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Fossil fuels

Big banks' trillion-dollar finance for fossil fuels 'shocking', says report

Coal, oil and gas firms have received $3.8tn in finance since the Paris climate deal in 2015

US and Canadian banks make up 13 of the 60 banks analysed, but account for almost half of global fossil fuel financing over the last five years, the report found. Photograph: Alamy

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Damian Carrington Environment editor
@dpcarrington
Wed 24 Mar 2021 01.00 EDT

The world's biggest 60 banks have provided $3.8tn of financing for fossil fuel companies since the Paris climate deal in 2015, according to a report by a coalition of NGOs.

Despite the Covid-19 pandemic cutting energy use, overall funding remains on an upward trend and the finance provided in 2020 was higher than in 2016 or 2017, a fact the report's authors and others described as "shocking".

Oil, gas and coal will need to be burned for some years to come. But it has been known since at least 2015 that a significant proportion of existing reserves must remain in the ground if global heating is to remain below 2C, the main Paris target. Financing for new reserves is therefore the "exact opposite" of what is required to tackle the climate crisis, the report's authors said.

US and Canadian banks make up 13 of the 60 banks analysed, but account for almost half of global fossil fuel financing over the last five years, the report found. JPMorgan Chase provided more finance than any other bank. UK bank Barclays provided the most fossil fuel financing among all European banks and French bank BNP Paribas was the biggest in the EU.

top 10 banks

Overall financing dipped by 9% in pandemic-hit 2020, but funding for the 100 fossil fuel companies with the biggest expansion plans actually rose by 10%. Citi was the biggest financier of these 100 companies in 2020.

A commitment to be net zero by 2050 has been made by 17 of the 60 banks, but the report describes the pledges as "dangerously weak, half-baked, or vague", arguing that action is needed today. Some banks have policies that block finance for coal, the dirtiest fossil fuel, but almost two-thirds of funding is for oil and gas companies.

The report's authors said targeting of banks by campaigners and activist shareholders could help change bank policies but that action by governments was also needed.

“When we look at the five years overall, the trend is still going in the wrong direction, which is obviously the exact opposite of where we need to be going to live up to the goals of the Paris Agreement,” said Alison Kirsch, at Rainforest Action Network and an author of the report. “None of these 60 banks have made, without loopholes, a plan to exit fossil fuels.”

“We have seen progress in restricting financing for special places like the Arctic or greenhouse-gas-intensive forms of oil, like tar sands, but these are such a small piece of the pie,” she said.

2016-2020 trend

“One bank after another is making solemn promises to become ‘net zero by 2050’,” said Johan Frijns, at BankTrack, part of the coalition behind the report. “But there exists no pathway towards this laudable goal that does not require dealing with bank finance for the fossil fuel industry right here and now.”

“Banks provide the financial oxygen that allows the fossil fuel industry to breathe,” said Mark Campanale, at financial thinktank Carbon Tracker, which was not involved in the report. “It reveals the shocking fact that lending has grown since the Paris Agreement, [which] should concern everyone, not least policymakers and shareholders of the banks themselves.

“The cost of carbon in terms of extreme weather events, lost lives and livelihoods will be borne by society and sadly not the banks, nor the fossil fuel companies,” said Campanale. “Next time the banks come looking to taxpayers for a bailout, they shouldn’t be surprised to find backs are turned.”

The report was produced by six NGOs and is endorsed by over 300 organisations from 50 countries. It used Bloomberg data to analyse both direct loans by banks to fossil fuel companies and funding from other investors that the banks arrange via bond and debt sales.

“A surprising result from the 2020 data is that BNP Paribas, a bank that never loses an opportunity to boast of its clean, green credentials, and those of its US subsidiary Bank of the West, came in as the fourth-worst fossil

bank in 2020," the report said, with the $41bn provided by far the biggest sum in last five years.

BNP Paribas has some of the strongest policies on unconventional oil and gas, such as fracking and tar sands, Kirsch said: "But it's a relatively small part of their overall funding and the bank hasn't reined in its financing to the oil and gas supermajors, which get really big deals."

A spokesperson for BNP Paribas said the report has ranked the bank second for the strength of its restrictions on financing coal, fracking and tar sands. "During the Covid-19 crisis, all sectors of the economy needed support and BNP Paribas, like other banks, played an important stabilising role for the economy. However, BNP Paribas supported the oil and gas sector to a lower extent than other sectors of activity."

JPMorgan Chase launched a "Paris-aligned financing strategy" in October, pledging to set intermediate emission targets for 2030 for its financing portfolio. It declined to comment on the report. Barclays and Citi did not respond to requests for comment.

A separate report last Thursday from the International Energy Agency and Imperial College London found that investments in renewable energy have seen a 367% greater return than fossil fuels since 2010.

Oil

UK government to allow new North Sea oil and gas exploration

Joint investment of up to £16bn tied to industry promise to cut carbon emissions by 50% by end of decade

Applications for drilling licences will be assessed against a new ‘climate compatibility checkpoint’. Photograph: Andy Buchanan/AFP/Getty Images

Applications for drilling licences will be assessed against a new ‘climate compatibility checkpoint’. Photograph: Andy Buchanan/AFP/Getty Images

Jillian Ambrose *Energy correspondent*
Wed 24 Mar 2021 02.01 EDT

Ministers will allow oil drillers to keep exploring the North Sea for new reserves, despite the government’s pledge to tackle carbon emissions, as long as they pass a “climate compatibility” test.

The government has offered to help the North Sea oil and gas industry cut its carbon emissions through a joint investment of up to £16bn to help support 40,000 North Sea jobs. In return, the industry has promised to cut its carbon emissions by 50% by the end of the decade.

The government said its "landmark deal" would help support the oil and gas industry's transition to a clean energy future. But it has dashed hope among green campaigners and policy experts that the UK would follow the lead of Denmark and France by agreeing to ban new oil exploration licences.

Instead, the government plans to introduce a new "climate compatibility checkpoint" to determine whether each application is "compatible with the UK's climate change objectives".

The checkpoint will use the latest evidence for the UK's domestic demand for oil and gas, the North Sea's projected production levels, the availability of clean energy, and the sector's progress against its emissions reduction targets ahead of each planned licensing round.

If the checkpoint – to be designed later this year – suggests that future oil and gas exploration would undermine the UK's climate goals, the licensing round would not go ahead.

Kwasi Kwarteng, the business and energy secretary, said the North Sea deal sends "a clear message around the world" that the UK will be "a nation of clean energy". He added that the UK will "not leave oil and gas workers behind" in the "irreversible shift away from fossil fuels".

Mel Evans, the head of Greenpeace UK's oil campaign, described the deal as "a colossal failure in climate leadership in the year of Cop26".

"Instead of finding ways to prop up this volatile and polluting sector, a better proposition for workers and communities would be for the government to confirm a ban on new licences, and put all its energies into a nationwide programme of retraining, reskilling and investment in renewables and green infrastructure," Evans said.

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Boris Johnson

Covid: 'greed' and 'capitalism' behind vaccine success, Johnson tells MPs

Prime minister revives 1980s ‘greed is good’ mantra as he lauds vaccine push at meeting with backbenchers

Boris Johnson holds a news conference at 10 Downing Street earlier yesterday. Photograph: Hannah McKay/Reuters

Boris Johnson holds a news conference at 10 Downing Street earlier yesterday. Photograph: Hannah McKay/Reuters

Aubrey Allegretti and *Jessica Elgot*
Wed 24 Mar 2021 03.12 EDT

The UK’s successful vaccine rollout was thanks to “greed” and “capitalism”, Boris Johnson has told Conservative MPs during a private call.

Several of those present confirmed the prime minister had made the remarks during an end-of-term Zoom meeting with Tory backbenchers, known as the 1922 Committee, on Tuesday evening, two days before the Commons breaks for Easter.

Johnson hailed the fact that more than 28 million people have been given a first jab in the UK, saying: "The reason we have the vaccine success is because of capitalism, because of greed my friends."

Immediately afterwards, he tried to backpedal and withdraw what he had said, according to MPs, one of whom added that the PM then made a joke about how details of the 1922 Committee virtual meetings often leak.

Downing Street has not denied the account but refused to issue a comment.

Opposition MPs condemned the PM's remarks, pointing out that they came on the anniversary of the first coronavirus lockdown.

Labour backbencher Barry Sheerman called it an "obnoxious comment on this day of all days", while his colleague Angela Eagle tweeted: "Altruism not greed will get us through this."

Liberal Democrat MP Layla Moran also said the prime minister's intervention was "not helpful".

Some of those on the call sought to add context to Johnson's words, saying he had been talking generally about how big pharmaceutical firms managed to safely create vaccines at record speed – and not the ongoing row with the EU. One called it "a lighthearted off-the-cuff comment".

But the remarks still risk escalating tensions with Brussels, given Johnson has previously been keen to avoid getting drawn into a war of words with European leaders, despite the threat of a vaccine export ban on the continent.

On Tuesday, Johnson suggested he would not engage in a tit-for-tat export ban, with sources saying the priority was still to calm tensions rather than escalate with threats.

Speaking at a No 10 press conference hours earlier to mark the one-year anniversary of lockdown, Johnson said: “We in this country don’t believe in blockades of any kind of vaccines or vaccine material, that’s not something that this country would dream of engaging in.”

At another point in the call with Tory MPs, Johnson admitted the local elections due to take place in May would be difficult, one MP said.

They also said he laid into the BBC, describing it as “detached from a lot of viewers” and suggesting corporation bosses should “move more in line”.

Goldman Sachs

Goldman Sachs' junior bankers rebel over '18-hour shifts and low pay'

Younger staff in London follow revolt in US offices over remote-working conditions

Junior Goldman Sachs staff in london have joined a revolt over working hours and pay during the pandemic. Photograph: Igor Golovniov/SOPA Images/REX/Shutterstock

Junior Goldman Sachs staff in london have joined a revolt over working hours and pay during the pandemic. Photograph: Igor Golovniov/SOPA Images/REX/Shutterstock

Kalyeena Makortoff Banking correspondent
@kalyeena
Wed 24 Mar 2021 02.00 EDT

The reputation of Goldman Sachs as the most desirable employer for aspiring investment bankers is at stake. Legendary for its pulling power with the best graduates, the bank is now facing a rebellion in its lower ranks.

Junior staff who used to tolerate long working hours thanks to office camaraderie have been forced to manage burnout at home, alone, throughout the pandemic. Some have started demanding change, while others are plotting their exit. What began as a little local trouble at a US office in February has now spread to the UK.

Goldman Sachs boss responds to leaked report into 'inhumane' working hours
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“It used to be either you get paid a lot, and your life is hell, or your life is better and you’re not paid that well,” one London-based banker, hired by Goldman last year, said. “At the moment we have neither.”

The banker, who spoke to the Guardian on the basis of anonymity, said staff were worried about speaking out on issues including 18-hour shifts that left juniors earning less than the living wage, or the number of colleagues on sick leave due to burnout. The employee – who is one of 100 recruits hired to work at Goldman each year – did not want their gender disclosed due to fear of repercussion.

“I knew what I was signing up for at Goldman. But then things changed really quickly with remote working during Covid,” they said.

With the Fleet Street head office closed, some colleagues moved home, while the banker, in their early 20s, was left to work out of a three-bed flat shared with two other roommates in London.

Goldman chief executive David Solomon has acknowledged the vast pandemic workload. While an investment banking boom helped push profits up 135% to $4.5bn (£3.8bn) in the fourth quarter of 2020, it has taken a toll on staff.

“There are three to six people on sick leave for burnout per team in London at all times. It’s actually pretty rough,” the London banker said. Some juniors are regularly working until 4-5am, and occasionally through to morning. “I’ve spoken to some analysts that have lost nearly 1 or 2 stone in one year just because they don’t have time to cook.”

Solomon was forced to address similar complaints laid out in a leaked presentation by 13 aggrieved first-year Goldman bankers this week, who complained that long hours, and abuse from co-workers had created “inhumane” working conditions.

The complaints, which date from February, indicate that Goldman is still grappling with the high-pressure culture that was exposed when 22-year-old Goldman analyst Sarvshreshth Gupta took his own life in 2015. Gupta was found dead after complaining of toiling 100 hours a week and throughout the night.

Inquiries suggest Goldman is not just overworking a small group of US hires, but that the problem is widespread and affecting junior bankers overseas.

In a company-wide message on Monday, Solomon pledged the bank would ramp up efforts to hire more junior bankers, transfer staff to stretched teams and strengthen enforcement of a no-work-on-Saturday rule. “We are not asking for crazy stuff, just for the existing rules to be enforced,” the London banker said.

Banks such as Goldman Sachs are able to demand long hours by adding a clause to contracts that opt staff out of 48-hour working week rules.

“Some days you don’t shower,” the London banker said. “Same with eating … You just don’t have time to say ‘Oh hey I need to go shopping for groceries and then cook’,” they said.

“We are supposed to work “whatever the business requires” but these requirements have kept increasing and we have no control on our hours. Senior employees can choose to pass on a deal if they don’t have the bandwidth, but we are just obeying orders,” the banker said.

Citigroup CEO ordains Zoom-free Fridays to ease 'relentless' pandemic workday
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To its credit, Goldman Sachs has tried to offer some remote perks, such as yoga or mental health webinars. “But you don’t even have time to sleep. So how would you have time to login for one hour on Zoom?” the banker said.

First-year bankers are weighing up the costs. Starting on a base salary of roughly £50,000, analysts who regularly work 18-hour shifts, six days a week, will earn roughly £8.90 an hour before tax – less than the £10.85 living wage for London – unless they last until bonus season.

“If you don’t get your bonus, you’ll get paid less by the hour than a McDonald’s employee. And everyone knows about that, but it also increases the pressure, in the sense that people are scared of voicing concerns, myself included,” they said.

The banker said a number of analysts had quit halfway through their second-year – refusing to wait for their bonus. “They said, ‘It’s not worth it. I’d rather have time off and then start to work where I’ll be paid more, than suffer like hell.’”

Meanwhile, Goldman has left bankers footing the bill for their own home-working equipment – including computers, screens, phone, chairs and desks – during the pandemic.

Staff have also been stripped of meal perks that allowed them to expense up to £20 a day when working overtime – and £60 on Sundays – since they left the office. “Juniors tried pushing for evening meals to be covered as used to be in the office but the firm didn’t reply. This has a huge impact as it amounts to 20% of net salary,” they said.

The banker claimed Goldman was aware it could pay workers less, and replace them quickly, thanks to the power of its own brand and prestige. “That’s the really perverse thing about it. Goldman keeps saying the real

force of Goldman is its people. And if that was the case, they'd treat the people better," they said.

The bank did not deny that staff had been overworked, but said in a statement: "We are actively engaging with our managers to ensure that everyone in their teams, including junior staff members, has the support they need given the high-levels of client activity and ongoing challenges of working from home."

Egypt

Suez Canal blocked by huge container ship

‘Suspected gust of wind’ sends 400m-long vessel into bank, sparking several failed attempts to refloat it

00:51

Container ship runs aground in Suez Canal causing traffic jam – video

Martin Farrer
Wed 24 Mar 2021 01.32 EDT

A vast container ship has run aground in the Suez canal after being blown off course by a “gust of wind”, causing a huge traffic jam of vessels at either end of the vital international trade artery.

The 220,000-tonne, 400 metre-long Ever Given – a so-called “mega ship” – became stuck near the southern end of the canal on Tuesday.

Several attempts to refloat it have failed.

Early reports speculated the vessel suffered a loss of power, but the ship’s operator, Evergreen Marine Corp, told Agence-France Presse: “The container accidentally ran aground after a suspected gust of wind hit it.

“The company has urged the shipowner to report the cause of the incident and has been in discussions with relevant parties including the canal management authority to assist the ship as soon as possible.”

Egyptian forecasters said high winds and a sandstorm plagued the area Tuesday, with winds gusting as much as 50 kph (31 mph).

“All crew are safe and accounted for,” said Bernhard Schulte Shipmanagement, which manages the Ever Given. “There have been no reports of injuries or pollution.”

The Ever Given is one of a new category of ships called ultra large container ships (ULCS), some of which were even too big for the Panama canal that links the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, according to one trade expert.

suez map

The ship, which is carrying hundreds of containers bound for Rotterdam from China, is operated by the Taiwanese shipping company Evergreen and registered in Panama.

Pictures taken from another ship in the canal, the Maersk Denver, show the Ever Given lodged at an angle across the waterway. It dwarfs the tugs sent in by the Egyptian authorities to try to free it, and also a mechanised digger that appeared to be trying to excavate ground in order to free the bow.

Julianne Cona, who posted the picture from the Maersk on Instagram, had watched the drama unfold as her ship waited at anchor.

“Hopefully it won’t be too long but from the looks of it that ship is super stuck,” she wrote. “They had a bunch of tugs trying to pull and push it earlier but it was going nowhere … there is a little excavator trying to dig out the bow.”

She added that after the Ever Given ran aground the ship behind her vessel lost power and “almost hit us so it’s been a fun day”.

Ships have been grounded in the canal before. In 2017, a Japanese ship became stuck but was refloated within hours. A more serious incident occurred near the German port of Hamburg in 2016 when the massive CSCL Indian Ocean ran aground and needed 12 tugs to set it free after five days.

The shipping monitoring site Vesselfinder.com showed the stricken ship surrounded by smaller tugs trying to free it from the banks.

The site also shows the traffic jam of other vessels at either end of the canal. The trade monitor TankerTrackers.com tweeted that there were "a lot of fully-laden" tankers stuck at either end of the canal carrying Saudi, Russian, Omani and US oil.

> Look at the size of the ship blocking the #SuezCanal if you zoom into the bow of the ship you can see a digger for size reference pic.twitter.com/428ha5ejav
>
> — Brendan Cruise (@brendancruise) March 23, 2021

Normally ships form convoys to traverse the Suez north and south up and down the canal. The Ever Given was part of a northbound convoy when the incident occurred, according to shipping agent GAC.

"The ship was fifth in the northbound convoy. None of the vessels before it were affected, but the 15 behind it were detained at anchorages waiting for the canal to be cleared. The southbound convoy was also blocked," GAC reported.

The Suez canal is one of the most important waterways in the world and links the Mediterranean with the Red Sea and shipping lanes to Asia. It is 120 miles (190km) long, and 79ft (24m) deep and 673ft (205m) wide. It was expanded in 2015 to enable ships to transit in both directions simultaneously, but only in part of the waterway.

The canal can handle dozens of giant container ships a day so any lengthy holdup could cause serious delays, although shipping experts expected it to be freed quickly.

But Flavio Macau, a senior lecturer in supply chain management at Edith Cowan University in Western Australia, said one problem was that container ships had become much bigger in recent years, too big even for the Panama Canal.

"Moving about 50 ships a day, the impacts of a stranded ship are negligible unless it takes weeks to float it," he said. "But that is very unlikely and it should be over in a couple of days, tops."

Mike Schuler, senior editor of the shipping news site gcaptain.com, said it was not clear exactly what had happened but noted that there was a lot of tugs being moved into place to free the Ever Given.

“There are a lot of tugs on the ship but it takes a lot of power to move a ship of that size. The tide schedule could also come into play because you get tides on the canal.”

The canal’s role as a cornerstone of international trade, particularly in oil, led Egyptian president Abdel-Fatah al-Sisi to announce an expansion of the vital waterway in 2014, a mega-project promised as “a gift to the world.”

The canal expansion, intended to allow marine traffic to flow in two directions in the canal, involved deepening and widening 37km of the waterway to cut transit times. The project cost $8bn (£5.2bn at that time), after the Egyptian dictator demanded the project be completed within a year, promising Egyptian citizens that the project would prove to be an “artery of prosperity.” Egypt welcomed world leaders to a grand ceremony marking the reopening of the new canal channel in 2015, amid a wave of nationalist fervour about the project.

Egypt’s Suez Canal Authority pledged that the expansion would double revenues from increased traffic, declaring that the canal would afford Egypt $13.23bn annually by 2023. Last year, revenues fell to $5.61bn, according to the canal authority’s own figures.

According to TankerTrackers, the Ever Given was stuck in part of the canal with only single-lane traffic, rather than the expanded section between the Bitter Lakes and the Mediterranean Sea.

Additional reporting by Ruth Michaelson

Wednesday briefing: 'Serious concerns' about police protest guidelines

Culture

‘Festival of Brexit': first events for divisive £120m project announced

A celebration of British weather and a grow-your-own food initiative will be among the festivities

The chief creative officer of Festival UK 2022, Martin Green, previously ran Hull’s city of culture project in 2017. Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

The chief creative officer of Festival UK 2022, Martin Green, previously ran Hull’s city of culture project in 2017. Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

Mark Brown *Arts correspondent*
Wed 24 Mar 2021 02.00 EDT

A celebration of the British weather and the largest grow-your-own food project of modern times will be among the events being staged for a nationwide festival of creativity aimed at bringing the UK together in 2022.

Organisers of the £120m festival, commissioned by Theresa May's government and supported by Boris Johnson, announced 10 teams who had successfully pitched ideas.

The festival remains a divisive one. In some eyes it is a politically motivated "festival of Brexit", but its supporters say that is the last thing it will be. Its chief creative officer, Martin Green, said it was about bringing people together and celebrating creativity in events that are "open, original and optimistic".

Others balk at the cost, while supporters point to the work it brings to creative freelancers ravaged by the pandemic. "Don't write it off," argued a Guardian editorial in September.

It has a working title of Festival UK 2022, but that will be replaced with a better name before the year is out.

On Tuesday 10 teams were named, chosen from 30 that had taken part in a three-month paid research and development process. The idea is that the successful teams give a flavour of what their project is about, but the public will have to wait for full details.

A team led by the Glasgow-based Aproxima Arts will offer "a unique approach to community growing celebrating music, future food technology and sustainable festivals." Part of that will be the "largest grow-your-own project of modern times".

Angus Farquhar, the creative director, said the plan was to empower as many people as possible to grow their own food and would involve spaces being reclaimed to allow that. But he added: "I'm conscious of giving too much away."

That "wait and see" element is true for all the teams, including one led by the Leeds-based events studio Newsubstance, which is promising "a physical manifestation and celebration of the British weather and UK coastline" involving "a large-scale installation that addresses global questions, encourages playfulness, elicits joy and presents an experiment in change."

All the teams are strikingly mixed in terms of specialisms and may include poets, film-makers or mathematicians. Other groups in the Newsubstance team include Dose of Society, a video platform for unheard voices; the British Antarctic Survey; and the kinetic sculptor Ivan Black.

The Turner prize-winning architecture collective Assemble are leading a team promising "an immersive experience exploring the wonder of the human mind through architecture, neuroscience, technology, light and sound."

The Salford-based Walk the Plank, known for outdoor spectaculars, head a team exploring the outdoor beauty of the UK and asking questions about "access, taking part, landscape and the future of public spectacle."

The festival has been cursed by the "festival of Brexit" label since the start, which may well have prevented some people and organisations taking part.

Claire Doherty, an associate creative director of National Theatre Wales, another team leader, said the process had been "incredibly open and transparent … We trust Martin [Green]. Our team said how can we use this investment to help recovery after the pandemic, how can we make sure this project … really looks at who is under-represented and overlooked and listen to those voices."

Green, whose CV includes the Olympic ceremonies and Hull city of culture, said the festival was one of a number of big events due to take place in the UK in 2022, including the Queen's platinum jubilee and the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham.

The festival is funded by the UK government but Green said the devolved governments were fully onboard.

Scotland's culture secretary, Fiona Hyslop, said it had been inspiring to see creative and Stem (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) sectors working together to share their talents. "This is an important opportunity to support freelancers and organisations in these sectors as we begin our recovery from the pandemic," she said.

Police

Latest Bristol policing protest culminates in 14 arrests

Police disperse demonstrators two days after Kill the Bill protest descended into violent rioting

Police and protesters at College Green in Bristol on Tuesday night. Photograph: Ben Birchall/PA

Police and protesters at College Green in Bristol on Tuesday night. Photograph: Ben Birchall/PA

Staff and agencies
Tue 23 Mar 2021 23.37 EDT

Police have moved in to disperse demonstrators in Bristol, two days after another protest that descended into rioting in the city. The demonstration overnight ended with 14 people arrested, Avon and Somerset police said,

including a person sought in connection with the disorder in Bristol on Sunday.

Public order officers were deployed on Tuesday night to College Green, where police said around 130 people had gathered earlier in the evening. It was the latest “Kill the Bill” protest in the city against the government’s policing bill, which will see the police handed new powers to tackle demonstrations.

Avon and Somerset police said officers had attempted to engage with demonstrators and asked them to move on.

The force posted online: “Officers had engaged with protesters and asked them to move on but tents and a sound system were set up. We remain in lockdown and we cannot allow this gathering to continue.”

Shortly before 11pm, police said protesters had been moved off College Green but that a “significant number” remained on Deanery Road “and continue to refuse to leave the area”.

The force tweeted: “Officers will take proportionate action to disperse crowds. They are not containing anyone and we continue to urge people to move on.

Man charged over homemade spear at Bristol 'kill the bill' riot
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“It’s disappointing we needed to take this action on a day we remember those who’ve lost their lives,” the force added, referring to the anniversary of the first national lockdown.

Video appearing to be from the demonstration showed large numbers of police with some officers on horseback and others with dogs. Shouts of “Our streets” and “Shame on you” could be heard.

Police investigating the riot that marred a “Kill the Bill” protest in Bristol on Sunday have released images of 10 people they wish to trace. Around 3,000 people had attended the peaceful demonstration on College Green but events

turned violent after around 500 people descended on the New Bridewell police station. Twenty-one officers were injured and vehicles set alight.

Seven men, aged between 20 and 44, were arrested on suspicion of violent disorder and have all been released under investigation. A 28-year-old man, from the Bedminster Down area of Bristol, has been in court charged with possessing an offensive weapon and is due to reappear on 10 June.

With the Press Association

Israel

Israel election: early results suggest extended deadlock

Neither Benjamin Netanyahu nor opposition leader Yair Lapid have a clear path to forming a coalition

Israel's fourth election in recent years appears likely to be inconclusive, with both Benjamin Netanyahu and Yair Lapid seeking to form coalitions. Photograph: Oded Balilty/AP

Israel's fourth election in recent years appears likely to be inconclusive, with both Benjamin Netanyahu and Yair Lapid seeking to form coalitions. Photograph: Oded Balilty/AP

Oliver Holmes and Quique Kierszenbaum in Tel Aviv
Wed 24 Mar 2021 02.03 EDT

Early results from Israel's fourth snap election suggested yet another stalemate, with Benjamin Netanyahu looking to cobble together a coalition

by partnering with extreme nationalist, hardline religious and far-right parties.

With more than half of the votes counted by Wednesday morning, the prime minister's Likud party was clearly leading with around a quarter of all votes. The opposition head, Yair Lapid, had less than 15%.

However, Netanyahu and Lapid will need to convince rival parties in the Knesset, Israel's parliament, to join them to form a majority government. That prospect appeared in doubt for both men, suggesting a potential extension of the two-year deadlock, and even an unwanted fifth election.

Speaking overnight in Jerusalem, Netanyahu said he intended to contact parliamentarians in an attempt to build a "stable" government. "I stretch out my hand to all [Members of the Knesset] who believe in this path; I don't rule anybody out. I expect all who believe in our principles to act in a similar fashion."

Netanyahu will rely on traditional allies from ultra-Orthodox Jewish factions, such as Aryeh Deri, who said on Sunday it was not a woman's "natural place" to be a candidate in the party he leads, Shas.

Meanwhile, the far-right former settler leader Naftali Bennett, 48, who was Netanyahu's defence minister but has since run against him, has emerged as a potential kingmaker.

Still, it seemed increasingly likely the prime minister will need backing from a group seen as even more extreme – an alliance called Religious Zionism, which includes politicians who have expressed anti-gay views and want to expel "disloyal" Arabs from the state.

One of its most hardline candidates, Itamar Ben Gvir, until last year kept a photo in his living room of Baruch Goldstein, an American-Israeli settler who in 1994 gunned down 29 Palestinians worshippers in Hebron as they held morning prayers. Wednesday's results indicted Ben Gvir would make it into the Knesset for the first time.

In opposition, Lapid, a former TV host and finance minister, hopes his Yesh Atid party can become a significant force. Speaking in Tel Aviv after midnight, Lapid told supporters he would also attempt to form a coalition.

"[There] won't be a government based on the votes of the racists and homophobes," he said. "I've started speaking to party leaders and we'll wait for the results but we'll do everything to create a sane government in Israel."

However, to lead Israel's next administration, the self-proclaimed "centrist" will probably have to forge tricky alliances with parties from across the political spectrum, from Arab parliamentarians to far-right nationalists, such as former Netanyahu ally Avigdor Lieberman.

Lapid took the role of head of the opposition from Benny Gantz, a former army chief who fought Netanyahu during the past three elections but who lost support after he made a power-sharing deal with the prime minister that ultimately collapsed.

Perhaps fatigued after repeated rounds of voting during a protracted crisis, or possibly due to the unusually dusty hot weather, turnout this year dropped to its lowest level in over a decade. The Central Elections Committee said 67.2% of eligible voters cast ballots.

Politicians representing the country's sizeable Arab minority, who won a significant proportion of seats in the previous election, appeared to falter. Last year, they teamed up with an anti-Netanyahu alliance called the Joint List that became the third-largest force in the Knesset. But their agreement has since fallen apart.

Hunger

Over 30 million people 'one step away from starvation', UN warns

The pandemic, climate crisis and conflict combining to drive ‘alarming’ levels of global hunger, says report

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A farm on the outskirts of Sokoto, northern Nigeria. Climate shocks have damaged agricultural yields. Photograph: Luis Tato/AFP via Getty

A farm on the outskirts of Sokoto, northern Nigeria. Climate shocks have damaged agricultural yields. Photograph: Luis Tato/AFP via Getty

About this content
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Wed 24 Mar 2021 02.30 EDT

Acute hunger is likely to soar in more than 20 countries in the next few months, the UN has warned.

Families in pockets of Yemen and South Sudan are already in the grip of starvation, according to a report on hunger hotspots published by the agency's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and World Food Programme (WFP).

An estimated 34 million people are struggling with emergency levels of acute hunger known as IPC (Integrated food security Phase Classification) 4, meaning they are 'one step away from starvation'.

Acute hunger is being driven by conflict, climate shocks and the Covid pandemic, and, in some places, compounded by storms of desert locusts.

"The magnitude of suffering is alarming," said FAO director-general Qu Dongyu. "It is incumbent upon all of us to act now and to act fast to save lives, safeguard livelihoods and prevent the worst situation."

Northern Nigeria, Yemen and South Sudan top the list of places facing "catastrophic" levels of acute hunger, the agencies said.

Most of the hotspots identified in the report are in Africa, but some are in other regions, from Afghanistan in Asia, Syria and Lebanon in the Middle East and Haiti in Latin America and the Caribbean.

"In many regions, the planting season has just started or is about to start," said Qu. "We must run against the clock and not let this opportunity to protect, stabilise and even possibly increase local food production slip away."

A massive famine is creeping into Yemen, we need to stop it devouring a generation | Mark Lowcock and Ignazio Cassis
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"We are seeing a catastrophe unfold before our very eyes," said WFP executive director David Beasley. "Famine – driven by conflict, and fuelled by climate shocks and the Covid-19 pandemic – is knocking on the door for millions of families."

Three things were needed to stop "millions from dying of starvation", he said – a halt in fighting, increased access to vulnerable communities and a step up in donations.

Earlier this month, the FAO and WFP called for $5.5bn (£4bn) to avert famine, through humanitarian food assistance, cash and emergency livelihood interventions.

Latin America is the region hardest hit by economic decline and will be the slowest to recover, the report found, while in the Middle East, Yemen, Syria and Lebanon are seriously affected by rapid currency depreciation and rocketing inflation.

More than 7 million people across South Sudan are projected to face crisis levels of acute food insecurity during the period from April to July, the report found, while more than 16 million Yemenis are expected to be experiencing high levels of acute food insecurity by June, an increase of 3

million since the end of last year. Other countries identified as among the worst hunger hotspots are Burkina Faso, Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Haiti, Sudan and Syria.

Deforestation

Disease outbreaks more likely in deforestation areas, study finds

Tree-planting can also increase health risks if it focuses too narrowly on small number of species, paper says

Smoke from a fire in the Amazon rainforest in Oiapoque, Amapa state. Photograph: Nelson Almeida/AFP/Getty Images

Smoke from a fire in the Amazon rainforest in Oiapoque, Amapa state. Photograph: Nelson Almeida/AFP/Getty Images

Jonathan Watts
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Wed 24 Mar 2021 01.00 EDT

Outbreaks of infectious diseases are more likely in areas of deforestation and monoculture plantations, according to a study that suggests epidemics are likely to increase as biodiversity declines.

Land use change is a significant factor in the emergence of zoonotic viruses such as Covid-19 and vector-borne ailments such as malaria, says the paper, published on Wednesday in Frontiers in Veterinary Science.

Even tree-planting can increase health risks to local human populations if it focuses too narrowly on a small number of species, as is often the case in commercial forests, the research found.

The authors said this was because diseases are filtered and blocked by a range of predators and habitats in a healthy, biodiverse forest. When this is replaced by a palm oil plantation, soy fields or blocks of eucalyptus, the specialist species die off, leaving generalists such as rats and mosquitoes to thrive and spread pathogens across human and non-human habitats. The net result is a loss of natural disease regulation.

“I was surprised by how clear the pattern was,” said one of the authors, Serge Morand, of the French National Centre for Scientific Research. “We must give more consideration to the role of the forest in human health, animal health and environmental health. The message from this study is ‘don’t forget the forest’.”

The researchers examined the correlation between trends for forest cover, plantations, population and disease around the globe using statistics from international institutions such as the World Health Organization, the World Bank, the Food and Agricultural Organization and the Gideon epidemic database. Over the period of study from 1990 to 2016, this covered 3,884 outbreaks of 116 zoonotic diseases that crossed the species barrier and 1,996 outbreaks of 69 vector-borne infectious diseases, mostly carried by mosquitoes, ticks or flies.

The paper shows outbreaks increased over time, while plantations expanded rapidly and overall forest cover declined gradually. By itself, a correlation is not proof of causality because other factors may be involved, such as climate disruption. The authors bolster their argument with multiple references to individual case studies that highlight the links between epidemics and land use change.

In Brazil, scientists have demonstrated that deforestation increases the risks of outbreaks of malaria. In south-east Asia, studies have shown how forest clearing favours the mosquito *Anopheles darlingi*, which is a vector for several diseases. Loss of primary forests has also been identified as a factor in the emergence of Ebola in west Africa and the re-emergence of arthropod-borne leishmaniasis.

The new study adds to a growing body of evidence that viruses are more likely to transfer to humans or animals if they live in or near human-disturbed ecosystems, such as recently cleared forests or swamps drained for farmland, mining projects or residential projects.

This is shaped by trade patterns and consumer behaviour. A quarter of global forest loss is driven by the production of commodities such as beef, soy, palm oil and wood fibre. Mining adds to this problem by contaminating rivers and streams that are vital for a resilient ecosystem, carbon sequestration and soil quality.

Morand said his study showed that disease risks needs to be added to risk-benefit analysis of new projects. “We should take the costs of public health into account when considering new plantations or mines. The risks are first to local people, but then worldwide because we have seen with Covid how quickly diseases can spread.”

He is particularly concerned about the deteriorating environmental health of the Amazon rainforest. Under the Brazilian president, Jair Bolsonaro, deforestation has surged to levels not seen in more than a decade and public health systems have been so mismanaged that the country now has the worst Covid death rate in the world.

“Everyone in the field of planetary health is worried about what is happening to biodiversity, climate and public health in Brazil,” Morand said. “The stress there is growing. The Amazon is near a tipping point due to climate change, which is not good at all for the world ecosystem. If we reach the tipping point, the outcomes will be very bad in terms of drought, fires and for sure in terms of disease.”

Other areas of concern include the rainforests of the Congo basin and south-east Asia, and monoculture afforestation projects in China, Europe and the US. “Our results clearly suggest that it is not only forest clearance that is responsible for outbreaks of infectious diseases, but also reforestation or afforestation, particularly in countries outside the tropical zone,” the paper notes.

Morand is now working on a more detailed study that will use satellite analysis of forest cover to examine links with disease. With more information, he believes it may be possible to predict future outbreaks and to work with local communities to build ecologically diverse and economically productive landscapes that reduce the risks.

As the author of a 2016 book called The Next Plague, he says it is only a matter of time until the next pandemic. “The risks are very high. It’s just a case of when and where. We need to prepare.”

University of Bristol

Bristol University happiness course students found to be more upbeat

‘Science of happiness’ course leader ‘astounded’ to find positive impact on students’ wellbeing

The Victoria Rooms at Bristol University. Photograph: Nick Riddle/Nick Riddle/University of Bristol/Flickr

The Victoria Rooms at Bristol University. Photograph: Nick Riddle/Nick Riddle/University of Bristol/Flickr

Steven Morris
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Wed 24 Mar 2021 02.00 EDT

Attaining – and maintaining – a state of joy or even simple contentment can be challenging, especially in these most difficult of times.

But data from a course pioneered at the University of Bristol has suggested that actually taking time to study happiness may be a good way of achieving it.

First year students who have been completed a "science of happiness" course – the first of its kind in the UK – have been found to be more upbeat than counterparts who have not taken it.

The three-month course has two strands – one academic, one practical. Students are lectured about the psychology and the neuroscience of happiness. What it is, why it happens.

They also have to carry out practical tasks such as performing an act of kindness, chatting to a stranger, taking time to savour an experience, exercising, sleeping well, even writing a thank you letter.

During sessions in "happiness hubs" led by senior students they are asked to think about the impact of social media on happiness, about how loneliness can impair immune systems and how optimism can increase life expectancy. Students are also expected to write entries in an online journal each week to help them reflect on their mental wellbeing.

There are no exams but students who complete the course receive the nice boost of 20 academic credits – a sixth of what they need to pass their first year. But, more importantly, many of the 1,000 students who have so far taken the course have said they feel happier.

Prof Bruce Hood, who runs the course, said: "I knew the students would enjoy the lectures as the content is so fascinating, but I was truly astounded to discover the positive impact on their mental wellbeing."

The course was launched in response to a worrying increase in student mental health problems across the UK.

Based on a successful course run at Yale University in the US, the idea of the course was to combine cutting-edge research with practical advice.

Sarah Purdy, the University of Bristol's pro vice-chancellor for student experience, said: "Offering students a course that was not examined or

graded was a new approach for us. It was a recognition that equipping students with the skills they need to stay mentally resilient is at least as important as giving them the knowledge they need for their future careers.

An academic study of the course has found that the first cohort, who took it at the end of 2019, had significantly higher mental wellbeing than a control group.

A second cohort, who were on the course during the early part of the Covid crisis, did not feel happier but were judged more resilient than a control group. The third course was an online one because of lockdown restrictions and, though there was no control group, participants reported that their sense of wellbeing had increased.

The study accepted there were caveats – most of those who took part were white and female and some students could not take part because of timetabling issues.

But Lara Czernecki, a first year film and television student who has completed the course, said it had helped her feel more content and she continues to use the meditation techniques she learned.

“It’s made me feel more conscious of my happiness. I’ve thought a lot about success and happiness. Lots of people think they will be happy if they are successful. We can turn it around – if we are happy we are more likely to be successful.”

2021.03.24 - Coronavirus

- 'The west focused on flu' How Taiwan triumphed over Covid as UK faltered
- Vaccine 'Hesitancy' in England and Wales is being overcome, study finds
- Brazil Fury as Bolsonaro says people will soon lead 'normal lives'
- Covid vaccines EU to widen criteria for possible export bans
- Live Coronavirus: Hong Kong suspends Pfizer vaccines; Brazil suffers record daily deaths
- Vaccine Hong Kong and Macau suspend Pfizer/BioNTech shot over packaging flaw
- 'Loneliness emergency' Pandemic's impact demands action, MPs say
- UK Pregnant nurse who died of Covid 'unhappy' to be sent home from A&E

How Taiwan triumphed over Covid as UK faltered

Vaccines and immunisation

Covid ‘vaccine hesitancy’ in England and Wales is being overcome, study finds

More than 80% of people who were reluctant to accept a jab in December have changed their mind

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Natalie Grover

Tue 23 Mar 2021 20.01 EDT

Researchers tracked more than 14,000 adults across two months and found that attitudes had shifted across all ethnic groups and levels of social deprivation. Photograph: Ian Forsyth/Getty Images

More than four in five people who said last December they were either uncertain about or intended to refuse a Covid-19 vaccine had changed their mind by February and had accepted a jab or planned to, an analysis has found.

Researchers tracked responses of 14,713 adults in England and Wales over the two months, finding that the change was consistent across all ethnic groups and all levels of social deprivation. The results are encouraging given minority ethnic people have been hit hardest by Covid but are among the least likely to take up the vaccine.

“We were really sort of taken aback by the sort of the magnitude of the shift,” said the study’s author, Dr Parth Patel of University College London.

“What we’re showing is that vaccine hesitancy has changed. Everyone is pretty keen to take a vaccine right now … that doesn’t mean disparities in vaccination rates will disappear,” he said.

Lower vaccine uptake among ethnic minorities and people who live in deprived areas is not just down to vaccine hesitancy, he stressed: it also has to do with structural barriers to accessing healthcare.

In the analysis, 1,432 respondents said “no” or “unsure” to the question “would you accept a Covid-19 vaccine if offered?” in December 2020. Of these, 1,233 (86%) went on to respond “yes” or “already had a Covid-19 vaccine” in February 2021.

This shift was observed across ethnic groups, ranging from 72% of vaccine-hesitant changing their minds in people from mixed ethnic backgrounds to 90% in people from south Asian ethnic backgrounds. Concerns about both Covid-19 illness and coronavirus vaccines influenced “vaccine intention”, the authors said in their analysis, which is still to be peer-reviewed.

Despite the encouraging shift in attitudes, some disparities in vaccine intention persist. Young adults, and people from black and white other ethnic backgrounds, were more likely to intend to refuse or be unsure about taking a Covid-19 vaccine, compared with older adults and white British people, the researchers found.

For instance, 25- to 35-year-olds were almost nine times more likely to intend to refuse a Covid-19 vaccine in February than over-75s, even after accounting for factors such as sex, ethnicity, deprivation and underlying health conditions.

So, what caused the big change in intentions over this relatively short time period? Those factors are still to be determined, said Patel. The NHS's efforts to address vaccine hesitancy and public health campaigns alongside people seeing their family, friends and peers getting vaccinated are potential explanations, he said.

"What we've seen is a big shift in two months — and there's nothing to say wouldn't go back the other way. This intention – it changes over time, it's not fixed … hopefully, it's a trend we will continue to see."

Although the analysis included a substantial number of people from ethnic minorities, the authors cautioned the sample was not fully representative of the national population. Given participation in the analysis (derived from the UCL Virus Watch study) is voluntary, the cohort is also probably biased toward people concerned about Covid-19 – which may lead to an overestimation of national vaccine intention.

Brazil

Brazil Covid crisis: fury after Bolsonaro says people will soon lead 'normal lives'

Screams of ‘murderer’ and ‘liar’ in major cities as president makes televised address to the nation on deadliest day yet

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Jair Bolsonaro has presided over a Covid crisis in Brazil. Photograph: Andressa Anholete/Getty Images

Jair Bolsonaro has presided over a Covid crisis in Brazil. Photograph: Andressa Anholete/Getty Images

Tom Phillips in Rio de Janeiro
Tue 23 Mar 2021 21.37 EDT

Loud protests have erupted across Brazil as the country's Covid-sceptic president, Jair Bolsonaro, struggled to defend his handling of the pandemic and claimed citizens would soon be able to resume their "normal lives" despite the soaring death toll.

Bolsonaro, whose anti-science response to coronavirus has drawn international condemnation, made a televised address to the country on Tuesday night, as Brazil suffered by far its heaviest day of losses since the outbreak began last February.

Brazil stares into the abyss as Covid intensive care units fill up everywhere
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According to a coalition of Brazilian news groups, which has been keeping a tally since Bolsonaro's administration was accused of trying to suppress such information last year, a record 3,158 deaths were registered on Tuesday, as well as 84,996 new infections. Brazil's official death toll – already the world's second highest after the US – rose to 298,843 and was likely to exceed 300,000 on Wednesday. About a third of the global total of fatalities were recorded in Brazil on Tuesday.

"What I see before me is a country that attaches no value to the lives of its citizens," the scientist and broadcaster Átila Iamarino said of his government's response.

In a four-minute pronouncement that was greeted with shrieks of rage and frustration in some of Brazil's biggest cities, Bolsonaro defended his reaction to the epidemic, claiming that by opposing containment measures such as lockdown he had been trying to protect jobs and avoid "economic chaos".

"I want to reassure the Brazilian people and let them know that vaccines are assured," claimed the far-right populist who critics accuse of undermining vaccination efforts by vowing not to be vaccinated himself and failing to acquire sufficient shots for the rest of the country.

Bolsonaro, who has dismissed Covid-19 as a "little flu", blamed Brazil's current drama on the new P1 variant thought to have emerged late last year

in the Brazilian Amazon and claimed: “Very soon we will resume our normal lives.”

“We are tireless in our fight against coronavirus – this is our mission and we will fulfil it,” the former army captain added.

The pronouncement came almost exactly a year to the day after Bolsonaro made a now notorious television address in which he claimed fears over the pandemic were exaggerated “and soon it will pass”.

“In my particular case, because of my background as an athlete, I wouldn’t need to worry if I was infected by the virus,” Bolsonaro boasted on 24 March 2020, when Brazil’s death toll stood at 46, sparking noisy pot-banging protests across the country.

The dissent returned with a vengeance on Tuesday with loud protests reported in major cities such as Brasília, Belo Horizonte, São Paulo and Recife as Bolsonaro spoke. In Rio de Janeiro dissenters could be heard heaping scorn and insults on the president from the windows of apartment buildings where residents have lost their lives. “Murderer!”, “Liar!” they bellowed. “Be gone, Bolsonaro!”

A person beats a pot from a window to protest against Brazil’s president, Jair Bolsonaro. Photograph: Ueslei Marcelino/Reuters

Experts and scientific evidence contradict Bolsonaro's claim that Brazil will soon return to "normal life" and many state capitals are now entering a period of lockdown despite his opposition to such moves.

"This is the most severe moment of the pandemic and the prognosis is not good," said Margareth Dalcolmo, a pneumologist from the public health institute Fiocruz.

"The situation is dramatic. The hospitals are completely exploding. There are no available beds any more – even for rich people," Dalcolmo added, calling for a two-week lockdown that might slow the spread of the virus.

On Tuesday more than 1,000 deaths were reported in São Paulo state alone. The state's governor, João Doria, blamed the calamity on Brazil's "psychopathic leader".

European Union

EU to widen criteria for possible Covid vaccine export bans

Bloc expected to assess countries' Covid vaccination coverage and record in facilitating exports to EU

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Daniel Boffey in Brussels, and Jessica Elgot

Tue 23 Mar 2021 14.17 EDT First published on Tue 23 Mar 2021 09.29 EDT

A health worker holds a vial of the AstraZeneca vaccine in Madrid. Photograph: Manu Fernández/AP

The EU is expected to take into account the level of vaccination coverage in a country and its record in facilitating exports to the bloc when deciding on whether to prohibit individual vaccine shipments to the UK and elsewhere.

The revision of the export authorisation scheme, widening the criteria that will guide Brussels' decisions on export requests, is due to be announced on Wednesday. EU leaders will then on Thursday discuss going further in controlling vaccine distribution when they meet by videoconference.

Despite the European commission's intended move, the German chancellor, Angela Merkel, appeared to offer an olive branch to Britain ahead of the virtual summit in a sign of the sensitivity of the issue.

"When it comes to vaccine production, there are a huge range of international interdependencies," she said. "You have to be very careful now about imposing general export bans – you have to take a very close look at the supply chains.

"We will make our decision in a responsible manner, and at the same time we will keep talking to the British government, as Boris Johnson has already spoken with us and Emmanuel Macron on Sunday – and he is, by the way, in constant contact with the European commission. And we will certainly make our decision on Thursday, or at least hold a discussion about it."

Johnson on Tuesday suggested he would not engage in a tit-for-tat export ban, with sources saying the priority was still to calm tensions rather than escalate with threats.

"We in this country don't believe in blockades of any kind of vaccines or vaccine material, that's not something that this country would dream of engaging in," the prime minister said at the press conference, adding that he was "encouraged" by European leaders expressing a similar sentiment.

"There's no point in one country being immunised, on its own. We need the whole planet to be inoculated."

England's chief medical officer, Prof Chris Whitty, said all vaccines were international collaborations, in a covert warning against vaccine nationalism.

“We see this as an international problem,” he said.

The decision to revise the current export authorisation mechanism comes as UK and EU officials are seeking to avoid more damaging fallout from the row between Brussels and the Anglo-Swedish pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca.

The latest clash of interests has concerned an AstraZeneca facility in the Netherlands, and the competing demands of the EU and the UK on doses being produced. Officials in Brussels said they would probably block an export application from the plant if one were made.

The EU is acting, however, to also widen its scope for controlling shipments of doses out of the bloc given the slow pace of its vaccination programme and supply problems in the first quarter of this year.

Sources said the changes due to be made to the export mechanism did not amount to a ban on exports to the UK but that a broad range of criteria would now be taken into account when judging on each export request by a pharmaceutical company.

The EU wants to avoid vaccines being sent to countries with very high vaccination coverage, such as the United Arab Emirates, due to concerns that some of the doses are then coming back into Europe on the black market. A threshold of 60% of the population being vaccinated could be set, sources said.

Companies who are holding back deliveries to the EU to the end of a quarter could also face blocks on their export requests, sources said. A test of whether a country receiving vaccines is facilitating the global supply chain, by exporting either doses or raw materials, is also likely to feature. A commission spokesman declined to comment.

The current rules only allow exports to be blocked where a pharmaceutical company is failing to fulfil its contract to supply the EU, as the bloc claims is the case with AstraZeneca. The sole export to be prohibited by the EU so far is a shipment of 250,000 Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine doses from Italy to Australia.

The company has been able to deliver only about a quarter of the 120m doses it had committed to provide to the EU owing to yield issues in its plants on the continent.

The move to go further offers evidence of the frustration in Brussels and member states' capitals that while vaccine suppliers based in the EU have exported about 10m doses to the UK, largely from Pfizer, doses are not coming the other way.

Last week the European commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, said she wanted greater reciprocity on vaccine exports.

On Tuesday the commission vice-president Maroš Šefčovič said vaccine suppliers had exported 41.5m doses from the EU and 70m doses had been delivered to the 27 member states, of which 52m had been administered. Without naming the UK, he said it was unfair that some countries had at the same time not exported a "single dose" to the EU.

"Do we get the fair deal from the pharmaceutical companies?" Šefčovič asked at a press conference following a meeting of EU ministers. "Is this supply to other countries proportional to the effort the European Union and the manufacturing sites in the European Union are making in comparison with how the vaccination rates are evolving across the EU member states?"

It is understood that UK officials led by the former ambassador to the EU Sir Tim Barrow, who is now the political director of the Foreign Office, are in talks over the next steps.

British officials have pointed out to their EU counterparts that components for the Pfizer vaccine are shipped from Yorkshire to the EU, and that any Brussels export authorisation system should recognise the investment per capita put into vaccine development.

The UK was the main funder of Oxford University's vaccine programme. EU sources suggested the talks with the UK would be reflected in the final announcement.

EU heads of state and government will reflect when they meet for the videoconference on Thursday on whether they need to take on even further powers to control production and distribution of vaccines.

France's EU affairs minister, Clément Beaune, said: "We are telling AstraZeneca: we can understand you have production issues but there is no reason for Europe to be the adjustment variable. We want to avoid that AstraZeneca doses produced in Europe go to Britain when we are not receiving anything. We want to make sure the reciprocity principle applies.

"AstraZeneca says: I am experiencing delays. We say: mobilise your plants for us and if you don't, we will block exports to the UK. We will discuss that on Thursday and Friday at the European council."

Vaccine companies have voiced their concerns about export controls, which were echoed by Ireland's taoiseach, Micheál Martin, on Monday. He said they would be a "retrograde step".

A spokesperson for Pfizer said: "We have been clear with all stakeholders that the free movement of goods and supply across borders is absolutely critical to Pfizer and the patients we serve."

Coronavirus live
Coronavirus

Coronavirus live news: Brazil suffers record daily deaths; Hong Kong suspends Pfizer vaccines

Hong Kong

Hong Kong and Macau suspend Covid Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine over packaging flaw

Governments stress there is no safety risk but the stoppage is the latest blow to rollouts of the coronavirus vaccine around the world

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People queue up at a vaccination centre after Hong Kong suspended use of the Pfizer coronavirus vaccine. Photograph: Tyrone Siu/Reuters

People queue up at a vaccination centre after Hong Kong suspended use of the Pfizer coronavirus vaccine. Photograph: Tyrone Siu/Reuters

Agence-France Presse
Wed 24 Mar 2021 01.03 EDT

Hong Kong and Macau have suspended the use of Pfizer/BioNTech's coronavirus vaccine after being informed of a packaging problem affecting one batch of vials.

Although officials stressed that they did not believe there was a safety risk, the stoppage is the latest blow in efforts to roll out mass vaccination programmes against a virus that has killed more than 2.7 million people around the world.

Vaccines and Covid variants: how effective are the jabs and what will it mean for travel?
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"For the sake of precaution, the current vaccination must be suspended during the period of investigation," Hong Kong's government said in a statement.

It comes a day after health authorities banned a local clinic from supplying vaccines after one of its doctors publicly said he would choose Pfizer's vaccine over Sinovac.

Both Chinese cities said their decision came after they were contacted about the packaging issue by Fosun, the Chinese pharmaceutical company that is distributing the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine in China.

Vials with the lot number 210102 were found to have defective packaging, authorities said.

The statements from Hong Kong and Macau did not give any details on how the packaging was defective but both said they did not believe there were any safety issues. Authorities said they decided to act out of an abundance of caution until their investigation is concluded.

Some Hongkongers said on social media their appointments that day had been cancelled and that some vaccination centres were closed. "I haven't lost confidence in the vaccine but I'm quite disappointed as I took the day off," one man, who gave his surname as Wong, told AFP as he arrived at a taped-off centre.

Vaccines with the lot number 210102 have already been given to members of the public in Hong Kong.

'Hong Kong is crumbling': seven days that crushed city's last resistance
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Authorities said another batch of vaccines with lot number 210104 would be put to one side until the investigation had concluded.

Despite being a densely populated city, Hong Kong has kept infections low thanks to some of the most stringent quarantine measures in the world, recording just 11,000 infections and 200 deaths since the pandemic began.

Hong Kong began its vaccination drive last month but the public take-up has been slow and ensnared by roiling political unrest.

The city was upended by huge and often violent democracy protests in 2019 that Beijing has responded to with a sweeping crackdown on dissent.

As a result, public trust in Hong Kong's government is low. A recent poll said only 37% of Hong Kong adults planned to get vaccinated.

Around 403,000 people – about 5% of the city's population – have had their first shot. Until Wednesday, authorities offered China's Sinovac and the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine.

Sinovac received fast-track approval despite not publishing peer-reviewed clinical data. Data points to an efficacy rate of 50-80%, depending on the studies. Pfizer says its efficacy rate is 94-95%.

The vaccination scheme was opened to anyone above the age of 30 last week after officials struggled to attract enough elderly people and those in priority groups.

Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam has previously lamented the tepid enthusiasm for vaccination and accused critics of "smearing" the Chinese vaccine.

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Loneliness

Action needed to tackle post-Covid 'loneliness emergency', MPs say

Investing in more benches, public toilets and street lighting will encourage people to reconnect, says parliamentary group

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A British Red Cross poll found 32% of Britons are worried they won't be able to connect with people as they did before the pandemic. Photograph: Leon Neal/Getty Images

A British Red Cross poll found 32% of Britons are worried they won't be able to connect with people as they did before the pandemic. Photograph: Leon Neal/Getty Images

Denis Campbell *Health policy editor*
Wed 24 Mar 2021 03.00 EDT

Britain needs more benches, public toilets and street lighting to encourage lonely people to start mixing socially again once the lockdown ends, MPs and peers say.

Action is needed to tackle a “loneliness emergency” that the Covid pandemic has exacerbated by denying people contact with family and friends, the parliamentarians say.

The call comes as new polling by the British Red Cross shows that more than a third (35%) of Britons feel less connected to their community than they did before Covid-19 struck and 39% do not think their feelings of loneliness will go away once the restrictions on everyday life lift.

Almost a third (32%) are worried that they may not be able to connect with people in the same way they did before the pandemic, according to a representative poll of 2,000 UK adults by Opinium.

The cross-party all-party parliamentary group on loneliness wants Boris Johnson and his government to ensure that the country has a “connected recovery”. They also want ministers to do more to close the digital divide, plan new housing developments so that residents can spend time together and fund charities and voluntary organisations that help “the lonely and cut-off”.

Neil O’Brien, the Conservative MP who chairs the group, said that during the past year “no matter where you live, neighbours and other quality connections – including those on the internet – have mattered”.

He said: “This means more public toilets, better street lighting, ramps and quiet safe spaces, so that everyone from all ages and all backgrounds has the facilities they need in order to make valuable friendships in their area.”

Zoë Abrams, the British Red Cross’s executive director of communications and advocacy, said tackling loneliness should be a priority because during the pandemic many people had faced “the life transitions that we know can lead to loneliness, such as poor physical and mental health, losing a job or losing a loved one”.

‘My thoughts became poisonous’: the toll of lockdown when you live alone
Read more

She said: “We know from our 150 years of responding to emergencies that people who are more connected socially are better able to cope with, and recover from, crises.

“A lack of a good bus service, free public toilets, parks and gardens, baby-changing facilities or accessibility adaptations can put up barriers that prevent people from connecting with others in person.”

A government spokesperson said: “The impacts of Covid-19 are being felt across the world, but the UK government is leading the way in tackling the issue of loneliness.

“Since the beginning of the pandemic we have invested over £31.5m in organisations supporting people who experience loneliness and a further £44m to organisations supporting people with their mental health.

“We recognise that the easing of lockdown restrictions will not mean the end of loneliness for many people, which is why this will remain a priority for the government.”

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Luton

Pregnant nurse who died of Covid 'unhappy' to be sent home from A&E

Mary Agyeiwaa Agyapong did not need oxygen and so was discharged, doctor tells inquest

- Coronavirus – latest updates
- See all our coronavirus coverage

Ernest Boateng and Mary Agyeiwaa Agyapong, who gave birth to their daughter while in hospital just before her death.

Ernest Boateng and Mary Agyeiwaa Agyapong, who gave birth to their daughter while in hospital just before her death.

Sarah Marsh
@sloumarsh
Tue 23 Mar 2021 14.18 EDT

A pregnant nurse who died from coronavirus shortly after being discharged from hospital was “unhappy” about the decision to be sent home, an inquest has heard.

Mary Agyeiwaa Agyapong, who was suffering from breathlessness and fatigue, was told by Dr William Manning that she should leave the emergency department of Luton and Dunstable university hospital because she did not require oxygen.

Speaking at the inquest at Bedfordshire and Luton coroner’s court on Tuesday, Manning said he believed the 28-year-old had coronavirus at the time but he was concerned about her being in the hospital, where there was an increasing number of Covid-19 patients.

He made the decision on 5 April 2020, and two days later Agyeiwaa Agyapong, a specialist diabetes nurse who was originally from Ghana, was readmitted later. She gave birth to a daughter and died in intensive care on 12 April.

Giving evidence on Tuesday, Manning said: “At the time, if a patient did not require oxygen therapy, they didn’t require admission to hospital. I decided she should be discharged.”

He said his decision also took into consideration that she apparently had a follow-up appointment booked with the obstetrician the next day.

He told the inquest: “Mary was in an area of the department with a lot of Covid patients. I said I suspected she had Covid and I explained we only admitted to Covid [if there was] a need for oxygen. She didn’t seem particularly happy to go home.

“She didn’t feel well, she had a fever and didn’t feel good but didn’t offer me a specific reason why she was unhappy with my plan.”

Manning also said he was unaware at the time of any suggestion coronavirus disproportionately affected people from ethnic minorities.

Agyeiwaa Agyapong’s husband, Ernest Boateng, said he was surprised his wife was initially discharged from hospital, hours after collapsing at home.

He said: “When I saw her [after being discharged], she looked absolutely appalling. I could not believe that she had been discharged from the hospital in her state as she was so poorly.”

Boateng has previously spoken about the grief of losing his wife and his campaign to find answers. “I was completely lost [after she died],” he said. “I had this lovely, cute baby girl, but her mum was not around, she was gone. I had to try and pick up from where we left off and just get on with the journey.”

He wrote to Boris Johnson last year urging him to make it a legal requirement for employers to allow all pregnant women who pass 20 weeks gestation to work from home or be suspended on full pay.

The inquest into Agyeiwaa Agyapong’s death was adjourned until Wednesday.

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Lockdown livingFriendship

The social biome: how to build nourishing friendships – and banish loneliness

All your daily interactions with others, big and small, make up your social biome, and the pandemic has severely damaged most of ours. Here's how to reinvigorate it

The social biome ... your relationship ecosystem. Composite: Getty

The social biome ... your relationship ecosystem. Composite: Getty

Moya Sarner
Wed 24 Mar 2021 02.00 EDT

You probably don't know you have a social biome – but according to Jeffrey Hall, professor of communication studies at the University of Kansas, you

do. Perhaps you've heard of the gut microbiome – the unique, diverse ecosystem of bacteria and other microbes that inhabit our gastrointestinal system and which, when balanced, keep us in good digestive health. Well, the social biome, says Hall, is the individual ecosystem of relationships and interactions that shapes our emotional, psychological and physical health. And – thanks to lockdown – it is unlikely to be in good shape.

Hall's term encompasses the "pattern of your social interactions throughout your days; the who, the what you talk about, and the modalities you use to communicate, from face to face to other means". The concept has roots, he says, in the idea that social interactions, like food, have "calories" that can make you feel socially nourished. And just as with what you eat, it is not just quantity that matters to health, but variety. Just as you need a mix of food groups on your plate, so you need a mix of modes of communication and types of relationship in your social diet.

In other words a healthy and varied social biome could feature deep and meaningful conversations with your best friend, pleasant small talk with a colleague in the lift, and swapping memes in a WhatsApp group of old school friends. And as with your gut microbiome, Hall says, if you get the balance right, it can "lead to a state of thriving, where you have all your social needs met" – but if the balance is off, you may find yourself lonely, socially malnourished and thirsty for meaningful contact. Sound familiar?

I ask Robin Dunbar, emeritus professor of evolutionary psychology at the University of Oxford, what he makes of this idea. "Most psychologists tend to think of the social world as being strictly dyadic," he tells me – in other words, based on pair relationships. "It's you and your mum, you and your baby, you and your romantic partner, maybe you and your best friend – but that's about as far as it goes. It's a very impoverished view of the social world." It's the classic psychologist move, he says – to "simplify everything" so as to "study basic mechanisms", "shorn of complications". He could be describing my social life over lockdown here: dyadic (and then, only outdoors), basic, simplified to the point of impoverishment. But, Dunbar reminds me, "these dyadic relationships are all embedded in an ever-extending network called the family, the community, the nation, the globe, which is all highly interconnected".

This network can bring extraordinary benefits, if we let it. It “creates a kind of enmeshing web within which you are cosseted, and the effects have enormous consequences for our health and wellbeing,” he says. And he cites “a huge torrent – a tsunami, really” of epidemiological papers in the past 15 years, showing that “the best single predictor for your psychological wellbeing and health, for your physical wellbeing and health – even for your risk of dying – is the number and quality of friendships that you have”. A healthy social biome, he suggests, is key to a healthy body and mind.

So what does a healthy social biome look like? Hall and his colleague Andy Merolla mapped the social biomes of nearly 400 people, combing through tens of thousands of interactions, to explore the link between a person’s everyday social exchanges and their sense of wellbeing. Study participants either responded to texts throughout the day asking whether or not they’d had a social interaction in the past 10 minutes, followed by questions about how they felt, or they filled in a survey at the end of the day. This gave the researchers insight into who felt most “socially nourished”. This data formed a mosaic of communication patterns they could then investigate, Hall says, to explore a key question: “Let’s take the most socially nourished people and ask, what do they do? What do their patterns look like?”

A healthy social biome is key to a healthy body and mind. Photograph: FG Trade/Getty Images

Some of what they found was fairly intuitive. Respondents with a higher sense of wellbeing had more frequent and longer interactions, and had meaningful conversations two-and-a-half times more often, than those with the least healthy social biomes. Among those with healthier social biomes, two-thirds of interactions were with close friends and family – in contrast to those with the least healthy, where it was closer to half – and they also had more choice about how and when interactions took place. But that was not the whole story.

"The most surprising result," Hall says, "the one I still think is really interesting, is that the strongest association with global wellbeing was how people felt when they were alone." When people replied "no" to the text asking if they'd had a social interaction in the past 10 minutes, and follow-up responses revealed they nevertheless felt good, connected and happy to be alone, it was the most powerful predictor of a healthy social biome.

This shows us, Hall says, that we cannot simply give ourselves a healthy social biome by forcing ourselves to have more and more frequent and longer conversations with our friends and family. "That's not how healthy people function," he says. "Alone time is actually a part of a healthy biome." When we feel sustained by just enough meaningful conversations – even one a day – and by just enough pleasant small talk, then we also feel nourished by time spent alone.

Many of us, in lockdown, have felt anything but socially nourished. Hall says: "It's critical to understand that we had a huge portion of our social biome straight out removed by the pandemic." You might live alone and feel socially starved; you might feel you have had so many intense conversations with members of your household that you are craving mild chat about the weather with a stranger in a queue at the post office.

In fact, says Hall, small talk is more nutritious than we think. His communication model, Communicate Bond Belong theory, is based on the idea that we have a limited amount of energy to spend on our social interactions, which makes the "energy-to-connection ratio" important. Easy, quick and friendly moments of contact, such as asking a colleague how their weekend was, or chatting about the traffic with a waiter, can have a powerful impact for the small amount of effort they require, and "tend to be really

good for mood regulation," he says. "Small talk is disparaged as being awful, but in some sense, checking in with another person and letting them know that you're glad that you're sharing a space with them is absolutely critical to a sense of community, and to our sense of social nutrition."

As our national and individual unlocking begins, many of us will be asking ourselves how we want to live differently. "I don't think there's any question that this is a huge reset," says Hall, who feels the social biome could be a helpful way of thinking about how we want to change our social diet. But, I ask him, can we really control our interactions like this? Can we truly perfect our own social biome? "No, we can't," he replies. "One of the great paradoxes of human experience is how badly we need other people, but are fundamentally unable to control or make people do what we want them to do. That's a really tough condition of life."

A healthy social biome cannot be engineered by us alone, there is no one solution, and it does not come from quick fixes; it has to grow. But we can help to create fertile conditions that will foster that growth, says Hall. "It has to come with an approach of saying, I acknowledge that at this stage in my life I am not as socially connected as I would like to be, so I'm going to take action to do something about that."

Five tips for improving your social biome

Photograph: MixMedia/Getty Images

Loneliness is social hunger – feed yourself

Dunbar explains that John Cacioppo, the late social neuroscientist, argued that "loneliness is an evolutionary signal telling us something is not right with your social environment, and you need to do something about it, fast". If you can understand your loneliness as a kind of hunger you need to feed, then you are in a good position to improve your situation, by phoning a sibling or joining a sports club. But not everybody can do that, Hall says. "In a functional social system, when I feel disconnected, I take action to try to ameliorate that sense of disconnection, and when I do so, I feel satisfied. Unfortunately, when people are chronically lonely, they tend to behave in ways that make their loneliness worse." Loneliness can make them discount the value of human interaction, assume others wouldn't want to be around them or be standoffish with people who try to reach out to them. That's why, Hall says, we cannot blame chronically lonely people for being lonely, and his advice for a healthy social biome may not work for "somebody who feels really, truly alone in this world."

Don't forget about Zoom – even if you really, really want to

Just because we can hug when lockdown is over, we shouldn't stop waving awkwardly on video calls, says Hall. We must take care not to sever connections with those we can only communicate with online, he advises.

“Building healthy routines of online contact is critical, whether we’re in the pandemic or not, because we probably don’t have face-to-face opportunities with some of the closest people in our lives.”

Prepare for some social renegotiations

“You’re sitting at the centre of a series of expanding circles of friendship, like ripples on a pond when a stone drops in,” says Dunbar. Just as each ripple is bigger and weaker than the previous one, each circle of friendship grows in size and decreases in the quality of relationship, from your closest loved ones to what he calls the “weddings, barmitzvahs and funerals circle” and beyond. His research showed the size of each of these circles is, frankly, alarmingly consistent – whether it’s in real life or on social media. “You get the same numbers, the same frequencies. You even see it in online gaming environments – exactly the same layers! It’s extraordinary,” he says.

As we emerge from lockdown, Dunbar says, we will probably experience some movement between these circles. “From the moment you don’t see a friend with the frequency you used to, the quality of that relationship starts to decline within a couple of months, by a noticeable measure.” Some of our friendships may have been destabilised. “They’re not quite the same as they were, so when you meet up again, you’ve got to do a bit of renegotiating, because your friend might have found someone else to replace you in the meantime.”

And how on earth are we supposed to cope with such horror? “Well, that’s just part and parcel of normal life,” he says. “We’re doing that all the time. It’s a bit slower for people in middle age, but people in the late teens and early 20s have a turnover of about 30% per year in their friendships.” All we can do is be prepared.

Invite people to things

In order to have more meaningful social contact with people you like, and to have more choice over how and with whom you spend your time, you will need to invite people to things. It may seem obvious, but if you are someone who, before the pandemic, waited to be invited – to coffee, to a party, to a gallery – rather than doing the inviting, this may require a change of mindset. “Inviting people you don’t know well, but who you’d like to know better is a good way to move a relationship along in a positive way,” says

Hall. And that won't just benefit you; you will improve the social biomes of those you interact with, too.

Climb the ladder of communication – when it's safe

We can think of the different methods of communication available to us as rungs on a ladder, says Hall – and we should prioritise climbing that ladder when it is safe to do so. The lowest rung is browsing social media, and you might want to skip that one, he says. "It's probably no better in terms of feeling connected than being totally alone, so it's not serving a social function." The next rung up is direct messaging a group – sharing memes or news on WhatsApp or Facebook. Then direct messages to people you want to keep in touch with."When something you've just seen reminds you of a friend, text and say: 'Hey, I was just thinking of you.' Use your naturally functioning social alert system to direct your behaviour, rather than just forgetting about it," he says. The next rung is phone calls and video chat – and top of the ladder is face-to-face conversation, the most nourishing of all forms of social contact. And when it finally arrives, how delicious will that be?

Smartphones

OnePlus 9 Pro review: super slick, rapid charging Android phone

Latest top-spec handset has Hasselblad-branded camera, great screen and long battery life

Top latest smartphone from OnePlus feels great, performs well and lasts two days on a charge. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

Top latest smartphone from OnePlus feels great, performs well and lasts two days on a charge. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

Samuel Gibbs *Consumer technology editor*
Wed 24 Mar 2021 03.00 EDT

OnePlus's latest 9 Pro Android phone takes the firm's winning formula of slick speed and adds knowhow from the Swedish renowned camera

manufacturer Hasselblad to try to improve things in the photography department.

The £829 phone tops the Chinese brand's line for 2021 and joins its stablemate Oppo in its pursuit of top dog Samsung.

The 9 Pro is a curved glass and metal sandwich just like its predecessors, but now comes in refined and grown-up colours.

The design is simple and sleek; even the Hasselblad-branded camera lump on the back looks refined. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

The large 6.7in QHD+ OLED screen looks great: bright, crisp and smooth, with a maximum refresh rate of 120Hz matching the best of competitors. The sub-200g weight and sub-74mm width make it fairly easy to hold for a big phone, while the in-screen optical fingerprint sensor is fast and accurate, so unlocking it is a breeze.

Specifications

- **Main screen:** 6.7in QHD+ OLED (525ppi) 120Hz
- **Processor:** Qualcomm Snapdragon 888

- **RAM:** 8 or 12GB of RAM
- **Storage:** 128 or 256GB
- **Operating system:** Oxygen OS 11.2 based on Android 11
- **Camera:** Quad rear camera: 48MP wide, 50MP ultra-wide, 8MP telephoto, 2MP monochrome; 16MP front-facing camera
- **Connectivity:** 5G, dual nano sim, USB-C, wifi 6, NFC, Bluetooth 5.2 (AAC, aptX/HD, LDAC) and location
- **Water resistance:** IP68
- **Dimensions:** 163.2 x 73.6 x 8.7mm
- **Weight:** 197g

Top performance and uber-fast charging

OnePlus's Warp Charge 65T technology will charge the phone from 1% to 100% in just 32 minutes, hitting 50% in 12 minutes with the included adaptor. It also has very fast 50W wireless charging and reverse wireless charging. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

The OnePlus 9 Pro has Qualcomm's latest Snapdragon 888 processor – which is the top chip available to Android devices – with at least 8GB of RAM and 128GB of storage. OnePlus is known for its exceptionally fast-feeling phones, and the 9 Pro continues to deliver. Apps are responsive, games fly and everything is smooth.

It also has good battery life. With the screen set to its maximum QHD+ resolution and 120Hz frame rate, the phone lasts about 44 hours with the screen used for more than five hours in various apps. That means the phone lasts from 7am on day one until 3am on day three and so requires charging every other night. That includes two hours on 5G, the rest on wifi, an hour of Disney+ and about 20 photos shot.

Sustainability

OnePlus rates the battery in the 9 Pro for 1,000 full-charge cycles while maintaining at least 80% of its original capacity. Longevity is aided by the optimised charging system. The battery can be replaced and the smartphone is generally repairable by OnePlus in the UK.

How we are changing the way we rate sustainability of consumer electronics Read more

The company offers a trade-in programme for its own phones and models from rivals. It did not comment on the use of recycled materials in its smartphones. OnePlus does not publish environmental impact assessments but did publish a sustainability report in 2019.

Oxygen OS 11.2

The selfie camera pokes through a small hole in the top left of the screen. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

The 9 Pro ships with the latest version of OnePlus's Oxygen OS, here based on Android 11.

Oxygen OS is one of the most refined and bloat-free western-orientated versions of Android. It offers a reasonable amount of customisation without being overwhelming, from basics such as the ability to remove unwanted icons from the status bar to changing the visual flourish around the fingerprint scanner when you press your finger on it.

It is fast, slick and easy to use, particularly if you have used either the standard Android experience offered by Google or Nokia's phones or Samsung devices.

OnePlus offers software support for three years from release, including two years of Android version updates and then a further year of security updates bimonthly. Samsung offers four years and Apple offers five for their respective phones, so OnePlus still has work to do.

Camera

The Hasselblad ‘pro mode’ in the camera app has most of the settings you’d expect from a more advanced camera, including shooting in RAW. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

On the back of the phone are four Hasselblad-branded cameras, including a 48MP main, 50MP ultra-wide, 8MP 3.3x telephoto and a 2MP monochrome camera, the last of which is a gimmick add-on only used for the weak “monochrome” filter.

The main 48MP camera is generally good, shooting well-exposed and balanced photos with a neutral colour balance. It can shoot at the full 48MP size but defaults to 12MP photos, with which I got better results. Low-light performance was pretty good and the dedicated nightscape mode works well in dark scenes. Highly backlit photos could look a bit washed-out, while some images could look over-sharpened and processed when viewed full-size – don’t blow them up to full size and they look great.

The 50MP ultra-wide camera is also one of the better sensors available, shooting good images and supporting nightscape and other modes. The 8MP telephoto camera has a 3.3x zoom, which is fairly good for a phone without a dedicated periscope zoom system such as that found on the Samsung Galaxy S21 Ultra. It has noticeably poorer low-light performance than the other cameras and cannot use the nightscape mode.

The 16MP fixed-focus selfie camera shot some great-looking photos in good lighting, but was a little soft on detail when blown up to full size. It handled lower-lighting conditions fairly well but lacks any dedicated low-light mode.

The Hasselblad partnership promises more in the future, but for now is limited to optimisation and camera app features. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

Video can be shot at up to 8K resolution at 30 frames a second, with some interesting features such as Nightscape and portrait modes for video.

OnePlus's partnership with Hasselblad has added a few things, including more neutral colour balancing compared to previous efforts. But the most obvious addition is a redesigned Hasselblad "Pro" mode, which has a lot of control options for things like ISO, white balance, shutter, focus and other bits. It is fairly complicated and difficult to get better shots than the normal mode but should be useful for those who want to take the time to go beyond simple point-and-shoot.

Overall the camera on the 9 Pro is good, but will not trouble the market leaders. Hopefully more work with Hasselblad can help improve things.

Observations

The excellent alert slider on the side of the phone toggles between silent, vibrate and ring. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

- The phone's haptic vibrations are nice and sharp, but are not as strong as I would like for some notifications.
- Call quality and 5G performance on EE was excellent.
- The screen is covered in the older Gorilla Glass 5, not the latest significantly more shatter-resistant Gorilla Glass Victus

Price

The OnePlus 9 Pro will cost £829 with 8GB of RAM and 128GB of storage, or £929 with 12 and 256GB.

For comparison, the Samsung Galaxy S21 Ultra has an RRP of £1,149, the Galaxy S21+ costs £949, Oppo Find X3 Pro costs £1,099, and the Apple iPhone 12 Pro Max costs £1,099.

Verdict

The OnePlus 9 Pro is yet another great-performing, well-made smartphone from the Chinese brand.

At £829 it still undercuts the competition on RRP, but not significantly with the frequent discounts for Samsung's Galaxy S21 series and others available online. Instead, OnePlus is more or less competing on an equal footing. In many respects it delivers, with a great screen, super-slick experience and a good battery life.

Where it falters is with a good but not class-leading camera and in only having three years of software support from release, which is decidedly average and behind the four or more that the likes of Samsung and Apple offer for their phones.

> **Pros:** Slick performance, good software, good battery life, speedy charging, great screen, solid camera, water resistance.
>
> **Cons:** Only three years of software support, camera can over-sharpen images, screen glass not the toughest available.

The metal sides and curved glass front and back make the 9 Pro feel narrower and easier to grip than similarly-sized rivals. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

Other reviews

- **Samsung Galaxy S21 Ultra review: the new king of Android phones**
- **Oppo Find X3 Pro review: Chinese smartphone champ can’t beat Samsung**
- **iPhone 12 Pro Max review: Apple’s longer lasting superphone**
- **Fairphone 3+ review: ethical smartphone gets camera upgrades**

Global development

'I've lost everything once again': Rohingya recount horror of Cox's Bazar blaze

Fire sweeps through the Cox’s Bazar refugee camp in Bangladesh. Photograph: Reuters

Fire sweeps through the Cox’s Bazar refugee camp in Bangladesh. Photograph: Reuters

Refugees caught up in the deadly blaze describe panic and despair after fire tore through the Balukhali area on Monday

About this content
Redwan Ahmed
Wed 24 Mar 2021 01.51 EDT

Marium Khatun, 40, was feeding her 10-month-old son at home when she first saw the fire and smoke nearby. Realising a huge blaze was ripping through the Cox's Bazar refugee camp just metres from her two-room shack, she panicked.

"I suddenly noticed people were running, scattered on the road in front of my house. I came to the door and saw this huge fire around 30 metres (100ft) away from my house. I couldn't think straight.

Bangladesh: 'massive' fire in Rohingya refugee camps forces 50,000 to flee
Read more

"I grabbed my son and started running in a different direction," Khatun said. Her husband and four other children were not home at the time, so she was alone with her baby as she tried to escape the walls of flame.

The fire tore through several camps in the Balukhali area on Monday afternoon and burned into the night, killing at least 15 people, including

three children. At least 400 people were still missing on Tuesday and the UNHCR said about 45,000 people had been displaced by the fire.

Khatun was one of them. Her home, made from bamboo and tarpaulin, was claimed by the blaze as she fled.

“Suddenly the fire was everywhere. Whichever direction I ran, the fire was blocking our path. I was thinking about my husband, my other four children who were out playing, and I thought ‘this is it, we all are gonna die today’.”

“At some point I was at a safe distance and I don’t remember how I went there with my child. But all I could think about then was the rest of my family. I was crying and screaming. I had no way to contact them. I was in shock. I thought I’ve lost them.”

Eventually, Khatun was found by a relative and taken to safety.

“One of my nephews found me in the crowd and he brought me to my sister’s house. I was able to call my husband. He was fine, but he also had no clue about my children. I was so worried, I felt I was dying.”

After a few hours, her children arrived at her sister’s house and the family was reunited, but their home is gone. On Tuesday she returned to the patch of ground where the shack had stood and her children sifted through the rubble to see if there was anything to salvage.

The aftermath of a huge fire in Cox's Bazar. Photograph: Tanbirul Miraj Ripon/EPA

"We've lost everything once in Myanmar. We came to Bangladesh and started over. Now I've lost everything once again. I just grabbed my son and fled the fire. I couldn't have the time to fetch anything else. I don't know what will we do now."

Khatun and her family have borrowed bamboos and a tarpaulin from her relatives and made a makeshift tent to sleep in. Her sister brought cooked food for them and they have received a carton full of provisions from the World Food Programme. "We always relied on the Bangladeshi government and the aid agencies. We're still counting on them," Khatun said.

Bangladeshi authorities and the UNHCR are rushing to provide critical support and protection to 45,000 Rohingya refugees who lost their shelters and belongings in the blaze.

'God knows how many of them couldn't flee'

Mohammad Selim, 38, rushed to the scene when the fire broke out. The blaze was moving too fast for people to take anything with them as they ran, he said.

“It was just chaos. People were just panicking. They were running for their lives. The fire spread so quickly that people hardly could fetch their belongings.”

“God knows how many of them couldn’t flee the fire at all,” Selim said.

The loss of human lives and properties would’ve been much worse if the fire took hold at night, Selim said.

“Thankfully it started during the day and everyone could act quickly. Everyone rushed there and was trying to douse the fire. Very soon the fire department arrived. Refugees and volunteers joined forces with the fire department, police and army. But the wind was so unfavourable it took hours to finally bring the fire under control.” he said.

Bangladesh has sheltered more than a million Rohingya Muslims in crowded refugee camps, the vast majority having fled neighbouring Myanmar in 2017 amid a major crackdown by that country’s military. The UN has said the crackdown had a genocidal intent, a charge Myanmar rejects.

The huge fire comes just months ahead of Bangladesh’s monsoon season, when cyclones and heavy rains between June and October batter the region and often lead to floods.

Architecture

China's rural revolution: the architects rescuing its villages from oblivion

Mesmerising … the Caizhai tofu factory. Photograph: Wang Ziling

Mesmerising … the Caizhai tofu factory. Photograph: Wang Ziling

After 20 years of frantic city-building, rustic China is in a death spiral. Now architects are helping to reverse the exodus – with inspirational tofu factories, rice wine distilleries and lotus tea plants

Oliver Wainwright
@ollywainwright
Wed 24 Mar 2021 02.00 EDT

In the remote Chinese village of Caizhai, a series of wooden pavilions step down a slope next to a babbling brook, their pitched tiled roofs echoing the rocky peaks of the mountains behind. Through big picture windows, day-trippers look inside, watching big barrels of soya make the journey from bean to tofu, passing through different rooms for soaking, grinding, pressing and frying, in a mesmerising parade of beancurd production.

Caizhai has always been known as a centre of tofu. But, before this facility was built in 2018, families would produce small batches in their home workshops. They struggled to make ends meet, as the conditions didn't meet the food safety standards for the tofu to be sold in supermarkets, while the younger generation saw little incentive to stick around in the countryside and join ailing family businesses.

Now, however, with a newly formed village co-operative running this purpose-built factory, they are processing 100kg of soybeans a day, supplying nearby schools and workers' canteens, and selling the improved product – for almost double the previous price – to retailers in the cities.

Around 30 younger villagers, who had been lured away by metropolitan life, have returned to Caizhai to join the production team, and visitors have increased 20-fold. They are drawn by an increasingly widespread nostalgia for the countryside, to see traditional tofu-making in action and get a taste of village life, creating demand for further cafes, guesthouses and related businesses nearby.

On the waterfront … Dushan leisure centre. Photograph: Wang Ziling

“We think of it as a kind of architectural acupuncture strategy,” says Xu Tiantian, the Beijing-based founder of DnA, the architecture practice behind the tofu factory and several other such projects across rural Songyang county in China’s eastern Zhejiang province. “In each case, we have tried to make something that restores the villagers’ pride in their local identity, as well as bringing in visitors and creating a local economic network.”

Over the last seven years, she has been working with county leaders to build an impressive constellation of new facilities around the region, from a brown sugar factory and a camellia oil workshop, to a rice wine distillery and pottery production plant, along with community centres and museums. The projects have now been brought together in a handsome new book, which reads like the work of several practices over several decades, such is the dizzying speed of change in China.

From a ring of bamboo trees tied together and pulled inwards to create an outdoor domed theatre, to a cave-like museum of Hakka culture made from rugged stone walls, the elegant collection of structures are all finely tuned to their setting. The projects mostly use simple local materials and traditional building techniques, updated to create a contemporary vernacular – oozing a seductive rustic chic that helps to attract a growing crowd of cultured urbanites in search of a rural restorative. But it was an uphill struggle at first.

Restoring pride in tradition … the camellia oil workshop. Photograph: Wang Ziling

“It was difficult to persuade some villagers about the value of using traditional methods, particularly in the more remote areas,” says Xu. “Everyone wanted something modern and fancy, like they had seen in the big cities. Nobody believed in the old rammed-earth houses or bamboo structures any more.”

Gradually, she convinced them that careful repair and low-key intervention was better than bulldozing and then importing the ersatz glitz of the city. One of her first projects was restoring a cluster of rammed-earth houses in Pingtain village, which had been abandoned for decades, converting them

into a community centre, with an indigo dye workshop and an exhibition space for agricultural equipment.

On seeing the results, previously sceptical villagers were inspired to renovate their own buildings in a similar way, some setting up home-stay businesses. Xu's restoration of an old stone bridge between two villages included the installation of a simple wooden canopy and a grove of trees planted in the middle, transforming the route into a new social space for markets and events. For a new rice wine distillery in Shantou village, she built an enigmatic complex of black concrete vaults and perforated brick walls, echoing the form of historic wine cellars, once again arranged with a visitor route weaving between the production spaces. A forthcoming pottery factory will produce bottles for the wine, as well as packaging for the region's other products, helping to build a self-sustaining, co-operatively owned, rural economy across the county.

"Songyang is an exemplar of what has become quite a widespread phenomenon," says Shanghai-based design critic Aric Chen, currently researching a book about modern rural architecture in China. "The last decade has seen a huge number of projects focused on eco-tourism and agri-tourism. It used to be about building boutique hotels, but the strategies have become much more sophisticated."

The state-led "preservation" of historic villages often used to entail wholesale demolition and reconstruction. Villagers were displaced, and their homes were transformed into restaurants and hotels to cater for coach-loads of domestic tourists, bussed in from the big cities for a glimpse of "the past". Unesco-listed towns and villages became Disneyfied cadavers of their former selves, their earthen walls "upgraded" with concrete and steel.

> After an era of foreign architects using China as a playground, we're seeing a new homegrown generation move in

The Songyang approach is much more subtle. The interventions stem from specific local industries in each village, and the projects are led by local unions, with funding coming from provincial and county-level subsidies, as well as the villagers themselves. Xu's strategic acupuncture acts as a catalyst

for communities to build a future on their own terms, while also helping to close the yawning rural-urban divide. “We’re trying to provide a bridge between the villages and the city,” says Xu. “Since we began, over 600 people have returned to Songyang to start new businesses, bringing their knowledge from the cities.”

The fate of the Chinese countryside has been under the spotlight in recent years, ever since president Xi Jinping declared the new national priority of “comprehensive rural revitalisation”. The past two decades of frantic city-building have led to “rural hollowing”, with almost 200 villages wiped off the map each day since 2000. Grandparents and babies were left behind by working-age adults flocking to the cities. The focus is now on creating incentives for a return. Ever keen to follow in Chairman Mao’s footsteps, Xi has also urged everyone – from teachers to artists and film-makers – to live among the rural masses, in order to “form a correct view”. Meanwhile, the Communist Youth League has promised to dispatch more than 10 million students to the countryside by 2022, to “spread civilisation”.

Rural revitalisation … a water facility. Photograph: Wang Ziling

In parallel with state-sponsored initiatives, there has been a growing romantic longing for the rural homeland – known as *xiangchou* – among city-dwellers facing the pressures of urban life, with rising pollution and

food safety concerns. Young tourists generally now prefer rustic retreats to the big resorts, while livestreaming from pastoral idylls has become a big business. Li Ziqi, a 30-year-old influencer from Sichuan province, has made millions from her personal food brand, promoted with videos of her foraging for wild herbs and pursuing traditional crafts, such as woodworking and natural dyeing. Her YouTube channel that has racked up more than 2bn views and she's not alone. Since mid-2019, more than 100,000 livestreamers have tuned in from rural farms to shift goods on Alibaba, the giant online marketplace.

It is a form of cottagecore that has intoxicated the architecture world, too, with younger practices increasingly keen to ditch the city for the fields. "It's a matter of opportunity," says Chen. "A lot of resources are being channelled into the countryside, and the smaller scale of projects make them easier for younger designers to get." But, deeper than that, he thinks it aligns with longstanding questions about what contemporary Chinese architecture is, in a context where there were no private practices until the 1990s.

'Sometimes the answer is to do nothing': unflashy French duo take architecture's top prize
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"After an era of foreign architects using China as their playground," he says, "we're seeing a new generation of Chinese architects defining their own approach – often using vernacular techniques in a new way – and inspired by the processional principles of traditional Chinese garden design and landscape painting, creating a 'social picturesque'."

With a large public housing project and a silk-farming workshop under way, the Songyang effect is keeping Xu and her team in hot demand. "We've received proposals from all over China," she says. "We're now working on a lotus tea factory in Guizhou and another rice wine factory in Shaanxi." With around 940,000 villages across the country, there's going to be plenty to keep architects occupied for a while yet.

The Songyang Story is published by Park Books.

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Documentary films

'I have to keep smiling': how the female pop star documentary got real

New docs about Demi Lovato and Billie Eilish reveal that while candor around mental health and body scrutiny has changed, the toxic pressures of fame have not

A still from Demi Lovato: Dancing With the Devil. Photograph: PR

A still from Demi Lovato: Dancing With the Devil. Photograph: PR

Adrian Horton
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Wed 24 Mar 2021 02.24 EDT

The YouTube docuseries Demi Lovato: Dancing with the Devil, which premiered at SXSW last week and is being released online over the coming month, is a four-episode punch of honesty, brutal both for the viewer and, seemingly, for Demi Lovato. While ostensibly a vehicle to address the

headline-generating drug overdose that nearly killed her in 2018 on her terms (and promote her upcoming album), the former Disney star turned pop singer, 28, fluidly addresses a constellation of past traumas, from drug addiction to bulimia to sexual assault.

The betrayal of Britney Spears: how pop culture failed a superstar
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In one of the most stomach-sinking parts of the series, directed by Michael Ratner, Lovato reflects on how the trauma of losing her virginity in a rape as a teenager refracted through her years as a famous entertainer, from self-harm to disordered eating as a means to regain control. In brightly lit sit-down interviews, she recalls the constraint she felt by the Disney Channel's pure image in the late 2000s, how sex and consent were so un-normalized that she didn't even recognize it as a rape, and believed it was her fault. She could not speak about it publicly, given her image as a wearer of purity rings, and when she brought it up privately, with an unnamed person presumably at Disney, nothing happened.

It's a hard-to-watch disclosure, all the more upsetting for the years of aftershocks it took Lovato to see what happened clearly, to understand how what she was taught made a teenage girl valuable – desirability, "goodness" – obscured and excused harm. That's a haunting lesson many women learn, pop star or not; famous female stars, as objects of admiration and often envy, are often the public avatar of such personal and cultural reckonings.

Dancing with the Devil was released, coincidentally, a month after The World's a Little Blurry, Apple TV+'s remarkably grounded, verité-style documentary, directed by RJ Cutler, about Billie Eilish, the dark-pop phenom born 10 years after Lovato. It also arrives a week before hyper-pop artist Charli XCX's fan-assisted quarantine project Alone Together, and on the heels of the New York Times's documentary Framing Britney Spears, which simply and succinctly presented evidence of the singer's frenzied stardom and triggered an outpouring of emotion over her media thrashing. The four films cover separate micro-generations and scopes of fame, from intimate Insta lives (Charli XCX) to mega-stardom (Spears), but all feel of a piece with a larger reconsideration of how female stars are discussed,

hounded, anointed and denigrated – and thus how we judge and value women in public, how we consider ourselves.

A still from Billie Eilish: The World's A Little Blurry. Photograph: Apple TV/PA

Lovato and Eilish's films, in particular jolt the often-boilerplate pop star documentary formula of stage-managed access with mold-stretching transparency on mental health and the relentless scrutiny over women's bodies as an indicator of worth. As Lovato's story attests, the appearance of power under the impossible binds of marketable public womanhood, especially for young women – be sexy but sexless, confident but not threatening, empowered but desirable – is a ruse. But there is control over one's story. From Katy Perry: Part of Me to Lady Gaga's Five Foot Two to Taylor Swift: Miss Americana, all of which are on Netflix, pop stars of the 2010s have used streaming documentaries as a way to exert narrative control – the kind stripped in hyper-dissection of female stars' looks, love lives, likability – through the guise of unguarded authenticity.

Since Madonna's Truth or Dare in 1991, directed by Alek Keshishian, pop star documentaries have marketed an implicit viewer-star contract: the promise of unguarded, vulnerable revelations – a chance to glimpse the human person behind overwhelming ubiquity – in exchange for burnishing

the star's chosen narrative. This is, of course, a very white celebrity phenomenon; black performers have to contend with a thicket of gatekeeping, marginalization, and genre-boxing in the pop music industry. (Beyoncé and Rihanna, two of the biggest music stars on the planet, have often been pigeonholed, musically, into R&B or "urban contemporary" Grammy genres; somewhat relatedly, both rarely give interviews. Beyoncé's 2013 documentary Life Is But a Dream is a collage of opacity; Rihanna's long-gestating documentary, filmed by Peter Berg, is set to debut this summer after Covid delays.)

An intentional, mediated impression doesn't mean the footage therein isn't sometimes genuinely raw, moving or demanding of empathy – the moment Katy Perry, in tears over the realization of her divorce, fixes her face seconds before hitting the stage in Part of Me; Taylor Swift chastising herself – "we don't do that any more!" – when a paparazzi photo triggers old habits of food restriction. But they're often more revealing in the moments where other motivations peek through – Gaga handing costume teeth to an unnamed assistant, the fact that Miss Americana prefigures the 2009 Kanye West VMA debacle as a foundational event. There's a kind of dual reading: what's intended and what's observable.

A still from Framing Britney Spears. Photograph: Sky

Dancing with the Devil has little interest in subtlety; the series, executive-produced by Lovato's new manager, Scooter Braun (who also manages Ariana Grande and Justin Bieber), feels instead like a collective evidence drop – here's the facts of addiction and trauma under the spotlight, synthesize as you will. The World's A Little Blurry, meanwhile, is more oblique and generously watchful of Eilish's fiercely protected adolescence – the excitement over her driver's license, astoundingly homespun creative process with her producer/brother Finneas, and impassioned vertigo of fandom (that of her fans, and her still-paralyzing love for hero Justin Bieber). Cutler embedded with the O'Connell family off and on for two years, weaving in Eilish and her family's own recordings. The World's a Little Blurry thus plays less like a classic pop star documentary of authenticity bargaining and more like a nature documentary observing a teenager, albeit a prolifically talented one under immense spotlight and pressure, growing up.

These films raise the bar for a sense of authenticity in pop-star documentaries – Lovato's by going uncomfortably deep in the details, down to a sketched visualization of how her assistant found her the morning of her overdose, and a refreshingly candid description of how she would buy drugs. Charli XCX mostly films herself as she blisters through the making of her quarantine album How I'm Feeling Now, and cedes a good portion of the film to dispatches from several LGBTQ+ fans about their experience in isolation and genuine connection to her creative output. Eilish has an instinct for documentation so fluid the observations seem un-stage-managed while still remaining humane, respectful. Born in 2001, she's a digital-native star; like her fans, she knows the idea of authenticity on and off screen is important for art but irrelevant for a personal life suffused with cameras, your own and others.

But that doesn't relieve the pressures of stardom – fascination with her body under her trademark style of loose clothing, pressure to be always amenable. Eilish's unapologetic, trailblazing stardom has amended some of the expectations of a micro-generation before – "I think it was when Billie started wearing the baggy clothes, that was the first time I was like, I don't have to be the super-sexy sexualized pop star," Lovato told the New York Times last week. But the binds – the high-wire act of acceptability for women in public, especially teenage girls, and the hyper-focus on women's

behavior and appearance – have merely mutated. “I can’t have one moment where I’m like ‘I don’t wanna do this,’” Eilish says after a fan wrote on Instagram that she was rude during a meet-and-greet. “I have to keep smiling and if I don’t, they hate me and think I’m horrible.

TV reviewTelevision

Kate Garraway: Finding Derek review – devotion and honesty in the face of Covid

Following the GMB presenter as she copes with husband Derek Draper's time in intensive care, this one-off documentary shows a human side behind the statistics

'We'll have to fall in love again' … Kate Garraway at home in London. Photograph: Tony Ward/ITV

'We'll have to fall in love again' … Kate Garraway at home in London. Photograph: Tony Ward/ITV

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Tue 23 Mar 2021 18.00 EDT

A week after the UK first locked down in March 2020, Derek Draper was admitted to hospital with Covid-19. And it is there that the psychologist, former lobbyist and Labour campaign adviser remains. He has spent months in intensive care, including time in an induced coma, after his liver, kidneys and heart failed and were agonisingly restored to function by the tireless work of the ICU team.

Kate Garraway: Finding Derek (ITV) is a film fronted by his wife, the Good Morning Britain presenter, about a year of coping with this astonishing rupture to their lives, and to those of their two children Bill and Darcey. It is hard to capture how magnificent – wholly unshowily so – she is. Garraway is a strong communicator, which you might expect from someone in her line of work. But here she is stripped of studio artifice, as she chats to the director, to us, the viewers, to people online and outdoors. She gathers information about the impact of long Covid on sufferers and their families, and you are reminded that being able to hold and diffuse attention on camera, in the right proportions, is a gift. Honed by experience, for sure – but still something not everyone can do. (She even manages to survive a

fantastically literal soundtrack that insists on making itself heard between her pieces to camera in case we can't be trusted to maintain our emotional pitch. At one point, during a pocket of improvement for Draper, I would not have been surprised if D:Ream's Things Can Only Get Better had suddenly been inflicted on us all.)

Soundtrack aside, it is a documentary that knows what it is doing and does it well. It knows what a natural asset it has in Garraway and puts her to good use. In essence, it is the simple sight of her coping. She whizzes around, picks up Lego, hangs up children's coats and supervises the builders making adaptations to the house in preparation for Draper's hoped-for return. Not to mention her return to work after five months' absence ("Extra concealer today!"), talking with doctors on the phone and absorbing rather than collapsing under verdicts that must land like body blows ("We think there's very significant [cognitive] damage").

As the year goes on, his situation becomes less perilous – which is to say the periods between medical crises become longer, the regressions become smaller and further apart and there is evidence that the essence of the man has not been damaged beyond repair. "He's definitely present," says Garraway, by now a scholar of microexpressions, and she is right. But her husband remains entirely dependent on 24-hour care from the staff and unable to speak much beyond a few words. The first one he mouths – his voice doesn't return until late on – is "pain". When his voice does come back, a faint and desperately weak thing, one of their early conversations is about how he doesn't feel able to cope, and "I'm at the point where I think 'Fuck it'". Does he mean "die", Garraway asks. Yes, he does. "No, darling," she says firmly. "You are coming back … I will find a way to make it better. You just have to hang in there."

Garraway's love for Draper is clear and uncomplicated. It has a strangely old-fashioned feel to it. The phrase that kept popping into my mind was "wifely devotion". She just – loves him. Will she be OK, someone asks her, if he comes out of hospital and he is no longer "her" Derek? Garraway's response is not immediate but considered. "He is still him," she replies. "That person that you love. He might behave differently and look different – that will be difficult for us both. I'm trying to look on it as a rather beautiful

thing. We'll have to fall in love again." Perhaps it looks emetic written down, but her simplicity and sincerity make it impossibly moving.

It isn't a documentary designed to give us much information or insight into the whys, wherefores or statistics surrounding long (or indeed any other form of) Covid, or to delve into the successes or failures of public policy or any of the sprawling rest of it. Its purpose is to tell a single story and bring comfort to those similarly afflicted and who, as Garraway says, aren't able to tell their stories and have them heard like she is.

It seems likely that Draper will need another year in hospital. May her stoic spirit give them both the strength they need.

Scott Morrison

'A scandalous swamp': how the Australian parliament's toxic male culture hit global headlines

Papers in Europe and the US report on ‘sexism in politics’ and how Scott Morrison has been ‘dealing awkwardly’ with the problem

Prime Minister Scott Morrison in Parliament House after new allegations emerged that Coalition advisers allegedly engaged in lewd sex acts on the desks of female MPs. Photograph: Sam Mooy/Getty Images

Prime Minister Scott Morrison in Parliament House after new allegations emerged that Coalition advisers allegedly engaged in lewd sex acts on the desks of female MPs. Photograph: Sam Mooy/Getty Images

Helen Sullivan
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Tue 23 Mar 2021 23.09 EDT

As the Australian government responds to yet more revelations about toxic male culture inside parliament, newspapers worldwide have reacted in horror, with Germany's Der Spiegel warning that the news has put the prime minister, Scott Morrison, in "dire straits", in a story headlined "Australia's government is sinking into a scandalous swamp".

This week a whistleblower alleged that Coalition staffers were swapping videos of themselves engaging in sex acts in Parliament House, including on the desk of a female Coalition MP. The whistleblower claimed that the building's prayer room was often used for sex and sex workers had been invited into Parliament House by a former minister.

The revelations follow accusations made by the former staffer Brittany Higgins that she was raped by a colleague in a ministerial office, and a cabinet member being accused of sexual assault in 1988.

Berliner-Zeitung reports that "sexism in politics has sparked an avalanche of indignation in Australia" and that Morrison's critics have accused him of "dealing awkwardly with the affairs".

In France Le Monde reports that Morrison, "whose position was already shaken by his handling of several cases" has seen his executive "further weakened" by the videos of staffers engaging in sexual acts in Parliament House.

Le Figaro noted that Labor, the opposition, "which has a quota system, is not immune to accusations of sexism and harassment, which have notably been compiled on a dedicated Facebook group".

In the US the Washington Post focused on what it termed Morrison's "disastrous" press conference on Tuesday, with the headline, "Facing fury over sex scandals, Australia's leader fights tears – then retaliates in outburst at reporter".

02:24

Scott Morrison says he's listening to women, warns media they 'sit in glass houses' – video

Morrison “sought to calm public anger on Tuesday – but ended up digging a deeper political hole”, the Post wrote, referring to the prime minister’s claim during the press conference that News Corp was dealing with an active claim of workplace harassment, made in response to a question from a reporter.

A reported rape of a staffer was not enough for Morrison to 'get it' – now women are tired of waiting | Katharine Murphy
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The Post also quoted Kirstin Ferguson, “a leadership and culture specialist who advises the leaders of large corporations” as saying: “The fish rots from the head … I just can’t imagine what would happen if there was a board responsible for Parliament House.”

Morrison later apologised for his “insensitive response” to the reporter’s question.

Bloomberg focused on the Coalition’s falling ratings, writing: “With Australia’s economy on the rebound, Covid-19 largely suppressed and vaccinations underway, Prime Minister Scott Morrison’s government should be riding high. Instead, its ratings are the lowest in over a year amid criticism of his failure to address sexual violence and inequality.”

'To convey black beauty is an act of justice': Tasweer photo festival – in pictures

Untitled, New York, 2018 by Campbell Addy. Photograph: Campbell Addy

2021.03.24 - Opinion

- Europe's trust in Britain has gone. We're now a problem, not a partner
- Johnson marks year since first lockdown – knowing he acted far too late
- It’s not too late for Australia to forestall a dystopian future that alternates between Mad Max and Waterworld
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- How much is the perfect wedding? I’m spending $60 – including a dog tuxedo

OpinionBrexit

Europe's trust in Britain has gone. We're now a problem, not a partner

Rafael Behr

On the Covid vaccine, compromise is possible. But relations are on a downward spiral and the damage will be lasting

‘What comes across to Tory ministers as a vendetta is actually something much less attentive. It is being a ‘third country’.’ Photograph: Bob Edme/AP

‘What comes across to Tory ministers as a vendetta is actually something much less attentive. It is being a ‘third country’.’ Photograph: Bob Edme/AP

Wed 24 Mar 2021 03.00 EDT

The pandemic is landing well-aimed punches on the already bruised relationship between Britain and the European Union. A dispute over vaccine supplies threatens to bring blunt instruments of trade war down on delicate national feelings. Not in the darkest hours of Brexit negotiations did either side imagine that supply-chain management would so quickly become a matter of life and death.

At a summit later this week, European leaders will discuss a possible ban on exports to the UK from an AstraZeneca plant in the Netherlands. There is frustration in Brussels that millions of vaccine doses have gone overseas (mostly Pfizer ones) and none have come over in return. The UK responds that it cannot be blamed for moving earlier, signing better contracts and generally getting its immunising act together faster.

Tory MPs say Brussels is lashing out in jealousy. Vaccination is something Boris Johnson’s government is doing well, and the EU is floundering. That

has less to do with Brexit than is claimed by triumphant ministers, but as propaganda the point is irresistible: there is nothing else to trumpet as a benefit of detachment from the continent, and winning the vaccination race resonates with voters grateful for jabs.

UK politicians overestimate how much time is spent in Brussels thinking about Brexit. The peak of trauma and caring came immediately after the referendum. There was a phase of anxiety that the separatist impulse might be contagious. That passed when Westminster curled itself into a writhing ball, unable to digest the reality of what the electorate had ordered. No one who saw that from inside the EU fancied a portion of what Britain was having.

What comes across to Tory ministers as a vendetta is actually something much less attentive. It is being a "third country" – the legal designation of an external state whose needs are always subordinate to the collective interests of the bloc. At Brussels summits, Britain's third-country status is more relevant than its G7 economy, its permanent seat on the UN security council and its nuclear arsenal. London isn't used to thinking of itself as junior to Ljubljana in EU affairs, but that is what Brexit means.

Specifically, it is Johnson's Brexit. He pulped the chapters in Theresa May's deal that would have made good on her pledge of a "deep and special partnership". The adjustment was more than tonal. It was an ideological choice with immediate consequences: rivalry over alignment, competition before cooperation. Those priorities are baked into Johnson's trade deal. Diplomatic bridges were burned and back channels blocked to make a point about regulatory freedom.

Leavers always exaggerate the UK's reach as a solo global trader, but the country's disruptive potential as a commercial rival parked off the French coast is real enough. That is why Brussels drove such a hard bargain on single-market access. In terms of size, Britain is in the sour spot relative to the EU: too small to be an equal, too big to be a client; not powerful enough to assert its will in trade negotiations but hefty enough to cause trouble.

That is a blueprint for relations on a downward spiral, which neither side wants or knows how to avert. Johnson has called for a cooperative front

against a third Covid wave. Many EU national leaders are not sold on the Commission's threat of a vaccine export ban. Compromise on AstraZeneca is available. But in the longer term, the tensions are structural and hard to overcome when all reserves of trust are spent.

Europeans have learned to disregard what Johnson says and focus on what he does. If he were serious about a cooperative spirit he would not, for example, be refusing to apply the full terms of the withdrawal agreement in Northern Ireland. Reliable partners do not sign treaties with their fingers crossed. If the British prime minister valued respectful dialogue, he would not have refused full diplomatic status to the EU's ambassador.

Most EU governments want a closer relationship with Britain. Some have economic motives. Others, notably eastern members with Russian sabres rattling at their borders, value the UK's defence and security capabilities. But none will put relations with a third country – not even an old friend – ahead of internal EU relations.

And since there is no prospect of pro-Europeans staging a comeback at Westminster, the default setting is to treat Britain as a problem to be contained, not a partner to be consulted. Ministers resent that label because they see themselves as running a big country that matters, but the Tory benches are not stocked with people who would know how to begin rebuilding influence in Brussels.

Brexit was a closed chapter for many Europeans when Britain was still bickering over whether it should go ahead. There were bigger and more urgent challenges even before the pandemic made everything harder: internal tensions over budgets and fiscal transfers; moral quandaries over the rule of law in rogue members that are hollowing out their democracies; strategic dilemmas facing a new superpower rivalry between the US and China; migration control; the climate emergency.

Britain may yet claim a stake in many of those conversations, but it has forfeited its place at the table. That is a loss on both sides of the Channel. Many smaller EU members used to rely on the UK, as one of the bloc's top three heavy-hitters, to make the case for financial prudence and respect for national differentiation. Britain was the pre-eminent non-eurozone member

and an internal counterweight to federalising and centralising impulses. Removing that voice inevitably alters the character of the project.

The EU's AstraZeneca vaccine stance will cost lives, here in Spain and all over Europe
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British diplomats and officials were admired for bringing pragmatism and rational scepticism to conversations where there would otherwise have been a bit too much integrationist theology. That is partly why Brexit came as such a shock. How could a nation of sceptics be so credulous as to swallow leave-campaign fictions? How could a pragmatic people submit to something so flagrantly impractical?

The EU was quick to see that Brexit was a lose-lose proposition, but the cost to Britain was obviously greater and easier to count in terms of trade and influence. The damage done to the European project is more subtle and insidious. It is a slow burn.

Grief at the separation was overtaken by frustration and impatience during the bungled exit process. Relief at finalising the divorce and the need to get on with other things has meant deferring the audit of what the EU will miss. No one is measuring the UK-shaped hole in Europe.

On that score, Johnson's consequential victory was not the defeat of enthusiastic pro-Europeans, who had not been a dominant cultural force, but the annihilation of rational Eurosceptics. It was the banishment of moderate Tories and the scorching of earth beneath anyone who could see flaws in the EU but wanted to address them from the inside, because membership still served the national interest. The extinction of that tribe is a tragedy for British politics, but it is also a loss to the rest of Europe. And the cost has yet to be counted.

- Rafael Behr is a Guardian columnist

The politics sketchBoris Johnson

Johnson marks year since first lockdown – knowing he acted far too late

John Crace

PM remembers those who have lost lives during the pandemic, many of whom might still be alive

- Coronavirus – latest updates
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Boris Johnson said he will be dealing with the fallout from the pandemic ‘for the rest of my life’. Photograph: Getty Images

Boris Johnson said he will be dealing with the fallout from the pandemic ‘for the rest of my life’. Photograph: Getty Images

Tue 23 Mar 2021 16.45 EDT

Tuesday was the national day of reflection to mark the anniversary of the start of the first lockdown. Ideally, of course, it would have happened a week or two earlier – had not the prime minister been so unwilling to take the coronavirus seriously. Boris Johnson hadn’t bothered to attend five Cobra meetings; he had insisted on ignoring the scientific evidence by boasting about shaking hands; he had allowed the Cheltenham Festival to go ahead. And there would have been all hell to pay if he had tried to cancel Carrie Symonds’s baby shower at Chequers.

Then there was the abject failure of test and trace in its early months. The care home scandal. The over-optimistic relaxation of the rules over the summer. The refusal to adopt a circuit breaker in autumn. The complacent messaging around Christmas. The delay in bringing in a third national lockdown.

So arguably what the country was also pausing to remember was the many thousands of people who had lost their lives through Johnson's incompetence and negligence.

Not that any of this was mentioned in the Downing Street press conference later in the day. Rather Boris, flanked by the familiar faces of Chris Whitty and Patrick Vallance, tried to talk up the spirit and endurance of the British people for having survived such a prolonged period of privation and highlighted the success of the UK's vaccination programme.

When the worst of the pandemic was over, then would be a time to think about a fitting and permanent memorial to all those who had lost their lives. He didn't say what form that commemoration might take. A statue of Johnson dressed in a clown suit, perhaps. Or maybe something rather more substantial than a 1% pay rise for all NHS workers.

Many of the questions invited Boris – and England's chief medical officer and the chief scientific adviser – to reflect on things they might have done differently. All of them rather side-stepped the issue as none of them exactly covered themselves in glory in the early days of the pandemic.

Johnson observed that it had been a completely new virus and that they had had to make up policy on the hoof. Which was true up to a point, though it failed to explain why other countries had achieved far better outcomes when faced with the same new health threat. The UK's death rate has been the highest in Europe and its economic recession the deepest.

"Do you wish you'd locked down sooner?" asked a reporter from ITV. Boris shuffled uncomfortably and tugged at his hair. These are very hard decisions, he said. Ones for which there are no good outcomes. Though some of those who died might beg to differ on that.

There again, Johnson probably couldn't do his job without a high level of denial about the mistakes he has made. If he were to seriously think of the consequences of some of his decisions, then he wouldn't be able to sleep at night.

And deep down he knows this. When asked for how long he would be dealing with the effects of the coronavirus, he replied: "For the rest of my life." Though whether this was the glimmer of conscience – not usually found in career narcissists – or a man beginning to feel self-pity for the position in which he now finds himself was unclear. To give him the benefit of the doubt, let's call it a bit of both. Though a prime minister feeling sorry for himself on a day to remember 125,000 dead is not the best of looks.

As Boris floundered rather, both Whitty and Vallance stepped in to fill in the pauses. Over the past year, the CMO and the CSA have become notably more self-confident under the spotlight. They have forgiven themselves for the herd immunity mis-step early in the pandemic and have grown in stature.

They are the two adults next to Boris's clumsy teenager. Now they are no longer frightened of the truth and are prepared to call things as they are. So there was no chance of Covid being eradicated: the best we could hope for was to live alongside it with repeated booster jabs. And the people who were dying were the same people who always died: those who lived in the most deprived communities.

Johnson sidestepped a question about owners of second homes being allowed to go abroad – the figure of his dad, Stanley, loomed heavily over that one – and was happy to end the presser by talking about vaccines. The one thing he has unquestionably got right.

But that's the equation he just can't solve. Does the vaccine exonerate him from all his other disastrous decisions? Will he somehow get away with it and emerge as a heroic figure – a great leader – or will he be judged by his other disastrous decisions?

Come the end, will everyone be so tired of the coronavirus they are prepared to forgive and forget? Or will the dead be given a voice? A year on and Boris is none the wiser.

OpinionClimate change

It’s not too late for Australia to forestall a dystopian future that alternates between Mad Max and Waterworld

Michael Mann

Catastrophic fires and devastating floods are part of Australia’s harsh new climate reality. The country must do its part to lower carbon emissions

00:20

NSW flooding: house swept away in flood waters in West Taree – video

Tue 23 Mar 2021 19.54 EDT

A year ago I lived through the Black Summer. I had arrived in Sydney in mid-December 2019 to collaborate with Australian researchers studying the impacts of climate change on extreme weather events. Instead of studying those events, however, I ended up experiencing them.

Even in the confines of my apartment in Coogee, looking out over the Pacific, I could smell the smoke from the massive bushfires blazing across New South Wales. As I flew to Canberra to participate in a special “bushfires” episode of the ABC show Q+A, I witnessed mountains ablaze with fire. One man I met during my stay lost most of his 180-year-old family farm in the fires that ravaged south-east New South Wales near Milton.

My experiences indelibly coloured the book I was writing on the climate crisis at the time called The New Climate War.

I returned home to the US last March, my sabbatical stay cut short by coronavirus. But just a year later, with memories of the hellish inferno that was the Black Summer still fresh in my mind, I must painfully watch from

afar now as my Aussie mates endure further climate-wrought devastation. This time it's not fires. It's floods.

Is NSW flooding a year after bushfires yet more evidence of climate change?
Read more

I lectured earlier this week at the Pennsylvania State University, where I'm teaching a course on climate change communication. I started class, as I always do, with a glance at the latest climate-themed stories appearing in my news feed. We watched a video – in stunned disbelief – of a house floating down a river. Let me repeat that. There was a *house* floating down a *river*.

Australians are of course familiar with the scene of which I speak. It's the dwelling that was observed floating down the Manning River in NSW, a few hundred kilometres north of Sydney, as the state suffered massive floods. Emergency responders rescued hundreds of stranded people after record rainfall caused the rivers to swell.

In fact, more than 18,000 people had to be evacuated in Sydney and the mid-north coast, thanks to what amounted to a "100-year flood". For the unwashed, that's a deluge so Noachian in character that it shouldn't, on average, happen more often than once in a hundred years.

But those sorts of statistics are misleading. The statistician in me notes that they make the very tenuous assumption of a "stationary" climate, that is to say, a climate that isn't changing. But the climate is changing, thanks to human carbon pollution, making episodes that might have once been "100-year events" now more like "10-year events".

Tragically, many of the same towns that were devastated by the massive bushfires a little more than a year ago found themselves under siege from these historic floods. A climate contrarian would cry foul: "You climate scientists can't make up your mind. Is climate change making it wetter or drier?" But in fact, that's a false choice: It's *both*.

We know that a warmer atmosphere holds more moisture, so during the wet season when you get rainfall, you get more of it, in larger downpours and

bursts. But hotter temperatures also mean drier soils and worsened droughts in the dry season, conditions conducive to bigger, hotter-burning, faster-spreading bushfires.

In a scientific study I co-authored a year ago, we demonstrated that climate change is causing the wet season to get wetter and the dry season to get drier in many parts of the world. NSW is one of those regions, and we've seen the consequence in the whiplash of fires and floods that have plagued the region over the past 14 months.

Australia's floods: what the disaster tells us about a climate crisis future
Read more

Australians can't seem to catch a break. But it's not too late to forestall a dystopian future that alternates between Mad Max and Waterworld.

Adapting to the harsh new reality Australia now faces will be hard, but it will be possible with sufficient government funding and infrastructure to support climate resilience. If, however, we allow the planet to continue to heat up, many heavily occupied parts of Australia will simply become uninhabitable.

There is still a narrow window of opportunity left. If we can lower carbon emissions by a factor of two over the next decade, we can still prevent a catastrophic 1.5C warming of the planet. If that is to happen, Australia, one of the largest exporters of fossil fuels on the planet, will need to do its part.

Thus far conservative prime minister Scott Morrison and the Coalition government have shown little appetite for making good on these obligations, however. They have instead engaged in the sort of soft denial I describe in The New Climate War that has come to replace the no-longer credible outright denial of the reality of the climate crisis.

Morrison and his allies use soothing but hollow words like "resilience", "adaptation" and "innovation" to make it sound like they're actually doing something when they're not. And they suggest they're moving towards net zero carbon emissions by mid-century, while meanwhile promoting a "gas-

led" economic recovery and shunning policies, such as carbon pricing and subsidies for clean energy, that could actually help decarbonise the economy.

Morrison's record on climate is so atrocious, in fact, that the UK's own conservative prime minister, Boris Johnson, disinvited him from last year's global climate summit.

If Morrison and the Coalition government refuse to act now, then perhaps the Australian people need to disinvite him from serving another term.

The future is still in your hands, mates!

Michael E Mann is distinguished professor of atmospheric science at Pennsylvania State University. He is author of The New Climate War: The Fight to Take Back Our Planet

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Project Syndicate economistsBusiness

Why is no one in Europe talking about dangers of rising inflation?

Hans-Werner Sinn

If economies recover and stimulus turbocharges pent-up demand, a lot of bank credit could result from central bank money

People in face masks pass a big euro sign in Frankfurt, by the European Central Bank HQ. Photograph: Yann Schreiber/AFP/Getty Images

People in face masks pass a big euro sign in Frankfurt, by the European Central Bank HQ. Photograph: Yann Schreiber/AFP/Getty Images

Wed 24 Mar 2021 02.00 EDT

The increasing risk of a return of inflation in the US and Europe is beginning to galvanise debates among economists. One key source of inflation fears is the expectation that, once the Covid-19 pandemic has been overcome by vaccines, pent-up demand will explode in an orgy of consumption.

Moreover, today's unprecedentedly large government bailout programmes will have powerful inflationary multiplier effects.

But the international debate has been strangely US-centric. Few people have yet considered the particular inflationary dangers that lurk in the eurozone, where the monetary base has risen in recent years to a much higher level than in the US, relative to annual economic output.

In January 2021, this ratio, known as the cash-holding coefficient in the economy, was 43% in the eurozone, almost double the 24% recorded in the US. By contrast, when the global financial crisis began in 2008, the figures were almost identical – 12% and 11%, respectively.

Since then, the monetary base in the eurozone has risen to about 3.5 times the level that was once sufficient for transactional purposes; in the US, it rose to double its previous level.

Accordingly, of the total central-bank monetary base of €5tn (£4.3tn) recorded by the European Central Bank (ECB) in January, close to three-quarters (72%), or €3.6tn, is a mere overhang of money that is not really needed for transactions.

Why central banks should forget about 2% inflation | Jeffrey Frankel
Read more

For the time being, this money overhang cannot cause inflation, because short- and long-term interest rates are near zero and the economy is currently in a liquidity trap. Indeed, this extra money is mostly being hoarded by banks, rather than circulating in the wider economy.

This is the archetypal situation that Keynesians have pointed to for years as proof of the ineffectiveness of monetary stimulus. It is correctly described by the common metaphor that likens monetary policy to a string: it can be pulled, but not pushed, and only if it is held tightly.

From this point of view, the monetary overhang seems harmless. But it is not, because if aggregate demand increases after the pandemic, and is boosted by huge fiscal spending packages, then the string should be pulled

to raise interest rates and curb investor purchases of machinery and building material.

But such a response is not likely to succeed in the eurozone, because the euro system would have to undo the many asset purchases that stand behind the expansion of the money base.

From the start of the 2008 financial crisis until January of this year, the net asset purchases of the ECB and the national central banks that form the eurozone system have totalled €3.8tn. Of this amount, the lion's share, worth over €3tn, comprises securities issued by state and quasi-governmental bodies.

Political resistance to any reversal of these asset purchases is now so great that it can be assumed it will not take place for the foreseeable future.

Indeed, any such sales would destroy the market value of these assets, thereby forcing banks, which still have many similar assets on their books, to book huge depreciation losses.

Should this unwinding begin, the bubbles created by the ECB's zero-interest-rate policy (which account for a large share of banks' equity capital today) would burst, triggering a wave of bankruptcies.

BioNTech's Covid vaccine is a triumph of innovation and immigration | Hans-Werner Sinn
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Moreover, the European Union's Mediterranean member countries, whose debt has reached exorbitant levels, would have enormous difficulties in taking on new debt and rolling over their existing liabilities. From this point of view, the eurozone system would be exposed as lacking any real brake on inflation when it matters.

Some economists counter the fear of inflation by pointing out that central bank money is less important than the money that commercial banks create.

Indeed, monetarists have rightly pointed out that the empirical correlation between inflation and money supply applies only to the higher monetary aggregates M1 to M3, which include, in addition to physical cash, book money and other liquid asset classes.

Because the time paths of these monetary aggregates have increased at a moderate pace since the beginning of the financial crisis in 2008 (perhaps with the exception of the most recent few months), one might be inclined to believe there is no inflation risk.

But that would be premature. In order to be able to produce and lend the book money they create, banks need base money.

The potential new book money is a certain multiple of the overhang of base money that depends on the minimum reserve requirements and the proportion of cash outflows.

The huge hoards of base money that banks now hold in their central bank accounts are not even covered by M1 to M3 monetary aggregates. In this respect, these aggregates obscure the actual risk of inflation, which is already more than obvious from the monetary base itself.

If the economy recovers and fiscal stimulus turbocharges pent-up demand, a lot of bank credit could suddenly emerge from central bank money. Price growth will then begin to accelerate, and the ECB will have a very hard time curbing it without having a functioning inflation brake.

Hans-Werner Sinn is professor of economics at the University of Munich. He was president of the Ifo Institute for Economic Research and serves on the German economy ministry's advisory council.

Guardian Opinion cartoon
Boris Johnson

Steve Bell on the new UK Covid travel rules - cartoon

OpinionEpidemics

Covid-19 has shown humanity how close we are to the edge

Toby Ord

To prevent catastrophe, governments must transform our resilience to climate breakdown, AI and engineered pandemics

Eagle Creek wildfire, close to Beacon Rock golf course, Washington, US, in 2017: ‘We need to transform resilience to the full range of extreme risks we face. We don’t know what the next crisis will be.’ Photograph: Reuters

Eagle Creek wildfire, close to Beacon Rock golf course, Washington, US, in 2017: ‘We need to transform resilience to the full range of extreme risks we face. We don’t know what the next crisis will be.’ Photograph: Reuters

Tue 23 Mar 2021 07.33 EDT

It is profoundly difficult to grapple with risks whose stakes may include the global collapse of civilisation, or even the extinction of humanity. The

pandemic has shattered our illusions of safety and reminded us that despite all the progress made in science and technology, we remain vulnerable to catastrophes that can overturn our entire way of life. These are live possibilities, not mere hypotheses, and our governments will have to confront them.

As Britain emerges from Covid-19, it could find itself at the forefront of the response to future disasters. The government's recent integrated review, Britain's taking of the G7 presidency and the Cop26 climate conference, which will be hosted in Glasgow later this year, are all occasions to address global crises. But in order to ensure that the UK really is prepared, we need to first identify the biggest risks that we face in the coming decades.

Technological progress since the Industrial Revolution has ultimately increased the risk of the most extreme events, putting humanity's future at stake through nuclear war or climate breakdown. One technology that may pose the greatest threat this century is artificial intelligence (AI) – not the current crop of narrowly intelligent networks, but more mature systems with a general intelligence that surpasses our own. AI pioneers from Alan Turing to Stuart Russell have argued that unless we develop the means to control such systems or to align them with our values, we will find ourselves at their mercy.

By my estimation, the chances of such a risk causing an existential catastrophe in the next century are about one in six: like Russian roulette. If I'm even roughly right about the scale of these threats, then this is an unsustainable level of risk. We cannot survive many centuries without transforming our resilience.

The government's recent integrated review highlighted the importance of these "catastrophic-impact threats", paying attention to four of the most extreme risks; the threats from AI, global pandemics, the climate crisis and nuclear annihilation. It rightly noted the crucial role that AI systems will play in modern warfare, but was silent about the need to ensure that the AI systems we deploy are developed safely and aligned with human values. It underscored the likelihood of a successful biological attack in the coming years, but could have said more about the role science and technology can play in protecting us. And although it mentioned the threat of other countries

increasing and diversifying their nuclear capabilities, the decision to expand the UK's own nuclear arsenal is both disappointing and counterproductive.

To really transform our resilience to extreme risks, we need to go further. First, we must urgently address biosecurity. As well as the possibility of a new pandemic spilling over from animals, there is the even worse prospect of an engineered pandemic, designed by foreign states or non-state actors, with a combination of lethality, transmissibility, and vaccine resistance beyond any natural pathogen. With the rapid improvements in biotechnology, the number of parties who could create such a weapon is only growing.

To meet this risk, the UK should launch a new national centre for biosecurity, as has been recommended by the joint committee on the National Security Strategy and my own institute at Oxford University. This centre would counter the threat of biological weapons and laboratory escapes, develop effective defences against biological threats and foster talent and collaboration across the UK biosecurity community. There is a real danger that the legacy of Covid-19 does not go beyond preparing for the next naturally occurring pandemic, neglecting the possibilities of a human-made pandemic that keep experts up at night.

Second, the UK needs to transform its resilience to the full range of extreme risks we face. We don't know what the next crisis on the scale of Covid-19 will be, so we need to be prepared for all such threats. The UK's existing risk management system, within the Cabinet Office's civil contingencies secretariat, is strong in many ways, but it only addresses risks that pose a clear danger in the next two years – making it impossible to adequately evaluate dangers that would take more than two years to prepare for, such as those posed by advanced AI. We also suffer from the lack of a chief risk officer, or equivalent position, who could take sole responsibility for the full range of extreme threats across government.

Time is running short – but we can get a grip on the climate crisis | Alok Sharma
Read more

Third, we need to put extreme risks on the international agenda. These are global problems that require global solutions. The legal scholar Guglielmo Verdirame argues that while the climate emergency and nuclear weapons are covered by at least some international law, there is no global legal regime in force that grasps the gravity of other extreme risks, or that has the necessary breadth to deal with the changing landscape of such risks. The G7 presidency is the perfect opportunity to remedy this. Rather than settle for a treaty on pandemic preparedness, as is being proposed by the prime minister, the UK could set its ambitions higher, and lead the call for a new treaty on risks to the future of humanity, with a series of UN security council resolutions to place this new framework on the strongest possible legal footing.

There is an understandable tendency for even the most senior people in government to see extreme risks as too daunting to take on. But there are concrete steps that the UK can take to transform its resilience to these threats, and there is no better time to do so than now. Covid-19 has given us the chance to make decades' worth of progress in a matter of months. We must seize this opportunity.

- Toby Ord is a senior research fellow in philosophy at Oxford University, and author of The Precipice: Existential Risk and the Future of Humanity

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OpinionMedia

Vilifying journalists is just part of the UK government's modus operandi

Jane Martinson

Jacob Rees-Mogg’s recent attack on a HuffPost journalist for merely doing his job is part of a worrying, bullying trend

‘Jacob Rees-Mogg called Arj Singh, the HuffPost’s deputy political editor, “either a knave or a fool”.’ Photograph: Peter Summers/Getty Images

‘Jacob Rees-Mogg called Arj Singh, the HuffPost’s deputy political editor, “either a knave or a fool”.’ Photograph: Peter Summers/Getty Images

Tue 23 Mar 2021 08.00 EDT

It may not be the first thing people remember about Dominic Cummings and his 264-mile trip to Barnard Castle, but the government’s initial response was to condemn the reports published by the Guardian and the Mirror as “fake news” put about by charlatans, or “campaigning newspapers”. A while later the prime minister’s senior adviser made his infamous non-apology explanation for the trip in front of the press in the Downing Street Rose Garden, confirming the story was actually true.

Almost a year later, you could be forgiven for thinking that times have changed. Not only are we no longer in the dark days of the first lockdown, when Donald Trump was US president and his ability to call the truth lies still admired by many of the world’s politicians, including our own – but the acrimonious reign of Cummings has come to an end, too.

A newly installed communications team in Downing Street, headed by former Guardian and broadcast journalist Allegra Stratton, seems far keener

on working with journalists again, rather than calling them liars just for doing their jobs. And yet the leader of the House of Commons is happy to question verified facts and the integrity of journalists, using parliamentary privilege to do so, without any rebuke.

The recent attack by Jacob Rees-Mogg concerns the ordinary business of government – future trade deals rather than public health in a pandemic. But the consequences in terms of corroding public trust and questioning the idea of truth – the heart of the matter with the Cummings affair, after all – is just as important.

01:53

Jacob Rees-Mogg calls journalist 'either a knave or a fool' – video

Gaslighting journalists still seems to be a thing this government is comfortable doing.

The latest row started when the HuffPost published a story based on a leaked recording of the foreign secretary, Dominic Raab, suggesting that human rights contraventions would not necessarily rule out trade deals. In comments made to department officials, Raab said: "If we restrict it to countries with ECHR-level standards of human rights, we're not going to do many trade deals with the growth markets of the future."

Two days later, Rees-Mogg said this report had been "shockingly distorted by low-quality journalism". Unforgivably, he called Arj Singh, the HuffPost's deputy political editor, who had first reported the story, "either a knave or a fool" and went on to say, "I think we should look at that type of poor-quality online journalism. It's not the sort of thing that would happen in the Times." This despite the fact that the story had indeed been followed up in the pages of many newspapers, including the Times.

The government, meanwhile, didn't deny the story, it simply insisted that more quotes from the recording were added. What's more, in an apparent attempt to distance itself from the row, Downing Street said that the prime minister "would not have made" the same comments. In fact, on Monday Raab admitted it was government policy.

Yet still there is no apology from or sanction for Rees-Mogg, suggesting either that the government is losing control of the cabinet – or it is perfectly happy for its members to impugn the integrity of journalists.

Those in power have often denied news stories, of course. What seems different now is the ad hominem attacks on the journalists themselves when the evidence is hard to argue with.

Singh published the taped evidence on Twitter to confirm his story and his case has been taken up by the National Union of Journalists. Michelle Stanistreet, NUJ general secretary, accused cabinet ministers of being "playground bullies, undermining the work of journalists, bringing their work into disrepute".

The verbal bullying has consequences of course. When another HuffPost journalist, Nadine White, dared to question Kemi Badenoch earlier this year, she was called "creepy and bizarre" by the minister for equalities on Twitter. The subsequent abuse White received online led to her making her social media accounts private. HuffPost editor-in-chief, Jess Brammar, complained to the Cabinet Office about Badenoch's behaviour, but received no apology.

Stratton suggested the row over the minister's offensive tweets was a "misunderstanding" and that both women were "great": the press secretary may be attempting to cultivate a less combative Downing Street regime, but the facts suggest that an elected official called a journalist names for asking questions.

Journalists make mistakes, of course – a misplaced word, a misjudged headline can detract from a brilliant scoop. But mistakes can and should be rectified. Asking questions and reporting facts is the essence of the job and no one deserves to be vilified for doing so. The ministerial code insists that ministers "give accurate and truthful information"; a working democracy insists that the fourth estate is allowed to report the truth and hold the powerful to account.

That both recent cases involve the HuffPost, a news team in the midst of a severe restructuring and layoffs, suggests ministers are picking on Fleet

Street's weaker targets, especially those like the HuffPost whose political stories are often followed up by others.

Some may argue that the government is simply picking on those who do not necessarily support it. So Matt Hancock is happy to call the Guardian "a rag" in WhatsApp messages.

Yet picking on weaker targets has always been the recourse of playground bullies, long before Eton was founded. By calling their victims liars they sow doubt where there should be none and, in so doing, attempt to send messages to bigger targets not to mess with them.

Allowing ministers to call journalists names for doing their job is not just a matter for HuffPost, it should be a matter for us all.

- Jane Martinson is a Guardian columnist

Opinion Weddings

How much is the perfect wedding? I’m spending $60 – including a dog tuxedo

Arwa Mahdawi

The average cost of a wedding is so high that many couples can’t afford it, but go ahead anyway and get into debt. But there is another way

Maybe a dream wedding should just stay a dream … Photograph: Nadtochiy/Getty Images/iStockphoto

Maybe a dream wedding should just stay a dream … Photograph: Nadtochiy/Getty Images/iStockphoto

Wed 24 Mar 2021 03.00 EDT

If you want to scream at your television then, boy, have I got just the thing for you. It's a new reality show called Marriage or Mortgage where young couples in Nashville, Tennessee, have to choose between – you guessed it – a marriage or a mortgage. Spoiler alert: most opt to spend their life savings on a wedding instead of a down payment. "We thought carefully about it," they all explain, "and we realised blowing thousands of dollars on a doughnut wall [the latest wedding trend, apparently] was important to us. A roof over our heads can wait, but expressing our love through Instagrammable desserts cannot." Rather sadly, a lot of these couples then have to downsize their big day because of the pandemic. Meanwhile, house prices in the US rocket, making homeownership even more difficult for young people.

If you have enough money for a down payment then you obviously don't need to choose between a marriage and a mortgage. Newsflash: you can have both! Thanks to the Wedding Industrial Complex, however, a lot of

people seem to think they need to spend a fortune on their nuptials. The average cost of a wedding is now about $33,900 in the US and £30,000 in the UK. If you can afford that, great. The problem is that a lot of people can't, but have a flashy wedding anyway. A recent study found 28% of couples in the US and 30% of couples in the UK go into debt to pay for their wedding.

I have never wanted a big wedding. Still, I'm hugely relieved that the pandemic has given me the perfect excuse to opt out of making much ado about "I do". I'm getting married on Zoom soon, and I can't wait. I literally can't wait because my partner is eight months pregnant, and we need to get married before the baby is born for legal reasons. Marriage licence: $35. Tux for the dog: $25. Marrying the perfect woman without spending your life savings on a doughnut wall: priceless.

Arwa Mahdawi is a Guardian columnist

2021.03.24 - Around the world

- Technology Zuckerberg faces Capitol attack grilling as Biden signals tougher line on big tech
- Exclusive Facebook guidelines let users to call for death of public figures
- Facebook Leak underscores strategy to operate in repressive regimes
- What's unacceptable? Facebook's rules for content revealed
- Myanmar Military releases 600 coup protesters as 'silence strike' begins
- Myanmar Seven-year-old girl killed after security forces open fire
- 'Don't wait another minute' Biden urges gun reform after Colorado shooting
- Boulder shootings Suspect allegedly bought rifle after sale ban blocked
- Good catch Man in Ukraine rescues child floating on ice with fishing rod
- Trump Lawyer says ‘no reasonable person’ would believe her election lies
- US Biden touts $1.9tn Covid rescue on Obamacare anniversary
- Brazil Lula judge was biased, supreme court rules, paving way to challenge Bolsonaro
- Saudi Arabia Top official issued death threat against UN's Khashoggi investigator
- 'Peak meat' Europe and US could reach max consumption in 2025

- **GameStop Shares fall as first earnings report released since Reddit-led rally**

Technology

Zuckerberg faces Capitol attack grilling as Biden signals tougher line on big tech

The head of Facebook, and his Google and Twitter counterparts, could face a rough ride at the scene of the insurrectionists' crime

Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook's CEO, will be joined by Sundar Pichai and Jack Dorsey, the chief executive of Google and Twitter respectively. Photograph: Erin Scott/Reuters

Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook's CEO, will be joined by Sundar Pichai and Jack Dorsey, the chief executive of Google and Twitter respectively. Photograph: Erin Scott/Reuters

David Smith in Washington
@smithinamerica
Wed 24 Mar 2021 03.00 EDT

Mark Zuckerberg, the head of Facebook, could be in for a rough ride on Thursday when he testifies to Congress for the first time about the 6 January insurrection at the Capitol in Washington DC and amid growing questions over his platform's role in fuelling the violence.

The testimony will come after signs that the new administration of Joe Biden is preparing to take a tougher line on the tech industry's power, especially when it comes to the social media platforms and their role in spreading misinformation and conspiracy theories.

The question every politician should be asking is, what does Mark Zuckerberg want with us? | Marina Hyde
Read more

Zuckerberg will be joined by Sundar Pichai and Jack Dorsey, the chief executives of Google and Twitter respectively, at a hearing pointedly entitled "Disinformation nation: social media's role in promoting extremism and misinformation" by the House of Representatives' energy and commerce committee.

The scrutiny comes after a report found that Facebook allowed groups linked to the QAnon, boogaloo and militia movements to glorify violence during the 2020 election and weeks leading up to the deadly mob violence at the US Capitol.

Avaaz, a non-profit advocacy group, says it identified 267 pages and groups on Facebook that spread "violence-glorifying content" in the heat of the 2020 election to a combined following of 32 million users. More than two-thirds of the groups and pages had names aligned with several domestic extremist movements.

The top 100 most popular false or misleading stories on Facebook related to the elections received an estimated 162m views, the report found. Avaaz called on the White House and Congress to open an investigation into Facebook's failures and urgently pass legislation to protect American democracy.

Fadi Quran, its campaign director, said: “This report shows that American voters were pummeled with false and misleading information on Facebook every step of the 2020 election cycle. We have over a year’s worth of evidence that the platform helped drive billions of views to pages and content that confused voters, created division and chaos, and, in some instances, incited violence.

“But the most worrying finding in our analysis is that Facebook had the tools and capacity to better protect voters from being targets of this content, but the platform only used them at the very last moment, after significant harm was done.”

Facebook claimed that Avaaz had used flawed methodology. Andy Stone, a spokesperson, said: “We’ve done more than any other internet company to combat harmful content, having already banned nearly 900 militarized social movements and removed tens of thousands of QAnon pages, groups and accounts from our apps.”

He acknowledged: “Our enforcement isn’t perfect, which is why we’re always improving it while also working with outside experts to make sure that our policies remain in the right place.”

But the report is likely to prompt tough questions for Zuckerberg in what is part of a wider showdown between Washington and Silicon Valley. Another flashpoint on Thursday could be Section 230 of the 1996 Communications Decency Act, which shields social media companies from liability for content their users post.

Repealing the law is one of the few things on which Biden and his predecessor as president, Donald Trump, agree, though for different reasons. Democrats are concerned that Section 230 allows disinformation and conspiracy theories such as QAnon to flourish, while Trump and other Republicans have argued that it protects companies from consequences for censoring conservative voices.

The cosy relationship between Barack Obama's administration and Silicon Valley is a thing of the past. Photograph: Bloomberg/Bloomberg via Getty Images

More generally, critics say that tech companies are too big and that the coronavirus pandemic has only increased their dominance. The cosy relationship between Barack Obama's administration and Silicon Valley is a thing of the past, while libertarian Republicans who oppose government interference are a fading force.

Amazon, Apple, Facebook and Google have all come under scrutiny from Congress and regulators in recent years. The justice department, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and state attorneys general are suing the behemoths over various alleged antitrust violations.

In a letter this week to Biden and Merrick Garland, the new attorney general, a coalition of 29 progressive groups wrote: "It's clear that the ability of Big Tech giants like Google to acquire monopoly power has been abetted by the leadership deficit at top enforcement agencies such as the FTC … We need a break from past, failed leadership, and we need it now."

There are signs that Biden is heeding such calls and spoiling for a confrontation. On Monday he nominated Lina Khan, an antitrust scholar

who wants stricter regulation of internet companies, to the FTC. Earlier this month Tim Wu, a Columbia University law professor among the most outspoken critics of big tech, was appointed to the national economic council.

There is support in Congress from the likes of David Cicilline, chairman of the House judiciary committee's antitrust panel, which last year released a 449-page report detailing abuses of market power by Apple, Amazon, Google and Facebook.

The Democratic congressman is reportedly poised to issue at least 10 legislative initiatives targeting big tech, a blitz that will make it harder for the companies and their lobbyists to focus their opposition on a single piece of legislation.

Cicilline, also working on a separate bill targeting Section 230, told the Axios website: "My strategy is you'll see a number of bills introduced, both because it's harder for [the tech companies] to manage and oppose, you know, 10 bills as opposed to one.

"It also is an opportunity for members of the committee who have expressed a real interest or enthusiasm about a particular issue, to sort of take that on and champion it."

Facebook

Facebook guidelines allow users to call for death of public figures

Public figures such as the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, and Marcus Rashford, are considered permissible targets. Composite: PA/Manchester United/Getty Images/Guardian Design Team

Public figures such as the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, and Marcus Rashford, are considered permissible targets. Composite: PA/Manchester United/Getty Images/Guardian Design Team

Exclusive: public figures considered to be permissible targets for otherwise-banned abuse, leaked moderator guidelines show

- Facebook leak underscores strategy to operate in repressive regimes
- Decoding emojis and defining 'support': Facebook's rules for content revealed

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Tue 23 Mar 2021 15.28 EDT

Facebook's bullying and harassment policy explicitly allows for "public figures" to be targeted in ways otherwise banned on the site, including "calls for [their] death", according to a tranche of internal moderator guidelines leaked to the Guardian.

Public figures are defined by Facebook to include people whose claim to fame may be simply a large social media following or infrequent coverage in local newspapers.

They are considered to be permissible targets for certain types of abuse "because we want to allow discussion, which often includes critical commentary of people who are featured in the news", Facebook explains to its moderators.

It comes as social networks face renewed criticism over abuse on their platforms, including of the Duke and Duchess of Sussex and of professional footballers, in particular black stars such as Marcus Rashford.Facebook, which also owns Instagram, has changed its policies in response to the criticism, introducing new rules to cover abuse sent through direct messages and committing to cooperate with law enforcement over hate speech.

In the detailed guidelines seen by the Guardian, running to more than 300 pages and dating from December 2020, Facebook spells out how it differentiates between protections for private and public individuals.

"For public figures, we remove attacks that are severe as well as certain attacks where the public figure is directly tagged in the post or comment. For private individuals, our protection goes further: we remove content that's meant to degrade or shame, including, for example, claims about someone's sexual activity," it says.

Private individuals cannot be targeted with "calls for death" on Facebook but public figures simply cannot be "purposefully exposed" to such calls: it is legitimate, under Facebook's harassment policies, to call for the death of a minor local celebrity so long as the user does not tag them in to the post, for example.

Similarly, public figures cannot be "exposed" to content "that praises, celebrates or mocks their death or serious physical injury".

The company's definition of public figures is broad. All politicians count, whatever the level of government and whether they have been elected or are standing for office, as does any journalist who is employed "to write/speak publicly".

Online fame is enough to qualify provided the user has more than 100,000 fans or followers on one of their social media accounts. Being in the news is enough to strip users of protections.

Facebook leak underscores strategy to operate in repressive regimes
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"People who are mentioned in the title, subtitle or preview of 5 or more news articles or media pieces within the last 2 years" are counted as public figures. A broad exception to that rule is that children under the age of 13 never count.

Imran Ahmed, founder of the Center for Countering Digital Hate, described the revelations as "flabbergasting".

"Despite high-profile attacks in recent years, including the murder of Jo Cox MP and the US Capitol domestic terrorist attacks, promoting violence against public servants is sanctioned by Facebook if they aren't tagged in the post," Ahmed said, adding that the safety of other public officials and figures could be put at risk as a result.

"Highly visible abuse of public figures and celebrities acts as a warning – a proverbial head on a pike – to others. It is used by identity-based hate actors who target women and minorities to dissuade participation by the very groups that campaigners for tolerance and inclusion have worked so hard to bring into public life. Just because someone isn't tagged doesn't mean that the message isn't heard loud and clear."

There is another broad exception for – and protection of – those who are "involuntary" public figures. These are public figures "who are not true

celebrities, and who have not engaged with their fame, UNLESS they have been accused of criminal activity", according to the guidelines.

Facebook holds a secret list of these involuntary public figures, which is not contained in the documents seen by the Guardian. But social media presence is indicated as de facto evidence that a user has "engaged with their fame".

The attempt to exhaustively define all aspects of harassment means Facebook's rules also include surprising specifics. Users can bully dead people, for instance, but only if they died before the year 1900, and they are allowed to "bully" fictional characters (moderators are told to take "NO ACTION" against the content "Homer Simpson is a bitch").

But the decision to let users bully and harass even minor public figures in ways that the company bans for those classed as private individuals is likely to spark concern among prominent users who have complained that Facebook fails to do enough to protect public figures from abuse on its main platform or on Instagram.

Facebook's bullying and harassment policy does protect public figures from attacks including direct threats of severe physical harm, derogatory sexualised terms or threats to release personal information.

But it is understood the company believes in letting people question or criticise public figures, with insiders highlighting "figurative speech" such as "Boris Johnson should just drop dead or resign already" or "just die already [Jair] Bolsonaro, you are not making it any better for your people".

The definition of a public figure is set to be updated to "raise the threshold … in increasingly digitally engaged times", sources say, including providing additional protections for activists and journalists who are already treated as high-risk individuals.

The reason some content is removed only at the point a public figure is tagged is because Facebook believes it becomes more of an "intentional harm" and means they are more likely to see it.

Decoding emojis and defining 'support': Facebook's rules for content revealed
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In February, Instagram committed to shutting the accounts of users who sent abusive direct messages to footballers. Previously, the company had not extended its rules to cover DMs, but a new "lower tolerance" for abuse was brought in after a number of prominent black footballers including Rashford, Axel Tuanzebe and Lauren James spoke out about online racial harassment.

A Facebook spokesperson said: "We think it's important to allow critical discussion of politicians and other people in the public eye. But that doesn't mean we allow people to abuse or harass them on our apps.

"We remove hate speech and threats of serious harm no matter who the target is, and we're exploring more ways to protect public figures from harassment.

"We regularly consult with safety experts, human rights defenders, journalists and activists to get feedback on our policies and make sure they're in the right place."

Asked why the leaked guidelines are not made public by Facebook, the spokesperson added: "By publishing our community standards, the notes from the regular meetings we have with global teams to discuss and update them, and our quarterly reports on how we're doing to enforce our policies, we provide more transparency than any technology company. We also intend to make even more of these documents public over time."

Facebook

Facebook leak underscores strategy to operate in repressive regimes

Exclusive: users are allowed to praise mass killers and 'violent non-state actors' in certain situations

- Decoding emojis and defining 'support': Facebook's rules for content revealed
- Facebook guidelines allow for users to call for death of public figures

Mark Zuckerberg cutouts at a Brussels protest in 2018. Facebook positioning itself above the law is likely to cause friction with governments around the world. Photograph: Stéphanie Lecocq/EPA

Mark Zuckerberg cutouts at a Brussels protest in 2018. Facebook positioning itself above the law is likely to cause friction with governments around the world. Photograph: Stéphanie Lecocq/EPA

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Facebook users are permitted to praise mass murderers and "violent non-state actors" in certain situations, according to internal guidelines that underline how the tech corporation is striving to operate in repressive regimes.

The leak also reveals that Facebook maintains a list of "recognised crimes" and instructs its moderators to distinguish between those and "crimes not recognised by FB" when applying the company's rules.

The list is designed to avoid giving succour to countries where criminal law is considered incompatible with basic human rights. "We only recognise crimes that cause physical, financial or mental injury to individual(s)" such as "theft, robbery and fraud, murder, vandalism [and] non-consensual sexual touching", the guidelines say.

Facebook guidelines allow for users to call for death of public figures
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Crimes not recognised by Facebook include "claims about sexuality", "peaceful protests against governments" and "discussing historical events/controversial subjects such as religion". Facebook argues this is the only way it can function in countries where the rule of law is shaky.

But the revelation of its explicit decision to place itself above the law may cause friction with governments round the world. "One of the biggest problems is that Facebook has gone into every single country on the planet with no idea of the impact," said Wendy Via, the co-founder and president of the US-based Global Project Against Hate and Extremism.

She described Facebook, which was founded in the US, as having "little language capability and zero cultural competency", adding: "You can't build secret rules if you can't understand the situation."

Even in the US, Facebook has struggled to deal with cultural changes. The documents give insight into how Facebook struggled to define and act against the far-right QAnon movement. Accounts associated with QAnon were banned across the platform in October 2020 after years of growing popularity and controversy.

Defining QAnon as a "violence-inducing conspiracy network", the company now bans non-state actors that "are organised under a name, sign mission statement or symbol; AND promote theories that attribute violent or dehumanising behaviour to people or organizations that have been debunked by credible sources; AND have advocated for incidents of real-world violence to draw attention to or redress the supposed harms promoted in those debunked theories", according to the leaked guidelines for moderators, which date from December 2020.

It highlights Facebook's battle to function in some of the most autocratic regimes in the world. One exception to guidelines on terrorist content, for instance, allows users to praise mass murderers and "violent non-state actors", a term describing designated militant groups engaged in civil wars that do not target civilians.

According to Facebook sources, the company recognised that in complex conflicts some violent non-state actors provided key services and engaged in negotiations with governments. Praise or support for violence by these groups is not allowed.

In a reference to Myanmar, the Middle East and north Africa in the guidelines, Facebook's global escalations team – a more elite group of moderators who are typically directly employed by the company rather than outsourced – are told: "Allow content that praises violent non-state actors, unless it contains an explicit reference to violence." Content "that discusses mass murders" is also allowed provided it is "discussion of the events leading up to a mass murder, even when such discussions take a favourable position towards the event or its perpetrator".

An example of a legitimate comment is: "Where were the police? Why did it fall to this guy to try and restore order?" The policy was rolled out early in Myanmar and Syria and now applies globally, it is understood.

Facebook's decision to set its own standard of behaviour above that of countries' criminal legislation also applies in other areas of its moderation guidelines. In telling moderators how to police discussions on "regulated goods", for instance, Facebook applies an international set of restrictions to items where national and local laws differ.

Cannabis cannot be bought, sold or traded on Facebook despite being legal in a number of regions but users can "admit" to smoking it and "promote" it. The same restrictions apply to alcohol, although alcohol stores, unlike cannabis retailers, are allowed to advertise to those over 18. All "non-medical drugs" are severely restricted on Facebook, overruling local legislation.

Facebook sources said the medical field had come to be more accepting of cannabis use to treat illnesses while "non-medical drugs" such as cocaine and heroin had no identified medical use.

Facebook's policy of selectively applying national laws has been reflected by its public actions before. In February the BBC reported on Facebook Marketplace being used to facilitate illegal sales of Amazonian land. According to the broadcaster, Facebook decided that "trying to deduce which sales are illegal would be too complex a task for it to carry out itself, and should be left to the local judiciary and other authorities".

In the US, the company spent four years deflecting criticism for treating Donald Trump differently to other users and other world leaders. In summer 2020, Facebook refused to take action against the US president over a post declaring "when the looting starts, the shooting starts". Its chief executive, Mark Zuckerberg, said he considered the post a warning of state action rather than a threat that went against Facebook's rules.

The same accusations of light-touch policing were made regarding how Facebook handled the QAnon movement. Until the platform declared its QAnon ban in October, the community had been largely unaffected by Facebook's guidelines. Even after the ban, numerous QAnon-linked pages remained accessible on the site.

In 2017, a separate leak of moderator documents to the Guardian revealed that the company only enforced rules against Holocaust denial in a subset of countries where that misinformation was illegal.

Rather than deciding based on the potential harm caused, Facebook focused on those places where the site was likely to face prosecution or be sued. In

2020, Facebook updated its policies to ban Holocaust denial on its platform around the world.

A Facebook spokesperson said: “We don’t allow anyone to praise violent actions and we remove content that represents or supports the organisations we ban under our policies. We recognise that in conflict zones some violent non-state actors provide key services and negotiate with governments – so we enable praise around those non-violent activities but do not allow praise for violence by these groups.

“We also maintain a list of crimes that we apply under these policies, but rather than breaking them down by country or region they are crimes that are recognised globally. Since we’re a global platform, we have a single set of policies about what we allow and apply them to every country and region. While we’ve made progress in our enforcement, we know there is always more to do.” The company had a process for national governments and courts to report content that they believed violated local law.

Facebook

Decoding emojis and defining 'support': Facebook's rules for content revealed

The 300-page document for moderators defines which phrases are ethically unacceptable

- Facebook leak underscores strategy to operate in repressive regimes
- Facebook guidelines allow for users to call for death of public figures

Facebook’s internal guidelines distinguish between ‘terrorists’ and ‘individuals convicted of terrorism’. Photograph: The Washington Post/Getty Images

Facebook’s internal guidelines distinguish between ‘terrorists’ and ‘individuals convicted of terrorism’. Photograph: The Washington Post/Getty Images

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Tue 23 Mar 2021 11.02 EDT

They run to more than 300 pages, envisaging and exemplifying some of the most borderline and ethically challenging uses of the world's biggest social network by its 2.8 billion monthly users.

Secret Facebook guidelines seen by the Guardian show how the company controls its mainly outsourced moderators' work down to the smallest detail, defining its rules so precisely that contractors are told which emojis constitute "praise" and which count as "condemnation".

A particular area of contention surrounds what are defined as dangerous individuals and organisations. In the leaked documents dating from December 2020, moderators for Facebook and Instagram are instructed how to define "support" for terrorist groups and other "dangerous individuals", whether to distinguish between "explaining" and "justifying" the actions of terrorists, and even in what contexts it is acceptable to call for the use of "gas chambers".

While Facebook's community guidelines – once almost entirely hidden from the view of users – have been public since 2018 when it first laid out in a 27-page document what it does and does not allow on its site, these newly leaked documents are different.

They constitute much more detailed guidelines on what the published rules mean in practice. Facebook has long argued that to publish the full documents would be counterproductive since it would let malicious users avoid a ban for deliberately borderline behaviour.

Kate Klonick, an assistant professor of law at St John's University in New York, likened the detailed documents to the role of case law in the English and Welsh legal system. "These things are very important for training moderators, and they establish the nitty-gritty detail of the community standards," Klonick said.

Earlier this year, Facebook faced criticism from its own oversight board for failing to explain such detail to users. The board, a quasi-legalistic body set up by Facebook's chief executive, Mark Zuckerberg, to act as a "supreme court" for the network's moderation decisions, ruled that a Facebook post quoting Joseph Goebbels to attack Donald Trump was not a violation of its hate speech policy, and required Facebook to restore the post.

In a non-binding "advisory statement" accompanying that ruling, the board also recommended that Facebook "explain and provide examples of key terms" from the policy on dangerous individuals and organisations, "including the meanings of 'praise', 'support' and 'representation'."

Facebook has not yet done so – but the definitions are set out in the internal guidelines seen by the Guardian.

In the documents, Facebook defines "praise" as "content that praises a designated [that is, banned] entity, event or ideology and seeks to make others think more positively of them. Where neutral speech discusses facts, history, political divisions, etc, praise often engages in value-based statements and emotive argument."

That includes direct praise, such as "the fighters in the Islamic State are really brave", as well as praise for groups' actions, such as "look at all the great work al-Qaida does for the local community". It does not, though, ban statements that dismiss a group as non-threatening (such as "white supremacy is not a threat"), nor meta-statements that argue that a designated entity should not, in fact, be designated.

Similarly, users cannot "legitimate the cause" of a dangerous entity (posting, for instance, that "Islamic State's actions in Syria are justified because of the United States' unjust occupation of the Middle East"), but they can post "statements presented in the form of a fact about the entity's motives".

Facebook distinguishes between acceptable and unacceptable statements, saying that "the IRA were pushed towards violence by the brutal practices of the British government in Ireland" would be allowed, while "the IRA were right to use violence to combat the brutal practices of the British government during the 20th century" would be banned.

Zuckerberg himself in 2018 explained why Facebook did not publish such detailed definitions for its users, writing that Facebook had a "basic incentive problem … when left unchecked, people will engage disproportionately with more sensationalist and provocative content". He added: "Our research suggests that no matter where we draw the lines for what is allowed, as a piece of content gets close to that line, people will engage with it more on average – even when they tell us afterwards they don't like the content."

Facebook came up with two solutions, both of which it pursued: one involved the company artificially demoting "borderline content", algorithmically suppressing its distribution. The other required the company to continue to hide the exact nature of the "line" that Zuckerberg refers to, so forcing users to "play it safe" rather than rub up against what was permissible.

Klonick said she had sympathy for Facebook on this point. "The closer you get to transparency in the rules, the easier it is for bad actors to break those rules. But also, the more transparent and the more open-book Facebook is about exactly what their content moderation policies are, the more they

invite engagement and discussion and pushback on where they push the line. When you open the book and say: 'Here [are] all the numbers, here are all the facts,' that's an invitation to find fault."

Alan Rusbridger says Oversight Board will ask to see Facebook's algorithm Read more

In the leaked guidelines, the least clarity is provided for a rule banning "aligning oneself with a cause", which is probably the specific issue at stake in the Goebbels quote decision issued by the oversight board.

According to the internal guidelines, Facebook bans users from "expressing a belief in the stated goals, methods, etc of an organization or individual", such as in the example: "I stand behind Tommy Robinson." It is also, perhaps surprisingly, explicitly against Facebook's policies for anyone to post an image of a designated individual "with no caption, or a nonsense caption", even if no support for them is expressed.

Support of banned organisations is itself banned by Facebook. Most obviously, that covers content that seeks to help a banned group financially or in kind. The statements "I am sending first aid kits to Isis fighters", "anyone coming to the Unite the Right rally can stay at my house" and "free tax preparation services for Proud Boys" are all listed as disallowed examples.

So too are calls to action on behalf of such an organisation ("contact us via Telegram"), as well as recruitment ("join the fight for your homeland, join HuM" – a Pakistani Islamist group) and sharing content created by those groups, with an explicit exception for "neutral news reporting".

Representation, by contrast, is fairly simple: banned groups and individuals cannot be on Facebook. Being a member of a group such as the Ku Klux Klan is automatically grounds for a ban, as is creating a page or group that purports to be, for instance, "official annual meeting of the Nazi party 2019". Creating a page that claims to be a "fan account" of a banned organisation is also disallowed, but as support rather than representation.

Giving further insight into the level of detail contained in the documents, beyond those top-level definitions are another 10 pages of clarifications. The document, which is arranged as an FAQ for Facebook's moderators to refer to while working, bears the hallmarks of having been added to over time, with questions getting increasingly specific the deeper into the document they appear.

In one, the emojis 😀😍❤ and are explicitly listed as "praise/support". In another, the document clarifies that "supporting the use of 'concentration camps', 'gas chambers' and 'sending people to the ovens'" is not allowed, unless the poster clearly specifies that they are referring to something other than the Holocaust ("eg in the case of gas chambers: legal capital punishment military drills, etc").

Some of the answers hint at the high-level problems that Facebook has in enforcing a global policy against dangerous individuals. "Do we consider individuals convicted of terrorism as terrorists under our policy?" one question asks. The answer is no, "we designate individuals/organizations only if they meet our internal criteria for designation, irrespective of a conviction or charge under local law."

The Guardian has not seen the long list of individuals and organisations that Facebook has labelled as "dangerous" but the document does contain the much shorter list of designated "hateful ideologies", support for which is removed from the platform. There are four: white supremacy, white nationalism, white separatism, and nazism.

Even then, the company cautions moderators not to be too hasty. Within the guidelines are two images, one showing a world leader Photoshopped to be wearing a Nazi armband and another sporting a Photoshopped Hitler-style moustache. Both would constitute political commentary and be allowed, the guidelines suggest. "Look to see the telltale signs: has the photo been edited to insert a hate symbol? Is the subject a public figure?" they say.

Facebook insists it is planning to increase transparency and offer better definitions of the distinctions it makes, sources said.

A spokesperson said: “We publish our community standards, the minutes from the regular meetings we convene with global teams to review and update them, and our quarterly reports showing how we’re doing to enforce them for the public to see.

“We have previously committed to publishing how we apply key terms under this policy as well as whether we can publish the list of individuals and organisations that we designate as dangerous under these rules. Before doing so, we need to make sure that making this list public doesn’t inadvertently allow dangerous organisations or individuals to circumvent these rules or put the safety of our employees at risk.”

Myanmar

Myanmar military releases 600 coup protesters as 'silence strike' begins

Busloads of mostly young people seen leaving Insein Prison in Yangon, some making three-finger salutes

Myanmar protesters detained during the anti-coup demonstrations are released at Tamwe township police station in Yangon. Photograph: Reuters

Myanmar protesters detained during the anti-coup demonstrations are released at Tamwe township police station in Yangon. Photograph: Reuters

Agencies
Wed 24 Mar 2021 03.07 EDT

Hundreds of people imprisoned for protesting last month's coup have been released in the first apparent gesture by the military to try to placate the protest movement.

Witnesses outside Insein Prison in Yangon saw busloads of mostly young people, looking happy with some flashing the three-finger gesture of defiance adopted by the protest movement. State-run TV said a total of 628 were freed.

The prisoners appear to be the hundreds of students detained in early March while demonstrating against the 1 February coup that ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi.

One lawyer, speaking on condition of anonymity because she doesn't want attention from the authorities, said all those released were arrested on 3 March. She said only 55 people detained in connection with the protests remained in the prison, and it is likely they will all face charges under Section 505(A) of the Penal Code, which carries a penalty of up to three years in prison.

Seven-year-old girl killed in Myanmar after security forces open fire
Read more

Myanmar's Assistance Association for Political Prisoners says it has confirmed the killings of 275 people in connection with the post-coup crackdown, with additional deaths still unverified. It also says that as of Tuesday, it had verified arrest or charges against 2,812 people, of whom 2,418 remain in custody or with outstanding charges.

Civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi was due to have a court hearing on Wednesday in Myanmar's capital Naypyidaw, on criminal charges that could see her permanently barred from political office.

But her lawyer Khin Maung Zaw said the hearing was adjourned until 1 April because of problems with video conferencing caused by a junta-imposed internet shutdown.

Demonstrators on Wednesday tried a new tactic that they dubbed a silence strike, calling on people to stay home and businesses to close for the day.

The extent of the strike was difficult to gauge, but social media users posted photos from cities and towns showing streets empty of activity save for the

occasional stray dog.

Protesters release red balloons during a protest against the military coup in Yangon Photograph: Reuters

The online meme posted to publicise the action called silence “the loudest scream” and explained its purpose was to honour the movement’s fallen heroes, to recharge protesters’ energy and to contradict the junta’s claims that “everything is back to normal.”

The new tactic was employed after an extended onslaught of violence from security forces.

Local media reported that a seven-year-old girl in Mandalay, the country’s second-biggest city, was among the latest victims on Tuesday. The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners included her in its list of fatalities.

Myanmar’s besieged resistance dreams of ‘people's army’ to counter junta
Read more

“Khin Myo Chit was shot in the abdomen by a soldier while she sat in her father’s lap inside her home in Aung Pin Le ward,” the online news service Myanmar Now reported, quoting her sister, Aye Chan San.

The report said the shooting took place when soldiers were raiding homes in her family's neighborhood. The sister said a soldier shot at their father when he denied that any people were hiding in their home, and hit the girl.

Aye Chan San said the soldiers then beat her 19-year-old brother with their rifle butts and took him away.

The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners recorded three killings in Mandalay on Tuesday, though some other reports said there were five.

Myanmar coup

Seven-year-old girl killed in Myanmar after security forces open fire

Girl was shot in her home and is youngest victim so far in crackdown against opposition to military coup

Protesters carrying sandbags to erect makeshift barricades during a crackdown by security forces on demonstrations against the military coup in Mandalay on 22 March. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

Protesters carrying sandbags to erect makeshift barricades during a crackdown by security forces on demonstrations against the military coup in Mandalay on 22 March. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

Reuters
Tue 23 Mar 2021 17.45 EDT

A seven-year-old girl was killed in her home when security forces opened fire in Myanmar's second city Mandalay, becoming the youngest victim so

far in a crackdown against opposition to last month's military coup.

The ruling junta accused pro-democracy protesters of arson and violence during the weeks of unrest, and said it would use the least force possible to quell the daily demonstrations.

Junta spokesperson Zaw Min Tun said 164 protesters had been killed in total and he expressed sadness at the deaths. Activists say at least 261 people have been killed in the security forces' crackdown.

"They are also our citizens," Zaw Min Tun told a news conference in the capital Naypyidaw, a day after the European Union and the United States imposed more sanctions on groups or individuals linked to the Feb. 1 coup that ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's elected government.

Staff at a Mandalay funeral service told Reuters that a seven-year-old girl had died of bullet wounds in Chan Mya Thazi township on Tuesday.

Soldiers shot at her father but hit the girl who was sitting on his lap inside their home, her sister told Myanmar Now media outlet. Two men were also killed in the township, it said.

As night fell, candle-lit vigils were held in the commercial capital Yangon and other cities.

The junta has faced international condemnation for staging the coup that halted Myanmar's slow transition to democracy and for its lethal suppression of the protests that followed.

It has tried to justify the takeover by saying a Nov. 8 election won by Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) was fraudulent – an accusation the electoral commission has rejected. Military leaders have promised a new election but have not set a date and have declared a state of emergency.

The junta's Zaw Min Tun blamed the bloodshed on the protesters and said nine members of the security forces had been also killed.

“Can we call these peaceful protesters?” he said, while showing a video of factories on fire. “Which country or organisation would regard this violence as peaceful?“

The spokesperson also accused media of “fake news” and fanning unrest and said reporters could be prosecuted if they were in contact with the CRPH, as the remnants of Aung San Suu Kyi’s government is known. The military has declared the CRPH an illegal organisation and said membership is punishable by death.

Myanmar’s besieged resistance dreams of ‘people's army’ to counter junta
Read more

In the more than three-hour news conference, he alleged that the NLD had created hundreds or even thousands of extra ballots in numerous townships by inventing voters, including in Aung San Suu Kyi’s own constituency.

The NLD has denied making any attempt to rig the election.

Aung San Suu Kyi, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991 for her campaign to bring democratic civilian rule to Myanmar, has been in detention since the coup and faces charges that her lawyer says have been cooked up to discredit her.

The European Union and the United States imposed sanctions on Monday against individuals involved in the coup and the repression of the demonstrators.

The 11 people the EU targeted included General Min Aung Hlaing, the military’s commander-in-chief and now the head of the junta.

Washington had already sanctioned Min Aung Hlaing and the measures announced on Monday expanded the list.

US gun control

Biden urges gun reform after Colorado shooting: 'Don't wait another minute'

Joe Biden called for swift gun control legislation in remarks at the White House on Tuesday. Photograph: Stefani Reynolds/Bloomberg/Getty Images

Joe Biden called for swift gun control legislation in remarks at the White House on Tuesday. Photograph: Stefani Reynolds/Bloomberg/Getty Images

- President lowers White House flag to half-staff to honor victims
- Senate urged to pass House-approved background checks bills
- US politics – live coverage

Tom McCarthy, *Joan E Greve* and *Joanna Walters*
Tue 23 Mar 2021 15.59 EDT

After recording a year with the lowest level of public mass shootings in more than a decade, the US suffered its second such incident in less than a

week on Monday night with a shooting at a Colorado grocery store that killed 10, including one police officer.

Boulder shooting: suspect and 10 victims named by police
Read more

Joe Biden addressed the shooting on Tuesday, calling for swift legislation to be passed, and once again lowering the White House flag to half-staff after he had called for it to be lowered after last week's mass shooting in Atlanta.

The president called on Congress to close the loopholes in the background checks system and to once again ban assault weapons. He specifically urged the Senate to pass the two background checks bills that the House approved earlier this month.

"I don't need to wait another minute, let alone an hour, to take commonsense steps that will save lives in the future," Biden said. "This is not and should not be a partisan issue. It is an American issue."

It is unclear whether the bills can make it through the evenly divided Senate, given Republicans' general opposition to gun restrictions.

Asked whether Biden was considering executive action to address gun violence, the White House press secretary, Jen Psaki, said the president was considering a number of options.

"There's an ongoing process, and I think we feel we have to work on multiple channels at the same time," Psaki said.

Gun safety advocates including Barack Obama also called for immediate action by Congress to address the resurgent national epidemic as the country emerges from a year of lockdowns and social distancing sparked by the coronavirus pandemics.

> This is not and should not be a partisan issue. It is an American issue
>
> *Joe Biden*

In remarks at the White House, Biden called for a new ban on assault weapons and high-capacity magazines and said the Senate "should immediately pass" legislation to close loopholes in the background checks system for the purchase of guns.

The Republican minority in the Senate is highly likely to block any action on gun control. Nonetheless, senators on the Democratic side echoed Biden's call to action.

"This is the moment to make our stand. NOW," tweeted Senator Chris Murphy from Connecticut, where a shooter killed 26 people at an elementary school in 2012.

A male suspect was arrested at the scene, a King Soopers grocery store in Boulder, Colorado. He was named on Tuesday, as were the 10 victims.

"This is a tragedy and a nightmare for Boulder county, and in response, we have cooperation and assistance from local, state and federal authorities," said the Boulder county district attorney, Michael Dougherty.

People watch as Louis Saxton plays his cello to honor the 10 victims of a mass shooting at a King Soopers grocery store in Boulder, Colorado. Photograph: Jason Connolly/AFP/Getty Images

The Colorado attack brought the week's death toll from mass public shootings to 18, after a gunman killed eight people at three Atlanta-area spas last Tuesday. Six of those victims were women of Asian descent, and that attack produced a national demand for reckoning with discrimination and violence directed at Asian Americans.

While racist scapegoating by Donald Trump and others sparked thousands of attacks against Asian Americans during America's pandemic year, 2020 was an unusually quiet one for mass public shootings, according to a database maintained by the Associated Press, USA Today and Northeastern University.

There were 10 such shootings in 2018 and nine in 2019, according to the database, which tracks public incidents in which at least four people died, not including the shooter.

The US suffered only two such incidents in 2020 – both at the start of the year, before the spread of the coronavirus led to local economic and school shutdowns and related restrictions.

Gun sales surged during the pandemic, leading to fears of a return of mass gun violence after coronavirus restrictions eased. Those fears appear to have been fulfilled already.

"We have had a horrific year as a country, as a world," Colorado's state senate majority leader, Stephen Fenberg, a Democrat, told MSNBC. "It had finally started to feel like things are getting back to 'normal'. And, unfortunately, we are reminded that that includes mass shootings."

The police officer killed in the Colorado store attack, Eric Talley, 51, the father of seven children, was the first to respond to reports of shots fired at the store, authorities said.

The attack came just days after a judge blocked Boulder from enforcing a two-year-old ban on assault weapons and large-capacity magazines in the city.

“The court has determined that only Colorado state (or federal) law can prohibit the possession, sale and transfer of assault weapons and large-capacity magazines,” wrote the county judge, Andrew Hartman, according to the Denver Post.

While no state is untouched by mass shootings, Colorado has had an especially difficult history of such incidents, beginning with an attack on students at a high school in Columbine in 1999 that killed 13. In Aurora in 2012, a gunman fired at a crowd watching a Batman movie, killing 12 and wounding 58.

As previously scheduled, the Senate judiciary committee held a hearing Tuesday on “constitutional and common sense steps to reduce gun violence”. Gun safety legislation has failed to gain traction in Congress despite wide public agreement about certain safeguards such as universal background checks.

“To save lives and end these senseless killings, we need more than thoughts and prayers – we need federal action on gun safety from the Senate, and we need it now,” said John Feinblatt, president of Everytown for Gun Safety. “That work begins with this hearing, and we cannot rest until we pass background checks into law.”

Murphy, who does not sit on that committee but who mounted a nearly 15-hour filibuster on the Senate floor in 2016 to advance gun safety legislation after 49 people died in a mass shooting at a gay nightclub in Florida, called on colleagues to finally address gun violence.

Murphy invoked Monday’s shooting in Boulder, a mass shooting at a Florida high school in 2018 that killed 17 and the mass shooting at Sandy Hook elementary school in Newtown, Connecticut.

“No more Newtowns. No more Parklands. No more Boulders,” he tweeted. “Now – we make our stand.”

Boulder supermarket shooting

Boulder shootings: suspect allegedly bought assault rifle after ban on sale was blocked

Ahmad Al Aliwi Alissa purchased a weapon shortly after a judge lifted a previous ban on their sale in the Colorado city, according to court documents

People leave flowers at the site of the mass shooting at King Soopers grocery store in Boulder. Photograph: Kevin Mohatt/Reuters

People leave flowers at the site of the mass shooting at King Soopers grocery store in Boulder. Photograph: Kevin Mohatt/Reuters

Associated Press
Tue 23 Mar 2021 23.31 EDT

The suspect accused of opening fire inside a crowded Colorado supermarket was a 21-year-old man who allegedly purchased an assault weapon less than

a week earlier, it has emerged.

Ahmad Al Aliwi Alissa bought the weapon on 16 March, six days before the attack at a King Soopers store in Boulder that killed 10 people, including a police officer, according to an arrest affidavit. It was not immediately known where the gun was purchased.

The shooting came 10 days after a judge blocked a ban on assault rifles passed by the city of Boulder in 2018. That ordinance and another banning large-capacity magazines came after the 2018 mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas high school in Parkland, Florida, that left 17 people dead.

A lawsuit challenging the bans was filed quickly, backed by the National Rifle Association. The judge struck down the ordinance under a Colorado law that blocks cities from making their own rules about guns.

Alissa, who is from the Denver suburb of Arvada, was booked into the county jail Tuesday on murder charges after being treated at a hospital. He was due to make a first court appearance Thursday.

‘We don’t live in a safe world’: Boulder in shock and disbelief over shooting
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Investigators have not established a motive for Monday’s attack, but they believe Alissa was the only shooter, Boulder county district attorney Michael Dougherty said.

A law enforcement official briefed on the shooting said the suspect’s family told investigators they believed Alissa was suffering some type of mental illness, including delusions. Relatives described times when Alissa told them people were following or chasing him, which they said may have contributed to the violence, said the official, who wished to remain anonymous.

The attack was the nation’s deadliest mass shooting since a 2019 assault on a Walmart in El Paso, Texas, where a gunman killed 22 people in a rampage that police said targeted Mexicans.

In Washington, president Joe Biden called on Congress to tighten the nation's gun laws.

"Ten lives have been lost, and more families have been shattered by gun violence in the state of Colorado," Biden said at the White House.

Senate majority leader Chuck Schumer vowed to bring forward two House-passed bills to require expanded background checks for gun buyers. Biden supports the measures, but they face a tougher route to passage in a closely divided Senate with a slim Democratic majority.

Supermarket employees told investigators that Alissa shot a man multiple times outside the Boulder grocery store before going inside, according to the affidavit. Another person was found shot in a vehicle next to a car registered to the suspect's brother.

San Francisco's Chinatown reckons with Atlanta attacks: 'I don't feel safe anywhere'
Read more

The gunfire sent shoppers and employees scrambling for cover. SWAT officers carrying ballistic shields slowly approached the store while others escorted frightened people away from the building, which had some of its windows shattered. Customers and employees fled through a back loading dock to safety. Others took refuge in nearby shops.

Multiple 911 calls paint a picture of a chaotic, terrifying scene, according to the affidavit.

One caller said the suspect opened fire out the window of his vehicle. Others called to say they were hiding inside the store as the gunman fired on customers. Witnesses described the shooter as having a black AR-15-style gun and wearing blue jeans and maybe body armor.

By the time he was in custody, Alissa had been struck by a bullet that passed through his leg, the affidavit said. He had removed most of his clothing and was dressed only in shorts. Inside the store, he had left the gun, a tactical vest, a semiautomatic handgun and his bloodied clothing, the affidavit said.

After the shooting, detectives went to Alissa's home and found his sister-in-law, who told them that he had been playing around with a weapon she thought looked like a "machine gun", about two days earlier, the document said.

No one answered the door at the Arvada home believed to be owned by the suspect's father. The two-storey house with a three-car garage sits in a relatively new middle- and upper-class neighborhood.

Monday's attack was the seventh mass killing this year in the US and came a few days after the shooting that left eight people dead at three massage businesses in Georgia.

Ukraine

Good catch: Man in Ukraine rescues child floating on ice with fishing rod – video

US news

Pro-Trump lawyer says ‘no reasonable person’ would believe her election lies

Lawyers for Sidney Powell argued conspiracies she laid out constituted legally protected first amendment speech

- US politics – live coverage

Sidney Powell in Alpharetta, Georgia, on 2 December 2020. Photograph: Nathan Posner/Rex/Shutterstock

Sidney Powell in Alpharetta, Georgia, on 2 December 2020. Photograph: Nathan Posner/Rex/Shutterstock

Tom McCarthy
@TeeMcSee
Tue 23 Mar 2021 11.51 EDT

A key member of the legal team that sought to steal the 2020 election for Donald Trump is defending herself against a billion-dollar defamation lawsuit by arguing that "no reasonable person" could have mistaken her wild claims about election fraud last November as statements of fact.

Senate filibuster reform would produce 'nuclear winter', says Mitch McConnell
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In a motion to dismiss a complaint by the large US-based voting machine company Dominion, lawyers for Sidney Powell argued that elaborate conspiracies she laid out on television and radio last November while

simultaneously suing to overturn election results in four states constituted legally protected first amendment speech.

“No reasonable person would conclude that the statements were truly statements of fact,” argued lawyers for Powell, a former federal prosecutor from Texas who caught Trump’s attention through her involvement in the defense of his former national security adviser Michael Flynn.

Powell falsely stated on television and in legal briefs that Dominion machines ran on technology that could switch votes away from Trump, technology she said had been invented in Venezuela to help steal elections for the late Hugo Chávez.

Those lies were built on empty claims that apparently originated in anonymous comments on a pro-Trump blog, only to be amplified on a global scale by Trump himself in a 12 November tweet in which he wrote in part “REPORT: DOMINION DELETED 2.7 MILLION TRUMP VOTES NATIONWIDE.”

Citing lost business and reputational damage, Dominion filed a $1.3bn defamation lawsuit against Powell and her colleague on Trump’s legal team, Rudy Giuliani. A Dominion employee separately sued the Trump campaign after receiving death threats.

Thousands of Trump supporters stormed the US Capitol on 6 January in an effort to stop the certification of an election they considered invalid, killing a police officer in violent clashes in which four others died.

But lawyers for Powell argued her false statements about election fraud in the months preceding the Capitol insurrection were unmistakably not presented as true facts.

“It was clear to reasonable persons that Powell’s claims were her opinions and legal theories on a matter of utmost public concern,” her legal motion says. “Those members of the public who were interested in the controversy were free to, and did, review that evidence and reached their own conclusions – or awaited resolution of the matter by the courts before making up their minds.”

The filing brought expressions of disbelief from Trump critics.

“This is her defense. Wow,” tweeted the Republican representative Adam Kinzinger.

“Bad argument!” tweeted Trump’s former lawyer Michael Cohen. “[Powell] should have gone with an insanity defense due to #TrumpDerangementSyndrome.”

“Shorter Sidney Powell: suckers!” tweeted Charlie Sykes, an editor of the anti-Trump conservative publication the Bulwark.

As Trump fought to reverse his election loss in November, the former president himself reportedly supported Powell’s claims in private – and trumpeted them in public, touting Powell two weeks after the election as a key part of “the legal effort to defend OUR RIGHT to FREE and FAIR ELECTIONS”.

Powell was publicly exiled from the Trump camp a week after that tweet, after she appeared at a news conference hosted by the Republican National Committee alongside Giuliani, whose hair dye memorably ran down his face, and Trump lawyer Jenna Ellis.

The group was “an elite strike force team that is working on behalf of the president and the campaign”, Ellis announced.

Then Powell faced the cameras and claimed to have identified “massive influence of communist money through Venezuela, Cuba and likely China in the interference with our elections here in the United States”.

Aides reportedly told Trump that Powell was not helping, and Giuliani and Ellis issued a subsequent statement announcing, “Sidney Powell is practicing law on her own. She is not a member of the Trump legal team. She is also not a lawyer for the president in his personal capacity.”

But that did not prevent Powell from filing lawsuits the next week on Trump’s behalf in Georgia, Michigan, Arizona and Wisconsin.

In her defense against the Dominion defamation lawsuit, Powell argued that whatever “reasonable persons” thought of her wild claims, Dominion had failed to demonstrate that she herself thought them to be false as she spoke them – a key distinction in defamation cases.

“In fact,” Powell’s motion reads, “she believed the allegations then and she believes them now.”

Joe Biden

Joe Biden touts $1.9tn Covid rescue package on anniversary of Affordable Care Act

Administration also extended the enrollment period for registering for subsidized health insurance coverage until 15 August

President Joe Biden speaks at the James Cancer Hospital at Ohio State University on Tuesday. Photograph: Evan Vucci/AP

President Joe Biden speaks at the James Cancer Hospital at Ohio State University on Tuesday. Photograph: Evan Vucci/AP

Guardian staff and agencies
Tue 23 Mar 2021 21.44 EDT

Joe Biden marked the 11th anniversary of the signing of the Affordable Care Act with a trip to Ohio on Tuesday, touting his efforts to reverse many

Trump-era measures aimed at weakening the landmark health reform law, and pledging that his $1.9tn Covid rescue package would build on the ACA's promise.

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The administration also extended a special enrollment period for registering for subsidized health insurance coverage until 15 August, from the previous deadline of 15 May. The extension will give Americans who lost health coverage during the pandemic more time to sign up, and allow more Americans to take advantage of new federal subsidies to reduce insurance premiums granted under the new relief package.

Biden visited Ohio State University's James Cancer Hospital to mark the anniversary and promote a $100m grant the hospital received under the program, known as Obamacare, to upgrade its radiation oncology department.

How Democrats can use Biden's $1.9tn Covid relief to win the midterms
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The visit comes as Biden and other top White House officials are hitting the road on the Help is Here tour to promote the $1.9tn Covid-19 relief bill, Biden's first major legislation. The measure provides short-term subsidies that deliver discounts for nearly everyone who buys insurance under the program.

"We have a duty not just to protect it, but to make it better and keep becoming a nation where health care is a right for all, not a privilege for a few," Biden said in a speech on Tuesday. "Millions of families will be able to sleep a little more soundly at night because they don't have to worry about losing everything if they get sick."

Many of Biden's trips have been to politically critical states. Democrats, who hold a bare majority in the Senate, are hoping to compete in 2022 for a seat being vacated by retiring Ohio Republican Rob Portman. Biden lost the battleground state to Republican Donald Trump in the 2020 presidential election.

Democrats see healthcare as a winning issue.

The Affordable Care Act – the signature legislative achievement of Barack Obama, under whom Biden served as vice president – has survived repeated attacks from Republicans, on Capitol Hill and in the courts. It is expanding under Biden's watch.

Biden signed several executive orders reversing actions by Trump, who failed in his repeated vow to repeal Obamacare.

Republicans oppose extensive government involvement in insurance markets and have criticized the cost and quality of healthcare under the program.

There are about 28 million Americans without health insurance, down from about 46.5m in 2010, when the ACA was passed, according to federal figures.

During last year's presidential election campaign, Biden proposed a healthcare plan that would allow Americans to choose between their private insurance plans and government-sponsored public options. He took criticism from the liberal arm of the Democratic Party, which felt his proposals were too mild.

Brazil

Lula judge was biased, Brazil supreme court rules, paving way to challenge Bolsonaro

Former president's vindication could prove a precedent for other high-profile politicians and business leaders in prison

Lula da Silva could face off against Bolsonaro in 2022 elections in Brazil. Photograph: Miguel Schincariol/AFP/Getty Images

Lula da Silva could face off against Bolsonaro in 2022 elections in Brazil. Photograph: Miguel Schincariol/AFP/Getty Images

Associated Press
Tue 23 Mar 2021 20.06 EDT

Brazil's supreme court has ruled that the former judge Sergio Moro was biased in the way he oversaw former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's

corruption trial, providing vindication for the leftist leader who has long claimed political persecution.

The decision further darkens the shadow over the reputation of Moro and the sweeping "Car Wash" corruption investigation he presided over for years.

He sentenced hundreds of business and political leaders previously believed to enjoy impunity, and transformed himself into one of the Brazil's best-known public figures. Some hailed him a hero while others accused him of being a zealot.

Lula excoriates Bolsonaro's 'moronic' Covid response in comeback speech
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"In this case what is discussed is something that for me is key: everyone has the right to a fair trial, due legal process, and the impartiality of the judge," said Justice Carmen Lucia, who cast the tie-breaking vote.

Leaked messages published by the Intercept Brasil in 2019 showed apparent collusion between Moro and prosecutors during the process that ultimately jailed Da Silva for corruption and money laundering. His conviction on appeal sidelined him from the 2018 presidential elections, pursuant to the rules of Brazil's "clean slate law", and allowed the fringe lawmaker Jair Bolsonaro to cruise to victory. Moro quickly became Bolsonaro's justice minister.

Tuesday's ruling follows a separate decision from Justice Edson Fachin on 8 March to annul Da Silva's two convictions, on the grounds that he was tried in a court without proper jurisdiction, and establishing that he could be retried in federal court in the capital, Brasilia.

"Moro enters history as a judge who, for motives alien to the justice system, opted to strip the political rights of a great leader with whom he didn't agree," said Senator Jean Paul Prates, of Da Silva's Workers' party. Da Silva is universally known as Lula in Brazil. "This decision combined with the annulment of Lula's convictions at the start of month make more than clear: he is innocent!"

While the decision this month cleared the way for Da Silva to oppose Bolsonaro in 2022 elections, it was also interpreted by legal experts as a means to head off a ruling on allegations of Moro's bias, and in so doing preserve the convictions and credibility of Car Wash. Another justice called for a vote on the pending matter regardless.

Brazil's ex-president Lula condemns Bolsonaro over Covid in comeback bid
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With their 3-2 decision on Tuesday, the justices prohibited evidence gathered in the Car Wash probe about Da Silva's alleged ownership of a triplex in the beach town of Guaruja from being used in any eventual trial. The justices did not rule whether evidence gathered previously could be used when retrying Da Silva's other conviction, or in his other two unresolved criminal cases.

Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro and Sergio Moro. Photograph: Evaristo Sa/AFP/Getty Images

Michael Mohallem, coordinator of the Justice Centre of the Getulio Vargas Foundation, said the ruling brought any corruption proceedings against Da Silva back to square one and solidified his 2022 candidacy. It also provided a glimmer of hope for others who have been jailed.

“Lula will be able to say he was persecuted by a judge who wanted to convict him. For the political campaign that’s very valuable,” Mohallem said. “The fear is that many inmates will present cases to annul their sentences. The ruling opens that discussion.”

Jamal Khashoggi

Top Saudi official issued death threat against UN's Khashoggi investigator

Senior official twice threatened to have Agnès Callamard ‘taken care of’ in meeting with UN colleagues in Geneva in January 2020

The UN special rapporteur on extrajudicial killings, Agnès Callamard: ‘Those threats don’t work on me. It didn’t stop me from acting in a way which I think is the right thing to do.’ Photograph: Fabrice Coffrini/AFP via Getty

The UN special rapporteur on extrajudicial killings, Agnès Callamard: ‘Those threats don’t work on me. It didn’t stop me from acting in a way which I think is the right thing to do.’ Photograph: Fabrice Coffrini/AFP via Getty

Stephanie Kirchgaessner in Washington
@skirchy
Tue 23 Mar 2021 08.00 EDT

A senior Saudi official issued what was perceived to be a death threat against the independent United Nations investigator, Agnès Callamard, after her investigation into the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

In an interview with the Guardian, the outgoing special rapporteur for extrajudicial killings said that a UN colleague alerted her in January 2020 that a senior Saudi official had twice threatened in a meeting with other senior UN officials in Geneva that month to have Callamard "taken care of" if she was not reined in by the UN.

'The EU did not rise to the challenge': UN special rapporteur on Europe's failure to fill human rights void
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Asked how the comment was perceived by her Geneva-based colleagues, Callamard said: "A death threat. That was how it was understood."

Callamard, a French national and human rights expert who will this month take on her new post as secretary general of Amnesty International, was the first official to publicly investigate and publish a detailed report into the 2018 murder of Khashoggi, a prominent former insider who used his column at the Washington Post to write critically about the Saudi government.

Callamard's 100-page report, published in June 2019, concluded that there was "credible evidence" that the Saudi crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, and other senior Saudi officials were liable for the killing, and called the murder an "international crime". The Biden administration has since released its own unclassified report, which concluded that Prince Mohammed had approved the murder. The Saudi government has denied the killing, which occurred in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, was ordered by the future king.

The Guardian independently corroborated Callamard's account of the January 2020 episode.

The alleged threats were made, she said, at a "high-level" meeting between Geneva-based Saudi diplomats, visiting Saudi officials and UN officials in Geneva. During the exchange, Callamard was told, they criticised her work

on the Khashoggi murder, registering their anger about her investigation and her conclusions. The Saudi officials also raised baseless allegations that she had received money from Qatar – a frequent refrain against critics of the Saudi government.

Callamard said one of the visiting senior Saudi officials is then alleged to have said that he had received phone calls from individuals who were prepared to "take care of her".

Callamard's report said there was 'credible evidence' that Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and other senior Saudi officials were liable for Jamal Khashoggi's killing. Photograph: Reuters

When UN officials expressed alarm, other Saudis who were present sought to reassure them that the comment ought not to be taken seriously. The Saudi group then left the room but, Callamard was told, the visiting senior Saudi official stayed behind, and repeated the alleged threat to the remaining UN officials in the room.

Specifically, the visiting Saudi official said he knew people who had offered to "take care of the issue if you don't".

"It was reported to me at the time and it was one occasion where the United Nations was actually very strong on that issue. People that were present, and

also subsequently, made it clear to the Saudi delegation that this was absolutely inappropriate and that there was an expectation that this should not go further," Callamard said.

While Callamard has in the past discussed the threats she has faced in her work as a special rapporteur, including by the Philippine president, Rodrigo Duterte, details of the alleged Saudi threat are being revealed in the Guardian for the first time.

The development will probably bolster the view of human rights experts that Saudi Arabia's government has acted with impunity in the wake of Khashoggi's 2018 murder, including through arbitrary arrests of critics of the prince, as well as his potential political rivals.

The Saudi government did not respond to emailed requests for comment, which the Guardian sent to the Saudi foreign ministry, the Saudi embassy in London and the Saudi embassy in Washington.

"You know, those threats don't work on me. Well, I don't want to call for more threats. But I have to do what I have to do. It didn't stop me from acting in a way which I think is the right thing to do," Callamard said.

Meat industry

Europe and US could reach 'peak meat' in 2025 – report

Fast growth of plant-based alternatives means consumption of conventional meat will start to fall

More people are eating meat and dairy alternatives as concern grows over health and the environmental impact of livestock. Photograph: Lam Yik/Reuters

More people are eating meat and dairy alternatives as concern grows over health and the environmental impact of livestock. Photograph: Lam Yik/Reuters

Damian Carrington Environment editor
@dpcarrington
Tue 23 Mar 2021 19.01 EDT

The fast growth of plant-based alternatives to animal products could mean Europe and North America will reach "peak meat" by 2025, at which point consumption of conventional meat starts to fall, according to a report.

The study also forecasts that plant-based meats will match regular meat on price by 2023 and that nine out of 10 of the world's favourite dishes – from pepperoni pizza to sushi – will have realistic alternatives by 2035.

The report, by the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) and Blue Horizon Corporation, says it is very likely that alternative proteins will capture 11% of the global protein market by 2035, and 22% if rapid technology and regulatory progress is made.

An increasing number of people are eating meat and dairy alternatives as concern grows over health, the environmental impact of livestock and animal welfare. The report says the annual market for alternative meat, eggs, dairy and seafood products is on course to reach at least $290bn (£210bn) by 2035.

"The most striking thing is that in developed economies, we're going to be at peak meat in 2025 in some scenarios," said Decker Walker, the head of agribusiness at BCG. "There's all this talk that alternative proteins are futuristic, and that many people don't resonate with the concept of artificial meat. But what most people don't realise is that we're actually already at a point where [traditional] meat consumption is going to be declining for the first time in history. The global consequences of the shift to alternative proteins are significant."

If alternative proteins grow to 11% of sales over the next 15 years, the report estimates that 1bn tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions will have been avoided, farmland equivalent to the area of the UK will have been freed from supporting livestock, and 50bn fewer chickens will have been raised.

Decker said meat alternatives were already convincing in recipes such as spaghetti bolognese, where they were just a small proportion of the overall flavour profile. Unprocessed cuts of meat would be the last to have realistic alternatives, he said. "When you do a steak, everything has to be perfect," he said.

Rosie Wardle, a partner at Synthesis Capital, which invests in alternative proteins, said: “From what we’ve seen as investors in this emerging sector over the past six years, I think 11% alternative proteins by 2035 is a conservative number. Given the confluence of factors driving momentum in the sector, I’d wager that the report’s bull case number of 22% is the more likely outcome by 2035.”

Avoiding meat and dairy is ‘single biggest way’ to reduce your impact on Earth
Read more

Avoiding conventional meat and dairy products is the single biggest way to reduce your environmental impact on the planet, according to scientists. Regular meat consumption was recently linked to a raised risk of heart disease, diabetes and pneumonia.

Another report in 2019 suggested most “meat” would not come from slaughtered animals in 2040, while a UN Food and Agriculture Organization director said a year ago that peak meat was getting closer in rich nations. In the UK, school and hospital caterers recently vowed to cut the meat they serve by 20%, and a coalition of the UK’s health professions have called for a climate tax on meat.

The new report is based on an industry survey and more than 40 interviews with experts. It says growing concerns from consumers and investors over the impact of meat is driving demand that will enable alternative protein products to closely match the taste, texture and price of animal proteins, with this alone driving market share up from 2% today to 11% in 2035.

The delivery of technology improvements to increase efficiency would boost the market share to 16% by that date. “There are technologies that address these challenges but they’re not at the level of robustness or adoption you need,” Decker said. “But miracles do not need to occur – it is simply faster adoption of technologies that are already in the pipeline.”

If policymakers introduce CO_2 prices and support for farmers to switch from animal agriculture to alternative proteins, the share could rise to 22%, the

report says, giving a rate of growth that would lead to peak meat in Europe and North America by 2025.

The report forecasts that two-thirds of the alternative protein products in 2035 will be plant-based, a fifth produced by microbes, as Quorn is, and about 10% will be meat grown in bioreactors. Cultured meat was approved for sale for the first time in November in Singapore, though the report says such meat will remain more expensive than regular meat until the early 2030s.

Hsin Huang, the secretary general of the International Meat Secretariat, which represents the global meat and livestock industry, said: “Healthy, honest competition from alternative protein choices is welcome.” He said the BCG report assumed alternative proteins were more nutritious, but this depended on the addition of vitamins and could be expensive. Huang also noted that the World Health Organization had said a healthy diet could include food from animal sources.

Bruce Friedrich, of the Good Food Institute, said governments that supported innovations in alternative proteins would reap the benefits. “Unless industrial meat consumption goes down, no government in the world will stand a chance of meeting their [climate] obligations. Now is the time for governments everywhere to use public dollars for the public good.”

GameStop

GameStop shares fall as first earnings report released since Reddit-led rally

Shares, which had fallen 6.5% during the day, briefly gained 8% in after-hours trading before dropping more than 15%

For the fourth quarter of 2020 GameStop's net sales were $2.12bn compared to $2.19bn in the fiscal 2019 fourth quarter. Photograph: Cezary Kowalski/Sopa Images/Rex/Shutterstock

For the fourth quarter of 2020 GameStop's net sales were $2.12bn compared to $2.19bn in the fiscal 2019 fourth quarter. Photograph: Cezary Kowalski/Sopa Images/Rex/Shutterstock

Dominic Rushe in New York
@dominicru
Tue 23 Mar 2021 17.40 EDT

GameStop released its first earnings report on Tuesday since it became the subject of international attention during a Reddit-fuelled buying rally and named the former Amazon and Google executive Jenna Owens as its new chief operating officer.

The company's sales and profit figures were slightly lower than analysts had expected and its shares, which had fallen 6.5% during the day, briefly gained 8% in after-hours trading before dropping more than 15%.

Bitcoin and Robinhood will end badly for those who can least afford it
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For the fourth quarter of 2020 GameStop's net sales were $2.12bn compared to $2.19bn in the fiscal 2019 fourth quarter. Net income was $80.5m, both figures were below analysts' forecasts.

Between December and late January shares in the troubled video games retailer had shot up 1,700% as an army of small investors who had coalesced around the Reddit forum WallStreetBets piled on to the company.

The investors had bet that Wall Street investors had overreached themselves betting that the share price would collapse and that its flagging fortunes would turn around after Ryan Cohen – founder of Chewy, the online pet supplies shop – bought a stake in the company and joined its board.

The extraordinary price surge in GameStop and other so-called meme stocks has led to congressional inquiries into the markets and the trading app Robinhood.

The shares which had been as low as $13 in December peaked at $347 on 27 January before collapsing once more in February and rallying again in March. On Tuesday GameStop told investors the share price stood at $181, valuing the company at $12.7bn.

Before the release GameStop announced its chief customer officer, Frank Hamlin, was stepping down, the latest in a series of exits since Cohen joined the board.

After the results call ended early, without the usual question-and-answer session from the chief executive, George Sherman, some on Reddit complained about the lackluster call. “Yeah, that call was rather terrible. No questions?? After the most volatile thing we’ve seen in the stock market … maybe ever? That was discouraging,” wrote one Redditor.

“Guys chill out nothing changed after this report. We knew that nothing changed. Just chill the fuck out,” posted another.

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- Myanmar Military releases 600 coup protesters as 'silence strike' begins
- Myanmar Seven-year-old girl killed after security forces open fire
- 'Don't wait another minute' Biden urges gun reform after Colorado shooting
- Boulder shootings Suspect allegedly bought rifle after sale ban blocked
- Good catch Man in Ukraine rescues child floating on ice with fishing rod
- Trump Lawyer says ‘no reasonable person’ would believe her election lies
- US Biden touts $1.9tn Covid rescue on Obamacare anniversary
- Brazil Lula judge was biased, supreme court rules, paving way to challenge Bolsonaro
- Saudi Arabia Top official issued death threat against UN's Khashoggi investigator
- 'Peak meat' Europe and US could reach max consumption in 2025
- GameStop Shares fall as first earnings report released since Reddit-led rally