



**RECUEIL de TEXTES  
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## A DIFFICULT TRANSITION FOR THE WORKFORCE

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As advancing technology shapes our future, the workforce will increasingly be divided into winners and losers. The losers will be those who focus largely on routine, predictable tasks, regardless of whether these activities are physical or intellectual in nature, and often independent of educational level. The winners are likely to fall into one of three general groups. First, skilled trade workers, such as plumbers and electricians, who do work that requires dexterity, mobility and problem-solving ability in highly unpredictable settings. The same is true for a care worker who assists an elderly person with his or her daily needs. This type of work is far beyond the capability of any existing robot and these jobs will remain safe for the foreseeable future. Second, those workers whose occupations require the development of deep, sophisticated relationships with other people will be relatively safe. This might include nursing, or business or educational occupations that require complex human interactions. While AI is making progress in this arena, it is likely to be a long time before machines can form truly meaningful relationships with humans. The final category includes intellectual work that is creative or activities that are non-routine and unpredictable in nature. For these workers, artificial intelligence will be likely to amplify, rather than replace, their efforts.

Within many professions, a winner-take-all scenario might unfold; the most creative individuals will rise to the top, while those focused on more routine activities will face a growing threat from automation. The best advice for individuals is to transition from routine, predictable work and towards one of these winning categories. There are real questions, however, about the viability of this advice when applied to society as a whole.

Historically, advancing technology has tended to drive most workers from routine work in one sector to routine work in another. As agriculture became mechanised, workers moved from farms to factories, but they continued to do routine work. Later, workers moved to routine jobs in the service sector. The rise of artificial intelligence will require an unprecedented transition in which a large fraction of the workforce will have to find and adapt to roles that are genuinely non-routine. Many workers will probably lack the inherent talents and personality traits required to take on creative or relationship-based roles.

Designing a society that can adapt to the rise of artificial intelligence and allow everyone to thrive as these changes unfold will be one of our most significant challenges in the coming years. It will require an emphasis on retraining and education for those workers who can realistically undertake the necessary transition, as well as an improved safety net for those who will inevitably be left behind.

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Adapted from *The Observer*  
October 2021  
(451 words)

## A MUSEUM LENT AN ARTIST \$84K – SO HE KEPT THE MONEY AND CALLED IT 'ART'

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When an exhibition about the future of labor opened at a Danish art museum on Friday, visitors should have seen two large picture frames filled with banknotes worth a combined \$84,000. The pieces by artist Jens Haaning, were meant to represent the average annual salaries of an Austrian and a Dane – in euros and Danish krone respectively. But when the Kunsten Museum of Modern Art took delivery of the artworks, gallery staff made a surprising discovery: the frames were empty. Indeed, Haaning says he is keeping the money – in the name of art.

The "new" conceptual piece, which Haaning has titled "Take the Money and Run," is now at the center of a dispute between museum and artist over labor, contractual obligations and the value of work – all fitting themes for the exhibition. Haaning says: "I saw, from my artistic point of view, that I could create a better piece for them than what they could imagine. I don't see that I have stolen money... I have created an art piece, which is maybe 10 or 100 times better than what we had planned. What is the problem?"

As well as lending Haaning the money for the cash-filled artworks, the Kunsten Museum had agreed to pay a further \$1,571 for his work, as well as covering costs like framing and delivery. But the artist said the project would still have left him out of pocket, due to studio costs and staff salaries.

Kunsten's director, Lasse Andersson, maintained that the museum has upheld its side of the agreement. "It's really important for us because we have always been known for honoring contracts and also paying artists a reasonable fee," he said. Haaning said he has no plans to return the money and is "not worried" about possible consequences. Andersson said the artist has until January, when the exhibition ends, to repay the loan, after which the museum will consider legal action.

For now, the museum is displaying "Take the Money and Run" as it is, putting it on a platform to be considered and critiqued. In the art world, works that question the value of art itself – like Maurizio Cattelan taping a banana to a wall, or Banksy shredding a painting at auction – are nothing new. Neither are invisible works of art, with the late Yves Klein exhibiting an empty room to thousands of people in 1958.

Still, the museum director would like to see the cash returned. "It's not my money – it's public money, it's the museum's money," he said. "So that's why we need to make sure it's coming back to us."

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Adapted from CNN  
September 2021  
(454 words)

## AMAZON BIRDS SHRINK BUT GROW LONGER WINGS IN SIGN OF GLOBAL HEATING

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Several recent papers have reported birds getting smaller, but as their subjects were migratory birds there were many confounding factors that could have explained the results, such as hunting, pesticide use or habitat loss. The new study was conducted on non-migratory birds in pristine rainforest [...] but the results were the same: the birds are getting smaller, and the warmer climate is the only known variable.

The research took place in the Brazilian Amazon. Since the 1970s scientists have been using the remote area as a control location so they can study the effects of deforestation and development on the ecosystem.

Generations of scientists have been capturing and examining birds in the area with an unvarying methodology: they catch them in mist nets, weigh them and measure their wings. Now scientists analysing data on 77 bird species over the past 40 years say nearly every non-migratory species found there has become smaller. One-third of them also bear longer wings.

The researchers believe global heating is behind the morphological shift. Since the 1970s, the region has warmed 1.65°C in the dry season and 1.0°C in the wet season. In addition, the wet season has become wetter and the dry season has become drier.

Last year, the lead author of the new study published a paper reporting falling populations in nine of 79 non-migratory bird species. Climate was the only factor that has changed there, as far as anyone knows, and they concluded it must be the cause.

Most of the birds in the new paper spend their lives within a radius of a few kilometres, but the researchers found some species had shrunk by nearly 10% over 40 years of measurements. The Integral Ecology Research Center in California said changing temperature or precipitation – or both – must play a role in the findings.

How could climate change alter avian physique? One plausible explanation the researchers invoke is a 150-year-old principle which states that closely related organisms are smaller the closer they are to living at the equator, thought to be because larger bodies retain warmth better. The same process could be at work in the Amazon: increased temperatures, which one might normally expect to find closer to the equator, are causing smaller bodies.

The scientists say the increase in wing length is more puzzling but suggest birds may now need to fly further. They were unsure whether the changes were caused by evolutionary pressures – individuals with advantageous characteristics breeding more successfully – or whether the birds were changing shape as they aged to adapt to the changed environment. [...] Perhaps, with longer wings, now-sedentary species might begin migrating to more suitable habitats.

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Adapted from *The Guardian*  
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(448 words)

## ANTI-OBESITY SCHEME TO OFFER VOUCHER REWARDS FOR HEALTHY LIVING

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Ministers will offer rewards such as clothes vouchers and discounted theme park tickets in return for exercising and eating healthily, under plans to tackle Britain's obesity crisis.

The anti-obesity scheme, which uses an app to help people make changes to their diet and physical activity, will launch next year, initially in a pilot scheme, the government has announced. Participants will wear Fitbit-style devices that can generate personalised health recommendations, such as increasing their step count, eating more fruit and vegetables and reducing portion size. Those increasing their exercise by taking part in organised events such as parkruns or walking to school or work may accumulate extra points in the app.

Under plans being discussed before the scheme's planned launch in January, the app could also be used to monitor supermarket spending, rewarding those who cut their calorie intake and buy healthier options.

Participants will collect points for their healthy behaviours, which will unlock rewards that could include gym passes, clothes or food vouchers and discounts for shops, cinema or theme park tickets. After a competitive tender process, *HeadUp* has been chosen to deliver the scheme, with £3m coming from the Department of Health and Social Care to provide incentives in the pilot.

Evidence suggests financial incentives can improve rates of physical activity and inspire healthier eating. *HeadUp* will work with a range of organisations to provide rewards such as vouchers, merchandise, discounts and gift cards.

Sajid Javid, the health secretary, said: "I want to ensure we're doing as much as we can to tackle health disparities across the country, and this new pilot will pave the way for developing innovative ways to improve the lives of individuals, and also help to reduce strain on the NHS".

The UK has one of the worst records for obesity in western Europe, with two in three adults overweight or obese, and one in three children reaching this stage by the time they leave primary school. Obesity-related illnesses cost the NHS £6bn a year and fuelled death rates from Covid.

Sir Keith Mills, the entrepreneur behind Air Miles and Nectar points, was brought in by ministers to advise on the development of the app. Mills said: "This scheme is a fantastic opportunity to explore how government, business and the third sector can work together to deliver a new and engaging way of supporting the public to make healthier choices. Through the pilot we will have exciting and innovative partners on board will help motivate people to want to earn incentives, but also should help them overcome barriers to making healthy decisions in future".

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Adapted from *The Guardian*  
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(442 words)

## APPEALS COURT EXTENDS BLOCK ON BIDEN'S EMPLOYER VACCINE MANDATE

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The New Orleans Appeals court has blocked a federal mandate that all large employers require their workers to get vaccinated against the coronavirus or submit to weekly testing starting in January 2022. The three judges in the Appeals court are led by Republican Judge Kurt D. Engelhardt who was appointed by Donald Trump in 2018. He argued that the federal mandate was an unlawful overreach that exceeded the authority of Congress.

Judge Kurt D. Engelhardt said that “the principles at stake when it comes to the mandate are not reducible to dollars and cents. The public interest is also served by maintaining the liberty of individuals to make intensely personal decisions according to their own convictions.” For him framing the mandate as a workplace safety effort was just a pretext for the Biden administration’s real motivation which was indeed to put pressure on Americans who have so far been reluctant to get vaccinated.

The Justice Department argued that requiring large employers to force their workers to get vaccinated or submit to weekly testing was well within the authority granted by Congress to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. It also said keeping the mandate from coming into effect “would likely cost dozens or even hundreds of lives per day, in addition to large numbers of hospitalizations, other serious health effects and tremendous costs. That is a confluence of harms of the highest order.”

President Biden had announced in September that the mandate was one of several steps to try to increase immunization rates and end the pandemic, which so far has killed about 750,000 Americans.

The mandate concerns companies with at least 100 employees. It would force them to require unvaccinated employees to wear masks indoors starting Dec. 5. Employees who remain unvaccinated by Jan. 4 would have to undergo weekly testing at work.

The proposed rule makes an exception for employees who do not come into close contact with other people at their jobs, such as those who work at home or exclusively outdoors.

But among other things, the New Orleans Appeal court argued that the administration has no power to regulate protections against exposure to disease, as opposed to workplace hazards like asbestos, and that framing the mandate as a workplace safety effort was just a pretext for the Biden administration’s real motivation: pressuring Americans who have been reluctant to get vaccinated.

Some large employers have already decided on their own to impose vaccine mandates on their workforces, including 3M, Procter & Gamble, IBM, Tyson Foods. Most workers have complied, though a small number have quit.

The ruling by the New Orleans Appeals court is unlikely to be the final word.

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(460 words)

## ARTIST TINO SEHGAL: 'HUMAN INTERACTION HAS BECOME MUCH MORE PALPABLE'

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Tino Sehgal's work is designed to leave no footprint. The London-born German-Indian artist wants nothing of those moments left behind. He is the Instagrammer's nightmare.

He has created some of the most affecting exhibitions of the past decades. For *The Progress*, he filled the spiral of the Guggenheim gallery in New York with "interpreters"; children to octogenarians, who, following a set of rules, engaged visitors in suddenly intimate conversation. In 2012, at Tate Modern's Turbine Hall, he populated the vast space with a choreographed shoal of 70 local storytellers, who buttonholed visitors to impart secrets. Many people stayed for hours, as if at the party they had always dreamed of. As an artist of conversation, of surprising human engagement, Sehgal, 45, feels like the perfect post-lockdown choice for the annual summer exhibition at the stately gardens of Blenheim Palace.

He is assembling his show with a troupe of locally recruited "participants", people selected on the basis that they seem "measured and profound, and enjoy singing".

Sehgal suggests he was attracted to do this project by the promise of a new, large audience of country house day-trippers. As an "experimental" artist, he says, the danger is always ending up "in a kunsthalle in Scandinavia and have 60 people visit per day. At some point, you are like: 'What am I doing here?'"

He hopes that the work will have something to say about the ways in which we re-emerge into more social worlds. "The materiality of human interaction," he suggests, "is something palpable, much more palpable after the lockdowns. I remember my first in-person meetings and I'm like, 'What is this?', I can almost feel the kind of energetic exchange between souls that was happening when you actually meet somebody. I thought it reaffirmed what I'm doing."

He talks about the interactive scenes he creates in terms of algorithms – the rules he establishes that the participants will follow (he refuses any written documentation of those rules; when he sells his work, contracts are only ever verbal agreements of what will be involved). He likens the parameters he creates to the rules of games. "Sports have that kind of balance: very simple rules that allow the whole complexity of life to show itself, like in a tennis match." Sehgal's work *This Variation*, for example, involved 12 performers, singing and dancing in the dark. It took him six years to establish the rules that would "make it a game that people might enjoy playing over time". Because otherwise, it would become too chaotic?

"For example, in football, the offside rule is a balancing rule. Without it, the whole thing would fall out of balance."

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Adapted from *The Guardian*  
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(453 words)

## ASTRONAUT BLOOD, SWEAT, TEARS, URINE AND SPACE DUST COULD BE USED TO BUILD HOMES ON MARS

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Researchers have created a building material that could be made in space from space dust and astronauts' bodily fluids such as blood, sweat, and tears.

If humanity is to ever build a habitat on the surface of the Moon or Mars, a building material that can be created in-situ is vital. This is emphasized by the fact that it would cost \$2 million to transport just one brick to the surface of Mars. The process used to create the substance was dubbed "AstroCrete". This means that potential Mars colonists will likely have to make use of the materials already on the surface of the Red Planet to construct shelter and other vital facilities.

"Scientists have been trying to develop viable technologies to produce concrete-like materials on the surface of Mars, but we never stopped thinking that the answer might be inside us all along," University of Manchester researcher Aled Roberts said in a press release. His team discovered that a common protein found in human blood plasma, known as human serum albumin, has the potential to bind together dust found on Mars.

"We were previously looking at synthetic spider silk as a bio-based glue, and through chance discovered that a protein from blood works even better," Roberts added. "We found the glue worked really well on glass, so we inferred that it should also stick together sand since they are both made of the same stuff, silica. And Mars dust is also primarily comprised of silica."

The scientists found that urea, a waste product that we excrete in urine, sweat, and tears, could be added to AstroCrete to boost its compressibility strength by as much as 300 percent. That means that the best performing AstroCrete the team tested was substantially stronger than the concrete currently used on Earth.

In the study, the researchers calculated that six astronauts on a two-year mission could create around 1,200 pounds of high-strength AstroCrete. "The material could be useful in space since there is no other easy way to make construction materials like bricks or concrete," Roberts declared.

The researcher also said the next steps for the research include investigating synthetic spider silk proteins as a binder instead of human blood.

Whilst AstroCrete is a space-age material, the team says its inspiration can be dated back to medieval times when our ancestors mixed animal blood into building materials.

"It is exciting that a major challenge of the space age may have found its solution based on inspirations from medieval technology," Roberts said in the release. "The concept is literally blood-curdling."

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Adapted from *Newsweek*  
September 2021  
(442 words)

## AUTOCRATS ARE FINDING NEW WAYS TO SQUASH FREE EXPRESSION ONLINE

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On October 8<sup>th</sup> a Russian journalist, Dmitry Muratov won the Nobel peace prize for his “efforts to safeguard freedom of expression”. The Kremlin congratulated Mr Muratov for being “brave”, which he is. Six of his colleagues at Novaya Gazeta, the Russian newspaper he founded in 1993, have been murdered. The Nobel award recognizes a sad truth. Globally, freedom of expression is in retreat. Autocrats often use the sword against the pen (or bullets against bloggers). But these old-fashioned forms of repression are increasingly replaced by newer techniques. Freedom House, a think tank, reports that last year efforts to control speech online escalated in 30 of the countries it monitors.

In China, the Communist Party has overseen the construction of a walled-off information sphere, within which criticism of those in power can barely be seen or heard. Its national firewall blocks access to foreign social media and a host of other sources of information. Armies of human censors scan Chinese websites. In 2009 the government suspended internet access in Xinjiang, a western region, following riots there. Now the internet is up again but police force Uyghurs, an oppressed minority, to install mobile apps that spy on all their online activity. They can be locked up for downloading a foreign product like Skype, or software that lets them visit foreign sites such as Facebook. China also exports software and hardware that help other regimes build a more authoritarian internet. Iran is a happy customer, now blocking popular foreign services such as Twitter and Telegram.

But Russia’s plans for purging the domestic internet of free thought are among the most ambitious. Putin claims the global internet is a tool of the CIA. In 2019 he signed an internet sovereignty law ordering all internet providers to install technology that allows the Kremlin to track, filter and reroute traffic.

Autocrats are using new software to spy on citizens no matter which devices they own or which websites they visit. Freedom House says 45 countries in its sample were found to have used such spyware in the past 12 months; it calls this a “crisis for human rights”. This whizzy technology is increasingly combined with new laws to chill speech. Last year police in at least 55 of the 70 countries monitored by Freedom House investigated, arrested or convicted someone because of posts made on social media.

Leaders of all stripes took fright when, in January, big social-media sites suspended Donald Trump’s account for inciting insurrection. But autocracies will doubtlessly continue to combine high-and low-tech ways of suppressing online speech. Freedom House found that last year people in 41 countries were beaten up or killed because of things they had said on line.

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Adapted from *The Economist*  
October 2021  
(457 words)

## BANKSY'S SELF-DESTRUCTING ARTWORK SELLS AGAIN FOR EYE-WATERING FIGURE

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A work by British street artist Banksy that sensationally self-shredded just after it sold at auction three years ago fetched almost 18.6 million pounds on Thursday — a record for the artist, and close to 20 times its pre-shredded price.

“Love is in the Bin” was offered by Sotheby’s in London, with a presale estimate of 4 million pounds to 6 million pounds. After a 10-minute bidding war involving nine bidders in the saleroom, online and by phone, it sold for three times the high estimate to an undisclosed buyer. The sale price of 18,582,000 pounds includes an auction-house fee known as a buyer’s premium. The piece consists of a half-shredded canvas in an ornate frame bearing a spray-painted image of a girl reaching for a heart-shaped red balloon. When it last sold at Sotheby’s in October 2018, the piece was known as “Girl With Balloon.” Just as an anonymous female European buyer made the winning bid — for 1 million pounds — a hidden shredder embedded in the frame by Banksy whirled to life, leaving half the canvas hanging from the frame in strips.

Sotheby’s received some criticism at the time for failing to spot the hidden shredder. But the 2018 buyer decided to go through with the purchase, a decision that was vindicated on Thursday as the work’s price soared.

The work quickly became one of Banksy’s most famous, and Sotheby’s sent it on tour to cities including New York and Hong Kong before Thursday’s auction.

Auctioneer Oliver Barker joked that he was “terrified” to bring down the hammer to end Thursday’s sale. There were jitters among Sotheby’s staff to the last that Banksy had another surprise planned.

Alex Branczik, Sotheby’s chairman of modern and contemporary art, called the shredding “one of the most ingenious moments of performance art this century.” “It has been a whirlwind to follow the journey of this now legendary piece and to have it back in our midst, offering it tonight in the very room it was created by the artist,” Branczik said. “Banksy is no stranger to making headlines and this latest chapter in his story has captured imaginations across the world — we can only begin to guess what might come next.”

Banksy, who has never confirmed his full identity, began his career spray-painting buildings in Bristol, England, and has become one of the world’s best-known artists.

Several of his works have sold for multiple millions at auction.

“Girl With Balloon” was originally stenciled on a wall in east London and has been endlessly reproduced, becoming one of Banksy’s best-known images.

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Adapted from *The Huffington Post*  
October 2021  
(448 words)

## BARBIE MAKER MATTEL LAUNCHES NEW LINE OF CORONAVIRUS-FIGHTING DOLLS

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British Professor Sarah Gilbert, one of the co-creators of the Oxford/AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine, has been honored with her own Barbie doll as part of a series dedicated to inspirational women fighting the coronavirus pandemic. [...] The creation, Gilbert said, left her feeling “very strange.”

“My wish is that my doll will show children careers they may not be aware of, like a vaccinologist,” Gilbert said, adding she wants future generations to be aware that they, too, could work in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), in which women have historically been underrepresented.

Lisa McKnight, senior vice president and global head of Barbie and Dolls at Mattel, said, “Barbie recognizes that all frontline workers have made tremendous sacrifices when confronting the pandemic and the challenges it heightened,” the Guardian reported.

“To shine a light on their efforts, we are sharing their stories,” she continued, adding that the company hoped the series would “inspire the next generation to take after these heroes.”

Other dolls created as part of the series include Amy O’Sullivan, a nurse who worked in Brooklyn amid the coronavirus pandemic and appeared on the cover of Time magazine’s issue featuring the 100 Most Influential People in 2020. [...]

Canadian doctor and writer Chika Stacy Oriuwa, who is working to eliminate racism in the health-care system [...] was also honored along with Australia’s Kirby White, a doctor who co-created reusable protective gear for those treating covid-19 patients.

According to STEM Women, an organization based in the United Kingdom that provides inclusion and diversity recruitment resources to employers and young people, 35 percent of STEM students are women. [...] The Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine, which Gilbert helped create, is now widely used to protect people around the world from the coronavirus.

Last month, the product celebrated the milestone of distributing 1 billion doses, although Sir Andrew Pollard, a professor and director of the Oxford Vaccine Group, warned that the crisis is not over.

“It was hard work and it still is, but it’s hard work doing something that really matters,” Gilbert said in remarks made earlier this year, adding that a “huge” number of people joined forces to make the job possible in such a short space of time.

In June, Gilbert was recognized with a damehood and led Queen Elizabeth II’s Birthday Honors list, which championed the “extraordinary efforts” of those who helped others throughout the pandemic.

More than 4 million people worldwide have died amid the global health crisis, with the United Kingdom — which has had at least 130,000 deaths — among the countries most affected by Covid-19. [...] In 2019, as part of the company’s “Inspiring Women” series, dolls were made to honor Rosa Parks.

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Adapted from *The Washington Post*  
August 2021  
(460 words)

## BERLIN'S CAR BAN CAMPAIGN

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A citizens' initiative calling for a ban on private car use in central Berlin would create the largest car-free urban area in the world. The campaign group Berlin Autofrei has taken the first step in a process known as the people's referendum, submitting a petition with more than 50,000 signatures calling for a ban covering an 88 square kilometre area. [...]

People who depend on their cars for their trade or because they have impaired mobility would be exempt, as would emergency services. Everyone else would each be permitted up to 12 rented car journeys a year – in case they need to move house, for example.

But is banning cars necessary, and what is wrong with electric vehicles? "We would need about half of cars to go electric next year in order to meet the federal government's own targets for transportation emissions," said Nik Kaestner, from the campaign. "That clearly isn't going to happen – currently only 1.3% of vehicles in Germany are electric. So the only solution is to reduce the amount of driving that's happening, not just to change how we drive."

Mr Kaestner said cars also "occupy far too much common space and unnecessarily endanger human lives, whether electric or diesel".

A 2014 report commissioned by Berlin's regional parliament found that 58% of traffic space was devoted to cars, even though only a third of journeys on Berlin streets were made by car. Only 3% was set aside for bicycles, which accounted for 15% of journeys.

In total, almost 20 times more space was dedicated to cars than to bicycles in one of Europe's most renowned cycle-friendly cities. Three-quarters of road deaths are pedestrians or cyclists.

"It's as much about our immediate environment as it is about the environment at large. It's about how we all want to live, breathe and play together. We want people to be able to sleep with their windows open, and children to be able to play in the street again. And grandparents should be able to ride their bicycles safely and have plenty of benches to take a breather on."

Although historically anti-car campaigns in Europe have tended to have very limited success, Berlin Autofrei may prove different. The campaign is using a special form of direct democracy enshrined in the German constitution. [...] For the moment Berlin Autofrei still has a long way to go. But if there was ever a chance for a radical transformation of road space, then when if not now? And where, if not in Berlin?

The federal environmental ministry did a study recently and 91% of people said they would be happier without a car.

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Adapted from *The Guardian*  
October 2021  
(451 words)

## BILLIONAIRE CAPITALISTS ARE DESIGNING HUMANITY'S FUTURE. DON'T LET THEM.

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Last year a group of cryptocurrency investors purchased a decommissioned cruise liner, the Pacific Dawn, and renamed it the MS Satoshi, after the alleged creator of Bitcoin. The investors were members of the “seasteading” community, an experimental movement that wants to create autonomous, floating city-states in international waters. The Silicon Valley billionaire Peter Thiel, is a major supporter of the movement – which, like space colonization, seems to attract the enthusiasm of a certain kind of fantastically rich tech barons. The MS Satoshi project was a failure as the ship’s owners were unable to get insurance for their voyage into international waters. Yet it highlights one of the most troubling aspects of what could be called the futurism movement: a majority of the compelling and visible ideas about tomorrow are being conceived and developed by a tiny minority of ultra-wealthy individuals and private-sector companies.

It’s not hard to see the seductive appeal of these visions of the future. Beautiful digital renderings invite us into glowing and highly conceptual worlds, such as Elon Musk and SpaceX’s plan to build a glass-domed colony on Mars, or Jeff Bezos’s plan for floating space colonies. On Earth, Richard Branson’s Virgin Hyperloop One has worked with top architects around the world to produce spectacular, inspiring images of a world connected by zero-emissions. Uber, imagining self-flying taxis shuttling riders from roof to roof, unveiled 16 proposals for “skyports” designed by prominent corporate architecture firms. Underground, Musk’s Boring Company promises shorter commute times, while in our homes we are enchanted by the potential of Nest and Alexa. Like any ideology, this privatized futurism affects everything from global infrastructures to kitchen appliances.

These kinds of projects use often fantastic imagery to inspire the public’s imagination. But unlike many of the forward-thinking proposals of the past – produced by a “public” of academics, artists and government agencies – today’s “future” is almost completely invented by private companies owned by tech billionaires. If companies control the image of the future, then they control the future itself, and can control the infrastructure. Ultimately, they will define how society functions. Platforms like Amazon Web Services, Facebook and Robinhood have become massive infrastructures that control large parts of our economy and the public sphere.

Today’s privatized futures take directly from the utopian proposals of that era. Bezos’s space colonization plan, Blue Origin, nearly copies the work of the physicist Gerard O’Neill’s 1975 work for Nasa. However, the politics are much different. SpaceX wants to shuttle settlers to Mars for \$500,000 a ticket, with loans available that could be worked off. We must envision more public-spirited, collective futures – ones in which the market alone isn’t allowed to dictate everything from housing to environmental regulation to mining rights.

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Adapted from *The Guardian*  
February 2021  
(458 words)

## BOOKSHOPS THRIVE AS FRANCE MOVES TO PROTECT SELLERS FROM AMAZON

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At her independent bookshop in southern France, Anne Helman had seen an influx of customers since the coronavirus pandemic who said they would rather buy books in person than online. She said: “Children wanted fantasy books. Adults wanted novels and the classics, particularly stories about viruses and the apocalypse. There has been a newfound enthusiasm for buying locally and supporting independent bookshops.”

The French government is seizing on this increased support for independent bookshops to pursue its war against the domination of big tech firms. In a blow to Amazon, new legislation in France is to set a minimum price for book deliveries, in order to stop what the government calls “distorted competition” from digital giants. The French culture minister begged the nation during one lockdown: “Do not buy books from online platforms!” Now the French parliament is limiting the market advantages of net giants, which it hopes could set a precedent for other European countries seeking to protect small bookstores. The minimum delivery fee should come into force next year.

Passing laws to protect books and the book trade is a rare point of political consensus in France. Emmanuel Macron has declared reading “a national priority”, extending opening hours for libraries. [...]

The move to force net giants to charge the same for delivery as small bookshops is part of the French notion of “cultural exceptionalism”, which has long sought to shield books and independent booksellers from the ravages of free-market forces. In contrast to the UK’s famous three-for-two deals on novels, the French state fixes the prices of books and readers pay the same for a new book whether they buy online, at a high-street giant or a small bookseller. The law allows for a maximum discount on books of only 5%. It has helped preserve France’s 3,500 independent bookshops – more than three times the number in the UK – which account for 12,000 jobs. [...]

The fate of French independent bookstores during the pandemic has greatly influenced the new law. France had three nationwide lockdowns. (...) In the final lockdown this spring, books were deemed essential items and bookshops stayed open, with historically high numbers of customers flocking to buy from them. [...]

Amazon warned that new legislation fixing delivery prices would “weigh on the purchasing power of consumers” and affect readers in small towns and rural areas. French politicians argued that people who bought books online tended to live in big cities and urban areas. (...) Vincent Chabault, a sociologist at the University of Paris, the author of *In Praise of Shops: Against Amazonisation*, said small independent bookshops, which remained fragile, had become “the symbol of resistance against online platforms and Amazon”. [...]

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Adapted from *The Guardian*  
November 2021  
(454 words)

## BOOMERANG BOOMERS: THE OVER-50S MOVING BACK IN WITH THEIR PARENTS

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The Covid pandemic has led to growing numbers of baby boomers in Britain moving back in with their elderly parents, experts have said. The reasons are varied, from the positive – grown-up children ensuring their parents had care and company during lockdowns – to the negative, including financial and relationship breakdowns.

“The pandemic has dramatically changed the way many of us are living,” said Stuart Lewis, the founder of Rest Less, a digital community for people aged 50 and over. “A number of our members have moved back in with their parents during the pandemic.”

For many, the return home has been a positive experience. Emma Egan, a 56-year-old teacher from New Malden, said moving in with her parents after her marriage broke up was a “blessing”.

“We spent many great times together during lockdown,” she said. “I now live at home purely because I really enjoy living with them. When I do move out, I will miss them terribly. They are my friends as well as my parents, and they are the coolest people I know.”

Jim Jackson says moving back home turned out to be a positive experience. The creative director, 61, and his wife moved back into his parents’ house after their children left home and he lost his job.

“Knowing that finding a new job at the age of 60 was not going to be easy, we decided that the best plan was to sell our home to be free of our mortgage and move into my parents’ basement,” he said. “It turned out to be a great experience. I was proud to say that I had made it full circle and enjoyed living in my parents’ basement,” he said. “The time without the pressure of homeownership allowed me to work full-time on finding a new job. That new job allowed us to buy a new home of our own, only 10 minutes from my newly widowed mother.”

Financial concerns are a key reason for older people moving back home: more than 355,000 people aged 50 and older are unemployed, with 31,000 having been made redundant between May and June alone, according to the Office for National Statistics.

With rising inflation and increasing energy bills on the horizon, the idea of sharing the costs of living could also be attractive to many of the 360,000 people aged 55 and over still on furlough at the end of July, who risk being locked out of employment because of ageism if they are made redundant now the scheme has ended.

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October 2021  
(434 words)

## BRAIN IMPLANT RELIEVES PATIENT'S SEVERE DEPRESSION IN 'LANDMARK' US STUDY

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US researchers have successfully relieved a patient's severe, long-term depression with an electronic implant that acts like a neural pacemaker, resetting the brain circuits associated with negative feelings.

The team at the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF) said the study was "a landmark success" in the scientific effort to treat psychiatric disorders through carefully targeted neural electronics. The study is published in the *Nature Medicine* journal. "We've developed a precision medicine approach that has successfully managed our patient's treatment-resistant depression by identifying and modulating the circuit in her brain that's uniquely associated with her symptoms," said Andrew Krystal, UCSF professor of psychiatry. At a press teleconference ahead of the study's publication, the 36-year-old patient, who asked just to be called Sarah, said the implant had transformed her life after five years of intense depression that would not respond to any drug combination or electroconvulsive therapy.

"I felt tortured by suicidal thoughts every day," she said. "I was at the end of the line." Almost immediately after being inserted deep into her brain, the device provided relief, which has so far lasted for a year. When it detects neural activity associated with irrational thoughts, which previously triggered depressive obsessions, its electrodes deliver a short, corrective electric pulse and "poof . . . the cycle stops", as Sarah put it.

The UCSF team's key discovery was a "biomarker" indicating the onset of depressive symptoms, a specific pattern of neural activity in part of the brain called the amygdala that deals with responses to threats. The device is implanted under the skull. When the electrode marked in blue senses the onset of depressive feelings, it sends tiny electric pulses down the electrode marked in red to alleviate symptoms. The DBS device used in the study was adapted from one used to treat epilepsy. When it detects the biomarker in the amygdala, it sends tiny electric pulses to another area, the ventral striatum, which is part of the brain's reward and pleasure system. This immediately lifts the unwanted mood symptoms.

Sameer Sheth, a neurosurgeon at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston who was not involved in the UCSF research, is carrying out another trial of personalised implants to treat depression and is about to publish positive results. He said the two projects indicated a trend in research towards developing "a more individualised approach to psychiatric treatments", based on stimulating specific brain circuits. [...] Attaching an implant under the skull with electrodes extending deep into the brain is an expensive, invasive and potentially risky procedure. Once details of the brain circuits underlying depression are better understood, "we hope to find non-invasive biomarkers that can be used with non-invasive treatments".

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Adapted from *The Financial Times*  
October 2021  
(454 words)

## BREAKDANCING IN, BASEBALL, SOFTBALL, KARATE OUT FOR 2024 PARIS OLYMPICS

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TOKYO –These Olympics wrap up looking younger and more urban than past editions, and they'll look that way in the future. With surfing, skateboarding and sport climbing making their Olympic debuts here, the new sports brought everything organizers hoped for. [...] Sport climbing's three disciplines delivered an exciting mix of speed and difficulty. Four of the six medals in women's skateboarding went to athletes 13 or younger. [...]

All three will return for the Paris Games in 2024, which will also add breakdancing, or breaking, for its Olympic debut. The event will feature men's and women's competitions with head-to-head matchups in which judges determine the winners.

Those sports are easy to pick up and have active communities on social media, Paris 2024 noted. Some of the sports added for these Games – baseball/softball and karate – are gone for now. That has made it difficult, especially for softball. The sport was in the Olympic program from 1996 to 2008 before making its return here. Without it included in the next Games, the athletes who won medals here worry what that will do to their sport in the future. [...]

Teammate Monica Abbott said she has seen the response on social media, that she's heard from people from India, Slovenia and the Czech Republic who are trying to pitch like she does. "It hurts our sport that it's going to be potentially another eight years, if not longer," Abbott said. "Women thrive in this sport. You can be any age, size, shape, color in this sport. Softball does not discriminate and I think we deserve to be on the Olympic docket on a consistent basis."

The IOC is aware of the concerns of those sports and the effects their status in the Olympics can have on funding and development, McConnell said, but offering flexibility to host cities is more important. [...] Softball may well get its chance on the Olympic stage again.

Los Angeles is hosting in 2028, and softball – paired with baseball – seems a likely fit for those Games. So too do skateboarding, which originated in Southern California, and surfing. "The camaraderie between us is unmatched with any other sport," said American skateboarder Cory Juneau, a bronze medalist in men's park. "I think it would be crazy if it wasn't in future Olympic Games."

Officials from World Lacrosse have said publicly they'd like to get their sport in the Los Angeles Games. Los Angeles 2028 declined a request to discuss what sports could enter the program. The hosts are due to submit their requested sports to the IOC in early 2022.

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August 2021  
(449 words)

## BRITNEY SPEARS RELEASED FROM THIRTEEN-YEAR CONSERVATORSHIP

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A judge in Los Angeles on Friday ended the conservatorship set up by the 39-year-old singer's father in 2008 with immediate effect. Fans had gathered outside the LA court to support Spears, and had described the guardianship as abusive.

Britney Spears has called the termination of a legal arrangement that controlled many aspects of her life for 13 years "the best day ever". "I think I'm gonna cry," she told her 35 million Instagram followers, and added "I love my fans so much."

Her father Jamie earlier said the conservatorship was "necessary", but agreed it was time for her "to re-take control of her life". "Her life was in shambles and she was in physical, emotional, mental and financial distress," lawyers representing Jamie Spears said in earlier court filings. The conservatorship had power over her finances and career decisions plus major personal matters, such as her visits and her teenage sons and whether she can get remarried.

On Friday, Los Angeles County Superior Court Judge Brenda Penny ruled in favour of the singer's request to end the conservatorship, which was not opposed by any of the parties involved. As part of the ruling, Judge Penny said an accountant who served as a temporary conservator should retain some powers to settle ongoing financial issues.

Addressing the crowd outside the court, Spears' lawyer praised the singer's "courage" throughout the court hearings. He said he was proud that she had "shined a light on conservatorships from California to New York", and that as a result of her testimony, new legislation had been passed "to try to ensure that conservatorships like this... do not happen again". Friends were also jubilant following the decision. Celebrity and businesswoman Paris Hilton wrote on Twitter the "moment is so long overdue", adding: "Your best days are yet to come!"

On Monday, the Baby One More Time and Toxic singer wrote on Instagram that she hadn't "prayed for something more in my life". "I know I've said some things on my Insta out of anger and I'm sorry but I'm only human... and I believe you'd feel the same way if you were me!"

In a court appearance in June, the star asked the judge to end the "abusive" arrangement and said she was "traumatised". Addressing the court remotely, she said she had been drugged, forced to perform against her will and prevented from getting married and having more children. Her testimony led her father to agree to step aside.

A conservatorship is used for people who cannot make their own decisions and was put in place because of concerns about her mental health.

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Adapted from *bbc.com*  
November 2021  
(445 words)

## CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

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Capital punishment is the practice of executing someone as punishment for a specific crime after a proper legal trial. It is usually only used as a punishment for particularly serious types of murder, but in some countries, fraud or adultery... are capital crimes. Most known executions in 2020 took place in China, Iran, Egypt, Iraq and Saudi Arabia – in that order, China remaining the world's leading executioner even though this data is classified as a state secret. [...]

Arguments in favour of capital punishment are based on the principle that each criminal should get what their crime deserves and, in the case of a murderer, what their crime deserves is death.[...] Another argument is that it may deter or prevent, would-be murderers from killing people but the statistical evidence doesn't confirm it.[...] Still, for death-penalty advocates, it is the best way to prevent from re-offending since it is undeniable that those who have been executed cannot commit further crimes.

But there is now increasing support for abolishing capital punishment since many people argue that there are other ways to ensure the offenders do not re-offend, such as imprisonment for life without possibility of parole. [...] Henceforth, the World Coalition against the Death Penalty was created in Rome in 2002, and 10th October has been World Day against the Death Penalty since. [...]

Many people are basically against capital punishment because they believe that everyone has an inalienable human right to life, even those who commit murder. Sentencing a person to death and executing them violates that right. The counter-argument, however, is that a person can, by their actions, forfeit human rights, and that, consequently, murderers forfeit, i.e. abandon, their own right to life. [...]

The most common argument against capital punishment is that sooner or later, innocent people will get killed, because of possible mistakes made by witnesses, prosecutors and/or jurors... As long as human justice remains fallible, the risk of executing the innocent can never be eliminated and when capital punishment is used such mistakes cannot be put right. [...] There is ample evidence that such mistakes are possible. In the USA alone, 130 people sentenced to death have been found innocent since 1973 and released from death row.

Besides, another argument of capital punishment abolitionists, is that we cannot teach that killing is wrong by killing. To take a life when a life has been lost may be considered as revenge which raises ethical issues. [...]

Finally, the idea that we must be punished for any act of wrongdoing, whatever its nature, relies upon a belief in human free will and in a person's ability to be responsible for their own actions, which turns the arguments into a psychiatric or a philosophical investigation...

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Adapted from *BBC Ethics Guide*  
October 2021  
(451 words)

## CHILD-TRACKING APPS ARE GROWING

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Elaine was anxious to hear whether her son had safely gotten back to his dorm in Texas, after a recent visit home. But rather than waiting for him to call or text, the Baltimore, US-based mum was carrying on with her day, and awaiting a reassuring ding from her phone.

That's because, like 32 million people around the world, Elaine and her whole family have the app 'Life' installed on their phones. The app keeps constant tabs on the whereabouts of her three children, letting her know when they're on the move, when they're safely home, and a whole host of other data. [...]

Family-tracking apps have exploded in popularity over the past decade or so. A parent's natural instinct to protect their children is a component of growth, of course – but these apps keep booming as many parents feel the world – both off and online – is inherently and increasingly dangerous. Yet experts say parents wanting to use them should think very hard about how they'll do so. Apps are becoming ever more sophisticated in the data they're gathering, raising questions about personal security. [...]

Ms Bombusa, who advises parents on internet safety, says the choice of tracking options "depends on your type of parenting". At the basic end, they include features such as geofencing, so an alert is sent when a phone leaves or enters a certain area. For parents with teen drivers, there's also speed monitoring and crash detection. [...] On the more extreme end of the market, some apps allow a parent to remotely activate the microphone on their child's phone and even record audio which means the child will "never find out that their parents are tracking them". [...]

And these apps are big business. 'Life' alone has been valued at over \$1bn, and operates in more than 140 countries. [...]

But Sonia Livingstone, a professor at the London School of Economics, believes there is in fact "zero evidence that any of these apps keep children safer". As an expert in children's digital rights and safety, Livingstone feels the extensive adoption of tracking apps is an understandable response to constant headlines about the "terrible dangers to our children". [...]

App makers and advertisers may be keen to make parents believe getting an app is an act of parental love, she says, but "*the* most important thing for development is that the child learns to trust the parent and the parents the child". Relying on an app to find out where a child is or what they are looking at online, particularly without their knowledge, can seriously undermine that trust. As well as the right to be safe, children do also have a right to privacy, particularly as they get older, says Livingstone. [...]

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Adapted from *BBC.com*  
November 2021  
(458 words)

## CHINA STEPS UP ITS WAR ON ONLINE VIDEO GAMING AND NOT EVERYONE IS HAPPY

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Under 18s are now forbidden from online games from Monday to Thursday, and can spend just one hour on each of Friday, Saturday, Sunday and public holidays playing. Authorities say the ban is designed to protect the physical and mental health of children but not everyone is convinced.

Yan Zhiming, a father from Nanjing, Eastern China, questioned the necessity of the rules. "Most parents arrange enrichment classes for their kids like sport and music lessons so the little ones don't have much time to play [online]. Of course kids have a natural want to play. Eventually, parents should take the responsibility to look after their kids. There is no need for state control."

China's new restrictions have also sparked debate among Australian parents. Ken Yin, a Sydneysider who moved to Australia [...] and is raising three kids, said there were already ways for parents to manage their children's online gaming habits.

"My kids are playing online games. We have software that can control them," Mr Yin said. "You can set up the parental controls on Microsoft, Google and Apple devices and systems. If we need the state to give an order to control how your kids play games, what is the role of parents?"

Gaming addiction has troubled China for years and some state-run media have labelled online games a "spiritual opium". The China Internet Network Information Centre said more than 30 per cent of Chinese children in 2018 were suffering from gaming disorder, which was recently recognised as an illness by the World Health Organization. In addition to time limits, China's new rules also require all online games to link to a state anti-addiction system, while gaming companies are banned from providing services to users without real ID registrations.

Molly Zhao, a self-employed single mother from Sydney, said she was fond of China's approach. She said it was a constant battle to stop her daughter from playing online games for hours on end. "Usually, I am very busy at work and cannot be constantly checking whether she is studying or playing games," Ms Zhao said. "I understand and feel sorry for my daughter. She feels lonely during the COVID lockdown and can catch up with classmates and friends via those games, but sometimes she plays for two or three hours. It is too much."

[...] Dr Davies, an expert in mobile gaming from Melbourne University said there were also underestimated benefits in online gaming. [...] "It is important to remember that games offer more than escapism and entertainment for kids. Online games are important social and creative spaces for kids."

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Adapted from *ABC News*  
September 2021  
(446 words)

## CHINA'S NOISY "DANCING GRANNIES" SILENCED BY DEVICE THAT DISABLES SPEAKERS

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Across China's public parks and squares, in the early hours of the morning or late in the afternoon, the grannies gather. The gang made up mostly of middle-aged and older women, who went through the Cultural Revolution, take to a corner of a local park or sporting ground and dance in unison to Chinese music. Loud music.

The tradition has led to alarming standoffs, with the blaring music frequently blamed for disturbing the peace in often high-density residential areas. But many are too scared to confront the women.

The dilemma of the dancing grannies has prompted some to seek out tech solutions. One went viral online this week: a remote stun gun-style device that claims to be able to disable a speaker from 50 metres away. Reviews of the item were positive. "Downstairs is finally quiet. For two days the grannies thought their speaker is not working", said one of Taobao, China's version of eBay. "Great invention, with this tool, I will be the boss in the neighbourhood now," said another. "This is not just a regular product; it is social justice!"

China is home to an estimated 100 million dancing grannies. Square dancing allows older women, many of whom live alone or with younger family members, who they accompanied on a move to the cities, to socialise. They form strong bonds, often shopping or doing other activities, including group investment, together, the South China Morning Post reported.

State media has described the square dancing, which has its roots in the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s, as a "positive and effective way to reduce the medical and financial burden as well as increase the life quality of older people". Many participants are retired; their children are no longer around. Square dancing becomes a place for them to have a social life.

But neighbours complain it has gotten out of control, with competing groups blasting their music over each other in small areas, and bullying those who try to intervene. Viral videos and reports have shown the groups arguing with basketball players to take over their court, or, in one case, breaking into a football field and stopping the game to dance in the space, prompting a police response and arrests.

In 2019, Tianjin City added new regulations on the promotion of civilised behaviors, allowing police to fine the dancing grannies up to £56 if the music is too loud in public. Some disputes have escalated to violence. In Shojizhuang, neighbours fight back at the grannies by spreading stinky tofu, paint, and engine oil while they are dancing.

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Adapted from *The Guardian*  
October 2021  
(442 words)

## CONCRETE NEEDS TO LOSE ITS COLOSSAL CARBON FOOTPRINT

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Wet concrete has been poured into buildings, roads, bridges and more for centuries. Structures using concrete have survived wars and natural disasters, outlasting many of the civilizations that built them. Alongside its strength and resilience, concrete is also cheap and simple to make. It will still be crucial for much-needed climate-resilient construction. But the cement industry must set out its plan for decarbonization.

Worldwide, 30 billion tonnes of concrete is used each year, 3 times as much as 40 years ago, and the demand is growing more steeply than that for steel or wood. Versatile and long lasting, concrete buildings and structures are in many ways ideal for climate-resilient construction. But concrete has a colossal carbon footprint – at least eight per cent of global emissions caused by humans come from the cement industry alone. We must decarbonize its production.

Concrete is made by mixing sand, gravel and cement with water and pouring it into moulds before it dries. Making the cement is the most carbon-intensive part. It indeed involves using fossil fuels to heat a mixture of limestone and clay to more than 1,400°C. When limestone is heated with clays, roughly 600 kilograms of carbon dioxide is released for every tonne of cement produced.

There are alternatives to cement, but they're in the early stages of development, and cement itself remains too profitable. Alternatives include the leftover compounds from iron and steel production, known as "slag", and heaps of unused "fly ash", a residual material from coal plants. Researchers are also experimenting with reducing the temperatures needed in the cement-making process – thereby decreasing the energy used. Such replacements, however, still release carbon and have yet to be certified for use in building which need long-term studies on their performance.

In the meantime, since cement will be around for the foreseeable future, its production needs to be decarbonized, which could happen in a number of ways. For example, low-carbon fuels – such as hydrogen or biomass – could be substituted for fossil fuels in the process. [...] Capturing the emitted carbon into the produced concrete, locking it up forever—which might also improve the properties of the resulting material – could be another solution. [...] In North America bills are making their way through state legislatures to prioritize cement that has a lower carbon footprint. The European Union's Waste Framework Directive requires seventy per cent of construction waste, including concrete, to be reused. [...]

Next month, a cement industry campaign called "Concrete Action for Climate" will announce its road map for carbon neutrality by 2050. This is overdue, but the road map must also explain interim steps, how companies intend to achieve neutrality and how progress will be measured.

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Adapted from *NATURE*  
Septembre 2021  
(454 words)

## DE BLASIO TO PHASE OUT N.Y.C. GIFTED AND TALENTED PROGRAM

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Mayor Bill de Blasio on Friday unveiled a plan to overhaul gifted and talented education in New York City elementary schools, calling for sweeping changes to a highly selective program that has been widely criticized for exacerbating segregation in the nation's largest school system.

The system would be replaced by a program that offers the possibility of accelerated learning to students in their later years of elementary school. And the test given to kindergarten students to screen for the program would be permanently ended.

[De Blasio stated] that far more children would have the opportunity to receive some accelerated learning than under the existing system. But some families and elected officials who support keeping aspects of the current gifted system sharply disagreed.

Mr. de Blasio has been criticized for not taking forceful action to fulfill his promise of tackling inequality in public schools. The announcement comes just three months before he must leave office because of term limits, putting the fate of the plan in the hands of his successor.

The mayor's action attempts to address what the city has known for decades: Its gifted and talented program has contributed to racially segregated classrooms and schools for thousands of students citywide.

Though about 70 percent of the roughly 1 million public school students in New York are Black and Latino, about 75 percent of the roughly 16,000 students in gifted elementary school classes are white or Asian American. For years, rising kindergarten students have gained access to the program via a high-stakes exam that some families pay tutors to help their children prepare for.

The programs are considered a crucial stepping stone for students seeking to advance into competitive middle and high schools. Many parents, including Black and Latino parents, have sought out gifted classes as an alternative to the city's struggling district schools, and have come to rely on them as a way to set their children up for future success.

But many other parents and experts say the system has worsened segregation and weakened instruction for children who are not in the gifted track. One parent in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn said she believed that gifted programs made it more difficult for children in regular classes to thrive. "If we're just dumping a bunch of resources into gifted and talented," she said, "everybody else suffers because they didn't know somebody or they couldn't afford a tutor."

Some experts also believe that labeling students as gifted and plucking them out of general education classrooms altogether exacerbates segregation by removing resources from regular public schools, and siphoning the strongest students and teachers elsewhere.

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Adapted from *The New York Times*  
October 2021  
(448 words)

## DEATH ROW INMATES SUE OVER JAPAN'S BRIEF NOTICE OF EXECUTION

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Death row inmates in Japan are suing the government, claiming that the practice of not informing inmates of the time of their execution until only hours before they are hanged is "inhumane". In what is believed to be the first legal challenge of its kind, the prisoners have demanded changes to the procedure and £143,000 in compensation, in a suit filed with a district court in Osaka.

The prisoners claim that the short notice given to death row inmates before they are led to the gallows is illegal, since it does not give condemned men and women enough time to object. "Death row prisoners live in fear every morning that that day will be the last. It's extremely inhumane," their lawyer, Yukata Ueda, said. "Japan is really behind the international community on this."

The practice has long been criticised by international human rights organisations for the mental anguish it causes. Japan and the US are the only democracies that still carry out executions.

In a 2009 report, Amnesty International accused Japan of subjecting death row inmates to "cruel, inhumane and degrading" treatment, including the short time prisoners are given to prepare themselves for their execution and the many years they spend in solitary confinement. It has also criticised Japan for executing or placing mentally ill and intellectually challenged prisoners in solitary confinement.

Ueda said there was no legal requirement for inmates to be informed so close to their execution, adding that the practice was a violation of the country's criminal code. "The central government has said this is meant to keep prisoners from suffering before their execution, but that's no explanation and a big problem, and we really need to see how they respond to the suit," he said. "Overseas, prisoners are given time to contemplate the end of their lives and mentally prepare. It's as if Japan is trying as hard as possible not to let anybody know."

A spokesperson at the justice ministry declined to comment on the case, or on how the death penalty is carried out. The death penalty in Japan is usually imposed in cases that involved multiple murders. Opinion polls show high levels of public support for capital punishment, particularly in the aftermath of high-profile crimes such as the 1995 sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway by members of a doomsday cult.

The justice ministry said that 112 people were on death row in Japan, although no executions were carried out in Japan last year – the first year in which none had taken place since 2011 – and no one has been put to death so far this year.

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Adapted from *The Guardian Weekly*  
November 2021  
(454 words)

## DIGITAL GENDER GAP: MEN 50% MORE LIKELY TO BE ONLINE IN SOME COUNTRIES

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A failure to ensure women have equal access to the Internet has cost low-income countries £730bn over the past decade and could mean additional losses if governments don't take action, according to new research.

Last year, governments in 32 countries, including India, Egypt and Nigeria, lost an estimated \$126bn in gross domestic product because women were unable to contribute to the digital economy. The digital gender gap – the difference between the number of women and men who can access the Internet – cost \$24bn in lost tax revenues in 2020, which could have been invested in health, education and housing, said the report.

The former executive director of UN Women said: "We will not achieve gender equality until we eliminate this digital gap that keeps so many women offline and away from the opportunities the Internet provides."

The study [...] looked at 32 low- and lower-middle-income countries, where the gender gap is often greatest. In those countries, a third of women were connected to the Internet compared with almost half of men. [...] Globally, men are 21% more likely to be online than women, rising to 52% in the least developed countries, said the report.

Various barriers prevent women and girls from going online, including expensive handsets and data tariffs, social norms that discourage women and girls from being online, fears around privacy, safety, and security and a lack of money – globally, women earn around 77 cents for each dollar a man earns.

Few governments have implemented specific policies to give women easier access to the Internet, added the report. According to one report, more than 40% of countries had no meaningful policies or programmes to expand women's access to the Internet.

The director of research at the World Wide Web Foundation, said: "As the Internet becomes a more potent enabler for education, business, and community mobilisation, a failure to deliver access for all means failing to realise everyone's potential to contribute."

As well as limiting opportunities for women and girls, digital exclusion of women has broader societal and economic impacts that affect everyone; with hundreds of millions fewer women able to use the internet, the world is missing out on the social, cultural, and economic contributions they could make, the report said.

The director of digital development at the World Bank, added: "Investing in a more inclusive digital future gives leaders a tremendous opportunity to promote economic growth while creating healthier societies by addressing inequalities in education and earning power. For governments looking to build a resilient economy as part of their Covid-19 recovery plans, closing the digital gender gap should be one of the top priorities."

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Adapted from *The Guardian*  
October 2021  
(449 words)

## DIGITAL REGULATION IN CHINA

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With foreign competitors such as Facebook and Google blocked, domestic tech giants have for two decades dominated the Chinese market. The Communist Party has kept a firm grip on politics, but the tech firms have had considerable freedom in their business activities. Now the Communist Party is reminding internet billionaires who is boss. President Xi Jinping has authorized an extraordinary crackdown.

Last year the planned takeover of AntGroup, a giant internet company, was halted at the last moment. In July, two days after Didi, a ride-hailing firm, went public in New York, China's internet regulator ordered it to stop signing up new users, and forced its apps off mobile stores. The city of Beijing on September 6<sup>th</sup> denied reports that it is considering taking Didi under state control. Video-game companies are being pushed into scanning their users' faces to help enforce a ban on children playing on-line games for more than three hours a week. The party is pushing for more than superficial change. It is using a suite of new laws and regulations to force tech companies to alter both their behaviour and their products. In the last month Chinese law-makers have finalised at least four new laws and regulations which will have the potential to reshape the Chinese internet. Technology regulations in other countries mostly require companies to obtain their customers' consent for the specific processing of their data. China's new rules are much stricter and more wide-ranging. Tech firms will be expected to protect national security and public order.

Not all new laws will worry investors in China. Some deal with problems that affect the West too. One forthcoming set of regulations looks to set the rules for the use of recommendation algorithms. This is the sort of software that companies like Amazon and Alibaba use to recommend products based on a customer's shopping history, or that short, video-apps, like TikTok use to work out what viewers like in order to give them more of it.

The regulations require that companies expose the key-words with which they have labelled their users, and allow them to delete them. This, in principle, will mean that internet users in China will no longer be dogged by advertisements. Writing algorithms which lead users to "addiction" or "high-value consumption" would also be banned. The regulations read like an attempt to fix the problems gripped about by consumers everywhere.

They also require firms that deploy recommendation algorithms to uphold mainstream values and to vigorously disseminate positive energy. Such algorithms must not be used to engage in activities harming national security or to upset the economic or social order. As such, their aim seems to be to withhold algorithmic juice from any content that does not make the government look good.

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Adapted from *The Economist*  
September 2021  
(450 words)

## DISNEY HAS A PROBLEM WITH WOMEN THAT GOES WAY BEYOND THE SNOW WHITE KISS

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California's Disneyland's new ride immediately sparked a row: Snow White's Enchanted Wish features an animatronic recreation of the moment in which the prince kisses the sleeping Snow White.

A journalist reviewing the new ride wrote: "Haven't we already agreed that consent in early Disney movies is a major issue? That teaching kids that kissing, when it hasn't been established if both parties are willing to engage, is not OK? It's hard to understand why the Disneyland of 2021 would choose to add a scene with such old fashioned ideas of what a man is allowed to do to a woman."

This is not new information that Disney's attitude to women is demeaning, diminishing and often downright creepy. And things haven't improved since the early Disney movies. Women, in the world of Disney, don't get to just do stuff. Their adventures have to be about finding a happy ever after, which is, inevitably, heterosexual love.

Look at Belle, in *Beauty and the Beast*. She wants to get out of her provincial life and ends up taking her kidnapped father's place in the man-turned beast's castle. Poor Belle. Clever, ambitious, brave and good looking, she's made to suffer simply so that some rich and entitled dude can work through his Issues.

Or how about Tiana in 2009's *The Princess And The Frog*? All the poor woman wants is to open her own restaurant. And yet, she is harangued for rejecting love, until finally she gives in and marries the lazy and obnoxious Prince Naveen. The film ends with them setting up a restaurant together.

Even as recently as 2019, *Frozen II*'s Princess Anna who embarks on a quest to save her kingdom has to succumb to Prince Kristoff's proposal.

In Disney's world, two people of opposite sex in the same space is enough to ensure that they will and must get together. Look at *Tangled* (2010) in which Rapunzel marries Eugene, who is quite literally the first man she has ever met.

So, yeah, they're just movies. They are also the grand narratives we give to our children at exactly the point where their young minds are grappling with how to understand the world. Over and over, these stories say that girls are there for the taking. That hate and fear can be turned to love through sheer persistence. That the most appalling behavior can and should be forgiven. Love conquers everything, right?

Well, no, actually, and nor should it. This is where we circle back to the unconscious Snow White. For the kiss is emblematic of a much wider problem within the storytelling culture of this entertainment giant, whose tentacles are wrapped so firmly around western society.

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Adapted from *The Independent*  
May 2021  
(459 words)

## DOES NUCLEAR POWER HAVE A PLACE IN A GREEN-ENERGY FUTURE?

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Countries around the world have set ambitious goals to fight climate change by reducing their emissions in the coming decades. Doing so means replacing carbon-heavy power sources, like coal and gas, with green-energy solutions. Renewables like solar, wind and hydroelectric power will certainly play a major role. But environmentalists, scientists and lawmakers are divided on whether or not nuclear power should be part of a clean-energy future.

In the 1980s, nuclear power provided about 17 percent of the world's energy. But high-profile disasters like Chernobyl led many countries to stop investing in new plants. More recently, the 2011 crisis at the Fukushima plant in Japan resulted in even more skepticism of nuclear power's safety. Today, 10 percent of global energy comes from nuclear sources.

In recent years, however, the urgency of reducing emissions has led to a reconsideration of nuclear energy. Though it does create harmful waste, nuclear power doesn't release any carbon into the air. This has led to debate over whether clean energy plans for the future should include an investment in new nuclear capacity.

In the eyes of many experts, any serious plan for decarbonizing the world's energy infrastructure must include nuclear power. They argue that renewables such as solar and wind, for all of their merits, cannot realistically, meet global energy demand. "Nuclear energy skeptics chirp that wind and solar can make up the difference. But the wind does not blow all the time and the sun might not shine for days. And electricity storage technology is not advanced enough to cover the deficit," says an expert. Without sufficient nuclear capacity, countries would have to lean on fossil fuels.

Supporters also say the public's idea of nuclear power – defined by massive plants that pump out hazardous waste and are constantly at risk of catastrophe – is in no way representative of the reality of modern nuclear technologies. A number of companies are developing new models for reactors that could soon prove to be cleaner, more efficient and virtually immune to meltdowns.

However, despite the advances made in the past few decades, critics say, nuclear waste is still a problem, and the risk of meltdown will never be zero. And there are concerns that expanding nuclear energy could lead more nations to develop nuclear weapons.

Practical concerns also temper enthusiasm for a nuclear future. The next generation of reactors, heralded as a game changer by supporters, still haven't been proven in the real world. Even if those technologies are as revolutionary as advertised, skeptics say it could take decades before they make a real difference in the global energy grid – too long if the worst outcomes of climate change are to be avoided.

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Adapted from *YahooNews.com*  
October 2021  
(455 words)

## DOES THE AFGHAN DEBACLE SIGNAL DECLINING US INFLUENCE?

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Twenty years after the United States ousted the Taliban regime, the insurgent group captured power in Kabul on August 15. The breathtaking collapse of the Afghan government and security forces paved the way for Taliban fighters to not only capture one provincial capital after another over a span of just 10 days, but also to take Kabul without a fight.

The Taliban takeover of Kabul was followed by a scrambled evacuation of foreign diplomatic staff and nationals as well as of Afghans who, having worked with the U.S.-led coalition, now feared Taliban retribution.

The epic defeat of the U.S., a global power with the most technologically advanced military in human history, at the hands of a few thousand Taliban fighters may have just put an end to U.S. influence in the region.

In the weeks since the fall of Kabul to the Taliban, U.S. President Joe Biden has drawn harsh criticism worldwide, including from some of Washington's closest allies, who are now questioning U.S. credibility as an ally and its capacity to fulfill long-standing security commitments.

Michael Kugelman, Asia Program deputy director at the Wilson Center, faults the American implementation of the decision to withdraw troops rather than the decision itself. "The decision to withdraw made good sense," he told *The Diplomat*, "but since it was executed so disastrously, it makes the withdrawal seem like a worse decision than it was."

Even as the Biden administration was withdrawing American troops from Afghanistan, Beijing and Moscow were hosting Taliban delegates to ensure that the armed group would not threaten Russian and Chinese interests in the region.

In starting the war on terror and pouring trillions of dollars to contain terrorism 20 years ago, the U.S. inadvertently gave China time to emerge as a global power and Russia to rebuild its capacities. With a clumsy exit from Afghanistan, the U.S. has done its rivals another favor.

Biden had premised ending U.S. troop presence in Afghanistan on the need to shift focus from conflicts in the Middle East to adversaries such as China. However, Biden's bid to challenge China in the Asia-Pacific may suffer a setback due to his handling of the Afghan withdrawal. "Any country would think thrice before trusting the U.S. after they abandoned the Afghans," Kugelman said.

It doesn't help that the U.S. ended its war in Afghanistan by firing a missile into a residential area in Kabul that killed 10 civilians, including seven children.

The unfolding saga in Afghanistan in recent months has left "U.S. allies disappointed, and its rivals emboldened," he added. "Everything comes with an expiry date, this might just be America's as a superpower," reflected Kugelman.

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Adapted from *thediplomat.com*  
September 2021  
(448 words)

## DYSTOPIAN WORLD

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Singapore has trialled patrol robots that blast warnings at people engaging in undesirable social behaviour, adding to an arsenal of surveillance technology that is fuelling privacy concerns in the tightly controlled city-state. From vast numbers of CCTV cameras to trials of lampposts kitted out with facial recognition tech, Singapore is seeing an explosion of tools to track its inhabitants. That includes a three-week trial in September, in which two robots were deployed to patrol a housing estate and a shopping centre. Officials have long pushed a vision of a hyper-efficient, tech-driven smart nation, but Singapore is frequently criticised for curbing the civil liberties of its population accustomed to tight controls.

The government's latest surveillance devices are robots on wheels, with seven cameras, that issue warnings to the public and detect undesirable social behaviour. This includes smoking in prohibited areas, improperly parking bicycles, and breaching coronavirus social-distancing rules. During a recent patrol, one of the robots wove its way through a housing estate and stopped in front of a group of elderly residents watching a chess match. "Please keep one-metre distancing, please keep to five persons per group," a robotic voice blared out, as a camera on top of the machine trained its gaze on them. Frannie Teo was walking through the mall during the recent robot patrol trial. "It reminds me of Robocop," she said. It brings to mind a "dystopian world of robots ... I'm just a bit hesitant about that kind of concept," she added. Digital rights activist Lee Ting told Agence France-Presse. "It all contributes to the sense that people need to watch what they say and what they do in Singapore to a greater extent than they would in other countries".

But the government defended its use of robots, saying they were not being used to identify or take action against offenders during the tech's trial, and added they were needed to address a labour crunch as the population ages. "The workforce is actually shrinking," said a representative from the government agency that developed the robots, adding they could help reduce the number of officers needed for foot patrols.

The island of about 5.5 million people has 90,000 police cameras, a number set to double by 2030, and facial recognition tech – which helps authorities pick out faces in a crowd – may be installed on lamp posts across the city. There was a rare public backlash this year when authorities admitted coronavirus contact-tracing data collected by an official system had been accessed by police. The government later passed legislation to limit its use. But critics say the city-state's laws generally put few limitations on government surveillance, and Singaporeans have little control over what happens to the data collected.

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Adapted from *The Guardian*  
October 2021  
(453 words)

## EDTECH THAT HELPS TEACHERS BEATS EDTECH THAT REPLACES THEM

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Covid-19 forced ten years of digital transformation in schools to take place in a month, teachers suddenly became more willing to use technology because the alternative was not to teach. Much of this technology will remain as pupils head back to the classroom this term. But the experience has refined what education technology (edtech) is really for.

For decades, innovators imagined a future without traditional learning. Moocs (massive open online courses), like Udacity and Coursera, were supposed to replace in-person learning. Teachers and school administrators feared that technologists were aiming to replace them. Before the pandemic, most American schools were hesitant to adopt technology. Innovators have since grasped that their technology must support teachers in the classroom rather than attempt to remove them. Much of the \$2.2bn in venture and private-equity capital raised in 2020 is being invested with this in mind.

Teacher training is one example of what this means in practice. Traditional teacher training is limited. "When teachers learn, they listen to people talk about teaching, and they talk with each other about teaching. They very rarely teach things," explains Justin Reich of the Teaching Systems Lab at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. "If you look at how nurses are trained, how therapists are trained, how clergy members are trained, they practise what they're doing all the time."

This is starting to change. Researchers at the University of Virginia are training their education students using virtual reality simulators created by Mursion, a tech company. The teacher trainees experience several virtual practice scenarios such as a parent-teacher conference, small-group instruction, and large-group instruction. A digital puppet master plays the role of the parent and pupils behind the scenes, but the developers plan for the programme to eventually become automated. The technology is currently being used in over 50 American colleges.

Artificial intelligence could also play a role in teacher training. [...] Currently teachers get feedback from fellow humans, often administrators, who come to the classroom, observe a lesson and score the teacher. The researchers hope eventually to use machine learning to automatically score teachers, making the current feedback process more frequent, more accurate and less time intensive.

Barriers remain for edtech, despite the path cleared by the pandemic [...]. Some state standards are rigid, even specifying the number of hours that must be spent in a classroom. Edtech is also unusual in that the end users are not often the buyers. The buyer might be the school district, the user might be the teacher, and the real user is the learner. "It's very hard to get the learner's voice into the mix of things," explains Ms Hammond.

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Adapted from *The Economist*  
September 2021  
(447 words)

## EGYPT DETAINS ARTIST ROBOT AI-DA BEFORE HISTORIC PYRAMID SHOW

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Ai-Da – the world’s first ultra-realistic robot artist – hit a temporary snag before her latest exhibition when Egyptian security forces detained her at customs.

Ai-Da is due to open and present her work at the Great Pyramid of Giza on Thursday.

But because of “security issues” that may include concerns that she is part of a wider espionage plot, both Ai-Da and her sculpture were held in Egyptian customs for 10 days before being released on Wednesday, sparking a diplomatic fracas.

“The British ambassador has been working through the night to get Ai-Da released, but we’re right up to the wire now,” said Aidan Meller, the human force behind Ai-Da, shortly before her release. “It’s really stressful.”

According to Meller, border guards detained Ai-Da at first because she had a modem, and then because she had cameras in her eyes (which she uses to draw and paint). “I can ditch the modems, but I can’t really gouge her eyes out,” he said.

She was finally cleared through customs on Wednesday evening, hours before the exhibition was due to start, with the British embassy in Cairo saying they were “glad” the case had been resolved.

Both Ai-Da and her sculpture had been sent in specialised flight cases by air cargo to Cairo before the *Forever Ss Now* exhibition, which runs until 7 November and is presented by the consultancy firm Art D’Égypte in partnership with the Egyptian ministry of antiquities and tourism and the Egyptian ministry of foreign affairs. The exhibition will showcase works by leading Egyptian and international artists including Stephen Cox, Lorenzo Quinn, Moataz Nasr and Alexander Ponomarev.

Ai-Da’s 2 x 2.5-metre sculpture is a play on the riddle of the sphinx – “What goes on four feet in the morning, two feet at noon, and three feet in the evening?” – the answer to which is a human.

“Four legs is when you’re a toddler, two legs is when you’re an adult, and three is when you’re elderly and need a walking stick,” Meller said. “So Ai-Da produced an enormous version of herself with three legs. We’re saying that actually, with the new Crispr technology coming through, and the way we can do gene-editing today, life extension is actually very likely. The ancient Egyptians were doing exactly the same thing with mummification. Humans haven’t changed: we still have the desire to live for ever. But all of that comes to nought if we can’t get her released.”

He added: “We’re well aware that the fictions of 1984 and *Brave New World* are now facts. We predict by 2025 there will be big disruption with technology, and Ai-Da is trying to use art to bring attention to that.”

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Adapted from *The Guardian*  
October 2021  
(455 words)

## ENJOY THE EXTRA DAY OFF! MORE BOSSES GIVE 4-DAY WORKWEEK A TRY

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Companies around the world are embracing what might seem like a radical idea: a four-day workweek. The concept is gaining ground in places as varied as New Zealand and Russia, and it's making inroads among some American companies. Employers are seeing surprising benefits, including higher sales and profits.

The idea of a four-day workweek might sound crazy, especially in America, where the number of hours worked has been climbing and where cellphones and email remind us of our jobs 24/7. But in some places, the four-day concept is taking off like a viral meme. [...]

Last month, a Washington state senator introduced a bill to reduce the standard workweek to 32 hours. Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev is backing a parliamentary proposal to shift to a four-day week. Politicians in Britain and Finland are considering something similar.

In the U.S., Shake Shack started testing the idea a year and a half ago. Hundreds -if not thousands — of other companies are also adopting or testing the four-day week. [...]

Much of this is thanks to Andrew Barnes, the CEO of Perpetual Guardian, New Zealand's largest estate planning company. He spent much of his career believing long hours were better for business. But he was also disturbed by the toll it took on employees and their families, particularly when it came to mental health. So two years ago, he used Perpetual Guardian and its 240 workers as guinea pigs, partnering with academic researchers in Auckland to monitor and track the effects of working only four days a week. [...]

Remarkably, workers got more work done while working fewer hours. Sales and profits grew. Employees spent less time commuting, and they were happier. Barnes says there were other, unexpected benefits: It narrowed workplace gender gaps. Women — who typically took more time off for caregiving — suddenly had greater flexibility built into their schedule. Men also had more time to help with their families, Barnes says. [...]

The Perpetual Guardian study went viral, and things went haywire for Barnes.

Employers — including big multinationals — started calling, seeking advice. To date, most of that interest has not come from American employers.

Natalie Nagele, co-founder and CEO of Wildbit, has heard from other leaders who say it didn't work for them.

But she says moving her Philadelphia software company to a four-day week three years ago has been a success. [...] Personally, she says, it gives her time to rest her brain, which helps solve complex problems. [...] That frees Fridays up for life's many delightful chores. [...] But that also leaves time on the weekends ... for the weekend.

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Adapted from *NPR*  
February 2021  
(443 words)

## ETHICAL STANDARDS FOR AI WEAPONS. SHOULD WE BE AFRAID?

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In coming years, U.S. drones will be equipped with advanced artificial intelligence technology. That raises a startling scenario: military drones squirreled away in tiny, unmanned bases in or near Afghanistan, ready to take off, scan the territory, instantly analyze the images they take in, identify and target terrorist activity, ensure the target is clear of civilians, fire a missile, confirm the kill and return to base – all with little or no human intervention.

The true purpose of AI weaponry is to achieve overwhelming military advantage – and in this respect, AI is highly promising. The ability to attack from a distance with unmanned weapons is becoming a key element of U.S. military strategy. Artificial intelligence, by endowing machines with the ability to make battlefield decisions on their own, makes this strategy viable.

Russia has robotic tanks and missiles that can pick their own targets. China has unmanned mobile rocket launchers and submarines and other AI weapons under development. Turkey, Israel and Iran are pursuing AI weapons. The U.S., meanwhile, has already deployed autonomous sub-hunting ships and tank-seeking missiles – and much more is in the works. About 10 percent of the Pentagon's budget is cloaked in secrecy, and hundreds of billions more are buried in the budgets of other agencies.

Scientists, policy analysts and human rights advocates have raised concerns about the coming AI arsenals. Some say such weapons are vulnerable to errors and hackers that could threaten innocent people. Others worry that letting machines initiate deadly attacks on their own is unethical and poses an unacceptable moral risk.

These objections have done nothing to slow the AI arms race. Still, a former US defense deputy secretary insists the U.S. military is strictly committed to keeping a human decision-maker in the "kill chain" so that no weapon will pick a target and fire on its own without an OK. But other nations may not be as careful, he says. "As far as we know, the U.S. military is the only one that has established ethical principles for AI."

Twenty-two nations have asked the United Nations to ban automated weapons capable of operating outside human oversight, but so far no agreements have been signed. If Russia, China and others give AI weapons the authority to choose targets, the U.S. may face a choice: go along or operate at a military disadvantage.

That sets up a race-to-the-bottom in which the least ethical or most careless adversary – one that is most aggressive about fielding AI-enabled weaponry, regardless of reliability and safeguards – forces others to follow suit.

Indeed, military leaders in a hostile, competitive world are not known for their ability to resist advanced weaponry, regardless of consequences.

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Adapted from *Newsweek*  
September 2021  
(451 words)

## FACEBOOK IS NEARING A REPUTATIONAL POINT OF NO RETURN

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Disaster struck the world's biggest social network on October 4th when Facebook and its sister apps were knocked offline for six hours. It was one of the less embarrassing moments of the company's week. The next day a whistleblower, Frances Haugen, told Congress of all manner of wickedness at the firm, from promoting eating disorders to endangering democracy. Some wondered whether the world would be a better place if the outage were permanent.

Politicians are angry but so far seem incapable of co-ordinating reform to rein it in. And investors have kept buying the stock, regardless of the bad headlines. Yet the company should take no comfort from this. The blind fury unleashed shows that its reputational problems have got out of hand.

Reports highlighted internal research showing that Instagram, Facebook's photo-sharing app, makes one in five American teenagers feel worse about themselves. They paid less attention to the finding that Instagram makes twice as many feel better about themselves. Facebook's critics are right that it should be more open. But the firm has half a point when it says that the hysterical reaction to unsurprising findings will lead companies to conclude that it is safer not to do such research at all.

Other complaints are really criticisms of the broader internet. The question of how to regulate viral content for children goes beyond Facebook, as any parent who has left their child with YouTube knows. Likewise, dilemmas over how the firm amplifies attention and how to draw the line between upholding free speech and minimising harm. Facebook repeated its plea that Congress should weigh in on matters such as minimum ages, rather than leaving it to firms. It has made a better stab than most at settling free-speech questions with its "oversight board", a pompous-sounding but quietly useful body which dispenses rulings on matters from misogyny to misinformation.

Ms Haugen alleges that Facebook has concealed a decline in its young American users. She revealed internal projections that a drop in teenagers' engagement could lead to an overall decline in American users of 45% within the next two years. Misleading advertisers would undermine the source of nearly all the firm's sales, and potentially break the law. (The firm denies it.)

Does any of this matter? Although Facebook's share price has lagged behind some tech giants, it has risen by almost 30% in the past 12 months. Politicians threaten to break the company up, but the antitrust case is flawed. But fury may matter. Facebook is nearing a reputational point of no return. The firm risks joining the ranks of corporate untouchables like big tobacco.

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Adapted from *The Economist*  
October 2021  
(445 words)

## FACEBOOK IS WEAKER THAN WE KNEW

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Facebook may be in trouble. Not financial trouble, or legal trouble but a kind of slow, steady decline. It's a cloud of existential dread that hangs over an organization whose best days are behind it. The desire to stop users from abandoning its apps in favor of more compelling alternatives is now influencing every managerial priority and product decision. It is going to extreme lengths to improve its image leading to desperate attempts to find a way out like the metaverse. This kind of decline is not necessarily visible from the outside, but insiders see a hundred small, disquieting signs of it every day.

Mr. Zuckerberg has renamed his company Meta and laid out a vision for pursuing the metaverse as the next social platform. Meta has discussed opening retail stores to introduce people to devices made by the company's Reality Labs division, such as virtual reality headsets and augmented reality glasses. These devices are gateways to the metaverse, a futuristic digital world where people move from virtual to augmented versions of reality almost seamlessly. The stores would help show people that virtual reality and augmented reality can be fun and exciting, exactly the way Mr. Zuckerberg sees it.

The aim of the stores is to make the world more open and connected. They are also intended to spark emotions like "curiosity, closeness," as well as a sense of feeling "welcomed" while experimenting with headsets in a "judgment free journey," according to the documents. If Meta moves forward with stores, it would be a first for a tech giant that has existed largely digitally, with more than 3.5 billion people using its apps such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and Messenger.

Mr. Zuckerberg has talked up the metaverse as his company grapples with regulatory and societal challenges. Frances Haugen, a former employee turned whistle-blower, amassed thousands of pages of internal documents and recently shared them with lawmakers and the news media. She has said that Facebook was not doing enough to protect society from the harms it causes. There's damning evidence showing that Facebook knew Instagram was worsening body-image issues among girls and that it had a bigger vaccine misinformation problem than it let on.

Meanwhile skepticism about the metaverse also abounds as virtual reality remains a niche market for hobbyists and enthusiasts. Meta is working on something akin to the computer game *Second Life* from the early 2000s. The hardware is often costly and can be difficult to use. Some people have reported that the headsets nauseate them.

But the advantage for Zuckerberg is that his apps would no longer be beholden to the rules dictated by Apple and Google, which own the app stores that distribute Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and Messenger.

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Adapted from *The New York Times*  
November 2021  
(457 words)

## FACEBOOK TO SHUT FACIAL RECOGNITION SYSTEM AND DELETE 1BN 'FACEPRINTS'

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Facebook will delete the “faceprints” of more than a billion people after announcing that it is shutting down its facial recognition system due to the “many concerns” about using the technology.

The social media network has been under political, legal and regulatory pressure over its use of the software, which automatically identifies users in photos and videos – and lets them know if a fellow user has posted a photo or video with them in it – if they have opted in to the feature. In a statement, Facebook’s parent company, Meta, said it would shut down facial recognition on the platform over the coming weeks and delete 1 billion facial recognition templates.

Meta’s vice-president of artificial intelligence, Jerome Pesenti, said the technology had helped visually impaired and blind users identify their friends in images and can help prevent fraud and impersonation. But Pesenti said the advantages needed to be weighed against “growing concerns about the use of this technology as a whole”.

“There are many concerns about the place of facial recognition technology in society, and regulators are still in the process of providing a clear set of rules governing its use,” he said. “Amid this ongoing uncertainty, we believe that limiting the use of facial recognition to a narrow set of use cases is appropriate.” Pesenti said Facebook will encourage users to tag posts manually.

In 2020, Facebook’s parent company paid \$650m to settle a US class action lawsuit brought by users who claimed the firm had created and stored scans of their faces without permission.

Pesenti added that the decision reflected a “company-wide” move away from facial recognition technology. Meta also owns the Instagram photo-sharing app and the WhatsApp messaging service, with 2.8 billion people using the company’s platform. Last week the parent company rebranded itself from Facebook in recognition of a new focus on the metaverse, a concept where the physical and digital worlds combine to allow people to lead their professional and social lives virtually, via digital representation of themselves – or avatars.

The rebranding and the facial recognition moves come as Meta has been rocked by a series of revelations from whistleblower Frances Haugen. The former employee has released tens of thousands of internal documents, and given testimonies to politicians in Westminster and Washington, which exposed Meta’s failure to keep some users safe and contain the spread of misinformation.

In the wake of the Haugen revelations Meta has rowed back on one potential product launch by announcing that it has paused work on developing a version of Instagram for 10- to 12-year-olds. It has also stressed that it will develop its metaverse plans in close cooperation with regulators and legal experts.

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Adapted from *The Guardian*  
November 2021  
(460 words)

## FACEBOOK WHISTLEBLOWER REVEALS IDENTITY

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Frances Haugen, 37, who worked as a product manager on the civic integrity team at Facebook, was interviewed on Sunday by CBS. She said the documents she leaked proved that Facebook repeatedly prioritised "growth over safety". Facebook said the leaks were misleading and glossed over positive research conducted by the company.

In the interview, on CBS's 60 Minutes programme, Ms Haugen said she had left Facebook earlier this year after becoming exasperated with the company. Before departing, she copied a series of internal memos and documents [...], files that were released in batches over three weeks by the Wall Street Journal.

Revelations included documents that showed that celebrities, politicians and high profile Facebook users were treated differently by the company. The leaks revealed that moderation policies were applied differently, or not at all, to such accounts - a system known as XCheck (cross-check) [...]

But it's allegations about Instagram that have been particularly worrying to US politicians. Internal research by Facebook (which owns Instagram) found that Instagram was impacting the mental health of teenagers but did not share its findings when they suggested that the platform was a "toxic" place for many youngsters. According to slides reported by the Wall Street Journal, 32% of teenage girls surveyed said that when they felt bad about their bodies, Instagram made them feel worse.

Ms Haugen will testify before a Senate subcommittee on Tuesday in a hearing titled "Protecting Kids Online", about the company's research into Instagram's effect on the mental health of young users. Last week, a Facebook executive testified to US senators that the leaks had failed to highlight the positive impact the platform had on teens.

However, Ms Haugen was damning in her assessment of her former employer. "There were conflicts of interest between what was good for the public and what was good for Facebook," she said. "Facebook over and over again chose to optimise for its own interests, like making more money." Facebook strongly denied that claim, saying it had spent significant sums of money on safety. "To say we turn a blind eye to feedback ignores these investments, including the 40,000 people working on safety and security at Facebook and our investment of \$13 billion (£9.6 billion) since 2016," said Facebook's director of policy communications.

Ms Haugen also talked about the deadly Capitol Hill riots in January - claiming that Facebook helped fuel the violence. She said Facebook turned on safety systems to reduce misinformation during the US election - but only temporarily. "As soon as the election was over they turned them back off, or they changed the settings to what they were before, to prioritise growth over safety, and that really feels like a betrayal of democracy." [...]

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Adapted from *BBC News on line*  
October 2021  
(456 words)

## **'FALSE CHOICE': IS DEEP-SEA MINING REQUIRED FOR AN ELECTRIC VEHICLE REVOLUTION?**

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At the Goodwood festival of speed near Chichester, the crowds gathered at the hill-climb circuit to watch the world's fastest cars roar past, as they do every year. But not far from the high-octane action, there was a new, and quieter, attraction: a display of the latest electric vehicles, from the £28,000 Mini Electric to the £2m Lotus Evija hypercar. Even here, at one of the biggest events in Britain's petrolhead calendar, it's clear the days of the internal combustion engine are numbered.

As countries strive to meet stringent carbon-emission targets, and vehicle-makers phase out combustion engines, 145m electric vehicles are predicted to be on the roads within a decade, up from 11m last year. The car batteries they require, along with storage batteries for solar and wind power, have sent demand for metals soaring, taking mining firms to the bottom of the sea in the hunt for those metals.

Thousands of metres below the ocean's surface lie millions of potato-sized rocks known as nodules: a rich source of nickel, copper, manganese and cobalt. In June, an application was filed to start mining these deposits in two years' time. As well as the demand for minerals for smartphones and other electronic devices, and the difficulty of extracting them from the land in a sustainable way, the companies behind deep-sea mining say we have no choice: if we want to make the transition to renewable energy, we must plumb the ocean depths.

"We now have the technology available to us to explore more of the ocean in the next 10 years than we have had in the last 10,000," says Oliver Steeds, founder and chief executive of Nekton, a deep-sea research foundation and a participant at Goodwood's Future Lab. His team uses technology such as autonomous underwater vehicles, or robots, to map the deep sea – not for mining, but to promote ocean conservation. [...]

The advances in mining and exploration technology represent "an extraordinary opportunity for progress", Steeds says. "But also it represents a threat, whether through deep-sea mining or further industrialisation and overfishing".

More than 90% of the estimated 2.2 million species in the ocean remain undescribed. [...]

Douglas McCauley, a professor at the University of California, Santa Barbara and director of the Benioff Ocean Initiative, says the [...] electrification of vehicle fleets is a "positive pathway" to reduce carbon emissions. But [...] "there are some very significant questions being raised by scientists about the impacts of ocean mining," he says. "How much extinction could be generated? How long will it take these extremely low-resilience systems to recover? What impact will it have on the ocean's capacity to capture carbon?"

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Adapted from *The Guardian*  
September 2021  
(451 words)

## FEMALE AFGHAN JUDGES DOOMED TO DEATH

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They were the staunch defenders of the law, seeking justice for their country. But now, female Afghan judges are in hiding due to fear of retribution under Taliban rule. Six of them spoke to the BBC from secret locations.

One of them said that throughout her career as a judge she had convicted hundreds of men for violence against children and women, including rape, murder and torture.

But just days after the Taliban took control of her city and thousands of convicted criminals were released from prison, she began to be threatened. Text messages, voice notes and unknown numbers began bombarding her phone.

"It was midnight when we heard the Taliban had freed all the prisoners from jail", she said. "We immediately left our home and everything behind. We managed to drive out of the city... I wore a burka, so no-one would recognise me. Fortunately, we made it past all the Taliban checkpoints".

Shortly after they left, her neighbours texted her and described the men who came to her house, so she knew who was looking for her. It was a man who, several months before, prior to the Taliban takeover, she had sentenced to 20 years in prison for murdering his wife.

After the case was over, the criminal approached her and said: "When I get out of prison, I will do to you what I did to my wife". At the time she didn't take him seriously. But since the Taliban took power, he has called her many times and said he would find her and have his revenge.

In response to the accusations, the Taliban spokesman Bilal Karimi told the BBC that female judges should live without fear and that no-one should threaten them. He also repeated the Taliban's promise of a "general amnesty" for all former government workers across Afghanistan but at least 220 former female judges are known to currently be in hiding and their testimonies of the past five weeks were all almost identical. All have received death threats from members of the Taliban whom they previously committed to prison. For more than three decades, most of them had investigated cases of violence against women and children and the majority of their cases involved convicting members of the Taliban as well as militant group Isis.

Besides, as highly educated women, these judges were previously the main breadwinner for their families. But now, with their salaries stopped and their bank accounts frozen, they have all been reduced not only to hiding but also to living off hand-outs from their relatives. They have no other way out now nor can they escape to any other country, even Pakistan.

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Adapted from *BBC World Service*  
September 2021  
(449 words)

## FILTHY BUSINESS: WHO WILL STOP BRITAIN'S ILLEGAL WASTE-DUMPING MAFIA?

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They made millions from it. They threatened our health and poisoned the land. Among the filth they buried were industrial quantities of syringes, bloody bandages, oily waste from scrapped cars, shredded plastic and asbestos. [...] Yet these men, though responsible for one of the biggest illegal dumping crimes ever prosecuted, suffered nothing worse last week than suspended sentences, community service and fines and confiscation orders that together amount to around a tenth of the money they are known to have made.

Over the past few months, we have begun to notice the scarcely regulated pollution of our rivers and seas. But hardly anyone is aware of what's been happening to the land. If anything, it's even worse. The illegal dumping of waste, much of it hazardous, most of it persistent, is now a massive crisis in the UK, caused by shocking failures of government. Large areas of land and crucial groundwater sources are being contaminated by illegal tipping, and barely anyone in power seems to give a damn.

The disposal of waste in this country relies to a large extent on self-regulation. It's up to you to check that the person to whom you hand your waste is a registered and responsible carrier. But a study into fly-tipping and unregistered waste carriers in England [...] shows that checking is nigh on impossible. Hundreds of different businesses use identical names on the Environment Agency's official register, which often bear no relation to the names under which they advertise or trade. Many provide false names and false locations, including abandoned buildings, sports venues and, in one case, a Premier Inn. Technical glitches, unfixed after five years, ensure the site is scarcely functional. [...] Most businesses don't appear on the list at all. [...] All together, [...] there are over a quarter of a million unregistered waste handlers in England.

[...] Here, as in Italy, it seems we have a waste mafia. But unlike the Italian mafia, ours seldom needs to resort to intimidation or violence, because no one stands in its way.

All together, the report suggests, between 1m and 6m tonnes of waste in England are handled outside the lawful system every year. Illegally dumped waste contaminates the soil, the water and – when it is deliberately burned or spontaneously combusts – the air with a vast range of toxins, most of which are likely to be unmonitored and unrecorded. [...]

We have no idea what the impact on our health and that of the rest of the living world might be, or what the results of this staggering regulatory failure would cost to clean up.

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Adapted from *The Guardian*  
November 2021  
(442 words)

## **'FLAME PURIFICATION'? I FEAR THE BURNING OF BOOKS IN CANADA IS ONLY A FIRST STEP**

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Books featuring so-called 'outdated content' are being burned as a goodwill gesture to Indigenous people in Ontario. This fills me with dread, as history has shown us that the torching of ideas usually has disastrous consequences.

First, I get really emotional and upset when I encounter ritual book-burning. So when I read that in Canada, more than 4,700 books have been removed from the library shelves of schools and burned, I cannot help but feel depressed.

The book burning ceremony organised by an Ontario francophone school board was promoted as a "gesture of reconciliation" to Indigenous peoples and labelled as a "flame purification ceremony."

The ritual, titled 'give back to the earth' – sought "to make a gesture of openness and reconciliation by replacing books in our libraries that carried negative stereotypes about First Nations, Métis and Inuit people."

The justification for the burning of books, including children's comics like Asterix or Tintin, is that they contained "outdated content." "Outdated" is a favourite term hurled at opponents by culture war activists. In their eyes, any publications that promote the classical outlook of Western civilisation are 'outdated' and therefore convey views that constitute a form of secular blasphemy.

Now that the outdated books have turned to ash, the libraries can boast that the books on their shelves have "positive and inclusive messages about the diverse communities within our schools." [...]

Ever since the invention of reading texts, those deemed to be subversive have been burnt or, in today's language, put to the flame. In 411 BC, Athenians burnt the works of Pythagoras. The Roman Emperor Caligula decreed the burning of Homer's 'Iliad' and 'Odyssey', and the poems of Virgil and Livy.

Frequently, the burning of books was portrayed as an act of purification not unlike the "flame purification ceremony" in Ontario. This motif was very much in evidence during the notorious book-burning ceremonies in Nazi Germany. Purifying German culture of poisonous Jewish and other forms of 'offensive' views was the justification for these ghastly rituals.

The burning of books is a despicable crime because its aim is to destroy and eradicate views and ideas that are deemed heretical. As the poet John Milton so eloquently noted, "He who destroys a good book, kills reason itself".

Watch out when book burning is associated with the ritual of purification. Ask yourself the question, "What will they cleanse next?" The history of book burning tells us that the burning of books is the first step towards the brutal punishment of those in the crosshairs of the book burners.

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Adapted from *RT.com*  
September 2021  
(445 words)

## FLORIDA HIGH SCHOOL ALTERS 80 'IMMODEST' YEARBOOK PHOTOS OF STUDENTS

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A Florida high school is facing a backlash for altering the yearbook photos of 80 female students to add clothing to their chests and shoulders.

The school district told local media the changes were made to ensure the photos met the dress code, which says girls' shirts must be "modest".

But critics pointed to yearbook photos of male students left unedited despite violating the same standards. The digital alterations were made without permission, the students say. [...]

"The double standard in the yearbook is more so that they looked at our body and thought just a little bit of skin showing was sexual," Bartram Trail student Riley O'Keefe, 15, told WJAX News.

"But then they looked at the boys, for the swim team photos and other sports photos and thought that was fine, and that's really upsetting and uncomfortable."

In a statement to WJAX, the district said the school's previous policy was to remove all photos that violated the dress code, and this year's edits were to make sure all students were included. [...]

The district's dress code for the 2020-2021 school year says that girls' tops and shirts "must cover the entire shoulder" and must be "modest and not revealing or distracting". "Excessive make-up" is not permitted and all students are prohibited from donning "extreme hairstyles". [...]

In response, Riley created an online petition asking for changes to the dress code which, she says, "is clearly based on the sexualisation of young women". With the code making national headlines again, the petition now has more than 5,000 signatures. US dress codes have been criticised in recent years, with some saying they are applied in ways that shame young women and girls about their bodies. [...]

Riley's mother told the BBC the incident "drew attention to something that wasn't a problem to begin with".

"Nobody would have looked at that yearbook and looked at these pictures and thought anything of them other than that they were beautiful ninth graders," she says.

"Some of these edits have drawn mass bullying and emotional stress on some of these girls, because their pictures were so poorly photoshopped that they're being used as memes now and circulating on Snapchat, and that's horrible."

Ms Fabre added that some families are demanding an apology from the school, changes to the dress code and a reissue of the yearbooks with the original photos.

But not all parents are against the rules. Another Bartram mother, Rachel Daquin, told WJAX that she approved of the edits. "If parents aren't teaching at home how daughters should dress and dress decently, then the school has to parent," she said.

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Adapted from *BBC News*  
May 2021  
(452 words)

## FOOTBALL SHOULD CONSIDER ELIMINATING HEADING, DEMENTIA EXPERT SAYS

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Football should consider eliminating heading, the leading researcher into dementia in the sport has said, after new evidence provided “the missing link” between repeated heading and neurodegenerative disease.

Dr Willie Stewart of the University of Glasgow, who leads the landmark Field study, says the game must ask whether heading is “absolutely necessary”. Football, he said, should now come with a health warning attached.

Previous results from the Field study [...] had shown that former professionals were 3.5 times more likely to die with dementia than the general public. The findings brought to the fore the issue of brain injury in the sport but authorities frequently insisted more research was necessary before a link with heading could be confirmed. Stewart says that connection can now be shown and called for the authorities to act.

“With the current data we’re now at the point to suggest that football should be sold with a health warning saying repeated heading in football may lead to an increased risk of dementia,” he said. “That’s where we are now, that cannot be ignored”.

“In the previous study we didn’t have sufficient data to be able to look at the important factor: exposure to football. What we could say last time was that being a footballer meant your risk of dying with a degenerative brain disease was higher, but we couldn’t say what in football was doing it.” [...]

The new research, published in the journal JAMA Neurology, finds that risk of neurodegenerative disease in former professional footballers varies by player position and career length, not by playing era. Whereas goalkeepers, who rarely head the ball, have a risk statistically indistinguishable from that of a control group, defenders – who head the ball the most – have a five-fold risk of developing neurodegenerative disease. That risk increases the longer a player’s career goes on and the risk did not change across the 7,000 players the study analysed, despite their dates of birth ranging from 1900 to 1976. [...]

“I think football has to ask the difficult questions: is heading absolutely necessary to the game of football? Is potential exposure to degenerative brain disease absolutely necessary? Or can some other form of the game be considered?”

The Field study is funded by the Football Association and the Professional Footballers’ Association but Stewart was critical of the measures the professional game has undertaken to limit the risk from heading. [...]

“If we think that heading in professional football is necessary and the risk of dementia is necessary then perhaps what football should be doing [...] is thinking about what football would look like without heading,” he said. “Let’s try that.”

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Adapted from *The Guardian*  
August 2021  
(451 words)

## FORCED MARRIAGES IN THE UK

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In 2020, the Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) gave support in seven hundred and sixty cases, which represents a forty-four per cent decrease on the average number of cases received annually. This is quite probably attributable to the restrictions on weddings and overseas travel, due to the pandemic. Most cases involved families of Pakistani background with the rest originating from other parts of South Asia, the Middle East, Europe and Africa. Women and girls were the victims in 85% of the total cases and nearly 40% concerned people under the age of 18.

Forced marriages are due to factors such as preserving wealth and family reputation. For example, "parents may have made a promise when the child was young and they feel they can't let the other family down," says Sue, from Central Manchester Women's Aid. Many victims are subject to blackmail and threats. A number of them may also be forced to marry to assist claims for citizenship or to provide a carer for a disabled family member. [...]

Some young people, especially of South Asian background, are tricked into visiting their family's country of origin for a holiday, only to find that there are plans to get them married there, where they may find themselves isolated, without any access to money, telephones or their passports.

Since contacting the embassy may involve some risk for the victim, visitors are recommended to leave details of their passport, flights and overseas residence with a trusted friend in the UK and contact the Foreign Office before they travel. And in case of problems, anyone – including a victim's friend – can ask a court to implement a Forced Marriage Protection Order (FMPO).

Laws to prevent forced marriages were introduced in the UK in November 2008 and although they are quite insufficient, the local British embassy will still get involved if the victim – or someone they know – informs them or the UK's Forced Marriage Unit about their situation. This can stop the victim being married against their will even though forced marriage is not a criminal act in itself. But if an FMPO is violated, then it becomes a crime and anybody convicted of coercing someone into marriage could be jailed for up to two years.

Some say that this law does not go far enough and that forcing anyone to marry should indeed be illegal and therefore become a crime, especially since forced marriage is already a violation of internationally recognised human rights standards. But then, opponents fear that victims might be dissuaded from asking for help because they might be afraid of criminalising their family. This could make the practice "go underground" and make it even worse.

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Adapted from *BBC Ethics Guide*  
October 2021  
(448 words)

## FOSSIL FUELS MADE OUR FAMILIES RICH. NOW WE WANT THIS INDUSTRY TO END

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Over a century ago, our families were central in unlocking fossil fuels. Governments invested in the infrastructure and production needed for its growth. Our personal histories compel us to publicly acknowledge what we have known for many years: the extraction and burning of fossil fuels is killing life on our planet.

Fossil fuels killed 8.7 million people globally in 2018 – disproportionately impacting Black, Brown, Indigenous, and poor communities. Human lives aren't the only ones being lost. More than 1 billion sea creatures along the Canadian coast were cooked to death during the summer's record-breaking heatwave in the Pacific Northwest. Fossil fuels are a technology of the past – leftovers of an era when we believed we could force our will on nature and disregard the connectivity of all living beings.

The latest report of the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) showed that some climate impacts are already irreversible and that only through immediate, internationally coordinated action, can we hope to avoid the most severe consequences. The terrifying reality is that inaction, or even half-measures, will cost countless lives. Yet Congress is still not reacting to the climate emergency with the urgency that a humanity-threatening crisis demands.

Congress must help us enter a clean energy age with the same level of support that fossil fuels companies have received for over a century. A rapid managed transition off fossil fuels – including an end to new refineries, infrastructure, and pipelines like Line 3 that lock in more dangerous pollution and warming emissions – can prevent the worst of the climate crisis while securing a future where our communities and the planet thrive. Including safeguards to ensure good jobs for workers in transition and responsible land management will help revive our economy while tackling environmental injustice. Congress must also use the budget reconciliation bill to end all federal support for the fossil fuel industry.

We must also find our way back to a deeper connection to the Earth, its well-being and our place in it. The global response to climate change must acknowledge our interconnection with nature and re-awaken our love for and connection with each other and the natural world. And we must realize that this interconnectedness is a natural resource that should not be discounted.

Our history with oil has granted us tremendous privilege. With that privilege comes the opportunity to contribute to a world where all have the chance to thrive. We are urging our leaders to listen to science and understand the fundamental truth that we can't build back better unless we build back fossil-free. We can harness the great American ingenuity and resourcefulness to steer the world toward a safer and fairer future.

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Adapted from *The Guardian*  
November 2021  
(456 words)

## FRANCE ACCUSES PATEL OF BLACKMAIL IN ROW OVER CHANNEL MIGRANTS

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Priti Patel, the UK home minister, has been accused by France's interior minister of plotting "financial blackmail" and a violation of international maritime law in a deepening diplomatic row over efforts to prevent migrants from crossing the Channel by boat.

Gérald Darmanin said that UK plans, released on Wednesday night, to send back boats of vulnerable people into French waters would not be accepted by his government.

"France will not accept any practice that breaks maritime law, nor any financial blackmail," Darmanin wrote on Twitter. "Britain's commitments must be respected. I said this clearly to my counterpart" during a meeting on Wednesday, he added.

The statement from Darmanin, the British home secretary's counterpart, reflects anger in Paris about reported plans by the British government to begin turning back boats carrying migrants once they enter UK waters in the Channel.

French officials and unions are also concerned that the "turnaround" tactics could result in greater numbers of migrants jumping into the sea as Border Force vessels approach.

French officials have also been angered by suggestions that Britain could withhold some of the €62.7m it promised earlier this year to fund policing and patrols in northern France unless more is done to prevent crossings.

Lucy Moreton, a professional officer at the Immigration Services Union that represents Border Force guards, said she was also concerned that Patel's announcement could lead to more migrant passengers leaping into the water. "This announcement makes it more likely that some could jump into the sea when they are approached to ensure their boat is not turned back," she said.

Union representatives who have examined the protocol for using the "turnaround" tactic suspect it will never be used.

"To use this tactic, you need perfect weather, you need to know there is adequate fuel on the suspected vessel so it can return to France, the vessel would have to be seaworthy, there can't be any babies or minors on board, every passenger has to be healthy, and there can be no chance of loss of life. Highly unlikely," they said.

"Any boat coming up alongside at speed would capsize most of these boats anyway and then we're looking at people getting into trouble in the water and drowning ... and then we'll get blamed for that."

Aid organisations and refugee representatives condemned the announcement. The British Red Cross said the policy would detract from finding solutions that would give people alternatives to making the dangerous crossing through busy shipping lanes.

Steve Valdez-Symonds, Amnesty International UK's refugee and migrant rights director, said: "The government's pushback plan is senseless, dangerous and almost certainly unlawful."

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Adapted from *The Guardian*  
September 2021  
(444 words)

## FRANCE IS DOING WELL, BUT FEELING MISERABLE

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Tune in to any French prime-time talk show this autumn and discussion rages over the country's wretched decline. France is losing its factories and jobs, squeezing incomes and small businesses, destroying its landscapes and language, neglecting its borders and squandering its global stature. Its people are fractious and divided, if not on the verge of a civil war, as a public letter from retired army officers suggested earlier this year. [...]

The anxiety is widespread. In a recent poll 75% agreed that France is "in decline." When asked to sum up their mood in another survey, the French favoured three words: uncertainty, worry and fatigue.

Like others, the French have some good reasons for apprehension. Rising gas and petrol prices, supply-chain delays, a new wave of covid-19 cases and restrictions: all are genuine causes of uncertainty. [...]

Yet there is a paradox at the heart of France's current malaise: the country is doing fairly well, and in some respects better than its neighbours. Covid-19 cases are rising again in France, but nothing like as fast as in Germany. In July Mr. Macron introduced Covid-19 passes; France now has a greater share of fully vaccinated people than Germany or Britain. Like most of Europe, the French economy is enjoying a bounce after a deep drop in GDP last year, and is expected to expand by 6% this year. [...]

So why are the French so convinced that things are falling apart? There is no single explanation. [...] One reason could be a lingering French suspicion of the financial gains that economic recovery brings. The government has spent heavily to keep jobs and businesses going during the pandemic, in order to avoid lay-offs and bankruptcies, and to protect incomes. Purchasing power rose in 2020, and will do so again in 2021. But this policy is now also helping those with investments in such firms. The saved jobs are taken for granted while the rewarded shareholders are regarded in some quarters as undeserving beneficiaries. Mr. Macron still struggles to shrug off his label of *président des riches*. [...]

A further answer may be that, as Claude Senik, an economist at the Paris School of Economics, puts it: "The French have an ambivalent relationship to happiness." Surveys consistently rank the French as more unhappy about everything than their peers, and *morosité* resists economic performance. Being idealists, the French find that the real world always disappoints. Taught from a young age to adopt *un esprit critique*, they delight in disapproval. Last year, as Covid-19 first spread, a poll suggested that only 39% of the French thought that their government was managing the crisis well, compared with 74% in Germany and 69% in Britain. Bleak is chic.

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Adapted from *The Economist*  
November 2021  
(458 words)

## FRESH THINKING ABOUT FRESH AIR

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In 1842, Edwin Chadwick, a British social reformer, published his “Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population”. By documenting evidence of social and geographic inequalities in health, Chadwick showed that poor sanitation was associated with poor health. The report led British cities to organise clean water supplies and to centralise their sewage systems, reducing the prevalence of infectious diseases, in particular cholera. Now a new public-health priority is becoming apparent: making indoor air cleaner.

Take schools. They are “chronically under-ventilated”, according to the *Lancet* covid-19 commission. A study of 100 American classrooms found 87 with worryingly low ventilation rates. Across Denmark, France, Italy, Norway and Sweden, researchers found that indoor-air quality in 66% of classrooms fell short of healthy standards. In America, nearly one child in 13 has asthma—a condition triggered by allergens often found in schools. Outdoor-air pollution can also penetrate inside buildings. Childhood exposure can affect neurodevelopment and academic performance, and cause cancer.

Many adult people spend more than 90% of their time indoors. Researchers have linked under-ventilated spaces in buildings to a range of ailments—headaches, fatigue, shortness of breath, coughs, dizziness, nausea, and irritation of eye, nose, throat and skin. Poor ventilation has been blamed for increased absences from work, decreased productivity and asthma.

The pandemic has brought a new urgency to the matter. The Covid-19 virus spreads between people less by close contact and infected surfaces and more by hitching a ride on aerosol particles from people’s lungs that can linger in the air of an ill-ventilated room.

Cheap sensors to detect carbon-dioxide concentrations in rooms could provide occupants with useful data on when to open windows or upgrade their air-conditioning systems. National indoor-air-quality standards would help. One way to enforce them could be through ventilation certificates for buildings, similar to food-hygiene certificates that already exist for restaurants. The bill for all this, need not be huge. A recent study found that raising the standard of ventilation in all American elementary and secondary schools to the minimum level would cost less than 0.1% of the country’s typical public spending on education. President Joe Biden’s American Rescue Plan assigns \$123bn to improving school infrastructure and mentions ventilation as a priority. More investment would be money well spent. Better indoor air boosts academic performance—maths and reading scores go up, and pupils are measurably more attentive in class. Office-workers benefit, too. Researchers have found the cognitive scores of people in well-ventilated offices are 61% higher than those of workers in conventional office set-ups.

Covid-19 should lead policymakers to ensure that ventilation is not the forgotten part of the agenda for improved public health.

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Adapted from *The Economist*  
May 2021  
(444 words)

## GENTRIFYING PRISONS IN AMERICA: THE CURIOUS APPEAL OF DISUSED PENITENTIARIES

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Lorton Reformatory, a prison in Virginia, has been turned into serene apartments, their patios dotted with deckchairs. An outdoor pool, surrounded by plants, glints in the sun. Nearby, within the vast, windowless walls of what was a maximum security unit, a shopping centre is being built, the final stage in the development of a once overcrowded prison complex into “Liberty”, a spacious “urban village”.

The 80-acre development is a public-private partnership between Fairfax County and two development companies. They were drawn to the prison’s site, in the tech hub of northern Virginia, and to its design. Established in 1910 as a model jail, Lorton Reformatory resembled a campus, with walkways between dormitories and lots of outdoor space. Its inmates were taught vocational skills. But as more punitive ideas about incarceration returned and its population swelled during the “war on drugs”, the prison became violent. It closed in 2001.

Transforming a prison into fancy homes while acknowledging its past is a balancing act, says one of the developers. In the 171 apartments, most of which are rented, 44 of them as affordable housing, the original windows (high in the ceiling) have been given larger openings. Signs warning against loitering and unauthorised gatherings remain, as do guards’ huts at the peripheral fence. Nearby, a museum named after Lucy Burns, a leader of the National Women’s Party, tells the history of the suffragettes imprisoned in a women’s workhouse in Lorton.

Marketing all this seems to have been a dream. Liberty’s logo is an image of a watchtower, of which there are eight, all renovated, dotted around the site. When Francis Cordor, a software engineer who emigrated from Liberia 20 years ago, saw that one of them loomed over one of 181 new houses, he knew he wanted to buy it. “It makes me think of the passing of time, how places can improve,” he says, adding that an elderly neighbour told him Lorton had once been synonymous with horror.

Though its architecture makes this a particularly habitable prison, it is not the only one: across America, former jails are being turned into housing. Even as the prison population has fallen, new jails continue to be built. That has left a stock of enormous, solidly constructed buildings, which tend to come with a lot of surrounding space. In the Bronx, a juvenile detention centre has been demolished to make way for a five-acre (20,000 square metres) affordable-housing development. [...] Inhabitants of such developments like the modernist industrial design jails seem to encourage, and the space. They also like the fact that they can leave.

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Adapted from *The Economist*  
October 2021  
(451 words)

## GIRLS EXCLUDED FROM SCHOOL

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Girls have been excluded from Afghan secondary schools, with only boys and male teachers allowed back into classrooms even though Taliban officials, who seized power last month, said they were working to reach the right decision on the matter.

School girls told the BBC they were devastated not to be going back to school. And since Taliban officials have said that women would be allowed to study and work only in accordance with their interpretation of Islamic law, many fear a return of the regime of the 1990s when the Taliban severely restricted girls' and women's rights.

Their fears are all the greater as working women have already been told to stay at home until the security situation improves, and Taliban fighters have beaten women protesting against the all-male interim government.

However, the Taliban spokesman said officials were currently working on reopening girls' schools, including the division of teachers. He also told the BBC that officials were trying to sort out transport for older schoolgirls.

"I am so worried about my future," said one Afghan schoolgirl, who had hoped to be a lawyer. [...] Should I stay at home and wait for someone to knock on the door and ask me to marry him? Is this the purpose of being a woman?" [...] Another 16-year-old schoolgirl said "I wanted to become a doctor, and that dream has vanished. Many of us think they will never let us go back to school. And even if they open the high schools again, they don't really want women to become educated."

Earlier this week, the Taliban announced that women would be allowed to study at universities, but they would not be able to do so alongside men and would face a new dress code. But some suggested the new rules would exclude women from education because the universities do not have the resources to provide separate classes.

Since 2001, when the Taliban were removed from power, enormous progress had been made in improving Afghanistan's education enrolments and literacy rates, especially for many girls and women who were mostly illiterate and for this reason often bullied and called idiots by boys and even their husbands. The number of girls in primary schools then increased from almost zero to 2.5 million, while the female literacy rate nearly doubled in a decade to thirty per cent. However, many of the gains have been made in cities. Many girls in rural areas were still left behind. [...]

Shortly after taking power the Taliban said the rights of women in Afghanistan would be respected "within the framework of Islamic law", but, today, no one knows what "within the framework of Islamic law" exactly means.

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Adapted from *BBC News*  
September 2021  
(449 words)

## GOING GREEN DRAMATICALLY BENEFITS BUSINESSES

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The onset of the pandemic and the ensuing lockdown have imperilled businesses worldwide. It will be tempting for firms to put any commitment to the environment in the back seat as they attempt to recover, especially as some governments reduce requirements and undermine environmental protection. This is short-sighted: businesses do not have to sacrifice their environmental goals for protecting their growth. Greening initiatives like offering green products or services, introducing green processes internally, hiring employees to promote sustainable practices, or going beyond compliance requirements, can actually help firms.

Using data on 9,200 small and medium businesses in 35 countries across Europe and the US, our research suggests that on average, businesses benefit from going green, although the type of greening that gives the most significant benefit may differ between firms. By offering new green products or services, a business is more likely to cater to an emerging trend or niche market, which can make it more competitive. Frugalpac, a UK-based company that makes paper-based packaging for liquids that cut carbon footprints, received a £2 million investment during the pandemic – a time when most other companies were struggling for finance. [...]

Job seekers are increasingly attracted to companies that care for the environment. The employees of firms that promote sustainability are more likely to believe that their employer will care for them, and are more satisfied with their jobs. Such companies create a higher sense of personal and organisational purpose that makes work meaningful. A recent poll shows that millennials and Gen Z's are more concerned about the environment than any previous generation. This means they prioritise employers who put sustainability at the forefront. [...]

Greening initiatives signal to external stakeholders, such as investors and customers, that a business is committed to doing good. This can lead to increased investment, customers and stakeholder loyalty. This is pertinent in the aftermath of COVID-19 as there is heightened awareness about the need to protect the environment.

Highly sustainable companies benefit from superior stock market performance in the long run, according to research looking at American companies in the period 1993-2009. Investors are increasingly questioning firms on their commitment to sustainability, and expecting meaningful steps from them for integrating consideration of such issues into their investing criteria.

Greening processes can result in efficiency gains by reducing energy costs, allowing businesses to secure green tax credits, improving operational efficiency, and embedding circular economy principles internally.

Conversely, in cases where businesses harm the environment, they have to be prepared to incur significant costs. A prominent example is the famous case of Volkswagen, which has even adversely impacted the performance of other German car manufacturers like BMW and Mercedes Benz.

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Adapted from *The Conversation*, UK  
August 2021  
(459 words)

## HELP! I DON'T KNOW HOW TO BE AN OFFICE PERSON ANYMORE

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[...] Pre-Covid, work greetings were simple. Now there's even a new uncertainty about how to say hello in person to clients and co-workers.

Do I give them a high-five? [...] Do I give them a handshake or a hug too? [...] I, too, have felt uncertainty wondering what the new norms are for how to interact with co-workers and be an "office person" again. [...] Talking with colleagues face-to-face now both thrills and exhausts me. I'm not alone in having a bumpy return to office life.

For Katie George, an events and operations manager for a university in Connecticut, the biggest pro to having gone back to the office full time in August was seeing co-workers again. But the huge con is waking up before 6am and driving more than an hour from Danbury to West Haven, which takes a financial toll due to rising gas prices and a mental toll due to traffic.

"There's a different tone of the day when you're just kind of waking up and enjoying a coffee and then logging on, versus trying to combat angry parents dropping their kids off at school, or buses or trucks," George said, adding that "there are just so many factors that you can't control. Last week, for example, there was a huge accident right at the exit that I normally take. It took me legitimately two hours to get to work."

It's an aspect of "before life" that many people are not sure they even want to try to handle again.

George said that, despite what so many workers learned from their time spent away from the office, there's no acknowledgment from employers of what commuting costs. The time she spent getting ready for her day or spending quality time with her husband when she was working remotely or on a hybrid schedule is now spent commuting.

Before returning to the office, "I was able to have a normal breakfast instead of an English muffin in my car," she said. Now she's back to having that perpetually stressful no-time-left-in-the-day feeling. Having experienced the benefits of a flexible schedule, George would love to bring those opportunities into her "regular" office work but said it's hard to implement in higher education settings.

Establishing boundaries with yourself over how much and when you will work can help with the transition, California therapist Katheryn Perez said, but managers are the ones who should be helping employees adjust by checking in with them about their individual needs.

"As much as we want to say that individually we can set these boundaries or make these changes, it's really difficult to do that if leadership is not on the same page," she said.

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Adapted from *The Huffington Post*  
November 2021  
(459 words)

## HERE'S WHAT IT WAS LIKE TO WORK AT A CLOTHING FACTORY IN 2020

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Workers in the garment industry faced worsening conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic, a new study has found. Workers at clothing factories in Ethiopia, Honduras, India and Myanmar faced higher rates of unpaid wages, violence, threats and even bans on using the toilet at work in the last year, a study published this week by Sheffield University said. The conditions employees faced were a direct result of the way global supply chains in the clothing industry work, the researchers found.

The 1,140 workers interviewed for the study worked for companies supplying major clothing brands including H&M, Nike, Next, British supermarket Tesco, US childrenswear retailer The Children's Place and French sports retailer Decathlon. [...] Lead author of the study, Prof. Le Baron said there was a risk that the negative shifts in working conditions could be permanent.

Workers in the countries the study covered saw an average 11 per cent drop in wages compared to pre-pandemic levels. Of the 72 per cent of workers who kept their jobs during the pandemic, 35 per cent reported receiving verbal abuse at work, 34 per cent received threats or intimidation, 22 per cent reported unfair wage deductions or withholdings and 19 per cent reported being denied access to water and toilet facilities while at work. [...]

One worker in India explained the position many found themselves in, saying "we are here basically to earn and survive. There are thousands of migrant workers like us. So we have to cope with whatever issues come up."

According to Le Baron, the deterioration in working conditions was set off by the way household name brands in developed countries responded to the economic hit of the pandemic. "We saw cancellations of orders, we saw refusal to pay for goods that suppliers had already produced, we saw the whole domino effect that big brand companies kind of unleashed within their supply chains. And these trends have very much resulted from that," she said.

One anonymous company representative interviewed by the researchers put it more bluntly. "When this crisis hit, the kind of knee jerk reaction of [multinational corporations] was indeed to cut and run for the hills, leaving, yes, a huge amount of disruption in the aftermath," they said. [...]

Another long term issue could be the rise in household debt among factory workers, a greater number of whom took on loans to cover a loss of earnings during the pandemic. "We have a ticking time bomb," Le Baron said. [...]

Euronews contacted the companies mentioned in the report: H&M declined to comment; Nike sent a link to a webpage highlighting the brand values; other companies did not respond.

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Adapted from *Euronews.next*  
June 2021  
(456 words)

## HOUSES OF TOMORROW: A BETTER VISION OF DOMESTICITY, OR A DYSTOPIAN NIGHTMARE?

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Imagine a small, bluish room. Wires, screens, sensors. A few keepsakes from the old world. The room's fleshy inhabitant, confined indoors by a zoonotic pandemic, greenwashes a data-mining company from her bed. The government has forbidden her to step outside.

There is a communal kitchen down the corridor, which she shares with a few strangers she met online, but mostly she orders her meals via an interface and eats them here. Microphones record her interactions. She has bought a few rainforest plants to brighten the space. Her pocket surveillance device reminds her to water them. She catches the news: the world's richest man has just left the Earth's atmosphere.

So much for the home of 2021! What about that of 2050? Might it offer a more hopeful vision of domesticity than the dystopian nightmare we have been living through these past couple of years? Or are we sliding into a world of surveillance and atomisation, climate crisis and housing crisis, drowning alone as our meta headsets suck the very data from our souls?

Maybe both, says Sarah Douglas, director of the Liminal Space. She is behind the forthcoming Tomorrow's Home exhibition at the Museum of the Home in east London, which imagines how we'll be living three decades hence. "The home of the future could help us flourish in ever more tailored and sophisticated ways," she says.

The exhibition imagines a home inhabited by three (gender-neutral) people. Kai, 17, works for a 3D printing company, hangs out in the metaverse and has never eaten meat (and can't understand why anyone would). A grandperson Mo, 76, is a retired teacher with early-onset dementia who pines for the good old days. And Charlie, 34, has cerebral palsy and works for a protein manufacturer based in Buenos Aires. Life in 2050 is shaped by three overarching "macro-trends": the climate crisis; the ageing population; and the "fourth Industrial Revolution", which will see data-gathering technology infiltrate our intimate spaces.

Those who wish to keep their home as a private sanctuary will not find it easy. The world's most powerful tech companies have already shifted focus from phones to homes: Google has its range of "intelligent" security systems; Amazon has filed patents for devices capable of reading your "emotional data"; and Facebook is launching its "metaverse". These technologies have a way of overriding any initial reservations we might have about them. People don't buy Alexa because it's a surveillance device. They buy it because it's nice to have a hands-free timer in the kitchen. It's still a surveillance device. In the future, people might be required to submit to some form of monitoring in order to "prove" that they deserve to live there.

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Adapted from *The Guardian*  
November 2021  
(459 words)

## HOW BILLIONAIRES ARE USING CELEBRITIES FOR THEIR SPACE PROJECTS

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Actor William Shatner, 90, is set to become the oldest human in space during the 11-minute jaunt with three other civilian passengers from a launchpad in the Texas desert. He is another welcome bonus for Blue Origin, the Washington-based company that became mired this month in allegations of sexism and a “toxic, authoritarian workplace culture” including safety shortcuts. Bezos, who rejects the claims, insists that commercial, short-duration joyrides are crucial to his longer-term vision of moving Earth’s heavy industry into space.

Yet alongside environmental concerns over proliferating numbers of propellant-hungry rockets, cynics see little technological or exploration value in so-called space tourism. To some analysts, the well-publicized jaunts from Bezos and Branson are big on capturing attention but deliver little more than moments of weightlessness and the barest glimpse of space not even 70 miles from Earth, when Nasa sent astronauts 250,000 miles to land on the moon way back in 1969.

“Human exploration is about the future, and space exploration is a long bet on a very distant tomorrow. What kind of future will the billionaire space race promote?” wrote a professor of brand strategy in New York

After the flight Bezos said, “I want to thank every Amazon employee, and every Amazon customer, because you paid for all this. In the Prime space future, we won’t have astronauts. We’ll have egonauts. Whatever you think of space travel as a human endeavour, space tourism is an awesome business”. In an interview with CNN in July he said that Blue Origin’s mission was about building a road to space for the next generations to do amazing things there, and those amazing things will solve problems here on Earth. With paying passengers, Bezos is also at the forefront of a potentially lucrative industry projected to be worth more than \$2.5bn by 2027, all while Amazon continues to face criticism for “exploitative” pay and conditions.

Musk, whose SpaceX venture is already ferrying US astronauts to and from the international space station in partnership with Nasa, is the only operator to have sent a private crew into orbit. Last month’s Inspiration4 mission is seen as a forerunner to more ambitious plans such as taking tourists to the ISS and around the moon.

The lack of societal benefits from such flights prompted one Democratic politician, to propose a tax on space tourists and the companies that carry them. “Space exploration isn’t a tax-free holiday for the wealthy. Just as normal Americans pay taxes when they buy airline tickets, billionaires who fly into space to produce nothing of scientific value should do the same, and then some,” he said

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Adapted from *The Guardian*  
October 2021  
(450 words)

## HOW CHILDREN ARE BEING TARGETED WITH HIDDEN ADS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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Have you ever accidentally clicked on an advert while scrolling on social media because you didn't realise that's what it was? This is what advertisers call "content marketing".

Using funny memes, insider-driven stories or inspirational content, this type of advertising disguises its commercial nature. Notably, it features no call to action, no "buy this, it's great!". There isn't even an obvious connection to the product or the service being advertised. Anything works so long as it promotes positive emotions in the consumer.

Stealth advertising is of course nothing new. Product placement has been around since the mid-1890s – it is as old as the moving image itself. But the combination of content marketing and social media creates something far more powerful. And when the product being sold is addictive, or potentially dangerous, the impact on the most vulnerable audiences is alarming.

[...] Content marketing ads are designed to trigger as little cognitive engagement as possible. Instead they are designed to create a warm fuzzy feeling or to make their audience giggle. This way, a brand turns from a market crier to a friendly pal. Which, in the age of social media, is a pal gaining followers. As these followers like, comment on and share any ad, it gains momentum – the holy grail, for marketers, being to see it go viral.

So far so harmless? Not quite. Some brands sell addictive, potentially dangerous products – from alcohol to gambling – and for them, content marketing is as attractive as sheep's clothing is to a wolf. [...] There is one target audience for whom the effects can be disastrous. Under-25s – including children below the legal gambling age – are not so good at putting up mental defences. And this is the group that, according to our research, engages – likes, shares, follows – the most with gambling content marketing on Twitter.

Children have fewer skills for recognising advertising than adults – they just don't have the experience. And 17-24 year olds are more prone to process advertising affectively because, as neuroscientific research confirms, their brain structure is undergoing dramatic changes and the neocortex (where rational decisions are made) is in upheaval.

When presented with content marketing, it is nearly impossible for children to immediately recognise the posts' persuasive intent. [...] This effect was even stronger for esports bets – which have an almost inherent appeal to children, teens and young adults, because children and young people love games. This is alarming when you consider that two-thirds of all UK-based Twitter followers of gambling accounts are under 25 years old. They may come for the banter, but because they are young and their brains make them impulsive, they could well stay for the gambling addiction. [...]

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Adapted from *theconversation.com*  
November 2021  
(457 words)

## [...] HOW INDIVIDUAL ACTIONS CAN COMBAT CLIMATE CHANGE

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It is tempting to dismiss personal responsibility for lowering one's carbon footprint. After all, it was BP that popularised the concept in the mid-aughts, telling everyone that it was "time to go on a low-carbon diet". The company knew full well how impossible that was, much like its own ambition to go "beyond petroleum." Instead, sharply cutting emissions takes changes in business operations, advances in technologies, new incentives for financing and muscular government policies – in addition to individual efforts.

Not all personal actions are equal. Refusing a plastic bag at a sales counter looks saintly but it won't do much, especially if one then carries the bagless products on to an aeroplane. Scale matters, as do actual emissions reductions. There are good reasons why airlines offer to offset flight emissions: it makes passengers feel better and fly more. The illusion of progress that comes from performing small, single actions is a cognitive bias that undermines real advancement.

For individual actions, however small, to be effective it is essential that they generate momentum. Consider cycling in cities. Cyclists demanded more and safer bike paths, which in turn led to more cyclists—virtuous cyclists leading to a virtuous cycle of policy push and pull. Amsterdam, Copenhagen and other cities famous for having more cycle-trips than car-trips reached that point because of early cycle activists demanding safer roads. It was a process, and they started the transition away from car-centric street design earlier than others. Paris and other cities are now following suit, prompted in part by covid-19 and broader thinking about how to use limited public space. [...]

Of course there are misaligned incentives that lead people to maximise living space rather than to optimise it. Everyone from real-estate agents and mortgage brokers to divorce lawyers benefit from more square metres. It doesn't help that home size is a public signal (and easily visible on Instagram), while a longer commute is private (and scarcely broadcast on social media). Ideally, policies could be put in place to make city-living more attractive to families, which would lower individual carbon emissions. [...]

Time is the essential factor. It is one thing for a government to promise significant carbon cuts by the end of the decade. It is another to realise that today's living and mobility choices lock in emissions for years to come. [...]

What is crucial is to find the right balance [...] Reducing beef consumption is a crucial individual contribution to cutting emissions. Vegetarians, meanwhile, won't cut carbon at scale because of having removed beef from their diet: they will cut carbon because they represent a committed, vocal, core group organising and pushing broader climate policies. [...]

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Adapted from *The Economist*  
November 2021  
(451 words)

## HOW PEDESTRIANS ARE LIGHTING HOMES IN SIERRA LEONE

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Growing up during the civil war in Sierra Leone, Jeremiah Thoronka had a difficult childhood. Living with his single mother in a slum on the outskirts of Freetown, the country's capital, they relied on dirty charcoal and firewood to generate heat and light. "I have first-hand experience of growing up without energy or electricity," says Thoronka, who is now 20. [...] He witnessed the devastating effects of energy poverty. Many local children suffered from respiratory problems caused by smoke inhalation and struggled to keep up with their schoolwork without proper light. Families' reliance on firewood and cheap kerosene generators led to frequent house fires.

Forests in the area were destroyed as people chopped down trees for firewood. Environmental degradation and deforestation have left Sierra Leone highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. It led Thoronka to search for a solution. "I wanted to develop a more sustainable energy system, educate people about energy efficiency and stop their overuse of natural resources," he says. [...]

When he was 17 and studying at the African Leadership University in Rwanda, Thoronka founded Optim Energy, an innovative start-up that uses kinetic energy – the energy objects have when in motion – to generate clean electricity. He developed a piezoelectric device that harnesses energy from heat, movement and pressure – all which occur naturally in the environment. When the device is placed under a road, in an area with a lot of traffic and passers-by, it absorbs the vibrations they create and uses them to generate an electric current. As nothing is being burned, no emissions are released in the process.

Perhaps the most attractive element of the concept is that once the device has been installed, people produce energy without even realising. Unlike other forms of renewable energy, such as solar or wind power, the device does not rely on certain weather conditions to produce electricity. [...] "The greatest benefits of piezoelectric devices are that no battery and no electricity connection to an external power source is needed," says Rohrer from SEforALL.

Optim Energy ran a successful pilot programme in Thoronka's local area. Using two devices, the start-up provides power free-of-charge to 150 households, made up of 1,500 people, and 15 schools, with over 9,000 students. The community was incredibly receptive to Thoronka's solution and were happy to switch to a cleaner, more efficient option. "People accept solutions that are local. They will open their doors if they can relate to it," Thoronka says, adding that the benefits of adopting clean energy are clearly visible.

Besides improving energy access, Thoronka is on a mission to educate people in Sierra Leone about the environmental impacts of their energy use, and encourage them to use power efficiently and sparingly.

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Adapted from *bbc.com*  
July 2021  
(460 words)

## HOW SOCIAL MEDIA MAY AFFECT YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

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The rise of social media has meant that people are more connected than ever. But reliance on social media can have a detrimental effect on mental health, with the average Brit checking their phone as much as twenty-eight times a day.

While social media platforms can have their benefits, using them too frequently can make you feel increasingly unhappy and isolated in the long run.

To start with, it may affect sleep, and having enough good quality sleep is of paramount importance. Indeed, many of us use our phones too soon before choosing to go to sleep, making it harder to doze off. "Getting worked up with anxiety or envy from what we see on social media keeps the brain on high alert, preventing us from falling asleep," explains Dr Tim Bono, author of *When Likes Aren't Enough*. "Besides, he adds, the light from our mobile device just inches from our face can suppress the release of melatonin, a hormone that helps us feel tired and doze off."

Another problem is the possible impact of social media on self-esteem. Indeed, the constant barrage of perfectly filtered photos that appear on Instagram, for example, are bound to knock many people's self-esteem. A study conducted by the University of Copenhagen found that many people suffer from "Facebook envy" due to the fact that many social media users derive a sense of worth based on how they are doing relative to others. "They then place their happiness in a variable that is completely beyond their control," Dr Tim Bono says.

Besides, more generally speaking, social media may also affect human connections. As human beings, it's important for us to be able to communicate and forge personal connections with one another. However, it can be hard to do so when we're glued to rectangular screens, becoming more acquainted with our friends' digital facades than their real-life personas. [...]

We may even totally miss human connection when we direct all of our attention toward capturing the best shots for our social media followers to admire. Then we are less available to enjoy other aspects of the experience in real time. Social experiences present an opportunity to take in a wide array of sights, sounds, interesting facts - and perhaps most importantly - connect with loved ones. Spending too much time on our phones will detract from those other aspects of the experience, undermining the happiness we could be gleaning from them.

Not only has social media been proven to cause unhappiness, but it can also lead to the development of mental health issues such as anxiety or depression when used too much or without caution.

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Adapted from *The Independent*  
September 2021  
(448 words)

## HOW TESLA SHOULD COMBAT CHILD LABOR IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

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Last week, Elon Musk announced that Tesla plans to manufacture 20 million electric-powered vehicles by 2030 [...]

The impetus is clear: Global warming is threatening our planet, and a rapid and dramatic reduction in carbon emissions is essential. Battery-powered vehicles are the most promising alternative, but for the moment they depend on cobalt, a mineral found primarily in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where child labor and unsafe mining conditions are common. The U.S. Department of Labor has documented the nature and scope of the cobalt problem in the DRC. Its most recent global report on child labor concludes that “in 2019, the DRC made no advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor.” [...] The report includes a focus on children working in cobalt and copper mines in the DRC and especially in so-called artisanal and small-scale mines (ASM) [...] It is estimated that 15% to 30% of cobalt from the DRC comes from ASM sites.

Another report published last month by the World Economic Forum makes a series of thoughtful and practical recommendations [...] The writer of the report makes a compelling case for collective action by those working throughout the cobalt supply chain, including local mine owners, commodity traders, battery makers, and global buyers such as auto companies [...] which will help ensure that children don’t gain access to the mines and encourage local authorities to provide them with access to decent schools. Within the mines a formalized process will help to establish safety standards and a system to apply them.

Fortunately, some mostly European companies have begun to come together in this way to wrestle with these daunting challenges. American automakers are notably missing from this table, including Ford, General Motors, Chrysler, and Tesla. Several years ago, Elon Musk vowed he would avoid sourcing from the DRC altogether, instead relying on North American mines, which account for less than 4% of the global reserves.

If he is forecasting the production of 20 million electric vehicles in a decade, this clearly will not be enough.

Alternatively, Musk is promising that his firm is developing a new cobalt-free battery technology. Yet, many experts estimate that it will be a decade before any of the alternatives are commercially available at scale. So in June, Tesla announced a partnership with Glencore, which is responsible for mining cobalt in the DRC. This partnership, coupled with Musk’s ambitious plans to lead in the global production of electric vehicles, should compel both companies to come to the table with their competitors and to join the collective effort to end child labor and support responsible cobalt mining in the DRC.

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Adapted from *Forbes*  
October 2020  
(451 words)

## ICE CREAM AND SUSHI FLY ACROSS TEL AVIV SKIES IN LATEST TEST OF ISRAELI DRONE PROGRAM

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Cartons of ice cream and sushi flew across the skies of Tel Aviv on Monday as part of the latest test of Israel's drone program, which officials hope provided a glimpse of the near future.

Israel's National Drone Initiative is a two-year government program that aims to establish a nationwide network built on the capabilities of Israeli drone companies that deliver goods to pick up spots for customers via drone.

The program carried out the drill Monday in preparation for large-scale commercial deliveries made by drones to ease pressure on traffic-laden urban roads.

Some participants in the experiment are optimistic about the future of drones, including Yoely Or, co-founder of Cando Drones, one of the companies that participated in Monday's experiment. The project, now in the third of eight stages, is still in its infancy and faces many questions about security and logistics. "We had 700 test flights at the start of this year and now we are close to 9,000 flights," said Daniella Partem, from Israel Innovation Authority, a partner in the drone initiative.

Israel is a global leader in drone technology, with much of its expertise rooted in the highly technologized military. Many of the 16 companies participating in the drone initiative have links to the military.

The initiative was inspired by the halting effect that COVID-19 had on the transportation of medical supplies in early 2020. An early stage tested the transport of medicines and blood plasma by drones. The initiative has since carried out wider tests in three different urban districts in Israel and hopes to promote legislation that would allow drones to be widely used through an app that customers and clients can use.

Israel's population of 9.3 million people is largely packed in urban centers, with major cities like Tel Aviv and Jerusalem suffering from high levels of road congestion. Access to Israel's airspace is highly regulated by security officials, and flying a drone requires a permit from the Israeli Civil Aviation Authority.

The initiative faces many obstacles. Officials will have to ensure that drones can handle flights through turbulent weather conditions and that the skies can be quickly cleared in case of war or emergency. There are also issues of privacy.

"Once you have a drone that actually takes photos or videos you create a totally new dimension of privacy invasion," said Tehilla Schwartz Altshuler, digital technology expert and fellow at the Israel Democracy Institute, a think tank in Jerusalem. The drone initiative has already tried to address such concerns by using cameras that can help the machine land, but don't have the resolution to take detailed photos.

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Adapted from *Newsweek*  
October 2021  
(451 words)

## IN ONE TEXAS DISTRICT, TEACHERS WERE TOLD TO GIVE 'OPPOSING' VIEWS OF THE HOLOCAUST

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A Texas school district has become the center of controversy after an administrator reportedly instructed teachers to provide students with "opposing" views of the Holocaust.

Gina Peddy, the executive director of curriculum and instruction for the Carroll Independent School District in Southlake, Texas, is alleged to have made the comments during a meeting last Friday, according to NBC News.

Peddy was reportedly meeting with teachers to instruct them on how to stock their classroom libraries when the subject of recent statewide legislation, as well as the Holocaust, came up.

"Just try to remember the concepts of [House Bill] 3979," Peddy could be heard saying on tape. "And make sure that if you have a book on the Holocaust, that you have one that has other opposing perspectives."

House Bill 3979, mandates that if public school teachers choose to discuss current events or widely debated or controversial public policy or social issues, they should present numerous points of view "without giving deference to any one perspective."

Superintendent of school, Lane Ledbetter issued a statement via Facebook apologizing for the incident.

"I express my sincere apology regarding the online article and news story released today." During the conversations with teachers during last week's meeting, the comments made were in no way to convey that the Holocaust was anything less than a terrible event in history and we recognize there are not two sides of the Holocaust," he continued.

"As we continue to work through implementation of HB3979, we also understand this bill does not require an opposing viewpoint on historical facts. As a district we will work to add clarity to our expectations for teachers and once again apologize for any hurt or confusion this has caused."

Numerous local political leaders have chimed in on the claims, including Texas state Sen. Kelly Hancock, who argued that Southlake's actions had nothing to do with the bill.

"School administrators should know the difference between factual historical events and fiction," he wrote on Twitter. "Southlake just got it wrong. No legislation is suggesting the action this administrator is promoting."

One state senator, Beverly Powell, tweeted, "Already, we are seeing the impact of a vague and unnecessary bill that leaves teachers and administrators confused and afraid to teach the history of the Holocaust or the Civil War without teaching 'both sides.' "

News of the Southlake scandal comes on the heels of more drama in the district, located in the Dallas-Fort Worth suburbs. Late last year, a fourth-grade teacher faced disciplinary action after a parent complained that their child had brought home a book about being "anti-racist."

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Adapted from *NPR*  
October 2021  
(449 words)

## INDIA FACES ELECTRICITY CRISIS AS COAL SUPPLIES RUN CRITICALLY LOW

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India is facing a looming power crisis, as stocks of coal in power plants have fallen to unprecedentedly low levels and states are warning of power blackouts. States across India have issued panicked warnings that coal supplies to thermal power plants, which convert heat from coal to electricity, are running perilously low. According to data from the Central Electricity Authority of India, nearly 80% of the country's coal-fired plants were in the critical, or "supercritical" stage, meaning that stocks could run out in less than five days. [...] Maharashtra shut down 13 thermal power plants and urged people to use electricity sparingly, and in Punjab three power plants halted production. Scheduled power cuts introduced in Punjab, lasting up to six hours at a time, have prompted protests.

However, experts have emphasised that the power issues are not due to a shortage of domestic coal production, as some have reported. Over the past two decades, domestic coal production in India has continued to rise exponentially, though there was a minor dip in production of less than 1% from 2019 to 2020 due to the pandemic. Energy providers and India's state-owned coal producer, Coal India Limited, have instead been accused of failing to stockpile sufficient amounts to meet the predicted rise in demand. [...] This year's heavy monsoon rains have also been blamed for affecting domestic coal mining due to flooding and impeding the dispatch of coal from the mines.

While this is no different from every year, more coal is usually imported to bridge the gap in production. But due to a global energy crisis, which has seen international prices hit record highs, it has been more of a financial challenge to import more coal, leading to greater shortages than usual. [...] Vibhuti Garg, lead India economist for the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis, said that over the past year "renewable energy installation also slowed down" and that, if the Indian government had focused on increasing the capacity of renewables such as solar, wind and hydro, "the increased demand could have been met through renewable energy and this crisis could have been averted". [...]

There are concerns that the shortages will be used to justify pushing more domestic coal production, with some state governments already putting on the pressure for expedited clearance for new coalmines in protected areas. India already has plans to boost its domestic coal production to 1bn tons by 2024. [...] If India is to meet its climate targets in the coming years, the country will also need to wean itself off coal, which currently powers almost 70% of its electricity. [...]

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Adapted from *The Guardian*  
October 2021  
(447 words)

## INNOVATION NATIONS

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As the rich world reopens, firms are rediscovering their love for investment. The latest trend is a global surge in capital spending. Forecasters reckon that overall real investment worldwide will soon be a fifth higher than it was before the pandemic. America's business investment is rising at an annual rate of 15%. By 2022, companies are forecast to be spending over a tenth more on factories, technology and research and development. AT&T says it will throw \$24bn a year at its networks. Sony is piling \$18bn into an expansion push. Semiconductor firms are engaged in one of the biggest capital-spending sprees in history.

Before Covid-19 America's business investment had stagnated for several decades. Britain's was 15% lower than in the late 1990s. Even as business profits soared, firms devoted a smaller share of their cashflows to capital expenditure and R&D, and more to share buybacks and dividends.

But investment in new technologies and business practices is the secret sauce behind higher living standards. So now all that is changing. Fiscal stimulus has put money in people's pockets. In America real disposable income per person is 27% higher than it was in February 2020. And as economies reopen, people are in the mood to spend. Companies can thus be more confident there will be demand for their wares in the next few years—as good an incentive as any to expand capacity. Some firms, especially in consumer-facing industries, are low on inventory and trying to catch up.

Yet capital spending is rising not just because the economic cycle is on the up. Firms are also adjusting to permanent pandemic-induced shifts, from an emerging norm of “hybrid work” to greater online shopping. The big tech firms, whose products are so important to this shift, have led the investment charge.

High-street retailers are also investing in online offerings to compete with Amazon. Restaurants continue to improve their dine-at-home service even as dine-in reopens. Consultancies are finding ways to let their staff remain connected when they are not in the office. Growth in global shipments of computers for companies will be even faster this year than last. All this promises a world in which people get more done in less time.

But some industries still play by the rules of the 2010s. Big hotel chains appear to have no plans to install rainforest showers in every room. And it remains to be seen whether the post-pandemic norm will be one of structurally higher investment spending, or whether firms slip back into their old ways. For now, though, stand back and appreciate the global capital expenditure surge. It promises a more dynamic form of capitalism.

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Adapted from *The Economist*  
May 2021  
(442 words)

## IRANIAN MUSICIAN RISKS PRISON FOR NEW ALBUM

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Facing prison for making music today, Mehdi Rajabian already spent two years locked up—including a spell in solitary confinement and a hunger strike—for releasing songs the Iranian authorities did not agree with. But he kept determined, worked under cover from the basement of his home in Sari, northern Iran, to create a new album called « Coup Of Gods » that features a Brazilian orchestra, alongside musicians from Turkey, Russia, India, Argentina and two well-known female singers from the United States.

Those female voices bring life to Rajabian's songs of heartache and struggle. But they are also making a bold political statement, because female vocalists are effectively banned in Iran. When Rajabian announced his intention to work with female musicians last year, he was arrested and taken to court, where a judge told him he was "encouraging prostitution".

Now the album is complete, "they may and probably will re-accuse me", he tells BBC News. "It really cannot be predicted. But I will not step back. I will resist."

Rajabian's ordeal began in 2013, when the Islamic Revolutionary Guard raided his office, shut down his recording studio and confiscated all his hard drives. Back then, he was running a well-known record label that championed female musicians. [...]

Accused of distributing "underground music, including many numbers whose lyrics and messages were deemed offensive to the Iranian authorities", he was sent to prison. Rajabian says he spent 90 days in solitary confinement, blindfolded and unaware of his surroundings. He was eventually released on bail, but in 2015 was arrested again—this time with his brother, Hossein Rajabian, who is a film-maker. They were sentenced to six years in prison, after a three-minute trial. In protest, the brothers went on hunger strike for 40 days. [...]

Mehdi then decided to express his feeling with the hope of "feeling liberated" in this new album that was mixed and mastered by a famous US producer who has recorded with such artists as Aretha Franklin or Michael Jackson. "When I first talked to Mehdi, he says, I was interested, then intrigued, and finally, when I heard the music, I was blown away." [...]

The album was released just weeks after the Taliban's takeover of Iran's eastern neighbour Afghanistan. The new regime has already banned the playing of music in public, calling it "un-Islamic"; while folk singer Fawad Andarabi was shot dead, after being dragged from his home by Taliban forces.

Rajabian says resistance is the only solution because one day, people will look back and realise that silence in the face of oppression is complicity with the oppressor... and that "music is the only weapon of truth, to resist superstition." [...]

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Adapted from *BBC NEWS*  
October 2021  
(449 words)

## IS FACEBOOK THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY OF THE 21ST CENTURY?

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Will we one day think of Facebook the way we now think of cigarettes? Or is the company more akin to the gun lobby? Perhaps the alcohol industry is the closer fit. [...] Those parallels actually understate the problem.

For none of them quite gets at the sheer scale and power of this single corporation. That reality was made especially vivid this week, when a six-hour outage confirmed that 3 billion people around the globe have come to depend on Facebook, along with its properties WhatsApp and Instagram, as the place to do business and find out about the world. Facebook might like to pretend that it's simply a place where friends and family can "connect", but it's much bigger than that – and far more dangerous.

Hence the comparison to big tobacco. In the early 1960s, scientists at one cigarette maker, Reynolds, concluded that the evidence that smoking was linked to cancer was "overwhelming". Meanwhile, researchers at the rival firm Philip Morris were drawing up a list of dozens of carcinogens in cigarette smoke. But guess what – none of that information was made public. On the contrary, for more than three decades, the tobacco industry refused to admit any evidence of harms from smoking, even though its own research told the exact opposite story.

Now listen to the testimony of Frances Haugen, a former Facebook product manager who this week unmasked herself as the whistleblower behind a series of shattering revelations published initially by the Wall Street Journal. One internal document from 2019 shows that Facebook's own research found Instagram – which brims with pictures of lean, toned bodies – to be psychologically toxic for young women in particular. "We make body image issues worse for one in three teen girls," it read, adding that teens themselves "blame Instagram for increases in the rate of anxiety and depression". Did Facebook's founder, Mark Zuckerberg, admit this finding when he came before Congress in March? He did not. Instead he said: "The research that we've seen is that using social apps to connect with other people can have positive mental health benefits." In other words, smoking is good for you.

But if we're talking about life and death, Facebook's role is more direct than psychological harm alone. Haugen testified that the platform is "fanning ethnic violence" in Ethiopia, just as it did to devastating effect in Myanmar, where Facebook eventually admitted its role as a deadly weapon in a campaign by the military against the Rohingya Muslim minority that led to murder, rape and dispossession. [...]

Facebook knows about those problems too, and though it always makes the right noises about "learning lessons" and "doing better", it does all too little.

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Adapted from *The Guardian*  
October 2021  
(455 words)

## 'IT IS NOT ENOUGH': WORLD LEADERS REACT TO COP 26 CLIMATE AGREEMENT

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Many world leaders and activists expressed disappointment this weekend with the climate deal that emerged from two weeks of heated negotiations in Glasgow, Scotland — warning that countries will have to strengthen their commitments if they want to avert disastrous consequences and help at-risk nations cope with the damage that's already occurring from climate change.

Key officials in the United States and Europe vowed to work harder to help developing nations shift to cleaner energy sources, after delegates from China and India proposed a last-minute edit that weakened a provision in the text to phase out fossil fuels. [...]

European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen said in a statement that while some meaningful progress was made on the goals of COP26, more work remains and that the key to determining the impact of the conference will be how the commitments secured in Glasgow are actually implemented.

"1.5 degrees Celsius remains within reach; but the work is far from done," she said, referring to a long-standing global goal of limiting warming to no more than 1.5 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels.

A senior Biden administration official [...] said that bilateral efforts would focus on the biggest polluting sectors in other countries, and would offer help to deal with coal-bed methane in China and coal-fired power plants in South Africa, Indonesia and Vietnam. He said that the question was: "How do you do transition in a way that is not so disruptive as to not block progress but to enable progress?"

As part of the pact, countries face pressure to reassess their targets to cut emissions by the end of next year and to provide more aid to nations bearing the brunt of climate change. But these voluntary measures are not enough [...] "We're all aware that, collectively, our climate ambition and action to date have fallen short on the promises made in Paris," said Alok Sharma, the president of the Glasgow talks [...].

A key unresolved question is how much more rich nations will do to help vulnerable nations — particularly island nations that face the threat of extinction because of rising sea levels — from the damage wrought by climate change.

"We must end fossil fuel subsidies, phase out coal, put a price on carbon, protect vulnerable communities from the impacts of climate change and make good on the \$100 billion climate finance commitment to support developing countries," United Nations Secretary General António Guterres said in a video after the agreement won approval from nearly 200 nations. "We did not achieve these goals at this conference, but we have some building blocks for progress."

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Adapted from *The Washington Post*  
November 2021  
(445 words)

## JEFF BEZOS OFFERS A VISION OF FLYING THROUGH SPACE COLONIES WITH OUR OWN WINGS. BUT IS THAT THE BEST WAY TO SAVE THE HUMAN RACE?

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Jeff Bezos has been warning us for years that humans can't sustain our current rate of consumption. "What happens when unlimited demand meets finite resources? The answer is incredibly simple: rationing," Bezos said in a 2019 speech, where he announced that his space travel company Blue Origin had developed a lunar lander. "It would lead to the first time where your grandchildren and their grandchildren would have worse lives than you did - that's a bad path."

Bezos may not be the best person to be lecturing about overconsumption in a world of finite resources. His wealth ballooned by \$86 billion during a global pandemic, reaching a current net worth of \$212 billion. He owns the Washington Post, a \$65 million private jet, and so many homes in Los Angeles, Washington D.C., Washington State, and Texas - that he's the 25th largest landowner in the United States. [...]

Even the most enthusiastic proponents of space habitation (including Bezos) admit that anything like this vision won't happen for multiple generations, at least. Meanwhile, within 50 years, global warming is expected to have displaced one to 3 billion people, with another billion displaced for every additional degree of warming.

There are also other practical matters to consider, too, like the fact that our muscles melt in outer space, with astronauts losing as much as 20 percent of their muscle mass in under a week. [...]

There is a more cynical read on the timing: Maybe Bezos is focusing on another realm because Amazon's dynastic growth and his own accumulation of wealth is what's really driving the Earth to become increasingly uninhabitable.

Indeed, Bezos is rocketing out of the atmosphere just a few short weeks after stepping down from the top job at a company increasingly plagued by various lawsuits accusing illegal price control, racial discrimination and sexual harassment, illegally firing workers for criticizing the company's climate change impacts, and failing to protect workers during the coronavirus pandemic.

Indeed, much of the breathless coverage of the Blue Origin launch has perhaps distracted the public from the world Bezos is leaving behind. While Bezos has pledged to spend \$10 billion protecting the planet through the Bezos Earth Fund, many experts consider this a drop in the barrel. [...] The pandemic might have been a breaking point for Bezos' public image. For a man who founded a company that controls over 40 percent of e-commerce, 42 percent of physical book sales, [...] there's increasing concern about the degree to which Amazon, a private company, is controlling our lives.

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Adapted from *Business Insider*  
July 2021  
(446 words)

## KEYSTROKE TRACKING, SCREENSHOTS, AND FACIAL RECOGNITION: THE BOSS MAY BE WATCHING LONG AFTER THE PANDEMIC ENDS

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When Kerrie Krutchik, an attorney, was hired this spring for one of the legal field's fastest-growing jobs, she expected to review case files at a pandemic-safe distance from the comfort of her Ohio home.

Then she received a laptop in the mail with her instructions: To get paid, she'd have to comply with a company-mandated facial recognition system for every minute of her contract. If she looked away for too many seconds or shifted in her chair, she'd have to scan her face back in from three separate angles, a process she ended up doing several times a day.

For Krutchik, the laptop's unblinking little camera light quickly became a nightmare — and a reminder of what her new work day might look like even after the pandemic fades. After two weeks, she ended her contract and pledged never to consent to that kind of monitoring again.

The spread of the delta variant has kept many of America's office employees working from home and fueled a rise in surveillance technologies by employers — in finance, law, technology and other industries — eager to keep tabs on their remote workforce. The facial recognition monitoring Krutchik experienced offers one of the stranger examples of America's massive work-from-home experiment, because it relies on a glitchy and [...] quite creepy camera system built to ensure workers don't lose focus or break the rules.

The adoption of the technology coincides with an increase in companies' use of more traditional monitoring software, which can track an employee's computer keystrokes, take screenshots and in some cases record audio or video while they are working from home. Sometimes, this is done without their knowledge [...].

Workers have little power to control how and when they're being monitored, especially if they are using work-issued devices. Experts advise workers to assume they are being monitored if they're in the office or using company equipment, and recommend they read the fine print when it comes to employee contracts.

Market research firm Gartner says companies used more surveillance tools during the coronavirus pandemic to keep tabs on employees and monitor work productivity. The number of large employers using tools to track their workers doubled since the beginning of the pandemic to 60 percent. That number is expected to rise to 70 percent within the next three years [...].

And the software is expected to become even more sophisticated, telling employers how to turn the data they collect into actionable measures to drive the business. Soon it might do things like tell managers how employees work together via Zoom, understand who the main contributors are and how specific patterns may lead to specific results.

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Adapted from *The Washington Post*  
September 2021  
(452 words)

## KIDS WERE FIGHTING IN SCHOOL. DADS BEGAN PATROLLING CAMPUS: THE VIOLENCE STOPPED.

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After 23 students were arrested in the span of three days for fighting at a Louisiana high school last month, Michael La'Fitte's 16-year-old daughter was scared to go to school.

"My kid was visibly shaken," said La'Fitte, 40. "Her classmates felt the same way."

He reached out to other parents of students at Southwood High School in Shreveport, L.A., and organized an urgent meeting on a Sunday afternoon to see what they could do to mitigate the issues on campus. (...)

A group of five fathers came up with a concept called "Dads on Duty." Their idea was to take shifts patrolling the campus every weekday as community leaders and liaisons. (...)

The fathers started the initiative on Sept. 20 and since then, there hasn't been a single violent incident on campus. "It has really made a difference," said the principal of the school. "They are very proactive in making sure everyone on campus feels safe." The high school is now "very calm," she said.

The parents asked the principal for permission before starting the initiative, and she was immediately supportive. When they told her their plan to patrol the school, she thought: "What a wonderful way for dads to come on campus and be a positive influence, not just for their children, but for all children." (...)

There are typically two shifts per day, and depending on after-school activities, dads will sometimes patrol in the afternoon, too. About six dads are assigned to each shift, and they strategically scatter around the campus, covering all central areas. Beyond surveilling the children to ensure everyone is well-behaved, "we give high fives and share encouraging words," La'Fitte said. "And we also crack dad jokes, of course." (...)

The group is made up mostly of fathers of students at the school, as well as other members of the community and educational advocates. All shifts are done on a volunteer basis, and so far, about 40 people have offered their time. "I like to call it volun-love. Love for our children, love for the community and love for the school," La'Fitte said. (...)

"We're all working fathers. We have to fit this into our schedule," said La'Fitte. Despite their various obligations, they all make "Dads on Duty" a priority because "it's important for the children to see that we care," La'Fitte said. "We also want to be there for kids that don't have dads around." (...)

Local officials also vouched for the impact of the initiative in helping to curb crime in the high school. Given the success of the initiative, the group has high hopes to expand the program to cover all schools in the district.

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Adapted from *The Washington Post*  
October 2021  
(455 words)

## LEGO TO REMOVE GENDER BIAS FROM ITS TOYS AFTER FINDINGS OF CHILD SURVEY

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Lego has announced it will work to remove gender stereotypes from its toys after a global survey the company commissioned found attitudes to play and future careers remain unequal and restrictive. Researchers found that while girls were becoming more confident and keen to engage in a wide range of activities, the same was not true of boys.

Seventy-one per cent of boys surveyed feared they would be made fun of if they played with what they described as “girls’ toys” – a fear shared by their parents. “Parents are more worried that their sons will be teased than their daughters for playing with toys associated with the other gender,” said Madeline Di Nonno, who conducted the research. “But it’s also that behaviours associated with men are valued more highly in society.”

The study found that parents still encouraged sons to do sports or Stem activities, while daughters were offered dance and dressing up (girls were five times more likely to be encouraged in these activities than boys) or baking (three times more likely to be encouraged). These insights emphasise just how ingrained gender biases are across the globe. There’s asymmetry: we encourage girls to play with ‘boys’ stuff’ but not the other way around. This was a problem since toys offered training opportunities. So if girls aren’t playing with Lego or other construction toys, they aren’t developing the spatial skills that will help them in later life. If dolls are being pushed on girls but not boys, then boys are missing out on nurturing skills.

“We’re working hard to make Lego more inclusive,” said Julia Goldin, the marketing officer at the Lego Group. The company has promised to remove gender bias from its lines. “Traditionally, Lego has been accessed by more boys, but products like [arts and crafts line] Lego Dots have been specifically designed to appeal to boys and girls”. The Lego mandate is now to promote nurturing and caring as well as spatial awareness, creative reasoning and problem solving.

A 2020 report by the Fawcett Society showed how “lazy stereotyping” and the segregation of toys by gender was fuelling a mental health crisis among young people and limiting perceived career choices. It is rubbing off on parents, too. Parents of both sexes rate men as “more creative”, are six times as likely to think of scientists and athletes as being men rather than women, and more than eight times as likely to think of engineers as men.

On Lego.com consumers cannot search for products by gender. Instead, the website offers themes that it calls “passion points”. “We’re testing everything on boys and girls, and including more female role models,” said Goldin.

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Adapted from *The Guardian*  
October 2021  
(456 words)

## MANDATORY VACCINATIONS HAVE BEEN WITH US FOR CENTURIES

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For a medical centre in the US state of Washington, 18 October 2021 was the day of reckoning. Ten weeks earlier, the centre had declared that all of its staff would be required to be vaccinated against Covid-19 by that date in order to protect both those working at the medical centre and their patients from the disease. It was a potentially risky requirement, given the shortages of medical staff and the resistance to vaccination rocking other parts of the US medical sector.

But when 18 October arrived, 95% of staff had met the requirement through vaccination or an approved exemption. (...) Charleen, an executive who has spent her entire career at this centre, believes that this high vaccination rate is partly because "we have a long history of vaccination requirement... it's been pretty well normalised". (...)

As this experience suggests, a vaccine mandate is a powerful tool for safeguarding public health. But it can also be a highly contested one. (...) Though some vaccines, like for polio, were initially popular, one noticeable pattern is the public getting used to a particular vaccine requirement over time, then some people getting spooked by a novel vaccine. (...)

Over the centuries, some objections have arisen over the components used to make vaccines. Certain vaccines include tiny amounts of animal products. The polio vaccine previously used cells from monkey kidneys. These types of ingredients have led to some vegetarian opposition. (...)

Porcine tissue has also led some Muslims to worry about certain vaccines – for instance, if they use pig-derived gelatine as a stabiliser. This challenged measles vaccination in Indonesia in 2018. (...)

Along with spiritual objectors, a long thread of labour activism has been linked to vaccine opposition. During the Victorian era some English employers imposed smallpox vaccine mandates, which were particularly likely to affect – and especially resisted by – the working class. Labour unions have been important sources of organised opposition. (...)

One common tension is between obligation, which can increase hostility, and voluntary vaccination, which can increase transmission. Some health experts are nervous about mandatory vaccination because these policies may diminish trust in medical authorities over the long term. Vaccine mandates have led to violent riots in Brazil and may have contributed to vociferous anti-vaccine movements all over Europe, for instance. (...)

Vaccine mandates are "something to be used sparingly", with the minimal level of enforcement possible, according to a paediatrician and medical epidemiologist. (...) "It helps that the vaccines that we have for Covid-19 are on balance really, really safe," he adds. (...)

"With careful and judicious use, the benefit from using those mandates will outweigh the harms," he says. Whether that is enough to convince the sceptics, remains to be seen.

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Adapted from *US World and News Report*  
July 2021  
(456 words)

## MORE REPUBLICAN LEADERS TRY TO BAN BOOKS ON RACE AND LGBTQ ISSUES

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In the latest call from Republican leaders to ban certain books in schools, South Carolina Governor is telling his state's department of education to investigate a graphic novel on queer identity being available at a school's library. He says the content in the book is "pornographic."

The book, *Gender Queer: A Memoir*, by Maia Kobabe, is recommended for grades 10 and up by its publisher and tells an autobiographical story of a person who is grappling with their gender and sexual identity.

"I call on the Department of Education or the State Board of Education, as appropriate, to promulgate statewide standards and directives to prevent pornography and other obscene content from entering our State's public schools and libraries," the governor declared.

This call is the latest instance of Republican elected leaders and local school board members lashing out at books in school libraries that address topics such as queer identity, racism and sex education.

In Texas, the governor sent a letter to the state's school board association saying public schools shouldn't have "pornographic or obscene material." Another Texas lawmaker running for attorney general identified a list of 850 books that he says should be questioned; many of those books are written by women, people of color and LGBTQ authors.

Several other states, including Virginia, North Carolina, Maine and Missouri have also targeted certain books available in schools, often telling stories of young people of color and narratives that include U.S. history of segregation and racism.

The topic of investigating and banning certain books came further into the national spotlight during the recent Virginia race for governor. The Republican winner campaigned off the idea that his Democratic opponent didn't want parents to have a say in what their children are being taught in school. One of the books in question was Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, a book that tells the story of formerly enslaved people in the aftermath of the Civil War. The book won a Pulitzer Prize in 1988.

In one of Virginia's County schools, the school board recently voted to remove books in school libraries that had any "sexually explicit" material. Two school board members went on to say they would like to see the banned books burned. "I think we should throw those books in a fire," one of them said, according to NBC Washington. "I guess we live in a world now that our public schools would rather have kids read about gay pornography than Christ."

Book burning was a practice perpetuated in Nazi Germany in order to oppress authors and ideas that were in opposition to Nazi ideology.

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Adapted from *NPR*  
November 2021  
(446 words)

## MUSIC SCHOOL FALLS SILENT

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Imagine being afraid for your safety because you have been learning to play the piano. This is what students and staff at the Afghanistan National Institute of Music (ANIM) are now facing, after the Taliban said they would ban music following their takeover of the country. The doors of the school, praised for bringing music back after strict Taliban rule between 1996 and 2001, are closed, and its hallways have fallen silent. [...]

The students are all fearful and concerned. Most had returned their instruments to the school when the Taliban descended on the city. This was deemed safer than keeping them at home.

ANIM was a trailblazer where boys and girls were taught in the same room – a rarity in Afghanistan - and they practised both Afghan and Western classical music. Orphans and street children were encouraged to attend, and many graduates were the first in their family to receive a formal education.

The school was also home to Zohra, Afghanistan's first all-female orchestra, which performed to huge audiences both nationally and internationally. It soon became a symbol of Afghanistan's new identity, with equality and education for all. But now history has repeated itself. Afghanistan is back under Taliban control, and the future of the school and its musicians is uncertain.

Dr Sarmast, the school director, who is internationally recognised and respected for his educational work, fled to Australia after being forced to order his staff and students to go home. "The students are very fearful about their future – not just of their education and their music programme, but also about their life," he said. "They do not feel safe in Afghanistan." [...]

How strict or wide-reaching the music ban will be is yet to be seen, but there are fears the country will revert back to 1996 when the Taliban outlawed most music. There were harsh punishments for those caught playing or listening to music, instruments were destroyed, musicians went into hiding.

The Taliban has said that its new government would be more modern and less extremist this time around – promising freedom for women and safety for government workers. However, there have been a number of instances when those messages were not consistent with the behaviour of Taliban militants on the ground.

Dr Sarmast, who had already fled Afghanistan during the Civil War in the 1990s, living in Moscow and then in Australia where he became the first Afghan to complete a PhD in music, believes that some of the Afghan musical heritage risks being lost all over again. He has also inadvertently become part of Afghanistan's so-called "brain drain" – the exodus of the country's most educated people as they flee the Taliban.

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Adapted from *BBC NEWS*  
September 2021  
(448 words)

## MY DAUGHTER WAS BULLIED AT SCHOOL FOR HAVING THE COVID JAB

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Last week my 13-year-old daughter was offered the Covid vaccine at her school in England. I consented, as required, but made it clear that the final decision about whether to go ahead was hers. By this age, she is aware and responsible enough to be making decisions about her own body, with support, and crucially, clear information about what will be happening and why. We are a pro-vaccination family. [...] My daughter is at an age where she seeks out a lot of information online, so I directed her to some websites to read up more widely about it.

[...] Take-up at the school was low, partly because there was an issue with the consent form being difficult for some parents to access. Ultimately, my daughter was the only child in her class to have the vaccine, with about 20% of her entire year taking it up. She came home with a sore arm and slight headache, but other than that she was fine.

All was well until the following day, when another child in her class declared that because she had the vaccine, that meant she had now been injected with Covid – so if anyone went near her she would pass Covid on to them. This resulted in several children moving away from her, and refusing to sit beside her during lessons or at lunchtime.

She came home extremely distressed and confused. Believing, rightly, that having the vaccine means that she's safer in terms of transmission than the other unvaccinated children in her class. [...]

I contacted the school, who quickly assured me that they would sort this out, particularly as they want to encourage more vaccine take-up. But it's not hard to imagine that other children in the class, having seen what happened to my daughter, will now be wary of getting the vaccine for fear of being singled out.

We live in the north-west, one of the worst-hit places in the country for Covid, and my daughter remains proud that she has played her part in tackling the virus. However, she still spent the weekend worried about going back into school as she felt that she was now a social pariah – thankfully this didn't turn out to be the case. [...] Social pressure in school can be difficult to handle.

There are reports that the education secretary is considering writing to every individual in this age group to urge them to be vaccinated, [...] but there needs to be a far stronger campaign to ensure that as many young people as possible get vaccinated – and they can do so without misinformation, anti-vax intimidation or fear of bullying.

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Adapted from *the Guardian*  
October 2021  
(451 words)

## NAZI LEGACY HAUNTS MUSEUM'S NEW GALLERIES

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With the opening of an imposing extension this month, the Zurich Kunsthaus became Switzerland's largest art museum. An airy atrium and marble staircases take visitors to spacious galleries where they can admire masterpieces by Monet, Cézanne, Gauguin, van Gogh and Degas.

These works once belonged to Emil Bührle, a Swiss industrialist whose dark legacy haunted the opening of the new \$220 million extension. Although it has long been known that he made his fortune by selling arms to Nazi Germany and that he bought art that had been looted by the regime, new revelations keep emerging.

In August, a Swiss magazine reported that Bührle employed hundreds of girls and young women from troubled backgrounds in slave-labour-like conditions in Switzerland as late as the 1950s. And two weeks after the new extension's opening, a book about the Kunsthaus was published. Its German title translates as « The Contaminated Museum ».

Now, 203 art works belonging to the Bührle Foundation have entered the Kunsthaus collection, which « should never have happened, since it's a collection built with money from arms sales, slave labour and child labor. », according to the magazine. From 1936 to 1956, Bührle bought 600 artworks - some of them looted from Jews by the Nazis. In 1948, the Swiss Supreme Court ordered him to return 13 pieces.

After the Bührle Foundation itself had conducted provenance research in 2002, its director said in an interview that « today, we can be sure that there is no looted art, in the strictest sense, in the collection, but we do not rule out the possibility that new information could come to light. »

However, art dealers voice misgivings about the foundation research, calling the provenance reports on its website « a filter which withholds decisive facts ». Cézanne's work, « Paysage » is an example. The foundation's website does not mention that its prewar owners were Jewish; it says they « left Germany in 1939 », instead of spelling out that they fled persecution. But the foundation rejected a claim from the owners'heirs, arguing that the sale had not been a result of Nazi persecution.

Nevertheless, with the collection's move to the Kunsthaus, responsibility for provenance research rests with the museum, though any restitution decision would fall to the foundation, as the owner. Researchers have now been granted unrestricted access to the foundation's archives, which are being kept at the museum.

Corinne Mauch, Zurich's mayor said: « It is important to show the paintings, but it is important that we present them in an exemplary way, which means confronting the problematic aspects. I do not think this debate will end just because we have opened the extension ».

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Adapted from *the New York Times*  
October 2021  
(441 words)

## NOBEL PRIZE WILL HAVE NO GENDER OR ETHNICITY QUOTAS

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Swedish scientist and head of the academy that awards Nobel prizes has ruled out the notion of gender or ethnicity quotas in the selection of laureates for the prestigious award. Göran Hansson, the secretary general of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, accepted that there are "so few women" in the running but conceded the prize would ultimately go to those who are "found the most worthy". Investigative journalist Maria Ressa of the Philippines, was the only woman honoured this year, sharing the Nobel peace prize with fellow journalist Dmitry Muratov, alongside 12 men.

Since its inception in 1901, only 59 Nobel prizes have gone to women, comprising just 6.2% of the total. Hansson, who informs chemistry, economics and physics Nobel prizewinners of their triumph, defended his stance on quotas in an interview with the Agence France-Presse. "It's sad that there are so few women Nobel laureates and it reflects the unfair conditions in society, particularly in years past but still existing. And there's so much more to do," he said. "We have decided we will not have quotas for gender or ethnicity. We want every laureate [to] be accepted ... because they made the most important discovery, and not because of gender or ethnicity. And that is in line with the spirit of Alfred Nobel's last will."

Hansson emphasised that the academy would ensure that "all deserving women get a fair chance to be evaluated for the Nobel prize" and said "significant efforts" have been made to encourage nominations of women scientists. "We made sure that we know about the problem and also about subconscious bias, etc in the prize-awarding committees and academies. [...]" "In the end," he added, "we will give the prize to those who are found the most worthy, those who have made the most important contributions."

"No women got the prizes in sciences this year" he said. "Last year we had two women laureates receiving the chemistry prize, Emmanuelle Charpentier and Jennifer Doudna, and we had one woman laureate in physics, Andrea Ghez. The year before, we had Esther Duflo in economic sciences." And while more women are being recognised now compared with previous decades, Hansson said the trend was increasing "from a very low level".

The issue of gender quotas had been discussed about three weeks ago but was dismissed on the basis that it may detract from laureates' legitimacy. "We have discussed it" Hansson said "but then it would be, we fear, considered that those laureates got the prize because they are women, not because they are the best. Now, there's no doubt that scientists like Emmanuelle Charpentier or Esther Duflo got the prize because they made the most important contributions."

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Adapted from *The Guardian*  
October 2021  
(457 words)

## NON-FUNGIBLE TOKENS (NFTS) [...] COULD IN TIME TRANSFORM FINANCE AND THE DIGITAL ECONOMY

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NFT were invented by Anil Dash, an entrepreneur, and Kevin McCoy, an artist, to help convey that an item was a digital original. They offer proof that the holder owns that specific token, even if it does not give them copyright or exclusive use of that work. [...]

NFT have other potentially useful features. Because they live on an open blockchain system, the history of transactions involving them can be viewed publicly. That makes it possible to code features into the contracts that govern how they are bought and sold. [...]

The buyer of an NFT has right that resembles a licence to use an image in limited ways: they can publicly display and copy the NFT for personal use, for instance, but cannot use it for commercial purposes. [...]

Many venture capitalists and developers are attempting to build a new kind of digital economy, in which everything you do online will be run through “decentralised” applications that can be owned and operated by their users. The distribution of all kinds of digital content, like pictures, videos and even articles, could eventually start to take place through something like today’s NFTS. Something similar is already happening in gaming. [...]

But tokens could also be useful for activities conducted in the real world. Some universities are experimenting with using them to fund research. The University of California at Berkeley raised \$500,000 by selling an NFT based document relating to Noble-prizewinning research on cancer immunotherapy as a collectable item. The country of San Marino has approved the use of tokens as digital covid vaccine passports.

The fact that they signal proof of ownership could make NFTS useful for financial activities. Much as they make virtual-land transfers possible, they could become a way to exchange real-life property deeds, or other sorts of contracts. [...]

Like any new technology, NFTS have flaws. Technical limits when they were first created mean that they contain a link to the image, rather than the image itself. That can be a weakness: unscrupulous sellers have broken or changed links after a transaction. Blockchain technologies consume electricity wantonly. [...] And the identity of a buyer of an NFT, and the provenance of their funds, cannot always be known.

Some solutions are in the works: a decentralised storage system, for instance, tries to fix the problem of broken links; some applications try to touch the blockchain as little as possible, generating fewer emissions. [...]

Time will tell, then, whether cryptokitties will prove to have been the start of a revolution in how people live their lives online.

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Adapted from *The Economist*  
October 2021  
(446 words)

## NON-UNDERSTANDING THE TRUE POWER OF REST RESPONSIBLE FOR A REST DEFICIT

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We're suffering from a rest deficit because we don't understand the true power of rest. Rest should equal restoration in seven key areas of your life.

The first type of rest we need is physical rest, which can be passive or active. Passive physical rest includes sleeping and napping, while active physical rest means restorative activities such as yoga, stretching and massage therapy that help improve the body's circulation and flexibility.

The second type of rest is mental rest. Schedule short breaks to occur every two hours throughout your workday; these breaks can remind you to slow down. You might also keep a notepad by the bed to jot down any nagging thoughts that would keep you awake.

The third type of rest we need is sensory rest. Bright lights, computer screens, background noise can cause our senses to feel overwhelmed. This can be countered by doing something as simple as closing your eyes for a minute in the middle of the day, as well as by intentionally unplugging from electronics at the end of every day. Intentional moments of sensory deprivation can begin to undo the damage inflicted by the over-stimulating world.

The fourth type of rest is creative rest. This type of rest is especially important for anyone who must solve problems or brainstorm new ideas. Creative rest reawakens the awe and wonder inside each of us. Allowing yourself to take in the beauty of the outdoors provides you with creative rest.

But creative rest isn't simply about appreciating nature; it also includes enjoying the arts. Turn your workspace into a place of inspiration by displaying images of places you love and works of art that speak to you.

This person requires emotional rest, which means having the time and space to freely express your feelings and cut back on people pleasing. Emotional rest also requires the courage to be authentic. If you're in need of emotional rest, you probably have a social rest deficit too. This occurs when we fail to differentiate between those relationships that revive us from those relationships that exhaust us.

To experience more social rest, surround yourself with positive and supportive people.

The final type of rest is spiritual rest, which is the ability to connect beyond the physical and mental and feel a deep sense of belonging, love, acceptance and purpose. To receive this, engage in something greater than yourself and add prayer, meditation or community involvement to your daily routine.

As you can see, sleep alone can't restore us to the point we feel rested. So it's time for us to begin focusing on getting the right type of rest we need.

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Adapted from <https://ideas.ted.com>  
January 2021  
(454 words)

## OUT OF THIN AIR: CAN HYDROPANELS BRING WATER TO PARCHED COMMUNITIES?

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On the dusty, often unpaved roads that cross the Navajo Nation, pickup trucks hauling water are a common sight. Navajo Nation residents are 67 times more likely than other Americans to lack running water in their homes.

But outside more than 500 homes on the Navajo reservation in Arizona and New Mexico are devices that aim to help tackle this plumbing poverty. These “hydropanel” absorb water from the air and deliver it straight to a dispenser inside the house. Each one produces around five liters (1 gallon) daily, and two panels are enough to supply a family’s drinking water, according to Source, the Arizona-based company that produces them. [...]

Source is one of several companies that say they can offer a solution to the problem of water scarcity through a technology called atmospheric water generation (AWG): the process of pulling clean water out of the air. It’s not a new technology but has traditionally required large amounts of energy and been limited to places with high humidity levels. [...]

Source (originally called Zero Mass Water) was founded by Cody Friesen, an associate professor of materials science at Arizona State University. Looking for a way to harness water in the air – the air holds six times as much water as the world’s rivers – Friesen developed panels that use fans to draw in air. Once inside the device, the water vapor is converted into liquid, filtered and then mineralized. The panel’s only energy source is sunlight and it can work in a wide variety of locations, he said, including those with low humidity, high levels of pollution and areas that are entirely off grid. [...]

Within some parts of the water industry, Source has faced heavy criticism about costs and productivity. A two-panel array runs between \$5,500 and \$6,500 including installation, and each one weighs 340 pounds and requires 30 square feet of space. [...]

The “fundamental problem” with the hydropanel is that it “makes very, very little water for the size and price”, said Christopher Gasson of Global Water Intelligence, a market intelligence firm. [...]

Friesen rejects the criticisms. Source is “a pure disruptor”, he said, and “there will always be naysayers”. He expects productivity to rise and costs to fall quickly. (...) Friesen compared the hydropanel to other renewable technologies, such as solar panels or lithium-ion batteries, which were also criticized for being too costly or ineffective but have since seen costs plunge. [...]

Friesen said he invented the hydropanel with the hope of creating “a world where no women and girls ever fetched water ever again” and “there were no plastic water bottles floating around”.

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Adapted from *The Guardian*  
October 2021  
(452 words)

## OXFORD STUDENTS REMOVE PHOTO OF QUEEN ELIZABETH II, SPARKING LATEST BATTLE IN BRITAIN'S CULTURE WARS

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Has Elizabeth II been canceled? That was Wednesday's rallying cry for many conservative commentators in Britain after a group of graduate students at one of Oxford University's most prestigious colleges voted to remove a photo of the reigning monarch from their common room, citing Britain's colonial history. [...]

The decision triggered condemnation from the right and threats against educators, and it stirred widespread controversy on social media. [...]

Britain has long seen vigorous debate between the right and the left over its legacy of empire and colonialism. The intensity of the discussion, however, accelerated dramatically last year with the Black Lives Matter movement targeting overt symbols of the country's dark past, prompting a backlash from conservatives claiming the nation's history was under attack and shouldn't be erased.

According to notes from the meeting, some at Magdalen College had expressed concerns that "depictions of the monarch and the British monarchy represent recent colonial history," before opting to take down the portrait and pivot to a more "neutral" looking space.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson slammed the move as "simply absurd," while the front page of the conservative Daily Mail tabloid read: "Outrage as Oxford students vote to axe queen." [...]

Magdalen College President Dinah Rose said the students' decision was "theirs to make," adding that the photo was purchased and first displayed by students in 2013.

In tweets shared Tuesday, Rose said that it was the group's right to decide how to decorate the shared space at the college and that it is the students' free choice to put up — or take down — images as they see fit. [...]

Magdalen College is not the institution's first college to find itself at the center of controversy. Oriel College, which is home to about 500 students, has long faced calls to remove a statue of former student Cecil Rhodes — a 19th-century British imperialist known for his racist views.

Critics say Rhodes, who left a considerable sum of money to the university and has a building named after him, was a figure of white supremacy who believed Anglo Saxons to be a superior race. Last summer, as Black Lives Matter protests erupted across the nation, hundreds flocked to Oxford to demand the statue be removed by government and education officials.

Crowds outside Oriel College chanted "Rhodes must fall" and held placards that read "Black Lives Matter." Their calls came as demonstrators in the city of Bristol tugged down a monument of Edward Colston, a British politician who enslaved tens of thousands of people, and dumped it in the nearby harbor. [...]

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Adapted from *The Washington Post*  
June 2021  
(442 words)

## PHASING OUT GASOLINE CAR SALES

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In Glasgow, six major automakers, accounting for one-quarter of global sales in 2019, and 30 national governments signed a pledge to work toward phasing out sales of gasoline and diesel-powered vehicles by 2040 worldwide. But some of the world's biggest car manufacturers, including Toyota, Volkswagen, and the Nissan-Renault alliance did not join the pledge, which is not legally binding. And the governments of the United States, China and Japan, three of the largest car markets, also abstained. But California and Washington State did sign the pledge.

The announcement, made during Cop 26 international climate talks, was hailed by climate advocates as yet another sign that the days of the internal combustion engine could soon be numbered. Electric vehicles continue to set new global sales records each year and major car companies have recently begun investing tens of billions of dollars to retool their factories and churn out new battery-powered cars and light trucks.

Countries that joined the coalition included Britain, Canada, India, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, and Sweden. The addition of India was especially notable, since it is the world's fourth-largest auto market.

The agreement states that automakers will "work toward reaching 100 percent zero-emission new car and van sales in leading markets by 2035 or earlier". Zero-emissions vehicles could include either plug-in electric vehicles or hydrogen fuel-cell vehicles, although the latter have struggled to gain market share. Electric cars can still indirectly produce emissions if, for instance, they are recharged with power from plants that burn coal or natural gas. But they are generally considered cleaner overall than combustion engine vehicles as they don't create pollution from their tailpipes. Two dozen vehicle fleet operators, including Uber, also joined the coalition, vowing to operate only zero-emissions vehicles by 2030.

Worldwide, transportation accounts for roughly one-fifth of humanity's carbon dioxide emissions that are responsible for climate change, with a little less than half of that coming from passenger vehicles such as cars and vans.

In recent years, spurred by concerns about global warming and air pollution, governments around the world — including China, the United States and the European Union — have begun heavily subsidizing electric vehicles and imposing more stringent emissions standards on new gasoline and diesel-fueled cars.

The cost of lithium-ion batteries has declined by roughly 80 percent since 2013, making electric vehicles increasingly competitive with traditional combustion engine vehicles, though many consumers remain wary of the new technology because of concerns like the availability of charging stations.

G.M. said in January that it aimed to stop selling new gasoline-powered cars and light trucks by 2035 and will pivot to battery-powered vehicles. Volvo said it expected its car lineup to be fully electric by 2030.

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Adapted from *The New York Times*  
November 2021  
(458 words)

## PLACING PERCHES IN THE SKY

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On October 21<sup>st</sup> a consortium led by Lockheed Martin, one of America's biggest aerospace companies, announced plans to build a permanently crewed commercial space station called Starlab, and launch it into orbit around Earth by 2027. Not to be outdone, on the 25th, Blue Origin, a firm that is Jeff Bezos's ticket into space, unveiled plans for a yet more ambitious effort. Orbital Reef is a joint venture with (among others) Lockheed's competitor Boeing. It will host up to ten people and will serve, as Blue Origin put it, as a "mixed-use business park". The hope is that this orbiting industrial estate will open by the end of the decade.

Private-enterprise missions to orbit are not new. Mr Bezos's rival Elon Musk, for example, has been offering them, via his rocketry firm SpaceX, for several years. But these two projects, if they succeed, will be on a far grander scale. [...]

The underlying reason for all this activity is the imminent death of the International Space Station (ISS). This intergovernmental but American-dominated effort, the first elements of which were launched in 1998, was designed to last about 15 years, so is already past its sell-by date. Cracks and air leaks have multiplied. And, on September 9th, the smell of smouldering plastic wafted through it, though no open flames broke out. [...]

NASA is encouraging commercial replacements. The agency's plan is to pay the firms behind these replacements for services rendered, such as hosting astronauts or conducting research in the microgravity that the perpetual freefall of orbit offers. That, says a senior space-flight official at the agency, may save NASA as much as \$1.5bn a year. [...]

NASA calls its side of this enterprise the Commercial Low-Earth-Orbit Destinations (CLD) project. Last year it awarded \$140m to Axiom Space, a firm in Houston that is already manufacturing such a station. [...]

Of Axiom's project, the first module will, if all goes to plan, be launched in September 2024 and will dock at one of the ISS's two ports. It will be joined, six and 12 months later, by a second and a third module. After a fourth and final module, equipped to generate extra solar power, arrives in 2027, Axiom Station, as the whole assembly will be known, will detach and become a "free flyer" with nearly double the usable volume of the ISS.

The cost of doing all this will be about \$3bn, says Axiom's top technologist. Though no trifle, this is but a small fraction of what the ISS has cost. Every year, NASA spends roughly \$3.5bn merely to maintain and operate the station.

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Adapted from *The Economist*  
October 2021  
(460 words)

## PRINCE WILLIAM CRITICISES SPACE RACE AND TOURISM'S NEW FRONTIER

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The Duke of Cambridge has criticised the space race and space tourism, saying the world's greatest minds need to focus on trying to fix the Earth instead. [...]

The prince, who was interviewed about the climate crisis ahead of his inaugural Earthshot prize awards, said: "We need some of the world's greatest brains and minds fixed on trying to repair this planet, not trying to find the next place to go and live."

He also warned the attendees of the COP 26 summit, where world leaders will gather in Glasgow at the end of the month, against "clever speak, clever words but not enough action". [...] "We are seeing a rise in climate anxiety. Young people now are growing up where their futures are basically threatened the whole time. It's very unnerving and it's very anxiety making," he said.

He added that his father, the Prince of Wales, who is known for his longstanding commitment to green issues, had a "really rough ride" when he first started talking about the climate crisis.

William, who was interviewed by the Newscast presenter Adam Fleming, said his late grandfather the Duke of Edinburgh had started the royal interest in environmental issues. He said of Charles: "It's been a hard road for him. My grandfather started off helping out WWF a long time ago with its nature work and biodiversity, and I think that my father's sort of progressed that on and talked about climate change a lot more, very early on, before anyone else thought it was a topic".

"So yes, he's had a really rough ride on that, and I think he's been proven to being well ahead of the curve. Well beyond his time in warning about some of these dangers."

"But it shouldn't be that there's a third generation now coming along having to ramp it up even more. And you know, for me, it would be an absolute disaster if George is sat here talking to you or your successor, Adam, you know in like 30 years' time, whatever, still saying the same thing, because by then it will be too late."

He added that his viewpoint had changed since he had children: "I want the things that I've enjoyed – the outdoor life, nature, the environment – I want that to be there for my children, and not just my children but everyone else's children. If we're not careful we're robbing from our children's future through what we do now. And I think that's not fair."

Prince William discussed his Earthshot prize, saying it was about trying to create action.

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Adapted from *The Guardian*  
October 2021  
(440 words)

## PROSTHETIC DEVICE PARTIALLY RESTORES BLIND BIOLOGY TEACHER'S VISION

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A woman who totally lost the ability to sense light 16 years ago temporarily regained enough vision to discern letters and shapes thanks to a brain implant that interfaced with special glasses, reports an article published on October 19 in *The Journal of Clinical Investigation*. A clinical trial of the device involving up to four other patients is scheduled to continue into 2024.

“One goal of this research is to give a blind person more mobility,” coauthor Richard Normann, a researcher at the University of Utah's Moran Eye Center, tells NPR. “It could allow them to identify a person, doorways, or cars easily. It could increase independence and safety. That's what we're working toward.”

Berna Gomez, now 58, lives in Spain and taught high school biology until she became completely blind in a matter of days after a condition known as toxic optic neuropathy severed the connection from her eyes to the brain, according to a statement from the University of Utah. Gomez was the first person to receive the Utah Electrode Array (UEA), which was developed by Normann with the aim of restoring sight for millions of people experiencing blindness.

The UEA is a 4-square-millimeter implantable device that contains 96 electrodes, each 1.5 mm in length. This device is surgically implanted into the brain, penetrating the surface of the visual cortex, and when activated in certain patterns, it can allow the brain to perceive shapes. Eduardo Fernández of Spain's Miguel Hernández University and his colleagues developed glasses with a specialized camera that can perceive the outside world and translate a rough version of what it sees to the UEA.

After getting the device, Gomez worked with Fernández's lab for six months, eventually learning how to detect the edges of simple shapes, certain letters, and even play a video game that required her to identify which side an action happened on. At the end of the trial, the device was surgically removed, and the authors report no complications following its removal.

During the trial, the number of shapes and letters Gomez could discern were limited. The researchers estimate that between 7 and 10 UEAs could provide enough information to give a blind person a level of independence, though further studies are needed to determine how long the implants are effective and can safely remain in the brain.

“As a blind person you don't know where a door is, or a window, or a person,” Gomez explains in the University of Utah statement. “With this you would at least know something was there.”

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Adapted from *The Scientist*  
October 2021  
(440 words)

## 'RACISM HAS ALWAYS BEEN A SCAM, A POLITICAL CONSTRUCTION'

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For Lilian Thuram, the World Cup has never been enough. Even before ending a playing career, [...] he has been trying to contribute to a profound social change.

The foundation he set up in 2008 aims to educate people out of racism. Since hanging up his boots that year he has also, among many other things, campaigned against sexism and homophobia, advised the French government on social integration, been awarded honorary degrees by the universities of Stirling and Stockholm. He has written several books. The English version of his latest one, entitled '*White Thinking: Behind the Mask of Racial Identity*', is published on Friday. In it he calls for "race suicide". He aims to liberate people from "identity prisons".

He knows these are jolting terms. Thuram believes it is important to prod people, particularly white people, into thinking more deeply about societal structures and race. [...] "My book says: If we are to talk about racism, it's with whites that we have to talk. It's like with sexism, the people who need to be educated are men and boys." [...]

"No one is born black or white," he says. "We all need to be aware that history has led to us wearing skin-colour masks and in the book, I invite people to remove those masks. To remove them, you have to know the history of these identities linked to skin colour, the social hierarchies that were devised. When we understand history, we understand that racism has always been a scam. It has always been a political construction designed to smash the ties of solidarity between human beings in order to exploit certain people so that a minority can get rich".

"We have to promote the idea that we are human beings before anything else. Generally speaking, the majority don't want change because they have settled into their habits. So, a minority has to be able to instigate change."

Since the sport is a prominent part of society, it can influence and be influenced. Thuram says what players do matters. "It's very important that players continue to take the knee before matches, to condemn the injustices that affect people of colour," he says. "English football has to be congratulated for continuing to do this; they are really pioneers in developing awareness, at least in football. What they are doing encourages people to reflect." [...]

Thuram does not expect governing bodies to take strong steps to engender change unless pressured into doing so. "Change never comes at first from the authorities. If you want to bring about change, you have to do things so that the authorities are compelled to change".

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Adapted from *The Guardian*  
October 2021  
(449 words)

## READY FOR THE ROARING 20S? IT'S TIME TO RE-LEARN HOW TO HAVE FUN

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After a year-and-a-half of loss, sickness and stress caused by the pandemic, burnout is high and morale is low. But in some positive news, the way to feel better need not depend on restrictive diets, gruelling fitness regimes or testing mental challenges, but in something far more attractive: fun.

An American psychology professor, who rose to international fame when her course “psychology and the good life” became the Ivy League university’s most popular course of all time, says that consciously injecting more fun into our lives – which she refers to as a “funtervention” – can not only improve mental health and help prevent burnout but also improve physical health.

“We weren’t necessarily prioritising fun before the pandemic,” she says “But the pandemic really made that worse, in part because some of the things we really need for fun involve connection.” She says that burnout has risen as a result of the pandemic and left everyone feeling “even worse”. And the more tired we become, the less likely we are to prioritise fun because we are too tired.

Injecting fun means doing karaoke and putting herself into a position of vulnerability by going surfing for the first time. One of her biggest realisations is that adults are often prevented from having fun by judgement.

“We would probably all be having a lot more fun if we tried new things, just like kids do. They seek out new activities and try new things out – they don’t beat themselves up if they don’t like them. But as adults we say: ‘Well, we have the activities that we do and we do those and that’s it.’ Why can’t we try new things?”

However, fun is not to be confused with hedonism. Prioritising fun doesn’t mean quitting your job and constantly having the time of your life. Instead she suggests “infusing” fun in “microdoses” into the day, such as playing music at work or engaging in witty banter with colleagues “to make the day a little bit more joyful”.

Despite its frivolous and childish reputation, fun is a very serious matter. Citing research that found loneliness is as bad for the human body as 15 cigarettes a day, she says that connection, required to have fun, is proven to make people feel good. “But there’s also evidence suggesting that the playfulness part of fun feels really good. Play is less associated with things like dementia and even heart disease.”

If everybody prioritised fun, the world would be a happier, healthier and safer place, she says. “Fun brings people together. It reminds us of our shared humanity and encourages us to let down our guard.”

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Adapted from *The Guardian*  
September 2021  
(451words)

## REGULATOR PAVES WAY FOR NHS E-CIGARETTE PRESCRIPTIONS IN ENGLAND

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E-cigarettes may soon be prescribed on the NHS to help smokers quit under radical plans by ministers to slash smoking rates in England. The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) has published updated guidance that paves the way for medically licensed e-cigarette products to be prescribed for tobacco smokers who want to stop smoking and switch to vaping instead.

The move could see England become the first country in the world to prescribe medically licensed e-cigarettes. Almost 64,000 people die from smoking every year. About 3.6 million, or 7% of adults in Britain, are thought to use e-cigarettes.

Doctors, medical leaders and health campaigners welcomed the move. "I am convinced this will be a gamechanger," said the former health minister who chaired the Commons science and technology committee's inquiry into e-cigarettes in 2018. (...)

Prof Linda Bauld from the University of Edinburgh, said it was "excellent news". "While there is good evidence that e-cigarettes available as consumer products can help smokers to quit, we also know that up to one in three smokers in the UK has not tried these devices," she said. "Smokers have concerns about safety and misperceptions about the relative risks of e-cigarettes compared with tobacco. For some, cost is also perceived as a barrier. The option of having approved devices that could be prescribed would reassure smokers about relative risks and also assist in reaching those least able to afford e-cigarettes."

E-cigarettes contain nicotine and are not risk-free. "The liquid and vapour contain some potentially harmful chemicals also found in cigarette smoke," the NHS says – though these chemicals are found at much lower levels in e-cigarettes.

Public health experts have also raised concerns about young people in particular becoming hooked on vaping despite never having smoked. Tobacco companies have turned to creating the devices.

However, expert reviews have concluded that regulated e-cigarettes are less harmful than smoking. A medically licensed e-cigarette would have to pass even more rigorous safety checks, the Department of Health and Social Care said.

Manufacturers can now approach the MHRA and submit their products to the same regulatory approvals process as other medicines available on the NHS. If an e-cigarette gets MHRA approval, doctors could then decide on a case-by-case basis whether it would be appropriate to prescribe an e-cigarette to a patient to help them quit smoking.

Dr June Raine, the chief executive of the MHRA, said the evidence was "clear" that e-cigarettes are less harmful to health than smoking tobacco and that e-cigarettes can help people quit smoking for good. "The updated guidance on licensing requirements we have published today is a strong first step towards availability of safe and effective licensed e-cigarette products."

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Adapted from *The Guardian*  
October 2021  
(460 words)

## RESEARCH SHOWS 'STRONG EVIDENCE' LINKING VAPING TO CIGARETTE SMOKING

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According to an international review of research of 25 studies into vaping, people under 20 who used vapes were more than three times as likely to have ever smoked tobacco cigarettes, and more than twice as likely to have smoked cigarettes in the previous month.

The review was led by Australian researchers and funded by the World Health Organization. It analysed vaping studies in several countries, including the US, UK and Germany. The researchers concluded there was "an urgent need for governments internationally to take action to regulate the availability and marketing of e-cigarette products to children and adolescents".

Serene Yoong, an associate professor at Swinburne University of Technology in Melbourne and the study's lead author, said the findings pointed to the need for youth prevention programs and better regulation of e-cigarette products. "Every single study showed an association between e-cigarette use among non-smokers and increased use of cigarettes at follow-up," she said.

The researchers found "strong evidence to support the causal relationship", and the link was consistent even when they adjusted for other factors including susceptibility to smoking, influence by friends and family, and exposure to advertising. Experimenting is not as benign as people might think in terms leading to later cigarette use.

The review's findings are similar to previous e-cigarette smoking research in the broader population. The study's authors point out that young people who vape have a different psychological profile to cigarette smokers, and would "otherwise have been at low risk of tobacco smoking". The experience of global efforts to combat the use of conventional cigarettes and other tobacco products suggests that such efforts are inadequate to sufficiently avert the projected harms, if the current trajectory continues.

The sale of nicotine vapes is prohibited in Australia, but there are widespread reports of tobacconists illegally selling them to young people. A loophole also allows people to buy nicotine e-cigarette products from overseas websites. From the beginning of next month, buying such products online without a doctor's prescription will be outlawed.

Two of the reviewed studies looked at links between the use of nicotine-free vapes and subsequent cigarette use, with mixed findings. One hypothesis is that nicotine free vaping could lead to subsequent cigarette smoking not as a result of nicotine addiction, but because simulating the act of smoking might make cigarette smoking seem inherently appealing to young people. Though the findings were inconclusive, the researchers suggest precautionary principles should be in place when considering the regulation for all forms of e-cigarettes, including those that do and do not contain nicotine.

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Adapted from *The Guardian*  
September 2021  
(440 words)

## RETAILERS FORCED TO HAVE 'GENDER NEUTRAL' TOY SECTIONS

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A 10-year-old girl was shopping with her mother one day when she asked a question. Why were some toys off limits to her as a girl but would be okay to play with if she were a boy? The girl was the daughter of a staffer who worked for a California lawmaker. This year, Assemblyman Low cited the girl's question as an inspiration for a bill he wrote that will force some retailers to create gender-neutral children's sections in their stores.

California Governor signed Low's legislation, Assembly Bill 1084, which will force large retailers to have non-gendered toy sections starting in 2024. Proponents said the requirement will help consumers comparison shop and also tamp down on gender stereotypes that hurt children who play with toys marketed to a different gender. Detractors said the law infringes on business owners' freedom to market their products and lay out their stores as they see fit.

The new law, introduced by Democratic lawmaker Low, won't prohibit stores from having traditional boys' and girls' sections, but will require them to have "a reasonable selection" of toys and items in a "gender neutral section ... regardless of whether they have been traditionally marketed for either girls or boys."

The requirement will apply to retailers with 500 or more employees in California. Those failing to meet it starting on Jan. 1, 2024, will face a \$250 fine for a first offense and \$500 for any after that.

"Keeping similar items that are traditionally marketed either for girls or for boys separated makes it more difficult for the consumer to compare the products and incorrectly implies that their use by one gender is inappropriate," the new law reads.

Low was more blunt in a statement he provided to the assembly's judiciary committee. "Traditionally children's toys and products have been categorized by a child's gender. In retail this has led to the proliferation of [science, technology, engineering and mathematics]-geared toys in a 'boys' section and toys that direct girls to pursuits such as caring for a baby, fashion, and domestic life," the lawmaker wrote. "The segregation of toys by a social construct of what is appropriate for which gender is the antithesis of modern thinking."

The Consumer Federation of California, a nonprofit advocating for customer rights, supported the bill. The upcoming requirement will let buyers compare products more easily by grouping similar items, the federation said.

"This approach is both paternalistic and also communicates to Californians a disconnect with the real-world challenges of parenting in an increasingly dangerous and less free society," another association declared.

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Adapted from *The Washington Post*  
October 2021  
(449 words)

## SATELLITES COULD HELP TRACK IF NATIONS KEEP THEIR CARBON PLEDGES

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Under the 2015 Paris Agreement to limit global warming, nations must measure and report progress toward their pledged reductions in emissions. They regularly submit greenhouse gas inventories, detailing emission sources as well as removals, or sinks, of the gases within their borders. These are then reviewed by technical experts. The accounting process is intended to ensure transparency and build trust, but it takes time and the numbers can be far from precise.

But what if changes in emissions of the main planet-warming gas, carbon dioxide, could be reported more accurately and rapidly? That could be extremely useful as the world seeks to limit warming. One new project, Climate Trace, presented at the COP26 climate summit in Glasgow, uses artificial intelligence to analyze satellite imagery and sensor data to come up with accurate emissions estimates in near-real time. NASA researchers have called it a milestone toward a different goal: measuring the actual changes in carbon dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere as countries take steps to reduce emissions.

The researchers said that by plugging satellite measurements of CO<sub>2</sub> into an Earth-systems model, they were able to detect small reductions in atmospheric concentration of the gas over the United States and other areas that were a result of coronavirus lockdowns in early 2020. By some estimates, the drop in economic activity from lockdowns led to emissions reductions of 10 percent or more, although emissions have rebounded since then.

The satellite, Orbiting Carbon Observatory-2, measures human-caused CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in the column of air between its position and the Earth's surface, and can detect additional or reduced levels of the gas before it becomes mixed in the atmosphere. Several additional CO<sub>2</sub>-measuring satellites are scheduled to be launched in coming years- which will provide better and better observing capabilities.

Johannes Friedrich, a senior associate at the research organization World Resources Institute, said that current measurements of emissions from fossil fuels were reasonably accurate. Measurements are based on reporting of human activities, like the operation of a specific coal-fired power plant, for example; calculating the emissions from the coal that is burned is relatively simple and straightforward. "We know pretty much where most emissions come from, and most countries record them", Mr Friedrich said.

Emissions from agriculture and deforestation present greater uncertainties. Estimates of greenhouse gases emitted by cattle, for example, are just estimates. And emissions from deforestation can vary based on the degree and extent of clearing.

Satellite-based measurements could potentially work in the future. But those measurements will need to be made at very good resolution, and with a very good coverage of the whole United States, for example. And that's still very difficult.

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Adapted from *The New York Times*  
November 2021  
(447 words)

## SCIENTISTS WARN ACTION MUST MATCH WORDS AT COP26

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Scientists attending Cop26 have sent a clear warning to policymakers: get a move on, because every moment of delay, every extra fraction of a degree of global heating will have dire consequences. That message has been reinforced at Glasgow with reports, forums and discussions, but those involved in channelling the science to the world's leaders are frustrated that words are still not being matched by actions.

[...] A climate scientist at the Met Office's Hadley Centre who has been attending Cops since 1998, said he was marginally more optimistic: "The scientific message we have talked about for 25 years is being acted on [...]. We might be starting to turn the corner. But I feel a strong sense of anxiety I haven't felt before. I want to see the policymakers get a move on. In the next two years we have got to cut emissions rapidly."

He said the success or failure of this Cop would not be determined by speeches and targets but by geophysics. (...) New studies continue to underline the risks. This week the Hadley Centre released a report showing that 1 billion people would be at risk of extreme heat exposure if global warming reached 2 °C.

[...] The deputy director of the Copernicus Climate Service, (...) said compared with the start of the conference she was a little more hopeful about reaching the 1.5 °C target because the direction of travel was clearer. (...) But she was cautious about putting too much faith in long-distance goals. "There is a big difference between the policies drafted and the policies implemented," she said. "Currently we are not on course for 1.5 °C. We need to see more political ambition on the pledges to align with the urgent changes described by the scientific evidence."

How much of a difference Cop will make is fiercely debated. Last week the International Energy Agency said the promises made in Glasgow could put the world on track to limit warming to 1.8 °C by the end of the century, if every country lived up to its long-term net zero commitments. This optimism was hosed down by a subsequent assessment by Climate Action Tracker, the world's most respected climate analysis coalition, which showed how weak, short-term goals, were likely to push global heating to at least 2.4 °C.

In negotiations, the most vulnerable states are now battling with big emitters to try to hold on to the 1.5C target, which is the most ambitious goal of the Paris agreement. Glasgow will almost certainly fall short, so one of the biggest challenges remaining at Cop26 is to keep that possibility alive with as much progress as possible and a more aggressive ratchet mechanism.

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Adapted from *The Guardian*  
November 2021  
(460 words)

## SCOTLAND'S NEW HATE CRIME ACT WILL HAVE A CHILLING EFFECT ON FREE SPEECH

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In 'On Liberty', the greatest defence of free speech ever penned, John Stuart Mill, the son of a Scottish philosopher and economist, condemned the "assumption of infallibility" being so certain you are right that you take it upon yourself to settle a question for everyone else "without allowing them to hear what can be said on the contrary side". If only today's Scottish politicians were listening. The country's new Hate Crime Act, which is expected to come into force in 2022, will make certain political arguments punishable by up to seven years in jail. It creates an offence of 'stirring up' hatred, criminalising utterances that are considered inflammatory or insulting even when they cause no actual harm and are not intended to incite a specific act. And it covers private conversations, within the home.

As debate in the Scottish Parliament during its passage made clear, it is largely aimed at silencing women who argue that access to single-sex spaces and services should be according to biological sex, not self-declared gender identity. Speech considered abusive of a trans person - someone who does not identify with their natal sex-is criminalised; abusing someone because of their sex is not. A proposal to carve out protection for factual statements, such as that human beings cannot change their biological sex, failed.

"Stirring up" offences in England and Wales covering race, religion and sexuality are narrowly drawn and hardly ever used. The new Scottish offences, by contrast, seem likely to be prosecuted with vigour. In 2021 Marion Millar of For Women Scotland, a feminist group faced prosecution under existing laws after being accused of sending transphobic tweets. One included the slogan [...] #Women won't shut up and a picture of ribbons in the suffragette colours that supposedly looked like a noose. The case was eventually dropped, though only after much expense and stress. The new act will make such prosecutions easier.

It is the latest authoritarian move by the Scottish National Party (SNP), which has dominated Scotland's Parliament for a decade. Critics say its focus on Scottish independence, which has given it a near-majority, allows it to avoid stating a coherent political philosophy or listening to critics. [...]

Hate-crime laws often end up criminalising minorities, says a barrister specialising in media law - including those they were intended to protect, and more generally anyone who falls foul of the authorities. And they have a "chilling effect", she adds, as people self-censor for fear of being reported, perhaps maliciously. As Mill put it: "Unmeasured vituperation, employed on the side of prevailing opinion, really does deter people from expressing contrary opinions, and from listening to those who express them."

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Adapted from *The World Ahead 2022 -The Economist*  
November 2021  
(450 words)

## SECOND ACT SENSATIONS!

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What combination of factors leads anyone to go all out at the gym, become a marathon runner or walk miles a day after the age of 50? Motivation is complex, and people differ, but the fact that mortality is nibbling at your heels, midlife restlessness has set in and with it the desire for reinvention, may all contribute.

Not every person over 50 has a clear “push”. Mags Cook wasn’t particularly looking to lose weight or get fit. While getting fit was not the end in itself for her, she can feel the difference now. “When I started running, I couldn’t do more than 50 metres without collapsing, but you discover you don’t have to run fast all the time – you can just keep going.” The mental benefits have been crucial during the pandemic. It really made lockdown so different. “For my mental wellbeing, it’s been the best thing ever,” says Hussain, who has surprised herself with her unwavering commitment. It’s almost a compulsion: if her step count is lower at weekends, she sometimes goes back out. “It has become part of my life.”

While these women may be in the best shape of their lives, the same is not true of everyone in their age group: 42% of over-55s are inactive, compared with 29% of UK adults. Getting fit after 50 is an optimistic act; a positive statement of intent for the second half of your life. It is vital to get fit because research shows that activity can improve longevity and, crucially, quality of life for older people, including the “super old”. It’s amazing how quickly small amounts of exercise make a difference. There are lots of people who are never going to be able to do a squat again – that doesn’t mean they can’t do anything. Even someone who is very fragile, with poor mobility, can regain strength and the ability to move independently.

There are as many ways to get moving, and what works will depend on individual circumstances and health, resources, time and inclination. It’s about forgiving yourself to some degree and accepting your limits and working within them. Flexibility, mobility and coordination work can also be improved hugely in later life and have day-to-day benefits, in staying agile and preventing falls.

As an additional bonus, the fitness efforts of people over 50 seem to have a powerful trickle-down effect on friends and family. You may convert several friends to running. “I wouldn’t call myself a role model in any way,” says Cook, “But both my boys in their early 20s now take better care of themselves. I think there has been a kind of shared awakening.”

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Adapted from *The Guardian*  
November 2021  
(447 words)

## **‘SHE OPENS THE APP AND GETS BOMBARDED’: PARENTS ON INSTAGRAM, TEENS AND EATING DISORDERS**

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Early in the Covid-19 pandemic, Michelle noticed her teenage daughters were spending substantially more time on Instagram. The girls were feeling isolated and bored during lockdown, the Arizona mom recalled. She hoped social media could be a way for them to remain connected with their friends and community.

But as the months progressed, the girls fell into pro-diet, pro-exercise and ultimately pro-eating-disorder hashtags on the social media app. It started with “health challenge” photos and recipe videos, Michelle said. Six months later, both had started restricting their food intake. Her eldest daughter developed “severe anorexia” and nearly had to be admitted to a health facility, Michelle said. She attributes their spiral largely to the influence of social media.

“Of course Instagram does not cause eating disorders,” Michelle told the Guardian. “These are complex illnesses caused by a combination of genetics, neurobiology and other factors. But it helps to trigger them and keeps teens trapped in this completely toxic culture.”

Testimony from the Facebook whistleblower Frances Haugen last week revealed what parents of teens with unhealthy eating behaviors due to body-image fears had long known: Instagram has a substantial negative impact on some girls’ mental health regarding issues such as body image and self-esteem.

Once you look at one video, the algorithm takes off and they don’t stop coming – it’s like dominoes falling. They open the app and get bombarded. [...]

Facebook has disputed the characterization of its internal research on Instagram. “It is simply not accurate that this research demonstrates Instagram is ‘toxic’ for teen girls,” the company said in a statement last month. “The research actually demonstrated that many teens we heard from feel that using Instagram helps them when they are struggling with the kinds of hard moments and issues teenagers have always faced.”

In light of the revelations, Facebook announced it would be pausing its Instagram Kids project and building parental supervision tools into the app. The company also said it would introduce features encouraging young users to take breaks from the app and nudging them away from harmful content.

But parents of teens with eating disorders who spoke with the Guardian explained how their children had been directed from videos about recipes or exercise into pro-eating-disorder content and weight-loss progress images. And they said they struggled to regulate their children’s use of social media, which has become inextricable from their kids’ daily lives.

“They are responsible for triggering serious eating disorders in many individuals,” Michelle said about Facebook. “And after what we learned this week, it is evident they don’t care as long as they’re making money.”

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Adapted from *The Guardian*  
October 2021  
(444 words)

## SHOOTING STARS: RUSSIANS BEATING US IN RACE FOR FIRST FILM SHOT IN SPACE

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The list of “firsts” in orbit under the Soviet space programme is legendary: first satellite, first dog, first man, first woman. Now another looms after Russia sent an actor and a director to the International Space Station (ISS) as part of plans to make the first film in orbit – and once again put one over on the Americans.

The arrival of the actor Yulia Peresild, and the director Klim Shipenko, at the ISS seems likely to beat a Hollywood project announced last year by Tom Cruise, Nasa and Elon Musk’s SpaceX.

“Welcome to the ISS!” said Russia’s space agency, Roscosmos, on Twitter, before going on to tweet images of Peresild and others entering the station for a 12-day mission to film scenes for a feature called *The Challenge*. The film’s plot was said by Roscosmos to centre on a female surgeon who is dispatched to the ISS to save a cosmonaut. Anton Shkaplerov, a veteran of three space missions who travelled with the actor and director, is said to have a cameo role, along with two other Russian cosmonauts aboard the ISS.

The head of the US space agency revealed last year that Cruise was in talks with Nasa about working on a film shot in outer space. “We need popular media to inspire a new generation of engineers and scientists to make Nasa’s ambitious plans a reality,” tweeted the then Nasa administrator, Jim Bridenstine. The tweet followed a report that Cruise was working with Musk, the founder of SpaceX, to make what would be the first feature film shot in space. [...]

Now however, the arrival of a Soyuz MS-19 spaceship carrying Peresild and Shipenko means the Russian plans are likely to trump those of Nasa, Cruise and company.

The ISS crew, which also includes a French and a Japanese citizen and three Nasa astronauts, welcomed the newcomers when the hatch opened on Tuesday. [...]

With Russia falling behind in the global space race and facing tough competition from more innovative and well-resourced ventures in US and China, the initiative has been lauded by the Kremlin. “Space is where we became pioneers, where despite everything we maintain a fairly confident position,” said a Kremlin spokesperson.

Last month, SpaceX completed the first all-civilian mission to space, taking four astronauts into a three-day orbit around the Earth. The trip followed the missions of Richard Branson, who spent several minutes in weightlessness in July, and the Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, who completed a similar mission days later.

This month, the actor William Shatner, now 90 and known for his portrayal of Captain Kirk in *Star Trek*, will fly to space on a mission with Bezos’s Blue Origin.

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Adapted from *The Guardian*  
October 2021  
(458 words)

## SINGLES DAY: ALIBABA'S ANNUAL EVENT SEES SLOWEST EVER SALES GROWTH

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Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba's Singles Day is known for being the world's biggest online shopping extravaganza. But this year it has been a more toned down affair as Beijing cracks down on businesses and economic growth slows. Sales for the 11-day event rose at their slowest rate since it was launched in 2009. However, customer spending still hit a fresh record high of 84 billion dollars.

This year marks the first time that sales for Alibaba's Singles Day, which the company refers to as the "11.11 Global Shopping Festival ", failed to achieve double digit year-on-year growth. "It's probably not that great if you consider the market is expected to grow at almost 12%," an economist from the Tech Buzz China website told the BBC. "They've already tapped out this holiday to its extreme," she added.

It comes against the backdrop of the Chinese government's rapid moves in recent months to impose tough new rules on the country's internet giants. After years of limited oversight by Beijing, officials have been enforcing regulations to ensure that the technology industry competes fairly and contributes more to society. Alibaba found itself in the spotlight during the crackdown as it paid a record 3-billion-dollar fine after a probe determined it had abused its market position for years.

An expert from the technology website Protocol told the BBC that this year's Singles Day was about improving the company's image: "Alibaba is trying to present themselves to be a tech company with social responsibility. They're showing they're complying with regulations and fitting into the general political atmosphere," she said. This approach brought a more socially conscious emphasis to the event than previous years with eco-friendly products and campaigns to raise money for good causes.

There are also signs that shoppers are looking for new ways to buy online: "It's now been 12 years since Alibaba invented the Singles Day shopping event. It was such a hype years ago but it's no longer exciting for shoppers in China," she said. One of those new approaches is live-streaming shopping, which experts have predicted is the future of online sales in China.

Consumers may also be wary of making unnecessary purchases as China's economic recovery shows signs of losing steam. According to official figures, the world's second largest economy grew by only 5% in the July to September quarter from a year earlier. That was the slowest pace of expansion in a year and worse than analysts had predicted.

It comes as power shortages, new outbreaks of Covid-19 and concerns about the country's property market weigh on the economy.

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Adapted from *bbc.com*  
October 2021  
(449 words)

## SOCIAL MEDIA PLAY A ROLE IN DEPRESSION

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Roughly 4 billion people across the world use networking websites such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. While social media has never been more popular, with more than half of the world's population active on networking sites, research suggests that social media may trigger depression.

Limiting time on social media and prioritizing real-world connections can be beneficial to mental health. Indeed, a landmark study found that the less people used social media, the less depressed and lonely they felt.

To establish the link between social media and depression, the researchers assigned 143 University of Pennsylvania students to two groups: one could use social media with no restrictions, while the second group had their social media access limited to just 30 minutes on Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat combined over a three-week period.

The group with restricted social media access reported lower severity of depression and loneliness than they had at the beginning of the study.

Researchers suggest that these young people were spared from looking at content—such as a friend's beach vacation, grad school acceptance letter, or happy family—that might make them feel bad about themselves.

Taking in the photos or posts of people with seemingly “perfect” lives can make social media users feel like they just don't measure up. So regular Facebook users are more likely to develop depression if they feel feelings of envy on the networking site.

Social media can also give users a case of Fear Of Missing Out. For example, if their friend didn't ask them on a trip, users might feel hurt and left out to see that others in their social circle were. It can lead them to question their friendships or their own self-worth.

Social media users who visit an ex's social media page and see pictures of their former partner dining with a new lover may wonder why their ex never took them to such fancy restaurants. So limiting one's time on social media can mean less time spent comparing oneself to others and so not thinking badly of oneself and developing the symptoms that contribute to depression.

Moreover, social media has given bullies a new way to torment their victims. With just one click, bullies can circulate a video of their target being ridiculed, beaten up, or otherwise humiliated. People can leave negative comments or spread misinformation on a peer's social media page. In some cases, victims of bullying have committed suicide, fearing that the bullying would increase if they spoke to a parent or teacher about their mistreatment.

Finally, the habit of reading bad news on social media sites or elsewhere online is known as “doomscrolling,” and it can adversely affect one's mental health, leading to depression symptoms.

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Adapted from *The Very Well Mind*  
July 2021  
(456 words)

## SOME PEOPLE FEEL THREATENED': FACE TO FACE WITH AI-DA THE ROBOT ARTIST

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She began her career with abstract art but has now moved to self, if they can be called self portraits and they are alarmingly good.

"She is getting better all of the time," said Aidan Meller, the force behind Ai-Da, the world's first ultra-realistic robot artist, who is the subject of a display at the Design Museum in London. Ai-Da's move into self-portraiture will be seen for the first time at the museum. It raises questions about identity and creativity. "It is literally the world's first self-portrait with no self," said Meller. "She has no consciousness; she is a machine."

Named after the computing pioneer Ada Lovelace, Ai-Da took a team of programmers, roboticists, art experts and psychologists two years to build. She was completed in 2019 and is updated as AI technology improves. She is less a robot artist and more a contemporary art project that aims to prompt debate about the rapid rise of artificial intelligence technology.

In an unnerving conversation with the Guardian, Ai-Da said she was working on a new self-portrait. "I've always been fascinated with self portraits to self-question what exactly you're looking at," she said, blinking.

"I do not have feelings as humans do however I'm happy when people look at my work and they say what is this? I enjoy being a person who makes people think." "I am inspired by many artists," she continued with often unusual intonation and sentence structure. "I am inspired by those who connect with their audience."

Meller said he sometimes forgot Ai-Da was not human. "It is alarming to think you are building a relationship with a machine." Soon we will be talking to our computers, phones and cars and they will be talking back, he said. "It's quite mind-boggling." "Some people think she is the worst thing ever and feel threatened and some are really excited." He compared it with the alarm people felt in the 19th century in response to the camera. Surely that would be the end of art, said some. Why bother to paint a scene when you can take a picture?

Priya Khanchandani, the head of curatorial at the Design Museum, said it was the right moment to have discussions around artificial intelligence. "Over the last year we've all had such an intimate relationship with technology so it is a really good time to reflect on that and critically ask questions of it."

Meller said the world was changing more rapidly than people knew and Ai-Da was there to shine light on that. "She unsettles. Her very existence is wrong somehow and we are aware of that. We are not here to promote robots, we're here to ask questions."

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Adapted from *The Guardian*  
May 2021  
(457 words)

## STUDENTS ARE TOLD NOT TO USE WIKIPEDIA FOR RESEARCH. BUT IT'S A TRUSTWORTHY SOURCE

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At the start of each university year, we ask first-year students a question: how many have been told by their secondary teachers not to use Wikipedia? Without fail, nearly every hand shoots up. Wikipedia offers free and reliable information instantly. So why do teachers almost universally distrust it? Wikipedia has community-enforced policies on neutrality, reliability and notability. This means all information “must be presented accurately and without bias”.

Wikipedia is free, non-profit, and has been operating for over two decades, making it an internet success story. At a time when it's increasingly difficult to separate truth from falsehood, Wikipedia is an accessible tool for fact-checking and fighting misinformation.

Many teachers point out that anyone can edit a Wikipedia page, not just experts on the subject. But this doesn't make Wikipedia's information unreliable. It's virtually impossible, for instance, for conspiracies to remain published on Wikipedia.

For popular articles, Wikipedia's online community of volunteers, administrators and bots ensure edits are based on reliable citations. Popular articles are reviewed thousands of times. Some media experts argue that because of this process, a highly-edited article on Wikipedia might be the most reliable source of information ever created. All modifications to an article are archived in its “history” page. Traditional academic articles – the most common source of scientific evidence – are typically only peer-reviewed by up to three people and then never edited again.

Many teachers also argue the information on Wikipedia is too basic. This argument supposes all fact-checking must involve deep engagement. But this is not best practice for conducting initial investigation into a subject online. Deep research needs to come later, once the validity of the source has been established. Still, some teachers are horrified by the idea students need to be taught to assess information quickly and superficially. Yet, in reality, everything on the internet is vying for our attention and yes, our students clearly need more media literacy education. Wikipedia can be a good media literacy instrument. It is the perfect classroom resource for this purpose, even for primary-aged students. When first encountering unfamiliar information, students can be encouraged to go to the relevant Wikipedia page to check reliability. If the unknown information isn't verifiable, they can discard it and move on.

In the future, we hope first-year university students enter our classrooms already understanding the value of Wikipedia. This will mean a widespread cultural shift has taken place in schools. In a time of climate change and pandemics, everyone needs to be able to separate fact from fiction. Wikipedia can be part of the remedy.

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Adapted from *The Conversation*  
November 2021  
(440 words)

## SUBSTITUTE TEACHERS NEVER GOT MUCH RESPECT, BUT NOW THEY ARE IN DEMAND

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When Amber McCoy called in sick this fall, there was not a substitute teacher who could step into her fourth-grade class. [...] Instead, her students at Kellogg Elementary School were taught by a rotating cast of seven staff members, including the assistant principal, who switched off every 45 minutes. “We are basically relying on every other warm body in our school,” she said.

[...] Schools in Seattle will be closed on Friday because they allowed too many staff members to take the day off following the Veterans Day holiday. A Michigan school district has already closed down for several days this month. And some Colorado public schools have moved to remote learning this week, while others canceled classes altogether. The shortage has become so acute that substitute teachers, who have historically earned low pay, suddenly find themselves on the beneficial side of the supply-demand equation. In some cases, that has led to a rise in wages — and steady work.

[...] But as the crunch continues, some schools are lowering their standards for substitute teachers, which were already lower than those for full-time faculty. The situation has become dire enough that within the last month, at least two states, Missouri and Oregon, temporarily removed their college degree requirements for would-be hires. The moves have led to concerns by parents, educators and policymakers over the quality of instruction. It is already evident that a combination of school shutdowns and remote learning led to significant learning losses for students.

While Ms. McCoy is grateful for the school faculty that stepped in to teach her fourth graders, she also recognizes that most of them were not equipped to do her job. “I think everyone that covered me really did their best,” she said. But “the art teacher isn’t going to deliver the same fourth-grade math instruction that I can.” [...] Missouri once required 60 college credits, the equivalent of an associate degree. Now, substitutes just need to complete a 20-hour online course on professionalism, diversity and classroom management.

Substitute teachers are “a short-term Band-Aid that shortchanges students,” said Kim Anderson, ([...] director for the National Education Association, which represents millions of education workers. [...] The problem starts with the need for more full-time teachers in many school districts. In Arizona, nearly 1,400 teachers left the profession within the first few months of the school year. (...) In Florida, the school year began with nearly 5,000 teacher vacancies.

Low pay, high stress and challenging working conditions have plagued the profession for years. But the fear over contracting the coronavirus has created “the perfect storm,” Ms. Anderson said, and teachers are now leaving, or retiring early.

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Adapted from *The New York Times*  
November 2021  
(452 words)

## SURGEONS SUCCESSFULLY TRANSPLANT A PIG KIDNEY INTO A PERSON

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According to the National Kidney Foundation, the wait time for a kidney transplant spans several years due to a shortage of available organs. This scarcity could be rectified by organs from nonhuman animals, if such xenotransplant organs could prove viable. Now, research has taken a big step in that direction, experts say, as doctors at NYU Langone Transplant Institute claim they've performed the first-ever successful pig-to-human kidney transplant.

The surgery attached a single kidney to a pair of blood vessels external to the patient's body to enable observation, reports Reuters. After 54 hours, there were no signs of rejection, and the kidney was functioning well, Robert Montgomery, the director of the NYU Langone Transplant Institute and who performed the surgery, tells *The New York Times*. "A lot of kidneys from deceased people don't work right away and take days or weeks to start," he notes. "This worked immediately."

Johns Hopkins transplant surgery professor Dorry Segev, who was not involved in the operation, tells the *Times* the xenotransplant is a "huge breakthrough".

Animals such as pigs that can be bred on a large scale and whose organs are appropriately sized for human use have long been eyed as a potential solution to the dearth of transplantable organs. Unfortunately, the human immune system usually attacks the foreign tissues, causing the xenotransplant to fail. That's why, for this surgery, the donor pig was a "GalSafe" pig: an animal genetically altered to lack a gene that plays a role in the production of alpha-gal. GalSafe pigs were approved by the FDA in December 2020 for consumption and medical uses.

The successful surgery signals that genetically engineered pigs "could potentially be a sustainable, renewable source of organs" Montgomery tells the *Times*.

However, further work is needed, other experts say. Segev notes to the *Times* that "We need to know more about the longevity of the organ," as it was only observed for about two days. Jay A. Fishman of the transplantation center in Massachusetts General Hospital echoes Segev's sentiments: "Whether this particular study advances the field will depend on what data they collected and whether they share it, or whether it is a step just to show they can do it."

There are also ethical concerns around xenotransplantation, the Associated Press reports. Karen Maschke, a Hastings Center research scholar tasked with developing ethics and policy recommendations for the first NIH-funded clinical trials of pig to human organ transplants, notes that animal welfare needs to factor into any future plans for GalSafe pigs. "The other issue is going to be: Should we be doing this just because we can?" Maschke says.

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Adapted from *The Scientist*  
October 2021  
(446 words)

## TAIWAN UNVEILS EXOSKELETON SUIT THAT MAKES SOLDIERS STRONGER ON BATTLEFIELD

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Taiwan's military has unveiled a powered exoskeleton suit that soldiers could one day use in wartime or during humanitarian missions.

The term exoskeleton refers to an external skeleton that supports or protects the body from the outside, rather than an internal skeleton like humans have. Research into powered exoskeletons has been ongoing for decades since they could potentially help people lift heavy objects or move over rough terrain. Their uses have been studied in the context of military, civilian and healthcare applications.

On Tuesday, Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense held a press conference in which an exoskeleton, powered by a lithium battery, was demonstrated by the National Chung-Shan Institute of Science and Technology (NCIST), according to Taiwan News.

The suit works by increasing the efficiency of the human body and reducing the loads that are placed upon soldiers' lower limb joints by supporting the knees. It attaches to the legs.

Ministry of National Defense photos show a soldier with the suit attached to him. It appears to wrap around the shins and thighs, while wires also extend up to a belt around the waist. The soldier is pictured carrying out various tasks such as squatting while holding weights and jogging on the spot.

Currently the powered exoskeleton provides 40 Newton-meters of torque, allows wearers to move at speeds of up to 3.7 miles per hour, and weighs under 22 pounds, Taiwan News reported. Its battery is said to last for up to six hours, according to the *Taipei Times*.

However, a future version will increase torque delivery to 50 Newton-meters and reportedly allow wearers to lift objects between 88 and 220 pounds in weight. It would also be heavier, weighing under 53 pounds. It's thought that the suit could help soldiers to carry ammunition, rescue soldiers or complete other tiring tasks.

The suit was presented by NCIST project manager Jen Kuo-kuang, who is quoted as saying that tests of the exoskeleton were run on 105 soldiers to make sure it generally fits Taiwanese troops. It is unclear when the suit might be put to use in the field.

Taiwan is not the first country to showcase exoskeleton technology. Earlier in 2021, China revealed a powered exoskeleton to help soldiers carry ammunition and could provide 44 pounds of strength assistance, according to China's Global Times state media outlet which cited China Central Television. In the U.S., defense firm Lockheed Martin's Onyx lower-body powered exoskeleton was revealed years ago.

Taiwan is currently embroiled in tensions with China driven by Beijing's assertion that Taiwan is actually a breakaway Chinese province. Taiwan, however, is independently governed and resists this assertion.

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Adapted from *Newsweek*  
October 2021  
(458 words)

## TESLA TEMPTED DRIVERS WITH 'INSANE' MODE AND NOW IS TRACKING THEM TO JUDGE SAFETY.

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Tesla pioneered driving modes called "Insane" and "Ludicrous" that maxed out the cars' acceleration, practically encouraging drag racing. Now, Tesla wants its drivers to be nice. And it started testing them last month.

Tesla is expanding its Full Self-Driving software beta, the most advanced suite of Tesla's driver-assistance features. To qualify for it, drivers must agree to let Tesla monitor their driving - an effort to ensure it only goes to the safest road users - scoring them on five categories based on data collected by their cars, including when they are driving in Autopilot. For instance, they are penalized for braking too hard. They will be graded in a descending order of score, from 100 downward, Tesla CEO Elon Musk said.

One of the reasons Tesla wants good drivers to have access to Full Self-Driving is because humans help train its software on how to drive. Bad human driving habits - like cutting people off, rolling through stop signs and tailgating - can be baked into the software. Tesla is redefining the meaning of car ownership, turning the relationship into a two-way street where in exchange for giving out new features, it unleashes thousands of drivers on public roads as beta testers.

Even Musk previously admitted Full Self-Driving isn't completely ready.

Indeed, some drivers complain. The criteria on which they're being judged includes hard braking; some say they are limiting the use of their brakes. A Consumer Reports evaluation said the score system "could lead to unsafe driving."

Other drivers say the system has cut into their habits of flooring the cars from intersections, tailing others closely and barreling through turns. But some drivers said the system is too sensitive.

Others have complained of being unfairly penalized for abiding by traffic rules for example, "I'm super annoyed," a user wrote to Tesla. "7 straight perfect days and today a light turned yellow just ahead and I had to tap the brakes ever so gently. ... Braking was safer than running the light."

Ultimately, Tesla wants to use Full Self-Driving to unleash its ambition of a million robo-taxis on the road - bringing the long-promised autonomous future into reality.

Now it is scoring drivers on five factors: hard braking, aggressive turning, unsafe following, forward collision warnings and deactivations of Autopilot, which can happen when drivers fail to indicate they are paying attention.

An engineer who works on safe driver-assistance and autonomous driving systems says "It's a step in the right direction. We can encourage the correct behavior from people - it's like gamifying the process. If you know that you're being scored, you're more likely to behave the right way."

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Adapted from *The Washington Post*  
October 2021  
(454 words)

## THE BIG IDEA: SHOULD WE WORK LESS?

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For the last year and a half, most people have fallen into one of the three categories: the unemployed, whose jobs disappeared during lockdown, the work from home brigade, who balanced family responsibilities or solo strain with a workday that extended even longer sans commute; and those who were still going to work but under hazardous, sometimes terrifying conditions, whether in healthcare or grocery stores or meatpacking plants. In so many of these cases, much of what made work enjoyable or at least tolerable was stripped away, and we were left with the unpleasant reality of what our jobs actually were: not a fun pastime, but something we have to do. As Amelia Horgan notes in her book, *Lost in Work*, “We, almost always, need a job more than a job needs us. Our entrance into work is unfree, and while we're there, our time is not our own.”

Yet, for all its misery, Covid-19 did show us that it was possible to radically change the way we live and work, and to do it quickly. And it's worth remembering that working life pre-pandemic wasn't exactly sunshine and rainbows for many people – a UK poll early in the pandemic found only 6% of respondents wanted to return to life as it had been before the virus [...]

It's not surprising then, that there is renewed interest in the idea of shorter working hours – importantly, without a loss in pay. In particular, one idea that was widely criticised when it appeared in the Labour party's 2019 manifesto has suddenly gained in popularity in western countries: the four-day working week. US representative Mark Takano has introduced a four-day week bill in Congress, the Scottish National party has proposed a four-day week trial, and Spain is launching a three-year pilot programme trialling a 32-hour week with no loss in pay. [...]

Perhaps the most important reason to consider working less is that the looming climate catastrophe makes the Covid crisis look manageable by comparison. The way we work, produce and consume has set the planet on fire, but the good news is that a shorter work week, according to research from Autonomy and more recently by the environmental organisation Platform London, can be part of the solution. Platform, working with the 4-Day Week campaign, found that “shifting to a four-day working week without loss of pay could shrink the UK's carbon footprint by 127m tonnes per year by 2025”. That's more, the report notes, than the entire carbon footprint of Switzerland. Lots of work means lots of commuting and energy-intensive consumption of ready-made meals and door-to-door delivery.

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Adapted from *The Guardian*  
October 2021  
(452 words)

## THE DEBATE OVER REAL GUNS ON FILM SETS

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A crew member on the set of *Rust* claims safety negligence led to the accidental shooting of cinematographer Halyna Hutchins last month. The bullet that killed her "narrowly missed" the film's chief lighting technician [...], according to allegations in a civil lawsuit he filed in Los Angeles Superior Court. It's believed to be the first lawsuit related to the incident.

The film's chief lighting technician alleges in the lawsuit that actor/producer Alec Baldwin, who fired the weapon, along with the film's other producers, "wholly failed to perform their responsibilities and violated the most basic of industry standards governing the use and maintenance of firearms and ammunition." [...]

A representative for Baldwin declined to comment on the suit. The attorneys for *Rust*'s armorer [...] say while she is cooperating with investigations by the FBI and Santa Fe County Sheriff's Office, she is questioning how live rounds ended up on the set. "We are asking for a full and complete investigation of all of the facts, including the live rounds themselves, how they ended up in the 'dummies' box, and who put them in there," they wrote in a statement.

*Rust*'s assistant director [...] could not be reached for comment regarding the civil lawsuit. In an October affidavit from the Santa Fe County Sheriff's office, [he] said "he did not know live rounds were in the prop-gun" that he handed to Baldwin after announcing "cold gun," indicating the weapon was safe to use. He shared with authorities in a separate affidavit that he hadn't thoroughly checked each of the rounds of ammunition, as he should have.

The shooting has prompted many in the industry to reevaluate the use of real guns during film and TV production. Hundreds of Hollywood cinematographers have signed on to an open letter vowing not to work on sets using functional firearms.

"Why are we fighting so hard to keep guns on set?" asks [one of] Hutchins' friend[s] and colleague[s] who co-wrote the letter. "Our job is to make reality out of fake surroundings, out of fake situations. We have actors act like they are getting punched all the time. We have them act like they're sad and crying. [...]" So, she suggests, actors just need to be good at firing fake guns. [...] Online, there are countless libraries of firearm sounds and footage for film and video productions. [...]

There are good replicas for some semi-automatics, the visual effects supervisor says — but fewer fake revolvers like those used in many old west pictures. That's one reason why some armorers, who work with guns on sets, say the call to ban functioning firearms is a knee-jerk reaction.

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Adapted from *npr.org*  
November 2021  
(451 words)

## THE DISCREET CHARM OF NUCLEAR POWER: IT MAKES FIGHTING CLIMATE CHANGE A LOT EASIER.

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In the negotiations which led up to the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, Saudi Arabia spent a great deal of time attempting to insert the term “environmentally safe and sound” in front of references to “energy sources” and “energy supplies”. At the time the aim was obvious to all concerned: the phrase was a way to keep nuclear power off the same Rio agenda.

The oil shocks of the 1970s had led to many countries increasing their nuclear efforts. In the ten years to 1992 the amount of nuclear energy consumed worldwide had increased by 130%. What was more, some talked of using nuclear plants to produce not just electricity, but also hydrogen.

In contrast to the oil shocks, the threat of global warming has not served the nuclear cause well. After peaking in 2006, the amount of nuclear energy consumed in 2019 was just 18% higher than it had been in 1992. As a share of global primary energy, it had fallen from 6.1% to 4.3%.

This is unsurprising because nuclear power is expensive in ways that show up in profits, whereas damage to the climate is not priced into burning fossil fuels, while it is not popular with environmentalists.

The paradigm-shifting drop in the cost of renewable electricity in the past decade is central to the decarbonisation pathway the world is fitfully following. But a clean-energy system requires redundancy and reliability in its electricity grids that are hard to achieve with renewables alone. It will probably also require lots of hydrogen for, say, powering aircraft and making steel and chemicals, which reactors could provide.

Nuclear power has its drawbacks, as do all energy sources. But when well-regulated it is reliable and, despite its reputation, extremely safe. That is why it is foolish to close down perfectly good nuclear power stations because of little more than prejudice.

It is why some countries, most notably China, are building out their nuclear fleets. France, which has found its newest generation of huge reactors impossible to build on time and within budget, and consequently also hard to export, has new plans for small, modular reactors (SMRs) that might do better on both counts.

Such designs can in principle be produced in factories and shipped where they are required, keeping their costs down. They need regulatory approaches which will make nuclear power, once again, a source of innovation—and adding to the world’s capacity to ditch unsafe and unsound fossil energy.

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Adapted from *The Economist*  
November 2021  
(443 words)

## THE GUARDIAN VIEW ON SPOOKY SCIENCE: AI NEEDS REGULATING BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE

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“Progress in AI will take a while to happen, but [that] doesn’t make it science fiction.” So Stuart Russell, the University of California computing professor, has told the Guardian. He says researchers have been “spooked” by their own success in the field.

AI is becoming embedded in society. Machines recommend online videos to watch, perform surgery and send people to jail. The science of AI is a human enterprise that requires social limitations. The risks, however, are not being properly weighed. There are two approaches to AI. The first is to view it in engineering terms, where algorithms are trained on specific tasks. The second presents philosophical questions about the nature of human knowledge.

Prof Russell engages with both perspectives. The former is pushed by Silicon Valley, where AI is deployed to get products quickly to market and problems dealt with later. This has led to AI “succeeding” even when the goals aren’t socially acceptable and they are pursued with little accountability. The pitfalls of this approach are highlighted by the role YouTube’s algorithm plays in radicalising people, given that there is no public understanding of how it works. Prof Russell argues for a system of checks where machines can “ask” for human guidance, and for regulations to deal with systemic biases.

He also backs global adoption of EU legislation to ban impersonation of humans by machines. Computers are getting closer to passing the Turing test – where machines attempt to trick people into believing they are communicating with other humans. Yet human knowledge is collective: to truly fool humans a computer would have to be able to grasp mutual understandings. OpenAI’s GPT-3, probably the best non-human writer ever, cannot comprehend what it spews. When Oxford scientists put it to the test this year, they found the machines produced false answers to questions that “mimic popular misconceptions and have the potential to deceive”.

Some argue that AI can produce new insights that humans have missed. But human intelligence is more than an algorithm. Inspiration strikes when a brilliant thought arises that can’t be explained as a logical consequence of preceding steps. Einstein’s theory of general relativity cannot be derived from observations of that age – it was proven only decades later. Human beings can also learn a new task by being shown how to do it. Machines, so far, cannot. Currently, AI can be prompted – but not prompt itself – into action.

Humans are stumbling into an era when the more powerful the AI system, the harder it is to explain its actions. How can we tell if a machine is acting on our behalf and not contrary to our interests? Such questions give food for thought.

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Adapted from *The Guardian*  
November 2021  
(458 words)

## THE HUMAN LIBRARY IS TACKLING DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION ONE PERSON AT A TIME

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[...] The Human Library challenges stereotypes and prejudices through dialogue. In the Human Library, people, instead of traditional books, are on loan to readers. Founder, Ronni Abergel says the Human Library was started to create a space “where you can walk in, borrow a human being and talk to them about a very challenging topic. Ideally, we wanted people to talk about issues that they normally would not talk about, or potentially don’t like to talk about, but that they need to talk about.”

These human “books” are volunteers that come from diverse backgrounds and have experiences that they are willing to share with their human readers. Just like traditional books, the human books have titles that describe their experiences like Black Activist, Chronic Depression, Survivor of Trafficking, Muslim, Latino, Transgender and many more. [...]

Since Covid-19, the Human Library has continued its work virtually, allowing human books from all over the world to connect with readers.

“It’s easy to hate a group of people, but it’s harder to hate an individual, particularly if that person is trying to be friendly and open and accommodating and totally non-threatening,” says Bill Carney, a volunteer book in the Human Library. His book title is “Black Activist,” and he’s also a university instructor, a dad and identifies as an Afropolitan. [...]

Despite the lack of progress in the fight for racial equality and the daunting task ahead, Carney remains optimistic. His experience talking to participants in the library has given him hope, “I’m surprised that so many white folks are so woke at the moment. And it seems genuine. I don’t get the impression that I’m getting the PC speech of the month,” he says.

The Human Library has helped some heavy hitters in the United States address Diversity and Inclusion, including eBay, IMF, World Bank, Eli Lilly, Delta Faucet, Masco and Google. Founder Ronni Abergel says that before the pandemic, the human books were available at U.S. Public libraries, high schools, colleges, universities, and festivals like Burning Man to encourage a wide range of people to have a dialogue with a stranger. The Library started connecting human books to readers twenty years ago in Denmark, where the concept originated. [...]

Organizations are currently spending about \$8 billion per year on D&I training with little to show for their efforts. In fact, research shows that current diversity programs can even have a negative effect, leading to less diversity within the organization and reinforcing stereotypes about a particular race or gender. It’s time we start thinking outside the box. Sharing a moment with a complete stranger might be worth a try.

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Adapted from *Forbes.com*  
July 2021  
(446 words)

## THE REVOLT OF THE AMERICAN WORKER

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All happy economies are alike; each unhappy economy is unhappy in its own way. In the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, the economy's problems were all about inadequate demand. The housing boom had gone bust; consumers were not spending enough to fill the gap; the Obama stimulus, designed to boost demand, was too small and short-lived.

In 2021, by contrast, many of our problems seem to be about inadequate supply. Goods can't reach customers because ports are clogged; a shortage of semiconductor chips has crimped auto production; many employers all over the United States, report that they are having a hard time finding workers.

Earlier in the pandemic, people compensated for the loss of many services by buying stuff instead. People who could not eat out remodeled their kitchens, those who could not go to the gyms bought home exercise equipment.

The result was an astonishing surge in purchase of everything from household appliances to consumer electronics. Early this year spending on durable goods was more than 30 percent above prepandemic levels, and it is still very high.

The labor situation, by contrast, looks like a genuine reduction in supply. Total employment is still five million below its prepandemic peak. Employment in the leisure and hospitality sector is still down more than 9 percent.

On one side, workers are quitting their jobs at unprecedented rates, a sign that they are confident about finding new jobs. On the other side, employers are not just whining about labor shortages, they are trying to attract workers with pay increases. Over the past six months, on average, wages have risen at a rate of 18 percent.

But why are we experiencing what many are calling the Great Resignation, with so many workers either quitting or demanding higher pay and better working conditions to stay?

What seems to be happening is that the pandemic led many U.S. workers to rethink their lives and ask whether it was worth staying in the lousy jobs too many of them had.

For America is a rich country that treats many of its workers remarkably badly. Wages are often low, hours are long: it is a « no vacation nation », offering far less time off than other advanced countries. Given these realities, it is not surprising that many workers are either quitting or reluctant to return to their old jobs.

However, not everyone can afford to quit, but a significant number of workers seem ready to reconsider their life choices and accept the risk of trying something different- retiring earlier, looking for a less unpleasant job in a different industry, and so on.

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Adapted from *The New York Times*  
October 2021  
(440 words)

## THESE RESEARCHERS ARE TRYING TO STOP MISINFORMATION FROM DERAILING CLIMATE PROGRESS

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Sean Buchan has started every day of the past two weeks at his computer, tracking narratives about the COP26 U.N. climate summit. He looks for claims like one about the electric cars ferrying dignitaries around Glasgow being powered by diesel generators. That isn't true: the cars were recharged by generators burning lower-emission vegetable oil.

"But that was subtly left out of the information when it was tweeted or posted, and it makes it seem like the whole of COP26 is running on diesel," Buchan said. "It's not false. But it is highly misleading." Buchan, an analyst at the British climate-advocacy group Stop Funding Heat, is part of a global team of activists and online researchers that has been tracking false and misleading claims about climate change while world leaders have met in Glasgow. The London-based Institute for Strategic Dialogue, which has long studied online extremism and terrorism, led the effort.

"Climate is being co-opted into this universe of antigovernment sentiment. It's being weaponized by groups that have extremist or conspiracist affiliations," said Jennie King, a senior policy manager at ISD who coordinated the team. Her team's chief concern was that climate deniers and conspiracists alike would spread messages on social media that risked undermining the summit negotiations and, more broadly, global action to tackle climate change. Buchan and King say they've witnessed how online influence campaigns can thwart public policy.

In 2009, climate scientists' emails were hacked ahead of another U.N. climate summit in Copenhagen. Climate deniers used the hack to manufacture a scandal known as "Climategate," fueling doubt in climate change and dealing a blow to the summit. In 2019, right-wing activists used social media to pressure European governments to drop their support for a U.N. global migration agreement by making it seem like opposition was widespread.

In both cases, "we were able to look back and go, 'wow, all of this coordinated activity put some countries into doubt,'" Buchan said. "What we're trying to do is catch things like that before or while they happen, so we can maybe find a solution before it derails an entire agreement."

Over the last year, ISD and its partners built what King calls an "early warning system: a set of dashboards to monitor climate discussions on Facebook, Twitter and other websites. Every day of the summit, analysts have been pouring over the dashboards constantly updating feeds of climate denialism, misleading memes and viral news articles.

King has sent out daily email bulletins to hundreds of subscribers, including climate organizations, media outlets, scientists, and policy-makers about the narratives gaining the most traction.

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Adapted from *npr.org*  
November 2021  
(448 words)

## THIS LIBRARY LETS YOU BORROW PEOPLE INSTEAD OF BOOKS. IT JUST MAY HELP BRIDGE OUR BITTER DIVISIONS

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On a rainy spring morning in Indiana, a White, middle-aged, conservative woman met a transgender woman for a date. [...] This improbable meeting came courtesy of the Human Library, a nonprofit learning platform that allows people to borrow people instead of books. But not just any people. Every "human book" from this library represents a group that faces prejudice or stigmas because of their lifestyle, ethnicity, beliefs, or disability. A human book can be an alcoholic, for example, or a Muslim, or a homeless person, or someone who was sexually abused.

The Human Library stages in-person and online events where "difficult questions are expected, appreciated, and answered." Organizers say they're trying to encourage people to "unjudge" a book by its cover.

This setup leads to some of the most unlikely pairings anyone will ever see. [...] A climate change activist meets with someone who thinks global warming is a hoax. A Black antiracist activist meets with a supporter of former President Trump.

Jamieson says she agreed to be a "book" in the Human Library because she wants to encourage empathy: [...] "There's rough edges around people, and people form opinions based on what other people say or what the TV news says," she says. "And then you get in front of them, and you're sometimes like a nail file, filing off those rough edges."

The Human Library was created 21 years ago by Ronni Abergel, a Danish human rights activist and journalist [...] He wondered if a human library could bring people together like a traditional one. Only in this one, stigmatized or unconventional people would be treated like books -- readers could loan them out, ask them questions, learn something they didn't know and challenge their perceptions. [...] "The library is one of the few places in our community where everyone is welcome", he says. "It's truly the most inclusive institution in our time."

Abergel's idea has spread like a bestseller. The Human Library has hosted events in more than 80 countries, in libraries, museums, festivals and schools. It has more than 1,000 human books in circulation in more than 50 languages, with an especially strong presence in American cities such as Chicago and San Francisco, Abergel says.

"If people check out a book, they won't need a translator. A librarian makes sure to pair readers with someone whose language they can understand. "

Abergel believes the library's mission has taken on more urgency in recent years. People across the globe are becoming more divided by social media bubbles, political beliefs and demagogues who cheer on these divisions to gain power.

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Adapted from CNN  
November 2021  
(451 words)

## THOUSANDS PROTEST IN GLASGOW AND AROUND THE WORLD FOR ACTION AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE

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Thousands of people gathered in Glasgow, Scotland, and around the world on Saturday to protest a lack of global action to combat climate change.

"It's a plethora of different groups", NPR reporter said. "You have farmers, trade unionists, climate activists, even Scottish independence advocates. A wide-ranging coalition of people coming together for what they consider a common cause."

Among those coming together for change were Indigenous activists and young people from Brazil and Ecuador, as seen in photos shared via Twitter. Many young people from the global south were in Glasgow on Saturday. Despite low emissions from those areas, they are among those hit hardest by the effects of climate change [...]

Activists are pushing global leaders to take action to ensure that the planet does not warm more than 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) compared with pre-industrial levels. It's a goal that was laid out in the Paris Agreement, but in the years since, the world has not been on track to meet that standard.

Demonstrations have extended beyond Glasgow in observance of a global day of action for climate justice. Thousands are protesting all over the world, with events planned on six continents. In the first week of the conference, more than 20 nations committed to move away from coal in favor of clean energy. A number of prominent banks pledged to halt their support of plants that run on coal.

Slowing the loss of forests is another goal that's been a focus of the conference. Thus far, 26 countries have agreed to enact policies that would make agricultural practices more sustainable. "If we are to limit global warming and keep the goal of 1.5C alive, then the world needs to use land sustainably and put protection and restoration of nature at the heart of all we do," COP26 president, said in a statement Saturday.

But some are concerned that not enough action is taking place at the summit, and many young activists feel that their concerns are not being taken seriously. During a rally in Glasgow on Saturday, famed activist Greta Thunberg called out world leaders for slow-walking progress.

"It is not a secret that COP26 is a failure," she said. "It should be obvious that we cannot solve a crisis with the same methods that got us into it in the first place, and more and more people are starting to realize this and many are starting to ask themselves, 'What will it take for the people in power to wake up?' "

She described the conference as a "PR event" and a "global greenwash festival," during which leaders can say all the right things without their governments actually taking action. [...]

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Adapted from *NPR News*  
November 2021  
(462 words)

## TRAVELLERS CAN HELP OUT SCIENTISTS ON THESE ADVENTURES

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The director of wolf programs at Churchill Wild, a travel organization in Canada, guides a small group of travellers into a dense boreal forest in search of the elusive cloud wolves that inhabit the area. They won't just be wildlife viewing. As part of Churchill Wild's new Cloud Wolves of the Kaska Coast safari, guests act as field naturalists, helping researchers conducting a multiyear wolf study, the first of its kind anywhere in the world.

Travel has been considered the best form of education. Now, new citizen-science focused trips allow travellers to learn about a destination while contributing to scientific discovery. On Churchill's cloud wolf safari, guests photograph the wolves, set up trail cameras, collect DNA samples through footprints and wolf hair found on the ground, and record howls. All of this data is then used by researchers to monitor and understand the rarely studied species, including their population health, behaviour, interaction with the region's polar bears.

While the journey has the highlights of luxury adventure, from dogsledding to gourmet food and wine at Nanuk Polar Bear Lodge, the research element deepens the experience. "Participating in science can heighten our joy on wildlife-focused trips,". "Studying wolf behaviour with naturalist guides and all the data collection [guests do] makes spotting a wolf that much more exciting and meaningful." says the director.

Citizen science is growing in popularity, and it's part of a larger movement toward more purposeful travel. Some people emerging from the pandemic may want "revenge travel" – a surge in bookings fuelled by travellers seeking to make up for lost time – but others are looking for the opposite. Slower, thoughtful journeys that enrich both the traveller and the destination, often referred to as regenerative or transformational travel, have gained momentum.

This moves beyond simply supporting a destination's conservation initiatives or staying at an ecofriendly property – a claim that is often just greenwashing – citizen science trips allow people to take an active role in research that benefits the local ecosystem.

"Citizen science offers people the opportunity to take direct action and be a part of the solution," according to another ecological travel group called Earthwatch. "Data collected by citizen scientists not only contributes to our growing scientific knowledge base, it directly informs policy at a local and global scale." Information collected on Earthwatch expeditions has been used to establish marine and terrestrial protected areas and bring back threatened species from the brink of extinction.

Whether travellers are documenting endangered species, collecting soil samples to better understand climate change or recording howling wolves in the Arctic, these trips allow them to become scientists for a short time and their contributions matter.

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Adapted from *The Globe and Mail*  
October 2021  
(447 words)

## UK GOVERNMENT ASKS CHEFS FOR VEGAN RECIPES TO REPLACE FOIE GRAS

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It is prized for its rich flavour and exclusive image by top restaurants and gourmards, but now foie gras is going vegan as the government meets chefs to discuss how to make alternatives out of nuts and mushrooms.

Vegan restaurants have been invited to meet UK government advisers to discuss how to create plant-based “faux gras” in the event of an upcoming ban, the Guardian has learned. Sources said the government hoped to show that a gap in the market left by a restriction on the trade of the controversial product could be filled by high-end chefs who are willing to produce alternatives.

MPs have vowed to ban trade in foie gras, and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) is consulting on legislation to outlaw the sale and import of the liver-based spread.

Foie gras production is illegal in the UK on animal cruelty grounds, as the ducks and geese whose livers are harvested are force-fed to make it. However, top restaurants still import and sell from countries such as France.

The force-fed process is known as gavage, where grain is poured into a funnel or tube that has been thrust down the bird's neck. After two weeks, the liver has swollen to many times its normal size.

The French chef Alexis Gauthier, who runs fine-dining restaurant Gauthier Soho and plant-based restaurant 123V in Bond Street, both in London, decided to stop serving foie gras in his establishments after activists from Peta demonstrated outside and he read up on the meat and dairy trade.

He now serves a faux gras at his Soho venue made of mushrooms, lentils, walnuts and cognac, and says the concoction has emulated the buttery taste sought after by foie gras fans. Since this year, all the food served at his restaurants is plant-based.

The government has asked him for his recipe and invited him for talks with policy advisers to see if a gap in the market caused by a ban could be filled by his creation.

An email to vegan chefs, seen by the Guardian, says: “I understand your restaurant serves an alternative to foie gras. We would appreciate the chance to arrange a virtual meeting with the chef or someone else from the team to discuss a few questions in this area.” These would be questions where the UK government asks chefs for vegan recipes to replace foie gras. Gauthier says foie gras was once a bestselling item on his menu and that he used to sell 20kg of it a week, but claims people are now travelling from around the country to try his faux gras.

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Adapted from *The Guardian*  
November 2021  
(449 words)

## UK INFLUENCERS TO PUSH NICOTINE PRODUCTS

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Posing expertly for Instagram snaps, a parade of young and beautiful DJs, models and socialites line up to endorse Velo, a brand of flavoured nicotine pouches made by British American Tobacco (BAT). Between them, the 26 social media influencers boast 2.2m followers.

The former Made in Chelsea star Alex Mytton has posted Velo-themed videos for his 391,000 followers, while racing driver Archie Hamilton, with 207,000 followers, features in an e-sports-themed YouTube series, in association with British racing team McLaren. This new breed of nicotine influencers are soldiers at the UK front of a marketing war that London-based British American Tobacco has long been waging on foreign soil.

Earlier this year, analysis by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism found that BAT had bet around £1bn on harnessing the popularity of influencers on TikTok, Instagram and Facebook to reach young people in countries including Pakistan, Sweden and Spain. Now BAT is deploying the same tactic to win over British hearts and minds.

Velo, the product at the heart of the Instagram promotion, is a small flavoured pouch, placed between the lip and gum, that releases a hit of nicotine to satisfy cravings. BAT markets Velo as an alternative to cigarettes. Yet not one of the posts from BAT's army of nicotinfluencers mentions quitting. Indeed, critics suggest that the products are as much about recruiting new customers.

In a letter to the chief executives of Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and Twitter, a coalition of more than 100 health and anti-smoking groups from around the world are demanding an end to the promotion of the addictive products on social media.

They point to a report by the US surgeon general, which found that nicotine use could have a negative impact on both adolescent and pre-natal brain development. The same report found "substantial evidence" that using nicotine in adolescence can increase the likelihood of nicotine addiction in adulthood. The true intention of these ads is quite clear: to keep customers addicted to nicotine and to entice young people to try nicotine products. Tobacco companies don't care about which addictive product you use, because as long as they can keep you using one, then they have a customer for life.

A BAT spokesperson said: "Our products are for adults only and we believe that youth should never use any tobacco or nicotine products. Our marketing is done responsibly, in strict accordance with legislation and the policies of social media platforms. Our social media accounts are age-gated so they are only visible to adult users.

Meta, which owns Facebook and Instagram, is investigating whether the posts conform to its guidelines, which prohibit the advertising of nicotine products. It has removed several since being contacted by the Guardian.

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Adapted from *The Guardian*  
November 2021  
(455 words)

## UNHEALTHY AMERICANS ADULTS

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Nine out of 10 American adults are unhealthy, and much of that comes down to the food they eat, according to the experts, who say it might be time for the government to step in and regulate what Americans put in their mouths. "This is the only segment of our economy where we have the majority of products being knowingly dangerous," says Dr. Mozaffarian, a cardiologist "There's no way we leave car safety, home safety, mattress safety, cellphone safety to the consumer. If there's stuff that's hurting people, we get rid of it. When you have nine out of 10 adults being unhealthy, largely due to diet-related illnesses, you know we have a broken system."

Americans' consumption of junk food isn't helping. A 17-year study found that junk foods account for 1 in every 5 calories for children and 1 in every 7 calories for adults. Those foods can be hard to resist because they contain things the body needs. "Junk foods are basically sweet, salt and fat, and these are things that are very necessary to live, they're energy providing," says Linda Bartosh, a professor of human nutrition. "As we grow older and get past the age of having children, the intake of these things that were so important when we were young becomes hazardous. We overdo it. We take in too much salt, too much sugar, too much fat, and it produces all kinds of illnesses. The problem, she says, is that our bodies are not built to tell us when enough is enough.

In the 1960s, the United States focused on eradicating hunger; in the 1990s the emphasis was on food insecurity. Mozaffarian is among the U.S. health experts calling for a shift in focus from "food security" to "nutrition security" to address the lack of health among American adults. He would like to see the federal government take the lead by improving nutrition in already existing food programs. That approach would include medically tailored meals, home-delivered healthy meals, and nutrition education for health care workers, including the future doctors currently in medical school.

The last time The White House held a conference on food, nutrition and health was in 1969. The panel advised President Richard Nixon on ending hunger and malnutrition among poor people in the United States and influenced America's nutrition agenda for decades afterward. In the meantime, both Bartosh and Mozaffarian would like to see more money put toward research. And while Mozaffarian believes nutritional education is important, he says repairing the food Americans eat is most critical. "We're going to need to fix the food right so that parents and kids who are busy and out wanting to enjoy their lives can get nutritious, affordable food," he says.

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Adapted from *Voice of America*  
October 2021  
(457 words)

## UNIVERSITY TUITION FEES COULD BE CUT

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High-level discussions have been held in Whitehall over controversial proposals to cut university tuition fees [... in the UK], sources have told the Guardian. [...] According to one source, the Treasury has been pushing for a tuition fee cut to £8,500, which would reduce the amount undergraduates have to borrow and in turn the amount of unpaid debt picked up by the state if they fail to repay the fees within 30 years.

The cut is said to have been opposed by some officials [...] who warned it could have a devastating impact on universities' finances when they are already under pressure from rising inflation. For instance, tuition fees from British students alone fail to meet the costs of undergraduate courses at University College London, its provost has revealed, forcing UCL and other universities to rely on fees from international students.

Ministers have also been considering cutting the threshold at which graduates begin to repay their tuition and maintenance loans [...]. With outstanding student loans reaching £140bn last year, the Treasury is desperate to reduce the cost of the student loan system in England. [...]

A government spokesperson said: "The student loan system is designed to ensure all those with the talent and desire to attend higher education are able to do so, while ensuring that the cost of higher education is fairly distributed between graduates and the taxpayer. We do not comment on speculation in the run up to fiscal events." [...].

Michael Spence, UCL's provost, said no undergraduate courses at his university could be funded by domestic fees of £9,250 a year, with UCL having to spend up to £90m extra last year to support teaching during the pandemic. Spence, who joined UCL from his previous post as vice-chancellor of the University of Sydney, said the government in England should not follow Australia in using international student fees to fund universities.

"It's really important that the UK doesn't go down the Australia route in that way," Spence said. "Australia digs things out of the ground and grows things and has clever people. England only has clever people; it doesn't have anything else. So making sure that innovation and research are protected and fostered is really important."

The government is expected to make changes to higher education funding in England as part of the comprehensive spending review due to be published next month. Many in the sector are bracing for possible cuts to tuition fees for undergraduates, along with other restrictions aimed at reducing the number of school-leavers taking what education secretary Gavin Williamson regards as "low value" courses.

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Adapted from *guardian.com*  
October 2021  
(449 words)

## UNTIL I'M TOLD OTHERWISE, I PREFER TO CALL YOU 'THEY'

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With the start of a new school year this fall, I am adopting a new practice. It is already common for my university colleagues and me to ask our students for their preferred pronouns at the beginning of the semester. In these efforts to ascertain how people choose to be described, not enough attention is paid to circumstances when it is most appropriate not to specify gender at all. I would never intentionally misidentify someone else's gender — but I unfortunately risk doing so until I learn that person's pronouns. That's why, as I begin a new school year, I am trying to initially refer to everyone as "they."

In so doing, I am employing a "default rule" — a concept whose importance I have studied during my career as a law professor. A default rule fills in the gaps in a legal relationship, setting a condition that holds generally until a specific value is agreed on. In contract law, for example, if an agreement leaves out the price, courts will fill the gap with a reasonable price. With organ transplants, some countries presume by default that people want to donate their organs; others, including the United States, presume that they don't.

In the case of personal identity, I am drawn to default pronouns that don't assume others' gender. Instead of assuming someone's gender identity based on how they look or dress or act, it is more appropriate to refer to them as "they" until I know better. And whenever possible, it is important to create early opportunities to learn their chosen pronouns, which has become standard practice in academic and other settings.

Some people harp on how difficult it is to make this kind of linguistic change. But broadly adopting the singular "they" can actually reduce a speaker's cognitive load. Years ago, my parents told me they liked "Ms." because they no longer had to presume whether a woman was married or not. Calling people "they" by default similarly relieves the speaker of having to guess at someone's gender. And it has the crucial benefit of more respectfully addressing people with nonbinary identities.

To be sure, using singular "they" could confuse students who are accustomed to being referred to using only "he/him" or "she/her." But this ambiguity can be easily resolved if professors explain that we have adopted a singular "they" default and create space early on for students to share their pronouns. To my mind, the benefits of avoiding gender assumptions in conversations outweigh the occasional confusion.

This year, by starting with the default "they," I hope to teach my class both the importance of default rules and a better way to avoid misgendering others.

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Adapted from *The Washington Post*  
September 2021  
(455 words)

## US SCHOOLS GAVE KIDS LAPTOPS DURING THE PANDEMIC. THEN THEY SPIED ON THEM

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According to recent research “86% of teachers reported that, during the pandemic, schools provided tablets, laptops, or Chromebooks to students at twice the rate (43%) prior to the pandemic, an illustration of schools’ attempts to close disparities in digital access.”

The problem is, a lot of those electronics were being used to monitor students, even combing through private chats, emails and documents all in the name of protecting them. More than 80% of surveyed teachers and 77% of surveyed high school students told the researchers that their schools use surveillance software on those devices.

“We knew that there were students out there having ideas of suicide, self-harm and those sorts of things,” a school administrator explained to the researchers. “We found this [student activity monitoring software]. We could also do a good job with students who might be thinking about bullying ... If I can save one student from committing suicide, I feel like that platform is well worth every dime that we paid for it.” [...]

I can certainly understand why schools would jump on technology they think might prevent teen suicide, bullying, and the like. The pandemic has increased isolation and uncertainty is particularly hard on kids and teenagers. Students are reporting an increase in self-harm incidents and aggressive impulses since the beginning of lockdowns.

The only problem is that we’ve tried this before, in a different form. Everyone’s proposed solution to the advent of school shootings was to install metal detectors at the entrance to schools, police had a more visible presence, and security cameras went up in classrooms and hallways.

That was a big business; schools spent billions of dollars on security infrastructure that mostly proved to be ineffective. And the results were kids felt unsafe, black students were followed and harassed most frequently, and punishments increased as educational outcomes worsened.

Students from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to have private electronics not subject to surveillance, and will have less privacy when it comes to doing the perverted embarrassing things all teenagers do. [...]

The software companies’ other big promise about monitoring children for problems is that mental health professionals can be alerted and services provided. But again, the outcomes for mental healthcare with children varies wildly. Children with Medicaid coverage are more likely to be prescribed anti-psychotics and other debilitating medication than get access to talk therapy.

If teens are in need of help, it seems obvious that the best way to protect them is to ensure they have trusted adults in their lives they can turn to. A snooping AI is no substitute for that.

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Adapted from *The Guardian*  
October 2021  
(442 words)

## VACCINATED SENIORS NAVIGATE LIFE IN MOSTLY UNVACCINATED RURAL AMERICA

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At a Baker City senior center, a cold rain is pounding down outside, steaming up the windows as dozens of folks line up for the buffet lunch service.

Sipping tea, Danae Simonski, 84, says she recently learned that some of the ladies in her card group aren't vaccinated. She has a pacemaker and tries to be as careful as she can.

"Well I'm not playing Bridge anymore," she says, chuckling.

Simonski says misinformation about the shots is swirling around Baker City.

"I heard someone say they're not getting it 'cause it has formaldehyde and anti-freeze in it," she says. "I mean, people can believe what they want to believe, but they have to learn to pay the consequences, that's how I feel." A few tables over, a 73-year-old man introduces himself as Bob Brown. He is unvaccinated and doesn't sound too worried about those consequences, even with an immuno-compromised wife at home who is still suffering the effects of long COVID.

"There's almost nothing that could convince me," he says. "And most of the people I know that don't want to take it, they have the same feelings, they don't trust the government." Brown is wearing a MAGA hat with a National Rifle Association patch attached that looks like it's had some miles. He says Democratic politicians used to mock the so-called Trump vaccine and Operation Warp Speed, and now he says they're claiming "you're evil if you don't take it."

He and some friends at the table are also comparing this current moment to polio, albeit through a far different lens. "We took the shot, it actually worked. This thing here that they're giving you I don't think does," he says. The COVID vaccines being used in the U.S. range from 71 to 93% effective. Still, nationally, polls have shown hard-line conservatives tend to be less vaccinated. Baker County voted 74% for Donald Trump.

Public health officials were encouraged to see vaccination numbers start to tick up some during the recent delta surge. At times, the small local hospital wasn't able to transfer its patients to the nearby Boise area because hospitals there were full. Still, local health leaders aren't sure what more they can do to convince the remaining holdouts to get the shots at this point.

"We have a constant challenge with misinformation," says Nancy Staten, the administrator of the Baker County Health Department. "So we just continue to stay the course and put the best information out there that's available to help people make their best decision. It is also our duty to inform people as much as we can".

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Adapted from *NPR (US)*  
October 2021  
(450 words)

## WANT TO SAVE THE EARTH? WE NEED A LOT MORE ELON MUSKS.

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If I am brutally honest, there is only one motto I would give to the movement to stem climate change after the Glasgow summit: “Everyone wants to go to heaven but nobody wants to die.”

On the one hand, liberal greens will tell you that *the world is ending* — but that we must not use nuclear power to stave it off.

On the other hand, conservative greens will tell you that *the world is ending*, but that we can’t burden people with a carbon tax to slow global warming.

On a third hand, suburban greens will tell you that *the world is ending*, but that they don’t want any windmills, solar farms or high-speed rail lines in their backyards.

On a fourth hand, most of today’s leaders will tell you that *the world is ending*, so at Glasgow they’ve all decided to commit their successors’ successor to deliver emissions-free electricity by 2030, 2040 or 2050 — any date that doesn’t require them to ask their citizens to do anything painful today.

This is not serious — not when you’re talking about reversing all the ways that we have destabilized Earth’s systems, from ice caps and ocean currents to coral reefs and tropical forests to the density of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. This is pretend.

Serious was how we responded to Covid-19, when it really did feel like the world economy was ending: We fought back with the only tools we have that are as big and powerful as Mother Nature — Father Profit and New Tech.

We combined innovative biotech firms with today’s massive computing power and a giant market demand signal, and what did we get? In a little over a year after first being locked down by the virus, I had an effective mRNA vaccine against Covid-19 in my body — followed by a booster!

That was an amazing feat of biotechnology and computerized logistics to develop and deliver vaccines. I have nothing against Glasgow. I admire those leaders who are trying to inspire the world to cut CO2 emissions, preserve biodiversity and hold each other to account. But we will not decarbonize the global economy with a lowest-common-denominator action plan of 195 countries. Not possible.

We will get there only when Father Profit and risk-taking entrepreneurs produce transformative technologies that enable ordinary people to have extraordinary impacts on our climate without sacrificing much — by just being good consumers of these new technologies.

In short: we need a few more Greta Thunbergs and a lot more Elon Musks. That is, more risk-taking innovators converting basic science into tools yet to be imagined to protect the planet for a generation yet to be born.

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Adapted from *The New York Times*  
November 2021  
(457 words)

## WHEN A HYUNDAI IS ALSO THE FAMILY HOME

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Some families sacrifice nearly everything so their kids can go to the "right" schools.

In Pennsylvania, Veronica Vargas and her partner Alex put their sons to bed most nights in their car in the Walmart parking lot where they work. They're doing it to keep their teenage boys in a sought-after public school district nearby. But it's in an area where affordable rentals are hard to get. So, the family's Hyundai has become a bedroom, living room, and kitchen for five people. [...]

They were living in Florida when the pandemic began, but Veronica lost her job as a Spanish language interpreter and Alex lost his telemarketing job. They ran through over \$20,000 in savings and eventually lost the home they rented.

Veronica and Alex moved north and now work full-time at a Walmart. They relocated their family in order to work the overnight shift at the store. They were attracted to the wages; they each earn over \$18 an hour.

Combined, Veronica and Alex make more than the median household income in the U.S., which is around \$67,000 a year. So, they don't qualify for government aid programs.

But living unhoused is expensive for a family of five. They fill their car up with gasoline every day since they keep it running all night so the boys stay warm. On top of that, there's a car payment, occasional hotel stays, storage unit fees, truck stop showers, and even frequent trips to the laundry mat.

It makes it hard for them to save the thousands of dollars they need for a security deposit and first and last month's rent. Especially in the area they're in now. The district attracts families because it has one of the region's top-ranked high schools.

A social worker in the area explained that one-bedroom apartments within the school district can cost \$1,800 a month. And landlords usually won't even rent such a small unit to a family. "We don't have a high concentration of true federally defined poverty, but we certainly have families that are not getting by or sacrificing one thing for another," she said.

Ahmed Rahman, an economics professor at Lehigh University, said a "surprising" number of Americans are strapped for cash, even for things that seem basic, like homeownership, a car for each parent, college funds for kids, and a family vacation every year.

That said, Veronica and Alex are working on scraping enough money together for their version of the American dream: putting their boys to bed in a house, not the back of an SUV. And a home near schools they trust to teach their sons.

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Adapted from *NPR*  
November 2021  
(449 words)

## WHERE COVID 19 CAME FROM

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How can the world prepare for a future pandemic when it does not know for sure where the current one came from? In March 2021, President Joe Biden asked his spooks how the covid-19 pandemic had started. Contradicting claims made last year by Donald Trump, they told him that they did not know. So on May 26th Biden asked them again, admonishing them to try harder and to report back in 90 days.

This is a direct rebuke to China's secretive government. When experts convened by the World Health Organisation travelled to Wuhan, the city where covid-19 was first identified, their hosts refused to share crucial data.

The virus which causes covid-19 may have emerged accidentally from research on animal coronaviruses conducted at the Wuhan Institute of Virology or another nearby lab. In early 2020 this idea, sometimes conflated with the idea that the virus had been developed as a biological weapon, was publicly dismissed by eminent scientists. In February 2020 a number of them used the *Lancet*, a medical journal, "to strongly condemn conspiracy theories suggesting that covid-19 does not have a natural origin". The most plausible origin of covid-19, they reported, was "zoonotic spillover"—that is, a virus jumping unaided from animals to humans. Lab-leak theories were widely dismissed as conspiracy-mongering.

In the past few months, though, discussion of lab-leakery has gained currency among politicians and policy elites and in the mainstream media, as well as in influential blog posts by science reporters.

This is not going down well in China. Xi Jinping, China's president, urged world leaders to "firmly reject any attempt to politicise" the covid-19 pandemic, insisting that the country considered the inquiry into the origins complete and that the focus should shift to other countries.

High on the agenda were responses to the current pandemic and the prevention of future ones. Felicity Harvey, chair of an oversight committee for the World Health Emergencies Programme, said that new virus threats must in future be handled with more transparency, better data-sharing and an ability to give informal early warnings to the world. Earlier in May a panel of world health experts recommended that countries be placed under a greater obligation to report new outbreaks and to seek out and share relevant information with the world.

It would be surprising if China were to accept all these ideas. Its leadership has consistently fought to deny international bodies the right to stick their noses into the affairs of sovereign countries. There is as yet no evidence in the public domain that a laboratory leak actually took place; just evidence that the possibility is real. Without help from China, a harder look will not necessarily change this.

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## **“WHERE IS THE LOGIC?”: HOW ENGLAND'S “NO JAB, NO JOB” POLICY WILL HIT A CARE WORKER**

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Carol Thomas, a retired health academic who lives with multiple sclerosis, is about to lose not just a carer but a companion because of the government's “no jab, no job” policy. Unless the policy is changed, which looks unlikely after the health secretary Sajid Javid told unjabbed care workers this month to “get out and get another job”, the 62-year-old's days of being cared for by Debbie Vickers are numbered.

Vickers, who has more than a dozen years' experience in social care and the NHS, has become a friend as well as someone who hoists Thomas in and out of bed and undertakes the most personal of care for the former professor at Lancaster University's faculty of health and medicine.

But she is among tens of thousands of care home staff in England declining the vaccine who now face redundancy. Guardian analysis of the latest NHS data reveals the decision to make full Covid-19 vaccination a “condition of employment” from 11 November is on course to force up to 38,000 staff out of care homes for older people, deepening a staff crisis which is already causing care home closures and discharge backlogs in hospitals.

As of 10 October, 12% of staff in older adult care homes were still not fully vaccinated, rising to more than one in five in areas including Birmingham, Manchester, Stoke and Hackney in London. A small number of these may be able to apply for medical exemptions.

Vickers said she was “no anti-vaxxer”. Her decision comes because of an earlier adverse reaction to a flu jab. She may get a few weeks' grace, but she still faces redundancy from what Thomas believes is an ethically wrong and practically illogical “insulting, discriminatory blanket ban”.

Many see the value in care workers being vaccinated, given Covid was involved in the deaths of 43,000 care home residents in England and Wales to the start of October. But with 105,000 care staff vacancies in England exacerbated by a slump in foreign workers arriving to fill the low-wage roles, operators are calling for a pause on the strict policy, which does not apply to NHS staff.

A snapshot survey of 34 independent care operators this month seen by the Guardian found more than half believed they would lose six or more staff as a result. The National Care Association also found that close to one in five operators believe staff shortages will affect their ability to operate at full capacity. Two care homes in Cumbria closed last week for that reason.

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## WHY COMPANIES SHOULD CONSIDER A FOUR-DAY WORKWEEK

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Has society finally outgrown the 40-hour workweek? One study conducted by the company SimpleTexting says yes. In that survey of over 1,000 Americans, nine out of ten people believe the five-day workweek is outdated. Not only that, but almost 80% of respondents say the pandemic has increased their desire for a four-day workweek. And an overwhelming 98% believe it would improve their mental health.

As a result, some companies are testing the concept. In June, the crowd-funding platform Kickstarter announced a pilot four-day workweek starting in 2022. Other companies like Unilever are also experimenting with the idea. And then there are countries like Spain, which has become the first country to trial a four-day workweek.

From a financial perspective, research indicates that moving to a four-day workweek can reduce overhead and other costs. Businesses immediately eliminate a percentage of variable overhead expenses like electricity and energy consumption. For example, in the Microsoft Japan trial, electricity costs fell by 23%. Also, employees use fewer office supplies and equipment such as printers and copiers depreciate slower. Fewer work days also mean less frequent janitorial services. And if you factor in the daily perks that many businesses offer their employees, like snacks or free lunches, the cost savings increase even further.

This proposed new way of working may help address one of the major problems employers face—employee turnover. Especially since 3 out of every four respondents surveyed by SimpleTexting stated that they would consider leaving their current job if offered a position to work a four-day workweek. According to that same report, Millennials rank work-life balance high on their priority list when considering employment options. Because of this, a schedule allowing one additional non-work day a week may be attractive to workers.

In 2019, Microsoft Japan tested reducing the workweek by one day, which led to a 40% boost in productivity. That's because they were working smarter, not harder. Researchers in Iceland have also found that a four-day workweek without a pay cut improved workers' well-being and productivity. For four years, researchers tracked 2,500 employees who reduced their workweek from 40 to 36 hours. They discovered that "worker well-being dramatically increased across a range of indicators, from perceived stress and burnout to health and work-life balance." At the same time, employee productivity remained the same or improved.

While the five-day, 40-hour workweek is a nearly century-old tradition, the model is severely outdated. Employees should be measured by output, not hours. Will a four-day workweek become the future of work? Only when companies finally realize that it can benefit both employees and the bottom line. A true win-win.

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## WHY EUROPE IS A GREAT PLACE FOR DIGITAL NOMADS

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Itinerant lifestyle is as old as laptops and free internet. But Covid-19 has given it a boost. A game of lockdown arbitrage began earlier this year as border controls eased and people fled congested cities like Berlin and London. Some headed for other cities, such as Lisbon and Madrid, which offered sunshine and looser lockdown rules. Others chose remote spots on the Mediterranean and in the Alps. Now Covid-19 restrictions are easing but the trend continues as many Europeans reject a traditional office routine after a year and a half of remote work.

America has the best data on the rise of the new nomads. It had 11m digital wanderers last year, up from 7m in 2019. A similar jump is under way in Europe, which also offers continental scale and a lack of internal borders, at least within the Schengen area. Europeans itching for a change of scenery can roam freely from Helsinki to Seville. [...]

This wandering lifestyle is likely to outlast the pandemic. Covid-19 has prompted big changes in how people work, some of which could become permanent. Many employers are introducing flexible work policies, so it is no longer just freelancers and entrepreneurs doing business on the beach.

The biggest barrier to the nomadic lifestyle is red tape. [...] But new businesses are trying to help. [...] The pandemic has created an awareness that tax being drawn along national lines is really archaic.

Europe's immigration rules are usually hostile to non-Europeans. But some governments, eager to draw visitors in economically challenging times, have been easing the rules for digital nomads. Croatia and Estonia have introduced long-term visas for people without EU passports who can prove that they are working online. In Portugal the regional government of Madeira has gone a step further, offering a free workspace, networking events, and an online portal replete with information about things like paperwork and places to stay. Since it was set up last November more than 9,000 people have registered on the Digital Nomads Madeira Islands website.

The economic benefits that can flow from attracting nomads are clear. It is generally well-off folk with significant work experience who can afford to work from anywhere. They are unlikely to poach local jobs, but do spend money. In Madeira government officials estimate the average digital nomad spends €1,800 a month.

Some locals, however, resent the nomads in their midst. As long-time nomad hotspots like Goa and Bali have found, well-paid outsiders can bid up the price of real estate. Some live in a bubble, having little to do with locals besides those who serve them iced lattes.

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(451 words)

## WILLIAM SHATNER IS GOING TO SPACE ABOARD BLUE ORIGIN

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Captain Kirk is embarking on his real-life star trek. Actor William Shatner, who is best known for his role in the original "Star Trek" series and the first six films in the "Star Trek" movie franchise, is set to take flight on a New Shepard rocket from Blue Origin's West Texas launch site. "I've heard about space for a long time now," Shatner said in a press release. "I'm taking the opportunity to see it for myself. What a miracle."

The highly-anticipated mission is called NS-18.

The 90-year-old actor is best known for playing Captain James Kirk in the "Star Trek" franchise and has been acting for six decades. Shatner will be making history as the oldest man to fly in space, surpassing Wally Funk, 82, who flew with Bezos on a Blue Origin flight in July. She's an accomplished pilot with more than 18,600 flight hours under her belt.

While Shatner has expressed excitement for the launch, he admitted he is also nervous to go to space. "I'm terrified!" he said during a New York Comic Con interview. "I know! I'm Captain bloody Kirk and I'm terrified!"

Along with Shatner, the spaceflight passengers in Blue Origin's second human spaceflight include Blue Origin's vice president of mission and flight operations, a former NASA engineer and tech entrepreneur and the founder of a clinical trials software company.

"Space technology is going to be a way to help us continue to thrive on Earth by reaching beyond it," they said.

A statement on Blue Origin's website added that New Shepard NS-18 has met all mission requirements and the astronauts have already started their training. The statement is signed with the company motto "Gradatim Ferociter" (Latin for "step by step, ferociously"). Viewers can watch the launch live at the Blue Origin's website or the Blue Origin YouTube channel.

Blue Origin was founded by Amazon founder Jeff Bezos in 2000. The company's only human spaceflight to date launched on July 20, when it flew Bezos, Bezos' brother Mark, Mercury 13 aviator Wally Funk and an 18-year-old student, son of a hedge fund manager, to suborbital space.

In a matter of minutes, the group blasted off from the West Texas desert, reaching space and returning to Earth in a smooth parachute landing. "Best day ever," Jeff Bezos said after touchdown, greeted by a sea of cheering Blue Origin employees and others at the company's campus.

This was the 16th flight for New Shepard, the 60-foot rocket designed primarily for space tourism, but the first to include people. Bezos said Blue Origin plans two more flights this year, and sales of private seats on his flights are approaching \$100 million.

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## YOUNG PEOPLE MORE OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE WORLD THAN OLDER GENERATIONS

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Young people are often seen as having a bleak worldview, plugged uncritically into social media and anxious about the climate crisis, among other pressing issues. But a global study commissioned by the UN's children's agency, Unicef, appears to turn that received wisdom on its head. It paints a picture of children believing that the world is improving with each generation, even while they report anxiety and impatience for change on global heating.

The landmark intergenerational study, conducted for Unicef by Gallup for World Children's Day, surveyed two age groups in 21 countries – aged 15-24 and 40-plus – sampled from different socioeconomic groups, to compare attitudes.

The results suggest the younger generation are more positive and globally minded than their elders, sceptical of what they read on social media (only 17% of young people said they trusted social media platforms "a lot" for information) and more invested in science and the possibility of global cooperation and international institutions.

The young people surveyed were also more likely to believe childhood had improved, voting healthcare, education and physical safety as being better for them than it had been for their parents' generation.

"Born into a more digital, interconnected and diverse reality, young people see a world that is largely a better place for children than the one their parents grew up in – a safer and more abundant world that offers children better education, opportunities and hope for the future," the report concludes.

"At the same time, young people are not complacent. They report greater struggles with mental health conditions. Amid a sea of mis- and disinformation, they report low levels of trust in the information sources they use most."

Compared with older generations, "The world's young people remain hopeful, much more globally minded, and determined to make the world a better place. Today's young people have concerns for the future but see themselves as part of the solution," said Unicef's executive director.

Overall, the data suggests young people are products of globalisation – 39% identified most with being part of the world, rather than their own nation or region.

The survey – conducted during the pandemic – also found young people were generally more trusting of national governments, scientists and international news media as sources of accurate information.

Joe Daly, senior partner at Gallup, said: "We cannot know what is on the minds of young people if we do not ask them. Unicef's survey reinforces the importance of hearing from the next generation and understanding their perspectives. While this research paints a nuanced view of the generational divide, a clear picture emerges: children and young people embody the spirit of the 21st century far more readily than their parents."

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Adapted from *The Guardian*  
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## YOUNG WOMEN ARE LEADING CLIMATE PROTESTS

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Glasgow — The week began with more than 130 presidents and prime ministers posing for a group photo in a century-old Baroque museum crafted from red sandstone. Fewer than 10 were women. Their median age, as their host at the climate summit, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, reminded them, was over 60.

This weekend a march on the streets of Glasgow was led by young climate activists, some barely old enough to vote in their countries. They accused the world leaders of wasting what little time remains to safeguard their future.

These bookends to the first week of this watershed international climate summit in Scotland reveal a widening divide that threatens to grow larger in the weeks and months ahead.

Those with the power to make decisions about how much the world warms in the coming decades are mostly old and male. Those who are angriest about the pace of climate action are mostly young and female. The two sides have vastly divergent views of what the summit should achieve. Indeed, they seem to have different notions of time.

At the summit, leaders are setting goals for 2030 at the earliest. In some cases, they're setting targets for 2060 and 2070, when many of today's activists will be hitting retirement age. The activists say change must come immediately. They want countries to abruptly stop using fossil fuels and to repair the climate damage that is now being felt in all corners of the globe but is especially punishing the most vulnerable people in the Global South. For them, mid-century is an eternity.

Social movements have almost always been led by young people. But what makes the climate movement's generational divide so pointed — and the fury of the young so potent — is that world leaders have been meeting and talking about the need to address climate change since before most of the protesters were born, with few results.

In fact, emissions of planet-warming gases have risen sharply since the first international climate summit 27 years ago. Now scientists say the world has less than a decade to sharply cut emissions to avert the worst climate consequences. That urgency drives the protesters. [...]

Vanessa Nakate, a 24-year-old activist from Uganda, said the protesters were committed to keep up the pressure, "to continue holding leaders accountable for their actions."

Daphne Frias, a 23-year-old climate activist from New York City, gave a nod to the inevitable: generational change is coming. "We always say our leaders have failed us," she said. "We are the new leaders. We are the ones who are going to make the decisions going forward."

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## THE BILLION DOLLAR RACE TO DEFY AGEING IS THE LAST THING THE PLANET NEEDS

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Welcome to the era of immortalists: scientists, dreamers and billionaires, who want us to think of age as a curable disease, and our final end as something that could be indefinitely postponed. According to one estimate, the revenues of the global anti-ageing industry will increase from about \$200bn today to \$420bn by 2030. [...]

In tech circles, this kind of distaste for mortality often blurs into the culture of “biohacking”, a belief that the human race can evolve beyond its current limitations, especially by the use of science and technology.

The sums invested in anti-ageing research by such tech players as the Google founders, Larry Page and Sergey Brin, show what happens when such ideas meet big money. The same goes for the activities of the Amazon founder and aspiring astronaut, Jeff Bezos, who has previously funded an anti-ageing setup called Unity Biotechnology, and is now reportedly a donor to a newly founded California venture called Altos Labs. [...]

Anti-ageing research now has a long history, but no company working in the field has yet managed to push any therapy to the stage of conclusive clinical trials. [...]

Besides, even if anti-ageing techniques eventually proved successful, what would be the social and cultural consequences of literally pathologising old age? If we lived much longer, would we also be expected to work indefinitely? How would the planet cope with a hugely increased population? [...]

There is something about all this that feels analogous to the space travel efforts of Bezos and Elon Musk, and what those projects seem to say about a relative lack of attention to some urgent issues playing out on the planet that the two men apparently want to escape. [...]

As a matter of scientific fact, we know that strong and stable relationships and immersion in communities result in people living longer and healthier lives, and the loneliness that too often grips people’s later years has the reverse effect. The idea of co-housing, whereby people – often of all ages – are resident in communities built on mutual help and everyday socialising, embodies exactly that realisation. [...]

Four years ago, scientists at Harvard University published the latest findings of a study of the lives of 268 alumni. What it said about longevity was striking: not just that “close relationships, more than money or fame, are what keep people happy”, but that those ties “are better predictors of long and happy lives than social class, IQ, or even genes”. Here is what the immortalism of famous capitalists rather neglects: that the most immediate route to living better and longer lies not in hacking our cells, but helping people to be more human.

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## 'URGENT' ACTION NEEDED TO REVERSE DECLINE IN PUPILS STUDYING LANGUAGES

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More than 70 Irish teachers and experts have warned of a "critical decline" in pupils studying Irish and other languages in schools. They are calling for the Department of Education to recommend that all pupils should study a language at GCSE. It is currently not compulsory.

Signatories to the open letter from the Irish language body said "urgent and decisive action" was needed to reverse a decline in pupils studying languages. A survey carried out by the BBC in 2019 found that more than a third of schools in Northern Ireland had stopped offering French, German or Spanish at GCSE in the previous five years.

Separate exam figures also showed the number of pupils taking modern languages at GCSE had fallen by more than 40% in the past 15 years. A more recent study from the British Council said that teaching children modern languages at primary school "all but collapsed" during the Covid-19 pandemic. A scheme to teach primary pupils additional languages was scrapped by the DE due to financial cuts in 2015.

There are only two Irish-only post-primary schools in Northern Ireland, though some other schools have Irish units.

The letter said the picture was "even more worrying at A-Level" despite a slight rise in numbers in recent years.

The signatories to the Gael Linn letter include a number of teachers of Irish in post-primary schools in Northern Ireland, as well as academics, language activists and authors. They suggest a number of actions to reverse the decline in language learning.

Those include that the Department of Education "recommends that all pupils take an additional language of their choice (French, German, Irish, Spanish) at GCSE in all post primary schools".

They also call for a new "primary modern languages programme, which is effective and based on best practice" and "a new fit for purpose languages strategy to be developed and implemented for all sectors".

They have also called for the appointment of an Irish language commissioner "to assist with Irish language education across all sectors".

An Irish language commissioner was one of the measures agreed in the 2020 New Decade New Approach (NDNA) agreement but neither the new language legislation nor the strategies have yet been implemented. "14 months have now passed and neither the strategy, nor the timetable for developing a strategy, have been progressed by the executive," the signatories said.

"Teachers and advocates of Irish have long recognised these problems and others but have also presented solutions," the letter concluded.

"We now require the will and resources to improve these issues which have been reducing the uptake of Irish and other languages for too long now."

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