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Alice da Silva Aguiar's family honours 'angel' at the funeral of nine-year-old Southport victim

Olympic Games end in spectacular style



Tom Cruise abseiled into the Stade de France to collect the Olympic flag at the end of a glittering closing ceremony

INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATION

Doctors and nurses accused of rape left free to work in NHS

Shocking figures obtained by this newspaper reveal that 248 doctors and 400 nurses accused of serious sexual offences were allowed to work on wards without supervision or disciplinary action between 2018-2024

REBECCA THOMAS AND TARA COBHAM

Doctors and nurses have been left free to practise despite being accused of sexual assault and rape, *The Independent* can reveal. Between 2018-2024, some 248 doctors faced such allegations without licences being suspended, according to the GMC. Over 400 nurses practised without restrictions after sexual abuse allegations between 2019 and 2024.

Editorials

At a time of strife and suffering, the Olympics were a beacon of hope

The Paris Olympics got off to a rather shaky, wet, rat-infested and sabotaged start, passed through more than a fortnight of gripping sporting excitement, and culminated in the unalloyed relief that the event passed without any of the potential civil unrest or terrorism that might have turned joy into tragedy. Only the lone individual climbing the Eiffel Tower in the last hours of the proceedings came close to any sense of jeopardy.

Yes, it was a shame that the Seine couldn't be cleaned up in time, but Paris is not the only capital city in the world with polluted waterways. Aside from some malicious disruption of rail and other communications, Paris was spared the crimes and scandals of previous Games. It is something to be grateful for in a world seemingly trapped in cycles of war and extremism.

Indeed, it may be said that the last few weeks have seen the French capital become a beacon of hope in torrid times. What we saw athletes from all over the world display was that spirit of intense but peaceful competition that was so much a part of the ancient as well as the modern event.

The antagonism of one competitor against another, to the ancient Greeks, implied strife; while competition more as a simple struggle to come first was a virtue. And, with some rare exceptions, that same spirit infused those taking part in Paris – fellow athletes embracing one another and celebrating together in mutual respect in a supremely multicultural, multiethnic environment.

There were many standout moments, and most for all the right reasons. One of the more memorable ones we witnessed at this, the XXXIII Olympiad – indeed a viral one on social media – was the "breaking" display put on by the Australian "Raygun" (real name Rachael Gunn).

Breakdancing, as it used to be known, made its debut as an official Olympic "sport" this year, and Gunn decided to do something a little different, combining some appropriately kangaroo-inspired hops with a mystifying series of larval squirming on the floor. Apparently, the proud Aussie felt she had to be more inventive in order to challenge the formidable

Lithuanian, French and American dancers with their more conventional power moves.

In doing so, b-girl Raygun placed herself firmly in the Homeric tradition, by blending intellectual virtue with physical prowess. She finished 16th and failed to earn a single point but hers was still a noble effort, recalling Great Britain's plucky skier, Eddie "the Eagle" Edwards, the sensation of the 1988 Winter Olympics.

These days, thanks to the National Lottery, Team GB can look forward to every set of Olympics with the justified expectation of a disproportionately large haul of medals, and Paris has been no exception. True, the performance hasn't been quite as strong as at some other recent championships, but the merits of the then prime minister John Major's idea of a national lottery as a way to bypass the difficult politics of funding sport through general taxation have become glitteringly clear. It may even turn out to be the abiding success of his premiership.

From Keely Hodgkinson in the women's 800m to Katy Marchant, Emma Finucane and Sophie Capewell in track cycling and Toby Roberts in the climbing, there were plenty of outstanding, world-beating achievements.

So, Paris was one of the more successful Games, though far from free of controversy. The gender status of the Algerian boxer Imane Khelif became a renewed focus for the debate on trans people in sport (she is not trans, as it happens), and, all too predictably, was traduced during one of Donald Trump's tedious, rambling US presidential rallies. Suffice to say, the rows about Khelif confirm how much more work needs to be done to achieve a consensus on chromosomes in sport.

More broadly, the Games brought the world together. They are one of the few events of any kind that are genuinely global, and in troubled times, the modern Olympics serve two complementary roles – distraction and inspiration.

It is no bad thing to gain some respite from stories of war and political strife, and the athletes can always inspire others to emulate their accomplishments in sports and in other walks of life. A figure such as Simone Biles, whose four medals in Paris have taken her overall tally to 11, redeemed herself in gymnastics after suffering a mental block, "the twisties" at Tokyo three years ago – encompassing an important message about mental health.

As the torch is passed once again, we look forward to the "Hollywood Olympics", in Los Angeles in 2028, and hope they will pass on more peaceful, happier times (and without Mr Trump presiding over them with a running commentary).

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Medics are left free to work in NHS despite rape claims



One charity said the GMC figures are ‘deeply troubling’ for both patients and staff (Getty)

REBECCA THOMAS
TARA COBHAM

Hundreds of doctors and nurses have been left free to practise unchecked despite being accused of serious sexual assault and rape in the last six years, *The Independent* can reveal.

Between 2018 and 2024, some 248 doctors faced allegations of rape, sexual assault or attempted rape without their licences

being suspended, according to new figures from the General Medical Council (GMC). The scandal-hit Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) had more than 400 nurses practising without restrictions after sexual offence allegations between 2019 and 2024.

The shocking figures call into question the decision-making of the UK's two biggest health watchdogs after a series of exposés by *The Independent*.

Health secretary Wes Streeting met the chair of the NMC, Sir David Warren, at the end of last month to discuss the concerns raised by this publication's reporting.

This newspaper can reveal:

- Between 2018 and 2024, 11 doctors were accused of having indecent images of children but no interim orders were made
- Over the same period, 261 doctors faced no restrictions despite allegations of physical assault
- In 2018, one doctor accused of murder had no restrictions placed on their ability to practise
- A doctor found to have sexually assaulted colleagues was able to practise as long as he informed the GMC of his job movements

Dr Becky Cox, who is a GP and founder of Surviving in Scrubs, told *The Independent*: "We are deeply concerned by this data showing a low proportion of doctors accused of sexual assault receive interim orders to limit their practise whilst awaiting investigation and tribunal.



Figures obtained under the Freedom of Information Act show hundreds of doctors faced claims of rape, sexual assault or attempted rape without their licences being suspended (PA)

“We strongly encourage the GMC to ensure that appropriate measures are put in place to safeguard patients, staff and members of the public whilst investigations take place.”

Figures obtained under the Freedom of Information Act show the number of doctors and nurses each year who were the subject of allegations without interim suspensions or restrictions. The data does not specify the length of time for which they practised in these conditions.

Doctors can have interim orders placed on their licence to practise if the GMC decides there is enough evidence, with the Medical Practitioners Tribunal Service (MPTS) setting the sanctions, which can include suspension. For nurses, the NMC can recommend to its fitness to practise panels that an interim order should be put in place.

Helen Hughes, chief executive of the charity Patient Safety Learning, said the figures were “deeply troubling” from both patient and staff safety perspectives. She added: “In healthcare, patients are often faced by a significant power imbalance. When serious allegations are made against healthcare professionals, there must be robust processes in place to safeguard both staff and patients while these are being investigated.”

Jacob Lant, chief executive of National Voices, a coalition of health and social care charities in England, said of the data:

“These are some very serious allegations highlighted, and in such cases, communities should quite rightly be able to expect that NHS leaders and regulators make full use of their powers to prioritise patient safety while investigations are carried out.”

The figures come after a series of reports by *The Independent* revealed how a “toxic” culture within the NMC was leading to nurses accused of sexual assault and domestic violence going unchecked.

Data reveals that when doctors do receive interim orders, the majority are still not suspended. Instead, they have conditions placed on them. One transplant surgeon, James Gilbert, based in Oxford, has been suspended from working for eight months following a fitness to practise hearing over allegations he sexually harassed female colleagues, made racist comments and abused his senior position. Three of his victims were trainees.

The surgeon previously had interim conditions on his licence but these only required him to inform the GMC of where he was working, rather than limiting his ability to work.

In another case, the GMC was taken to the High Court by its own regulator, the Professional Standards Authority (PSA), after the Medical Practitioners Tribunal Service handed only a six-month suspension to a doctor accused of having sex with a patient. The GMC had recommended the doctor be erased from the register.



A series of reports by The Independent have revealed a ‘toxic’ culture within the Nursing and Midwifery Council (PA)

The PSA argued the GMC did not take into account the vulnerability of this patient and the High Court ordered a further six-month suspension for the doctor.

The GMC said it takes all allegations it receives seriously, with sexual assault, rape or attempted rape claims referred to the MPTS following an investigation, unless in exceptional circumstances. It said it also informs those responsible for a doctor's appraisal of concerns raised.

Anthony Omo, director of fitness to practise and general counsel at the GMC, said: "We are very clear that there is no place for any form of sexual assault, harassment or discrimination in the medical profession. In many cases involving sexual allegations, the GMC's position will be that such serious misconduct is incompatible with continued registration."

He added: "Earlier this year our updated professional standards for doctors, Good Medical Practice, came into effect, which sets out zero tolerance of sexual misconduct and makes clear that acting in a sexual way towards patients or colleagues is unacceptable. Patients and doctors must be supported by environments that are free from all forms of sexual misconduct."

In the last year the NMC strengthened its guidance for staff making decisions on sexual misconduct and other forms of abuse outside professional practice. This came after reports from *The Independent* revealing it was allowing nurses and midwives accused of sexual assault outside of work to continue practising.

It said: "We take allegations of sexual misconduct very seriously, and our data shows that where charges are found proved at a hearing, the most common sanction handed down by panels is a striking off order."

A Department of Health and Social Care spokesperson said: "NHS organisations have a responsibility to protect both patients and staff, and ensure robust measures are in place to stop sexual assaults happening in NHS services and premises and to take action to fully investigate any cases that are reported."

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News

No early release for rioters, promises cabinet minister



Jonathan Reynolds said that ‘there is capacity in the system to deal with this disorder’ (Getty)

KATE DEVLIN
WHITEHALL EDITOR

Rioters will not be freed early despite the chronic overcrowding in the UK’s prisons, a cabinet minister has said. Business secretary Jonathan Reynolds said they would not be included in the government’s release scheme.

The guarantee came as the justice secretary Shabana Mahmood warned that the impact of the violent scenes on the country's streets would be felt in the criminal justice system "for months and years". Last month, she announced plans to release some inmates early to free up prison space, blaming the decision on the last Conservative government.

Asked if he could guarantee that rioters won't be set free early under the overcrowded release scheme, Mr Reynolds told *The Camilla Tominey Show* on GB News: "I understand that they won't be."

He added that it was "because of those difficult decisions that were made by the ministers in the new government to make sure there is sufficient capacity, moving on from the disastrous state that we inherited … that there is capacity in the system to deal with this disorder".

He also urged the public to support local businesses affected by the riots. "If you care about these brilliant local businesses that are the heart of your community, please give them your support in the days and weeks ahead," he said. But he denied he was concerned the days of riots, broadcast on television screens across the globe, could affect foreign investment in the UK.



The impact of the riots on small businesses was 'very significant', Jonathan Reynolds said (PA)

He said he was "not worried" about the issue despite Labour's hopes that overseas cash can help the UK's growth. As the

violence spread this week, the chancellor Rachel Reeves was holding meetings with global investors during a three-day visit to the US and Canada, where she told them: “Britain is open for business.”

Mr Reynolds said: “It is clearly a difficult thing to have to contend with as a country. However, I would say that, for the big investors that I talk to, they’re more motivated by the political stability of the government, by the certainty of the tax regime, by the changes to planning policy and a whole range of other pro-business measures that we’re putting in place. And, certainly, for our investment summit, which is coming up in October, we have a huge amount of interest in it, so I’m not worried about the effect.”

He added that while the costs of the riots were unclear, the impact on small businesses was “very significant”.

He said he is seeking to make insurers pay claims promptly and alert businesses that they might be able to access support under the Riot Compensation Act if they are not insured or not adequately covered by insurance.

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News

Cleverly accuses Farage of being politician just for the ‘clicks, likes and content’



Tory leadership hopeful attacked Nigel Farage over his online remarks (Joe Giddens/PA)

KATE DEVLIN

Tory leadership hopeful James Cleverly has attacked Nigel Farage, telling him to choose between being a “serious politician or a social media content creator”.

The shadow home secretary accused the Reform UK leader of making statements designed to “generate traffic” as riots erupted across the country. Mr Farage has been widely criticised for his claims of “two-tier policing”, echoing the language of a right-wing conspiracy theory, and his remarks about the Southport stabbings.

Mr Cleverly said: “I think some of the things that he has framed as questions are clearly designed to generate traffic, generate digital content. And he needs to decide, is he a politician, a serious politician, or is he a social media content creator? As politicians, we have a duty to think very, very carefully about what we do and very, very carefully about what we say.”

He told Times Radio that politicians must “not intentionally reinforce gossip and rumour, particularly if it has serious real-world implications. And so, you know, the question that he will need to ask himself and perhaps others as well, is, do you believe parliament is an important institution where serious decisions are made and the country is governed? Or is it just part of a PR operation for clicks and likes and monetised content?”

Another leadership contender, Mel Stride, has said Mr Farage would not be welcome in the Conservatives under his leadership as he criticised the former Ukip leader’s response to the riots, saying he was “irresponsible and wrong to fuel the fires”.

Mr Farage has suggested that the riots have been dealt with more harshly than other recent protests such as the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. He also reached out to billionaire X/Twitter owner Elon Musk, alleging a conspiracy between the government and media to support “open borders”. He also doubled down on his much-criticised claims about the Southport stabbings, and claimed “the truth was being withheld” about the suspect.

Farage said: “One of the reasons the Southport riots were as bad as they were, one of the reasons the mosque itself was targeted, was because the authorities didn’t tell us quickly enough what the truth was. We then learnt a few hours later he was born in

Cardiff and actually he wasn't a radical Islamist at all. But my question about whether he was on a watch list still hasn't been answered."

False claims that the alleged attacker of three young girls in Southport was on a watchlist and a Muslim were used to stir up far-right mobs.

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News/ Exclusive

Children ‘taught racism’ by extremist family members

‘By the time they are five or six, sadly, they are pretty much indoctrinated into being against different ethnicities’



Youngsters take part in far-right protests in Hull (@funky_nelly/X/Reuters)

MAYA OPPENHEIM
JOE MIDDLETON

Children as young as nine are being radicalised by their far-right relatives, a reformed neo-Nazi has warned.

Nigel Bromage, who was involved in far-right groups for two decades but now runs a deradicalisation charity, told *The Independent* the youngest person that his organisation has supported was a boy who was using neo-Nazi references after being radicalised by his older brother.

Discussing the recent explosion of violence, he warned the far right is radicalising lay people to use as "pawns" to perpetrate violence and destruction. Extremists have managed to get people to believe the misinformation and lies they are pushing and mobilise them as people "feel voiceless and unheard", he added.

His exclusive interview comes in the wake of far-right violence erupting across the UK in the aftermath of the fatal stabbing of three young girls at a Taylor Swift-themed holiday club in Southport. False information spread rapidly online claiming the suspect was a Muslim asylum seeker who came to the UK on a small boat crossing.

Rioters have attacked mosques, ambushed riot police, set fire to a hotel housing migrants and torched a public library and Citizens Advice Bureau building.

Mr Bromage, director of Exit Hate Trust which helps people who want to leave racist groups, said his organisation had come across children who have been radicalised by parents or older siblings. One case involved a nine-year-old who had been fed extremist views by his brother.

The 59-year-old said the child's older brother became involved in the movement via extreme right-wing forums – explaining his organisation had helped both brothers leave the far right.

Nazism is built on the notion the "struggle is from the cradle to the grave", Mr Bromage said. "When babies are born, they are dedicated to Adolf Hitler and national socialism and they will be brought up believing that they have to protect the white race and there is an ongoing war against the system.

"By the time they are five or six, sadly, they are pretty much indoctrinated into being against the system and being against

people of different ethnicities."

The Exit Hate Trust takes self-referrals as well as referrals from friends and family. Mr Bromage said the trust talks to couples involved in far-right groups, adding it tends to be the man in a racist or extreme right-wing organisation when then gets their girlfriend or wife involved.

"Then this then disseminates down to the children being promoted racism and extremism," he said.



'The far right are really good at promoting their message,' says Nigel Bromage (Supplied)

Mr Bromage noted family members can use racist games, music, memes or other forms of humour to indoctrinate children.

Worrying signs of racist behaviour have been seen from young people during the riots over the last week. In footage on social media, a girl was seen skipping down the street holding the arm of an older woman while chanting "P***s out", just before an anti-immigration march in Belfast.

An 11-year-old boy was arrested during disorder in Hartlepool last Wednesday, while a 14-year-old boy is the youngest person charged in connection with the riots so far.

Once you had actually been on a march and then started to go on two, three, four, or five – it was like a drug. You absolutely embraced it

Nigel Bromage

Anki Deo, senior policy officer at Hope Not Hate, wrote *Plugged in but Disconnected: Young People and Hateful Attitudes*, a report which explores how harmful attitudes are formed in young people. The researcher said that from focus groups with secondary school teachers, they discovered that young people could pick up harmful views at home.

She said: "A lot of the teachers were railing against the idea that the young people they were concerned about were weird loners, they were saying some of them were actually reasonably popular. They are not necessarily social outcasts. A lot of the social relationships and structures in the home were making it difficult for teachers to reinforce a positive narrative in schools. Teachers felt they were parroting things they'd heard at home."

Mr Bromage said demonstrations were predominantly made up of political activists when he was involved in the far right but now protests include both extremists and frustrated members of the public.

The campaigner said: "The far right are really good at promoting their message of hate and division. So what they will do is they will create memes, tell lies about stories, edit films so what you are actually seeing is a small cut of a much larger film with really emotive headings."

He warned that some protesters are “getting lost in this mayhem and destruction”, adding that “they are just being used as pawns within this plan of the far right to cause destruction”.

Mr Bromage argued that social media can radicalise someone in months, turning them from being angry to believing direct action and violence is the only solution. He compared this to the much slower radicalisation process when he was involved in the movement – explaining they would have to wait two or three months for a response after writing to PO boxes in the US.

Discussing his trajectory, he recalled going to protests from around the age of 15 “simply for the excitement”.



Unrest first broke out on 30 July following the Southport knife killings (PA)

“I was born a working-class lad in a council flat, and it was a bit dull and not very exciting,” he said. “But once you had actually been on a march and then started to go on two, three, four, or five – it was like a drug. You absolutely embraced it and looked forward, sadly, to the confrontations and the flag-waving and the drums and all that type of thing.”

Mr Bromage recounted how he slowly became involved in the far right – joining groups which were increasingly extreme. He also explained how his mother died from cancer when he was 18 and his dad died five years later after being hit by a van. Aged 23, the far right effectively became his family as he had no siblings.

The campaigner said he then ended up joining the National Front as a foot soldier, going to meetings and demonstrations and starting up a Rock Against Communism band called Buzzard Bait. After this, he became an organiser in the West Midlands for the British Movement, an openly Nazi group, and went on to become a recruiter and local organiser for Combat 18, the neo-Nazi group which has pushed white supremacy.

He left that life behind in 2000 after members of the racist group tried to throw a Black man through a shop window in Birmingham and he intervened to stop them.

Since starting campaign work, Mr Bromage said he has been forced to move house twice due to receiving threats of violence. He said his organisation has been subjected to many threats of violence and abuse – some of which have come from as far away as the US – and had lost members of staff due to this.

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News

We'll disappoint voters and mess up, admits Phillips



Jess Phillips told an Edinburgh audience to expect 'a more honest approach' from Labour (PA)

KATE DEVLIN

Labour frontbenchers are "going to mess up" and "disappoint" voters, a Labour minister has said. But Jess Phillips, the minister for safeguarding and violence against women and girls, said that overall, her party would have a "more honest approach" than the Conservatives.

Of the last Tory government, she said: “It feels like politicians have been spitting in our face and telling us it is raining, which is a funnier way of saying ‘gaslighting you.’” The Birmingham Yardley MP added: “They will be like, ‘we’re spending more on the NHS than ever before’ and then you spent 19 hours and leave the accident and emergency unit not having any treatment.”

She made the comments at the Edinburgh International Book Festival, where she said her latest book, *Let’s Be Honest*, had been written after she went to an A&E in Birmingham and received “genuinely worse than healthcare I have watched being provided in war zones”. Ms Phillips said: “I just went fucking apeshit and started writing.”

She warned the audience, that when it comes to Sir Keir Starmer’s new ministerial team: “I think some of them are going to mess up over the next years, and they are going to disappoint you, that is the truth.” But she added that “overall, it is going to be a more honest approach” from the government.



Phillips resigned from Labour’s front bench last year to back a Commons motion calling for a ceasefire in Gaza (AP)

She also said she was “hopeful” the government would make progress in tackling male violence against women. And she told of how she was surprised to be made a minister in the wake of Labour’s landslide election victory last month.

Ms Phillips resigned from Sir Keir’s front bench late last year to rebel and back a Commons motion calling for a ceasefire in Gaza. She said she was a “bit surprised” to be invited to be part

of the government, during a phone call with Sue Gray, the prime minister's chief of staff.

"I hadn't expected to be asked back because you have to stay out in the cold a bit when you are a rebel," she said. However, she said that the fact that "Keir Starmer gave me, the naughty girl, the job back" showed Labour's determination to tackle violence against women.

She stated: "Even just in the Home Office, let alone I feel it across government, there is this turn, this switch towards this thing that everybody has been talking about being the priority. Culture is actually head of politics on violence against women and girls, the nation has tired of it and wants it to be a public priority, certainly but not just exclusively the women in our country. To then now watch the government switch its focus and direct it on to it, I already feel really, really positive."

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Should X be turned into an ‘ex’ for Labour politicians?



Elon Musk, the owner of the social media platform, has been criticised for disseminating false information about recent disorder in the UK (AP/PA)

KATE DEVLIN

It is hard to remember nowadays, but there used to be a time when politicians tried to resist Twitter, as Elon Musk’s X used to be known. The then prime minister David Cameron even famously quipped in an interview that too many tweets “might make a twat”. However, as it swiftly became the social media

drug of choice for the political classes, it became almost impossible for MPs not to have an account.

In the wake of Musk's attacks on the government and Keir Starmer over the recent riots, is it time for Labour politicians to break up with X?

Which minister has deleted X from her phone?

Home Office minister Jess Phillips has said she is "not going to use it very much" any more. She told an audience at the Edinburgh Festival: "As soon as he took it over, I took the app off my phone." The minister for safeguarding and violence against women and girls added: "Fundamentally, for me now, I think that I am sort of done with it, I don't wish to fish in that particular pond any more." Strong words from Phillips, who admits she was "massively addicted" to the social media site.

So what's the problem?

No 10 clashed with X owner Musk last week after the billionaire entrepreneur used the platform to claim "civil war" was "inevitable" in Britain. Musk also hit out at the prime minister, calling him #twotierkeir, aping the language of a right-wing conspiracy theory which claims different types of protesters are treated differently by the police. He was even the victim of misinformation on his own site after he tweeted fake news that Starmer was considering building detention camps in the Falklands.



Keir Starmer clashed with Musk last week (Reuters)

Cabinet ministers have warned that online posts acted as a "rocket booster" for the organisation of violence. Starmer is under pressure to call an inquiry into the role social media played, to prevent platforms "fuelling" more violence. For his part, Starmer has pledged to "look more broadly at social media" when he is sure the riots are over.

So why don't politicians just quit X?

For one, the obvious answer is that it gives them a very direct, instantaneous channel to their voters that they never had before.

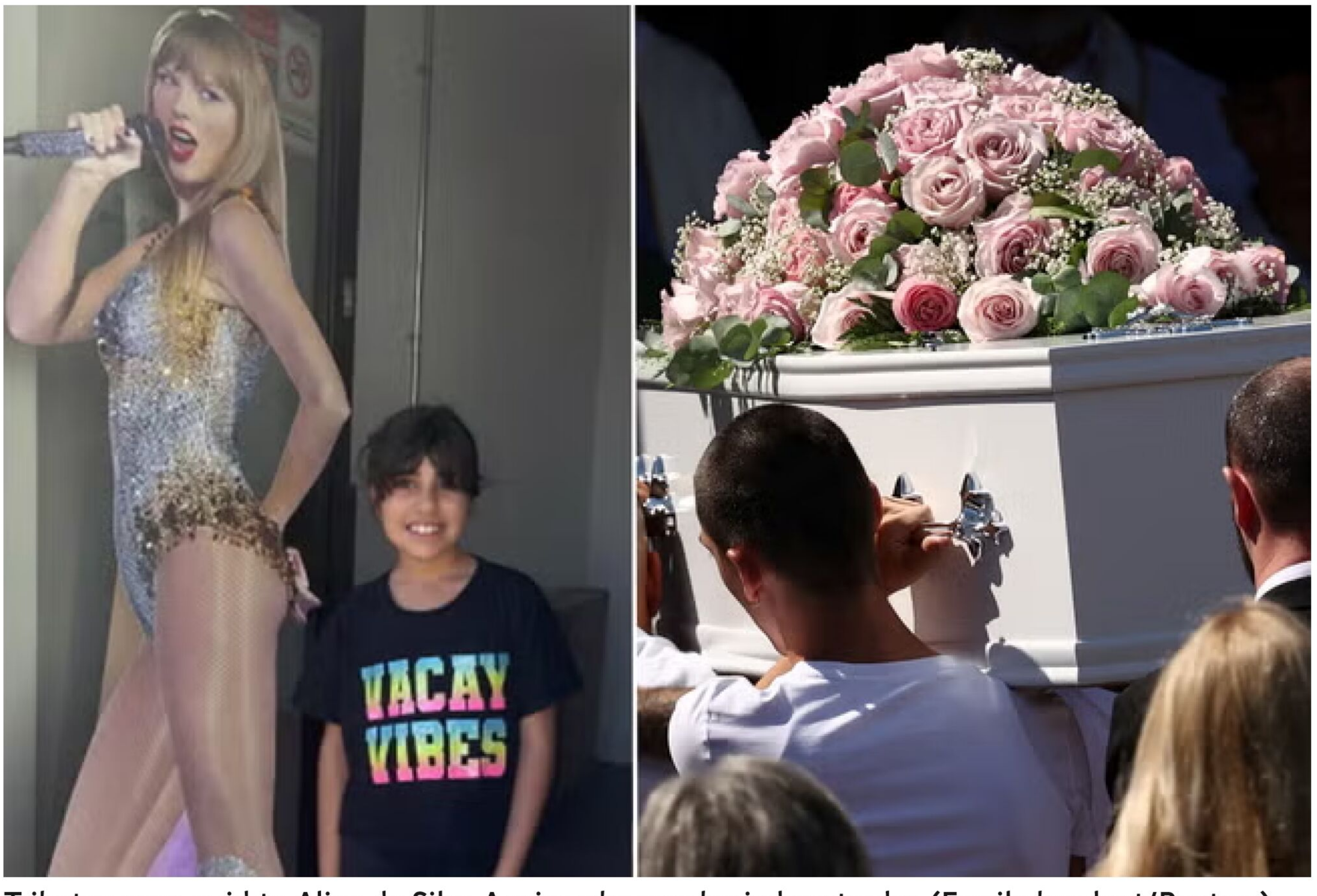
Social media is also a powerful campaigning tool. In the first few weeks of the election campaign, Labour spent more than £2.4m on social media ads – more than twice as much as the Conservatives. Starmer himself came under fire last year for an attack advert, widely shared on Twitter, which claimed Rishi Sunak did not think that people who sexually abuse children should go to prison. Labour's X account also triumphantly posted "Preparation is the key to success" alongside images of Starmer in a Team GB cagoule at the Olympics while other world leaders appeared to struggle with plastic versions.

But for politicians, like many X users, there is also the hope that things might change. The former Lib Dem leader Tim Farron posted on X at the weekend: "By the way, no way am I leaving Twitter. This place is like a lovely pub, that got taken over by some soulless pub company and with a full on wazzock as a new landlord. But I was here first and I'm staying."

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Hundreds line streets for funeral of Southport victim



Tributes were paid to Alice da Silva Aguiar who was buried yesterday (Family handout/Reuters)

ALEXANDER BUTLER
TARA COBHAM

Hundreds of mourners lined the streets of Southport yesterday for the funeral of Alice da Silva Aguiar, one of three young girls killed in a knife attack at a Taylor Swift dance class.

Tributes were paid to the nine-year-old as her parents were joined by up to 300 family members and friends at St Patrick's

Catholic Church yesterday, including the paramedics, police officers and firefighters who tried to save her life.

Dressed in white, her father Sergio and mother Alexandra praised their “beloved angel” during the service, saying she was dedicated to dance and hoped that she would “keep dancing”, before later releasing a series of photographs of Alice, which included a number relating to her dancing passion.

Among the pictures is an image of Alice waiting to get into the Taylor Swift-themed dance class on 29 July, smiling with a life-size cardboard cut-out of the singer in the doorway of the Hart Space studio.

The youngster – who is pictured wearing leggings, trainers and a T-shirt with the slogan Vacay Vibes – was killed in the mass stabbing in the Merseyside town, along with Bebe King, six, and Elsie Dot Stancombe, seven, near the start of their summer holidays.

Members of the public lined Marshside Road yesterday as Alice’s funeral cortege arrived, along with about 30 uniformed police officers, with pink ribbons and balloons seen tied to lamp posts and garden walls. Applause broke out as the carriage, drawn by two white horses sporting orange and white plumes and containing the youngster’s white coffin, approached the church entrance.

Several hundred people then packed into the church, while more listened outside as the service was relayed on loudspeakers.

In an address to their daughter given on their behalf, Alice’s parents said: “Dear Alice, you were our perfect dream child, everything was idyllic from the moment you arrived.



Alice’s family and friends at yesterday’s service (PA Wire)

“A good girl, with strong values and kind nature. A lover of animals and an environmentalist in the making. You moved our world with your confidence and empathy. Playful, energetic, friendly, and always so respectful.

“Being around you was a privilege, we cherished every milestone. You completed us. In nine short years, we never needed time off from you.”

They went on: “We feel shocked, unimaginable pain, we miss you.

“From time to time, the pin drops. When mommy says ‘good night, Sergio, good night Alice’ and then it hits us all over again. We don’t hear you back.

“Moving forward will be hard … But we made a promise to always be there for each other in moments of despair … We are surrounded by a wonderful community and their full support … We have the full support of the country … For that, we’re thankful.



The coffin of Alice arrives at St Patrick's Church in Southport on yesterday (PA)

"For now, our beloved Angel, keep dancing, mummy and daddy will always, always love you."

Parish priest Fr John Heneghan said Alice was a regular at Mass at St Patrick's church and noted she had a "smile more radiant than the sun".

In an emotional tribute, Alice's headteacher at Churchtown Primary School also listed her smile as well as her enthusiasm for life among her qualities.

Speaking through tears, Jinnie Payne read a poem about her pupil, called *Here Comes Alice*, in which she said: "The time has come to say 'there goes Alice'. We are letting you go dancing now, Alice. Teach those angels a few dance moves."

The chief constable of Merseyside Police praised Alice's parents for their "courage" in calling for violent riots to stop after their daughter's death.



A paramedic carries flowers ahead of the funeral (PA Wire)

Serena Kennedy told the congregation: “You [Alice’s parents] have shown great courage in asking me to be here today to give a message from you, Alice’s family, to say that you do not want there to be any more violence on the streets of the United Kingdom in the name of your daughter.

“I am ashamed and I’m so sorry that you had to even consider this in the planning of the funeral of your beautiful daughter, Alice.

“And I hope that anyone who has taken part in the violent disorder on our streets over the past 13 days is hanging their head in shame at the pain that they have caused you, a grieving family.

“I know that you asked that there is no more violence and that you are now given time as a family to grieve in peace, and that our traumatised community is allowed time to heal, the time it needs to start to heal.”

Labour’s Southport MP Patrick Hurley added: “There are no adequate words to express the town’s shock and distress at the atrocity which befell Alice and the other little girls two weeks ago.”



The nine-year-old danced and performed from a young age (PA Media)

Earlier this week Alice's parents also attended a celebration of life service at St Patrick's for Alice, which is traditional in their home country of Portugal one week after a loved one has died.

Eight other children who were injured in the attack on 29 July have all now been discharged from hospital and are recovering at home.

Axel Muganwa Rudakubana, 18, was charged with three counts of murder and 10 counts of attempted murder in connection with the tragedy.

Soon after the attack, false claims about the suspect's identity and background were spread widely online, sparking far-right

riots that erupted across the country, with more than 770 people arrested over the violent disorder, of whom more than 340 have been charged.

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Shambling music festival vibes hit all the right notes

Colourful closing ceremony of the Olympic Games 2024 is less high art and more Paris pop concert, says **Nick Hilton**



French band Phoenix perform at the Stade de France in the capital last night (EPA)

★★★☆☆

"This is not the time for high art," BBC presenter Hazel Irvine announced, as coverage of the Olympic closing ceremony began.

“It’s time for a singsong.” After an opening ceremony marred by the weather (“Damp and extraordinary,” in the words of Irvine’s commentary partner, Andrew Cotter) and subject to a series of confected rows (Donald Trump called it a “disgrace” prompting artistic director Thomas Jolly to revise his script for the closer), this Parisian finale played it far safer. Less high art, more pop concert.

Opening in the Tuileries, where the Olympic flame has spent the past fortnight, French singer Zaho de Sagazan stomped around in Doc Martens, while a choir warbled along with her to “Sous le Ciel de Paris” (”Under the Sky of Paris”). She proved only the first of the many performers on a night when music replaced sport at the centre of attention. French indie rockers Phoenix, inside the Stade de France, were joined by acts from around the world: compatriots Kaminsky and Air, as well as Cambodia rapper VannDa, Belgian singer Angèle, and Vampire Weekend’s Ezra Koenig.

Thomas Jolly’s direction – of both the opening and closing ceremonies – has, at times, resembled the frustrations of French New Wave cinema. Some of the action has been ponderously introspective (a shot of star swimmer Léon Marchand carrying the last flicker of the Olympic flame was pure Truffaut), preferring to remain utterly unrushed. Perhaps, as a consequence, the BBC allotted an extra 25 minutes, after the scheduled end of the event, before the *10 O’clock News* began (it still overran). With runtimes of four hours and two-and-a-half hours respectively, Jolly’s ceremonies would have Jacques Rivette checking his watch.



Tom Cruise floats into the Stade de France (AP)

But the dominant mood in the Stade de France was one of relief. A successful Olympics – phew. Jacked up on two weeks of – if the rumours are to be believed – chocolate muffin-fuelled marathon sex sessions, the Olympians paraded out into the Stade de France, bopping along to Joe Dassin's "Les Champs-Élysées" and Queen's "We Are the Champions" before the live music began. It set the tone for an evening that had nothing of the artistry of Beijing or the carnival of Rio, but plenty of danceable music.

When the artistic elements finally took centre stage, Jolly took viewers on a journey into, in the words of the BBC's comms team, "the past, present and future". A trippy light show proved only a backdrop to the arrival of a dancer in a gold-plumed gimp suit (symbolising, perhaps, the watching public's relentless horniness for medals). What followed was a maximalist reimagining of the Olympics' origins. Cotter and Irvine were on hand, as ever, to provide live translation of the rather oblique narrative unfolding on-stage, a pungent mixture of Kabuki, fetish-wear and *Tron*.

Closing ceremonies don't carry the same weight of expectation as their opening counterparts. Clare Balding, speaking during the buildup on BBC One, described it as "the fun bit". All the same, Jolly's portentous evocation of the importance of the Olympic fraternity didn't quite hit the same "fun" heights as, say, the women's breakdancing. For the reported tens of millions

of euros it cost to stage the ceremony, couldn't they have tempted Australian viral sensation Rachel Gunn – aka Raygun – to reprise her performance?



Spectacular fireworks during the ceremony last night (AP)

"This is what everyone really comes for: the speeches," quipped Cotter (who does a good line in snark), as the shambling music festival vibes gave way to the bureaucratic segment. But if you survived that tedium you were rewarded with the handover to 2028 hosts, Los Angeles. Mayor of LA Karen Bass took the flag and began the American invasion (LA ran significantly over the normal 12-minute rule). A wobbly rendition of "The Star-Spangled Banner" was followed by the much-hyped sight of a 62-year-old Tom Cruise (looking increasingly like his Madame Tussauds doppelganger) floating down from the stadium's rafters. LA native acts Red Hot Chili Peppers, Billie Eilish and Snoop Dogg, played us out, live from a sun-soaked Venice Beach. A stark warning, if it were needed, of what the US is willing to invest in maintaining its soft power hegemony.

This closing ceremony has thrown into stark relief the issues with the games' curtain-raiser. The Stade de France – an 80,000-seater stadium – proved a sufficiently large canvas for the theatrical elements of proceedings. And unlike the rain-smudged camera shots across the Seine, the joy and excitement was plain to see on individual athlete's faces. Broadcasters the world over, meanwhile, must have been relieved. The show was rehearsed; the elucidation from the commentary box clearly pre-

prepared. The dancers and cameras, within the stadium, moved in perfect sync.



Billie Eilish performs on Venice Beach (Getty Images for LA28)

After two weeks of seamlessly delivered sporting action, the high-class pantomime of an Olympic ceremony always feels a bit anticlimactic. But at least Jolly and Co checked the impulse to be *avant garde*. After all, thousands of people might gather on the streets of Paris, but millions more are watching around the world. This closing ceremony, at the very least, felt like something designed with television audiences in mind.

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News

Exposed: the huge scale of the prisons crisis in Britain

MoJ figures reveal rapid increases in drug use and violence



The prison population remains ‘within a few hundred places of collapse’ (Getty)

JABED AHMED

Prisons across the country are in a deep state of crisis – the extent of which is exposed by the latest statistics. Soaring rates of violence, self-harm and drug misuse have become widespread in overcrowded prisons in England and Wales.

The prison population remains “within a few hundred places of collapse”, according to the new justice secretary Shabana Mahmood, as overcrowding in prisons increases for the third year in a row.

The far-right riots this summer have added further pressure to the crisis-struck system, with police already arresting nearly 500 people. Sir Keir Starmer’s government has announced plans to make more than 500 new prison places available to deal with rioters.

However, the crisis in the system doesn’t stop with a bursting population – there are high rates of homelessness for ex-offenders and probation services across the country are rated as inadequate.

Campaigners warn that exposing inmates to violence and mental distress will be detrimental to efforts to rehabilitate them. The scale of the chaos in UK prisons begins in young offender institutes, where there has been a substantial increase in self-harm and violence, according to the latest figures.



The government has announced £100m in funding to improve HMP Wandsworth in London after a damning inspection (PA)

Children and Young People Secure Estates

Violence

There were 510 incidents of assault in youth offender institutes from January to March this year – a 10 per cent increase on last

year. These involved 386 different children as assailants. There were 224 assaults on staff and 38 incidents of serious violence, including sexual offences, stabbings, burns, extensive bruising and fractures.

Children aged 15 were the age group most likely to resort to violence. Children aged 10 to 14 were disproportionately victims of assault in young offender institutes.

Self-harm

From January to March 2024, there were 558 incidents of self-harm involving 89 different children in the prison estates – an increase of 119 per cent compared to the same period last year. The rate of incidents is influenced by small numbers of individuals self-harming multiple times.

Nearly a quarter of incidents resulted in an injury requiring treatment, and 4 per cent required hospital attendance. Despite accounting for less than 2 per cent of the total population, girls were responsible for more than half of all self-harm incidents.

Adult prisons

Overcrowding

There was an increase in the prison population this year, with 87,726 people in prison on 30 June 2024. This is around 4,700 higher than pre-pandemic levels. Overcrowding in prisons also increased for the third year in a row, with nearly a quarter of prisoners held in crowded accommodation compared with 23 per cent in the previous 12-month period.

Crowding is measured as the number of prisoners who, on the last day of the month, are held in a room where the number of occupants exceeds the normal figure.

Violence

The number of prison assaults increased by nearly a third in the last year – reaching a post-Covid pandemic high of 28,292 violent assaults in the past 12 months. The number of incidents in female establishments increased by 36 per cent to 1,917 incidents in the same period, while violence in male

prisons increased by more than a quarter to 26,375. Assault rates have been higher in female establishments than in male establishments since 2019.

There were 18,788 prisoner-on-prisoner assaults in the year ending March, and there was a new peak of 9,847 assaults on staff. This includes 3,215 incidents of serious violence.

Self-harm

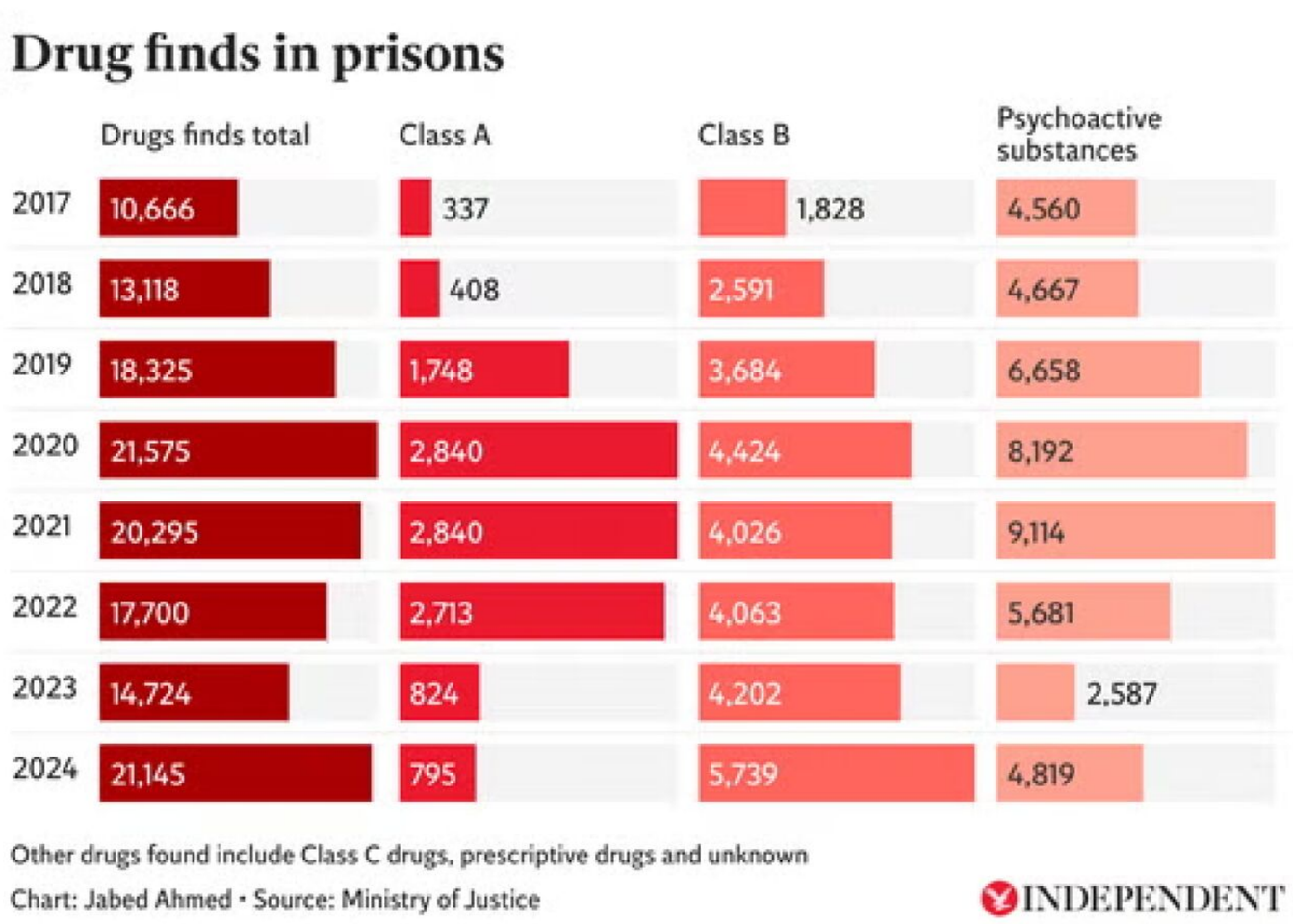
The rates of self-harm in adult prisons have hit their highest level since records began, with 73,804 incidents of self-harm taking place in the last year – a rate of one prisoner hurting themselves every seven minutes. This amounts to 852 incidents per 1,000 prisoners.

The number of self-harm incidents requiring hospital attendance increased by nearly a quarter, with the rate of self-harm in female prisons more than eight times higher than in the male estate.

Drugs and weapons

In the last year, drugs were found in prisons 21,145 times – an increase of 44 per cent from 14,724 in the previous 12-month period. There was a 37 per cent increase in the number of class-B drugs, such as cannabis and ketamine, being found and the number of psychoactive substances found has increased by 86 per cent compared to last year.

Weapons were found in prisons on 9,400 separate occasions – an increase of 24 per cent compared to the previous year. In the 12 months to March 2024, there were 10,669 incidents where mobile phones were found in prisons – an increase of 36 per cent.



In the 12 months to March, drugs were found in prisons 21,145 times (Ministry of Justice)

Protests

In the 12 months to March 2024, there were 1,827 incidents of prisons barricading themselves to prevent access from officers. There were also 58 incidents where prisoners took someone hostage – a large majority (54 incidents) involved prisoners as hostages.

Life after prison

Homelessness

There has been a 12 per cent increase in the number of people being released from prison in the past year, from 62,345 to 70,040. The number of people leaving jail into homelessness has risen from 7,055 to 9,210 – an increase of more than a third.

On average, about 800 people per month go straight from prison into homelessness. This includes a 48 per cent increase of women who are rough sleeping – increasing from 445 to 660 in the past year.

Reoffending and employment

Adult convicts have a proven reoffending rate of 26 per cent, while a third of younger prisoners re-offend. This increases for adults released from custodial sentences of less than 12 months

at 57 per cent. In total, re-offenders committed almost 82,000 reoffences over a one-year follow-up period.

In the year to March 2024, 80 per cent of offenders released from custody were unemployed after six weeks. This decreases to 69 per cent after six months. Offenders serving longer custodial sentences have better employment chances.

Higher employment rates of offenders who have served a custodial sentence were generally seen among Asian or Asian British ethnic groups.



Violence in prisons increased by a third in the last year (PA)

Andrea Coomber KC, chief executive of the Howard League for Penal Reform, said: “These shocking statistics tell us why the new government was absolutely right to take steps to ease pressure on the prison population, and why further action will be needed to change prisons for the better.”

“These figures remind us that there is a crisis of human misery behind bars too,” she added. “Exposing people to environments of rising violence and mental distress will do nothing to turn their lives around and away from crime. This is exactly why the prime minister was correct to describe the prison system as ‘broken’.”

The justice secretary said: “Our prisons are in crisis, leading to endemic violence and harm behind bars. These statistics reveal what is really happening inside jails today, and why we had no choice but to act. This government will always protect the

public, lock up dangerous offenders, and make prisons safe for prisoners and the brave staff who work there."

This month, the government announced £100m to improve HMP Wandsworth after a damning inspection report found high rates of self-harm, dangerous levels of violence and nearly 50 per cent of prisoners taking drugs.

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News

South to bake in 34C heat



Families enjoy the warm weather on Bamburgh Beach in Northumberland yesterday (PA)

REBECCA THOMAS

Temperatures in the south of England are set to hit 34C this week while other regions face thunderstorms, the Met Office has warned.

Today is forecast to be the hottest day of the year so far in central, east and southeast England but heavy rain storms are predicted across Wales, northern England, Northern Ireland, and Scotland.

The Met Office has issued a yellow weather warning, which means there could be low-level travel disruption. The hot weather will be driven by tropical storms from North America, according to the weather authority.

Met Office deputy chief meteorologist, Dan Holley warned that as well as a rise in temperatures, there is also an increasing threat of heavy rain and thunderstorms across portions of Wales, northern England, Northern Ireland and southern and eastern Scotland.

“We expect to see a relatively brief hotter and more humid spell of weather for Sunday and Monday, before these hotter conditions recede on Tuesday, allowing more unsettled conditions to return,” Mr Holley said. “This change to hotter conditions is caused, in part, by the effects of Tropical Storm Debby in North America. Debby is helping to strengthen the jet stream, causing it to meander over the Atlantic.“

Pollen and UV levels will also increase as temperatures rise.

The hot weather may continue in some areas tomorrow, the Met Office said, when the hot air will likely be displaced by fresher weather conditions. The weather is then set to become unsettled again with occasional showers.

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Row erupts over payment to women donating their eggs



Campaigner says they have witnessed women as young as 18 have their eggs harvested for others going through fertility treatment (Getty)

MAYA OPPENHEIM
WOMEN'S CORRESPONDENT

Furious accusations of exploitation have been made concerning the issue of how much women should be paid for donating their

eggs.

Women's rights campaigners accused the government of enabling the targeting of low-income women by increasing the amount of money they can earn.

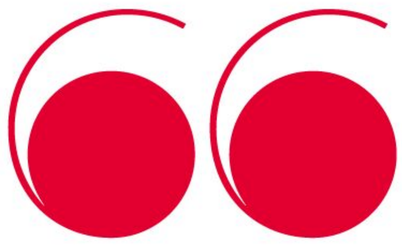
Campaign group Surrogacy Concern urged the government to block the fertility watchdog's plans to increase the payment to egg donors from £750 per cycle to £986.

Campaigners also called for adverts encouraging women to sell their eggs to include health risks as they warned this is not currently a legal obligation. But the fertility watchdog has insisted the rise in payment reflects increasing inflation and is not an attempt to "monetise" egg donation.

Helen Gibson, Surrogacy Concern's founder, said: "Egg donation can in no way be called 'altruistic' when a payment of £986 is being made, potentially up to 10 times per donor. We do not pay kidney or blood donors: why is an exception made to incentivise women to sell their eggs, which are then often sold on in packages by fertility clinics at huge profits? We are clear: this is exploitation of women."

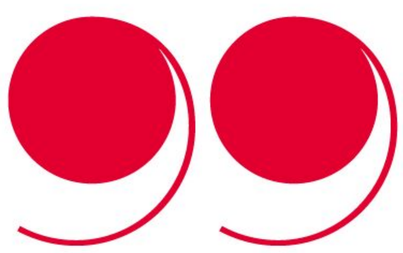
She said they do not support any payment being made for egg donation as she called for adverts targeting women for egg harvesting to only be allowed if they include health risks. "They are not legally currently required to do so, putting egg donor adverts at odds with advertising standards more generally," Ms Gibson added.

They have witnessed women as young as 18 have their eggs harvested for others in fertility treatment, she said.



The Department for Health and Social Care has confirmed to us it has not seen or commissioned research into the long-term impact on women of having eggs harvested

Helen Gibson, Surrogacy Concern



She added: “These women will not have already had their own children, and are put through the early stages of IVF in order to produce a large number of eggs for harvesting. Prior to retrieval, the women are given additional drugs to mature the eggs, which are then removed via a needle puncturing the vaginal wall and perforating her ovaries, multiple times.

“The ovaries swell to many times their usual size and dozens of eggs can be retrieved in one go, often more. Her body, meanwhile, is only designed to release one or two per month in her usual cycle.”

The campaigner warned at least two women in England have died from complications coming from ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome (OHS) – a condition triggered by egg retrieval, which happens more frequently among young women.

“Adverts which target women for egg donation do not have to list health risks, and the Department for Health and Social Care has confirmed to us it has not seen or commissioned research into the long-term impact on women of having eggs harvested,” Ms Gibson added.

“We have heard from many women who have suffered from perforated bowels, abscesses, ovarian hyperstimulation

syndrome, long hospital stays, and from women who nearly died following egg retrieval."

Ms Gibson argued it was "shameful" that the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority [HFEA] and the Department for Health and Social Care are "taking such a cavalier attitude to young women's health".

But Clare Ettinghausen of the HFEA insisted the UK fertility sector is bound by "strict laws and rules" to make sure patients receive safe treatment.



A doctor inspects an extracted eggs (AFPTV/AFP/Getty)

"The process of donating eggs is generally very safe but, like any medical procedure, it carries some risk," she added.

Ms Ettinghausen explained they work with clinics to "do everything possible" to stop and manage OHS, pointing to recent data that showed severe or critical cases take place in less than 0.1 per cent of UK cycles.

She added: "When donor compensation was first introduced in 2011, the HFEA conducted a thorough ethical review, which identified a set of principles that ensured altruism remained at the heart of donation and that there weren't any unjustifiable barriers to donation. The increase in donor compensation later this year will be the first since 2011 and only reflects the rise in inflation, rather than any intent to monetise donation in the UK."

The comments come after new laws came into force in the UK last October, meaning individuals born using an egg or sperm donor who turn 18 from that point onwards will be able to learn who their donor is. A historic change was made to the law covering donor anonymity in 2005, meaning thousands of people born through egg and sperm donation are now able to trace their biological roots for the first time.

A spokesperson for the Department of Health and Social Care said: “Everyone should have access to the fertility services they need. The decision to increase compensation for egg donors is one that balances the need to support fertility treatment while ensuring the safety and wellbeing of donors so that no one is pressured or misled into making such a significant choice.”

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Pictures of the Day



Umbrella academy

Japanese shield from the sun during a hot summer day in Tokyo.

Reuters



Good day, sunshine

A man goes for a walk, shortly after sunrise in Riedlingen, Germany. *AP*



The final countdown

The Olympic flame stands inside the Jardin des Tuileries on the final day of Paris 2024. *AP*



Poles ahead

The flag-raising squad rehearses in Jakarta for the Independence Day of Indonesia celebrations this week. *AFP/Getty*



Flower power

A photographer captures a field of sunflowers in Sarre, Kent. *Reuters*

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Home news in brief



Actor Amanda Abbington has accused pro dancer Giovanni Pernice of misconduct (BBC)

Abbington ‘questioned again’ about Strictly dancer claims

Amanda Abbington has been “questioned a second time” about her claims against Giovanni Pernice amid “new evidence”. It was reported last month that former *Strictly Come Dancing* professional Pernice had found out the results of an investigation into his behind-the-scenes behaviour after the *Sherlock* star, with whom he was partnered on last year’s series, accused him of misconduct. However, it is believed that

Abbington has spoken to BBC bosses once again after she alleged the dancer made sexual comments in the rehearsal room. *The Independent* has contacted Pernice, who has denied all allegations.

The Sun on Sunday reports that the findings of the Pernice investigation have been delayed due to the child images scandal involving former newsreader Huw Edwards. Abbington suddenly quit *Strictly* five episodes into the 2023 season citing medical reasons at the time. The actor added that in the aftermath of her exit, she received "death threats" and "rape threats towards not only myself, but my daughter, and threats of death to my son". The BBC announced in June that Pernice – who has been on the show since 2015 – would not be participating in the forthcoming 2024 season.

Newquay festivalgoers injured in 'terrifying' crowd surge

A "terrifying" crowd crush left revellers injured during an outdoor music event in Cornwall, with several claiming to have suffered broken ankles and legs. Festivalgoers were hurt in a crush during a DJ set at the Boardmasters festival in Newquay on Friday evening, the region's police force said. A mother of two who attended the festival with her husband and daughters said the crush was "terrifying" and alleged that crowd control was poor. "My daughter and I got crushed against the barriers so I heaved her up and over a barrier and then pulled myself out," she said. "I warned the security guards again that there was a big problem brewing. Nothing seemed to be done… There was no security stopping people." She added: "My daughters were terrified."

Seven rushed to hospital after chemical incident

Seven patients were taken to hospital following a chemical incident in east London. London Ambulance Service's specialist Hazardous Area Response Team rushed patients to the hospital after reports of a chemical leak in the Wren Road area of

Dagenham. Paramedics found people struggling to breathe after a chemical was released, believed to be palytoxin from coral in a fish tank, according to *The Sun*. However, authorities have not confirmed the substance. Following the incident 10 houses were cordoned off.

Pupils now more likely to get first-choice university

Pupils are more likely to get their first choice of university course than at any point in the past three years – in part because of a fall in international students, experts have predicted. Despite record numbers applying for places, analysts say universities are planning to accept more UK students. After net migration soared to 750,000, Conservative ministers announced a crackdown on visas, including for students from overseas, triggering a 15 per cent fall in applications. “All the signs are there that for 18-year-olds holding offers it will be a better admissions cycle than in either 2022 or 2023,” Mark Corver, a former director of admissions service Ucas, told *The Observer*.

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Fear as nuclear plant set ‘alight by Russian forces’

President Volodymyr Zelensky confirms no radiation leak detected as local Ukrainian official blames Moscow for fire



Smoke billows from the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant yesterday (Ukrainian Presidential Press)

HOWARD MUSTOE

Russian forces lit a fire at the site of the occupied Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant in southern Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky

has said. Radiation levels were normal, the president said, although the blaze is visible from Ukrainian-held territory.

A local official in the Ukrainian city of Nikopol said that Russian forces were rumoured to have set fire to a large number of tyres in the cooling towers, Reuters reported. Russia claimed the fire was started by nearby shelling.

The UN's International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) nuclear watchdog, which has a team at the vast six-reactor plant, said its experts had seen strong, dark smoke coming from the northern area of the plant following multiple explosions.

The IAEA said there had been no reported impact on nuclear safety at the site. "Team was told by [the nuclear plant] of an alleged drone attack today on one of the cooling towers located at the site," it wrote on X.

Mr Zelensky published video showing belching black smoke that appeared to be coming out a cooling tower with a blaze burning at its foot.

"Currently, the radiation indicators are normal. But as long as Russian terrorists retain control over the nuclear plant, the situation is not and cannot be normal," he said.

The reactors at the plant located close to the front line of the war in Ukraine are not generating power but the facility relies on external power to keep its nuclear material cool and prevent a catastrophic meltdown.

It comes as at least 15 people have been injured in a Ukrainian drone and missile attack on Russia's Kursk region, Moscow said.



Ukrainian soldiers near the border with Russia yesterday (Reuters)

Russia's defence ministry said troops had destroyed 14 Ukraine-launched drones and four Tochka-U tactical ballistic missiles this morning.

People were injured after debris from a destroyed Ukrainian missile fell onto a nine-storey residential building, it claimed.

It comes as Mr Zelensky has for the first time confirmed his forces are engaged in a major cross-border offensive into Russia's Kursk region.

"Ukraine is proving that it truly knows how to restore justice and applies the necessary pressure on the aggressor," he said.

The Russian region's authorities have rushed to evacuate 76,000 civilians from areas at risk as the fighting continued into a sixth day.

The attack represents Kyiv's largest incursion into Russian territory since the start of the war, which left southwestern parts of Russia vulnerable before reinforcement started arriving. Russia has declared a state of emergency amid fierce fighting within its borders with Ukraine.

The Russian Defense Ministry has claimed that 35 drones were shot down overnight over the Kursk, Voronezh, Belgorod, Bryansk and Oryol regions.

Ukraine hasn't commented on drone attacks inside Russia yesterday. But they come as Ukraine has increased the pace of similar drone attacks largely targeting military infrastructure and oil depots in recent weeks.

Two days ago Mr Zelensky praised his army's ability "to surprise" and "achieve results" as it battles Russian forces during an audacious cross-border attack into Russian territory.

Around 1,000 Ukrainian troops in tanks and armoured vehicles successfully broke through the Russian border and into the Kursk region in the early hours of Tuesday with air support from swarms of drones and pounding artillery, according to Russian officials. An angry Vladimir Putin has labelled the offensive a "major provocation".

Ukrainian soldiers have now penetrated more than 10km (six miles) across the border, breaking through two Russian defensive lines and a stronghold, the Institute for the Study of War said. Some reports suggest that Kyiv's forces are advancing towards a village 21km (13 miles) into Russian territory.

Heavy fighting has been reported near the town of Sudzha and some Russian bloggers, currently one of the most accurate sources of information, said Ukraine's forces were pushing towards the Kursk nuclear power station, under 64km (40 miles) northeast of Sudzha.

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World

Biden's 'defeat Trump' plea after leaving election race



The US president claims he managed to 'pull the nation together' (CBS Sunday Mornings)

OLIVER O'CONNELL
IN NEW YORK

Joe Biden talked about the pressure from his fellow Democrats to leave the White House race as he sat down for his first interview since becoming the first sitting president in over 50 years not to seek re-election.

Speaking to Robert Costa of CBS News, Mr Biden said that while polling showed him neck and neck with Donald Trump, “a number of my Democratic colleagues in the House and Senate thought that I was going to hurt them in the races”.

“I was concerned if I stayed in the race, that would be the topic you’d be interviewing about,” he said in the interview which aired yesterday adding that he had first run as a “transition president” and that maintaining democracy was a critical issue, the combination of which led to his decision.

Mr Biden said: “Although it’s a great honour being president, I think I have an obligation to the country to do what I… the most important thing you can do, and that is, we must, we must, we must defeat Trump.”

The president said his family are proud of him and when asked about his late son Beau, to whom he promised to stay engaged after his death, he said: “Whenever I have a decision that’s really hard to make, I literally ask myself, what would Beau do? … He should be sitting here being interviewed, not me. He was really a fine man.”

Mr Biden restated that he initially had no plans to run for the presidency in 2020, but changed his mind after seeing white supremacists demonstrating in Charlottesville in 2017, saying they saw Mr Trump as an ally in the White House.

Asked if he believed there would be a peaceful transfer of power in January 2025, the president responded: “If Trump loses I’m not confident at all. He means what he says, we don’t take him seriously. He means it, all the stuff about if we lose, there’ll be a bloodbath.”



President Biden said he decided to run for the White House in 2020 after seeing white supremacists demonstrating in Charlottesville in 2017 (CBS Sunday Mornings)

Reflecting on his time in office, Mr Biden was asked how he would like to be remembered. He said: “He proved democracy can work. He got us out of a pandemic. He produced the single greatest economic recovery in American history. We’re the most powerful economy in the world.” Mr Biden added: “[He] demonstrated that we can pull the nation together.”

On that same theme, the president said: “Look, democracy works, and it was very important to prove that it worked … I mean, look what we’ve been able to do. We’ve created 16 million jobs … We’ve gotten around a brief of having the private sector invest over a trillion dollars, a trillion dollars, in the American economy.”

He added: “One of the things I fought for as a senator for a long time was to change the dynamic of how we grow the economy, not from the top down, but from the bottom up. The idea of trickledown economics doesn’t work, in my view.”

Asked what he could say to those who expressed scepticism about his health and ability to be out on the campaign trail, the president said: “All I can say is, watch, that’s all. Look, I had a really, really bad day in that debate because I was sick, but I have no serious problem.”

Mr Biden confirmed he will be out campaigning for vice-president Kamala Harris and Minnesota governor Tim Walz in

the run-up to election day in November.

He added: “I was talking to Governor [Josh] Shapiro, who’s a friend we’ve left and went to Pennsylvania, my original home state. He and I put together a campaign tour in Pennsylvania. I’m going to be campaigning in other states as well, and I’m going to do whatever Kamala thinks I can do to help most.”

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Why Trump is still trying to make ‘the laugh’ a problem

Friends of Kamala Harris recognise an old nervous tic – and explain why Donald Trump hates it so much, writes **Io Dodds**



Trump is using the vice-president’s distinctive whole-body laughter as an attack line (Reuters)

Long before Kamala Harris was running to be president of the United States, Mark Buell noticed that she had a certain anxious tic. “[Harris] is very funny. She has a very good sense of humour, and when she enjoys herself, she has a very hearty laugh,” recalls the San Francisco real estate developer and Democratic donor,

who was one of Harris's earliest political patrons, in an interview with *The Independent*.

But back then, he says, when she was nervous "that laugh became more prominent... so between the two, it would show up sometimes at inappropriate times".

Two decades later, Donald Trump and other conservatives are trying to use Harris's distinctive and frequent peals of whole-body laughter as an attack line, with the former president even adding "Laughing Kamala" to his notorious roster of nicknames. "You ever watch her laugh? [...] You can tell a lot by a laugh. She's crazy. She's nuts," Mr Trump said at a rally in Michigan last month.

According to Mr Buell, that is no coincidence. He believes someone tipped Mr Trump or his team off about Ms Harris's old habit, and – "in keeping with Mr Trump's approach to politics, looking for weaknesses and faults in people" – he went after it.

Yet old friends and allies claim that Ms Harris's sense of humour is one of her most appealing characteristics, and a sign of her genuine willingness to connect with other people emotionally. Indeed, on TikTok Ms Harris's laughter has become one of the most-memed sounds of the 2024 election, endlessly and affectionately remixed by superfans, comedians, and dance musicians.



Former California state legislator Mark Leno, an old friend of Harris, says Republicans are trying to use her laugh as a 'weapon' against her (Mark Leno / US Senate)

"I don't know that I have any memory of, quote, 'the laugh', which Republicans have used as a weapon against her since she became VP," says Mark Leno, a former California state legislator who has been friends with Ms Harris since the mid-Nineties. "But it does speak to her vivaciousness, her energy, her love of life, her passion. And I think it's terrific that it has now been turned around to be an asset."

When Donna Sachet first met Ms Harris in 2003, one of the first things she noticed was the way she laughed. "Yes, it's the same laugh," the now fifty-something LGBT+ activist and drag performer tells *The Independent*. "It bubbles up, and sometimes it gets kind of loud."

Ms Sachet got to know her during Ms Harris's (victorious) campaign to be district attorney of San Francisco, challenging an eight-year incumbent. Mr Leno, a mutual friend, had suggested she help raise funds for Ms Harris, sparking a friendship that lasted through all her subsequent campaigns and into the present day.

"Politics – to me, as I was beginning to get involved in it – seemed very dry. Some of the speeches would go on and on," says Ms Sachet. "But she often had humour in her speeches, and if you made a joke and she found it funny, she laughed fully, she laughed boisterously. We had fun with it. She would even sometimes cover her mouth and say, 'Oh, I'm being too loud!'"

Ms Sachet adds that they would often discuss fashion together, complimenting each other's outfits and comparing heel heights (Harris's shoes tended to be slightly lower, since she had to wear them throughout the day).



Donna Sachet, right, with Harris and her husband Doug Emhoff at the vice-president's residence in Washington, DC last summer (Donna Sachet/Office of the Vice President)

Mr Leno, in turn, had first met Ms Harris in 1995 through her then boyfriend Willie Brown's campaign to be mayor of San Francisco. After the pair broke up in 1996, Mr Leno and Ms Harris became deeper friends, accompanying each other to the San Francisco Symphony – a strictly platonic date, since Mr Leno is gay. "The Kamala I see on the national and international stage today is no different from the woman who befriended me almost 30 years ago," he says.

Ms Harris herself appears happy to make laughter part of her brand, proudly telling the actor and TV host Drew Barrymore back in May – admittedly an aeon ago in this election – that she has her mother's laugh.

"Apparently some people love to talk about my laugh," she said. "Let me just tell you something... I grew up around a bunch of women in particular, who laughed from the belly. They *laughed*. They would sit around the kitchen drinking their coffee, telling big stories with big laughs."

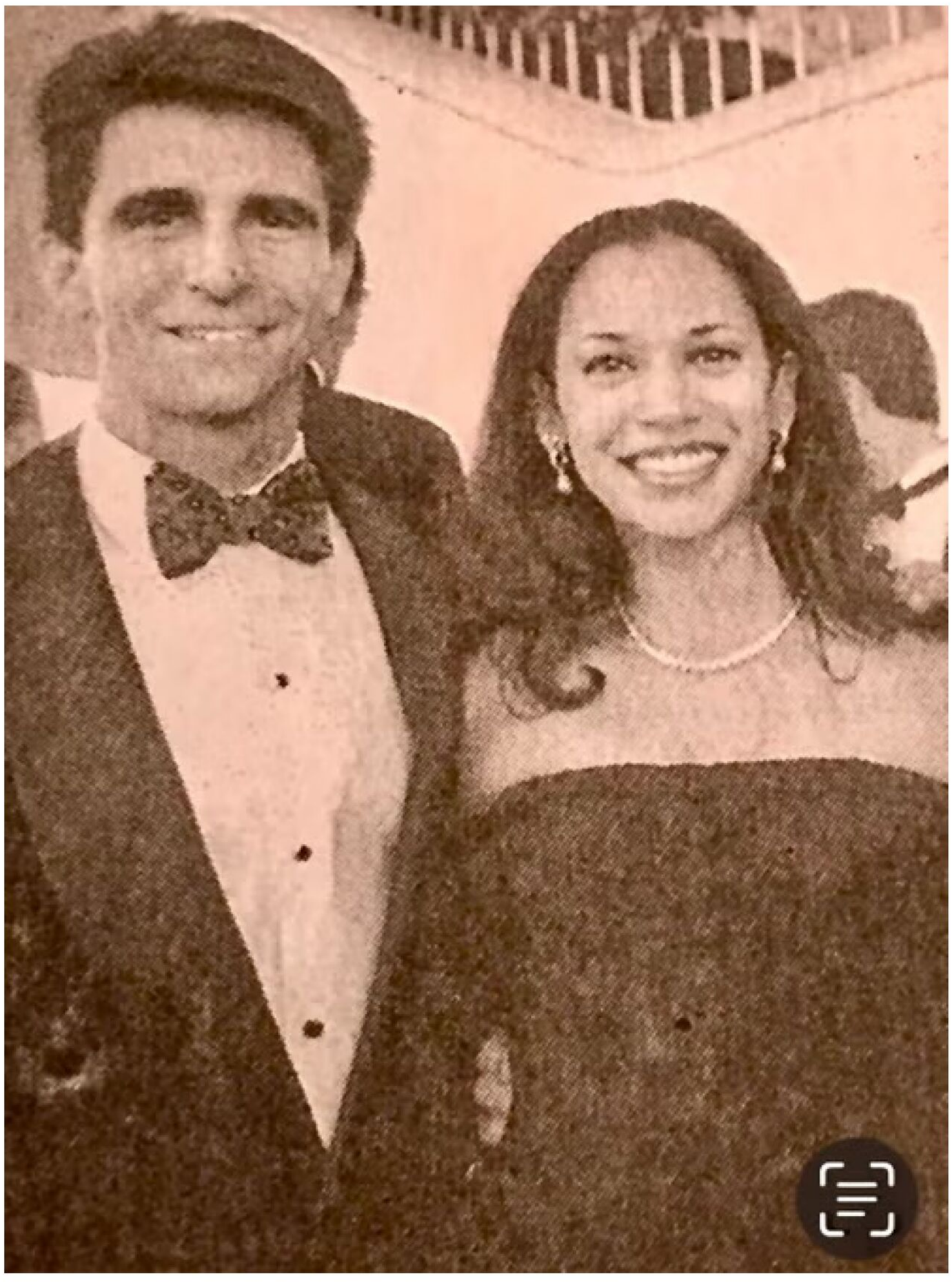
She went on: "You know, I'm never gonna be..." Then she covered her mouth demurely and gave an exaggeratedly feminine giggle. "I'm just not that person! And I think it's really important for us to remind each other, and our younger ones:

Don’t be confined to other people’s perceptions about... how you should act in order to be, right?”

Today, Buell contends that Ms Harris has lost her old habit of laughing when she is nervous. “That’s long past, and she’s matured out of it,” he says. But that hasn’t stopped her opponents from honing in on it.

‘She’s running against a man with no sense of humour’

Donald Trump has been trying to make this attack stick for several years. As early as October 2020, at a campaign rally in Pennsylvania, he said: “Is there something wrong with her? She kept laughing at, you know, very serious questions.”



Leno and Harris snapped for the San Francisco Chronicle while attending a symphony orchestra performance in 1996 (The San Francisco Chronicle via Mark Leno)

In 2021, right-leaning news outlets such as *The New York Post* and *Mail Online* reported on Ms Harris's seemingly nervous laughter when confronted by journalists asking about the chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan as she boarded a jet to Singapore.

In 2022, Republicans also criticised Ms Harris for laughing during a press conference about the war in Ukraine, with Ukrainian-American GOP state legislator Victoria Spartz calling it "a very serious situation" and "not a laughing matter".

The implication of these criticisms tends to be that Ms Harris doesn't treat her job, or the lives and welfare of the millions of people affected by her decisions in office, with sufficient gravity. In other words, that it's all a joke to her. This year, Mr Trump's allies and sympathetic pundits have warmed to the theme. The National Republican Senatorial Committee last month flagged up Ms Harris's "habit of laughing at inappropriate moments" as a potential weakness of her candidacy, while Fox News host Sean Hannity compiled a supercut of Harris's laughter, which he said made voters "detest" her.

In fact, one of the very first YouTube uploads of Ms Harris's now-famous "coconut tree" remarks came from an official GOP account – apparently not anticipating how enthusiastically her words would be adopted by her "coconut-pilled" supporters.

Feminist academics and authors have argued that this smacks of misogyny and racism, saying that women – and especially women of colour – are often harshly policed over the minutiae of their emotional effect. Back in the Noughties, Hillary Clinton was similarly mocked for her "Clinton cackle".

Many younger progressives say they feel charmed by Ms Harris's open expressions of levity. "It's like she's surprised at the laugh," said comedian Allison Reese, who is widely known on TikTok for her impressions of Ms Harris, in an interview with *The Washington Post*. "It feels more uninhibited... the laugh is truly coming from this place of inner joy."

All of which dovetails with the Democrats' newfound strategy of painting Republicans less as dangerous would-be dictators, as Joe Biden did, but as "weird" and joyless puritans, pruriently

obsessed with other people's private lives. That line of attack is especially effective, Mr Buell argues, because Mr Trump is someone who, despite his undeniable skill at making other people laugh, almost never laughs himself (at least in public).

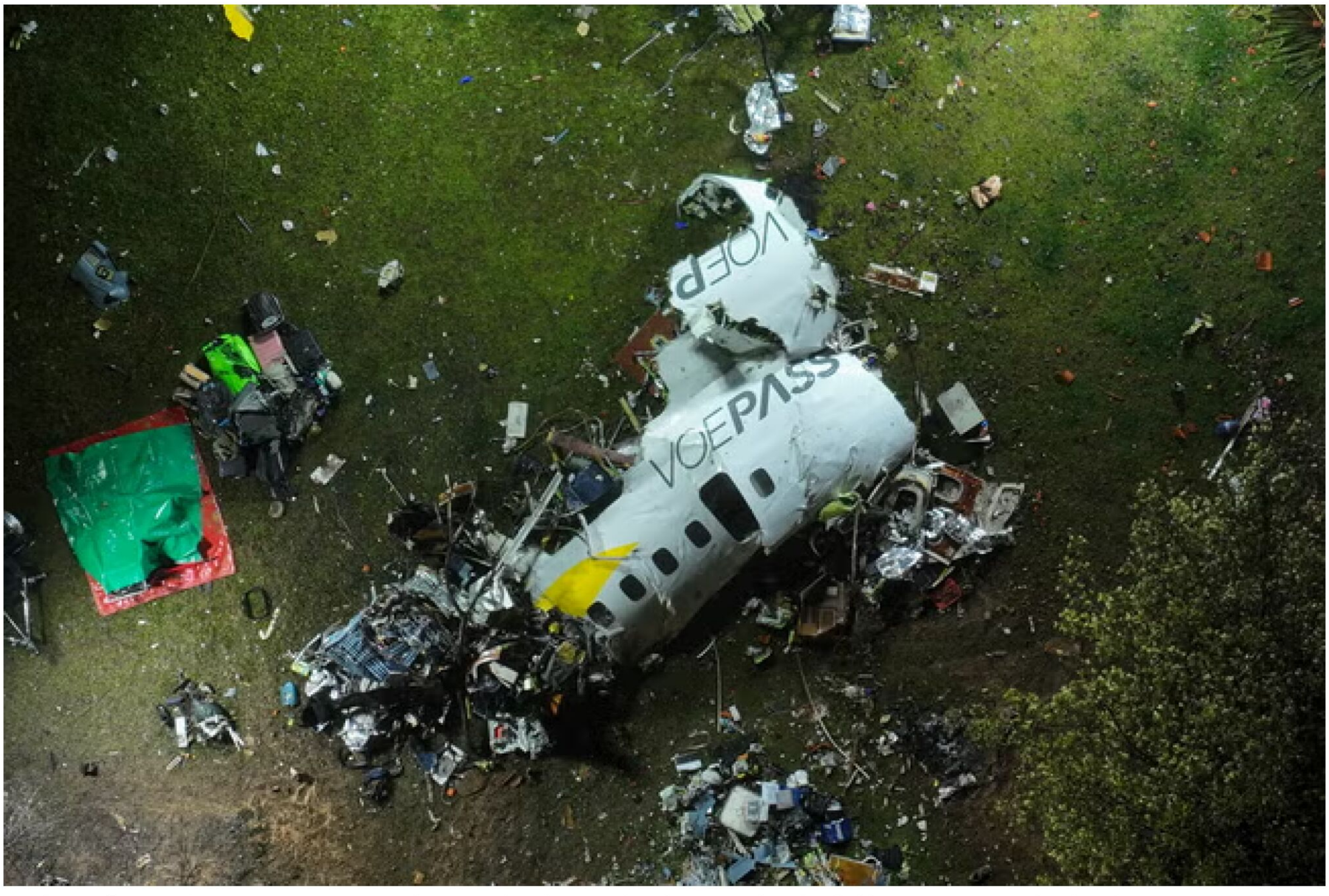
"If you look at who she's running against – a man who has no sense of humour – it's a contrast," says Mr Buell. "The root of narcissism is massive insecurity... narcissists are always trying to create an image of themselves. [That's why] he's always denigrating other people and building up himself."

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World

Eight cancer doctors among dead in Brazil plane crash



Debris from the twin-engine plane which crashed in Vinhedo killing 62 people (AP)

ARPAN RAI

At least eight cancer doctors who were heading to an oncology conference were among dozens killed in a plane crash in Brazil, an official has said.

The ATR 72 twin-engine plane, carrying 58 passengers and four crew members, was heading for Sao Paulo's Guarulhos international airport on Friday when it nose-dived and crashed

in Vinhedo, said Voepass airlines, which operated the aircraft. Emergency crews confirmed on Saturday they had recovered the remains of all 62 victims, including an unaccounted person later found to be on the plane. An official from the Regional Medical Council said he was able to confirm the deaths of the eight doctors.

“These doctors were going to an oncology conference. These were people who dedicated their lives to saving others,” said Eduardo Baptistella, according to the *Daily Mail*.

He added that a total of 15 doctors were supposed to be travelling to the conference on the flight, but seven of them had taken an earlier service. The Uopeccan Cancer Hospital in Cascavel confirmed to BBC Brasil that two of its trainee doctors were among the fatalities.



Firefighters and rescue teams work in the residential area yesterday where the plane crashed (AP)

Parana state governor Ratinho Junior was also quoted as saying at least eight physicians were on board the flight, and that the death toll also included four professors at Unioeste university in western Parana.

Rescue workers and Brazilian emergency crews said the bodies of most of the victims – 34 males and 28 females – have been moved to Sao Paulo’s police morgue for identification. The bodies of the pilot and co-pilot were identified earlier on Saturday, said Dario Pacheco, the mayor of Vinhedo. The

victims include four people with dual citizenship, three Venezuelans and one Portuguese woman, said regional carrier Voepass.

Firefighters at the crash site said officials are using seat assignments, physical characteristics, documents and belongings such as mobile phones to identify the victims. Family members of the victims are being taken to Sao Paulo to provide DNA samples to help in the identification of remains, said state civil defence coordinator Henguel Pereira.

Investigators are now analysing the plane's "black box", said Marcelo Moreno, head of Brazilian aviation accident investigation centre Cenipa, at a press conference in Vinhedo.

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World news in brief



Rwandan president Paul Kagame during his signing-in ceremony in Kigali yesterday (EPA)

Kagame sworn in with 99% of vote

Paul Kagame was sworn into office yesterday as the president of Rwanda for a five-year term after a landslide win in last month's election. The former rebel leader won with 99.18 per cent of the vote after eight other candidates were barred by the electoral commission. He has now been in power for almost 25 years.

Mr Kagame won acclaim from Western and regional leaders for helping to end the 1994 genocide and turning Rwanda into an attractive investment and aid destination. But his reputation has been damaged by allegations of rights abuses and suppression of

dissent, plus support for rebels in Democratic Republic of Congo, accusations he has denied. *Reuters*

‘Friends’ threaten diaspora communities, Australia warns

Supposedly friendly nations have been interfering in Australia’s diaspora communities, the country’s spy chief has warned. Mike Burgess, the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation’s director, warned that he would name the nations involved if the threat persisted and became a significant risk.

“I can think of at least three to four that we have actually actively found involved in foreign interference in Australian diaspora communities,” the domestic spy chief told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s (ABC’s) *Insiders* programme. Mr Burgess said he could confirm one of the nations was Iran, given a minister had already spoken publicly about Tehran’s involvement.

Australia recently uncovered a plot by an international intelligence agency to eliminate an Australian resident by luring them to an offshore location, ABC reported. The resident had been critical of an unnamed foreign regime. Australian PM Anthony Albanese said he did not plan to identify the other nations involved.

Iran reappoints sanctioned official as head of nuclear agency

Iran’s newly elected president has reappointed a US-educated official who once came under UN sanctions as head of the country’s nuclear department. Mohammad Eslami, will continue his work as chief of Iran’s civilian nuclear programme and serve as one of several vice presidents. Mr Eslami’s reappointment by the president, Masoud Pezeshkian, comes as Iran remains under heavy sanctions by the West following the collapse of the 2015 deal that curbed Iran’s nuclear activities in exchange for sanctions relief. Mr Pezeshkian had said during his presidential campaign that he would try to revive the nuclear deal.

The UN sanctioned Mr Eslami in 2008 for "being engaged in, directly associated with or providing support for Iran's proliferation of sensitive nuclear activities or for the development of nuclear weapon delivery systems", when he was the head of Iran's Defence Industries Training and Research Institute. He was appointed as the chief of Iran's nuclear department for the first time by late president Ebrahim Raisi in 2021, before that, from 2018, in moderate former president Hassan Rouhani's era, Mr Eslami served as transport and urban development minister.

Dion criticises Trump for using Titanic song at rally

Celine Dion has criticised Donald Trump and his running mate JD Vance for using her Oscar-winning song from *Titanic* at his latest rally. The management team and record label of Dion have shared a statement on behalf of the Canadian singer, revealing that the usage of the song was "in no way" authorised.

The post, which appeared on Dion's social media pages, said: "Today, Celine Dion's management team and her record label, Sony Music Entertainment Canada Inc, became aware of the unauthorised usage of the video, recording, musical performance, and likeness of Celine Dion singing 'My Heart Will Go On' at a Donald Trump/JD Vance campaign rally in Montana. In no way is this use authorised, and Celine Dion does not endorse this or any similar use."

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We need to talk about how climate affects immigration



Two Peruvian men seeking asylum in the US take shelter days after a migrant died from heat stroke at the US-Mexico border (Getty)

ANDREW GILMOUR

Last year, Antonio Guterres, the cautious-speaking UN secretary general, warned that rising sea levels threaten "a mass exodus of entire populations on a biblical scale". Soaring temperatures will have a similar effect, as unprecedented heat levels make homes uninhabitable and lands uncultivable.

The world needs to wake up to a new “triple nexus” between climate change, conflict and migration that is likely to become a dominant feature of international relations – and one with very domestic ramifications. Climate change is a contributory cause of both conflict and migration; while migration is a result of both climate change and conflict.

Two years ago, it was estimated that of the record number of 100 million forcibly displaced people in the world that year, one-third were caused by weather-related phenomena such as droughts, floods, storms and extreme heat. By 2050, that figure is likely to be dwarfed as a result of more intense and more frequent disasters – some estimates exceed 1 billion migrants.

Many of those forced to move because of climate change will remain in their own regions. But many will move to more temperate climates and richer regions – first and foremost Europe. But if one million arrivals could convulse the liberal political settlement in much of Europe in 2015, what would 10 million do – let alone 100 million?

It is a perverse irony that many of Europe’s far-right parties and Trump Republicans in the US – strongly opposed both to immigration and also to climate action – know they stand to benefit electorally from influxes of people fleeing the climate crisis (a crisis to which they themselves are contributing by their persistent contemptuous opposition to net zero initiatives).

Our leaders need to wake up to the almost certain massive increase of climate-driven migration

Russia, too, believes it will benefit from the discord, destabilisation and violence that large-scale migration might trigger in Western countries. And it’s no coincidence that far-right parties (many of which are supported by Moscow) support

President Putin's "family values", his climate "scepticism", and his war aims in Ukraine.

Having seen the effects of Syrian migration on Europe in 2015, which contributed to the rise of right-wing movements and also the success of Britain's "Leave" campaign, Putin authorised the deployment of Wagner Group mercenaries in African countries, including Libya and Mali. Their goal was to extract resources, deepen political instability, and provoke people to flee across the Mediterranean.

The last was spelled out as a deliberate strategy in 2022 by the head of the Russian Security Council, Nikolai Patrushev. Amid the grain shortages sparked by the Russian invasion of Ukraine (which he naturally blamed on the West), he declared that "tens of millions of people" in Africa and the Middle East will come to the brink of starvation. "In order to survive, they will flee to Europe." He added, wishfully, "I'm not sure Europe will survive the crisis".

What steps need to be taken to head off a situation whereby the climate crisis forces tens of millions of people to migrate from their countries, most of whom have contributed practically nothing to the emissions that have caused the crisis?

First, politicians need to squarely face the issue. Even though soaring anti-immigrant sentiment makes this an electorally toxic topic, our leaders need to wake up to the almost certain massive increase of climate-driven migration.

Second, we need to strengthen legal protections for those fleeing climate disaster. Considering them just as much "refugees" as those who flee from conflict or persecution – instead of dismissing them as economic "migrants" – is a first step.

Third, development aid and climate finance need to be targeted at the countries worst affected by both climate change and conflict. Improved agricultural methods could help persuade communities that there's hope for a viable future in their countries of origin, reducing incentives to migrate. The international climate finance system urgently needs reforming

so that the most vulnerable countries have access to much-needed funding.

Fourth, we need to invest in collaborative approaches to climate resilience and natural resource management. Environmental peacebuilding approaches have proven effective at uniting rival communities to tackle shared challenges.

Fifth, it's essential to counter far-right disinformation and hate speech against migrants. The disgraceful riots by the English Defence League in Southport last week underline the importance of this. We need to highlight extremist links with Moscow's agenda; to show the benefits of migrants (not least for Western countries with ageing populations); and to prepare host communities in receiving states, through education and dialogue.

Each of these five elements will require serious funding, new partnerships and – above all – political courage. None will be easy. But failure to take such action would condemn millions more to misery and destabilise our own societies, while the only people to benefit will be those in Moscow willing on these trends, together with their myopic backers from Western far-right parties.

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When it comes to budgeting, only one 'hack' really works



The important thing is that your budget method works for you (Getty Images/iStockphoto)

TALIA LODERICK

"Talia, what's the best budgeting app?" It's a question I'm often asked, especially this summer as people try to make their money stretch to

cover the holiday period. My answer is often unexpected: "There isn't one."

In a fast-paced world where we're time-poor and seeking quick wins, money tips, tricks and hacks seemingly meet a need. But for budgeting to work – and I mean really work – it takes time and effort.

I know, I know. You want to hear that if you find the right app it'll take you just five or 10 minutes to plug in your numbers and get a result. Unfortunately, that's not how it works. The thing about budgeting is, it's simple (money in less money out for set period of time) – but "simple" doesn't necessarily mean easy to implement.

Don't get me wrong, I'm a fan of some so-called "hacks". The TikTok trend of "loud budgeting" is a fun one. It's all about being honest with friends when you say no to anything you can't – or choose not to – afford. In a world full of options, temptations and other people's expectations on how you should spend your cash, it can be a great way to advocate for yourself and your money.

Similarly, what's not to like about zero-based budgeting, where you give every pound a job? It's a great way of being intentional with your money. Because another term for budgeting is "spending plan". And it's easier to say yes to the things that matter and no to the things that don't if you make a plan for your money.

It can be a slog, and sometimes it can feel like you're doing it wrong – after all, surely this kind of thing should only take five or 10 minutes?

The 50-30-20 budgeting method worked really well for one of my coaching clients, who is self-employed with multiple sources

of income. Here, you allocate 50 per cent of your income to cover essential spending such as rent/mortgage and bills; 30 per cent to cover lifestyle spending including socialising; and 20 per cent to cover savings and investing.

But effective budgeting takes real dedication. It takes time – typically an hour or two or sometimes more in the first instance – to put together the relevant figures. It can be a slog, and sometimes it can feel like you're doing it wrong – after all, surely this kind of thing should only take five or 10 minutes?

The good news, though, is that once you have it down, it will take less and less time – maybe you'll eventually be able to get it down to that mythical five or 10!

It doesn't really matter what form your budget takes – it can be an app, a spreadsheet, an online planner, a pen and paper, and yes, an app. Really anything that helps them gain the clarity needed to take control of their finances.

A budget is a forward-planning tool. Done in advance, it will tell you if there's enough money coming in to cover your planned outgoings. If yes, great. If not, you can adjust accordingly. The important thing is that it helps you prioritise spending and consider the big picture, in terms of putting money aside now to achieve future financial goals.

Unfortunately, people can be averse to the idea of setting a budget. Why? Well, the fact is that budgeting has an image problem. When people hear the word "budget", they think the focus is on what they *shouldn't* do rather than what they *can* do. They think that to budget is to cut back, to restrict – that budgeting is a punishment for being "bad" with money.

But it's a false economy to cut back on all the things that make life worth living. Because what happens then, similar to dieting, is that people eventually crack and splurge, then beat themselves up for being bad at budgeting and stop – perhaps leaving them worse off than where they started.

With that in mind, it's important to leave room in your budget for the things you enjoy. Maybe it's the weekly meal out, or a bag

you've been eyeing up. Don't get caught up in self-deprivation for the sake of achieving artificial goals – but at the same time, make sure those goals are achievable in the first place. Because at the end of the day, the only budget that really works for you is the one that you can stick with.

Talia Loderick is a money coach, who helps people to understand and take control of their finances

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‘Faster, higher, fruitier’: why we need the Wine Olympics



Photo finish: there are hundreds of wine competitions spanning the globe (Getty)

ROSAMUND HALL

Like most things in life, the Olympics have got me thinking about wine – specifically, whether the medal-winning wines we see on the shelves of supermarkets and wine shops are really deserving of those

accolades. Unlike the scarcity of Olympic medals, they seem to be abundant.

Wine is the most appallingly marketed product, with both cheap and expensive bottles looking very similar – give or take the weight of the bottle, and maybe the quality of paper used on the label. As such, buying wine can feel like a bit of a lottery. There's so much choice on a shelf where everything looks the same. So perhaps, seeing a bottle adorned with a winner's medal may make you more inclined to buy it – but does it mean it's any good?

There are hundreds of wine competitions spanning the globe – from small, regional association competitions to large-scale internationally renowned awards. But how are they organised? If you were an elite athlete, you would expect judges at regional, national, international or Olympic events to follow the same process of judging. Unfortunately, the same can't be said about wine competitions, whose methodology can vary widely.

There are those that fall under the umbrella of OIV, the International Organisation of Vine and Wine. Headquartered in France, the OIV gives "patronage" to numerous competitions including Concours Mondial de Bruxelles. These competitions have a rather outdated methodology for tasting, including prohibiting judges from discussing individual wines, which strikes me as a very limiting way to assess their merits.

Then there are those that follow a similar judging pattern to each other. These include the Decanter World Wine Awards, the International Wine Challenge, and the International Wine and Spirits Competition. Here, entrants pay in the region of £150 per wine to enter and have the fruits of their labour rigorously tasted by a panel of judges. In these larger competitions, the panels are made up of highly respected professionals and experts from all across the globe, giving greater prestige to the competition itself.

It’s vital to remember that they are essentially advertising tools, used as a way to stand out in a very crowded market

The wines are tasted blind, organised by style, region or price. It can take several days to conclude a competition and is a staggering logistical undertaking. And then come the magical stickers – the small medals that wineries receive (well, they have to buy them) to adorn each bottle when they’ve won.

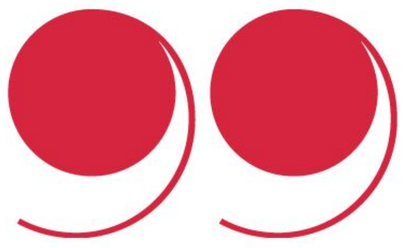
In the most recent Decanter World Wine Awards 18,143 wines from 57 countries were tasted, “resulting in 50 Best in Show, 117 Platinum, 643 Gold, 5,977 Silver, and 8,016 Bronze medals”. So, not everyone is a winner (but only barely).

So, should you be swayed by wine medals? Well, yes and no. The last three contests I mentioned are globally recognised and highly respected competitions. A medal winner from one of these competitions will have been tasted with great thought and consideration and re-tasted if necessary. Yes, wineries have to pay to enter but there is no guarantee that they will win anything.

Standing in the aisles of a supermarket can be daunting, and a selection from one of these may well be a safe bet. However, it’s vital to remember that they are essentially advertising tools, used as a way to stand out in a very crowded market. And most importantly, when it comes to wine tasting you must remember that it is a totally human activity, subject to all the biases and preferences you would expect.

Ultimately, the only taste that matters is your own, and the more you experiment and try, the closer you get to finding the wines you truly love – and that is the only winning wine that matters.

Rosamund Hall is a freelance writer and wine expert



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Voices

Phew, the Games are over: I can't take any more expertise



When you look at Keely Hodgkinson or Tony Roberts, all you see is talent, grit and absolutely no hint of them being anything but delightful. How do they do it? (AFP/Getty)

WILL GORE

Well, it's all over. Team GB has done its country proud, winning more overall medals at this year's Olympics than at any Games since 1984. And, despite the limited coverage on the BBC, I've thoroughly enjoyed tuning in over the last fortnight.

However, with the Games having now drawn to a close, I can't help breathing a major sigh of relief.

Much as I love it, the Olympics always makes me feel inadequate. All those bulging muscles and toned physiques throw into sharp relief the shortcomings of us mere mortals (or should that be podgy relief?). Most of the heroic participants rub it in further by having plenty of hair, perfect teeth and, above all, oodles of youth. At least our skateboarder, Andy MacDonald, had the decency to be 51.

So, there they all are, looking like gods and goddesses, and then they go and bash out a few thousand metres in the time it takes me to walk downstairs and make a cuppa. Or they do things which appear to defy all physical logic, as well as any sensible advice: the pole vault, for instance, or anything involving a high diving board or pommel horse.

If you're a generally sporty person, you can pop along to a League Two football match and take some comfort from what you see. You know in your heart that you're not good enough to slot into the MK Dons forward line, or do a job at right-back for Doncaster Rovers; but then again, you can sort of kid yourself that what you're watching isn't a million miles away from what you could do in your Sunday league team. Or, at the very least, you can understand how the professionals do it.

That rarely feels the case with the Olympics, where the talent and the drive on display seem almost otherworldly. Indeed, that drive – that sense of absolute purpose – is as remarkable as any innate ability on show. For many Olympians, the furrow they plough is a lonely one and not particularly well-remunerated. Even those who actually make it into their respective finals gain only fleeting public recognition: it will probably be only the gold medal winners who we remember in the long term.

Someone, somewhere will have already broken their collar bone trying to Fosbury flop over their back fence

Perhaps it's that knowledge which keeps Olympians so humble. But that only makes them even harder to take. The top professional footballers might have incredible talent but then they turn out to be total prima donnas, wearing ludicrous, diamond-encrusted watches, so you can at least hold that against them. When you look at Keely Hodgkinson or Tony Roberts, all you see is talent, grit and absolutely no hint of them being anything but delightful. How do they do it?!

As if all this were not enough, we're also supposed to be inspired by the Olympics to take up new sports, or to double down on our determination to follow in the footsteps of our heroes. And sure enough, just as Hodgkinson talked of being inspired by watching Jessica Ennis-Hill in 2012, no doubt there will be girls and boys who in a decade or so will be clutching their own gold medals and telling Clare Balding how they were spurred on by Hodgkinson's stunning 800m victory in 2024.

That's all very well, but spare a thought for all the kids who will spend the next couple of weeks flirting with the most unlikely ambitions. Someone, somewhere will have already broken their collar bone trying to Fosbury flop over their back fence, or smashed their neighbour's greenhouse with a misplaced discus/hub cap.

Regrettably, my son appears to have been particularly taken with the swimming events and I spent several evenings last week at our local pool as he endeavoured to smash his PB in the 25-metre freestyle. I duly timed one splashy length after another but after an apparent breakthrough, when he scored an impressive 36-second split, he then lost his breathing pattern and the ability to swim in a straight line. The only similarity

between him and Adam Peaty is that he vaguely resembles a man swimming in a bog.

Don’t worry, I’ll keep encouraging him, and when he wins the Olympic 50m butterfly in 2036, I’ll eat my words. For now, however, with thanks to Paris and to every incredible participant, I’m giving the Olympics a rest – and slowly starting to rebuild my self-esteem.

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Why young adults need more protection from revenge porn



Evolving technology is giving perpetrators more opportunities to abuse (Getty/iStock)

SOPHIE MORTIMER

The online landscape is constantly evolving. From one generation to the next, the baton of what is deemed appropriate is passed on, and standards of behaviour are constantly changing.

Ever since I began working for the Revenge Porn Helpline, initially as a helpline practitioner and now as the helpline manager, coordinating a team to support those affected by these devastating crimes, I have witnessed first-hand how technological advancements are continuing to fuel a rise in intimate image abuse.

First, it is clear to me that the rules of romantic engagement as we knew them have changed. Alongside the increasing popularity of sexting, people have simply become much more comfortable exchanging nude images of themselves, regardless of age or gender. And as long as you're an adult, it's consensual and it's legal, then there is absolutely nothing wrong with that.

While now a seemingly normal ritual between people meeting online, at the Revenge Porn Helpline I've seen the experiences of those who have been affected by how these images can be abused. This was the case with Aaliyah, a 22-year-old woman who reached out to the helpline after discovering, through a friend, that intimate images of herself had been shared onto an adult website by an ex-partner a year after their breakup.

Over the course of their online relationship, Aaliyah had shared intimate and non-intimate images with her partner, showing the trust she had in him. Feeling anxious after the revelation that her intimate images had been shared online, Aaliyah searched her name followed by the term "nude", which led to her discovering her intimate images were openly available on the internet.

Our helpline initiated the process of reporting and removing Aaliyah's images and, to date, the Revenge Porn Helpline has successfully removed 3,110 intimate images and videos from various adult platforms of Aaliyah.

Young adults, who might have a more laid-back view on the world, need to be made aware of the potential risks of sharing intimate images in the digital age

In 2023, the Revenge Porn Helpline received almost 19,000 reports – a 106 per cent increase from the previous year. I don't think this is a problem that is going away any time soon. Sadly, based on current trends and with technology evolving at a rapid rate, we can only expect more opportunities to arise for perpetrators to abuse.

I can list numerous high-profile examples of celebrities who have experienced intimate image abuse, such as reality star Georgia Harrison, who took her ex-boyfriend to court for creating and then posting intimate footage of her without her consent on his OnlyFans page. Similarly, DJ and music producer Diplo recently made the news when he was sued by an anonymous Jane Doe for allegedly sending intimate videos of her to third parties without her consent.

Despite the completely understandable normalisation of sharing intimate images, naturally enough there remains a strong desire for privacy. However, once an image is shared, it can be very difficult to control its distribution.

In addition to confusion over consent and ownership, there is also a lack of understanding about legal levels of protection available. While there are laws in place to combat intimate image abuse, such as England's legislation against sharing an intimate photograph or film, the current regulation alone is not enough to ensure an individual's complete safety.

At the Revenge Porn Helpline, we still have a problem that we are trying to resolve: currently 10 per cent of content reported

by the helpline remains online and is legally allowed to be viewed, even if a perpetrator has been convicted.

This means that we have 30,000 URLs containing non-consensually shared content that we cannot remove due to the current legal framework and non-compliant websites. This issue could be resolved if internet service providers were empowered to block access to content we cannot remove.

With Harrison's support, we've campaigned tirelessly to garner support from MPs, NGOs and organisations to close this legal loophole and reinforce tougher protections for individuals affected by intimate image abuse. The need for this legislative change is more important than ever, because there is no justification for allowing this behaviour to continue. Non-consensually shared intimate imagery should be made illegal, and we urge the new government to rectify this problem.

Unfortunately, I've seen there can sometimes be a lack of sympathy for people who shared images willingly, but who have since fallen victim to intimate image abuse.

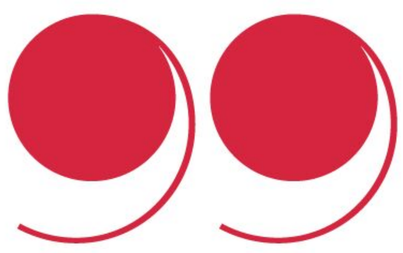
Young adults, who might have a more laid-back view on the world, need the support and guidance to be made aware of the potential risks of sharing intimate images in the digital age whilst using features like blocking and reporting tools to help restrict the sharing of sensitive content. New preventative technologies such as StopNCII.org go a long way to giving people peace of mind.

While the internet and smartphones have transformed our lives in many positive ways, delivering great benefits to individuals and society, caution is necessary. As we embrace new and quickly evolving technologies, we need accompanying education, awareness and support to balance the harms that can come alongside them.

I am incredibly proud of the work my team and I have done since our inception in 2015 and our efforts have been crucial in supporting those affected by intimate image abuse. During my time at the helpline, I've seen how times and fashions do change, and each generation faces its own unique challenges.

The internet and smartphones are powerful tools that, when used responsibly, can enhance our lives. However, I believe it's essential to approach these technologies with understanding and an awareness of how we can appropriately protect ourselves.

If you have been affected by intimate image abuse and are an adult over the age of 18 living in the UK, you can contact the Revenge Porn Helpline on 0345 6000 459 or email help@revengepornhelpline.org.uk



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Social media does so much good (and so much harm)

I agree that social media must be investigated for facilitating the far-right violence against refugees over the past week or so. The "oligarchs" of social media such as Elon Musk need to be brought under the rule of law, otherwise we risk being overpowered by billionaires who feel free to use their wealth as a means of political dominance, which will break the authority of democratic institutions.

Nevertheless, we must not forget the positive influence of social media – specifically how it was the means by which local communities across the country disempowered the thugs. Who could not be impressed by the "refugees welcome" banners on display everywhere across England? They seemed to appear almost spontaneously, yet Facebook groups made some contribution, surely?

I suppose the key is to clarify what information shared on social groups is acceptable in our society, and what is plainly obnoxious.

Simon Fisher *Sellindge, Kent*

Where is the international community?

The heartrending images of body parts scattered on floors in a school sheltering displaced Palestinians in Gaza defy comprehension. Sadly, the global community appears powerless in ending this seemingly intractable cycle of terrifying violence and death, and in stopping the relentless bombardment of innocent people.

The denial of the inalienable rights of Palestinians cannot continue unabated. How many more people must perish before the international community intervenes to put an end to these horrendous crimes?

Dr Munjed Farid Al Qutob *London*

Take a hard line against anti-vaxxers

I must strongly commend the letter from Dr Ellen Nolan regarding the most effective means of combatting anti-vax rhetoric. Even before the Covid pandemic enabled anti-vaxxers to recruit huge numbers of people, we were suffering from collective memory loss: my parents would be approaching 100 if they were still around, and they remembered the epidemics before the war and the small army of disabled people on our

streets in those days. Quite simply how many people are left that clearly remember the pre-vaccination era?

I certainly believe that, as Dr Nolan mentioned, we must seriously look at obligatory childhood immunisations for school and nursery placements. Plenty of diehards will switch to homeschooling, which already is top-heavy with anti-vaxxers, but it should propel the vaccinated numbers upward to get us at least near the level for herd immunity. Fingers crossed.

Robert Boston *Kent*

Cruel mockery

The case of Rachael Gunn, aka Raygun, the Australian breakdancer whose performance in the Olympics was widely derided is a perfect example of how our social media use has spiralled out of control.

It seems like a fairly benign thing, but this woman has been subject in just a few days to a lifetime's worth of mockery. Worse still, we don't seem to see anything wrong with that as a society. Maybe it's time to think about how we use the internet and social media, preferably in such a way that the human element is not entirely forgotten.

Molly Howe *Liverpool*

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Telegram radicalised me... but I managed to break free

The app is in the news for its role in the riots. Ex-users tell **Zoë Beaty** how they fell down the rabbit hole, then woke up



Telegram offers high levels of secrecy for those organising violence (PA/Getty/EPA)

One link. A click. A curious statement – "What they don't want you to know!" It's 2020 and Leila Hay is in her room, at the back of her parent's terraced house in Hull, unaware that she's about to fall down a rabbit hole. Before now she's never heard of the social media app Telegram, or 4chan – an anonymous posting

board that quickly became the home of internet subculture, and conspiracy. Soon, it would take the next year of her life.

“I saw a rambling post on pizzagate,” she explains – a famous, completely false theory about a child sex ring run from the basement of a pizzeria in Washington DC.

“To be honest, I was afraid,” she says. “I was petrified, actually. I kept reading, needing to know more. Because if all of this – what I was reading – was true, it would completely reshape my world.”

Within just a few weeks Hay, who was studying at university, was reading screenshots of Hillary Clinton’s emails, convinced she was a paedophile. She quickly began to believe posts predicting that Donald Trump was going to come forward with serious allegations and arrest warrants for “pretty much every celebrity, for child endangerment”, Hay says.

“There were accusations against celebrities, the media… for horrific crimes against children. Everyone thought I was crazy.” But, quickly, Hay was fully invested in the fantasies of the far-right world, which, even off the app, were often disseminated as screenshots from Telegram. “In a way I was smug – you see yourself as above others. You’re told that others are just naive to any other possibilities.”

Over the last two weeks, Telegram has been noticeably present in headlines and discussion around the far-right riots. It was screenshots of this app that circulated from fascists organising gang violence in towns around the country; onTwitter/X, users perpetuating violence directed their followers to Telegram.

This isn’t new. In fact, Telegram has long been an epicentre of dangerous right-wing narratives and conspiracy. Only, after the Southport killings, Telegram’s usually obscure users spilled out onto the streets.

“Telegram is currently one of the most popular platforms in the world, and will probably become even more visible in the coming years,” says Ruslan Trad, a security researcher at American think tank the Atlantic Council’s Digital Forensic Research Lab.

“Why is it a popular platform? The need for secrecy and privacy is at the core. Whether we’re talking about teens talking about favourite hobbies and sex secrets, or radicals staging riots and terrorist attacks, Telegram has become a major destination over the years,” he says.

He adds that Telegram “has played a major role in spreading propaganda”. Far-right groups who have discovered the app have “found it possible to speak out without worrying that their content will be deleted”.



At a ‘Save Our Children’ rally at Downing Street in 2020, the sign referencing the US conspiracy theory (Getty)

Telegram saw a rise in popularity during the pandemic – that’s when people like Hay discovered it, and Michael’s parents, too. Before the pandemic, Michael’s dad, Carl*, had been into what he deems “more light” conspiracies, “like the fake moon landing, cold fusion, electric universe” (a theory that challenges the cosmology showing that the universe is gravity-dominated, arguing instead that a web of electromagnetism connects the planets). “But, when my dad got onto Telegram, it got much worse.”

He was talked into joining a group on the app, Michael, 26, who wishes to protect his identity, says. Telegram made him a crucial promise – to show what was “really happening” behind the pandemic. Really, it wasn’t so unusual and, in many ways, it makes sense. Many of us went looking for answers and sought

control when the world seemed to suddenly fall apart. On Telegram, Carl believed that's what he found.

Soon, it was all that he could talk about. "He never wanted to push [conspiracy theories] on me before the pandemic, so there wasn't really a problem then," Michael, who lives in Chemnitz, Saxony, in Germany, and begins his masters in physical technology this September, explains. "Back then, we could talk about literally anything and everything."

Once Carl got Telegram, he would show Michael content from the groups – "the worst content for conspiracy nuts you can think about," he says – and try to convert him.

Slowly, Michael's mum also started to believe the theories too. For two years Michael tried hard to argue the truth, but it took its toll on him as their insistence only grew more aggressive. He burnt out and "with no defences left" began to accept what they were telling him. Michael refused to get vaccinated against Covid, and began to isolate himself as reality rocked on its foundations.

They called themselves 'Noah's Ark for unvaccinated people'. That's a pretty good description if you ask me. It shows how nuts they are

Michael

"I lost all sense of direction, every last bit of motivation," he writes on Reddit. We're speaking over the platform because he can't risk his parents, who are still fully consumed by conspiracy, hearing our conversation.

For months Michael was depleted and embroiled. But being “on my dad’s side” gave him space from the constant opinion-pushing and, eventually, allowed him the mental capacity to begin to question what he believed again.

When Russia attacked Ukraine, his parents became pro-Russia – which helped Michael realise that they were on the wrong side. But by then his parents had also become obsessed with chemtrails (the theory that governments have a secret programme to add toxic chemicals into the air from planes), the Great Reset, and the climate change hoax. They were deep into the well.

The tipping point came last year, when Michael’s parents said they wanted to move to Paraguay to “flee the ‘big plan’”, says Michael. “It was a place for like-minded people to move into and get through the rough times they imagined. They called themselves ‘Noah’s Ark for unvaccinated people’. That’s a pretty good description if you ask me. It shows how nuts they are.”

But their decision sent Michael over an edge. He says: “It was like a final goodbye and I just couldn’t take it.” Soon after their announcement, he ended up in psychosis, his brain completely overloaded, and was admitted to hospital.



A rioter in Sunderland hurls a smoke bomb at police (Getty)

Now the family don’t talk about conspiracy at all, which Michael says has infinitely improved their relationship. His dad still goes out on a “walk” (“which means a protest,” he says) every Monday

morning as he has since the pandemic, and his mum is just as infected by what Michael calls an “informational virus”. “Thinking about this feels like trying to lift a car with your bare hands,” he writes on Reddit. “I love them. It hurts.”

So, how can an app like Telegram become so deeply effective in spreading disinformation? “Telegram was a useful platform for conspiracists in the pandemic, because as social media platforms slowly introduced stronger rules around Covid and vaccine disinformation, Telegram was a place where conspiracy theorists could encourage their followers to go and get their rawest, falsest content,” explains Callum Hood, head of research at the Centre for Countering Digital Hate.

“And they could build communities on Telegram that would survive any changes in terms of their access to mainstream platforms.” People reach Telegram via mainstream platforms like Twitter/X. “They’ll often say, ‘If you want my real content, go and look at my Telegram’. Other times you’ll just see content that has originated on Telegram embedded in posts on social media.

It’s like addiction – you’re only going to help yourself if you want to get help. I hated feeling that way, and not having a relationship with my family

Leila

“There will be a portion of the people who look at this content that embeds a Telegram link and go through to the source, then end up signing up to Telegram… and then getting steady,

regular access. What Telegram is good at is it's searchable. So if there are particular topics you're interested in, it will just let you search for the names of channels."

The app has a contentious political history. It was founded by billionaire Pavel Durov, a Russian exile who founded it to counter growing censorship in his native country. And, says Trad, it was among the main platforms housing ISIS communication channels. "Telegram was also the group's propaganda platform of choice, and every researcher and journalist who focused on conflict used and monitored Telegram for the latest news."

The 2014 war in Ukraine also gave the platform a "huge boost", he says, it having been founded just a year earlier. Its interface has some influence on this. "If you create a group, it can have thousands of people in it; messages are easy to write. Telegram is light and fast compared to Facebook, for example; it doesn't have the limitations of Twitter and secrecy can be at a very high level," says Trad. "These are factors that have led to far-right groups using the platform. They understood that Facebook was being monitored."

The question is: can it be regulated, or stopped – and if so, how? Trad recalls that there was significant US government pressure on the app in 2019 to take down the group's channels "which have been reaching more and more people and influencing offline with the execution of attacks and threats". Telegram buckled, he says. "The main reason for this was not only pressure, but also the possibility that the platform would lose advertisers.



Telegram was forced to take down some channels in 2019 by the US government (Getty)

“The financial aspect is among the few levers that can be used to push a platform to introduce norms and standards.” Still, there is perilously little protection for people like Michael’s family, or Leila, who find themselves slipping into the rabbit hole.

Leila’s journey culminated after more than 10 months of mostly sitting alone at her computer, isolated from her friends and family. For her, there was an element of sunk cost – it’s not easy to admit that the thing you’ve become so completely absorbed in, which you’ve invested your time and life in, is all a lie.

Still, she was lonely. “Firstly it was me not wanting to feel this way. It’s like addiction – you’re only going to help yourself if you want to get help,” says Leila, who now lives happily with her partner and 13-month-old son. “I hated feeling that way, and not having a relationship with my family.

“So I started looking at people online who were talking about QAnon, but from the other side – who were debunking it, and pursuing authentic sources for another explanation. Slowly, I started to cut the conspiracy off, and follow more valuable sources.”

The road to recovery wasn’t easy. “I’d stopped watching any films or listening to music because I thought it was Satanic,” she says. “I reintroduced that little by little. I was able to walk to the

shops and have a small break from my phone or laptop – things like that – and I felt better."

She still carries shame, and the stigma has been hard to shake off. When she began dating her current partner, for example, she says his friends messaged him to warn him off her. "[One] said that my boyfriend should break up with me because he thought I was a terrorist, basically – a lot of people associate QAnon with what happened at the Capitol. He said, 'she's crazy'.

"I had a discussion with my partner and he completely understands that's not how I am. But it's hard." As for Michael, he still takes medication as a result of his breakdown, and still worries about his parents' welfare. He had a lucky escape. But conspiracy, disinformation – platformed by Telegram – remains an eerie threat in his life. And, considering its presence on our streets last week too, for the rest of us as well.

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Another Indian summer of Olympic underachievement

Why did the world's most populous nation and fifth largest economy finish 71st in the medal table? **Namita Singh** talks to experts and former Olympians to uncover the root causes



Neeraj Chopra celebrates after winning silver in the javelin – India's only non-bronze medal at the Paris Games (Getty)

India had to wait until the 13th day of the Paris Olympics to secure a medal higher than bronze, with flag-bearer Neeraj Chopra's silver in the men's javelin sending a wave of

celebration tinged with relief through the medal-starved country.

India sent a contingent of 117 athletes to Paris, yet have a paltry haul of five bronze medals and Chopra's solitary silver to show for it. They rank 71st in the medals table, below the likes of Hong Kong, Taiwan, North Korea, Cuba and Saint Lucia – a Caribbean island of just 180,000 people.

It's a disappointing return to the norm for a country that registered its best-ever performance at the last Games in Tokyo in 2021: seven medals, including one gold. For the most populous nation on Earth, a sports-mad country of 1.4 billion which also boasts the world's fifth largest economy, it's a record as frustrating as it is puzzling.

India have won just two golds in the last three decades: the men's 10m rifle shooting at Beijing 2008 and Chopra's javelin heroics three years ago. Until Tokyo, it had won a grand total of 28 medals across 36 Olympics, the same tally as the individual record of American swimmer Michael Phelps.

Speaking to *The Independent*, experts and former Indian Olympians explain that there's no one quick fix that could bring the country a gold rush at Los Angeles 2028. Widespread poverty and malnourishment remain serious issues preventing millions of young people from reaching their sporting potential – but there is also a chronic lack of investment even at the elite level in the country.



Wrestler Vinesh Phogat celebrates winning her semi-final bout. She was later disqualified (Reuters)

After star wrestler Vinesh Phogat's dramatic disqualification earlier this week, when she failed to make the weight for her women's 50kg final, India's sports minister Mansukh Mandaviya sparked controversy by defending the government's 7.5 million rupees (around £75,000) expenditure on Phogat's training and support team. This would be a drop in the ocean compared to the amounts being spent on wealthier nations' top medal hopes, or indeed the vast sums flowing around the Indian Premier League (IPL), the wealthiest cricket league in the world.

An increase in investment is needed from the grassroots up, says former Olympian Dipa Karmakar. Athletes need to be provided the right resources over the long term, she says, not just for the few months running up to major competitions.

"Simone Biles pulled out of the Tokyo gymnastics finals to deal with her mental health but she still had consistent investment for three years. Here, players are given resources for three or four months once they qualify for the Olympics," says the gymnast, who came fourth at the Rio 2016 Games.

"If our players receive such resources from a year or two before, our medal count might increase."

Karmakar, the first Indian female gymnast to compete at the Olympics, says "it is a very tough journey" for a gymnast going from playing locally to competing at a state level, then national and international.



Dipa Karmakar won bronze in the women's vault final at the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow (Getty)

"I didn't have any infrastructural support when I started out. It was only after 2016 that I got a foam pit and good equipment," Karmakar tells *The Independent*.

Tripura, her home state in India's remote northeast, is some 2,400km from the national capital. "I would travel to Delhi for training camps," she says. "Now, there is infrastructure here in Tripura as well."

Nobel laureates Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo point to high malnutrition as a significant contributor to India's Olympics underperfomance, and urge the need for better investment in the health sector as a whole.

"Of course India is poor but not as poor as it used to be, and not nearly as poor as Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Haiti, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Uganda, each of which, per head, has more than 10 times India's medal count," the economists note in their book *Poor Economics*.

India's stunting and wasting figures are devastating. At 18.7 per cent, according to the Global Hunger Index of 2023, the south Asian country has the highest child-wasting rate in the world, reflecting acute undernutrition. Even war-torn and famine-stricken Yemen (14.4 per cent) and Sudan (13.7 per cent) fare better.

There has been some increase in investment in sports in recent years with the lion's share going to the Khelo India (Play India) programme launched by the Narendra Modi government in 2017, says Ronojoy Sen, senior research fellow at the National University of Singapore's Institute of South Asian Studies.



Team India celebrate after winning the men's hockey bronze medal match against Spain in Paris (Getty)

"The overall budget for the sports ministry increased to Rs 34.4bn (£320m) this year from Rs 33.9bn (£310m) in the previous financial year," he tells *The Independent*.

"I think India's government investment in sports is much higher than most developing countries but of course, it is for a much larger population too."

The impact sustained investment can have is noticeable in some sports that have received more attention, such as field hockey, a sport in which India won a second straight bronze at Paris after ending a 41-year medal drought at Tokyo.

India once dominated hockey, winning a record 11 Olympic medals, including eight gold, in the sport until 1980. A steady decline over the following quarter century reached a nadir in 2008 when it did not even qualify for the Beijing Games.

The embarrassment sparked a process of rebuilding that culminated in a bronze medal at Tokyo, says former hockey goalkeeper and coach AB Subbaiah.

“Everybody worked very hard to win but we never had scientific support behind us,” he tells *The Independent*. “When to peak, when not to peak and how much training we have to take to prevent injury. Now scientific approaches have been introduced.” There is a physio now, a dietician, mental trainer, scientific adviser and analytical coach, he says.

We were sent the criteria for qualification after seven or eight days of the trials. If the administration had been more proactive, I would have received the criteria ahead of the trials, not a week after

Dipa Karmakar, gymnast

“If you are building champions, you need to support them in every area. The players should be only thinking of going and giving their best on the ground.

“The manager has to take care of his players, visas, passports, travel plans, everything,” he says, drawing a contrast with his days playing for India between 1988 and 1998 when managers would sometimes “take support from players to carry their baggage”.

The change came about, he says, when the old Indian Hockey Federation was disbanded in 2008 and replaced with Hockey India.

As an example of poor sporting administration in India, Karmakar recalls how she missed the last Asian Games in Hangzhou, China, last year.

“I did not face a lot of politics but there was an administrative problem during the last Asian Games when we were informed about the criteria after the trial,” she says. “As a result of which I could not go. And this despite securing the first spot during the trials.”

The federal sports ministry had informed the Gymnastics Federation of India that only two of its nine qualified athletes met the selection criteria for the Games.

“We were sent the criteria for qualification after seven or eight days of the trials,” the gymnast says. “If the administration had been more proactive, I would have received the criteria ahead of the trials, not a week after.”



Defending champion Chopra finished behind Pakistan’s Arshad Nadeem in the javelin (Getty)

At the Paris Games, Phogat’s dramatic exit has shone a spotlight on what critics have decried as the lack of support from sports administrators who were supposed to look out for her.

Phogat was guaranteed to win at least a silver medal, and had a good chance at gold, before she was disqualified on the morning of the final for coming in overweight – by as little as 100 grams, according to some reports. Officials said she tried to cut weight through the night before the final, cycling and running, but to no avail.

“I am surprised and I feel very bad for the athlete,” says Subbaiah. “I’m also surprised that she was training the whole

night. Without eating, I mean that could have been life-threatening. The support staff and coach should have taken a little more care."

Phogat's journey from Delhi to Paris was itself wrought with challenges. She wanted to compete in the 53kg category but a younger rival, Antim Panghal, had claimed the spot, *SportStar* reported.

When Vinesh sought a trial to determine who should be given the spot in her preferred weight category, the wrestling federation, with which she had locked horns while leading a street protest against its then chief over sexual abuse allegations, denied the request.

It meant competing in the 50kg category was her only chance of going to Paris.



Team India have won successive Olympic bronze medals in men's hockey (Getty)

Panghal, who was sent to compete in the 53kg, was deported from Paris on Thursday following a "disciplinary breach" by her entourage, including younger sister Nisha. She had already been knocked out in her quarter-final bout a day earlier, losing 10-0 to Turkey's Zeynep Yetgil.

The Independent contacted India's chef de mission in Paris, Gagan Narang, with a detailed questionnaire. He did not respond.

India's sustained underperformance in sports stands in stark contrast to China, the country it overtook in terms of total population around mid-2023 according to the UN.

"I think there are different reasons for different underperformances," says Rahul De, associate professor at Azim Premji University and host of the podcast series *Economics of Khel* which looks at the business of sporting subcultures.

"The first is, if you look at which countries dominate the Olympics, winning the most medals, you have nations that have historically invested a lot in sports," he says.

Then there are countries such as China and Qatar which see winning sports medals as being important to their global brands.

"China is well known as almost a factory production where they identify children from the age of four and five years, and put them into public hostels and in training," he says.



Phogat controversially had to drop a weight category to compete in Paris (Getty)

"So it is kind of strange, they have ignored some sports that are popular while focusing on those that they have better chances winning, even if those sports have no fans."

Gymnastics, he points out, is one sport that receives high investment. China has more than 2,183 state schools that train children as young as five to groom them for the Olympics, Reuters reported in 2016.

Calling China's approach "authoritarian", De says there are very few countries that can emulate such a system which also significantly limits access to sports for the general public.

India cannot take such an approach, he says, partly because the country's system of devolved powers to state government makes it harder to roll out such a rigid policy nationwide.

But there is also no indication that the Modi administration sees it as a budget priority to do so. Considering "the amount of investment you need, the government has never allocated that much", he says.

The message appears to be that if India is to turn around its fortunes at the Olympics, it will have to be through improving health and welfare across the board – rather than a sudden influx of investment in elite sports from the government.

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TWIST AND SHOUT?

Drinking from a bottle has suddenly become maddening, due to lids that remain attached. But the development is rooted in the battle against plastic waste, **Katie Rosseinsky** discovers



Mind the cap: the eco-friendly style of bottle top seems to have few fans so far (Getty)

Who knew that cracking open a plastic bottle could ruin your week? This once simple act now comes with a side order of drama. Try to sip from your bottle and you'll find yourself doing unfortunate facial contortions as it pokes into your nose or prods your chin.

If you're really unlucky, you'll catch some rogue liquid in the lid, which will then inevitably catapult all down your top, leaving you looking a bit like a sad, soggy toddler who's still finessing their motor skills. Attempt to snap the thin attachment connecting the cap to the bottle rim to avoid repeating this mess and you risk soaking yourself again, too.

The culprit, of course, is that little bit of plastic that keeps lids attached to bottles. The new design has quietly snuck onto the soft drinks aisle over the past couple of years. If you believe its detractors, this tiny but unwelcome addition to the packaging has turned a relatively straightforward process – grab bottle, remove lid, sip and enjoy – into a high-jeopardy activity.

One social media user branded the development "the worst thing to happen to humanity since the removal of the headphone jack [on smartphones]" – hyperbole, of course, but one that perhaps sums up the outsized consternation with which this change has been received in some quarters. Will you drench yourself in front of your colleagues if you dare take a gulp of water during an important meeting? Or will you simply funnel liquid all over your laptop? The possibilities are endless.

The correct way to describe a lid like this is "tethered". The design can be traced back to a European Union directive that was initially proposed in 2018 then officially adopted the following year, with a deadline put in place: from 3 July 2024, the EU stated, caps on all non-returnable plastic drinks bottles with a capacity of three litres or less must stay attached after opening.



Bottle caps, which animals confuse with food, are among the most common forms of plastic waste on beaches (Getty)

The purpose was not to collectively infuriate thirsty Europeans, but to tackle a serious problem: plastic waste. It's estimated that we produce around 400 million tonnes of the stuff worldwide every single year. Plastics break down into small particles but never fully disappear. These microplastics can harm the environment, polluting oceans and soil, and can enter the human body (they've been linked to health problems such as endocrine disruption and even cancer, and have also been found in placentas).

What might seem like an infuriating change seems much more reasonable when you start to explore the impact of our soft drinks habit. When lids are "untethered" from bottles, they often get dropped or lost, potentially blown by the wind or carried by the rain into drains or rivers that flow out into the sea; bottle caps are among the most common forms of plastic waste found on Europe's beaches.

And even if they do get to a recycling bin and then processing plant, their diminutive size is a problem. "Caps are filtered out through sieving drums because they are too small," explains Ross Lakhdari, a circular economy expert at PA Consulting. "Generally, any item smaller than two inches in any dimension risks being lost during this screening process."

If these lids remain attached to something bigger, then, they're less likely to be lost as waste or end up in the ocean, where they

can prove perilous to wildlife such as turtles and birds. Unfortunately, animals often confuse them with food – no wonder plastic caps were ranked among the top five most harmful types of ocean rubbish by the NGO Seas at Risk.

Despite the plan seeming like a no-brainer, the EU directive did initially get some pushback from Big Soft Drink. Various multinationals claimed it would be too tricky and expensive to make new, compliant lids, and that it would be better to concentrate instead on improving recycling processes.

But since the directive was introduced, drinks manufacturers have been slowly rolling out the change in order to meet the 2024 deadline. So these tethered bottles haven't appeared on our shelves overnight – Coca-Cola started selling them in Europe in 2022 – they've just gradually become more prevalent. Countries can decide their own "effective, proportionate and dissuasive" penalties for those who break the rules.

On social media, you'll find references to 'woke bottle caps' (sometimes ironic, sometimes not)

But hang on, I hear you ask. Britain is famously no longer part of the European Union (Brexit means Brexit, blah, blah, blah). So why are these tethered bottles cropping up here? Did "take back control" not apply to our beverages?

Detachable lids are in fact completely legal in the UK (that's why you might still come across the odd bottle with an old-style lid). It just makes little to no financial sense for major drinks companies to produce special attachment-free bottles (like the

soft drink equivalent of a post-Brexit blue passport) specifically for the relatively small British market. They'd effectively have to operate two production lines at once, which would be far more costly. And this way, should the UK ever introduce a similar rule of its own, they'll already be covered.

As with anything that bears a whiff of EU regulation, these mildly irritating lids have also become something of a lightning rod: a punching bag for those who don't want to have a bit of a rant about accidentally soaking their T-shirt in Fanta, but instead want to start hand-wringing about overbearing bureaucracy and the nanny state.

On social media, you'll find references to "woke bottle caps" (sometimes ironic, sometimes very much not). Earlier this year, *The Spectator* published an article making the grandiose claim that "the EU has ruined plastic water bottles".

This bottle-related EU bashing is just as fervent… inside the EU. Tethered lids even got a namecheck in the run-up to Italy's recent European Parliament elections, with deputy prime minister Matteo Salvini citing the caps as proof that his country needs "less Europe". Yes, getting your face splashed with Sprite is pretty irritating, but it's hardly the stuff of stirring election campaigns, is it?

Perhaps it's not the new lids that are the problem, but our own incompetence – could it be that all we need to do is get a bit better at using them? A viral TikTok video recently seemed to crack the code, showing us that, actually, we've been opening bottles all wrong: we just needed to pull the lid over the top, so that it sits neatly to the side, out of trouble. And if you can't master that? May I suggest sipping with care, and trying to think about happy sea creatures, rather than your squashed nose?

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(Spending) less is more

Eye-catching home design need not break the bank, writes **Adele Cardani**, especially if you follow these expert tips...



Focus on key areas where investment will have the most impact (Pictures by Laura Hammett)

We all want our homes to make a good impression – looking beautiful and feeling plush. The good news is you don't have to spend tons to achieve a luxe ambiance. Knowing where to splurge and where to save is key.

Sharing this philosophy is Laura Hammett, creative director at the eponymous interior design and architecture studio, and founder of luxury homeware brand, Laura Hammett Living.

Having curated award-winning, sumptuous spaces for over a decade, here are her tips for making your home look like you spent a lot more money than you actually did.

“I usually start with a base colour scheme of layered neutrals – incorporating shades of ivory, beige, bronze and even rusts, browns, and navies – to create depth,” Hammett begins. These hues set a tone of sophistication and serenity.

“Layer luxurious textures like cashmere or alpaca throws, cushions, and wool rugs to add warmth and softness,” she continues. You should prioritise the things you touch often, making sure the materials feel good.

“Then, accent with metallics, such as shagreen or patinated pieces, as well as organic wood or hand-blown glass elements. These bring a touch of glamorous light reflection and tactile interest,” she tells me.

Hammett recommends focusing on a few key areas where investment will have the most impact, saying, “splurge on high-quality, bespoke curtains and window treatments to frame your most-used spaces elegantly. This will ensure a correct fit for a polished presentation.



Avoid clutter: ‘It’s important to curate your space carefully and avoid over-decorating’

Invest in a high-quality wool or silk-blend rug that will last a lifetime and make your living room feel grounded, tying the seating together. And generally, prioritise the foundational

pieces that will get the most use – sofas, mattresses, and the dining table. You'll be pleased when they still look and feel great years later."

Compromise on the smaller, lesser-used items. "You can find some great antiques on eBay without a huge price tag, which is where I found the small bobbin-leg side table and grandfather clock in my home," she emphasises.

Likewise, cool prints, picture frames, coffee tables, lamps, mirrors, and accent chairs all abound from local antique shops and Facebook Marketplace.

She also suggests identifying and elevating the small things you use daily. Think linens, soap, and stationery. These little luxuries set a sophisticated tone without breaking the bank. Consider getting your initials embroidered onto a few pillowcases or towels, and opt for Le Labo or Aesop hand wash – leaving your hands feeling soft and smelling divine.

Hammett concludes, "One of the biggest culprits of a low-end look is clutter and an overabundance of small, low-quality accessories. It's important to curate your space carefully and avoid over-decorating.

Treat your shelves and surfaces like a gallery, where the skilful use of negative space is just as important as what you're displaying. This helps to achieve the right visual balance."

By taking this "less is more" approach, you can create spaces that feel both luxurious and enduring.



‘Prioritise the foundational pieces’



‘You can find great antiques on eBay’



‘Splurge on quality bespoke curtains’



Prioritise the things you touch often



Start with a base of layered neutrals

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Can we reboot a Wellington trip for this nervous flyer?



Take advantage of rail and boat routes when travelling to and from New Zealand's capital (Getty)

Q We have family near Wellington, New Zealand, and want to visit them at Christmas. My partner is an anxious flyer and we want to keep the number of flights to a minimum. But there doesn't seem to be any way of reaching Wellington from the UK without taking at least three flights. Can you advise?

Victor R

A The two biggest cities in New Zealand are relatively easy to reach in two hops from the UK. Auckland on North Island is

accessible via a wide range of hubs in Asia and North America, with Singapore and Los Angeles the most prominent. Christchurch on South Island has a daily overnight flight from Singapore, which has links from London Heathrow, Gatwick and Manchester.

But the New Zealand capital, Wellington, has few international flights: only to Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney in Australia. None of those cities has a nonstop link with the UK (though Qantas is working on Sydney, with nonstops from London Heathrow due to start in 2026).

May I suggest you turn this concern about minimising flying to your advantage, by flying into Auckland and trying out the Northern Explorer train to Wellington? It travels overland during the day and is by all accounts a memorable journey. Mark Smith, the international rail guru known as The Man In Seat 61, says: “It's an epic 423-mile journey across the interior of the North Island, through every kind of scenery there is, from coastline to volcanoes to mountains, lush green farmland to thick New Zealand bush. It takes you over feats of engineering such as the Raurimu Spiral, Turangarere Horseshoe and Makatote Viaduct. It's one of the world's great railway journeys and one of my favourites.”

Don’t return to Auckland by this route, though: instead, take the Interislander ferry from Wellington to Picton on South Island, which takes 3hr 30min, then the Coastal Pacific train onwards to Christchurch. Note that this train runs only four days per week until 1 January 2025, when it resumes a daily service.

A good specialist travel agent will put together the ideal trip for you.

Email your question to s@hols.tv or tweet @SimonCalder

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Section 2

ON THIS DAY



James Bond author Ian Fleming died on this day in 1964 (Getty)

1762: George IV, King of England, eldest son of the insane George III, was born. But he did little to enhance the crown, being too fond of wine and women.

1774: Robert Southey, poet laureate and historian, was born in Bristol.

1881: Cecil B DeMille, producer and director of epic films such as *The Ten Commandments*, was born in Ashfield, Massachusetts.

1887: Thomas Edison made the first sound recording when he recited "Mary Had a Little Lamb" which was recorded on to a foil-wrapped cylinder on the Edisonphone.

1908: The first Model T Ford, affectionately known as the "Tin Lizzie", came off the production line, replacing the original Model A.

1925: Norris and Ross McWhirter, British twins who founded the Guinness Book Of Records, were born. After the Bible, it is the best-selling book in the world. Ross McWhirter was murdered by the IRA in 1975.

1944: Pluto, the "pipeline under the ocean", began operating, transporting fuel from England to Allied troops in France.

1960: Communications satellite Echo was launched from Cape Canaveral.

1964: Ian Fleming, bestselling author and creator of James Bond, died.

1982: Mexico announced that it was unable to pay its enormous external debt, marking the beginning of the debt crisis that spread across Latin America.

1990: The largest and most complete Tyrannosaurus rex skeleton was discovered by Sue Hendrickson in South Dakota.

2012: The Summer Olympics closing ceremony took place in London, which completed the games.

2014: Hollywood actor Lauren Bacall died in her home at the age of 89 following a stroke.

On this day last year: The death toll from the devastating wildfires in Maui, Hawaii, had now reached 80, officials reported.

Birthdays

George Soros, financier, 94; **Michael Brunson**, political broadcaster, 84; **Mark Knopfler**, singer/guitarist (Dire Straits), 75; **Tanita Tikaram**, singer/songwriter, 55; **Pete Sampras**, tennis

player, 53; **Casey Affleck**, actor, 49; **Djibril Cisse**, former footballer, 43; **Mario Balotelli**, footballer, 34.

PA

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Woodstock revisited: the demise of the hippy dream

Mark Beaumont asks if the legendary music festival was a ‘blueprint for a new society’ or as ‘shambolic, profit-driven and violence-marred’ as the attempt to do it all again in 1999



Suited and booted: two festivalgoers hitch a lift home from Woodstock Music and Arts Fair, in upstate New York, in August 1969 (Getty)

In 1969, with flowers in their hair, the children of Woodstock made love, danced naked and braved the elements with a

communal spirit of peace and protection. In 1999, with baseball caps on backwards, they attacked audio towers, torched kerosene tankers, looted, rioted and raped.

Whatever happened to the teenage dream? How had the Aquarian utopia of the "three days of peace and music" on a dairy farm in New York 55 years ago this week become, 30 years later at the notorious Woodstock '99 event, a *Lord of the Flies* nightmare?

The immediate conditions behind both events are well documented. The 460,000 hippies who tore down the fences on Max Yasgur's farm at Woodstock '69 and instigated a state of emergency across Sullivan County endured a weekend of rain, mud and food shortages, all liable to induce a group survival instinct. They swayed late into the night to bands that went well with a hefty spliff – Grateful Dead; Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young; Creedence Clearwater Revival; Joan Baez – many espousing anti-war, pro-love messages from the stage.

The similar number of attendees at the '99 event, documented in the horrifying 2022 Netflix series *Trainwreck* and dubbed "Profitstock" by those who were there, faced more rage-inducing conditions. Forty-degree heat on an asphalt air force base with little shade. Vendors scalping them for overpriced food and water. Scarce free water supplies contaminated with human waste. And a line-up dominated by aggressive nu-metal and rock acts like Korn, Kid Rock and Limp Bizkit, some literally playing songs called "Fist of Rage" and "Break Stuff".



Going on down to Yasgur's farm: festivalgoers in 1969 (AP)

But with both events equally chaotic and challenging, there's clearly far more to a countercultural volte-face as drastic as Russell Brand's shift in political outlook. What was it that made rebellion in 1969 all about free love and harmony and, in 1999, about blood, lust and destruction?

Much has to do with the growing pains of youth culture itself. In the Sixties, after generations of societal oppression and rigid life expectations, young people were finding their voice through the hippie movement, reacting against a Cold War parental generation that had brought them to the brink of nuclear annihilation with the Cuban missile crisis and engulfed America in the immoral and unnecessary Vietnam war.

"The prevailing mode when you have this highly educated, highly mobile, relatively affluent, very creative younger generation is: 'why should we look up to you? You've done everything wrong, you've messed it up'," says Cambridge University cultural historian James Riley, author of *The Bad Trip: Dark Omens, New Worlds and the End of the Sixties*.

"Youth found American government, institutions, and the dominant culture incredibly disturbing," says Damon Bach, a history lecturer at Texas A&M University and author of *The American Counterculture: A History of Hippies and Cultural Dissidents*. "They revolted against the affluent society, suburbia,

repressive sexual culture, and traditional careers and life paths. They sought authenticity and meaningful work, explored Eastern mysticism, and championed sexual liberation and communal living."

> **Youth found American government, institutions, and the dominant culture incredibly disturbing**
>
> *Damon Bach, historian and author*

Turned off by the conformity of the picket-fence American dream and the 9 to 5 rat race, the burgeoning counterculture movements springing up in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury and elsewhere sought out alternative ways of living – communes, travelling communities and festivals. "Festivals gain pace over the course of the Sixties as momentary, almost temporary experimentations in those alternative ways of being and existing," says Riley. Hence Woodstock was the counterculture's ultimate existential test, against the harshest of conditions.

And it passed. As the mud rose and supplies ran dry, food was shared and the vendors of the market area Bindy Bazaar began operating a cashless barter system. Riley believes that Michael Wadleigh's semi-idyllic 1970 Woodstock documentary has rose-tinted our perception of what was also a shambolic, profit-driven and violence-marred event, but sees the hippy ideals in action there.

"Despite the fact that it was quite shambolic, you had small, autonomous temporary communities building up around the swimming areas." Bach agrees. "Woodstock, for many hippies,

represented the supreme moment in counterculture history," he says. "For three days, hippies immersed themselves in their ideal micro-society … The most ardent hippies viewed Woodstock as a blueprint for a new society."

For a while, the establishment, at least outwardly, wasn't opposed to wearing the odd bit of sky in its hair. "The Sixties represents a small pocket of left-wing-slash-democratic progressivism, certainly in America, sandwiched between periods of Republican right-wing authority," says Riley, pointing to a top-down relaxation of laws on censorship, abortion and homosexuality in the UK and the US over the decade. "One has to see the period as a synergy between relatively enlightened policymakers and the receptive youth culture who are ready to go with that."



Communal living: friends enjoy a picnic by their car at the first Woodstock festival (Getty)

But with the Manson murders fresh and Nixon already in the White House, the Sixties spirit was soon broken. "[Nixon's] administration is defined by its rollback of a lot of that progressivism," Riley says, and a young, unified and idealistic movement would soon become disaffected, splintered, atomised and redirected. By the second iteration of Woodstock at Winston Farm in Saugerties in 1994, countercultural coherence had been diluted through prog, heavy metal, punk, goth,

hardcore, indie rock and grunge, forming an array of divided tribes where once there was a more powerful, politicised force to be reckoned with.

“When you think about the Nineties, it’s very difficult to point to the alternative culture,” says Riley. “There’s a lot of almost siloed interests. We’re metallers over here, we’re moshers over there, we’re goths here, we don’t talk to the other people. We don’t like boy bands, we don’t like dance music, very entrenched cultures.”

Festivals and large stadium shows had also become commonplace rather than generation-defining and a sense of consumerist familiarity bordering on cynicism was creeping into the MTV age. Hence, for all Woodstock ’94’s throwbacks to the original festival – torrential rain, hundreds of thousands of fence-jumpers, chaotic security and organisation, several acts that had performed in ’69 – it felt like a lacklustre attempt to recreate the Summer of Love. A new Woodstock attitude was engendered: acts such as Green Day and Primus were pelted with mud and, during Jackyl’s set early on Friday, singer Jesse James Dupree fired a rifle in the air and chainsawed a burning stool in half.

Woodstock, for many hippies, represented the supreme moment in counterculture history

Damon Bach

The true Woodstock spirit, Riley argues, was very much elsewhere. “There was Lollapalooza, there’s things like Ozfest,”

he says. “There’s also things like Burning Man festival gaining pace, and the residual 1960s link-up counterculture, that’s where it’s going. That impetus doesn’t really need a Woodstock because it’s finding it elsewhere.”

Meanwhile, the alternative, as it was now known, had been washed through Reagan’s neoliberal rush towards me-me-me capitalism and largely consumed by the same major label corporations that were pushing Billy Ray Cyrus and The Backstreet Boys. “You’re giving your money to the same masters and there’s a lot of almost cognitive dissonance on the part of a lot of groups at the time,” says Riley.

“Nirvana obviously had this, Pearl Jam were wrestling with this, Smashing Pumpkins were wrestling with this – what does that actually mean for their status and is the result of it that they’re just going through a series of poses? If you wanted to analyse what you see at the extent of the [1969 and 1999] Woodstock festivals, it’s people not really knowing what to do and how to behave as a countercultural enclave. You could also just see it as terrible behaviour by entitled people.”

The relative political calm of the era played its part too. “They’re at play at the end of history,” Riley says. “[The Nineties are] this 10 years between the fall of the Berlin Wall and 9/11. I think Douglas Copeland talks about it as this passive, relaxation decade. You’ve got a big signal that a potentially very dangerous conflict has been averted and capitalism has won and that’s fine. And then we’re not yet into the much more dangerous and unknown territory of the 21st century. It’s a moment of respite. What also comes with that is a question about what does rebellion mean?”



‘Woodstock ’99 feels like a different festival. It’s effectively nu metal with a couple of other chart toppers’ (Getty)

Rebellion, it turned out, meant self-gratifying chaos. Woodstock ’99 became a 500,000-capacity tinderbox of music fans who felt they deserved their own generational moment of hedonistic abandon and, when they got an exploitative cash-in instead, responded with primal barbarism. It didn’t help that organiser Michael Lang and his team chose to lash the festival’s permissive ideology to the most aggressive edge of alternative culture.

“Woodstock ’94 feels much more like an attempt to create some kind of dialogue with Woodstock ’69,” Riley says. “There’s some of the same performers there, there’s some of the same styles. Woodstock ’99 feels like a completely different festival. It’s effectively nu metal with a couple of other chart toppers popped in. Nirvana used to moan about people in Guns N’ Roses T-shirts turning up to the concerts, jocks and stuff turning up to the concerts, like they had any way to actually police that. But when you get to Woodstock ’99, that’s almost a large-scale elaboration of that.”

It seems unthinkable that Lang went on to plan a 50th anniversary Woodstock in 2019 with The Killers, Jay-Z and Miley Cyrus on the bill, an event that was eventually cancelled following permit issues, funding drop-outs, venue downsizing and artist withdrawals. The Woodstock name, after all, had already been resoundingly trashed. A shame, too, at a time when

our Woodstock ’99 sort of world badly needs a Woodstock ’69 sort of ethos.

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Hat-trick hero! Finucane makes history with bronze



Track cyclist Emma Finucane with her third medal of the Games yesterday (Getty)

JAMIE BRAIDWOOD
AT SAINT-QUENTIN-EN-YVELINES

When Chris Hoy and Laura Kenny picked out a British cyclist to watch ahead of the Olympics in Paris, it was worth sitting up and taking notice. After seven brutal days at the Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines National Velodrome and with the pressure of being

Team GB's next great hope, Emma Finucane did not just meet those expectations but surpass them. At her first Olympics, the 21-year-old from Wales became the first British woman in 60 years to win three medals at a single Games.

A final bronze in the women's sprint was added to gold alongside Katy Marchant and Sophie Capewell in the team sprint earlier this week, as well as another bronze in the keirin. It is a haul that even the greats of British cycling – Laura Kenny, Victoria Pendleton, Elinor Barker and fellow Welsh rider Becky James among them – did not manage, or indeed out of everyone else in Team GB's contingent in Paris. Finucane's bronze in the individual sprint made her the most successful British athlete of these Olympics.

There was a hint of disappointment at missing out on a second gold. The reason Finucane was so highly tipped ahead of Paris was because of how she stormed to victory in the women's sprint at the world championships in Glasgow last year. But the Olympics are exhausting and after seven days of consecutive action in the stuffy heat of the Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines velodrome, she was beaten in the semi-finals by the eventual champion, New Zealand's Ellesse Andrews.



You did it! Finucane with family and friends (Getty)

Finucane responded well to ensure she claimed bronze in the small final yesterday, comfortably beating Hetty van de Wouw across both races after outmanoeuvring her Dutch opponent.

“It’s like a dream,” she said. “Obviously, I would have loved to win that gold medal. But a gold and two bronze is more than I could have dreamed of. I wish I had a book for someone to tell me how to get through an Olympic week. I’ve cried, I’ve had happy tears, I’ve been exhausted. To get up every day and keep fighting. I’m just really proud of myself.”

Finucane won gold in the team sprint alongside Marchant and Capewell earlier this week, smashing the world record in the race against New Zealand to win Britain’s first Olympic women’s sprint title. The manner of individual competition across both the keirin and sprint meant there were endless rounds of qualifiers and heats, victories as well as defeats.

“I’ve learned that emotions aren’t a negative and they mean they’re not weak,” she said. “I’ve cried a lot this week, and it just shows that I’m strong enough to get it out and reset. For me to be able to cry and then get on the track and reset and go again I think that’s really important, to speak to people and let it out. It’s a long week, I’ve been for seven days now, and my mind’s been on a mad one. I’ve just learned a lot about myself that I’ll take forward for the coming years.”

To target medals in three events was ambitious and led to an inner battle within the mind. But it resulted in history: the first British woman to complete a hat-trick since Mary Rand won a gold, silver and a bronze at the Tokyo Olympics in 1964. “My mind was telling me things like, ‘You can’t do it’,” she said. “I’ve dealt with the [outside] pressure pretty good this week. It was more me, like my internal pressure and how I wanted to deliver. My legs were screaming at me, telling me to stop. It’s been many emotions. But I kept on going.”

Jack Carlin had the chance to join Finucane on three medals but crashed out in the men’s keirin final. Carlin was battling to make it into the medal positions but was caught as Japanese rider Shinji Nakano and Malaysia’s Muhammad Sahrom collided and went down in front of him. It was a painful fall, but Carlin did not require the stretcher than had been prepared for him, and the 27-year-old departs having won silver in the men’s sprint and bronze in the men’s team sprint.

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Penalty taker and stopper is still City's number one guy



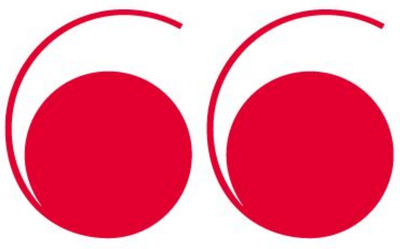
Ederson, here with Savinho, saved and scored a spot-kick against United to help Manchester City win the Community Shield on Saturday (The FA/Getty)

RICHARD JOLLY
SENIOR FOOTBALL CORRESPONDENT

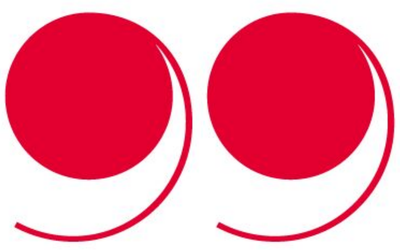
Manchester City have amassed a squad brimming with technique and talent. They have players who caress a ball as much as strike one. They have those who are defined by the precision of their passing. They have a man who may prove the greatest goalscorer of his generation.

And so their outstanding spot-kick taker is… the goalkeeper? "He is our best penalty taker," said Pep Guardiola. "Along with Erling Haaland and Kevin de Bruyne." Manuel Akanji narrowed it down further. "Ederson is probably the best penalty taker in our team, Erling as well," the defender said, "When Ederson takes the penalty, I know it is a goal." Oscar Bobb felt he was in the top one. "I think so," said the winger. "I haven't seen Ederson miss so probably, yeah."

The Community Shield amounted to a triumph of a reluctant remainer. Ederson could have been found in Riyadh or Jeddah rather than Wembley now. Playing for City pays well; playing in Saudi Arabia is still more lucrative. A bid from Al-Nassr was rejected. Al-Ittihad were interested and Ederson too, in swapping the Mancunian rain for the desert of the Middle East, but neither club met City's asking price and both of his Saudi suitors have since signed other goalkeepers. Now the assumption is that Ederson stays. The start of a new season could have marked City's first game after the Brazilian; instead, it may be another trophy that Guardiola attributes to his footballing goalkeeper.



Guardiola's emphasis on a passing goalkeeper means Ederson, a left-back at points in his youth, doubles up as the 11th outfield player



Not the most celebrated: that is the Champions League where Ederson's late saves from Robin Gosens and Romelu Lukaku can be overlooked amid the impressions of inevitability about City's

triumph. Not by Guardiola. There are times when it seems that being City's goalkeeper is the most lucrative of part-time jobs, given that they can spend much of a match as a spectator. Guardiola may disagree with that: his emphasis on a passing goalkeeper means Ederson, a left-back at points in his youth, doubles up as the 11th outfield player.

It rendered him a trailblazer in the Premier League, a catalyst in the shift of style under Guardiola. "You cannot understand this process that we have lived for many years without Ederson: his charisma, his consistency," the Catalan said on Friday.

An element has been added: his calm spot kicks. At Wembley, for the second time in four months, Guardiola put Ederson on the pressure penalty: the fifth. He scored against Real Madrid, even though City exited the Champions League anyway. He scored against Manchester United, though it took a further three penalties apiece for Akanji to ensure victory after Jonny Evans had ballooned his effort.

The turning point, however, belonged to more typical skills for a goalkeeper: a raised right arm tipping Jadon Sancho's penalty on to the post when Bernardo Silva's early miss had afforded United the initiative. Penalties – the goalkeeping part of them, anyway – has not always been Ederson's field of expertise. In matches, he has saved six and conceded 51. In the Real Madrid shootout, however, he saved from Luka Modric. If he only stopped one of seven on target from United, they missed two of eight in total. That proved enough.



Ederson saves Jadon Sancho's penalty (Action/Reuters)

And, Ederson may note, for the second time in two trips to Wembley, a City goalkeeper had a decisive impact in deciding the destination of a trophy. Stefan Ortega was partly culpable – though Josko Gvardiol more at fault – for Alejandro Garnacho's goal in the FA Cup final.

His understudy had acquired the reputation as the best second choice in the business; one with aspirations to be more than that. Meanwhile, the criticism is that Ederson saves too few shots: his save percentage dipped to 62 in the 2022-23 Premier League, the fifth lowest among 23 regular goalkeepers. But while it was up at 70 last year, when Stefan Ortega made the potentially title-winning stop from Heung-Min Son at Tottenham in the penultimate match, there was a temptation to wonder if Ederson would have proved their rescuer in such a fashion. City themselves know Ortega is their best goalkeeper in one-on-one situations. When the German signed a new contract in the summer, it added to the impression that Ederson may leave.

When Ederson looked shaky in pre-season, it may have created more competition. Guardiola invariably gives the reserve goalkeeper the FA Cup – damagingly when Zack Steffen was Ederson's deputy – and Ortega had been granted last season's Community Shield, too. Indeed, Ederson had only played in one previous Community Shield in seven seasons at City.

But there was a decisive answer from Guardiola on Friday when asked who would start: Ederson. And while the City manager ascribes less importance to the Community Shield than any other trophy – it helps when you have won so many more prestigious prizes – it had the feel of a statement, a vote of confidence. Even if it was only an attempt to allow Ederson to find form and confidence after pre-season, it worked. And while penalties were an issue at City for years, with a host of misses in matches, perhaps Guardiola has found his man for the fifth spot kick in any shootout. And rather than a long walk up from the centre circle, he only has a few yards to travel after facing one.

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Campbell clinches bronze with record-breaking lift



Emily Campbell came third in the highly competitive +81kg weightlifting category (AP)

TOM HARLE
AT SOUTH PARIS ARENA

Having blazed a trail to two Olympic medals, Emily Campbell hopes that her days as a lone figurehead for weightlifting are numbered.

Campbell self-funded her way to silver at Tokyo 2020 and thanks to that historic podium finish, the sport now enjoys National

Lottery backing with a group of seven athletes featuring on UK Sport's World Class Programme. That allows them to train full time, have access to the world's best coaches and benefit from pioneering medical support.

The 30-year-old was the sole Team GB lifter to qualify for Paris, winning bronze. Crucially, she believes the conditions are now in place for that not to be the case at LA 2028 and beyond and will do everything in her power to ensure it doesn't.

"It would be lovely to have some friends here with me," said Campbell, "We've got some really good juniors coming up, they're working really hard and hopefully they can see me on the podium and be like, 'you know what, she's gone and done it again, we can do this.'"

Campbell has a high opinion of 26-year-old Fraer Morrow, who is the British record holder at 55kg. Morrow pulled out of the Paris Olympic qualification process in March due to back issues.

"I'm going to be around the University of Nottingham, which is our base, trying to help and mentor some of the girls and some of the guys, to motivate them to realise they can do this on the international stage. We can play."



Hyejeong Park, left, Wenwen Li, centre, and Emily Campbell (PA)

Weightlifting at Olympic level is a game of chess played with the weight of the world on your shoulders.

Campbell was as assured in the snatch stage as she could have wished for, adding 2kg to the British record she set in winning gold at the 2022 Commonwealth Games in Birmingham. She lifted 126kg with such ease and emphasis that it felt as if she could have been more ambitious and looked to get closer to South Korea's Park Hyejeong in silver medal position.

Park, who has burst onto the scene since Tokyo and won the 2023 world title, proved impossible to catch but the Brit extended her 3kg buffer in bronze medal position to 5kg with a 162kg lift in the clean and jerk, although attempts at 169kg and 174kg were well beyond her.

"My snatches just felt insane, they've not felt that good in a very long time," she said. "They were going exactly where they needed to go.

"You have to try these big weights, it's the Olympic Games and the only way I was going to move up was to put that on the bar. You have to go for these things."

Gold went to China's Li Wenwen, who blew away the competition, winning with an overall total of 309kg, with Park taking silver on 299kg and Campbell bronze in a personal best of 288kg.

"The field was tough," said Campbell, "the level compared to Tokyo was so much higher. I know I had to bring out the big guns and I'm just so happy.

"I was the sole GB representation this time so I had to bring back something special, and my Tokyo medal has got a friend now!"



A British record snatch lift of 126kg made sure Campbell left the Olympics with a bronze medal. (PA)

Having stolen the show with her red and blue bobs in Tokyo, Campbell sported an extravagant hairstyle made up of the Olympic rings, devised with celebrity stylist Lisa Farrall.

Campbell is the first British weightlifter since Louis Martin in 1964 to win multiple medals at the Olympics.

Her silver in Tokyo was Team GB's first in a women's event and was won in the absence of friends and family, who were out in force in the French capital.

"When I started weightlifting, we always set out that I would go for the Olympics in Paris and try to win a medal," said Campbell.

"Tokyo was a bonus along the way. This is special, we've achieved the goal we set out to do and I can't really complain."

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Sport

Sports news in brief



Sifa Hassan wins the women's marathon in Paris yesterday in record time (AFP)

Final medals handed out in French capital

The US women's basketball team held off France yesterday to win gold in the final event of the Paris Olympics, and that hardware was needed for the Americans to tie China for the most with 40. The US won the total medal count with 126. Aside from the 40 gold, the Americans won 42 silver and 44 bronze.

In the women's marathon, Sifan Hassan traded elbows with Tigst Assefa with 150 metres left in the race, then passed her along the railing to win the race for her third distance medal of the Paris Games yesterday. Hassan, an Ethiopian-born racer who

runs for the Netherlands, finished in an Olympic record time of 2 hours, 22 minutes, 55 seconds. Assefa won silver for Ethiopia, three seconds behind, and Kenya's Hellen Obiri took the bronze.

In the medal table, China came in second in the total medal race with 91. China won 40 gold, 27 silver and 24 bronze. Japan was a distant third with 20 gold medals, 45 overall. Great Britain won 65 medals, but only 14 were gold for an overall ranking of seventh.

The British Olympic Association says Team GB's medal haul at Paris 2024 should be celebrated, despite Britain finishing in its lowest position in the table for 20 years.

Andy Anson said: "It's hard to feel like that when we've won 65 medals. It's frustrating to be seventh in the medal table, but we've got to celebrate first the number of fantastic moments, the way athletes have won their medals. It's about this continual fine tuning figuring out what can be done better to move forward." The medal rankings are done by gold, and the last time the US didn't top the standings was at the Beijing Olympics in 2008, when the Americans finished second to China, 48-36.

Olympic gymnast forced to return bronze medal

US gymnast Jordan Chiles must return the bronze medal she won in the floor exercise at the Olympics after a court ruling decided her score had been improperly judged. The Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) voided an appeal made by Team USA coach Cecile Landi during the competition that saw Chiles's score increase by 0.1 and move her from fifth to third, securing a bronze medal. The CAS ruling on Saturday said the on-floor appeal by Landi came outside the one-minute window allowed by the International Gymnastics Federation (FIG). The committee wrote that the inquiry came one minute and four seconds after the score was posted, meaning it did not meet the criteria for an appeal.

The CAS ruled that the initial finishing order should be restored, with Romania's Ana Barbosu and Sabrina Maneca-Voinea in third and fourth respectively and Chiles back down to fifth. They left the final ranking decision to the FIG who determined it was up to the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to decide on potentially reallocating the bronze medal. The IOC yesterday confirmed the decision to strip Chiles of the medal and give it to Barbosu. Chiles took to Instagram on Saturday following the CAS ruling, saying she is "taking this time and removing myself from social media for my mental health, thank you".

Chelsea pay £54m for Wolves winger

Chelsea have completed a £54m deal for Wolverhampton Wanderers winger Pedro Neto. The 24-year-old Portuguese has signed a seven-year deal with the London side and completed a medical before being announced as the latest member of Chelsea's mammoth squad. The deal, which was agreed after the Blues had two previous bids rejected, is believed to be worth an initial £51.3m with £2.6m in add-ons.

Neto made 135 appearances and scored 14 goals for Wolves since joining the midlands club from Lazio in 2019. "I feel really grateful to have joined this club," Neto said. "I have worked really hard in my career to be here and I'm looking forward to getting on the pitch with this shirt." The move is now Wolves' record sale, replacing Ruben Neves's transfer to Saudi Arabia's Al-Hilal for £47m last summer.

He becomes the 10th player signed by Chelsea this summer following the arrivals of midfielders Kiernan Dewsbury-Hall, Renato Veiga and Omari Kellyman, goalkeeper Filip Jorgensen, defenders Tosin Adarabioyo, Aaron Anselmino and Caleb Wiley, winger Estevao Willian and striker Marc Guiu. Premier League squad lists can have a maximum of 25 players following the end of each transfer window and Chelsea's first-team squad is now coming close to 50.

Stokes carried off with hamstring injury

England captain Ben Stokes suffered an injury while playing in The Hundred for the Northern Superchargers and required assistance to be carried off the field yesterday. Stokes is now a major doubt for the first Test in the three-match series against Sri Lanka, which starts on 21 August.

Stokes, while playing at the same ground against the Manchester Originals, sustained the injury after taking a quick single while batting from the non-striker's end. The all-rounder then grabbed the back of his left leg in pain, appearing to suffer a hamstring injury. The 33-year-old looked devastated and could be seen punching his right thigh in frustration. It meant Stokes retired hurt, having made just two runs from four balls as the Superchargers chased 153 for victory over the Originals. The Manchester Originals made 152-7 (100 balls) while the Northern Superchargers hit 156-3 (97 balls), winning by seven wickets.

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