountered the nascent hip-hop scene: "Rappers, scratch DJs – we heard Planet Rock, and it was completely different, in the same way that Wicky Wacky by the Fatback Band sounded completely different to me when I was at school." Freeez's next hit, IOU, in 1983, was a collaboration with Arthur Baker, who had produced Planet Rock, and sounded like work of an entirely different artist: "It didn't involve jazz-funk at all, it was all about electro."

Spandau Ballet's Gary Kemp performing Chant No 1 …with Beggar and co in July 1981. Photograph: PYMCA/Universal Images Group/Getty Images

But Britfunk continued to exercise an influence over British pop. A succession of artists with roots in the scene, who made more pop-facing music, became stars, Linx and Imagination among them. Beggar and Co

became the horn section of choice for British pop acts. Spandau Ballet had long been Britfunk devotees – in the group's early days, Maunick remembers, they would "come and sit in the corner of Light of the World's rehearsal room and ask us to show them how to play bass and saxophone". Next they were tapping Beggar and Co to provide the superb brass arrangement on Chant Number 1 (I Don't Need This Pressure On). In the wake of its success, Beggar and Co's members went on to work with everyone from Wham! to Psychic TV.

And perhaps its impact was wider than merely musical. "When we play with the Brit Funk Association, people come up to us and the first words out of their mouths are: 'You don't know what you did for me,'" says McLean. "They say: 'Because of you I've got my own business as a mechanic,' or 'I've got my own hair salon.'"

"You go: 'I'm sorry? What?' They say: 'The bare nuts you guys had by just going for it, by singing: "That's what we are – superstars." I just felt that if them boys from north-west London can go up there and do that, I want to do it.'"

Aspects by STR4TA is out now on Brownswood Recordings

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Games

Play nicely! The fun and frustrations of gaming with your partner

Quality time together or the guaranteed path to a breakup? Either way, over the pandemic more and more couples have been giving co-operative video games a try

Kristan Reed and Keza MacDonald play It Takes Two Photograph: Keza MacDonald

Kristan Reed and Keza MacDonald play It Takes Two Photograph: Keza MacDonald

Keza MacDonald, Kristan Reed, Oliver Holmes, Pip Usher, Alysia Judge, Chris Godfrey and Dylan B Jones
Fri 2 Apr 2021 05.00 EDT

Kristan and Keza play It Takes Two

Kristan Reed: “Oh God! Let’s never break up!” pleads Keza as we embark upon the divorcees-to-be shenanigans of It Takes Two, a kind of Honey-I-Shrunk-the-Parents-to-Fix-Their-Toxic-Marriage. I admit, I approached this bizarro platformer with a certain amount of trepidation, on account of occasionally having a rocky time playing games with my beloved partner. People imagine it’s some holy-grail nirvana to have a gamer partner, but the truth is Keza is just a bit too good at games to be wholly tolerant towards others (mostly: me) flailing around haplessly – especially in Nintendo games, effectively her second native language.

Keza is a classic back-seat gamer, always spotting the solution in 0.3 seconds and barking at you for getting there fractionally later. And yet, It Takes Two has a pleasant, companionable feel to it – possibly because of the madcap cooperation at its heart. For once, our slapstick failures to nail the arm down of an angry boss were cause for gentle ribbing and hoots of laughter, rather than impatient harrumphing. What starts as a heartwarming tale of marital reconciliation actually reminds me that, hey, I really enjoy playing games with Keza. Maybe we should do it more often.

Keza MacDonald: Kristan and I met because we are both video games journalists, so you’d assume that we’ve spent many blissful evenings over the years working through the classics of the art form together. But when games are your job, you tend to want to do other things when you’re not working – and actually, it’s surprisingly hard to find great two-player games. Many of them relegate one player to bored sidekick while the other does all the fun stuff. Others insist on online play, which for us would involve setting up two separate TVs and consoles in the living room and the bedroom (it has been known, but it’s patently ridiculous).

It Takes Two, however, is one of those rare games actually designed for chatting and gentle competition on the couch. As two soon-to-be-divorced parents (harsh vibe) transformed into miniature dolls, we run and jump and puzzle our way from the garden shed to the family home, and neither of us is left feeling like the hapless tagalong (usually him) or the impatient drill sergeant barking orders (usually me). Instead of focusing relentlessly on the objective, I’m actually enjoying the journey. We really should do this more often.

Chris and Dylan play Overcooked

Chris Godfrey (left) and Dylan Jones. Photograph: Natasha Khambhaita

Chris Godfrey: Dylan and I don't really play video games together because I'm better than him at all of them. Even those we've not played yet. I grew up playing games and haven't stopped, so I'm instinctively better than him (a casual gamer at best). I have tried to help him. I generously dedicated dozens of hours to coaching him at Mario Kart 8, but still, me losing is a rarity (losing to anyone is rarity, to be honest). It's not fun for either of us.

Enter Overcooked, a co-op game where you *work together*, staffing a series of kitchens while you prepare and serve orders to restaurant patrons. A four-minute timer, personalised dishes, impatient customers and environmental hazards (thieving rats, icy floors, lava pits, etc) create a confusing, pressure-cooker environment. Bedlam is never more than one kitchen fire away. But so long as we communicate and work together, I'm sure we'll complete it in no time. It'll be fun!

Things seem simple enough on the first level. The customers want onion soup and so onion soup they shall have. Dylan, who I have appointed my sous chef, chops the onions; I take the onions and put them in the pot; when

the soup is ready I plate up, shout “SERVICE!”, then Dylan takes the dish to the conveyor belt to complete the order. Chop, cook, serve, repeat. We split the dirty dishes between us. Easy!

As we progress through the game, the dishes become more complicated (pizzas with different toppings, burritos with different fillings) and the kitchens more ridiculous (haunted houses, icy lakes, the crater of a volcano). Our (my) strategy remains the same though: take a few trial runs to map out the level, then create a perfect, metronomic system of delegation and cooperation.

So long as Dylan continues to follow the plan we’ll be fine. Even if he panics, loses his rhythm, gets confused, slips on the icy floor and into the lake – I’m good enough to pick up the slack. We’re having fun! I’m really enjoying this.

Dylan Jones: I hate this. The best word to describe the sous-chef Overcooked experience, under executive chef Chris’s barked orders, is “gruelling”. If the hapless lambs to the slaughter of Gordon Ramsay’s Hell’s Kitchen thought they had it bad, they should try half an hour of frantically trying to make an inexplicable salad, as a flurry of ingredients and instructions fly at you from all corners of the kitchen. Oh, and the kitchen is 300 feet in the air, in the swaying basket of a hot air balloon. Which is on fire.

Of course, for many, Overcooked’s frenetic, all-consuming stress is its appeal – and don’t get me wrong, it is a great game. But I value my mental health – and mine and Chris’s relationship – too much. It’s 2021! I don’t need all-consuming stress, I need to watch season 3 episode 12 of Will & Grace for the hundredth time (the one where Sandra Bernhard guest stars and they all sing Midnight Train To Georgia) while eating McCoy’s salt & vinegar crisps, with taramasalata.

While some find Overcooked’s high octane gastronomy escapist, I find it triggering. I’m getting flashbacks to my days as a student working in restaurants in Soho. I was so bad at it that I had at least 12 restaurant jobs in my first year. On Overcooked, I usually make it through three of the trickier levels – which Chris gleefully selected to be as traumatising as possible –

before calmly putting down my controller and walking to our much more serene and thankfully grounded kitchen to pour myself a large glass of cheap red wine.

Oliver and Pip play A Way Out

Pip Usher and Oliver Holmes play A Way Out. Photograph: Oliver Holmes/The Guardian

Oliver Holmes: Getting my wife to play video games has always felt like a dream. Pip has imagined we might become a yoga-retreating, juice-cleansing couple that watches sunrises. My wish is to scoff chicken wings and Haribo until we attain that delicate mix of a food coma *and* a sugar high, and then play PlayStation till dawn.

There have been several failed attempts but Pip agreed to give it one last go. We played A Way Out, a cooperative game in which two convicts help each other escape a Shawshank-inspired jail. Pip chose to be Leo, a short-tempered armed robber, whereas I picked Vincent, a white-collar fraudster.

Events started off well, with me distracting a guard while Pip snuck through the infirmary to steal a chisel. However, things soon inevitably deteriorated. We hit the same issues as in previous attempts to game together – Pip could

make her character either walk or look around, but never both at the same time. It made me remember how unintuitive and frustrating video game controllers are when you're just getting started with them.

It's hard not to share the thing you love most with the person you love most. But after an hour of playing, Pip was getting repeatedly knifed in the jail kitchen. So we thought we'd give it a break.

Pip Usher: I've never understood how playing a stressful game helps you unwind. Just like sociopathic politician Frank Underwood in House of Cards, my husband likes to decompress with high-stakes virtual adventures – like A Way Out.

Within minutes of starting the game, I was being assaulted by an ogre of a man who kept shouting that Harvey had sent him. Who's Harvey? I have no idea and the ogre didn't offer details.

Because I couldn't figure out how to operate the controller, my brief time in jail mostly consisted of walking into walls, getting stuck staring upwards, and being repeatedly humiliated and brutalised. Oliver and I managed a few successful operations, which I found so stressful that I just kept repeating, "Oh God, oh God, oh God" while he shouted "Press square! Press square! Press square!"

Alysia and Joe play Call of Duty: Warzone

Alysia trained up Joe as her rookie partner in Call of Duty: Warzone

Alysia: Joe wasn't a gamer. He owned a secondhand PS4 that he bought to watch Netflix. But when Covid hit 10 weeks into our relationship and non-cohabiting couples like us were forced to stay apart, the world inside that PS4 became our shared space.

Since Call of Duty: Warzone was free, it was the obvious game to introduce Joe to when we realised we were effectively going long-distance and needed a way to connect. First though, my rookie partner had to go through an intense bootcamp. "Be quiet!" I'd hiss, as he clattered through a house while four green enemy dots lit up my heartbeat sensor. We were pinned on a hill at one point and I forced Joe to push forward – which he dutifully did, and was immediately machine-gunned. My guilty silence down the headset was deafening.

But as his abilities have grown over the months, Warzone has become a way for us to take care of each other. We lay down cover fire, strategise, and in the quiet of the loading lobbies catch up on the intricacies of our days. And after a year, Joe is now actively engaged in video game culture. His YouTube feed is full of Warzone tip videos, and he's bought special paddles for his controller that let him pull off advanced moves. Warzone has

become our routine, a lifeline, and a way to snatch victories on days when real life has been full of loss.

Joe: I only started playing video games regularly during lockdown after Alysia suggested teaming up in Warzone. I didn't have a clue what I was doing to start with. I regularly threw grenades at doors instead of opening them because I'd forgotten which button did what ("Sneak, Joe! Sneak!" Alysia would howl). It was fun having Alysia coach me through the controls and game mechanics, even if she sometimes overestimated my abilities …

I tend to feel bored and isolated if I play a video game alone, but being able to play together online with a headset makes it feel more like we're in the same room. Because our relationship was so young when the pandemic hit, I know some of Alysia's friends only by their voices – yet we've shared (virtual) life-and-death experiences! With Covid making travelling impossible, I'd never have met them without Call of Duty.

Lockdown shut all the date spots and holiday destinations, but Alysia and I have still managed to escape on a little adventure each night. Instead of museums or a trip to France, we're getting into gunfights and flying helicopters round the fictional map of Verdansk.

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On a roll: skating booms in lockdown London – photo essay

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New Zealand

'Citrusy aroma': how feijoas baffled a New Zealand immigrant – and polarise a nation

When Polish-born Hania Żądło inquired about the strange avocado-like fruit, she was met with a mixture of indignation, hostility … and sympathy

‘Like pears, guavas and pineapples had a weird baby.’ Feijoa are native to South America, but ‘essential’ to New Zealand culture.

Photograph: Jonny Weeks/The Guardian

‘Like pears, guavas and pineapples had a weird baby.’ Feijoa are native to South America, but ‘essential’ to New Zealand culture.

Photograph: Jonny Weeks/The Guardian

Elle Hunt in Auckland
Thu 1 Apr 2021 21.01 EDT

When Hania Żądło, a new arrival in New Zealand, asked an innocent question about an unfamiliar fruit, she was not to know that she was undermining a national treasure.

As a registered nurse, Żądło and her husband, an anaesthetic technician, had both been granted "critical purpose" visas to take up jobs at Dunedin hospital. After landing in Auckland from the UK in late March, they were sent with their two children to the Crowne Plaza hotel for two weeks' mandatory quarantine.

On day seven, the paper bag delivered to their door with that day's lunch contained an oval-shaped, grass-green fruit. It looked like a mini-avocado, Żądło thought, but it smelled citric, almost floral. "I was very happy to get something different," she says, from quarantine still. "But I had no idea what to do with it."

Żądło turned to the New Zealand hotel quarantine Facebook group, where 13,000 people share tips on travelling to New Zealand through the

pandemic. With the majority of members citizens, Polish-born Żądło framed her question with appropriate deference.

> Recent arrival in MIQ gets a New Zealand welcome pic.twitter.com/AJmUSZ5Tp9
>
> — Elle Hunt (@elle_hunt) March 29, 2021

"I hope I won't offend anyone here with this post," she wrote, beneath a photo, "but … what fruit is this and how do you eat it?"

Żądło realised her faux pas within minutes as her post was flooded with hundreds of replies. Her "mini-avocado", she was told again and again, was a feijoa – and "it appears to be a massive thing here", Żądło marvels.

The feijoa is a kind of guava that grows on small trees of the myrtle family, pronounced "fey-oa" in its native South America and "fee-jo-ah" in New Zealand, where it is as essential to the culture as the kiwifruit (itself Chinese).

Żądło's question piqued the suspicion of the Facebook group's self-appointed gatekeepers as a failed test of nationhood. "Are you a Kiwi? It's a quintessential kiwi fruit …" wrote one. "Sad that a New Zealander doesn't know a feijoa! How is this even possible?" fished another.

One was more blunt: "If you don't know what feijoas are, I have to wonder which category you are entering New Zealand under?"

As anyone from Aotearoa will tell you, feijoas are typically eaten like kiwifruit, cut in half and scooped out with a spoon – though they are also used widely as a filling or flavour in baking, confectionery, chutneys and jams, curries, ice-cream and even alcohol.

But the distinctive taste is polarising, even of New Zealanders. "Like pears, guavas and pineapples had a weird baby," ventured one commenter, responding to Żądło. "Like you accidentally sprayed your perfume in your

mouth," wrote another in disgust. It is most often likened to soap – by detractors and fans alike.

Żądło describes it as somewhat sour, with a "bouquet of fresh, citrusy aroma" and soft flesh that turned gritty, like a pear, closer towards the skin. "The taste is very distinct – it hit my palate immediately," she says. One of her Facebook correspondents put it this way: "They are THE MOST DELICIOUS FRUIT IN THE WORLD!!!!"

'Quince challenged me': how to cook, eat and enjoy seven of the world's most difficult fruits
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The description-defying flavour means that people who do like feijoas tend to be zealous about them – "almost as if this fruit is some kind of national treasure," says Żądło.

Within New Zealand, there is a countdown to the start of the season, around April. This year increased rainfall meant it started a month early, with Gisborne grower David Hansen giving this update to Radio New Zealand in early March: "Fruit size is good. Flavours are good. Good sugar levels. So, it's looking really good."

With the trees common in private gardens and usually highly productive, for two to three months of the year feijoas are so plentiful as to be given away, in bulging carrier bags and buckets left at the side of the road. Kate Evans, a journalist working on a book about feijoas, has pointed to this as evidence of their being "part of the New Zealand identity". She says: "There's something really democratic about them."

But the brevity of the season – and their fleeting window of ripeness – adds to the urgency to make the most of it: by July, the season is over for another year.

The hundreds of thousands of New Zealanders based overseas can only look on with longing. Despite efforts to export them around the world, feijoas are only sparsely available in Australia and virtually unheard of

elsewhere – meaning expat Kiwis often make a point of filling their boots on trips home.

“They just don’t travel very well,” says Sariah Wilson of Heather’s Feijoas, a Hawke’s Bay farm that recently acquired its first London stockist on top of four others outside in New Zealand in Hong Kong, Miami, Brisbane and Perth. But “logistically, it’s just quite hard to do”, she says.

“Really, feijoas are so unknown around the world, even if you look up ‘rare fruit’ online, feijoas just don’t come up – they are even rarer than the rarest fruit. For us in New Zealand, we take it for granted, but the rest of the world has never even heard of them.”

For those prevented from returning by the pandemic, Żądło’s post prompted wistful reminiscences of back yard trees and heaped buckets – not to mention, unabashed envy. “It’s been 10 long years …” wrote one expat. “I would give my teeth to have that feijoa,” said another frankly.

Żądło – the strong inference was – did not know how lucky she was. But what did this incoming New Zealander make of its favourite, and most contentious, fruit?

Żądło says that her stomach can be sometimes sensitive to exotic fruits: “When I tried lychee fruit, I was physically sick.” Plus, of the two feijoas she tasted, the riper one had the undeniable taste of soap.

And yet, Żądło says – “I really enjoyed them.” She is even hoping to plant her own tree.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/02/strange-fruit-how-feijoas-baffled-a-new-zealand-immigrant-and-polarise-a-nation

2021.04.02 - Opinion

- It's a cop-out to pin all the blame for sexual abuse on schools
- The world's poorest countries are at India's mercy for vaccines. It's unsustainable
- Boris Johnson's latest 'build back better' pledge won't get Britain back to work
- What researching my family's Nazi history taught me about how to approach the past

OpinionRape and sexual assault

It's a cop-out to pin all the blame for sexual abuse on schools

Gaby Hinsliff

Ultimately, it’s parents who raise boys. Though we often struggle to find the words, we know we need to talk to our sons

Illustration by Nate Kitch

Illustration by Nate Kitch

Fri 2 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

‘When I was 16, a boy at a party led me to a shady corner of the garden.” “We were all sleeping in tents at my mate’s party.” “I had a boyfriend, at first everything was perfect.”

'It's extremely difficult': heads face a minefield of sexual allegations
Read more

How many parents will have read the plaintive first lines of the stories on Everyone’s Invited – a new website allowing schoolgirls to tell anonymously their stories of sexual violence – not just with horror but with a sinking feeling of recognition? If it didn’t happen to you, growing up what feels like a lifetime ago, then it probably happened to someone you knew.

Locked bedroom doors, at drunken house parties: the girl emerging tearful, the boy feigning nonchalance; rumour and counter-rumour spreading. Summer evenings that spiralled into darkness. Stories whispered around sixth-form common rooms, about girls pressured into something, although

nobody knew quite what; things we never dreamed could be described as criminal offences when we were growing up.

Grimly, the only surprising thing about reading the 2021 version of these long-forgotten stories is that so many girls still post tentatively about "sexual assault(?)", or describe being so drunk that they didn't know someone had actually had sex with them until the news was all over school, yet still feeling uncomfortable describing that as rape. These were boys they knew and trusted, after all: their friends and classmates, sometimes their boyfriends. Boys who are almost certainly someone's beloved son.

Since the site asks girls to name the alleged perpetrator's school rather than the perpetrator himself, the pressure has initially been on schools to respond to this teenage #MeToo moment. Education secretary Gavin Williamson has asked Ofsted to review safeguarding practices, although if that was enough to solve the problem there would be precious little left to solve. Ofsted has been routinely inspecting schools' safeguarding practices for years, yet a recent Girlguiding survey found six in 10 girls and women reported suffering sexual violence or sexual harassment in the past year at secondary school or college, ranging from having their skirts pulled up or unsolicited sexual images being sent to their phones, to unwanted sexual touching.

And while some schools are clearly not the safe places they should be, the worst of it often happens in places over which headteachers have no power, but for which they're now increasingly expected to assume responsibility: at house parties and sleepovers, or on WhatsApp groups where boys betray their girlfriends' trust by sharing explicit pictures that were meant to be private. (No, girls shouldn't send nudes; but neither should boys pester for them, jeer that they'll never get a boyfriend if they don't, or send them round the class like trophies.)

Schools obviously have obligations to keep their pupils safe, to teach consent and respect, and deal with any fallout coming through their doors. But dumping all responsibility for a society-wide problem on headteachers is frankly a cop-out. As is assuming that just because the initial posts on Everyone's Invited involved private schools, the problem is somehow confined to a handful of entitled posh boys; as its founder Soma Sara points out, doing so "risks making these cases seem like they're rare or anomalies,

or that these patterns of abuse can only happen in certain places" when the statistics show they happen everywhere and all the time.

Ultimately, it's parents who raise boys, and in a porn-saturated culture that makes a mockery of efforts to instil heathy attitudes to sex, frankly we need more help than we're getting.

We know we need to talk to our sons, but we struggle to find the words. If it was awkward enough having the "stranger danger" conversation when they were tiny, the mental gymnastics involved in seeing your own child simultaneously as vulnerable – as teenage boys invariably still are, beneath the bravado – and potentially a threat if he doesn't learn to respect girls' boundaries, is in a different league. No wonder some parents grow defensive, arguing that their sons shouldn't be demonised for the behaviour of a few.

Yet there are ways of grasping the nettle without making boys feel ashamed of being boys, and one is to raise them not to be bystanders or reluctant enablers of things they instinctively already know to be wrong.

For every boy sending some poor girl's nudes to half the school, there will be dozens more receiving them. For every predator at a crowded party there are other teenagers milling around, either oblivious or unsure what to do when they see a girl being led upstairs in no fit state to know what's happening.

And poignantly, scattered among the thousands of girls posting on Everyone's Invited are boys writing anonymously about how they don't want to be part of toxic rituals any more – bets on who can sleep with the "ugliest" girl, say – but don't know how to object without becoming social pariahs.

So fathers in particular should talk to their sons, not just about consent, but about the times they've stepped in and looked out for the women in their lives; about peer pressure and doing the right thing. Mothers can find age-appropriate ways of talking about the times a male friend stood up for them.

Just as some men were shocked by what women revealed after Sarah Everard's death, so will some boys have been forced over the past week to see teenage girls in a different light. It's up to parents, not just schools, to take that moment and use it.

- Gaby Hinsliff is a Guardian columnist

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Opinion Coronavirus

The world's poorest countries are at India's mercy for vaccines. It's unsustainable

Achal Prabhala and Leena Menghaney

This is what happens when a third of humanity depends on one manufacturer for Covid jabs. We need to waive patents now

Covishield vaccine administration in Gauhati, India. Refocusing on domestic supply has resulted in delays of global shipments under the Covax programme. Photograph: Anupam Nath/AP

Covishield vaccine administration in Gauhati, India. Refocusing on domestic supply has resulted in delays of global shipments under the Covax programme. Photograph: Anupam Nath/AP

Fri 2 Apr 2021 04.00 EDT

As the UK's vaccination programme was "knocked off course" due to a delay in receiving five million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine from India, a far more chilling reality was unfolding: about a third of all humanity, living in the poorest countries, found out that they will get almost no coronavirus vaccines in the near future because of India's urgent need to vaccinate its own massive population.

It's somewhat rich for figures in Britain to accuse India of vaccine nationalism. That the UK, which has vaccinated nearly 50% of its adults with at least one dose, should demand vaccines from India, which has only vaccinated 3% of its people so far, is immoral. That the UK has already received several million doses from India, alongside other rich countries such as Saudi Arabia and Canada, is a travesty.

The billions of AstraZeneca doses being produced by the Serum Institute in India are not for rich countries – and, in fact, not even for India alone: they are for all 92 of the poorest countries in the world.

Except they're now being treated as the sovereign property of the Indian government.

How did we get here? Exactly one year ago, researchers at Oxford University's Jenner Institute, frontrunners in the race to develop a coronavirus vaccine, stated that they intended to allow any manufacturer, anywhere, the rights to their jab. One of the early licences they signed was with the Serum Institute, the world's largest vaccine manufacturer. One month later, acting on advice from the Gates Foundation, Oxford changed course and signed over exclusive rights to AstraZeneca, a UK-based multinational pharmaceutical group.

AstraZeneca and Serum signed a new deal. Serum would produce vaccines for all poor countries eligible for assistance by Gavi, the Vaccines Alliance – an organisation backed by rich countries' governments and the Gates Foundation. These 92 nations together counted for half the world – or nearly four billion people. India's fair share of these vaccines, by population, should have been 35%. However there was an unwritten arrangement that Serum would earmark 50% of its supply for domestic use and 50% for export.

The deal included a clause that allowed AstraZeneca to approve exports to countries not listed in the agreement. Some countries which asked for emergency vaccine shipments from Serum, including South Africa and Brazil, were justified: they had nothing else. Rich countries like the UK and Canada, however, which had bought up more doses than required to vaccinate their people, to the detriment of everyone else, had no moral right to dip into a pool of vaccines designated for poor countries.

Paradoxically, when South Africa and India asked the World Trade Organization to temporarily waive patents and other pharmaceutical monopolies so that vaccines could be manufactured more widely to prevent shortfalls in supply, among the first countries to object were the UK, Canada and Brazil. They were the very governments that would later be asking India to solve their own shortfalls in supply.

The deal did not include restrictions on what price Serum could charge, despite AstraZeneca's pledge to sell its vaccine for no profit "during the pandemic", which led to Uganda, which is among the poorest countries on Earth, paying three times more than Europe for the same vaccine. (An AstraZeneca spokesperson told Politico that the "price of the vaccine will differ due to a number of factors, including the cost of manufacturing – which varies depending on the geographic region – and volumes requested by the countries".)

As it became clear that the western pharmaceutical industry could barely supply the west, let alone anywhere else, many countries turned to Chinese and Russian vaccines. Meanwhile, the Covax Facility – the Gavi-backed outfit that actually procures vaccines for poor countries – stuck to its guns and made deals exclusively with western vaccine manufacturers. From those deals, the AstraZeneca vaccine is now the only viable candidate it has. The bulk of the supply of this vaccine comes from Serum, and a smaller quantity from SK Bioscience in South Korea. As a result, a third of all humanity is now largely dependent on supplies of one vaccine from one company in India.

Cue the Indian government's involvement. Unlike western governments, which poured billions into the research and development of vaccines, there

is no evidence that the Indian government has provided a cent in research and development funding to the Serum Institute. (This did not stop it turning every overseas vaccine delivery into a photo-op.) The government then commandeered approval of every single Covax shipment sent out from Serum – even, according to one well-placed source within the institute, directing how many doses would be sent and when.

The Indian government has not publicly commented on its involvement in the vaccine shipments and has refused requests for comment.

Last month, faced with a surge in infections, the Indian government announced an expansion of its domestic vaccination programme to include 345 million people, and halted all exports of vaccines. About 60m vaccine doses have already been dispensed, and the government needs another 630m to cover everyone in this phase alone. One other vaccine is approved for use – Bharat Biotech's Covaxin – but it is being produced and utilised in smaller quantities. As more vaccines are approved, the pressure on Serum might decrease. For now, however, the bulk of India's vaccination goals will be met by just one supplier, which faces the impossible choice of either letting down the other 91 countries depending on it, or offending its own government.

The consequences are devastating. To date, 28m Covax Facility doses have been produced by Serum for the developing world – 10m of which went to India. The second largest shipment went to Nigeria, which received 4m doses, or enough to cover only 1% of its population. Given the new Indian government order of 100m doses, further supplies to countries like Nigeria may be delayed until July. And given the Indian government's need of 500m more vaccine doses in the short run, that date could surely be pushed out even further.

This colossal mess was entirely predictable, and could have been avoided at every turn. Rich countries such as the UK, the US, and those of the EU, and rich organisations such as Covax should have used their funding of western pharmaceutical companies to nip vaccine monopolies in the bud. Oxford University should have stuck to its plans of allowing anyone, anywhere, to make its vaccine. AstraZeneca and Covax should have licensed as many manufacturers in as many countries as they could to make enough vaccines

for the world. The Indian government should have never been effectively put in charge of the wellbeing of every poor country on the planet.

For years, India has been called "the pharmacy of the developing world". It's time to rethink that title. We will need many more pharmacies in many more countries to survive this pandemic.

- Achal Prabhala is the coordinator of the AccessIBSA project, which campaigns for access to medicines in India, Brazil and South Africa; Leena Menghaney is an Indian lawyer who has worked for two decades on pharmaceutical law and policy

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OpinionFurther education

Boris Johnson's latest 'build back better' pledge won't get Britain back to work

Polly Toynbee

‘Free qualifications for 11 million adults,’ we’re told. Like all the other empty promises, wait for the funds to be swept away

‘Here comes yet another grandiose ‘build back better’ pledge from Boris Johnson, breezing out sums with a lot of noughts on the end, but when the news moves on the funds are pared back.’ Photograph: Reuters

‘Here comes yet another grandiose ‘build back better’ pledge from Boris Johnson, breezing out sums with a lot of noughts on the end, but when the news moves on the funds are pared back.’ Photograph: Reuters

Thu 1 Apr 2021 11.05 EDT

Nothing is what it seems: no sooner than it is announced than now-you-see-it-now-you-don’t money is whisked away. From today, the offer seems to be a chance for 11 million adults to gain new qualifications at no cost to themselves under a lifetime skills guarantee. Here comes yet another grandiose “build back better” pledge from the prime minister, breezing out sums with a lot of noughts on the end. But when the news moves on, under-the-counter cuts by the Treasury pare the funds away again.

There is a clear pattern: Boris Johnson promised Britain would become a “global science superpower”, a wise ambition since the UK is good at life sciences, despite low spending on research and development. But this week “catastrophic” cuts in grants put 18,000 research jobs in peril, sending the science budget into reverse.

Or take the promise to roll out fibre broadband to hundreds of rural areas: yet from Wednesday, 2m fewer homes will be eligible for vouchers, just as more people set up businesses in the countryside. Or the green homes scheme, destined to provide hundreds of thousands of jobs retrofitting old homes to cut carbon emissions: now that is suddenly scrapped.

The lifetime skills guarantee disguises other funds shaved from further education, as ever the Cinderella of British education. Johnson promised "pioneering reforms" to "reshape the training landscape". But Thursday's skills guarantee, promising everyone the right to retrain to level 3 – the equivalent of two A-levels – is cheese-pared to exclude 9.4m jobs.

There will be no retraining in arts, media, retail, hospitality, travel, tourism or leisure – the sectors hardest hit by the pandemic, yet according to House of Commons research for Labour ineligible. Anyone trying to retrain will find themselves barred if they already have a level 3 or above. What's more, cheese-paring again, FE Week reveals that more than half the courses on offer fail the Department for Education's own definition of a level 3 qualification.

Quietly, promises made to FE colleges are rescinded. The prime minister last September loudly pledged £1.5bn to improve their capacity, yet now the Treasury is clawing back millions from colleges that couldn't run full courses during lockdown. The Association of Colleges says 45% were already in financial trouble pre-pandemic, and will now be crippled, just as T-levels, the new technical equivalents to A-levels, are starting to be rolled out.

The government hails apprenticeships, yet in the two years before the pandemic more than 150,000 were lost. Kate Green, the shadow education secretary, points to the £330m the Treasury seized from the apprenticeship levy, instead of creating more places. With another £80m taken away from Get Help to Retrain, which was wound up early, this £95m over two years doesn't look so "new".

UK urged to create green apprenticeships to help Covid recovery
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FE funding has fallen by 20% since 2010, and the number of colleges has dropped by a quarter, with 9,000 fewer FE teachers (who are paid £7,000 less than school-based teachers), Green said in a speech at Swindon College this week. As for levelling up, the greatest fall in FE students has been in the north-east and the west.

Meanwhile, the government's Kickstart scheme promises just 250,000 placements for the 600,000 young unemployed people, of which fewer than 5,000 have yet been created.

Labour's Jobs Promise guarantees all 16- to 24-year-olds education, training or work, reprising its 1997 New Deal – which was a phenomenal success in reaching a lost cohort of young people. When Labour left office in 2010, its Future Jobs Fund, making the same promise to young people stricken by the 2008 crash, was axed within a month by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat government. As is the case now, business was struggling in that recession, so most of the jobs created for young people were in the public sector or charities. But today many of those workplaces, stripped bare by the austerity years, no longer have the capacity.

Despite much pious talk of valuing skills, little in the government's plans suggests this generation will escape the same fate as many young people in the 1980s, whose lives were permanently scarred by unemployment.

From now on, whenever you hear this government make a big promise, follow the money. Remember the Institute for Fiscal Studies' verdict on the recent budget: it warned that spending plans show the public sector plunging into another austerity era, with cuts of 8% in most departments. That means big spending announcements are mirages; the money will always be clawed back. Politically, the big question is how long will it take people to find out.

- Polly Toynbee is a Guardian columnist

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OpinionNazism

What researching my family's Nazi history taught me about how to approach the past

Géraldine Schwarz

Heinous crimes committed years ago cannot be excused by appealing to the ‘social context’ of the age

A rose on the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin to mark International Holocaust Remembrance Day on 27 January. Photograph: Maja Hitij/Getty Images

A rose on the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin to mark International Holocaust Remembrance Day on 27 January. Photograph: Maja Hitij/Getty Images

Fri 2 Apr 2021 02.00 EDT

Rooting around the basement of my family home in Mannheim, south-west Germany, some years ago, I discovered evidence that in 1938 my grandfather had taken advantage of antisemitic Nazi policies to buy a small business from a Jewish family at a low price. I also found letters from the only survivor of this family: his relatives had been killed at Auschwitz. After the war he wrote asking for reparations, but my grandfather refused to face up to his responsibilities.

I was shocked. Seeking to investigate my family's Nazi history for a book I was working on, I started by calling on two first-hand witnesses. My aunt Ingrid, born in 1936 and who suffered through wartime bombardments and postwar poverty, excused her father's actions: "We can't put ourselves in their place. They lived under a dictatorship – you had to be a hero to resist."

My father, Volker, born in 1943 and part of the generation in the 60s that forced German society to face its Nazi past, was much less lenient: "I used to tell my father: what upsets me is not that you've done the Nazi salute, since I might also have done that; its's that even today you still don't recognise the atrocities of the Third Reich and your own responsibility."

Testimonies are less reliable than documents. They are filtered through experience and emotion, sadness and anger, but also love and loyalty. I had to confront them with historical facts. How far was it possible not to be a Nazi under the Third Reich? What were the risks? What did ordinary Germans such as my grandparents know about the Nazis' crimes, about the fate of the Jews?

If conceiving of Auschwitz was difficult, it was still impossible to have "seen nothing, heard nothing" as my grandparents' generation claimed until their deaths. Especially as many took part in auctions held in the apartments of deported Jews: homes abandoned in haste, where there might still have been cups of coffee on the kitchen table or toys in the children's room. Joseph Goebbels himself said that his compatriots plunged "like vultures on the warm crumbs of the Jews".

I also took into account the psychosocial mechanisms that form social and individual attitudes: conformism to moral standards, fear, opportunism, as

well as political and ideological manipulation. The Third Reich did more than just inundate all levels of society with propaganda; it also devised the perfect way of making people become complicit while keeping their consciences clear: making crime legal.

Eventually I came to the conclusion that my grandfather was not blind to the immorality of his actions. He was enabled by the legalisation of the looting of Jewish property, but he acted from an opportunism that was his own. Of his own initiative, he participated in a state-organised crime, feeding into the inhumane enterprise of a regime he didn't even support. The fact that antisemitism was the norm by that time doesn't alter his personal moral failure.

Boycott questions over Beijing Winter Olympics raise eerie echoes of 1936 | Sean Ingle
Read more

Beyond the complexity of historical contexts and the grey areas of any human endeavour, there are actions that were as wrong yesterday as they are today. Taking refuge in moral relativism while facing the shadows of history is an easy escape, but it leads to a dead end. Yet how many countries are stuck in denial under the pretext that they refuse to judge their imperial past by today's standards?

Slavery, for instance, was never "good". In European Christian societies, slavery has always provoked certain resistance and caused unease – it clearly contradicted the messages of love. Throughout history, Christian dogma had repeatedly expressed its rejection of slavery. It was, then, preferably practised far from home, so that English and French ladies and gentlemen could drink their sweet tea or eat their chocolate desserts without having to think about the suffering their pleasure was costing others. So nations and businesses could make vast profits without pausing to consider the human cost, the devastation in faraway lands.

The millions of Europeans who directly and indirectly benefited from the slave trade while keeping a Bible by their beds were not ignorant or unenlightened. They were simply opportunists and hypocrites, bigots

betraying their God when it suited them.

This hypocrisy became all the more unbearable as the political idea that every person is born free and should enjoy the same rights was advancing in western countries. How could Britain, France, the Netherlands and the US, nations that fashioned themselves as the champions of freedom, continue unscrupulously exploiting and oppressing others through slavery and colonialism for centuries? Here again, we can't say that our current perspective is distorting the past. Throughout this dark history, voices, especially those of the enslaved and colonised themselves, were calling out these immoral double standards.

If Britain and other nations want to come to terms with their past, they need to accept a minimal consensus: slavery and colonialism cannot be explained by the "social and moral standards" of a different age, but by a rapacious desire for domination and profit. How convenient that your thirst for exploitation is justified by a racial hierarchy in which you happen to be on top.

Such consensus wouldn't "cancel" the debate; instead it would depolarise it. It would open the possibility for fruitful dialogue and help overcome the old victim-versus-perpetrator dialectic, replacing it with a culture of honesty and responsibility. Despite claims to the contrary, failure to have this dialogue, languishing in denial, is ultimately more damaging than facing the past. It reveals a profound misunderstanding of how important this process is for democratic maturity.

From personal experience, I know the heavy responsibility that comes with judging an era you haven't lived through, populated by dead people who can no longer defend themselves. But I also know how necessary it is to overcome blind loyalty to your own family or country, to work to correct prejudices and take others' perspectives into account, if you want to really search for truth. While investigating my family's history, I often asked myself: what I would have done under the Third Reich? I'll never know. But reading German historian Norbert Frei, I understood that the fact that we cannot know what we would have done "does not mean that we do not know how we should have behaved".

- Géraldine Schwarz is an author, journalist and film-maker. Those Who Forget is published in paperback by Pushkin Press

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2021.04.02 - Around the world

- **Derek Chauvin trial Video of George Floyd's killing retraumatizes many as trial unfolds**
- **George Floyd Officer's supervisor says there was no justification to keep knee on man’s neck**
- **Myanmar coup Military expands internet shutdown**
- **Mozambique Body found in search for missing Briton after Isis attack**

George Floyd

Video of George Floyd's killing retraumatizes many as trial unfolds

Prosecution has shown jury – and those watching at home via livestream – footage of the afternoon, the arrest and Floyd's death

A mural of George Floyd is seen next to Cup Foods in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on 31 March. Photograph: Brandon Bell/Getty Images

A mural of George Floyd is seen next to Cup Foods in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on 31 March. Photograph: Brandon Bell/Getty Images

Amudalat Ajasa in Minneapolis
Fri 2 Apr 2021 02.30 EDT

The public has been able to livestream the murder trial of ex-police officer Derek Chauvin since Monday, as searing video of George Floyd and wrenching testimony from distressed witnesses who watched him die filled

the court room and the senses of millions, from Minneapolis to the rest of the world.

As the trial got fully under way, the prosecution showed the jury not only bystander video, with which many were familiar from but also a lot of never-before-seen footage showing various aspects of Floyd's last afternoon, his arrest and his excruciating death as Chauvin kneeled on his neck last May.

George Floyd's girlfriend gives tearful testimony about addiction struggle
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The prosecution has made it clear they will rely on using video of Floyd's killing as the key tactic in their effort to secure a rare murder conviction of a white police officer for killing a Black person in America.

"Believe your eyes," prosecutor Jerry Blackwell told the jury during opening arguments on Monday.

For many Minnesotans and Black people across the country, in particular, watching the videos of George Floyd's final moments, as he begged and pleaded for mercy under the pressure of Chauvin and two other officers pinning him down, has acutely re-traumatized them.

The prosecution also warned that, contrary to the long eight minutes and 46 seconds that prosecutors originally said was the length of time Chauvin's knee was on Floyd's neck, further evidence has shown it was actually even longer – nine minutes and 29 seconds.

Some had watched footage at the time, but avoided it since; some had made a point of never watching it, perhaps until now.

"For many, the nine minutes and 29 second [video] was the first time, not just jurors, but many viewers had seen that video in its entirety," civil rights attorney Areva Martin told the Guardian.

Abdulaziz Mohamed, the president-elect of the student body of the University of Minnesota, was in such disbelief when he first watched the

original eight minutes and 46 seconds of bystander video last summer that he rewatched it multiple times and now is seeing it again at the trial.

> It's unnerving. It just seems that we are being traumatized, over and over again
>
> *Abdulaziz Mohamed*

"To say that it was traumatizing would be the understatement of the year. It's unnerving. It just seems that we are being traumatized, over and over again," he said.

"It has to get to a point where we are able to collectively recognize not only trauma, but work to fight against a system that upholds and creates that trauma for us constantly," Mohamed added.

Chauvin denies the charges of murder and manslaughter and, as the defendant in his criminal trial, has been sitting in the courtroom all week in downtown Minneapolis, too, while footage and stills of him are being shown repeatedly.

Dr Bula Wayessa, assistant professor of African American and African studies at the University of Minnesota, believes that watching the graphic content from the courtroom is important because it gives a wider range of viewers the chance to see what the Black community has experienced, despite its disturbing content.

"I know the trauma will be with us for so many years to come and even for the generation to come," he said.

Wayessa said, however, that he saw the fear and a hopelessness in his 12-year-old son and nine-year-old daughter after they saw the video while watching television.

He wasn't emotionally ready to give any explanations, he said.

For Areva Martin, who has been a practicing attorney for over two decades, and is based in Los Angeles, she had to prepare herself to watch.

“I will be watching the trial from gavel to gavel. We will be watching those horrific moments, seconds and minutes when Chauvin is literally squeezing the life out of George. We are going to be watching that over and over again,” she said.

Martin has been watching, she said, both with her attorney hat on and through her Black woman lens.

She understands the trauma people endure when watching and rewatching the videos of Floyd’s death, she said.

“It was heart-wrenching for me as a mother, as a wife, as a sister, as an African American to watch it,” she said.

As the wife to her Black husband and the mother of her Black autistic son, Martin said she fears for the safety of the men in her life.

“For every individual watching, especially if you’re African American, you can’t help but believe that that could be you or your loved one,” she said.

Angi Porter, an attorney who lives in south Minneapolis where Floyd was killed, feels all too close to the events.

‘It’s for the people’: how George Floyd Square became a symbol of resistance – and healing
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She grew up being educated in civil rights history, she said, with her family being involved with the NAACP civil rights organization.

She recalled seeing many pictures of lynching and the infamous images of Emmett Till in the pages of a magazine, and so pointed out it is not abnormal to be exposed to some of the gruesome, racially-motivated killings of Black people, via various media outlets throughout history.

“It’s a common experience for Black children to be exposed to horrific images,” Porter said. “I think it is normal as a Black person to have this exposure but I wouldn’t say it’s any less traumatic each time.”

Porter has been watching the trial since jury selection began in early March and applauds the prosecution for sharing videos of Floyd's death because not all of the jury members had seen the video.

"I, of course, watch that video and still feel my heart break each time," Porter continued. "That could be my dad, my brother, my cousin, my friends because they are all Black men. That trauma doesn't go away."

While some choose to watch the trial or read about it, others would rather avoid the trauma.

"The thought of reliving the trauma of watching [Floyd] be killed over and over again … it's really overwhelming to think about," Victoria Millet, an associate in the equal opportunity and affirmative action office, also at the University of Minnesota, said.

"I really try to avoid videos of Black bodied being brutalized."

She worries that traumatic videos will normalize and desensitize people to the deaths of Black bodies.

> We need this video evidence because I think it sheds light on the atrocities that are happening, but as a Black person, it's so difficult to see
>
> *Victoria Millet*

"We need this video evidence because I think it shed light on the atrocities that are happening, but as a Black person, it's so difficult to see," said Millet, who lives five blocks away from where Floyd was killed.

Millet's husband has experienced nightmares from various videos of Black people being killed by police, she said.

"As a Black man in America, it just cannot be healthy for him to walk through a world having those images burned into his head," she said.

But Millet admitted she also feels a sense of guilt for not watching.

Meanwhile, Chauvin's defense has been taking what some see as the route of exploiting racially-charged tropes, emphasizing earlier how Floyd was under the influence of drugs, was found to have drugs in his system, and whose struggle upon being arrested justified restraint, however unpleasant that was to witness.

They intend to argue that it was the drugs and underlying health conditions that killed Floyd, despite the official autopsy concluding it was homicide.

Areva Martin said that such strategies have been long used when there is a white officer and a Black victim.

"The defense is you have an implicitly large Black male that is out of control because of drugs or alcohol and he is acting in such an erratic [fashion] that they must use extraordinary force to subdue him," she said.

Millet briefly watched the first day of testimony and then turned the live stream off when the defense started to attack Floyd's character.

"I thought that was really inappropriate," she said.

She added: "It's really shifting the focus about who the trial is about in a way that I don't think would happen if it were a white victim," she said.

Some observers expressed that what the world is now watching offers a sliver of insight into the experiences so many Black people have endured with police in America – and that the trial has the potential to hold a white officer accountable for a Black person's death for the first time in Minnesota's history.

"In my mind [Chauvin's] trial is a referendum on policing in America," Martin said. "To finally say that police officers are not above the law, that they will face the same punishment as everyday citizens."

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George Floyd

Chauvin's supervisor says there was no justification to keep knee on George Floyd's neck

Sgt David Pleoger tells trial that Chauvin and the other officers should have stopped using force once Floyd stopped resisting

00:41

Derek Chauvin's supervisor says officers 'could have ended restraint' of George Floyd – video

Chris McGreal
Thu 1 Apr 2021 18.13 EDT

Derek Chauvin's police supervisor has told his murder trial that there was no justification for the officer to keep his knee on George Floyd's neck for nine minutes.

Sgt David Pleoger, who arrived at the scene shortly after Floyd was taken away by ambulance, said that Chauvin and other officers holding down the 46-year-old Black man should have stopped using force once Floyd stopped resisting.

Derek Chauvin trial: witness breaks down on stand while watching video
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"When Mr Floyd was no longer offering up any resistance to the officers they could have ended their restraint," he said.

Video recording showed that Chauvin kept pressing his knee into Floyd's neck even after the detained man pleaded that he could not breathe and then stopped moving. Two other officers were also holding Floyd down.

Chauvin, 45, who is white, has denied charges of second- and third-degree murder, and manslaughter, over Floyd's death. He faces up to 40 years in prison if convicted of the most serious charge.

Pleoger is among a number of officers expected to be called as witnesses for the prosecution including the chief of the Minneapolis police department, Medaria Arradondo, who, in a highly unusual move, will give evidence against his own former officer. Arradondo fired Chauvin shortly after Floyd's death.

Pleoger was alerted to concerns about the arrest by a 911 emergency operator and called Chauvin on his cellphone.

In the conversation, Chauvin can be heard saying: "We just had to hold a guy down. He was going crazy."

The supervisor then headed to the scene to determine whether an appropriate level of force has been used. Pleoger said that the first he became aware that Chauvin had his knee on Floyd's neck was when one of the other officers suggested he ask Chauvin about it. Even then, he said, Chauvin did not reveal its full extent.

Pleoger said all police officers are trained that if a suspect is restrained with handcuffs on the ground, they should be turned on to their side as soon as possible because of the danger of "positional asphyxia".

"If they are left on chest or stomachs for too long, their breathing can be compromised," he said.

Floyd was kept in a prone position throughout despite his evident difficulty breathing.

A mural of George Floyd in Minneapolis. Photograph: Brandon Bell/Getty Images

Earlier on Thursday, Floyd's girlfriend told the trial that the couple shared an addiction to opioid painkillers that they struggled to overcome in the weeks before his death.

Courteney Ross said that Floyd had been clean for a while after she took him to hospital when he overdosed, but that he started using again about two weeks before his arrest by Chauvin, a former Minneapolis police officer, last May.

The bulk of Ross's often tearful testimony on the fourth day of the trial focused on the pair's opioid use, as the prosecution sought to head off defense claims that Floyd was killed by drugs because he had opioids and methamphetamine in his system.

Ross's account helps establish that Floyd built up a tolerance to opioids, and that the relatively small amount recorded in the official autopsy would not have been enough to kill him.

The prosecution is also seeking to undermine defense claims that the level of force used by Chauvin in kneeling on Floyd's neck for about nine

minutes was justified because the detained man was high on drugs.

Ross, who dated Floyd for about three years, said they both became hooked after being prescribed opioids to treat chronic pain. “We got addicted and we both tried to break that addiction many times,” she said.

Ross said sports injuries led to Floyd’s addiction to prescription pills obtained legally before the pair started buying black market drugs, including from Maurice Hall, the man who was in the car with Floyd at the time of his death.

These included oxycodone pills, including the powerful prescription opioid OxyContin.

Chauvin’s defense has claimed Floyd was overdosing at the time and that it contributed to his death from heart failure.

The state medical examiner’s report on Floyd’s death recorded that he had the powerful opioid fentanyl and methamphetamine in his system when he died, but it did not list them as a cause of his death.

On Thursday, Derek Smith, the first paramedic on the scene, said that when he arrived he saw three police officers on top of Floyd but no one giving medical treatment. “He wasn’t moving. I didn’t see any chest rise or fall,” he said.

The paramedic tried to find a pulse in Floyd’s neck but could not find one.

The trial continues.

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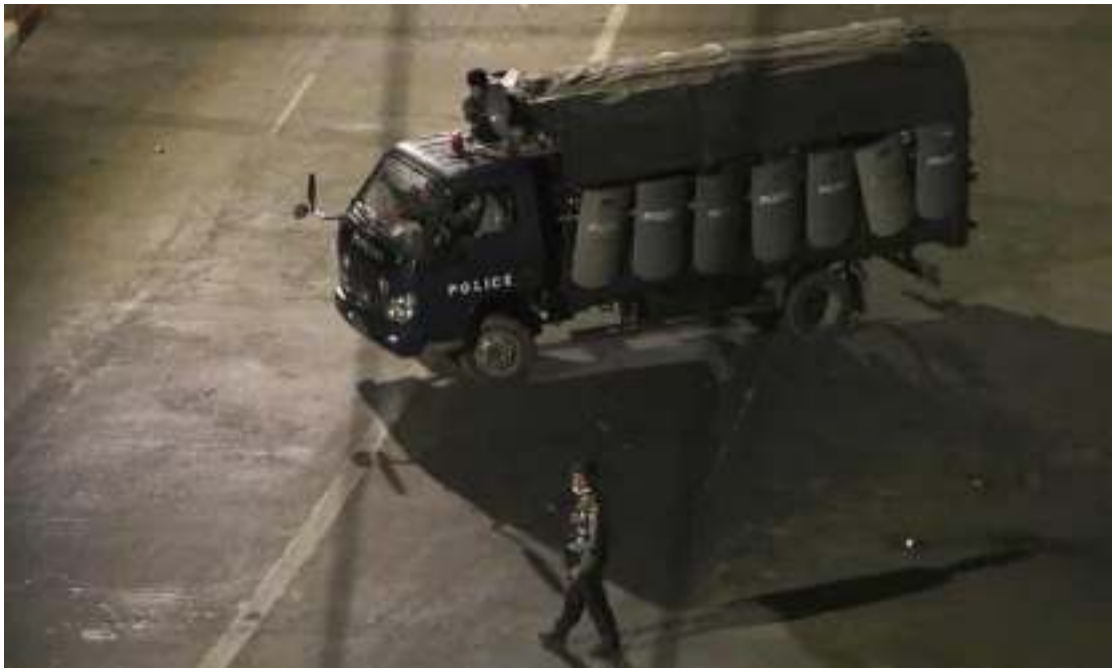
Myanmar

Myanmar coup: military expands internet shutdown

New cuts affect wireless broadband services and come as UN security council expresses ‘deep concern’ at the ‘rapidly deteriorating situation’



Police patrol Kamaryouk township in Yangon on Thursday. Photograph: AP

Police patrol Kamaryouk township in Yangon on Thursday. Photograph: AP

Rebecca Ratcliffe
Fri 2 Apr 2021 02.12 EDT

Myanmar’s military junta has expanded an internet shutdown, further stifling access to information in the country, where hundreds of people have been killed and disappeared following a coup in February.

On Thursday night, ahead of the new restrictions, people rushed to share links to radio channels and communication apps that function offline. On

the streets, protesters held a vigil, using candles to spell the words “We will never surrender”.

Access to the internet had already been severely restricted by the junta. Mobile data, which is the main source of internet access, has been cut for 18 days across the country, while a wider shutdown has been imposed every night for almost 50 days. The new cuts affect wireless broadband, though fibre services still appear to be working.

Aung San Suu Kyi and Australian adviser accused of breaking secrets law
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On Thursday, the UN Security Council “expressed deep concern at the rapidly deteriorating situation” in Myanmar. In a statement, it said it “strongly condemned the use of violence against peaceful protestors and the deaths of hundreds of civilians, including women and children.”

At least 535 people have been killed by the military since the coup, according to the Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), while more than 2,500 people who have been detained. The advocacy group has been unable to confirm the location of the vast majority of recent detainees.

“The military junta’s widespread use of arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances appears designed to strike fear in the hearts of anti-coup protesters,” said Brad Adams, Asia director at Human Rights Watch.

On Thursday, prior to the imposition of new internet restrictions, protesters called for a “flower strike” at bus stops where demonstrators killed by security forces had departed on their last journeys. “We will leave flowers at bus stops tomorrow ... That’s what I want to tell you guys before the internet is down,” Khin Sadar, a protest leader, posted on Facebook.

At protesters earlier in the day, fatalities rose further. According to reports by AFP, a 31-year-old protester was shot dead, and 10 others were wounded, in Monywa in central Myanmar, while one person was also killed, and six injured, in Mandalay.

British foreign minister, Dominic Raab, accused the military of “the wanton killing of innocent people, including children”, announcing sanctions against one of the military’s biggest conglomerates, Myanmar Economic Corporation (MEC). The UK also said it would contribute $700,000 towards UN security council efforts to document serious human rights violations in Myanmar.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies has called for greater protection for medical workers, warning that Myanmar Red Cross first aiders have been “wrongfully arrested, intimidated or injured”, and that Red Cross property and ambulances had been damaged.

“This is unacceptable. Health workers should never be a target. They should be granted unrestricted humanitarian access to people in need,” said Alexander Matheou, the IFRC’s Asia Pacific regional director.

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Mozambique

Body found in search for missing Briton after Mozambique Isis attack

Family of Philip Mawer say it appears he died trying to escape the assault in Palma last week

Philip Mawer's family described him as a 'much-loved son, brother, uncle and friend'. Photograph: RA International

Philip Mawer's family described him as a 'much-loved son, brother, uncle and friend'. Photograph: RA International

Edna Mohamed
Thu 1 Apr 2021 18.11 EDT

A body matching the description of a missing British man has been found, eight days after he was caught up in an attack by Islamic State-linked insurgents in Mozambique.

The family of Philip Mawer said on Thursday that it appeared that he had died while trying to escape the deadly assault on the town of Palma last week.

Mozambique's government has confirmed dozens of deaths in Palma, As many as 60 people – mostly foreign citizens – are unaccounted for following a deadly ambush on a convoy that was trying to escape Palma on Friday. Mawer is believed have been one of those killed.

Only seven vehicles in a convoy of 17 made it to safety after the attack, and among those that did make it through, at least seven people were confirmed dead.

Mawer's family described him as a "much-loved son, brother, uncle and friend".

A statement from Mawer's employer, the leading remote site service provider RA International, on behalf of his family said: "Philip was an ebullient, outgoing character who had something of the lovable rogue about him. He had a wonderful sense of humour and could be relied on to find a humorous take on the most difficult of situations.

"The family is devastated by the loss, and he will be sadly missed. We would like to acknowledge the support we have received from friends, family and Philip's colleagues in a period of tremendous anguish."

RA international has confirmed that seven staff members, including Mawer, remain unaccounted for following the attack on 24 March in Palma.

On Thursday, a boat carrying 1,200 survivors – some of whom had spent days hiding in the bush – reached safety in the port of Pemba.

The statement from Mawer's family goes on to say: "It was the nature of his chosen line of work to be in the more dangerous corners of the world, and Philip's career had previously taken him to Somalia, Sierra Leone, Algeria, Afghanistan and Yemen. His ability to get things done in the most hostile of environments made him a valued colleague."

Ferry brings 1,200 survivors of Isis Mozambique massacre to safety
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A Foreign Office spokesperson has said in response to news that a body had been found in the hunt for Mawer: “We’re deeply concerned by this latest development. We are in close contact with the family and are working with the government of Mozambique and the Met police to confirm further details. We stand with the people of Mozambique against the threat of terrorism and are working with the government to restore peace and stability.”

The rebels are thought to have killed more than 2,000 people and displaced an estimated 670,000 throughout three years of fighting in the country.

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Headlines saturday 3 april 2021

- **Coronavirus NHS feels strain as tens of thousands of staff suffer long Covid**
- **Coronavirus vaccine Experts stress benefits outweigh risks after seven UK deaths**
- **US Capitol One officer and suspect dead after car rams into barrier**
- **Richard Okorogheye Let someone know you are safe, say Met police**

NHS

Strain on NHS as tens of thousands of staff suffer long Covid

ONS says at least 122,000 health service workers have condition, threatening patient care

- Coronavirus – latest updates
- See all our coronavirus coverage

Denis Campbell Health policy editor

Sat 3 Apr 2021 11.47 EDT First published on Sat 3 Apr 2021 02.00 EDT

NHS staff inside a Covid intensive care unit in Coventry. Health staff have the highest rates of long Covid among all professions in the UK. Photograph: Jonny Weeks/The Guardian

Intense pressures on the already overstretched NHS are being exacerbated by the tens of thousands of health staff who are sick with long Covid, doctors and hospital bosses say.

At least 122,000 NHS personnel have the condition, the Office for National Statistics disclosed in a detailed report that showed 1.1 million people in the UK were affected by the condition. That is more than any other occupational group and ahead of teachers, of whom 114,000 have it.

Patient care is being hit because many of those struggling with long Covid are only able to work part-time, are too unwell to perform their usual duties, or often need time off because they are in pain, exhausted or have "brain fog".

"Ongoing illness can have a devastating impact on individual doctors, both physically and by leaving them unable to work. Furthermore, it puts a huge strain on the health service, which was already vastly understaffed before the pandemic hit," said Dr Helena McKeown, the workforce lead at the British Medical Association, which represents doctors.

"With around 30,000 sickness absences currently linked to Covid in the NHS in England, we cannot afford to let any more staff become ill. Simply put, if they are off sick, they're unable to provide care and patients will not get the care and treatment they need.

"In the longer term, if more staff face ongoing illness from past Covid-19 infection, the implications for overall workforce numbers will be disastrous."

Chris Hopson, the chief executive of NHS Providers, which speaks for health trusts in England, said: "Long Covid is a real and growing concern for trust leaders because of its impact on the health and wellbeing of the NHS staff affected and the effect their unavoidable absence has on the ability to deliver healthcare services.

"It is particularly worrying that in the latest ONS data healthcare workers self-reported the highest rates of long Covid among all professions, with

nearly 4% – accounting for about 122,000 of the estimated 1.094 million people in the UK reporting ongoing symptoms."

Dealing with long Covid will be "a significant challenge [for the NHS] for months and most likely years to come", he added.

A Facebook group for doctors with long Covid has 1,200 members, though a small number of those are thought to be fellow medics who are studying the condition.

Dr Sarah Burns and Dr Sue Warren, the GPs who set up the group, said recently in the BMJ that doctors incapacitated due to long Covid feel "intense feelings of failure and grief for leaving colleagues with increased workloads and not personally contributing to the 'fight against Covid'. This self-stigmatisation and shame is common among sick doctors."

They added that "many felt angry that they had, almost certainly, contracted Covid-19 in their workplaces but now felt abandoned or even penalised by colleagues. A small but not insignificant number have been asked to leave roles due to prolonged sick leave." Some doctors with long Covid say the NHS has not understood their condition and that help so far has been patchy.

Prof Andrew Goddard, the president of the Royal College of Physicians (RCP), which represents hospital doctors, said: "Anyone with long Covid should be able to expect that those looking after them in the NHS understand their condition. It is worrying that doctors with long Covid have described their condition as not understood by their colleagues."

Recent RCP surveys have shown that a small but growing number of doctors have symptoms of long Covid, especially fatigue, pain and breathlessness. In February more doctors were off sick because of that than due to acute Covid itself, Goddard added.

Layla Moran, the Liberal Democrat MP who chairs the all-party parliamentary group on coronavirus, wants ministers to classify long Covid as an occupational disease and set up a scheme to compensate workers in

health, social care and other public service roles who have been left unable to work because they have it.

The ONS found about 30,000 social care workers also had long Covid, which could affect staffing levels in care homes and among services that provide at-home care.

NHS England said its new network of specialist long Covid clinics was already treating staff with the condition.

A spokesperson said: “Our network of long Covid clinics is already supporting healthcare staff who are experiencing ongoing coronavirus symptoms, to make sure they get the right support.

“We have also put in place a comprehensive package of support for the mental health impacts of the pandemic, including dedicated staff mental health hubs across the country, 24/7 text and phone support and free access to self-help apps.”

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Vaccines and immunisation

Experts stress Covid vaccine benefits outweigh risks after seven UK deaths

30 reported cases of blood clotting issues after AstraZeneca jab out of 18.1m doses

- Coronavirus – latest updates
- See all our coronavirus coverage

Doses of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine. Photograph: Diego Radames/Sopa Images/Rex/Shutterstock

Doses of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine. Photograph: Diego Radames/Sopa Images/Rex/Shutterstock

Nicola Davis Science correspondent
@NicolaKSDavis
Fri 2 Apr 2021 13.18 EDT

Further cases of a rare blood clotting syndrome including seven deaths have been reported among recipients of the Oxford/AstraZeneca jab in the UK, although experts say the numbers remain low and the benefits of the vaccine far outweigh any risks.

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) runs a "yellow card" scheme to pick up suspected side-effects or other concerns for medicines and medical devices.

According to the latest figures from the MHRA, there have been 22 reports of a blood clot in the brain called cerebral venous sinus thrombosis (CVST) that was accompanied by a low platelet count as well as eight reports of other blood clotting problems with low platelets, among recipients of the Oxford/AstraZeneca jab up to and including 24 March. Platelets are fragments in the blood that help it to clot. Of these 30 reports, the MHRA told the Guardian seven people had died.

However, such cases remain rare: the MHRA notes that by 24 March, 18.1m doses of the Covid-19 Oxford vaccine had been given.

There have also been two cases of CVST among people who received the Pfizer/BioNTech jab, neither of them accompanied by a low platelet count.

Concerns over rare blood clotting events have dogged the Oxford jab in recent weeks. The MHRA and the European Medicines Agency (EMA) have said it has not been proven that the events were caused by the jab, and the benefits of vaccination far outweigh the risks, given the danger posed by Covid. But the EMA said a warning about such events would be included in the vaccine information while investigations continued.

Variants v vaccinations: what the dueling trends mean for Covid in the US
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The EMA says it has looked into 14 deaths reported by 22 March related to unusual blood clots in recipients of the jab, although not all of these were associated with CVST.

While many countries have resumed use of the vaccine after pausing their programmes, others have remained nervous. Among them, Canada has suspended use of the jab for people under the age of 55, while Germany has suspended routine use of the jab in the under-60s. The latter has noted 31 cases of CVST after giving 2.7m doses of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine, 19 of which were associated with low platelets, and nine deaths.

Estimates of CVST in an unvaccinated population vary, but it is rare, with upper estimates of 15 to 16 cases per million people per year.

At present, most of these rare clotting events appear to be occurring in women under the age of 65 – but quite why this is remains unclear.

Some have said CVST is more common in this group in general, while others have noted that countries such as Germany were initially reluctant to approve the Oxford/AstraZeneca jab for older people, meaning most of the recipients were younger people, primarily healthcare workers and teachers – the majority of whom are women. This may also explain the apparent disparities between Germany and the UK, as the latter approved the jab for older people from the off.

According to an expert haematology panel whose guidance is being cited by the British Society for Haematology, blood clots with low platelets after coronavirus vaccination have been highlighted as affecting patients of all ages and both genders. The syndrome of blood clots and low platelets appears to be similar to a condition sometimes seen in patients who have been given the blood-thinner heparin, they add.

Dr June Raine, the MHRA's chief executive, said the agency was continuing to conduct a thorough review of the reports, but vaccinations would continue.

"The benefits of Covid-19 vaccine AstraZeneca in preventing Covid-19 infection and its complications continue to outweigh any risks and the public should continue to get their vaccine when invited to do so," she said. "We are asking healthcare professionals to report any cases they suspect to be linked with Covid-19 vaccination via the coronavirus Yellow Card website."

Paul Hunter, a professor in medicine at the University of East Anglia, said the new figures increased concerns about a possible causal link between the Oxford jab and CVST, but stressed that such events remained very rare.

“Risk of death is still much, much greater in people who are unvaccinated than in people who have had the [Oxford] vaccine,” he said. “It would not put me off my next dose.”

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Washington DC

US Capitol: one officer and suspect dead after car rams into barrier

Police shoot suspect after he allegedly rams vehicle and then lunges at officers with a knife

01:24

US Capitol: officer dead after suspect rams car against security barrier – video report

Daniel Strauss in Washington and Martin Pengelly
Fri 2 Apr 2021 20.38 EDT

A police officer and a suspect were dead on Friday after the suspect rammed a vehicle into two US Capitol police officers outside Congress in Washington, then lunged at others with a knife.

The suspect was shot. Two officers were taken to hospital. Police named the officer who died as William “Billy” Evans, an 18-year veteran of the department.

The incident happened just after 1pm. Amid initial confusion, the Capitol was placed on lockdown, with staff told to “seek cover” amid reports of an “external security threat”. One congressional reporter posted to social media dramatic video of a helicopter landing outside the east front of the building.

At a briefing, Yogananda Pittman, acting chief of the Capitol police, said she spoke “with a heavy heart”.

A handout photo shows Officer William ‘Billy’ Evans. Photograph: USCP/EPA

“The suspect rammed his car into two of our officers,” she said, “then hit the North Barricade barrier. That suspect exited the vehicle with a knife in hand. Our officers then engaged that suspect.

“He did not respond to verbal commands. The suspect did start lunging toward US Capitol police officers, at which time US Capitol police officers fired upon the suspect. The suspect has been pronounced deceased.”

“Two US Capitol police officers were transported to two different hospitals, and it is with a very, very heavy heart that I announce one of our officers has succumbed to his injuries.”

In a subsequent statement, Pittman said: “It is with profound sadness that I share the news of the passing of Officer William ‘Billy’ Evans this afternoon.”

Evans started work for the Capitol police in 2003, she said, and was a member of the first responders’ unit.

The House speaker, Nancy Pelosi, ordered flags at the Capitol to be flown at half-staff, in recognition of the fallen officer. Her Democratic counterpart in the Senate, Chuck Schumer, said: “I’m heartbroken for the officer killed today defending our Capitol and for his family. We’re in their debt.”

From the Camp David retreat in Maryland, Joe Biden ordered the flag at the White House to be flown a half-staff too.

“I have been receiving ongoing briefings from my homeland security adviser and will be getting further updates as the investigation proceeds,” the president said. “I want to express the nation’s gratitude to the Capitol police … and others who quickly responded to this attack. [We] mourn the loss of yet another courageous Capitol police officer.”

Kamala Harris said Evans had “made the ultimate sacrifice” on behalf of the American people.

Congresswoman Liz Cheney of Wyoming, a member of Republican leadership, tweeted her condolences.

Even after the lockdown at the Capitol was lifted at around 3.30pm, congressional staffers were still being told to stay in buildings and not go outside.

“The external security threat located at all of the US Capitol campus buildings has been neutralized but [Capitol police are] continuing to investigate out of an abundance of caution and there is still no entry or exit permitted at this time,” read a police advisory. “You may move about within the buildings and underground between buildings. If you are outside, seek cover.”

The Capitol has been on heightened security alert since 6 January, when supporters of Donald Trump stormed the building in an attempt to overturn his election defeat. Five people died as a direct result of the attack, one of them a Capitol police officer who confronted rioters.

Some of the security fencing put up after the attack has recently been removed.

Pittman “asked that the public continue to keep US Capitol police and their families in your prayers. This has been an extremely difficult time for US Capitol police, after the events of 6 January and now the events that have occurred here today.”

On Friday, USCP said Constitution Avenue between Second Street NE and First Street NW and First Street between Constitution Avenue NE and Independence Avenue SE were closed to traffic.

National guard members were filmed marching into the Capitol.

Capitol police officers salute as a procession carries the remains of the officer killed. Photograph: José Luis Magaña/AP

Law enforcement officials identified the suspect as 25-year-old Noah Green. Investigators were still digging into his background and examining whether he had a history of mental health issues as they tried to discern a motive. They were working to obtain warrants to access his online accounts.

Pittman said the suspect did not appear to have been on the police’s radar. But the attack underscored that the building and campus and the officers charged with protecting them remain potential targets for violence.

Green described himself as a follower of the Nation of Islam and its controversial leader, Louis Farrakhan, and spoke of going through a difficult time during which he leaned on his faith, according to recent messages posted online that have since been taken down. The messages were captured by the group Site, which tracks online activity.

“To be honest these past few years have been tough, and these past few months have been tougher,” he wrote. “I have been tried with some of the biggest, unimaginable tests in my life. I am currently now unemployed after I left my job partly due to afflictions, but ultimately, in search of a spiritual journey.”

Rob Contee, the acting chief of the Metropolitan police, said at a briefing that there did not appear to be a link to terrorism or a threat to any member of Congress, or any ongoing threat to the Capitol or the neighbourhood around it.

The House and Senate are not in session but some elected officials and staff were in the building on Friday. Ro Khanna, a Democratic representative from California, spoke to CNN from his car, where he said officers had told him to go after he came back to the Capitol from going out for lunch.

“It’s really sad,” he said. “Once the barriers were removed we were moving back to some sense of normalcy, but this just shows the level of risk there still is.

“I can’t imagine saying that going to the United States Capitol to represent your constituents is actually a dangerous thing.”

Contee said: “Whether the attack was at law enforcement or whoever, we have a responsibility to get to the bottom of and we’ll do that.”

Gabrielle Canon and the Associated Press contributed reporting

This article was amended on 3 April 2021. Louis Farrakhan is the leader of the Nation of Islam, not the founder as stated in an earlier version.

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London

Richard Okorogheye: let someone know you are safe, say Met police

‘You are not in trouble’ and only concern is your safety, police tell missing London teenager

Photo of missing Richard Okorogheye alongside a screengrab of CCTV footage dated 23 March of him in Loughton, in the Epping Forest district of Essex. Photograph: Metropolitan Police/PA

Photo of missing Richard Okorogheye alongside a screengrab of CCTV footage dated 23 March of him in Loughton, in the Epping Forest district of Essex. Photograph: Metropolitan Police/PA

Molly Blackall
Sat 3 Apr 2021 05.14 EDT

Police investigating the disappearance of 19-year-old Richard Okorogheye have implored him to get in touch, saying: “Our only concern is your

safety."

Okorogheye, who has sickle cell disease, has not made contact with his family since leaving his home in Ladbroke Grove, west London, on Monday 22 March at about 8.30pm. He was reported missing two days later.

The teenager was captured on CCTV in Loughton, Essex, in the early hours of Tuesday 23 March, walking towards Epping Forest. That was the last known sighting of Okorogheye, and police said his phone had not been used since his disappearance.

Searches of the forest entered their third day on Saturday, as the Metropolitan police urged the Oxford Brookes student to contact them or someone he trusts. The Met said they had not found anything of relevance in the previous two days of searches.

Det Supt Danny Gosling, the head of the Met's central west public protection unit, said: "People can go missing from home for any of number of reasons. Our job is not to cast judgment but to work to find them and bring them home safely.

"My message to Richard is clear: our only concern is your safety. You are not in trouble and have done nothing wrong. If you read or hear this message we would ask you to contact us, or someone you trust, to let us know you are safe. Your loved ones, and many other people who you do not even know, are very concerned.

"I would also like to thank the public for their continued support in sharing our appeals, checking doorbell and dashcam footage and passing on any information. As our efforts to find Richard continue, the eyes and ears of ordinary members of the public will be essential tools in our search."

Okorogheye's mother, Evidence Joel, previously said her son was struggling to cope with the pressures of university and had been shielding during the coronavirus pandemic. He would only leave the house to visit hospital for regular blood transfusions.

Okorogheye was seen boarding a number 23 bus headed southbound in Ladbroke Grove at 8.44pm on Monday 22 March, with CCTV footage showing he was wearing all black and carrying a black satchel bag with a white Adidas logo, worn across his lower back.

According to police, inquiries have shown he took a taxi from the W2 area of London to a residential street in Loughton. He was then captured on CCTV walking alone towards Epping Forest at 12.39am on Tuesday 23 March.

Anyone with information is asked to call police on 101.

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2021.04.03 - Coronavirus

- **Live Coronavirus live news: two visitors for England care home residents from mid-April; India cases hit six-month high**
- **Travel Boris Johnson prepares to outline tests for restart of foreign trips**
- **Australia Covid vaccine rollout to continue after blood clot case in Melbourne**
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Coronavirus live
Coronavirus

US sets new record with 4m Covid jabs in day – as it happened

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Coronavirus

Boris Johnson prepares to outline tests for restart of foreign travel

UK adds four more countries to ‘red list’ in effort to stop spread of vaccine-resistant Covid variants

- Coronavirus – latest updates
- See all our coronavirus coverage

Heather Stewart, Nicola Davis and Jason Burke

Fri 2 Apr 2021 13.12 EDT Last modified on Sat 3 Apr 2021 00.11 EDT

The UK added the Philippines, Pakistan, Kenya and Bangladesh to the list of countries from which almost all arrivals are banned. Photograph: Frank Augstein/AP

Boris Johnson is preparing to outline the tests the government will use to determine whether foreign travel could resume this summer, after four more countries were added to the "red list" of areas from which almost all arrivals are banned.

The government announced on Friday that the Philippines, Pakistan, Kenya, and Bangladesh would join 35 other countries on the list, as ministers sought to prevent potentially vaccine-resistant variants of Covid-19 from entering the UK.

UK and Irish nationals and residents can return from red-list countries but they must pay to enter compulsory hotel quarantine.

The changes will come into effect at 4am on 9 April. "The government has made it consistently clear it will take decisive action if necessary to contain the virus and has added these destinations to the red list to protect public health," a government statement said.

To the dismay of some experts, ministers have rejected the idea of widening the list to include European countries such as France and Germany, where a third wave of Covid infections is causing growing concern about the potential for mutations.

"It is bonkers," said Gabriel Scally, a visiting professor of public health at the University of Bristol and a member of the Independent Sage committee, adding that everyone entering the country should go into hotel quarantine.

"The biggest risks are from countries on our doorstep where the virus is engaged in exponential growth, it is out of control, and France is definitely one of them."

He added: "The only thing that is saving the UK at the moment is the high levels of vaccination – but the government is putting all that progress at risk by having a public health policy on our borders that is a leaky sieve."

Dr Kit Yates, the co-director of the centre for mathematical biology at the University of Bath and also a member of Independent Sage, said the risks

would increase as Covid restrictions were eased, potentially increasing the R-number.

“New importations have occurred at a time when the reproduction number has been less than one and chains of transmission are more likely to be broken naturally,” he said. “The worry is that this will no longer be the case as we begin to open up.”

The R number is the average number of people an infected person goes on to infect: when it is above 1 an epidemic can grow exponentially and when it is below 1 the disease will eventually fizzle out. Among concerns, Yates noted the South Africa variant was at high levels in countries which were not yet on the government’s “red list”.

The prime minister told the liaison committee of senior MPs last week that placing France on the red list could not be ruled out, but underlined the close trading and other ties between the two countries that would make it difficult to implement.

“We are certainly looking at that but people should be under no illusions that it would have consequences,” Johnson said, stressing the high volume of cross-channel trade.

The prime minister is expected to set out further details on Monday of how and when foreign travel could potentially resume, with a No 10 source warning the government would continue to be “pretty tough on borders” for the time being.

Ministers are known to be considering a “traffic light” system, with the toughest quarantine and testing restrictions applied to red list countries, while quarantine-free travel could potentially be opened up to “green” countries.

Government sources confirmed that a key criterion in deciding which countries would be “green” would be the proportion of the population that is vaccinated, as well as the prevalence of “variants of concern”.

Places with the highest rates of vaccination at present include the US, Israel, Chile and the Maldives.

The government's roadmap says foreign travel will not resume before 17 May at the earliest. For the time being, travel for all but a few essential purposes remains banned.

In Kenya, the travel ban to the UK had been widely predicted, and reaction has been largely muted. But some in the eastern African economic powerhouse and major tourist destination accused the UK of "medical racism".

"Once the US, UK and EU reach herd immunity by June, it will close itself against Africa, Latin America, Middle East and Asia. It will be medical racism," Donald Kipkorir, a lawyer in Nairobi, told the Nation newspaper.

Others pointed out that the ban came days after British soldiers tested positive for Covid-19 after arriving in Kenya. The British army training camp in Kenya has been placed in enhanced isolation after positive tests by a "very small number of soldiers", the British high commission in Nairobi said.

The decision will reinforce widespread resentment at western measures to protect economies and public health, as even wealthier African countries struggle to procure vaccines. The ban will further damage the Kenyan tourist industry, removing one of the few remaining direct transport links between the UK and sub-Saharan Africa.

Health campaigners in the Philippines lamented the travel ban. Dr Joseph Carabeo, the co-convener of the campaign group Shape Up, which has campaigned for changes to Manila's Covid strategy, said the UK's decision was understandable, given the surge in infections.

But he added that he hoped the UK would recognise that sharing vaccine supplies fairly around the world would also protect the British public in the long term. "Even if you have herd immunity in your country, it is still a small globe," he said.

In Pakistan, where cases are also surging, the prime minister, Imran Khan, has said the recent variant of the virus has been brought by people from the UK who have travelled to Lahore, Islamabad and Peshawar.

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Health

Australian Covid vaccine rollout to continue after blood clot case in Melbourne

The acting chief medical officer says it is ‘likely’ the 44-year-old Victorian man’s condition is related to the vaccine

- Seven UK recipients of Oxford jab reported dead after clotting

Australia’s vaccination program will continue as health authorities investigate whether blood clots developed by a Melbourne man are linked to the AstraZeneca jab. Photograph: Dado Ruvić/Reuters

Australia’s vaccination program will continue as health authorities investigate whether blood clots developed by a Melbourne man are linked to the AstraZeneca jab. Photograph: Dado Ruvić/Reuters

Lisa Cox and *Michael McGowan*

Sat 3 Apr 2021 02.20 EDT

Australia's acting chief medical officer says there will be no changes to the national vaccination program for Covid-19 while health authorities continue to investigate whether blood clots developed by a 44-year-old Victorian man are linked to the AstraZeneca jab.

Prof Michael Kidd said the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (Atagi) and the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) had not recommended any change to the rollout of the vaccine following an urgent meeting of health authorities on Saturday.

Kidd said there was currently no definitive evidence of a connection between the 44-year-old man's condition and the vaccination he received in March.

However, given the clinical features of the case were similar to other cases overseas, he said a connection was likely.

Seven UK recipients of Oxford jab reported dead after clotting
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"While at this time, we don't have evidence of causality, the clinical features of this case, are consistent with what we have seen in international reports of similar cases. And it is likely that the case reported yesterday is related to the vaccine," Kidd said.

"This would be consistent with international experience."

He said authorities investigating the case were working with regulators in the European Union and the UK, where millions of doses of the vaccine have been administered, and would provide further advice in coming days.

He said serious side-effects were rare and Australians, most of whom have not yet been vaccinated, were at greater risk from further outbreaks of Covid-19.

“If we experienced a severe outbreak – especially among older Australians and those with severe health issues – the risk is far greater than the very small potential risk of a very rare clotting disorder associated with the vaccine,” Kidd said.

Kidd was unable to provide an update on the Victorian man’s condition on Saturday.

State healthcare workers were being instructed to be on the lookout for what were considered to be very rare signs of blood clotting among those who had received the vaccine.

The man received the vaccine on 22 March and days later he presented at Melbourne’s Box Hill hospital suffering from a fever and abdominal pain. He was found to have abdominal clots with a low platelet count.

He showed symptoms similar to those which led some European countries to pause their rollout of the vaccine after some people who had received the jab were reported to have developed clotting in Europe.

Those cases were from millions of people who have received the vaccine in Europe, and the European Medicines Agency said preliminary data from its review of the cases suggested the risk of blood clots following the vaccine was potentially one in 100,000.

In an earlier statement, Australia’s independent regulator of vaccines, the TGA, stressed “no cause-and-effect relationship between Covid-19 vaccination and this case has been established at this stage”. However, the head of the TGA, John Skerritt, confirmed it was investigating the case.

“A small number of people, predominantly overseas, have presented with clotting disorders following vaccination with the AstraZeneca vaccine,” he said.

“One case has been reported in Australia [and] is being investigated by the Therapeutic Goods Administration.

“Medical experts within the European Medicines Agency and the UK Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency have not confirmed a causal link with the AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine but continue to look in great detail at the available data and clinical circumstances around these reports.”

“Similarly, our expert committees, the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (Atagi) and the National Vaccine Safety Investigation Group (VSIG), in conjunction with our independent regulator, the TGA are monitoring the situation closely, both in Australia and internationally.”

On Wednesday, German health authorities in Berlin and Munich suspended the rollout of the AstraZeneca vaccine for those under the age of 60 following new concerns around rare blood clotting. It came after the country’s medical regulator announced receiving 31 reports of blood clots in recipients of the vaccine. Nine of those people died.

A day earlier, Canada made a similar move due to the same concerns, halting the rollout for people under age 55.

Atagi on Friday released a statement aimed at helping state healthcare workers to identify and respond to any potential instances of clotting cases.

This article was amended on 3 April 2021 to clarify that the 31 cases of blood clots in vaccine recipients were reported in Germany alone, not Europe.

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Energy bills

Big energy bill in the Covid crisis? Switch to save £250 or more

Working from home in the Covid crisis means many Britons will be using more energy than before. Photograph: JGI/Jamie Grill/Getty Images/Tetra images RF

Working from home in the Covid crisis means many Britons will be using more energy than before. Photograph: JGI/Jamie Grill/Getty Images/Tetra images RF

The watchdog raised its price cap this week, but that doesn’t mean you have to pay more

- Coronavirus – latest updates
- See all our coronavirus coverage

Miles Brignall
Sat 3 Apr 2021 02.00 EDT

Millions of people who were already having to contend with higher gas and electricity bills as a result of working from home will see their charges rise by a further £96 a year from this week, adding a total of about £1bn to bills. But by switching, you can easily save £250 a year or more.

On Thursday, households signed up to their suppliers' standard tariff had their energy bills increase by more than 9% after the energy regulator, Ofgem, increased its cap – the highest price that suppliers can charge.

The move, which affects more than half of all households in Great Britain, adds about £96 a year to average dual-fuel bills paid by direct debit, assuming you are on a default standard tariff. Anyone choosing quarterly bills will pay about £100 more a year.

Families with higher than average energy use, and those still working at home who have seen their energy consumption jump by as much as 30%, will be hit by even bigger price increases from this week.

However, you don’t have to passively take it. Switching experts say that almost everyone affected can save at least £250 a year by moving to a better deal.

In 2019, Ofgem introduced its price cap after criticism that the energy firms were unfairly penalising customers – often elderly people – who rarely switched supplier and found themselves on their provider’s most expensive standard variable tariff.

> Since the price cap’s introduction, consumers have seen four cuts in prices but two big increases

Customers who were previously on a fixed tariff that then came to an end are similarly affected, as they will have been placed on the standard tariff by default.

Ofgem sets the maximum prices suppliers can charge – the price cap – every six months after examining wholesale gas and electricity prices and the distribution and other charges faced by suppliers.

Since the price cap’s introduction, consumers have seen four cuts in prices but two big increases. Analysis from the energy price comparison site TheEnergyShop.com shows that the changes have left standard variable tariffs £41, or 3.5%, lower than they were before the cap came into effect. Over that time, wholesale gas prices have fallen by 13%, it said this week.

Joe Malinowski, the founder of TheEnergyShop.com, says: “Energy price hikes are never welcome even at the best of times. But with many households already struggling financially from pandemic-related lockdowns, these increases are really going to hurt. The situation is made much worse, we believe, by the regulator repeatedly telling households that they are somehow being protected by the energy price cap and that the prices they pay for their energy are fair.”

The price comparison websites have queued up to say that this week’s price increase should be the thing that prompts affected customers to switch to a better deal.

Customers on standard tariffs are free to leave at any time, and there really isn't any excuse for not switching, given that it takes about 15 minutes.

The very cheapest dual-fuel tariffs start at about £850 a year – for average consumption – compared with the new Ofgem-capped price of £1,138.

For a quote, get your annual consumption figure from your latest bill and do a comparison using one of the switching websites. We like Energyhelpline.com, TheEnergyShop.com and uSwitch.com for ease of use. Make sure you filter the results to include the plans that require you go direct, as this will show you the whole of the market, not only the firms paying commission to the switching site.

Customers on standard tariffs are free to leave at any time. Photograph: Simon Dack/Alamy

The cheapest firms at the moment – companies such as Orbit Energy, Neo Energy, Outfox The Market, and Green – are all at about the £850-£885-a-year mark for average consumption.

Igloo Energy, the company that tops the Citizens Advice service ratings, is about £955 a year. However, Outfox The Market (£878 a year) and Green (£886) get almost as good customer service scores and both offer 100%

renewable electricity, which is likely to be a big draw for many Guardian readers.

Note all those prices are for variable tariffs, which means that the price could go up during the year. If you want to fix your prices for the year, we would go with Green's Pauli tariff, which was this week priced at £938 a year. Unlike some other suppliers, Green will not hassle you every week to have a smart meter installed.

Once you have chosen your new supplier, simply log on to their website and sign up. You do not need to contact your existing provider.

Guy Anker from the website MoneySavingExpert.com says: "Our message is, and has always been, that if you're on a standard tariff, don't just sit back and accept the rip-off. With many of us still spending more time at home and using more energy as a result, it makes our call even more pertinent."

Switching is easy, even in a pandemic, he says. "No one needs to visit your home (unless you want a smart meter) and you won't be left without gas or electricity. All that changes is the price and which firm bills you for your energy. It's that straightforward."

How the energy suppliers measure up

For a quote, get your annual consumption figure from your latest bill and do a comparison using one of the switching websites. Photograph: Rosemary Roberts/Alamy

Citizens Advice has helpfully just published its latest customer service ratings, giving a good guide to the best energy suppliers – and the ones to maybe avoid.

Customer service levels at some energy firms have been very poor over the past year or so, so it is worth checking the data before you switch. Citizens Advice's latest star ratings (covering customer service scores for October to December 2020) show Igloo Energy, M&S Energy, Outfox The Market, Octopus Energy and Co-operative Energy were the top performers. Green, goto.energy and EDF also scored well.

At the other end of the table, Orbit Energy, Symbio Energy, Utilita Energy, PFP Energy and Enstroga were the poorest performers. E.ON and Utility Point also scored badly.

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2021.04.03 - Opinion

- For Alex Salmond and his new Alba party, the prospects are not looking good
- A new biography ‘unveils’ Philip Roth as a misogynist. Tell me something I don’t know
- The poisonously patronising Sewell report is historically illiterate
- Marsha de Cordova The Sewell report is an attempt to sow division
- Cartoon Martin Rowson on the Tory cabinet's Good Friday plans

OpinionScottish politics

For Alex Salmond and his new Alba party, the prospects are not looking good

David Clegg

A new poll forecasts no seats won in next month's Holyrood elections – and he has a dreadful net favourability rating of -61

'Alex Salmond's ego is at risk of taking another bruising.' Photograph: Andrew Milligan/PA

'Alex Salmond's ego is at risk of taking another bruising.' Photograph: Andrew Milligan/PA

Sat 3 Apr 2021 05.00 EDT

It's Al-a-buh.

Of all the controversies surrounding Alex Salmond's new political party, his inability to pronounce it was the most unexpected. When you're one of the most famous Scottish nationalists in history, launching a new party named after the Gaelic word for Scotland, you really should research how to say it in the native tongue. Instead, the former first minister enraged purists and amused opponents by enunciating Alba with a suspiciously Sassenach two syllables.

His pronunciation isn't the only aspect of Salmond's new party that's dividing opinion. Depending on who you listen to, Alba is either one man's ego trip, a desperate scheme to destroy Nicola Sturgeon or the best chance of forcing Boris Johnson to concede a second independence referendum. So which is it really?

If Salmond's ambition is to bolster his ego, the early evidence is that he could be in for disappointment. The first opinion poll to include the Alba party, published by my newspaper the Courier on Thursday, predicts the party will get no seats in next month's Scottish parliament elections. Even more worryingly for Salmond, his net favourability rating is a dreadful -61, making him significantly more unpopular with Scots than even Johnson (-32).

Those numbers seem to have dented his self-confidence. Consider the national statesman who took Scotland to within 200,000 votes of independence in 2014 and compare him with the diminished figure who presided over Alba's blunder-filled campaign launch last weekend, then unveiled a string of candidates with track records of dodgy remarks or offensive social media posts.

Salmond has surely been on one of the most dramatic post-resignation journeys in the history of elected office. Since losing his Westminster seat, four years ago, he has launched a highly controversial talkshow on the Vladimir Putin-backed RT television network; faced a number of sexual harassment allegations dating back to his time as first minister; won a court battle with the Scottish government over how it investigated those claims; been acquitted of 13 counts of sexual assault, including attempted rape, after a high court trial; and publicly accused Sturgeon's husband, Peter Murrell, and other senior figures in the SNP of being involved in a

“malicious plan” to have him jailed. It is not really surprising there has not been much time for candidate-vetting.

One candidate whose conduct Salmond has spent a lot of time examining recently is Sturgeon. Five weeks ago he told the Holyrood inquiry into the Scottish government’s botched handling of the harassment complaints that he believes his former deputy broke the ministerial code on numerous occasions during the process. It was widely interpreted as an attempt to end her political career. If it was, it failed – the independent Hamilton inquiry cleared the first minister of any wrongdoing. This is why some are convinced Alba is primarily a vehicle to heap more pressure on Sturgeon, who now believes Salmond mistreated at least one woman who worked for him, and is not fit for public office.

Alex Salmond's back in town and it's still all about him | Katy Strickland
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Salmond publicly insists his comeback is motivated purely by his desire to see Scotland leave the United Kingdom, and has promised supporters that backing the SNP in the first (constituency) vote and Alba in the second (regional) ballot will secure a “supermajority for independence” at Holyrood. While the early polling tells a different story, Salmond will still fancy his own chances in the north-east of Scotland, where he enjoys a considerable personal vote and is standing as his party’s top candidate.

Alba could also have success attracting socially conservative voters who are uncomfortable with SNP policies such as gender self-identification. While the schism in Scottish nationalism has largely been framed as a personal feud between Salmond and Sturgeon, bitter arguments familiar from culture wars in other parts of the world have also played a part. An influx of new members after the 2014 referendum made the SNP one of the largest mass-membership political parties in Europe – but the unexpected deluge introduced thousands of young, diverse and politically progressive members into a party that had largely been the preserve of white, middle-aged men.

The two camps have increasingly clashed, and some of the early defections to Alba suggest it is partially acting as a new home for those whose wider politics sat more comfortably in the old SNP.

The new party is, of course, primarily expecting to pick up second votes from independence supporters frustrated at Sturgeon's slow progress towards a second referendum. Ultimately, however, it might not be the voters who decide what happens next on the constitutional issue. Johnson has repeatedly insisted he will block a further ballot. A Holyrood majority cobbled together from two warring independence factions secured through tactical voting would be easier to refuse than a direct mandate for the SNP alone.

So where does this all leave Salmond? If the SNP wins a majority without Alba, it doesn't need him. If votes that go to Alba deprive the SNP of a majority, he has damaged the cause that defines his politics. And even if Alba MSPs do contribute to an overall pro-independence majority, Johnson has the get-out card of accusing the nationalists of unfairly gaming the electoral system.

Salmond's ego is at risk of taking another bruising, Sturgeon's position looks secure, and there is no electoral outcome in which Alba helps the fight for independence.

That sounds bad for Salmond, however you pronounce it.

- David Clegg is editor of the Courier

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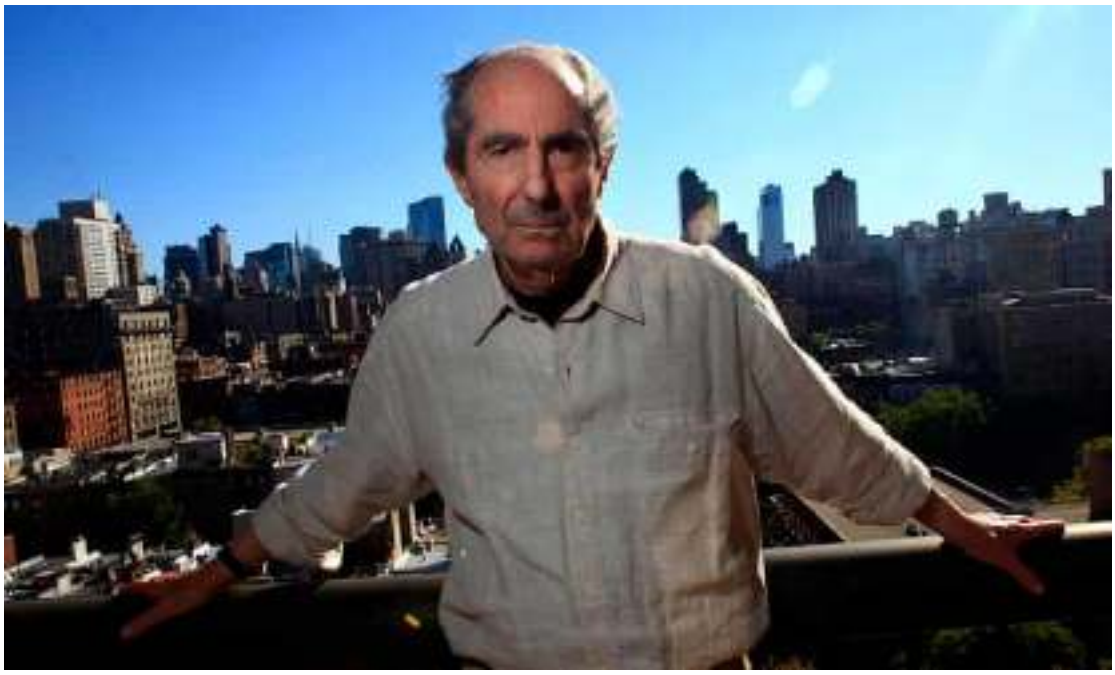
Hadley Freeman's Weekend columnPhilip Roth

A new biography ‘unveils’ Philip Roth as a misogynist. Tell me something I don’t know

Hadley Freeman

The campaign to cancel the author is typical of today’s all-or-nothing approach, where if you don’t like everything about a public figure, you can’t like anything



Philip Roth: ‘No one can accuse him of ever hiding who he was.’ Photograph: Reuters/Alamy

Philip Roth: ‘No one can accuse him of ever hiding who he was.’ Photograph: Reuters/Alamy

Sat 3 Apr 2021 04.00 EDT

In order to grow up, as Sigmund Freud probably wrote somewhere, a child must rebel against its parents, and for a while now modern culture has been rebelling against its literary fathers, that Mount Rushmore of 20th-century highbrow masculinity: Saul Bellow, Norman Mailer, John Updike and Philip Roth. Last month, two British newspapers announced that Roth “could face getting cancelled” on account of details about his personal life included in two new biographies. That Roth arguably cancelled himself three years ago by dying is beside the point: the quickest way to prove one is Good these days is to vilify those who are Bad, and death is no hiding place.

Since their deaths, all of these men have come in for criticism, mainly for their attitudes towards women: Mailer was hugely popular at his peak, but now he’s probably best known for that whole stabbing-his-second-wife awkwardness; Updike is regularly derided as “a misogynist”; and Bellow’s

female characters are often, at best, thinly drawn, or full-on bitches and shrews. Now, inevitably, it's Roth's turn.

"New biographies of the Great American Novelist highlight Roth's predatory behaviour and obsession with sex," read one headline, although as headlines go, "Philip Roth was obsessed with sex," is pretty much up there with "The royal family are snobs." Who'd have guessed such a thing of the man who wrote one novel about extreme masturbation (Portnoy's Complaint) and another about a man turning into a giant breast (The Breast)? As for his behaviour with women, you don't need to read the new biographies to learn about that. Roth's ex-wife, Claire Bloom, wrote about their relationship in her memoir, Leaving A Doll's House, 25 years ago. You could also read Roth's not-exactly-contrite reaction to Bloom's complaints, his 1998 novel, I Married A Communist, in which the protagonist's vicious wife was clearly based on Bloom.

This side of these authors hardly went unnoticed in their lifetimes. Second-wave feminists including Kate Millett and Germaine Greer took on Mailer, and David Foster Wallace described Updike as "a penis with a thesaurus". Roth anticipated his posthumous destiny in his 2007 novel, Exit Ghost, in which his long-term protagonist, Nathan Zuckerman, rages against prurient biographers who tear down the reputations of the dead. So the stories aren't revelatory – but that doesn't mean they shouldn't be re-examined. They are not irrelevant, but are they the full story?

I love awards ceremonies – but losing on Zoom is another story | Hadley Freeman
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I was never a Mailer fan, but I went through a Roth and Bellow phase after university, as a reaction against the entirely English (and goyish) focus of my literature degree. Roth's American trilogy is probably my favourite of all these books, and in those his libido is largely in the shadows. This is not something that can be said about my second-favourite series, Updike's Rabbit books. But enjoying a novel is not dependent on approving of the deliberately flawed characters, or its similarly imperfect author. There are many things that make a book good – elegant writing, emotional truth,

narrative voice – besides its morality. “Roth’s misogyny infuses everything that he writes,” according to Meg Elison, a novelist recently described by the Times as “re-examining Roth”. This is typical of the all-or-nothing approach that is popular today, where if you don’t like everything about a public figure, then you can’t like anything.

“Looked at from the point of view of today, Roth’s books are on the wrong side of MeToo,” Sandra Newman, an American novelist, has said. Looked at from the point of view of today, every single thing from the past is on the wrong side of the modern moment, because that’s how time works. I hate to break awkward news here, but I don’t think too many of Charles Dickens’s novels pass the Bechdel test. Looked at from the point of view of today, The Merchant Of Venice is on the wrong side of a lot of things – but it’s still a terrific play.

I didn’t always enjoy the lust and the rage in Roth’s books, and I probably love his poignantly historical books (American Pastoral, The Plot Against America) more than the unremittingly sexual ones. Books can reflect the times in which they were written, but they also show us the author, and no one can accuse Roth of ever hiding who he was: American, Jewish, obsessed with sex, obsessed with death, funny, angry, wise, profane, imaginative, cruel. That is what readers always liked about him. Reducing him to one aspect of his biography is like reading the York Notes version of his books. There is a difference between reckoning with the past, and seeing only one colour of the rainbow.

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OpinionRace

The poisonously patronising Sewell report is historically illiterate

David Olusoga

It condemns young people for doing exactly what it claims to support – exploring their ancestors' roles in shaping Britain

A Black Lives Matter protest in London, June 2020. Photograph: RMV/Rex Features

A Black Lives Matter protest in London, June 2020. Photograph: RMV/Rex Features

Fri 2 Apr 2021 10.17 EDT

Since its publication, the report by the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities has been denounced as "divorced from reality" by public health experts. Dame Doreen Lawrence has warned that it risks pushing the fight

against racism "back 20 years or more". Academics named in the report have revealed they were not properly consulted, and an author is having his name removed. Windrush campaigners have condemned the report for paying so little attention to the scandal that was exposed three years ago, and just about every leading writer and commentator on race and racism in the UK has criticised the report's findings and challenged its methodology.

If the report had been intended to help address racism in Britain, it must surely be written off as a disaster. However, many question if that was ever the objective of this commission and this government. The report minimises and at times denies the existence of institutional racism in Britain, despite the fact that, as the government now acknowledges, several witnesses gave detailed evidence of the forms of institutional and structural racism that they feel do operate within the UK. It was produced by a commission led by figures who had rejected the concept of institutional racism years before they began work. Arguably it has achieved exactly what the government wanted, adding credence to the false binary that underpins their culture war agenda: that the nation faces a choice between addressing racial inequalities or class disadvantage.

> Shockingly, the authors deploy a version of an argument that was used by the slave owners themselves 200 years ago

The report's many detractors struggle to see how its authors could reach its conclusions from the data presented. The chapter on health inequalities was ripped apart by no lesser an authority than the British Medical Journal. At its worst, the report is government-funded whataboutery stretched over 258 pages.

It is also littered with inconsistencies. For example, the authors suggest that the acronym BAME is unhelpful because it bundles together different ethnic groups who experience racism differently – hardly an original or particularly controversial view. But having dismissed BAME, they on 87 occasions deploy the term "ethnic minorities", a phrase that groups together disparate communities in exactly the same way.

As a historian, for me the most disturbing passages are those in which the authors stumble, ill prepared and overconfident, into the arena of history. The prose on those pages – littered with unwieldy phrases and bizarre constructions – is as weak as the arguments. In a sentence that reads like an auto-dictation error that got past the proofreaders, and using a phrase that would get marked down in an undergraduate essay, the authors state that the "slave period" of Caribbean history was not only "about profit and suffering".

Well, of course it wasn't. Every historian of slavery I have ever encountered writes about Britain's centuries of slave-trading and slave-owning as a history of resistance and resilience in which people trafficked from their homelands or born into bondage created new cultures, identities and art forms, while being dehumanised and commodified.

At the start of the same grammatically challenged sentence the authors claim there is "a new story about the Caribbean experience". They are entirely correct. That new story is exactly what historians are currently disentombing from beneath a mountain of denial and a monomaniacal focus on abolition and the white abolitionists. It was that William Wilberforce-centric history that characterised enslaved people only as victims – passive beneficiaries of British mercy. Shockingly, the authors – perhaps unwittingly – deploy a version of an argument that was used by the slave owners themselves in defence of slavery 200 years ago: the idea that by becoming culturally British, black people were somehow beneficiaries of the system.

It is the fact that the histories of slavery and empire are becoming mainstream, and that young people are entirely comfortable with the reality that "profit and suffering" were at the centre of both, that appears to disturb the authors and the government whose agenda they have so faithfully served. Determined to privilege comforting national myths over hard historical truths, they give the impression of being people who would prefer this history to be brushed back under the carpet.

The historical illiteracy and internal inconsistencies do not stop there. The report argues that young black people should reclaim their British heritage. Which is exactly what black British people have been doing, by recovering

the contributions of their ancestors to British history and culture. Yet the report crudely characterises those struggles to bring marginalised black figures and communities into the mainstream of British history as "token expressions of black achievement" – a poisonously patronising phrase.

The culture war is a box of matches the UK government can't help playing with | Marina Hyde
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This report is, in effect, Britain's version of the 1776 report, a similarly poorly written document published in the last days of the Trump administration by a similarly dubious and politically compromised commission. The authors of the 1776 report blamed racial disadvantage in the US not on the legacies of slavery, segregation and continuing racism but on the teaching of the histories of slavery and segregation in American schools and universities. To counter this, they called for critical scholarship to be replaced by what they called "patriotic education". There are statements in the UK's race disparities report that come dangerously close to similar conclusions.

Just as disingenuous is the report's false characterisation of demands made by students and staff at many universities for the decolonisation of the curriculum. The report mischaracterises these demands as the "banning of white authors". This crude attack line, like so many others in the report, is inflected with a patronising tone of inter-generational arrogance, a blithe dismissal of the politics and passions of the young that – with fathomless condescension – the authors dismiss as the "idealism" of the "well-intentioned".

What is really happening in our universities is that curricula are being expanded to include the voices and the stories of formerly colonised people. Is the report's reduction of this to the "banning of white authors" deliberate provocation or just ignorance? Have they begun to believe their own culture war disinformation?

Throughout the report, the authors rail against phenomena they either misrepresent or misunderstand. They defend the nation from charges no one is making; they create and then slay straw men, and set up false binaries.

Wilfully blind to the interplay between race and class, they are selective in both their sources and conclusions. The government has been quick to point to the ethnic diversity of the commission. What is lacking here is not ethnic diversity but diversity of opinion. This is a report that many fear will set the struggle against racism back. It may, however, prove to be a powerful weapon in the government's ceaseless culture war.

David Olusoga is a historian and broadcaster

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OpinionRace

The Sewell report on racial disparity is an attempt to erase progress and sow division

Marsha de Cordova

We need robust action on inequality and institutional racism. This exercise in denial does nothing to address those challenges

‘The commission had an opportunity to seriously respond to structural racial inequalities. Instead, we have a 250-page divisive polemic.’ Black Lives Matter protest in London Photograph: Henry Nicholls/Reuters

‘The commission had an opportunity to seriously respond to structural racial inequalities. Instead, we have a 250-page divisive polemic.’ Black Lives Matter protest in London Photograph: Henry Nicholls/Reuters

Fri 2 Apr 2021 06.48 EDT

From the moment Boris Johnson appointed Tony Sewell - who once said the evidence for institutional racism was "flimsy" - to chair the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities I sensed they might not be serious about tackling racial inequality.

But even the deepest cynic could not have anticipated that it would be so bad as to suggest that slavery was "not only being about profit and suffering but how culturally African people transformed themselves", as he does in the foreword to the report.

Reading this report, a year into a pandemic that has disproportionately cost Black, Asian and ethnic minority people their lives and livelihoods, left me as a Black British woman feeling deeply insulted and distressed. After decades of fighting for racial justice, this report seeks to erase progress and turn back the clock. Many Black, Asian and ethnic minority people across the country will be feeling wounded by its words.

The commission had an opportunity to seriously respond to structural racial inequalities in the UK after the powerful Black Lives Matter movement. A chance to set the record straight on disproportionality in the criminal justice system, maternal mortality, school exclusions and unemployment. Instead, we have a 250-page divisive polemic that cherry-picks statistics to prove a preordained ideological point.

Just 24 hours on from the publication of the report its credibility completely unravelled with the government's most senior race adviser resigning citing a "politics steeped in division" and two contributors distancing themselves.

The report appeared to claim that socioeconomic conditions drive inequality more than racism. This is a textbook "divide and rule" approach from a government more interested in deflecting from its mishandling of the pandemic, cronyism and negligence than genuinely improving living standards.

A decade of Conservative rule has left working-class people across communities, including Black and ethnic minority people, facing low pay, insecure work and overcrowded housing. These are the things that have cost

people their lives in the past year. You can't split apart inequalities of race, class, geography and ethnicity in this way.

The second headline-grabbing conclusion was the absurd claim that the term institutional racism is too "liberally used" and not rooted in data.

Doreen Lawrence says No 10 report gives 'racists the green light'
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The Race Disparity Unit, established by Theresa May in 2016, clearly cites that Black people are nine times more likely to be stopped and searched, more than four times more likely to die in childbirth and five times more likely to be excluded from school in some parts of the UK.

The 1999 Macpherson report stated that an institution such as "laws, customs and practices" can be said to be racist if it "systematically reflect[s] and produce[s] racial inequalities in society".

The government's own data shows the labour market, criminal justice system, healthcare system and education system all produce racial inequalities. It is a dangerous place to be when a report published on a government website overlooks these findings.

As for the recommendations, many of them lack teeth and are reliant on individual discretion. For example, the failure to recommend mandatory ethnicity pay gap reporting clearly misses the mark, while proposals to fund the Equality and Human Rights Commission to work on race equality simply ask the government to undo the damage done in the past decade.

Proposals to diversify the curriculum are overshadowed by the suggestion that a "new story" be told about empire and slavery, and recommendations to phase out the term BAME, while correct, do nothing to close huge gaps in standards of living for Black, Asian and ethnic minority people.

We need robust action on inequality and institutional racism across society, and a better future for everyone out of the pandemic. But the Conservatives seem determined to ignore inequalities and to try to divide our country.

Labour is committed to resisting this division in all its forms and standing together to build a brighter future.

Ultimately, we have to see this report as just another attempt to divide and derail us. And we have to resist it every step of the way.

- Marsha de Cordova is the Labour MP for Battersea and has been the shadow women and equalities secretary since April 2020

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2021.04.03 - Around the world

- George Floyd death Detective says Chauvin knee on neck a 'totally unnecessary' use of deadly force
- Derek Chauvin trial What we've learned after the first week
- Analysis Chauvin trial prosecutors are working on behalf of a traumatized community

George Floyd

Detective says Chauvin knee on neck a 'totally unnecessary' use of deadly force

Richard Zimmerman gives testimony and tells court ‘if your knee is on someone’s neck – that could kill them’

Richard Zimmerman said: ‘I saw no reason why the officers felt they were in danger, if that’s what they felt. And that is what they have to feel to use that level of force.’ Photograph: AP

Richard Zimmerman said: ‘I saw no reason why the officers felt they were in danger, if that’s what they felt. And that is what they have to feel to use that level of force.’ Photograph: AP

Chris McGreal
Fri 2 Apr 2021 13.03 EDT

A Minneapolis homicide detective has described Derek Chauvin’s decision to press his knee into George Floyd’s neck for more than nine minutes as a

totally unnecessary use of “deadly force”.

Video of George Floyd's killing retraumatizes many as trial unfolds
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Lt Richard Zimmerman, who leads the Minneapolis homicide department, said in testimony on Friday that in four decades as a police officer he had never been trained to place a knee on someone’s neck as a means of restraining them during an arrest.

“If your knee is on a person’s neck, that can kill them,” he said.

In evidence likely to be highly damaging to the defence claim that Chauvin was acting out of concern for his own safety as he arrested Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man, in Minneapolis last May, Zimmerman described the level of force used by officers after Floyd was in handcuffs as “totally unnecessary”.

“Once a person is cuffed, the threat level goes down all the way. They’re cuffed, how can they really hurt you?” he said.

Video shows Floyd was already handcuffed by the time he was forced onto the ground.

“I saw no reason why the officers felt they were in danger, if that’s what they felt. And that is what they have to feel to use that level of force,” said Zimmerman.

Chauvin, 45, has denied charges of second- and third-degree murder, and manslaughter, over Floyd’s death. He faces up to 40 years in prison if convicted of the most serious charge. Three other officers face separate charges.

Zimmerman was one of 14 police officers who published a public letter to the citizens of Minneapolis a month after Floyd’s death, to “wholeheartedly condemn” Chauvin’s actions.

“Like us, Derek Chauvin took an oath to hold the sanctity of life most precious,” they wrote. “Derek Chauvin failed as a human and stripped George Floyd of his dignity and life. This is not who we are.”

Zimmerman told the trial officers are trained in the dangers of keeping a detained person in the prone position on the ground. Floyd was held for more than nine minutes with Chauvin’s knee on his neck and two other officers pinning his torso and legs.

“Once you secure or handcuff a person, you need to get them out of the prone position as soon as possible because it restricts their breathing,” Zimmerman said.

Chauvin’s lawyer, Eric Nelson, put it to Zimmerman “that in a fight for your life, you as an officer are allowed to use whatever force is necessary?”

Nelson challenged the detective’s claim never to have been trained to put a knee to a suspect’s neck, but Zimmerman said the training was to place the knee on a person’s shoulder and only while handcuffing them.

Zimmerman also told the court that police failed to follow critical incident procedures intended to ensure officers are properly interrogated. Zimmerman said that procedure meant the officers involved in Floyd’s death should have been taken in separate squad cars to an interview room for questioning. Yet he found two of the officers, Alexander Kueng and Thomas Lane, still at the scene. He ordered them taken for questioning.

Earlier, a Minneapolis police sergeant, Jon Edwards, who secured the scene after Floyd’s death, told the trial he found Kueng and Lane in their squad car together. He ordered them out and to turn their body cameras on to record their conversations.

Zimmerman’s evidence followed similar testimony from Chauvin’s shift supervisor, Sgt David Pleoger, on Thursday. He said there was no justification for the officer to keep his knee on Floyd’s neck for nine minutes or for the other officers to continue to hold him down once he stopped resisting.

“When Mr Floyd was no longer offering up any resistance to the officers they could have ended their restraint,” said Pleoger, who arrived at the scene shortly after Floyd was taken away by ambulance.

He also said Floyd should not have been kept in the prone position because of the danger of “positional asphyxia”.

“If they are left on chest or stomachs for too long, their breathing can be compromised,” he said.

Pleoger said police officers are trained about the danger that a suspect can suffocate if they are not put on their side in the recovery position.

Derek Chauvin trial: police chief to testify against former officer in 'remarkable move'
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The police evidence came at the end of a week that began with the prosecution putting witnesses on the stand who gave emotional evidence about Floyd’s struggle for life under Chauvin’s knee.

Some of the most emotional testimony was heard on Thursday as Floyd’s girlfriend, Courteney Ross, spoke about their shared struggle with opioid addiction. Ross, who dated Floyd for about three years, said they both became hooked after being prescribed narcotics to treat chronic pain.

Three other officers involved in Floyd’s death are scheduled to be tried together later this year on charges of aiding and abetting murder and manslaughter.

The trial continues. Next week, the chief of the Minneapolis department, Medaria Arradondo, is expected to testify. In a highly unusual move, he will give evidence against his own former officer. Arradondo fired Chauvin shortly after Floyd’s death.

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George Floyd

Derek Chauvin trial: what we've learned after the first week

Chauvin kept his knee on George Floyd longer than originally thought and witnesses described feelings of guilt

A man outside the Hennepin County Government Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where the Derek Chauvin trial is taking place. Photograph: Stephen Maturen/Getty Images

A man outside the Hennepin County Government Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where the Derek Chauvin trial is taking place. Photograph: Stephen Maturen/Getty Images

Victoria Bekiempis
Sat 3 Apr 2021 02.00 EDT

The trial against Derek Chauvin, the white former police officer charged with murdering George Floyd in Minneapolis last May, began in earnest

Monday and lasted all week.

Floyd died after Chavin kneeled on his neck for more than nine minutes during an arrest. The public responded to Floyd's death with mass protests across the US in what became the largest US civil rights movement since the 1960s.

Floyd's death brought renewed attention to the Black Lives Matter movement. Protesters called for reform in policing – and the broader criminal justice system – to address longstanding racial disparities in arrests, prosecution, and punishment.

Bystander video of his killing went viral, showing Americans – and millions of people around the globe – Floyd's slow death at the hands of Chauvin. The ex-officer has pleaded not guilty to second-degree unintentional murder, third-degree murder, and second-degree manslaughter charges.

Here are four crucial points during Chauvin's trial so far:

Chauvin kept his knee on Floyd's neck for more time than originally thought.

Prosecutors revealed Monday that Chauvin held his knee against Floyd's neck for 9 minutes and 29 seconds – 43 seconds, more than the 8 minutes and 46 seconds than what was first reported, according to NPR. The prosecution said that Chauvin killed Floyd by "grinding and crushing him until the very breath, the very life, was squeezed out of him".

"What Mr Chauvin was doing, he was doing deliberately," prosecutor Jerry Blackwell said.

He also argued that Floyd wasn't breathing during the last minute Chauvin restrained him by the neck. Even after a paramedic told Chauvin that Floyd didn't have a pulse, Chauvin kept his knee in place, Blackwell alleged.

The bystander who recorded the viral video described her feelings of guilt.

Darnella Frazier, who was just 17 when she recorded the now-viral video of Floyd's death, said she felt guilty about having been incapable of intervening to save his life. "I ended up apologising and apologising to George Floyd for not doing more," Frazier said, who sobbed at various points during her testimony.

Frazier did add that the issue is not whether or if she could have done anything. "It's what he should have done," Frazier remarked, apparently referring to Chauvin. She said he "had like, this cold look … it seemed as if he didn't care." She claimed that Chauvin responded to the crowd's entreaties by applying more pressure to Floyd.

"If anything he was kneeling harder, like he was shoving his knee into his neck," she testified.

Floyd's struggles with addiction could undermine Chauvin's defense.

Courteney Ross, Floyd's girlfriend, told jurors that they both had an addiction to opioid painkillers and had tried to get clean in the weeks preceding his death. Ross testified Thursday that Floyd had been clean for some time after she brought him to hospital due to an overdose. Floyd started using drugs again some two weeks prior to his arrest by Chauvin.

Prosecutors have elicited this testimony to undermine the defense's position that Floyd died from drug use and underlying health problems. Opioids and methamphetamine were detected in Floyd's body. Ross's description of Floyd's history of substance abuse, however, helps show that he had built up a tolerance to opioids and that the amount in his body could not have killed him.

Ross, who dated Floyd for approximately three years, said they both developed addictions after receiving prescriptions for opioids to address chronic pain. She also explained that Floyd's addiction was spurred by sports injuries.

Witnesses described officers acting callously toward Floyd.

Minneapolis firefighter Genevieve Hansen tearfully told the court that she happened upon the scene while off duty – and that the four officers there prevented her from helping Floyd. Hansen said these officers were led by Chauvin. Hansen, who has emergency medical training, said she urged these police to let her administer aid to Floyd, or render aid themselves, to no avail.

Eyewitness Charles McMillian, 61, testified Wednesday about why he confronted Chauvin after the lifeless Floyd was taken from the scene by ambulance.

Newly released police body camera footage captured audio of Chauvin interacting with McMillian. This recording, which is from Chauvin's body camera, is the first time Chauvin has been publicly heard making any explanation for why he restrained Floyd during the arrest.

When McMillian takes issue with Chauvin's use of force, Chauvin can be heard replying: "That's one person's opinion."

Chauvin is also heard in the recording saying: "We had to control this guy because he's a sizable guy. It looks like he's probably on something."

Prosecutors asked McMillian why he confronted Chauvin after Floyd was taken by ambulance. He responded: "Because what I watched was wrong."

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George Floyd

Chauvin trial: vivid testimony and focus on deadly force in dramatic first week

‘It’s been nights I stayed up apologizing and apologizing to George Floyd for not doing more,’ Darnella Frazier, the teenager who recorded eyewitness video of Floyd’s death, told the jury. Photograph: Chris Tuite/Rex/Shutterstock

‘It’s been nights I stayed up apologizing and apologizing to George Floyd for not doing more,’ Darnella Frazier, the teenager who recorded eyewitness video of Floyd’s death, told the jury. Photograph: Chris Tuite/Rex/Shutterstock

The ex-officer’s trial has seen witnesses offering personal and raw accounts of their experiences from the day George Floyd was killed

Oliver Laughland
@oliverlaughland
Sat 3 Apr 2021 02.00 EDT

The murder trial of Derek Chauvin, which concluded its first week of testimony on Friday, saw a wave of witnesses come before the jury, with many offering deeply personal and vivid accounts of their experiences on 25 May last year.

At times the trial has felt unique in comparison to other officer involved murder cases that have made it to court, partly as a result of prosecutorial strategy but also the very specific circumstances of the death of George Floyd, the 46-year-old Black man killed during a police restraint.

Detective says Chauvin knee on neck a 'totally unnecessary' use of deadly force
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The court's docket may title the case State vs Derek Chauvin but, as one reporter covering the trial pointed out, the first week of hearings has often felt like a literal iteration of "the people versus…", with prosecutors

working on behalf of a community traumatized by the violence they witnessed.

During opening arguments, lead prosecutor Jerry Blackwell told the jury they would hear from “a veritable bouquet of humanity”, including children, senior citizens, shop clerks and off-duty first responders, each of whom witnessed Floyd die under Chauvin’s knee, where he was held while handcuffed for nine minutes and 29 seconds.

The results were both forensic and powerful testimony.

Darnella Frazier, the teenager who recorded eyewitness video of Floyd’s death, told the jury: “When I look at George Floyd, I look at my dad. I look at my brother. I look at my cousins, my uncles, because they are all Black.”

She added: “It’s been nights I stayed up apologizing, and apologizing to George Floyd for not doing more and not physically interacting and not saving his life.”

Charles McMillian, a 61 year-old witness who confronted Chauvin after Floyd was taken away in an ambulance, was asked by prosecutors to explain how he felt watching Floyd die. “I feel helpless. I don’t have a mama either. I understand him.”

Genevieve Hansen, an off-duty firefighter trained in medical first response, spoke of watching the incident and feeling powerless to intervene. “I got there and I could have given medical assistance. That’s exactly what I should have done,” she said, her voice trembling. She broke down when describing how “totally distressed” she felt.

The testimony was raw, but it will serve a very real purpose for the prosecution, who have charged Chauvin with second- and third-degree murder and manslaughter, for establishing what happened.

Firstly, Chauvin’s defense lawyer Eric Nelson has argued that he and the other officers were distracted by the crowd of onlookers during their restraint of George Floyd, who Nelson characterized as unruly and chaotic. The witnesses’ first-hand testimony is a complete contrast to this depiction.

But it is also important to compare this prosecution to other recent murder trials involving police officers, where prosecutors have sometimes had to rely on limited or no bystander testimony at all.

For example in the trials of the Baltimore police officers accused of killing Freddie Gray, the prosecution struggled to establish that the 25-year-old unarmed Black teenager had been subjected to a so-called "rough ride" that led to a fatal spine injury, relying on expert evidence rather than eyewitnesses.

In the case of Walter Scott, an unarmed Black man killed in North Charleston, South Carolina, the prosecution relied on a single witness, Feidin Santana, who saw the incident and recorded it on film. Santana's lone eyewitness testimony was not enough to secure conviction at the trial of former officer Michael Slager, who, as the only other eyewitness, testified in his own defense. The trial ended with a hung jury, with Slager later pleading guilty to separate federal charges.

Portraits of Black people killed by police are seen on a fence around the Hennepin county courthouse. Photograph: Jack Kurtz/ZUMA Wire/REX/Shutterstock

For the prosecution to be able to present a consensus view among a large group of bystander witnesses marks a major strength in their case.

If the first four days of bystander testimony marks the first phase of the prosecution, it seemed clear by the end of day five that lawyers are moving to their second phase, where experts and former colleagues of Chauvin from the Minneapolis police department have begun to testify that his use of a knee-to-neck restraint was a disproportionate use of deadly force.

“Totally unnecessary,” in the words of Lt Richard Zimmerman, who testified on Friday against his former colleague. “If your knee is on a person’s neck that can kill them,” he added.

The testimony is already highly damaging to Chauvin’s defence. During opening arguments Chauvin’s lawyer made clear much of his defense will centre around the suggestion that the protracted use of the restraint was justified because Chauvin had acted according to department policy.

“The use of force is not attractive, but it is a necessary component of policing,” Nelson told the jury.

But that point is likely to be under further strain with testimony next week. In a rare, possibly unprecedented move, the prosecution will call the Minneapolis police chief, Medaria Arradondo, to testify against his former officer, adding even further weight to the argument that Chauvin’s actions flew in the face of department policy.

The third phase of the prosecution seems likely to focus on the conclusion that Floyd’s death was caused by the restraint itself.

The critical component to this is the medical examiner’s report, which labelled the cause of death homicide, caused by “cardiopulmonary arrest complicating law enforcement subdual, restrain, and neck compression”. The autopsy also noted “other significant conditions”, including fentanyl intoxication, recent methamphetamine use and signs of heart disease.

The prosecution have indicated that a pathologist from the Hennepin county medical examiner’s office, Dr Lindsey Thomas, will testify in court over

the findings, which are likely to be challenged by defense witnesses as well as cross examination.

While the document itself is definitive in an administrative manner – that Floyd died directly as a result of the restraint he was put under – it will still be contested at trial. And Nelson made clear in opening arguments he plans to cast doubt over some of its findings.

He will argue that Floyd died of cardiac arrhythmia, due to a number of complicating factors including Floyd's use of drugs.

The prosecution has already been out on the offensive to battle this argument, calling Floyd's partner, Courteney Ross, to testify about the couple's battle with addiction. But it seems likely that the issue will be revisited continually throughout the trial, which resumes again on Monday.

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Table of Contents

- 'We're in a really good place' Is Israel nearing the Covid endgame?
- Travel Overseas destinations 'to be ranked using traffic light system'
- US States may be in early stages of fourth wave as Covid cases rise, reports say
- Pfizer vaccine Jab has 91% efficacy for up to six months, trial shows

2021.04.02 - Spotlight

- 'There were pitched battles, fist fights' How Britfunk overcame racism to reinvigorate UK pop
- Play nicely! The fun and frustrations of gaming with your partner
- On a roll Skating booms in lockdown London – photo essay
- 'Citrusy aroma' How feijoas baffled a New Zealand immigrant – and polarise a nation

2021.04.02 - Opinion

- It's a cop-out to pin all the blame for sexual abuse on schools
- The world's poorest countries are at India's mercy for vaccines. It's unsustainable
- Boris Johnson's latest 'build back better' pledge won't get Britain back to work
- What researching my family's Nazi history taught me about how to approach the past

2021.04.02 - Around the world

- Derek Chauvin trial Video of George Floyd's killing retraumatizes many as trial unfolds
- George Floyd Officer's supervisor says there was no justification to keep knee on man's neck
- Myanmar coup Military expands internet shutdown
- Mozambique Body found in search for missing Briton after Isis attack

Headlines saturday 3 april 2021

- Coronavirus NHS feels strain as tens of thousands of staff suffer long Covid
- Coronavirus vaccine Experts stress benefits outweigh risks after seven UK deaths

- US Capitol One officer and suspect dead after car rams into barrier
- Richard Okorogheye Let someone know you are safe, say Met police

2021.04.03 - Coronavirus

- Live Coronavirus live news: two visitors for England care home residents from mid-April; India cases hit six-month high
- Travel Boris Johnson prepares to outline tests for restart of foreign trips
- Australia Covid vaccine rollout to continue after blood clot case in Melbourne
- Big energy bill in the Covid crisis? Switch to save £250 or more

2021.04.03 - Opinion

- For Alex Salmond and his new Alba party, the prospects are not looking good
- A new biography ‘unveils’ Philip Roth as a misogynist. Tell me something I don’t know
- The poisonously patronising Sewell report is historically illiterate
- Marsha de Cordova The Sewell report is an attempt to sow division
- Cartoon Martin Rowson on the Tory cabinet's Good Friday plans

2021.04.03 - Around the world

- George Floyd death Detective says Chauvin knee on neck a 'totally unnecessary' use of deadly force
- Derek Chauvin trial What we've learned after the first week
- Analysis Chauvin trial prosecutors are working on behalf of a traumatized community