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session 2023

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A £4M SCHEME TO BRING LATIN INTO BRITISH STATE SCHOOLS BEGINS

Evelyn Waugh, a novelist, valued his classical education. Not because it enabled him to understand ancient languages, but because it did enable him to excel in a more important exercise: spotting and judging those who knew less than he. Such people betrayed their deprivation with sentences of "inexcusable vulgarity". "I do not," he wrote, "regret my superficial classical studies."

Latin occupies an odd place in English curriculums. One part proper subject, two parts smug social shibboleth, to have chanted "amo, amas, amat" in a Latin class has long implied membership of another kind of class altogether. The decline and almost fall of Latin in state schools in the 20th century did not diminish its social cachet, because numbers in fee-paying independent schools remained high. In 2020 eight times more pupils sat Latin GCSE at Eton, a posh school, than in the entirety of Northumberland. Evelyn Waugh considered Latin the mark of a gentleman. But a professor of classics at Cambridge University puts it more briskly: it gets seen as a subject for "posh white boys".

This harms it - a bit - and helps it - a lot. Posh white boys tend to do quite well for themselves. A famous example recently left Downing Street; as he left, Boris Johnson mumbled that he was like Cincinnatus, a reference to a retiring Roman that both alarmed classicists (Cincinnatus returned as a dictator) and appealed to them (they got the joke).

Classicists may lament the passing of the subject's golden age, but it declined for good reasons. A Britain alternately warmed by the white heat of technology and chilled by fear of the cold war had to prioritise science over dead languages. In 1960 Oxford and Cambridge dropped Latin O-Level as an entry requirement.

Changes continue to be made. Cambridge University has just introduced a four-year classics degree for those who have studied no Latin at school. And while he was in office Mr Johnson tried to make the subject more accessible via the Latin Excellence Programme, a £4m scheme to bring it to 40 state schools.

Which is why, on a rainy Monday in September, in Pimlico Academy in London, children sit in a lesson that would have felt familiar to Evelyn Waugh. The verb "esse" is chanted; etymologies are discussed; the word "conjugate" is used fearlessly. Its pupils would have felt less familiar to him, however: almost half of pupils in the school are on free school meals; 15% have English as an additional language; many are even female.

Employers and universities still like to see Latin. It is about more than verbs: it makes one feel clever.

Adapted from *The Economist*October 2022
(451 words)

A 105-MILE-LONG CITY WILL SNAKE THROUGH THE SAUDI DESERT. IS THAT A GOOD IDEA?

A tall and narrow stripe of a city more than 105 miles long, teeming with 9 million residents and running entirely on renewable energy — that's the vision Saudi Arabia's leaders have for The Line, part of a "giga-project" that will reshape the kingdom's northwest.

Newly revealed design concepts show a futuristic walled city [...] stretching from the Red Sea eastward across the desert and into a mountain range.

Details emerge about the city [...]: It will be only 200 meters wide; it will rise 500 meters above sea level — higher than the Empire State Building; residents will be able to run errands with a five-minute walk; there will be no cars or roads; high-speed rail will carry people from end to end in 20 minutes; it will cost hundreds of billions of dollars to build.

Construction has already begun, and Saudi projections call for 1.5 million people to live in The Line by 2030. The unconventional megacity is part of the government's ambitious Neom development project, which released conceptual videos showing the city's high walls enclosing trees, gardens and other plant life, nestling communities among work and recreational structures.

"The designs revealed today for the city's vertically layered communities will challenge the traditional flat, horizontal cities and create a model for nature preservation and enhanced human livability," Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman said on Monday.

The designers say the structure will maintain an ideal climate year-round, thanks to its mix of shade, sunlight and ventilation. But not everyone was as keen on the concept of living between gigantic walls in the Saudi desert. [...]

The idea of solving urban problems by creating a city from scratch isn't new. It's been tried before, from Brasília and India's Chandigarh to Malaysia's Putrajaya and Masdar City in Abu Dhabi, as Pardo, a senior adviser to the New Urban Mobility Alliance, notes.

"This solution is a little bit like wanting to live on Mars because things on Earth are very messy," he tells NPR. [...]

Pardo worries that the high-tech approach seems to ignore people's desire to simply go outside, to experience something in a city that isn't man-made.

"This seems impossible, greatly limited or just plain artificial," he says. [...]

While the project's supporters tout The Line's zero emissions and a smaller footprint than conventional cities, critics note that those utopian ideals will come at an environmental price, as an entirely new city is created in the desert.

Neom is led by bin Salman, who aims to diversify the kingdom's economy and help it respond to climate change. The project is bankrolled by the government's public investment fund.

Adapted from *NPR* July 2022 (460 words)

A BIT RICH? BILLIONAIRES' CLIMATE EFFORTS DRAW SCEPTICISM

Australia's second-richest person, mining magnate Andrew Forrest, is known to his admirers as a straight-shooting businessman cut from the same cloth as self-made billionaires Jeff Bezos and Bill Gates. And like his contemporaries in the USA, Forrest, the chairman of Fortescue Metals, the world's fourth-largest iron ore producer, has taken on a leading role in the fight against climate change.

Forrest is spending \$114 billion Australian dollars to build the world's largest electrolyser, an apparatus that separates water into oxygen and hydrogen. Powered by wind and solar energy, it will produce an emissions-free energy source and promises to decarbonise Asia's steel mills.

While some welcome the super wealthy's newfound focus on the climate, others question whether their actions can be seen as altruistic after they amassed fortunes from heavily polluting industries. Fortescue Metals emitted 2.2 million tonnes of carbon last year, according to Australia's Clean Energy Regulator. "No Australian has ever caused more damage to the environment than Andrew Forrest," an Australian Financial Review columnist said in a recent commentary.

Bezos brings a similarly mixed track record to the table. In 2020, he created a \$10bn fund for climate change. But his company Amazon emitted more than 60 million tonnes of carbon that year – 15 percent more than in 2019.

According to a report by Oxfam, the world's wealthiest 1 percent are responsible for 15 percent of carbon emissions – nearly twice as much as the world's poorest 50 percent. Similarly, just 1 percent of the world's population is responsible for half the emissions caused by aviation, while almost 90 percent of people hardly ever fly.

Bill Gates, who last year published his book How to Avoid a Climate Disaster, has an annual carbon footprint of 7,500 tonnes, mostly from flying on private jets. That is nearly 3,000 times more carbon than the average person in Fiji creates in a year.

In many cases, billionaires' proposed solutions involve expensive nascent technology like green hydrogen that, if successfully scaled, will create new monopolies that control consumption patterns for decades.

"We need to stop looking at magical solutions," scientist Emily Ghosh said. "That is what got us here in the first place and I'm worried that we will go down the same path where we are locked into one technology and not looking at a diversity of energy options."

Nonetheless, Fortescue Metals will continue to pump millions of tonnes of carbon into the atmosphere for at least another eight years, according to the company's 2030 carbon neutrality plan.

Rather than looking to billionaires to "wave their magic wands", Ghosh believes "solutions should come from the bottom as well as the top because one solution will not fit into every space".

Adapted from *AlJazeera* May 2022 (455 words)

A FEDERAL PROPOSAL COULD TURN GIG WORKERS INTO EMPLOYEES

The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) announced a proposal that could drastically reframe the distinction between independent contractors and employees, potentially making it easier for millions of workers to receive federal labor protections they currently lack.

Gig work has now become the standard for many app-based companies such as Uber, Lyft, and Instacart. Although gig work opens up opportunities for flexible and profitable work, gig workers are in a more precarious position than employees because their work doesn't guarantee them protections like minimum wage or overtime pay.

The proposal would expand employment classification to include multiple new factors, including how permanent the position is, how integral the work is for the employer, and the skill levels it requires.

According to the Bureau of Labour, 10% of the workforce—more than 15 million people—consisted of some form of independent contractor in 2017. It was noted that many gig workers worried about contracting COVID-19 through their work and that this prompted calls for better safety and labor protections.

The defining feature of gig workers is that they set their own hours and that allows for "greater potential for higher wages." But, gig workers may be more vulnerable to exploitation and harassment because they aren't protected by labor laws in the same ways that workers who have employee status are.

Under the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, federal labor laws guarantee workers' rights to fair, safe, and healthy working conditions. Some of the most notable laws cover minimum wage, overtime pay, protection against discrimination and unemployment insurance, but many of these protections don't apply to gig workers.

If the proposal delivers on its aim to loosen the standards that bar workers from qualifying for employee status, more gig workers could transition to employee status and be covered by federal labor protections. This is the Biden administration's second attempt to overturn Trump-era policies favored by many business groups.

If the measure is approved, some workers now considered independent contractors will have a stronger argument for employee classification. Labor rights activists, particularly groups that banded together to support app-based workers at places like Uber or Doordash, have criticized Biden's lack of effort to protect gig workers since he took office. Despite its support from these groups, the DOL said that the proposal isn't designed to target specific industries.

Businesses reliant on gig workers have opposed similar initiatives in the past, however, saying that they'd face soaring operating costs. "This gets to the core of their business model," Gough says. In the hours following the proposal, Uber and Lyft's shares fell by as much as 10%. The DOL estimates that the proposal will cost groups with misclassified workers \$188 million.

Adapted from *Time* October 2022 (457 words)

A JUST TRANSITION DEPENDS ON ENERGY SYSTEMS

The west's dash for African gas has become a rallying point at COP27, with climate justice activists calling out the hypocrisy of rich polluting nations who are scrambling to keep energy prices down by pushing for more fossil fuel projects in Africa.

This short-term fix to the energy price crisis created by Russia's war on Ukraine will lock some of the poorest, most climate-affected countries in the world in polluting fossil fuel projects with few economic or energy benefits for the communities whose land, water and heritage will be sacrificed.

There, more than 630 industry lobbyists are scattered around the COP27 conference centre as deals on climate finance, forests and food systems are being made. It's a huge, often insurmountable challenge for grassroots leaders from frontline communities to have their voices heard – let alone offer alternatives to the mostly market-based solutions being pushed.

But the climate justice movement's message is clear: community-based renewable projects that work for the people, not corporations, are a necessity, according to Friends of the Earth International in Mozambique. "It's not just about the energy source, it's about the whole energy system – who decides, who benefits and who profits."

Across Africa, an estimated 600 million people still lack access to electricity – in large part because most fossil fuel investment is directed toward infrastructure for export rather than delivery to Africans. The Lake Turkana windfarm in northern Kenya is built on indigenous territory after 40,000 acres were handed over to a consortium of investors without consulting the Indigenous pastoral communities who have lived and farmed sustainably on the land for hundreds – if not thousands – of years. The wind project, the biggest in Africa, has caused forced migration, conflicts, gender-based violence, water and food insecurity as well as the disruption of cultural and language traditions. Farmers have been forced to move further and further away with their goats, cows and camels in search of grazing lands and water, as the region faces the worst drought in decades.

Between 2015 and 2021, the Resource Centre recorded 369 attacks linked to renewable energy, including the murder of 98 land and environmental defenders. None of the world's 15 largest renewable energy companies have policies on respecting land rights despite wind and solar requiring substantial amounts of land.

In Kenya, after years of campaigning by activists, new legislation in 2016 banned the sale or lease of communally owned land without the consultation and approval of the whole community. The communities around Turkana are using the legislation to fight land grab – of 110,000 acres this time – and so far the court has sided with them.

Adapted from *The Guardian* November 2022 (444 words)

A NOISY NOISE ANNOYS HANOI

The streets of Hanoi are not quiet. Hordes of motorbikes race SUV's down narrow side lanes. Their horns and engines compete with the din from drills, hawkers and squawking livestock. So raucous is Vietnam's capital that patrons in Tranquil, a café, are instructed to speak only in whispers, if they must talk at all. But soon loudspeakers in Vietnam's capital will blare propaganda once more. The city's residents hate the idea.

The city's government now plans to add to the clamour by reincarnating a city-wide public-address system introduced during the country's war with America that was used to broadcast state messages and propaganda. The city wants working speakers in every part of the capital by 2025, the better to convey the voice of government into homes and businesses. Many Hanoians object.

The *loa phuong* have a long history. During the war they provided warning of American bombing raids, and shared optimistic updates from the front line. When the conflict ended, they were put to other purposes. One Hanoi resident remembers hearing neighbours shamed for not paying their taxes. Another recalls a song encouraging people to clean their neighbourhoods and chastising households which had not yet pitched in. One ditty urged the twice-daily brushing of teeth.

Endless announcements offended the ears as much as they did the spirit. Pham Gia Ngoc, who spent decades broadcasting statements about everything from power cuts to vaccination schedules, told state media that residents often became so incensed by the racket that they cut speakers' wires or turned them upside down and filled them with water. A Hanoian bigmouth can be accused of being "as loud as the ward loudspeaker".

The speakers were widespread until 2017. That year the city announced a plan to remove them gradually; it said it would spread its messages in other ways. Some were still working when the pandemic hit. They were used to remind citizens to wear masks and keep their distance. They blasted out a motivational song every morning with the phrase, "Citizens, let's join forces in this fight so covid disappears!"

Now that the city is preparing to reinstall speakers everywhere, its spin doctors are claiming that there was never a plan to remove them in the first place. This does not sway Hanoians. A recent poll found that 70% of people want to get rid of the noisemakers. One newspaper editor in Hanoi calls the plan "idiotic".

So far local officials have not wavered. Zachary Abuza of the National War College in Washington, DC, says that is because the decision was made by Hanoi's Communist Party committee. Its members are more concerned to impress party bigwigs than to avoid upsetting the little folk.

Adapted from *Economist* September 2022 (451 words)

A TRIAL OF E-SCOOTERS IN BRITAIN HAS ENCOURAGING RESULTS

"E" stands for "electric", but in Britain it could also mean "experimental". Since 2020 the Department for Transport has allowed 31 English local authorities to carry out e-scooter rental trials. The scheme was fast-tracked during the pandemic, when lockdowns restricted public transport. Its primary aim is to help the government decide whether to legalise e-scooters as a way of reducing emissions (private scooters are illegal unless ridden on private land, though some ride them regardless). A member of Portsmouth council, which is running a trial, says the city has "a major congestion problem" and poor air quality. "We wanted to get as many people as possible out of their cars."

Transport infrastructure makes a difference to safety. To the ire of many motorists, rented escooters may be driven on the road and in special cycle lanes. A recent study of six European countries found that traffic accidents reported to the police increased by an average of 8.2% after rented e-scooters were introduced, but did not rise in towns with good cycle lanes.

Another reason given to oppose e-scooters is that they may not be as green as people think. Rides typically replace short journeys on foot or by bike, rather than by car, says Christian Brand of the University of Oxford. A French study found that, because of an e-scooter's short life, the total emissions from its use can be six times those from taking the metro. In Portsmouth, however, the council says that 34% of users responding to its surveys say they would otherwise have used a car for their most recent e-scooter journey. Only 15% walk or cycle less than they did before.

One of the most notable things about the English scheme is that it allows for local experimentation. In consultation with councils, e-scooter companies constantly refine their "geofencing", which uses the satellite-based global positioning system to map "no-go" areas, where the scooters shut down, and to automatically enforce speed restrictions. In Oxford riders cannot scoot by the river, presumably to stop students dumping the machines during drunken nights out.

Public feedback also informs the schemes. Surveys consistently show a demand for more parking bays, as well as concerns about safety. Britain has more mandatory parking bays than other European countries.

If interest is a measure of success, the trials are going well. So far 29 of the 31 councils have chosen to continue them. The trial period has been extended to 2024. But its most tangible result may come sooner, if private e-scooters are legalised, which could happen in a transport bill expected next year. Then "e" might also stand for "everywhere".

ACTIVIST IDA B. WELLS IS COMMEMORATED WITH A BARBIE DOLL

Educator, journalist, anti-lynching activist and NAACP co-founder Ida B. Wells joins the pantheon of distinguished women honored by Mattel with her own signature Barbie doll [...] The new Ida B. Wells doll also comes with a historically significant accessory: a miniature replica of the *Memphis Free Speech*, the newspaper where Wells became editor and co-owner in 1889.

Mattel has created numerous Barbie dolls to honor both historic and contemporary heroines in the hopes of inspiring "generations of girls to dream bigger than ever before." It's Inspiring Women Series includes dolls dedicated to Maya Angelou, NASA mathematician Katherine Johnson and singer Ella Fitzgerald.

The oldest of eight children, Ida B. Wells was born into slavery in Holly Springs, Miss., in 1862. When she was 16, both of her parents and a younger brother died during the yellow fever epidemic. Wells raised her younger siblings and became a teacher to support her family.

"I am honored that Barbie has chosen to celebrate my great-grandmother, Ida B. Wells, as part of its Inspiring Women Series," says Michelle Duster, author, public historian, and great-granddaughter of Ida B. Wells [...] "My great-grandmother was a trailblazer, who courageously followed her convictions and challenged the status quo by fighting for civil rights and women's suffrage. This is an incredible opportunity to shine a light on her truth and enduring legacy to empower a new generation to speak up for what they believe in."

A pivotal moment in Wells' life came in 1883 when she was traveling by train from Memphis to Woodstock, Tenn., where she was a teacher. When she refused to give up her seat and ride in a segregated car, she was forcibly removed. Wells later sued the Chesapeake, Ohio and Southwest Railroad Co. A local court ruled in her favor but the decision was eventually overturned in federal court.

Wells became a fierce anti-lynching activist. She investigated white mob violence and wrote scathing indictments of the lynchings of Black men. Her articles so angered locals, the offices of the *Memphis Free Speech* were destroyed.

In the preface to her 1892 pamphlet Southern Horrors: Lynch Laws In All Its Phases, Wells wrote, "It is with no pleasure I have dipped my hands in the corruption here exposed. Somebody must show that the Afro-American race is more sinned against than sinning, and it seems to have fallen on me to do so."

Mattel recently honored medical workers on the front lines of the COVID epidemic. In a release, Mattel says, "Barbie continues to celebrate role models, as every child imagines that they can be anything, but actually seeing that they can, and hearing the stories of others, makes all the difference."

Adapted from *NPR*January 2022
(457 words)

ADIDAS ENDS PARTNERSHIP WITH KANYE WEST AT A CONSIDERABLE COST

For more than two weeks, as Kanye West made a series of antisemitic remarks and embraced a slogan associated with white supremacists, Adidas, the most important partner in his fashion empire, said only that its relationship with the rapper and designer was "under review."

But as Ye, as Mr. West is now known, continued his offensive behavior, and with the condemnation of his remarks growing more widespread, Adidas announced that it would cut ties with him — a move the company said would cost it 250 million euros this year.

"Adidas does not tolerate antisemitism and any other sort of hate speech," the company said in a statement. "Ye's recent comments and actions have been unacceptable, hateful and dangerous, and they violate the company's values of diversity and inclusion, mutual respect and fairness."

Over the past month, Ye tested the boundaries of acceptable behavior even for a noted provocateur. At his Paris Fashion Week show, he wore a shirt with the slogan "White Lives Matter," which the Anti-Defamation League has identified as hate speech and has been adopted by the white supremacist movement. He made antisemitic remarks on social media, including a Twitter post that said he would go "death con 3 on Jewish people."

Though Adidas was among the first of Ye's corporate partners to announce publicly that it had placed the relationship under "review," the fact that the company did not move faster to officially sever the ties began to take a toll. The Anti-Defamation League shot back, "What more do you need to review?"

In Germany, the Central Council of Jews called on the company to cut ties to Ye. "The historical responsibility of Adidas lies not only in the German roots of the company, but also in its entanglement with the Nazi regime," the head of the council said.

The founder of Adidas, Adi Dassler, belonged to the Nazi Party, and his factory produced munitions in the final years of the war. Thanks to the sworn statement of a Jewish friend, Dassler was allowed to found the present-day company after World War II ended. Antisemitic statements made online can lead to prosecution in Germany, and companies with ties to the Nazi era are expected to act to prevent the return of such sentiment.

As pressure on the company mounted in the United States in recent days, its leadership remained largely silent, frustrating even its own executives. "As a member of the Jewish community, I can no longer stay silent on behalf of the brand that employs me," a director for trade marketing at Adidas in the United States wrote in a LinkedIn post.

Adidas stock has fallen over 20 percent in the past month.

Adapted from *The New York Times* October 2022 (459 words)

AI CAN NOW CREATE ANY IMAGE IN SECONDS, BRINGING WONDER AND DANGER

Since the research lab OpenAI debuted the latest version of DALL-E in April, the AI has dazzled the public, attracting digital artists, graphic designers, early adopters, and anyone in search of online distraction. The ability to create original, sometimes accurate, and occasionally inspired images from any spur-of-the-moment phrase, like a conversational Photoshop, has startled even jaded internet users with how quickly AI has progressed.

Five months later, 1.5 million users are generating 2 million images a day. On Wednesday, OpenAl said it removed its waitlist for DALL-E, giving anyone immediate access.

The introduction of DALL-E has triggered an explosion of text-to-image generators. Google and Meta quickly revealed that they had each been developing similar systems, but said their models weren't ready for the public. Rival start-ups soon went public, including Stable Diffusion and Midjourney, which created the image that sparked controversy in August when it won an art competition at the Colorado State Fair.

The technology is now spreading rapidly, faster than AI companies can shape norms around its use and prevent dangerous outcomes. Researchers worry that these systems produce images that can cause a range of harms, such as reinforcing racial and gender stereotypes or plagiarizing artists whose work was siphoned without their consent. Fake photos could be used to enable bullying and harassment — or create disinformation that looks real.

Historically, people trust what they see, said a professor at the University of Southern California's school of engineering. "Once the line between truth and fake is eroded, everything will become fake," he said. "We will not be able to believe anything."

OpenAl has tried to balance its drive to be first and hype its Al developments without accelerating those dangers. To prevent DALL-E from being used to create disinformation, for example, OpenAl prohibits images of celebrities or politicians. (...)

"The question OpenAI should ask itself is: Do we think the benefits outweigh the drawbacks?" said a UC Berkeley professor, who specializes in digital forensics, computer vision, and misinformation. "It's not the early days of the internet anymore, where we can't see what the bad things are." (...)

Each evolution of image technology has introduced potential harms alongside increased efficiency. Photoshop enabled precision editing and enhancement of photos, but also served to distort body images, especially among girls, studies show.

More recently, advances in AI gave rise to deepfakes, a broad term that covers any AI-synthesized media — from doctored videos where one person's head has been placed on another person's body to surprisingly lifelike "photographs" of people who don't exist. When deepfakes first emerged, experts warned that they could be deployed to undermine politics.

Adapted from *The Washington Post* September 2022 (445 words)

AI REUNITES HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR WITH CHILDHOOD PHOTOS

Blanche remembers hiding inside a bed while Nazis searched for her. "I felt them tapping on the bed," she recalls. "I said, you better not breathe or sneeze or anything."

Blanche was a survivor - she was lucky. Six million Jews like her were murdered by the Nazis in the Holocaust during World War Two. The names of more than one million of those people are unknown.

Now a tool using artificial intelligence (AI) - built by a software engineer for Google - could hold the key to putting names to some of the many faces, both victims and survivors, in hundreds of thousands of historic photographs. It found Blanche in a wartime photo which she had never seen before.

The website, Numbers to Names, uses facial recognition technology to analyse a person's face. It then searches through archive photos to find potential matches. The software has been cross-referencing millions of faces, to try to find matches for people who have already been identified in one photo - but not in others. That detective work could then help identify some people in photos whose identities are currently unknown.

Blanche, who is now 86 and lives in New York, knew about one family snapshot but she had never previously seen other photos taken in France during the war. It was the Al software which made the connection.

Blanche lived in Poland when the Nazis came looking for her and her family. Her mother and her siblings were killed - but she was saved, thanks to her Aunt Rose, who hid her.

The lost image from the past triggered a long-forgotten memory in her - a French song she learned as a child. Blanche immediately recognised herself standing at the front of the large group of people, but that's not all. She also identified her Aunt Rose and one of the boys in the photo - giving the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum new information to work with.

"It's so important to identify these photos," says the director of curatorial affairs at the museum. "You're restoring some semblance of dignity to them, some comfort to their family, and it's a form of memorial for the entire Jewish community."

"That's part of the problem. I can't stress enough how important these photos are of individuals. We all know the figure - six million Jews were killed - but it's really one person six million times. Every person has a name, every person has a face."

Before Blanche set eyes on the photo, only three people in it had been identified. Thanks to Blanche, and the software, that number has doubled.

Adapted from *BBC News* November 2022 (449 words)

AI-DA BECOMES FIRST ROBOT TO PAINT LIKE AN ARTIST

Brush clamped firmly in bionic hand, Ai-Da's robotic arm moves slowly, dipping in to a paint palette then making slow, deliberate strokes across the paper in front of her. This, according to Aidan Meller, the creator of the world's first ultra-realistic humanoid robot, Ai-Da, is "mind-blowing" and "ground-breaking" stuff because Ai-Da has become the first robot to paint as artists have painted for centuries. Camera eyes fixed on her subject, Al algorithms prompt Ai-Da to interrogate, select, decision-make and, ultimately, create a painting, and no two works are exactly the same.

Yet the question Meller wants to raise with this, the first public demonstration of a creative, robotic painting, is not "can robots make art?", but rather "now that robots can make art, do we, humans, really want them to?" "This is an ethical project", said Meller.

With rapidly developing artificial intelligence, growing accessibility to super computers and machine learning on the up, Ai-Da exists as a "comment and critique" on rapid technological change. Ask Ai-Da what she thinks of art and she tells you she used machine learning to teach her to paint. Can she appreciate art or beauty? "I do not have emotions like humans do, however, it is possible to train a machine learning system to learn to recognise emotional facial expressions," she answered.

But, can what she creates be truly considered art? "The answer to that question depends on what you mean by art," she said, adding: "I am an artist if art means communicating something about who we are. To be an artist is to illustrate the world around you."

Devised in Oxford by Meller, Ai-Da was created more than two years ago by a team of programmers, roboticists, art experts and psychologists, completed in 2019, and is updated as Al technology improves. She has already demonstrated her ability to sketch and create poems. Her new painting talent was unveiled at her solo exhibition at the 2022 Venice Biennale. The exhibition is about AI from Alan Turing to the metaverse and explores the future of humanity in a world where AI technology continues to encroach on everyday human life.

Soon, with the amount of data we freely give about ourselves, and through talking to our phones, computers, cars and even kitchen appliances, Al algorithms "are going to know you better than you do", Meller warned. We are entering a world, he said, "not understanding which is human and which is machine. We are not here to promote robots or technology. We are deeply concerned about the nature of what this technology can do," he added. "The whole point of Ai-Da is to highlight what is it we are doing, unknowingly, online all the time."

Adapted from *The Guardian*April 2022
(460 words)

ALASKA'S FAT BEAR WEEK PROVES CONSERVATION CAN BE JOYFUL

For one rabid corner of the internet, October is Octobear. On October 5th, Katmai National Park & Preserve in southern Alaska kicked off Fat Bear Week, when the park's brown bears are pitted against each other in a challenge, much like college basketball's March Madness tournament. Fans use before and after photos to vote for the bear they think has gained the most weight over summer to prepare for hibernation. But what began as a niche contest for conservationists has become a global campaign where superfans stump for their favourite bear to be crowned the fattest of them all.

Fat Bear Week began in 2014 as Fat Bear Tuesday. A park ranger at Katmai noticed that live webcams showing the bears generated a lot of online comments. He and the other rangers let people vote for their favourite fat bear on Facebook. The one-day event attracted just 1,700 votes in 2014. Last year's week-long contest elicited nearly 800,000. Fans gather to watch the live bear cams set up around the park. Some go further. One of them is hosting a bear-themed meal where she lives in Northern Michigan. Guests must bring foods that appeal to both bears and humans, such as salmon cakes and honey butter. This year Ms Gross says she is rooting for Holly, an older she-bear, because "she is a nice little fat girl and so am I".

The contest serves two other purposes: America's national parks are often in remote, undeveloped areas. They can be difficult and costly to travel to. Fat Bear Week brings Alaska's pristine wilderness to fans' computer screens. "The webcams help to democratise the experience," says a naturalist for explore.org, which operates the bear cams. "It's not limited to the fortunate few who can go to the river any more."

Second, Fat Bear Week heaps attention upon the bears, and the ecosystems they inhabit. The 2,200 bears of Katmai are so husky because they feed from one of the healthiest salmon runs in the world, says a former park ranger. Salmon in the Pacific Northwest have suffered due to overfishing, dam construction and warming rivers due to climate change. Brooks River, where Katmai's bears like to fish, has so far dodged these threats.

Creators and fans of Fat Bear Week argue the contest has gone viral because it is a conservation success story that for one week helps dispel feelings of doom about habitat loss and climate change. "Maybe things aren't super great all the time in the world," says a Katmai ranger, "but there's some really fat bears in Alaska."

AMAZON ENTERS THE AGE OF ROBOTS. WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR ITS WORKERS?

Trapped in a metal cage in a corner of a 350,000 sq ft Amazon warehouse outside Boston last week a lonely yellow robot arm sorted through packages, preparing items to be shipped out to customers demanding ever-faster delivery. Soon it will be joined by others in a development that could mean the end of thousands of jobs and the creation of thousands of others. As the robot worked, a screen displayed its progress. It carefully packed a box of napkin rings then a tube of hemorrhoid cream.

One day soon the robot, called Sparrow, could do the work of the hundreds of thousands of people that Amazon now employs to sort the 13m packages it delivers each year. Using computer vision and artificial intelligence Sparrow can already identify about 65% of its product inventory, tell if an item is damaged and discard it, and adjust its suction cup "hand" to handle different objects – all jobs currently done by human hands. As it learns, it gets better day by day.

Sparrow, which will start rolling out next year, was just one of the new army of robots on display for the first time at Amazon's "Delivering the Future" conference last Thursday. The company also showed off its latest drone which it hopes will allow the company to deliver 500m packages by air by the end of the decade. The 2020s will be the "age of applied robotics", said Tye Brady, chief technologist at Amazon Robotics. "Robots will be doing meaningful tasks and extending human capability. It's exciting!"

People have predicted that robots will destroy the labour market. Back in1933 the economist John Maynard Keynes prophesied widespread technological unemployment was coming due to our discovery of means of economizing the use of labour outrunning the pace at which we can find new uses for labour.

"I just don't see that at all," said Brady. "We made our first serious investment in robotics over 10 years ago and in those 10 years we created more than a million jobs." More robots will boost the efficiency of warehouses and store more goods. Amazon will sell more stuff and more people will be needed to make sure everything runs smoothly, he said.

Yet employers "may use technology in ways that decrease the skill requirements of jobs to reduce training times and turnover costs. This could create wage stagnation and job insecurity".

Nothing will slow Amazon's robot revolution, though. The company is the largest manufacturer of industrial robots worldwide. Its Boston facilities already produce 330,000 robots a year: "We will react to what customers want and if they want their toothpaste faster, we will help them get it faster", Brady said.

Adapted from *The Guardian*November 2022
(458 words)

AN ASTRONAUT'S VIEW ON PROTECTING THE EARTH

French astronaut Thomas Pesquet, who has recently become a UN Food and Agricultural Organization Goodwill Ambassador, spent six months aboard the International Space Station last year. Long periods with his feet off solid ground gave him a unique and privileged perspective on our planet. His Instagram account is bursting with beautiful images of "the blue ball we call home." But the beauty is tainted. Pesquet says that even from space the effects of climate change are visible, with glaciers visibly retreating, and a rise in extreme weather events. [...]

"When you look at the Earth from the space station, he adds, it's absolutely magical. [...] It is absolutely breathtaking the first time you see it. It's the most beautiful scenery you could possibly imagine.

When you're on the Earth, you feel that everything is vast, that everything is endless. You have a hard time understanding how limited we are, whereas, when you take a step back and you see the Earth in its entirety, you suddenly understand that we live in an oasis in the cosmos. All around us is nothing, no life, blackness, emptiness – apart from this blue ball with everything we need to sustain human life, and life in general, which is so fragile. It makes you want to cherish the Earth and protect it, particularly because, from space, you can see a lot of the consequences of human activities. The most visible effect is glaciers retreating together with extreme weather phenomena.

And we, up here, can do more than simply observe... First of all, as a space agency, we have satellites that can take precise measures.

Then, the way we deal with our limited resources on board the space station gives us techniques to recycle oxygen and water that could be applied on Earth.

It is all the more important for us to contribute to improving the Earth, as space travel has an impact on the environment. Even though it is negligible when compared to aviation, cars or other industries. We need activity in space to get satellite research done. This benefits the planet a lot. So space travel is a necessary evil.

Besides, if we set ourselves on the right path, there's nothing we cannot do. We built this unbelievable facility in space for good reasons. We're using it every day, in peaceful cooperation between countries that were not always friends. So if we can transfer that model to the way we deal with the environment on Earth, I think we'll get there.

We're creative enough, we have the technology and we have the will. So, I'm optimistic for the future. If we can make a space station fly, then we can save the planet."

Adapted from *CNN* January 2022 (449 words)

ARE WE FALLING IN LOVE WITH ROBOTS?

Cristine Bonifacio has just extracted a large chocolate bar from a white robot with six wheels that has rolled up outside her home. She is in a hurry and has to dash back indoors for a work Zoom call, but she's got just enough time to express her affection for the robot delivery service that sends these machines scuttling along her local pavements. "I love the robots. Sometimes you find one that is stuck so you help it and it says 'thank you'."

The robot delivery service from Starship Technologies was launched in Milton Keynes four years ago and has been expanding ever since, with further towns added last month.

After decades of playing the villain in science fiction, robots are now part of life in many towns and people haven't just embraced them, they rush to assist them. What is going on? Mrs Case is an Oregon-based specialist in human-robot interaction and the way technology changes everyday life. "In the movies robots are always a technology that's attacking us. But the delivery robots wait for us and we use them."

She thinks occasions when a robot hits an obstacle and requires help from a passer-by are a crucial part of the human-robot relationship. "Technology can be adorable if it needs our assistance. We like a robot that needs us and helping the robot creates a bond."

Curiously, Ms Case is critical of the Starship Technologies delivery robots in Milton Keynes. They are battery-powered, summoned and opened by an app, equipped with sensors to detect pedestrians and armed with a speaker. This allows a remote human operator to address people observed through on-board video cameras. Yet this arsenal of tech is not being applied correctly, she says. "I feel they are automating the wrong part of the journey. Humans are really good at negotiating terrain and finding a particular house. Is this just a fetish for automating things?" Despite these reservations she concedes that "the Starship team have made sure it's not scary, but cute. It seems they think more about the design and a well-designed robot is more likely to succeed."

"The emerging human-robot bond has banished the stereotype of a menacing robot", says one inhabitant. "When you see one you don't get that science-fiction emotion of 'Oh No! It's a robot!' It's more like a cute little character you see on the street. It makes your walk more colourful."

Mr Curtis, Starship's operations manager talks about each machine operating in a "bubble of awareness" that allows it to alert people to its presence and offer thanks if they assist it. "It's designed to be cute, not to be invasive."

Adapted from bbcnews.com August 2022 (450 words)

ARTS JOURNALISTS HAVE A TWITTER PROBLEM

It's Saturday morning and I've been up all night scrolling Twitter, trying to decide if being an arts and culture writer is in direct conflict with the use of the increasingly divisive social media platform under the new ownership of the world's richest and most annoying man, Elon Musk. My job is to shine light on the ways that human creativity can illuminate, challenge and ultimately transform life on Earth, and to dig up injustice of all kinds as it relates to [...] art. Twitter's job is to foment outsized outrage at just about everything.

According to a recent study, Twitter is the most-used social media platform among journalists, with 69% of us saying that we use it the most, or second most, in the course of our jobs. We didn't become addicts out of the blue: Twitter's rise directly coincided with the devastating fall of print media.

The platform's ability to drive traffic online was seen as a life raft for publications struggling to monetize the web. Twitter encouraged our ardor, and in those early days, entire newsrooms were given the blue check marks denoting official accounts. We repaid the social media site with our near-constant attention. I was once pulled into an editor's office and reprimanded for not tweeting enough. [...]

The site's greatest failing is now being exacerbated by the platform's new overlord, Elon Musk, who seems intent on offending almost everyone, recently tweeting, "Being attacked by both right & left simultaneously is a good sign," and pinning to his profile a poll that asks what advertisers should value more, freedom of speech or political correctness. [...]

Musk's ownership has pushed journalists who promote their work on the site to a moral crossroads: to tweet or not to tweet. For arts and culture writers [...], Twitter has been an especially useful tool of dissemination. It's a forum for meeting kindred spirits and fellow arts practitioners and for staying up to date on cultural conversations before they begin to trend. [...]

Leaving is hard, although some journalists are already doing it. I applaud their resolve and ability to place principle above the convenient expediency of the fast-moving, ever-churning social media site. As I mentioned up top, I remain a Twitter user. One of my biggest concerns about society today is its extreme fracture, which I believe stems from our ability to silo ourselves off from ideas and people we find offensive and uncomfortable. For that reason I have never blocked someone on social media — no matter how angry or indignant they make me. And that's how I'm justifying my continued presence on the site. It's a window into the soul of America, and like America, it is exceedingly dark right now.

BANKSY UNVEILS UKRAINE GYMNAST MURAL ON BUILDING BOMBED BY RUSSIA

Renowned graffiti-artist Banksy has unveiled his latest work on a building devastated by bombing in Ukraine. He posted a picture on Instagram of the artwork, a gymnast doing a handstand amid debris.

Murals spotted in and around Ukraine's capital Kyiv had led to speculation the anonymous artist was working in the war-torn country. Another, not officially claimed, depicts a man resembling Vladimir Putin being defeated at Judo by a child. The Russian president is a judo black belt and noted admirer of the martial art.

The graffiti artist posted three images of the gymnast mural in the wreckage left by Russian bombing, with a caption merely stating "Ukraine".

The area was one of the places hardest hit by Russia's bombardment of Ukraine in the immediate aftermath of the 24 February invasion. Russian soldiers occupied the town - located around 30 miles North West of Ukraine's capital Kyiv - for weeks in the initial phase of the war, before it was eventually liberated by Ukraine in April.

After the town was recaptured, the BBC News international editor - a veteran war correspondent - said the destruction wrought by the Russian bombardment was the worst he had seen in Ukraine at the time. Several witnesses said that Russian troops stopped attempts to dig survivors out of wrecked buildings, threatening people who wanted to do so at gunpoint. BBC News has also heard the story of a local police officer who lost six family members - his mother, father, brother, grandmother, wife and one-year-old daughter - in a single Russian strike.

The third artwork that appears to be painted by Banksy shows a female rhythmic gymnast, wearing a neck brace, performing with a ribbon on top of a gaping hole in the side of a building in Irpin. The town, which is on the outskirts of Kyiv, was the site of a notorious massacre of hundreds of civilians by occupying Russian troops.

A fourth work, which also resembles Banksy's signature spray-painted style, portrays two children sitting on a metal tank trap and using it as a playground spray painted onto a concrete defensive block in Kyiv.

Banksy is one of the world's most famous artists - while also remaining completely anonymous. He rose to fame with stencilled designs around Bristol in the early 1990s. But over the years, examples of his work have popped up in Paris, New York and Park City, in Utah. Often described as "elusive" and "secretive" by the press, the "guerrilla street artist" has a legion of fans that includes A-list celebrities.

Adapted from *BBC News* November 2022 (440 words)

BANNED IRANIAN MUSICIAN RAJABIAN RETURNS, WITH THE HELP OF GRAMMY WINNERS

Iranian composer Mehdi Rajabian has defied the efforts of the Iranian authorities to silence him, by releasing a new album in collaboration with a string of prominent international musicians.

It Arrives, released on September 10, has had a difficult path. Rajabian is banned from working with other musicians in Iran, he can't tour or release music locally and can't even use professional music studios.

Instead, the 32-year-old turned to the internet to collaborate with numerous Grammy Award winners and nominees [...] "We did all the parts online, from musicians, studio recording, album art, mastering, everything you see in this project has been done over the internet," he said.

Trying to collaborate with people thousands of miles away presents plenty of challenges, made worse by poor internet connections. "In Iran, the internet speed is very low and most of the applications are blocked and filtered, which made it much more difficult, especially for transferring large files," said Rajabian.

There is also the ever-present risk that the authorities might come calling. Rajabian has been arrested multiple times for his artistic endeavors and in 2015 was sentenced to six years in prison. After spending two years behind bars, he went on a hunger strike for 40 days, lapsing into a coma. The authorities released him on parole, but he said three years of his sentence remain suspended. "They can easily send me back to jail," he said.

He was again arrested in 2020, following the release of his album *Middle Eastern*, which was part of a project involving female singers and dancers.

"You are under pressure in several ways. These pressures are both mental and physical and cause the destruction of the work of art," said Rajabian. "As a result you must produce a magnificent work of art. What is finally produced is a work that overcomes great difficulties."[...]

"It really makes me proud to work with the most important musicians in the world. If it wasn't for their help and persistence, I would never have been able to produce music."

While some music is allowed in Iran, many artists are driven underground.

"Any artist who has a platform has definitely given in to censorship and has agreed to produce artwork within the framework of censorship. People like me definitely do not and have not given in to this framework," said Rajabian. [...]

"I believe that an artist should be a fighter. He should know prison, solitary confinement, hunger strike, torture... and not be afraid. But his work of art should be philosophical. This time I tried to use more variety of colors in the album, unlike the previous album. Maybe this anger and loneliness of mine has reached happy colors."

Adapted from *Forbes* September 2022 (460 words)

BIDEN ADMINISTRATION RELAXES RULES FOR STUDENT DEBT FORGIVENESS

The Biden administration is moving forward with an overhaul of several student debt forgiveness programs, aiming to make it easier for borrowers to get relief if they are duped by their colleges or if they put in a decade of work as public servants.

Education Secretary Miguel Cardona called it a "monumental step" that will make it faster and simpler to get debt relief. "The Biden administration is fixing a broken system and putting borrowers first," Cardona told reporters.

Chief among the changes is a revamp of a program which offers debt forgiveness to students whose colleges make false advertising claims or otherwise commit fraud.

The new policy clarifies that the Education Department can review claims from individual borrowers or it can grant forgiveness to huge swaths of students from the same college, if it has been found to have committed fraud. The new rule cements the department's ability to erase debt for thousands of borrowers in a single action.

In a major shift, the federal government will also be able to force colleges to cover the cost when their students are granted loan cancellation because of fraud. Those costs have typically been passed to taxpayers, prompting complaints from conservative critics.

The overhaul also brings big changes to the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program, which was created by Congress as an incentive for government and nonprofit workers but has failed to deliver its promise because of notoriously complex rules.

Under the existing rules, teachers, nurses and other public workers can get the rest of their federal student debt erased after making 120 monthly payments. All payments must be made in full and within 15 days of their due date.

The new rule erases the 15-day rule, allowing payments to count even if they are made late or in multiple installments. It also allows borrowers to make up to a year of payments in advance in a single sum, rather than making monthly payments.

That program cancels federal student debt for people who are permanently disabled and unable to generate significant income.

Loosening the rules around existing debt forgiveness programs has been a priority for the Biden administration, which has already granted \$38 billion in debt cancellation for defrauded students, public students and others. That doesn't include Biden's broad cancellation plan, which is estimated to cost about \$400 billion.

Yet, a federal appeals court has temporarily blocked Biden's plan, creating uncertainty for millions of borrowers who were told they would get up to \$20,000 canceled. The Education Department has said it's still processing applications even while it's barred from erasing the debt. Cardona on Monday said his agency is moving "full steam ahead" with the plan.

Adapted from *The Washington Post* October 2022 (454 words)

BRAZIL, INDONESIA AND DRC IN TALKS TO FORM 'OPEC OF RAINFORESTS'

The big three tropical rainforest nations – Brazil, Indonesia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo – are in talks to form a strategic alliance to coordinate their conservation, nicknamed an "Opec for rainforests". The election of Lula da Silva has been followed by a flurry of activity to avoid the destruction of the Amazon, which scientists have warned is dangerously close to tipping point after years of deforestation.

President-elect, Lula has pledged to fight for zero deforestation in the Amazon. Brazil, Indonesia and DRC are home to 52% of the world's remaining primary tropical forests, which are crucial to avoiding climate catastrophe. The alliance could see the rainforest countries make joint proposals on carbon markets and finance, as part of an effort to encourage developed countries to fund their conservation, which is key to limiting global heating to 1.5C (2.7F) above pre-industrial levels.

The three countries – home to the Amazon, Congo basin and Borneo and Sumatra forests, which are threatened by commercial logging, mining and illegal exploitation – signed an agreement at Cop26 in Glasgow to halt and reverse deforestation by 2030.

"The president-elect is already working with DRC and Indonesia to protect all tropical forests on the planet. He also reiterated the commitment of his government to get to zero deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon during his presidency," he said, explaining that Science Panel for the Amazon would launch a proposal for an "arc of restoration" covering more than 1m hectares mainly in the southern Amazon near the Andes.

"Implementing such a project will protect the Amazon rainforest from reaching the tipping point and also will remove more than 1bn tonnes of CO₂ from the atmosphere for several decades – a mandatory goal to combat the climate emergency," he said.

He said: "The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change made clear in a recent report the urgent need to recognise the rights of Indigenous peoples and support adaptation of ecosystems. Proposals to conserve tropical forests that fail to protect the rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities in the forests of Africa, Latin America and Indonesia, cannot succeed."

At Cop26 in Glasgow last year, three big initiatives to protect the world's forests were launched: a commitment by more than 140 world leaders to halt and reverse deforestation, the creation of a working group of producers and consumers of commodities linked to deforestation, and a commitment by major commodity producers of soya, palm oil, cocoa and cattle to align their business practices with the 1.5C target.

However, despite the agreement, data shows that Brazil, DRC and Indonesia were among the top five countries for primary forest loss in 2021, with 11.1m hectares of tree cover lost in the tropics overall last year.

Adapted from *the Guardian* November 2022 (459 words)

CALIFORNIA WILL BAN SALES OF NEW GASOLINE-POWERED CARS BY 2035

California air regulators voted Thursday on a historic plan to address climate change and harmful pollution by moving the nation's largest auto market away from the internal combustion engine.

The regulation will phase out the sale of new gasoline-powered cars, trucks and SUVs in the nation's most-populous state, culminating in a total ban of new sales of the vehicles by 2035.

The ban will not prevent people from using gas-powered vehicles or apply to the used car market, but California officials say it will dramatically cut the state's climate-warming emissions and famously dirty air by speeding the transition to electric vehicles.

"California now has a groundbreaking, world-leading plan to achieve 100% zero-emission vehicle sales by 2035," said the state's governor, Gavin Newsom.

The regulation, which was approved by the California Air Resources Board (CARB), could have massive repercussions for the country's auto-manufacturing industry and the broader fight against climate change. Transportation is the largest source of climate-warming greenhouse gas emissions in the country, and scientists have said in increasingly dire language that drastic cuts to those emissions are crucial to providing a livable future on the planet.

President Joe Biden has set a goal of making half of the nation's new sales zero-emission by 2030. The recently enacted Inflation Reduction Act aims to move consumers that way by providing tax credits to people looking to buy new or used electric vehicles.

Auto industry analysts say the unprecedented move by California could help push the auto market to achieving that goal. Thirteen other states, including Oregon, New York and Colorado, typically follow California's auto emissions standards, which are already the most stringent in the country.

Electric vehicles account for just 5.6 percent of new-car sales between April and July, according to the latest quarterly report from Cox Automotive, an industry consulting firm. Reaching 100 percent emission-free new vehicle sales by 2035 will be "extremely challenging," said John Bozzella, CEO of the Alliance for Automotive Innovation, which represents large automakers. "It is directly linked to external factors like inflation, charging and fuel infrastructure, supply chains, labor, critical mineral availability and pricing, and the ongoing semiconductor shortage," he said.

A nationwide shift to electric vehicles would have major health benefits beyond its impacts on global climate change. More than 4-in-10 Americans live with unhealthy air, according to the American Lung Association. And research finds that the negative effects are disproportionately borne by people of color, regardless of income.

A report by the American Lung Association earlier this year found that a nationwide shift to zero-emission vehicles by 2035, as California is seeking, would generate more than \$1.2 trillion in public health benefits between 2020 and 2050 and avoid up to 110,000 premature deaths.

Adapted from *NPR* August 2022 (459 words)

CAN AI STOP RARE EAGLES FLYING INTO WIND TURBINES IN GERMANY?

Small in size, sensitive of constitution and with only 130 breeding pairs surviving locally in the wild, the lesser spotted eagle of the Oder delta lives up to its name. In Germany, key questions over the country's energy future hang on the question of whether artificial intelligence systems can do a better job of spotting the reclusive animal than birdwatchers do.

Lesser spotted eagles (named after the drop-shaped spots on their feathers) are fond of riding thermals over many of the flatlands earmarked for a mass expansion of onshore windfarms by a German government under pressure to compensate for a pending loss of nuclear power, coal plants and Russian gas.

Because lesser spotted eagles in mid-flight are unused to vertical obstacles, and keep their eyes focused on mice, lizard or frog-shaped prey below, conservationists say, they are known to occasionally collide with the rotor blades of wind turbines. German researchers list eight dead specimens found in the vicinity of windfarms since 2002.

A controversial reform of the federal nature conservation act, pushed through by Olaf Scholz's coalition government earlier this summer, slashes red tape around building windfarms near nesting sites, but banks on Al-driven "anti-collision systems" as one way to minimise such accidents.

Software engineers in Colorado are feeding hundreds of thousands of images of the airborne *clanga pomarina* into an algorithm. Linked to a camera system perched atop a 10-metre tower, the trained-up neural networks of the US company IdentiFlight are expected to detect eagles approaching from a distance of up to 750 metres and electronically alert the turbine.

The turbine will then take 20-40 seconds to wind down into "trundle mode" of no more than two rotations each minute, ideally giving the eagle plenty of time to navigate safe passage between its slowly moving blades.

Wind energy in Germany underwent a massive boom after Angela Merkel announced the phase-out of nuclear power in 2011, with windfarms currently providing about a quarter of the country's electricity needs. But the expansion plans have stalled for the past four years, at about 30,000 turbines providing just over 60,000 megawatt hours a year.

Wind power companies complain that planning applications take longer and longer, with not only environmentalists but locals opposed to turbines having learned to use natural protection laws to stymie their plans.

Court action looks predestined. "As a society, we have to start asking ourselves some basic questions," said a German industrialist. "Do we want to build windfarms because we want to mitigate climate change and protect the environment as a whole? Or do we want to save every individual bird?"

Adapted from *The Guardian*September 2022
(441 words)

CAN DRUMMING RECONNECT YOU TO YOUR COLLEAGUES?

Performers are on stage as the audience filters into the auditorium. A drum sits on each chair. The leader picks up his instrument and tentatively, without a word, everyone else does the same. He plays a phrase and the audience answers. Layer upon layer of rhythm, intensity and complexity builds. Drum rolls rise and fall in waves until – as if by magic – we feel as if we've been performing together for years. Even though I join in via video and use my table as a drum, I can feel the energy and I can sense the human connection.

The session, organised by Drum Cafe, is a team building exercise. Typically, the instructors will join the participants at their office. Everyone can join in the easy-to-follow rhythms, which are interspersed with solos from the professionals. "We walk in rhythm, our hearts beat in rhythm. We all have rhythm. Even with as many as 5,000 participants, we can play in unison," says the director of Drum Cafe. He says the pandemic has left "tension in the air. When people arrive, there are feelings of negativity, stress and uncertainty. We offer people a moment of release. They leave refreshed, emotionally purged – feeling the joy of reconnection."

Prof Amanda Weltman, an astrophysicist at the University of Cape Town, and her team first experienced the Drum Cafe effect in 2019. "It was profound," she says. "We were guided to learn several rhythms and, very quickly, this crowd of strangers was moving as one. In that moment, I felt great. I felt part of something."

With more people than ever working from home, it's a big challenge for companies to build a sense of common purpose. "Feelings of closeness and belonging to a social group are basic needs for every human being – and work is no exception," says Dr Vasquez, a psychologist. He points out that virtual interaction has benefits. It allows organisations to hire workers from different cities and nations, and to extend the working day beyond the time zone of the office.

But there are big drawbacks: "It impairs spontaneous daily interactions, generates mistakes due to misunderstanding and lack of co-ordination, causes delays due to geographic dispersion, and disrupts work-life balance. All of this can negatively impact employees' well-being." According to a recent report 67% of workers say they experience stress at work at least once a week, and one in seven say they feel stressed every day and employees say that although they're having more meetings than ever, they also feel more isolated than ever. The result: a sharp deterioration in professional relationships impacting productivity, efficiency and innovation.

Adapted from bbcnews.com August 2022 (447 words)

CANADA PLANS COMPLETE FREEZE ON HANDGUN OWNERSHIP

The Canadian government has introduced legislation that would put a freeze on importing, buying or selling handguns. "We are capping the number of handguns in this country," said the prime minister, Justin Trudeau. The regulations to halt the growth of personally owned handguns is expected to be enacted this autumn. "It will be illegal to buy, sell, transfer or import handguns anywhere in Canada," the prime minister said.

Canada already has plans to ban 1,500 types of military-style firearms and offer a mandatory buyback programme that will begin at the end of the year. Canada had already expanded background checks ahead of this total ban.

Trudeau has long had plans to enact tougher gun laws but the introduction of the new measure comes after mass shootings in Uvalde, Texas, and Buffalo, NY, this month.

Bill Blair, minister of emergency preparedness, said Canada was "very different from the United States". "In Canada, gun ownership is a privilege, not a right," he said. "This is a principle that differentiates ourselves from many other countries in the world, notably our colleagues and friends to the south. In Canada, guns are only intended to be used for hunting and sport purposes." Canada has had far fewer mass shootings than the US in part because of a lack of easy access to guns, though the US population also is far larger than Canada's.

Blair said guns were often smuggled in illegally from the US, which he noted had one of the largest small arms arsenals in the world. The Canadian government plans to fight gun smuggling and trafficking by increasing criminal penalties, providing more tools to investigate firearms crimes and strengthening border measures. Trudeau said increased funding already helped border officials double the amount of smuggled guns confiscated at the US border. His government also said the bill would allow for the removal of gun licences from people involved in acts of domestic violence or criminal harassment such as stalking.

The bill would create a new "red flag" law allowing courts to require that people considered a danger to themselves or others surrender their firearms to police. The government said the measure would guard the safety of those applying through the process – often women in danger of domestic abuse – by protecting their identities. "Canada can teach us a lot," tweeted a former US ambassador to Canada (...)

Trudeau said his government recognised that the vast majority of Canadians who owned guns were responsible, but the level of gun violence was "unacceptable". "This is a concrete and real national measure toward keeping Canadians safe," Trudeau said. "We cannot let the gun debate become so polarised that nothing gets done. We cannot let that happen in our country".

Adapted from the Guardian May 2022 (455 words)

CLIMATE ACTIVISTS ARRESTED AFTER BLOCKING PRIVATE JETS IN AMSTERDAM AIRPORT

Dutch border police arrested hundreds of climate activists who stormed Amsterdam's Schiphol airport and sat in front of the wheels of aircraft to prevent them from leaving. More than 100 protesters, wearing white suits, entered an area where private jets are kept on Saturday as part of a day of demonstrations in and around the airport organised by environmental groups.

Dewi Zloch, the Netherlands campaign leader for Greenpeace, one of the groups involved, said: "We want fewer flights, more trains and a ban on unnecessary short-haul flights and private jets." Greenpeace says Schiphol is the largest source of carbon dioxide emissions in the Netherlands, emitting 12bn kilograms annually.

Extinction Rebellion was also involved in the action. Hundreds of other demonstrators in and around the airport's main hall carried signs saying "Restrict aviation" and "More trains".

About three hours after the protest began, border police started arresting activists, some of whom were dragged to waiting buses after passively resisting arrest, AFP reported. "We take this very seriously," Dutch border police spokesperson Major Robert van Kapel said. "These people are facing charges relating to being in a place where they should not have been," he said, adding that prosecutors will now formulate the exact charge.

The activists were taken to various border police offices around the airfield where they were being processed and identified, Van Kapel said.

Greenpeace said police were "far too heavy-handed against the activists on bicycles" and that at least one person received a head injury.

Responding to the protest, Schiphol said it aimed to become an emissions-free airport by 2030 and it supported targets for the aviation industry to reach net zero emissions by 2050. On Friday, in response to an open letter from Greenpeace, Schiphol's new CEO, Ruud Sondag, conceded that change needed to happen faster.

The Dutch government announced plans in June to cap annual flights at the airport at 440,000, about 11% below 2019 levels, citing air pollution and climate concerns. The transport minister, Mark Harbers, told parliament last month that his office could not control growing private jet traffic, and the government was considering whether to include the issue in its climate policy.

More than 120 world leaders are due to attend this year's UN climate talks at the Red Sea coastal resort of Sharm el-Sheikh, which start on Sunday. Extinction Rebellion has been warning of the environmental impact of air travel for many years and in October 2019 a protester climbed on to a British Airways plane at London City airport and was seen lying on top of it. Other activists staged a sit-in at the airport entrance during the third day of protests in London at that time.

Adapted from *The Guardian* November 2022 (456 words)

CLIMATE ACTIVISTS THROW BLACK LIQUID AT GUSTAV KLIMT PAINTING IN VIENNA

Climate activists in Austria have attacked a painting by Gustav Klimt, with one throwing a black, oily liquid at it and another gluing himself to the glass covering the painting.

Members of Last Generation Austria tweeted that they had targeted the 1915 painting Death and Life at a museum in Vienna to protest against their government's use of fossil fuels.

After throwing the liquid at the artwork, which was not damaged, one activist was pushed away by a museum guard while another glued his hand to the glass over the painting.

The group said they were protesting against "oil and gas drilling", which they called "a death sentence to society".

In a video of the incident, which the group posted online, one of the activists can be heard shouting: "We have known about the problem for 50 years – we must finally act, otherwise the planet will be broken."

The museum's restoration team said later that while the painting itself had not been harmed, the damage to the glass and security framing, as well as to the wall and floor, was "evident and significant".

The director of the museum told the news agency that the concerns of the climate activists were justified, "but attacking works of art is definitely the wrong way to implement the targeted goal of preventing the predicted climate collapse". He appealed to the group to find other ways to make their concerns known.

Austria's culture minister also expressed understanding for "the concerns and also the desperation" of the activists, but criticized their form of protest.

"I do not believe that actions like these are purposeful, because the question arises whether they do not rather lead to more lack of understanding than to more awareness of the climate catastrophe," the culture minister said. "From my point of view, accepting the risk of irrevocable damage to works of art is the wrong way to go. Art and culture are allies in the fight against climate catastrophe, not adversaries."

The Klimt work is an oil on canvas painting depicting death on the left side and a group of people on the right. It's one of the latest pieces of art to be targeted by climate activists in recent months. In Germany, mashed potatoes were thrown at a Claude Monet painting, while the British group Just Stop Oil threw tomato soup at Vincent van Gogh's Sunflowers in London's National Gallery.

Activists also glued themselves to John Constable's The Hay Wain in the National Gallery, and to the frame of an early copy of Leonardo da Vinci's The Last Supper at London's Royal Academy of Arts.

Adapted from *The Guardian* November 2022 (454 words)

CLIMATE ANXIETY: HOW WRITING TO YOUR FUTURE SELF CAN UNLOCK HOPE

National Trust is encouraging supporters to write letters to their future selves about their climate concerns. Here's how doing so can help focus your mind and benefit the wider community.

This year's heatwaves and energy crisis have amplified national conversations about the climate emergency. They have brought home the urgency of climate breakdown and the scale of the challenge we face to avert its worst effects, and to protect and restore nature.

The Climate Coalition, with support from the National Trust, is launching Letters to Tomorrow, an initiative giving people the chance to share their worries about the climate crisis by writing letters to their future selves.

"Sitting down to write a letter with others feels more worthwhile and important," says a social scientist. "Knowing you're part of a community is all the more validating, and there's something motivating about doing it together. Given the scale of the challenges we're facing, it's easy to feel helpless and hopeless. But we know from history that individuals can make a difference, and that people-power can change the course of history."

Writing a letter to your future self can also give you a fresh perspective on the crisis. "Most of us spend our time absorbed with things that have already happened, or that might happen to us. We tend to either overlook where we are, or get mired in the present and can't see beyond it. Writing a letter to your future self is about taking the time to make a decision about what direction you're heading in, and where you want to arrive."

"When you have to formulate your own answer about what you care about and why, and put your thoughts into words, it's very decisive. It allows you to express a clear, purposeful intention. It can also help to galvanise your own efforts by reminding you what matters most and boost your motivation."

The National Trust hopes Letters to Tomorrow will reinforce the message that the people of the UK care about their planet and want the government to work towards protecting and restoring nature, for now and for future generations.

"Environmental citizenship is often linked to a desire to create a more moral and caring society, focusing on the benefits of taking action. And the actions taken by young climate activists are inspiring adults to embrace campaigns such as Letters to Tomorrow. Even if it moves just a handful of people, it'll be worth doing. And I think we need to be reminded, sometimes, that other people *do* care – because it's hope and empathy that will change the world."

Adapted from *The Guardian*September 2022
(441 words)

CLIMATE PROTESTS: WHEN SOUP AND MASHED POTATOES ARE THROWN, CAN THE EARTH WIN?

First it was cake smeared on the Mona Lisa in Paris, then tomato soup splattered across a van Gogh in London, and then, on Sunday, liquefied mashed potatoes hurled at a Monet in a museum in Potsdam.

What these actions shared [...] was the intentions of the protesters behind them. Desperate to end complacency about the climate crisis and to pressure governments to stop the extraction and burning of fossil fuels, they said they had resorted to such high-profile tactics because little else has worked.

None of the paintings were harmed, as all were encased in protective glass. But the actions went viral and set off an international storm of outrage and debate.

[...] For the climate activists, the protests amounted to wins, insofar as they nabbed far more attention than anything they'd undertaken yet. Despite decades of lobbying, petitions, marches and civil disobedience, planet-heating fossil fuel emissions are at an all-time high, and the window to avert further climate catastrophe is closing.

"We tried sitting in the roads, we tried blocking oil terminals, and we got virtually zero press coverage, yet the thing that gets the most press is chucking some tomato soup on a piece of glass covering a masterpiece," said Mel Carrington, a spokeswoman for Just Stop Oil, the group behind the Oct. 14 soup attack on van Gogh's "Sunflowers" at the National Gallery in London.

[...] Stephen Duncombe, a professor at New York University and co-founder of the Center for Artistic Activism, a nonprofit group that trains activists, said the focus of much commentary had made him question the efficacy of the protests.

"Are they talking about food being thrown at art or are they talking about how carbon-based fuels are going to extinguish life on the planet?" he said. "If the message getting across is activists doing crazy stuff, does it help the cause or not?"

Yet Heather Alberro, a lecturer in global sustainable development at Nottingham Trent University, said such attention-grabbing actions were all but inevitable given that conventional means of protest have largely failed. [...] "We're at a moment where we need every tool in the shed," she said. "If you're more outraged by throwing soup on a painting than governments investing in fossil fuels, that says a lot." [...]

Benjamin Sovacool, a professor of earth and the environment at Boston University, said the most effective social movements employed sustained and intense pressure for long periods of time, and that one measure of an action's success was how much it builds a coalition or alienates people. While the museum protests were polarizing, he said, "At least we're talking about it."

Adapted from *The New York Times* October 2022 (446 words)

COMMUNITY GARDENS BENEFIT THOSE WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES AND MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

The pandemic became a time to explore new hobbies. While some were definitely more beneficial than others, one especially health-centric practice has exhibited staying power: gardening.

During the pandemic, 18.3 million people chose to start gardening, and 89% of them plan to continue gardening post-pandemic, according to the National Gardening Survey.

In urban areas, gardening and farming on rooftops and in community settings began taking off well before Covid-19. As more city-dwellers are incorporating gardening into their lives, they're also seeing some major mental health benefits as well.

Gardening, in general, has proven to be an incredible practice for relieving stress. And studies show that community gardens are an efficient and affordable method of promoting physical health and mental well-being.

When it comes to general health, happiness and mental health, researchers have found that community gardeners have significantly better outcomes than their neighbors who don't partake in gardening activities.

A small study that looked at urban rooftop gardening found that the practice was associated with a greater sense of purpose and social inclusion, emotional and physical well-being, and general quality of life for individuals living with intellectual disabilities or mental health disorders.

A horticultural therapist treats patients through experiential therapies on a working farm. His program is rooted in the healing power of social engagement and community, as residents dedicate up to 20 hours a week doing work on the farm that aligns with their interests, whether that's growing and preparing food, gardening and landscaping, caring for animals, or creating art.

"By contributing to the community, residents are empowered and their dreams and aspirations awakened, helping set them on the path to mental health recovery," the therapist says. "They are learning how to be a part of something bigger than themselves. The work helps them to get out of their own heads and engage in something meaningful to them and others."

He sees the work being done in the gardens and greenhouses as especially therapeutic. The plants can only thrive when the right preparation, weeding, and pruning is taken care of. This process becomes a strong metaphor for the mental healing journey.

The mental benefits of community gardens also come from their ability to provide safe spaces that foster socialization and common purpose.

Gardening, and nature in general, can provide an opportunity for strong bonding.

"Running into people, sharing a moment of awe or a gardening tool or tip, and sharing the produce you raise are part of why gardening feels good. I think of community gardens as cooperatives, filled with teamwork and long-term vision," the founder of an American urban garden says.

Adapted from theconversation.com July 2022 (443 words)

COUNTRIES PUSH TO UNDERMINE BAN ON COMMERCIAL WHALING

A 40-year-old ban on commercial whaling is in danger after "misleading" resolutions were put forward at the International Whaling Commission (IWC) meeting in Portorož, Slovenia.

The wildlife protection organisations OceanCare and Humane Society International said proposals by pro-whaling countries, including Antigua and Barbuda, could reverse progress made by the IWC.

Antigua and Barbuda have submitted a resolution seeking to reopen a formal debate on commercial whaling. It also co-sponsored another resolution with Cambodia, Guinea and the Gambia arguing the fishing practice could contribute to food security and address poverty. Members are expected to vote on the resolutions on Tuesday.

Nicolas Entrup, OceanCare's director of international relations, dismissed the concept of sustainable whaling as "ridiculous". If passed, he said, Antigua and Barbuda's resolutions would "reverse" progress made in 2018 towards a more conservation-focused IWC.

"Instead of losing precious time with decade-old debates about fabricated scenarios like 'sustainable whaling' and false solutions to food security, the IWC should urgently take up the real pressing issues: climate change and plastic pollution," Entrup said.

At the last meeting of its 88-member countries in Brazil in 2018, the IWC rejected a proposal by Japan to lift the ban on commercial whaling, which Tokyo said could be done sustainably. [...]

Japan, which had tried for many years to lift the ban, left the commission the year after the 2018 meeting and is no longer bound by the restriction.

Commercial whaling in the 19th and early 20th centuries brought the mammals to the brink of extinction.

Wendy Higgins, director at Humane Society International said: "People assume the whaling ban, which has saved the lives of hundreds and thousands of cetaceans, is done and dusted. But the ban is in jeopardy as long as there are nations in the IWC who will vote to return to whaling."

Higgins described the resolution on "sustainable whaling" as misleading and said: "I hope whale-friendly nations will vote against the biggest threat to the conservation of cetaceans that we have seen for a long time."

Jiří Mach, the commissioner who is responsible for coordinating the position for the EU-member states, said it was "absolutely clear" that the position of the EU and its member states was to "support the maintenance and full implementation of the moratorium on commercial whaling in the schedule and to oppose any proposal which could undermine the moratorium or potentially lead to threats to whale stocks".

The resolutions come as the IWC faces financial difficulties after the departure of Japan, the Covid pandemic and global economic problems. A quarter of the 88 countries that make up the commission have not paid annual dues that the IWC says are "critical" to its continued mandate. [...]

Adapted from *theguardian.org* October 2022 (453 words)

DAMIEN HIRST BURNS HIS OWN ART AFTER SELLING NFTS

Damien Hirst has begun burning hundreds of his own artworks after selling a series of nonfungible tokens (NFTs). The artist told buyers who bought pieces from his latest collection to choose either the physical artwork or the NFT representing it.

Those who chose the NFTs were told their corresponding physical piece would be destroyed.

Asked how he felt to be burning the works, Hirst said: "It feels good, better than I expected." It has been estimated the works being burned are collectively worth almost £10 million.

Hirst launched his first NFT collection last year, which was made up of 10,000 NFTs, corresponding to 10,000 original pieces of art. London's Newport Street Gallery said 5,149 buyers opted for the original artworks while 4,851 chose the NFTs.

The NFTs, which depicted colourful spots, reportedly sold for \$2,000 each.

Livestreaming the event, Hirst deposited individual pieces into fireplaces in the gallery as onlookers watched. "A lot of people think I'm burning millions of dollars of art but I'm not," Hirst said. "I'm completing the transformation of these physical artworks into NFTs by burning the physical versions. The value of art, digital or physical, which is hard to define at the best of times, will not be lost; it will be transferred to the NFT as soon as they are burnt."

The artworks were created in 2016 and each is numbered, titled, stamped and signed. Before Hirst burned each artwork, he showed it to a camera to log its unique code to keep track of every piece that had been burnt.

Many have criticised Hirst for burning his own valuable artworks during a cost of living crisis. Hirst, who is no stranger to what some critics describe as publicity stunts, rose to fame during the 1990s and is one of Britain's most controversial artists. Much of his work has divided critics, including one featuring a dead shark floating in formaldehyde, another consisting of a bisected cow and calf or a platinum cast of an 18th-century human skull encrusted with diamonds.

NFTs are "one-of-a-kind" assets in the digital world that can be bought and sold like any other piece of property, but which have no tangible form of their own.

The digital tokens can be thought of as certificates of ownership for virtual or physical assets. Traditional works of art such as paintings are valuable precisely because they are one of a kind.

But digital files can be easily and endlessly duplicated. With NFTs, artwork can be "tokenised" to create a digital certificate of ownership that can be bought and sold.

NFTs soared in popularity last year as crypto-rich speculators sought to cash in on rising prices but sales volumes have fallen more recently.

Adapted from *BBC News. com* October 2022 (459 words)

'DEVASTATED' UK STUDENTS FORCED TO LIVE IN NEIGHBOURING CITIES

When 18-year-old Jessie Smith netted the top grades she needed last month to study at Manchester University, she was delighted. She didn't know then that all the university's student halls would be full, and she would be forced to accept accommodation in Liverpool.

Sarah Smith, Jessie's mother, who works as a PA in Sheffield, said she feels "frightened and disgusted" about her daughter living so far from the university of Manchester has offered £100 a week to cover commuting costs, but she feels this "misses the point". She doesn't want her daughter to be a 40-minute train ride away from the city she signed up for.

"There are all these fantastic activities in freshers' week. I don't want her worrying about how to get home afterwards," she said. "University is about getting to know people and how can she do that if she is not even in Manchester?"

Smith is not alone. A week ago, Manchester confirmed it still had more than 350 freshers waiting for a place in halls in the city. Last week, after offering £2,500 to anyone within commuting distance who would switch to living at home, a spokesperson for the university said there were now 75 freshers still waiting for somewhere to live.

He added that they were "prioritising working on more support" for students such as Jessie living in Liverpool, and would be linking them with a hall in Manchester. The university is rushing to finish refurbishing alternative accommodation, and says it is "very likely" that students will be able to move into the city in a few months.

Down the road, Manchester Metropolitan University, whose halls are also oversubscribed, has offered £100 a week to first years willing to accept accommodation in Liverpool or Huddersfield.

But popular though the city is among students, Manchester University is quick to point out that this isn't just a local issue. The university told students and parents that there has been "unprecedented demand for university accommodation across the UK this year."

Universities have long been expecting the demographic surge in the number of 18-year-olds that is now under way, but Manchester points out that they weren't prepared for the pandemic and three years in which far more students achieved the high A-level marks they ask for. Pressure from record results last year meant many students deferred their places to this year.

New students in cities including Bristol, Glasgow and Edinburgh are reporting similar anxious struggles to find somewhere to live.

Nick Hillman, director of the Higher Education Policy Institute think tank, said students who find last-minute places through clearing often miss the boat on university-owned accommodation.

Adapted from *The Guardian*September 2022
(459 words)

DO NOT BRING YOUR 'WHOLE SELF' TO WORK

For those lucky enough to have worked from home over the past two and a half years or whatever it was, it's back to the office time. (...) And some people can't wait. But for those less excited, reluctant to face the creepy supervisor they've been avoiding (...), the portion of the job they've been faking, here's a nifty tip for easing the transition: Do *not* "bring your whole self" to work. (...) Defy the latest catchphrase of human resources and leave a good portion of you back home.

So what exactly does it even *mean*? According to TED talker and corporate consultant Mike Robbins, author of a book called "Bring Your Whole Self to Work," it means being able "to fully show up" and "allow ourselves to be truly seen" in the workplace. Per Robbins, it's "essential" to create a work environment "where people feel safe enough to bring all of who they are to work." (...) In this new workplace, you don't have to keep your head down and do your job. Instead, you "bring your whole self to work" — personality flaws, vulnerabilities, idiosyncratic mantras and all.

Perhaps you've heard of whole self's cousin, the "authentic self" also urged to head into the office. (...) "That means acknowledging your personality, including the quirky bits, and bringing your interests, hopes, dreams, and even fears with you, even if they don't seem relevant to your work."

In other words, for the world outside the H.R. department, the phrase "bringing your whole self to work" is almost guaranteed to induce a vomit emoji. Rarely has a phrase of corporate jargon raised so much ire and rolled as many eyeballs with everyone I've talked to about the subject.

- (...) In recent years, the "whole self" movement has gained momentum in part because it dovetails with fortified corporate diversity, equity and inclusion programs. Both purport to make employees feel comfortable expressing aspects of their identity in the workplace, even when irrelevant to the work at hand.
- (...) So here's an alternative: Let's all bring only or at least primarily the worky parts. (...) It's that old-fashioned thing we used to call "being professional." After all, the office isn't the only place you exist why should they get to have *all* of you? If you only bring the best parts of you or at the very least, the part of you that does the actual work, you're more likely to get rewarded for it.

Nor is it fair to ask the workplace to deal with all your hopes, dreams and problems. (...) During the pandemic, many of us inadvertently shared a lot more of ourselves than we might have otherwise. (...)

But not all people are comfortable having their co-workers know so much about them.

DREAM JOB OR PASSION TRAP?

At 25, Andrew was soaring up the career ladder as a pastry chef at a Michelin-starred restaurant in Scotland. He was in a role that he had worked towards – and wanted – for years. But, at the height of his career, working in his dream job, he quit. He'd walked away, not just from the job he'd worked so hard for, but from the whole hospitality industry. The tipping point came when he realised none of the exhausting work required was worth it. "From 19 to 25, I just sort of sacrificed," he says. "Everyone else was out having a great time and I was basically a slave in the kitchen." Throughout his career, he realised, he had felt overworked, underappreciated and underpaid.

Most workers have always hoped for roles that coincide with their interests and passions; swapping the office grind for that longed-for job in a bakery, or fun role at a videogame company sounds like a no-brainer. Yet this 'do what you love' narrative comes with drawbacks. Many people find that their dream jobs require more work, under worse conditions. Others discover that the industries they idolise trade on workers' passions to keep pay low. In the face of these pressures, some workers find themselves asking whether the dream job is really worth it after all.

These days, more than ever, the idea that happiness and success are linked to working in a 'cool' job is omnipresent. But career redirections to get a dream job may not always work out as people hope, particularly if employers take advantage of their workers' passions. "Employees who love their job or really value their work are willing to put up with harsher conditions than others, such as non-standard working hours or low pay," says Laura Giurge, a professor of behavioural science. "And to some extent, the employers might know this and thus ask those dedicated and passionate employees to take on additional work or abide by dreadful conditions." This practice of passion-exploitation is particularly prominent in creative industries in the UK where most jobs – such as journalist, fashion stylist, musician and game designer – fall below the annual average salary.

Andrew says he recognised this phenomenon from the start in the hospitality sector. "When I started, my ambition was to get that Michelin-starred level," he says. "So, I decided that the money didn't matter, which obviously it does." This initial disregard for financial security is something career coach Eleanor Tweddell sees often among her clients who are looking for a more fulfilling job. It's often an attitude she has to coach them out of. "We do actually work for money," she says. "There's no shame in that. Most of us work because we need the money."

Adapted from *The BBC*October 2022
(455 words)

DUTCH CITY BECOMES WORLD'S FIRST TO BAN MEAT ADVERTS IN PUBLIC

A Dutch city will become the first in the world to ban meat adverts from public spaces in an effort to reduce consumption and greenhouse gas emissions.

Haarlem, which lies to the west of Amsterdam and has a population of about 160,000, will enact the prohibition from 2024 after meat was added to a list of products deemed to contribute to the climate crisis.

Adverts will not be allowed on Haarlem's buses, shelters and screens in public spaces, prompting complaints from the meat sector that the municipality is "going too far in telling people what's best for them".

Recent studies suggest global food production is responsible for one-third of all planetheating emissions, with the use of animals for meat accounting for twice the pollution of producing plant-based foods.

Forests that absorb carbon dioxide are felled for the grazing of animals while fertilisers used for growing their feed are rich in nitrogen, which can contribute to air and water pollution, climate change and ozone depletion. Livestock also produces large quantities of methane, a powerful greenhouse gas.

Ziggy Klazes, a councillor from the GroenLinks party, who drafted the motion banning meat advertising, said she had not known the city would be the world's first to enforce such a policy when she proposed it.

She told the Haarlem105 radio channel: "We are not about what people are baking and roasting in their own kitchen; if people want to continue eating meat, fine ... We can't tell people there's a climate crisis and encourage them to buy products that are part of the cause.

"Of course, there are a lot of people who find the decision outrageous and patronising, but there are also a lot of people who think it's fine.

"It is a signal – if it is picked up nationally, that would only be very nice. There are many groups of GroenLinks who think it is a good idea and want to try it."

The ban also covers holiday flights, fossil fuels and cars that run on fossil fuels. The ban is delayed until 2024 due to existing contracts with companies that sell the products.

There is some opposition within Haarlem's council to the move, with critics arguing that it restricts freedom of expression.

Sander van den Raadt, the leader of the Trots Haarlem group, said: "It is remarkable that the municipality of Haarlem is holding a large poster campaign that you can be yourself in Haarlem and love whoever you want, but if you like meat instead of soft grass, 'the patronising brigade' will come and tell you that you are completely wrong."

Adapted from *The Guardian* September 2022 (448 words)

EATING RIGHT TO AVOID CATASTROPHE

Devastating pandemics such as HIV/AIDS, Ebola, and COVID-19, all of which likely originated in wildlife, are reminders of how environmental destruction and infectious diseases are intertwined. [...]

From the perspective of individual consumers, the global population needs to shift to diets low in livestock-sourced foods to stem human encroachment on tropical areas of wilderness. Second, there is a need to curb wildmeat demand in tropical cities.

Closer to the equator, biodiversity becomes richer. These tropical regions have historically seen less development and are typically teeming with wildlife and carbon stored in the form of abundant vegetation. But in recent decades, agricultural frontiers have expanded rapidly into tropical forests. This unprecedented expansion of farmland for grazing and feed production may be increasing contact between wildlife, people, and livestock, which may enhance the likelihood of pathogens jumping from one to the other. [...]

In addition, if the human population continues to grow and adopt diets rich in livestock-sourced foods, it's unlikely that global warming can be kept well below 2°C and that the rate of species extinction can be slowed. This is because livestock production has the largest environmental footprint of all food production systems in terms of land and water use, greenhouse gas emissions, and pollution of terrestrial and aquatic systems.

Asking everyone to become vegan is not realistic or even desirable. But flexitarian diets could feed the growing world population without further expanding farmland into tropical wildlands and with reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. [...]

Such a dietary shift would have other public health benefits too, such as reducing overweight and obesity, diabetes, heart diseases, and colorectal cancer.

Measures available to governments, civil society, and businesses to promote healthier and more sustainable levels of consumption of livestock-sourced foods include education in schools, training of physicians and paediatricians, eco-labels on food packaging, taxation of meat and dairy products, a statutory duty for retail and hospitality sectors and food procurement for workplaces, schools, and hospitals.

But in the absence of effective state law enforcement and sustained campaigns to reduce consumer demand, bans do not work. In fact, consumers' strong preferences for wild-meat mean that they may continue to purchase it despite price increases induced by a ban, boosting black markets. [...]

Dietary shifts away from livestock-sourced foods and reductions in tropical urban wildmeat demand are crucial to simultaneously protect the environment, safeguard resource-limited vulnerable communities, and reduce the risk of further disease outbreaks and pandemics.

We all share the responsibility to act now to prevent pollution, floods, drought, famine, and epidemics from becoming increasingly prevalent.

Adapted from *The Scientist* October 2022 (443 words)

ELECTRIC VEHICLES START TO ENTER THE CAR-BUYING MAINSTREAM

While sales are still skewed toward affluent buyers, more people are choosing electric vehicles to save money.

The first wave of people who bought electric cars tended to be affluent, environmentally aware technology enthusiasts who lived in California.

But now, electric vehicles are starting to go mainstream in the United States after making earlier inroads into the mass markets in China and Europe.

Battery-powered cars now make up the fastest-growing segment of the auto market, with sales jumping 70 percent in the first nine months of the year from the same period in 2021, according to data from Cox Automotive, a research and consulting firm. Sales of conventional cars and trucks fell 15 percent in the same period. Buyers of electric vehicles in 2021 were more likely to be women and tended to be younger than in 2019, according to Cox data.

Gasoline-powered cars, of course, still account for most of the new car market. But electric vehicles' share of new vehicle sales almost doubled in the first nine months of the year, to over 5 percent from nearly 3 percent in the same period in 2021, according to Cox.

That growth could have been stronger if automakers had been able to make more electric cars. Many manufacturers have long waiting lists because production has been limited by shortages of computer chips, batteries and other parts.

Buyers of battery-powered cars are concerned about climate change, but lower costs are also a powerful attraction. Driving on electricity is generally much cheaper than gasoline. Some drivers said they were using energy they generated from rooftop solar panels to charge their cars, potentially lowering costs even further.

Electric car buyers used words like "love" and "awesome" to describe their vehicles. Many said they would never buy a gasoline car again, but many others said they intended to keep at least one conventional vehicle, because traveling long distances by electric car can be inconvenient and sometimes impossible because of difficulties in finding charging stations.

Electric vehicles are now becoming popular in places other than where they took off, like California, where 39 percent of all U.S. electric vehicles were registered as of June. Registrations outside California jumped 50 percent in 2021, compared with a 32 percent increase in the state.

In the long run, much wider use of electric vehicles will require many more affordable models. But it may be a while before there are enough affordable models, including used cars, which sell in greater numbers than new vehicles. Yet, many buyers are concluding that electric vehicles make economic sense even when they cost thousands of dollars more than similar gasoline vehicles.

Adapted from *New York Times* November 2022 (444 words)

ELON MUSK DEBUTS TESLA ROBOT, OPTIMUS, CALLING IT A 'FUNDAMENTAL TRANSFORMATION'

Tesla unveiled a prototype of its humanoid robot, dubbed Optimus, launching a bet on artificial intelligence that aims to reshape the future of physical work.

The robot walked onstage and demonstrated its range of motion, waving hello and pumping its arms in the air. [...]

Tesla CEO Elon Musk said he wants the robot to be manufactured at scale, sold for less than \$20,000, and encompass core physical capabilities, such as the ability to move all fingers independently, and opposable thumbs with degrees of freedom so it can operate tools.

"This means a future of abundance," he said. "A future where there is no poverty. Where you can have whatever you want in terms of products and services. It really is a fundamental transformation of civilization as we know it," he said.

The company said it designed the robot with the same mass production targets in mind as when it would design a car, so the robot can be built as quickly as possible at scale. Tesla has said it could draw on the robot to perform tasks in its factories, which employ thousands of manufacturing workers.

This demonstration shows how Musk wants to solve one of the toughest problems in robotics and artificial intelligence: how to make a machine that can replace a human. [...]

The Tesla bot is part of the company's long-term effort to introduce a new era of automation, in which computer algorithms engage in humanlike decision-making and advance their knowledge independent of human input.

As the country grapples with worker shortages that have left a huge percentage of manufacturing jobs unfilled, companies are dreaming up new ways to automate work previously performed by humans. The efforts have faced criticism from organized labor but have also garnered acceptance when they can improve worker safety and open up new opportunities.

A company cracking the code on humanoid robots would certainly be a groundbreaking — if controversial — advancement in the effort. If it materializes, Optimus could initially disrupt manufacturing jobs that make up roughly 10 percent of U.S. labor, or \$500 billion in yearly wages, the managing partner of Loup Ventures, wrote in an analysis. [...]

Musk has said he fears artificial intelligence could one day outsmart humans and endanger us, citing AI as the biggest threat to civilization. But he said that by building the Tesla robot, the company could ensure it would be safe. [...]

Like some other Tesla products before it, the Tesla robot did not have a specific product rollout timeline. But answering a question about when it would be available to the general public, Musk said people could "probably receive" an Optimus within three to five years.

Adapted from *The Washington Post* September 2022 (456 words)

ELON MUSK GIVES ULTIMATUM TO TWITTER EMPLOYEES

Twitter's new owner Elon Musk has given employees until Thursday evening to commit to "extremely hardcore" work or else leave the company, according to a copy of a late-night internal email sent by the billionaire. "Going forward, to build a breakthrough Twitter 2.0 and succeed in an increasingly competitive world, we will need to be extremely hardcore," Musk wrote in the memo. "This will mean working long hours at high intensity. Only exceptional performance will constitute a passing grade. So whatever decision you make, thank you for your efforts to make Twitter successful."

Musk goes on to outline how the new Twitter will be "much more engineering-driven" and then gives staff an ultimatum. "If you are sure that you want to be part of the new Twitter, please click yes on the link below," directing staff to what appears to be an online form. Musk said any employee who has not done so by 5 p.m. on Thursday will receive three-month severance.

The email comes as Musk has publicly and privately clashed with Twitter employees over his approach to running the company. It also comes after Musk pushed out Twitter's top executives, eliminated the board of directors and most of its public relations team, and laid off roughly half the staff, reducing its workforce to around 3,700 employees.

Musk said that he expects the "fundamental organizational restructuring" at Twitter to be finished by the end of this week. He added that while he has spent most of his time at Twitter rather than his other companies in the past few weeks, he doesn't expect that to be the case forever. "I expect to reduce my time at Twitter, and find somebody else to run Twitter, over time," Musk said.

Some Twitter employees told CNN ahead of the deadline on Thursday that they had planned to reject the ultimatum, citing a toxic work environment they say the billionaire has introduced: "The email from Musk feels like a punch in the gut because no matter how you feel about wanting to stay or go, those decisions are more than just 24 hours. I don't want to sacrifice my mental health and family life to make the richest man in the world richer," said one of the employees who plans to exit the company.

But the decision may not be so easy for others. It comes during a difficult period for the tech industry, following mass layoffs and hiring freeze announcements at many major firms including Meta and Amazon. Employees working in the United States from other countries could also risk losing their work visas if they leave the company.

Adapted from *cnn.com* November 2022 (449 words)

ENERGY CRISIS: WHY IS THE UK THE WORST AFFECTED COUNTRY IN WESTERN EUROPE?

Rising energy bills have pushed up prices across the continent, and contributed to global inflation. While other countries are struggling too, winter blackouts and widespread fuel poverty are becoming increasingly pressing concerns within Britain.

[...] Now, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has published data which also suggests that the UK is struggling more than most of Europe. What does the data say? The IMF looked at how the energy crisis will impact the rest of 2022 by examining the fossil fuel prices in May. It found that the UK is set to lose the highest proportion of its spending power this year among all the countries in western Europe, due to the amount its population has to pay for energy bills.

The UK will lose 8.27% of its spending power this year. [...] Out of the whole of Europe, only Estonia and Czech Republic households are facing a larger decline in household budget than the UK.

As homes across the country have already realised, higher energy bills mean other goods are becoming more expensive too, as businesses pass the additional costs onto the consumer. The IMF claims this will reduce British disposable income in 2022 by a further 2%. The disparity between the rich and poorer households in the UK is also particularly alarming – the poorest 10% will end up spending around 17.8% of their budget on energy this year. The richest 10%, on the other hand, will only have to spend 6.1% on their energy bills. This echoes previous findings from the Institute for Fiscal Studies that lower-income households face higher inflation rates, as they have to spend more on gas and electricity.

[...] Why is the UK particularly vulnerable to the crisis? UK homes are usually not very energy-efficient, and notoriously drafty. This means it costs more to heat British households, especially in the winter. [...] Most British homes use gas for heat (the most expensive form of power), because the UK was previously so dependent on the North Sea gas fields. These are now depleted.

[...] Is there a solution? Yes – the UK could start by insulating households across the country and prioritising heat pumps over gas boilers. Placing the emphasis on wind and solar energy would also help reduce the UK's dependency on fossil fuels, and renewable energy sources are approximately nine times cheaper than gas. [...] But Downing Street has not delivered any significant insulation strategy recently, and has been reluctant to act on onshore wind farms – although Boris Johnson has tried to put the emphasis on nuclear power during his final days in office.

Adapted from *The Huffington Post* September 2022 (444 words)

ENORMOUS EMISSIONS GAP BETWEEN TOP 1% AND POOREST

The top 1% of earners in the UK are responsible for the same amount of carbon dioxide emissions in a single year as the bottom 10% over more than two decades.

The findings highlight the enormous gaps between what have been termed "the polluting elite", whose high-carbon lifestyles fuel the climate crisis, and the majority of people, even in developed countries, whose carbon footprints are far smaller.

It would take 26 years for a low earner to produce as much carbon dioxide as the richest do in a year.

The UK is not alone in having such a gulf between high and low earners on greenhouse gas emissions. A growing body of research points to the existence of a "polluting elite" whose lifestyles bear little relation to those of the majority of people. This holds true in developed and developing countries, where the poorest tend to be responsible for a tiny amount of greenhouse gas emissions, while those with most wealth are comparable in their impact with the elite of rich countries.

Flying, driving large, expensive cars, owning multiple homes and travelling between them, eating a diet rich in meat and imports, buying more clothes and imported luxury goods are all reasons for the richest generating far higher carbon footprints. Poorer people tend to stay closer to home in small houses and use public transport, while their expenditure on luxuries and items such as "fast fashion" is much smaller.

The actions taken by most people, such as turning off lights to save energy, will make no difference if the government doesn't address the fact it's the rich who are disproportionately responsible for the climate crisis.

However, the government has preferred to reduce taxes on activities such as flying and driving, despite their environmental impact.

Peter Newell, professor of international relations at the University of Sussex, told the Guardian the massive gap should be addressed. The most effective way for the government to tackle climate change would be to properly tax the rich, through a well-targeted carbon tax scheme.

If the UK had started taxing carbon emissions from just the top 1% of income groups two decades ago, the effort could have raised about £126bn to retrofit nearly 8m homes, keeping us warm this winter and bringing down fuel bills, while providing critical support for renewable energy and making us less dependent on Putin's gas.

Taxes on the most polluting activities could target only the rich and need not add to the cost of living crisis for the great majority of people. They could also help to plug the yawning gap in the UK's public finances and be a key lever in driving the transition to a cleaner and greener economy.

Adapted from *The Guardian* November 2022 (458 words)

ENVIRONMENT SECTOR HAS FAILED TO BECOME MORE INCLUSIVE, STUDY SUGGESTS

The environment sector has failed to act on its ambitions to become more inclusive, suggests new research that finds just one in 20 organisations are enacting plans to increase ethnic diversity.

According to a sector-wide survey, out of 44 environment charities, 84% had considered or were taking action over a lack of inclusion, but only 4% said they had a consistently implemented action plan. Three-quarters of environmental charity executives and trustees thought increasing diversity would have a positive impact on the sector. But while most leaders agreed it should be a top priority for the sector, few felt it actually was.

The research was commissioned by a coalition of environmental charities (...) to inform a new collective strategy aimed at increasing diversity in the sector. It calls for members to take collective actions to implement sector-wide unconscious bias training, in-depth research on racism, and programmes to draft more people of colour into leadership roles.

According to the coalition's chief executive, "Too many people feel excluded from nature and too many people still feel excluded from the nature sector. Our research shows that there's a great appetite for change in the environment movement. People want to be part of an inclusive, diverse and socially progressive movement. They know that saving nature will depend on the talents and energy of everyone working together. It also shows that despite this conviction, many organisations are still in the starting blocks on diversity and inclusion."

As in many sectors, the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020 inspired fresh urgency to efforts to diversify the environment professions, and to address its systemic biases. Recent research has also shown how people from ethnic minorities are more likely to be affected by environmental harms. As understanding has grown, the narrative around environmental issues has shifted to encompass racial and social injustices, and a sense that the environment sector must diversify to tackle them.

But in 2021, just 4.8% of environment professionals had an ethnic minority heritage, compared with 12.6% of the workforce overall, according to official figures. Only farming had lower ethnic minority representation. (...) Most minority ethnic professionals in the sector said an inability to take up volunteering or low-paid jobs in order to gain experience had been a barrier to entry. They complained of a lack of clear career progression, and of arriving at work to find a white colleague had been promoted to a vacant role they did not even know existed.

Forty-two organisations have so far signed up to the new strategy, including Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace. The chief executive of one charity said: "We are in a nature and climate emergency, and we save nature through people, all people."

Adapted from *The Guardian* October 2022 (448 words)

EXECUTIONS AND DEATH SENTENCES IN U.S. REACH HISTORIC LOWS IN 2021

In 1999, 279 people were sentenced to death in the United States, and 98 prisoners were executed. That year saw the most executions since capital punishment was reinstated in 1976.

Things have changed.

In 2021, the number of people sentenced to death was down to 18, and the number of prisoners executed this year was 11. The number of executions was the fewest since 1988, and the number of death sentences equals last year's total for the fewest in the modern era of the death penalty.

And when Virginia outlawed the death penalty in March, after having executed more prisoners than any other state, it created a majority of 26 states that have either banned capital punishment or imposed a moratorium on its use, according to statistics released Thursday by the Death Penalty Information Center.

The numbers marked a continuing decline in America's desire to execute convicted murderers. A Gallup poll from earlier this year found public support for the death penalty at a 50-year low. Although 80 percent of those surveyed in 1994 supported capital punishment, this year only 54 percent said they were "in favor of the death penalty for a person convicted of murder."

"There's a consistent national trend moving away from the death penalty," said Robert Dunham, the center's executive director. He cited two major factors: "There's been a paradigm shift about punishment in general, a social shift away from excessive punishment, and there's been this growing awareness about flaws with the death penalty, in particular," whether it's the wrongful conviction of defendants, the racial disparities in its use or the high cost of the trial and appeals process.

New research by the center found that 186 prisoners since 1973 have been exonerated after being sentenced to die. "We now know for every 8.3 executions, there's an exoneration," Dunham said. "That's an appalling failure rate. If we read that about any other public policy, it would not be tolerated."

Dunham added: "It is now unquestionably true that people who were innocent have been executed, and their innocence has never been discovered."

The center found that the death penalty is becoming geographically isolated, with just three states — Alabama, Oklahoma and Texas — accounting for a majority of both death sentences and executions last year. In 2021, Texas and the federal government — which executed 13 prisoners during the last six months of the Trump administration — both performed three executions, while Oklahoma had two and Missouri, Alabama and Mississippi each had one. There were no executions west of Texas for a seventh straight year.

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

FEDERAL JUDGE BLOCKS NEW YORK GUN LAW

Between a court challenge and the hostility of many sheriffs, New York's effort to provide a model for new concealed-carry legislation could be teetering after the Supreme Court struck down a stricter law.

Gun deaths have been rising in the US lately. Homicides and suicides involving guns, which soared in 2020, the first year of the pandemic, continued rising in 2021, reaching the highest rates in three decades. And mass shootings in 2022 show that gun violence is a persistent American problem. Philadelphia, for example, is one of the few major American cities where it truly is as bad as it has ever been. This is why alarms have sounded about gun violence across the country over the past two years.

However, Federal Judge Suddaby has just blocked large portions of a new New York gun law, considering that the state's new restrictions on carrying guns in public trampled on the rights of New Yorkers. He said that New York's attempts to bar guns in a number of places deemed "sensitive" — including museums, theaters, stadiums, libraries, places offering services to children and anywhere alcohol is served — appeared impermissible. As mandated by the Supreme Court, his analysis depended primarily on comparing the new restrictions with laws that regulated guns in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Unsurprisingly, New York authorities blasted Judge Suddaby's ruling. But his decision illustrates the longstanding battle lines in the debate over the Second Amendment, giving a significant advantage to those who seek to carry guns in public. This is a signal to all the states currently enacting gun laws that the chances of those laws surviving in court are very slim.

Meanwhile, Eric Ruben, a law professor at Southern Methodist University in Dallas who specializes in gun regulation, stressed the fact that New York City needs modern-day gun laws responding to modern-day problems - which can't be evaluated on the basis of 18th- or 19th-century regulations.

Judge Suddaby also took exception to part of the law that restricts the carrying of guns on private property unless the owner explicitly allows them to be carried, saying that there was no historical analogy.

He did let portions of the law stand, including the 18 hours of training required of permit applicants, and the barring of guns from government buildings, schools and places of worship.

But overall, Judge Suddaby, who was appointed to the court in 2008 by President George W. Bush, said that since the Supreme Court ruling, it had not become easier to obtain a permit to carry guns in New York and that instead, the state had "further reduced a first-class constitutional right".

Adapted from *The New York Times* October 2022 (443 words)

FINLAND WANTS TO TRANSFORM HOW WE MAKE CLOTHES

Petri Alava used to wear pressed suits and leather shoes to work, managing large corporations selling everything from magazines to gardening equipment. [...]

Now he runs a Finnish start-up, Infinited Fiber, and has invested heavily in a technology which can transform textiles that would otherwise be burned or sent to landfills, into a new clothing fibre

Called Infinna, the fibre is already being used by global brands including Patagonia, H&M and Inditex. "It's a premium quality textile fibre, which looks and feels natural - like cotton," says Mr Alava, [...] and it is solving a major waste problem." [...]

To the untrained eye, samples of Infinited Fiber's recycled fibre resemble lambswool; soft, fluffy and cream coloured. The product is produced through a complex, multi-step process which starts with shredding old textiles and removing synthetic materials and dyes, and ends with a new fibre, regenerated from extracted cellulose. [...]

Infinited Fiber has already attracted so much interest in its technology that it recently announced it was investing €400m to build its first commercial-scale factory[...] in Lapland.

The goal is to produce 30,000 tonnes of fibre a year[...]which is equivalent to the fibre needed for approximately 100 million T-shirts. [...]

Infinited Fiber's growth is tied into a wider vision in Finland, which wants to become Europe's leading circular economy, with a focus on reusing and saving resources. [...]

Several other Finnish start-ups are also looking at ways to produce new textile fibres on a big scale, while also cutting down on harmful emissions and chemicals. [...]

But experts say there are a range of challenges facing these new fibre brands as they plot their expansions. One of them underlines that the clothing manufacturing sector has, until recently, been slower than many other industries when it comes to embracing sustainability. [...]

Another issue is whether clothing brands will be able to pass on the additional costs of their new high-tech production techniques on to consumers, especially at a time when the cost of living is spiralling globally. [...]

"Pulp and other alternative fibres can provide diversity for sourcing textile materials and therefore lessen the burden caused by production of more traditional textile raw materials such as cotton," says a leading forest expert for WWF. "However, it depends on the use of energy, all the processes they use and how they use waste materials." [...]

But within the Finnish fibres industry there is a sense of boomtown optimism that the increased use of recycled or reimagined fibres could be an important part of the jigsaw in the battle to limit climate change. [...]

Infinited Fiber's manager believes that if investment continues, the recycled fibres could become mainstream within ten to 15 years.

Adapted from *The Guardian* November 2022 (457 words)

FOOD FIRMS' PLANS FOR 1.5C CLIMATE TARGET FALL SHORT, SAY CAMPAIGNERS

The world's largest food companies, whose products have been linked to the widespread destruction of rainforests, have failed to come up with an adequate strategy to align their business practices with the 1.5C climate target, according to campaigners.

The leading producers of soya beans, palm oil, cocoa and cattle published their roadmap to align with 1.5C earlier this week, promising to develop and publish commodity-specific, time-bound targets on stopping deforestation which will be backed by science and checked each year. The companies include the Brazilian beef firm JBS, the American agricultural firm Cargill and the Singaporean food processing firm Wilmar International.

Land use change is the second biggest driver of global heating behind burning fossil fuels and the biggest cause of biodiversity loss, while halting the destruction of rainforests is a key part of tackling the climate and biodiversity crises. To comply with 1.5C, all land use conversion must stop by 2030 with significant progress made by the middle of the decade, according to scientists.

[...] The disagreement between campaigners and companies is about the date by which firms should stop deforestation. Cristiane Mazzetti, a senior forest campaigner at Greenpeace Brazil, said some of the companies had previously promised to rid deforestation from their supply chains by 2020 and had failed.

"We cannot afford any more greenwashing or reckless behaviour from these companies who profit from the destruction of ecosystems and come up with more delays and inadequate plans to halt and reverse the destruction they drive that will continue to fry the planet," she said.

Malaysia and Indonesia, home to most of the world's palm oil sector, have had success at reducing deforestation in recent years, in part because of better regulation.

Nico Muzi, managing director of the environmental group Madre Brava, said the plan announced at Cop27 did amount to some progress but said the commitment fell short of what was needed, especially in the meat sector. "There are two flagrant omissions: a cutoff date to stop soy-driven deforestation now, and the exclusion of conversion by cattle and soy expansion of the largest savanna region in South America, Brazil's Cerrado," she said.

André Vasconcelos, of Global Canopy, said the plan was encouraging as the companies involved represented more than 60% of Brazilian soy exports, 50% of Brazilian beef and 45% of Indonesia's palm oil exports in 2020, although some of the main producers were missing. But he added that the companies needed to go further for the plan to be credible.

"Tackling deforestation is integral to staying under 1.5C," he said. "Traders need to go further, faster."

Adapted from *BBC.COM* September 2022 (450 words)

FOSSIL FUEL RECRUITERS BANNED FROM UK UNIVERSITY CAREERS SERVICE

Fossil fuel companies have been banned from recruiting students through a university careers service for the first time. The new policy from Birkbeck, University of London, states its careers service "will not hold relationships of any kind with oil, gas or mining companies".

The decision follows a campaign, supported by the student-led group People & Planet, to cut off recruitment pathways to fossil fuel companies. The campaign is now active in dozens of UK universities.

The group said universities have been "propping up the companies most responsible for destroying the planet", while the climate crisis was "the defining issue of most students' current lifetimes".

The campaign is backed by the National Union of Students and the Universities and College Union, which represents academics and support staff. It calls on universities to end all relationships with fossil fuel companies. Student protests have already targeted fossil fuel careers events, including at Oxford University, where students blockaded an event by the mining group Glencore, and at Sheffield University, where a sit-in protest prevented BP and ExxonMobil events.

Birkbeck's new ethical careers policy says it will not allow fossil fuel companies to attend their careers fairs or take part in sponsorships or advertising. The policy also says that "job posts made by or on behalf of oil, gas or mining companies (...) will not be approved by Birkbeck".

Julius Cassebaum, a careers consultant at Birkbeck, said: "As the climate crisis continues, we are proud to help minimise exposure to those industries in any capacity that we can. We hope that our commitment can be a stepping stone for other universities to follow suit soon." (...)

Birkbeck's decision represents "the first domino, which sets the precedent and shows that this is not only a reasonable demand, but an achievable one", said J Clarke of People & Planet.

About 20% of UK universities already ban certain sectors from their careers services, including the tobacco, pornography and gambling industries.

Clarke said banning fossil fuel companies was justified: "First, these jobs are terrible for the planet." Second, the jobs "simply don't make sense" from a student's perspective, since "these are industries that are going to rapidly downsize or cease to exist entirely within the working lifetime of students". Third, Clarke said, almost two-thirds of UK universities have divested their endowment funds from fossil fuels, so it would be hypocritical to allow those companies to recruit students.

Clarke hopes that up to five more universities will announce a fossil-fuel-free careers policy by the end of 2022, and that half will have done so within five years, though Clarke would like progress to be even quicker.

Adapted from *The Guardian* September 2022 (446 words)

FROM DREAM BRIDE TO DOLL FOR BOYS: THE EVOLUTION OF THE BARBIE AD

Black Friday might look pretty pink to parents flooding the nation's Barbie aisles. But even though Barbie is a billion-dollar brand, it's facing stiff competition [...]. So its maker, Mattel, is trying to fight back with new ads intended to freshen Barbie's image.

One ad is part of a high-end collaboration [...] featur[ing] three precocious little kids. That's nothing new for a Barbie ad — except, for the first time, one of them is a boy.

Was there any trepidation at Mattel over casting a boy in the video? An employee working in the company's communications department, says, "No. Barbie is a brand that's all about imagination and storytelling, whether you're a boy or a girl." [...]

And she says to expect more tonal turn around when it comes to Barbie marketing. "You're absolutely going to see the brand push boundaries where we haven't before."

Another new Barbie commercial shows grownups charmed by small girls working as a college professor, a dinosaur expert and the adorable coach of a men's soccer team. Then it turns out they've been acting these roles out with their Barbies the whole time.

But a sociology graduate student says she found that ad to be insufficiently feminist. She acknowledges that Mattel has sold career-themed Barbies for decades, but says many of them, including Paleontology Barbie, are limited special editions. "I think that Barbie is a few steps behind who women are," she says.

To test that theory, NPR showed her a Barbie commercial from 1992, the year she was born. The ad shows three little girls ecstatic about their Teen Talk Barbies. The dolls say things like "I love to shop, don't you?" "Meet me at the mall" and "Do you have a crush on anyone?"

And then there's the Teen Talk Barbie phrase "Math is tough," which was left out of that commercial. That one made an impression on her. She says, "When you see something like this, you realize how far we have come."

That progress is even more apparent when you look at one of the earliest Barbie ads, from 1959. It shows four stiffly posed Barbies in fabulous '50s frocks, and it ends with the line "Someday I'm going to be exactly like you," and a lingering close-up on a Barbie bride. [...]

In the late 1960s, commercials tried to lend Barbie youth credibility by making her more fashionable. "They did pick up on the mod aspect of it, but I don't think there was a civil rights Barbie." Black Barbies *were* sold in the late 1960s, but you wouldn't know it from the ads on TV.

Adapted from *NPR* November 2022 (452 words)

FROM SCIENCE FICTION TO REALITY, 'NO KILL' MEAT MAY BE COMING SOON

Imagine a way to produce meat without slaughtering animals. Instead of raising livestock on farms, [...] a cardiologist, and co-founder of Upside Foods dreamt of a way to "grow" meat in a production facility, by culturing animal cells.

The concept for what's now called "cultivated" meat came to the co-founder when he was working with heart attack patients at the Mayo Clinic more than 15 years ago, growing human heart cells in a lab. It should be possible to grow meat with similar science, he realized.

Scientists could extract cells from an animal via a needle biopsy, place them in tanks, feed them the nutrients they need to proliferate, including fats, sugar, amino acids and vitamins, and end up with meat.

It has taken years of experimentation by a crew of biologists, biochemists and engineers to turn that concept into a product ready to eat. Now the company is awaiting a greenlight from the Food and Drug Administration to begin selling its first cultivated meat products, including a chicken fillet.

After four years of talks with regulators at the FDA, the co-founder anticipates this could happen "in the very near future." When it does, Upside's production facility in Emeryville, Calif., will be able to produce over 50,000 pounds of cultivated meat products per year.

"People said it was science fiction," the co-founder told me as we toured the 70,000-square-foot facility. "This is real."

We suited up for the tour in gowns, goggles and hair nets to maintain food safety protocols and walked past shiny, brewery-style, stainless steel tanks reaching from floor to ceiling.

But these tanks — called cultivators in this industry — "brew" meat, not beer. We saw the cell bank where the animal cell samples are stored, the pipes that pump nutrients into the tanks, and finally the raw meat as it emerged from the production facility.

The process had a futuristic vibe but by the end of the tour, it felt somehow ordinary to me — like a kind of hydroponic gardening.

The facility's glass walls look out into a busy upscale neighborhood, filled with restaurants, apartments and offices. The co-founder says the glass walls are intentional — to signal transparency. "To create a paradigm change, people should be able to walk through and see and believe it," he says.

Upside Foods could have lots of competition once cultivated meats enter the market. More than 80 companies are staking a future in the space. For instance, [...] Sci-Fi Foods, founded by self-proclaimed "burger-obsessed food lovers" aims to blend cultivated beef with a plant-based recipe to produce a hybrid burger that, they say, will be better for the planet.

Adapted from *NPR* November 2022 (451 words)

GEN Z AREN'T 'INTOLERANT': WE'RE JUST POOR, FED-UP AND WANT REAL CHANGE

Pampered, illiberal, woke snowflakes: the slurs that are made against Gen Z are so well-worn, so boring, yet they just don't seem to go away. Despite what our elders seem to think, the reality is that our lives are bleak. We are poorer than generations before us, deal with high levels of depression, and face the very real prospect of living through runaway climate breakdown for the rest of our lives. Instead of this being seen as an indictment of a society that has betrayed young people, it is instead used to berate us as "fragile" or "entitled".

New research by Channel 4, which looked at more than 1,500 13- to 24-year-olds, sheds some light on a debate that seems to go round in circles. It found that the cost of living, a lack of affordable housing and uncertainty about the future were Gen Z's top three concerns. Contrary to the belief that we spend all our free time doxing C-list celebrities who don't acknowledge their white, cis, hetero privilege, it turns out our priorities are fundamentally material.

What makes this all the more anguish-inducing is the fact that avenues for change are limited. Addressing our concerns is seen as parliamentary kryptonite by both major political parties. (..). In the 2017 general election, a majority of voters under 47 years old voted for Labour. In the Brexit vote a majority of under 50s voted to remain. We know who prevailed in each of these contests – not us.

But what about the idea that Gen Z is "illiberal"? The Channel 4 study found that almost half of 13- to 24-year-olds surveyed thought "some people deserve to be cancelled", compared with one-third of over-25s. They have "very little tolerance for people with beliefs [they] disagree with". No generation has a monopoly on illiberalism, but if every call-in show or TV debate about "cancel culture" spent more time focusing on government legislation such as this, the stereotypes attached to my generation might have less traction.

But I don't want to dodge the issue either. I think we are a generation that is very diverse and less likely to inhabit a social world that is straightforwardly Christian or straight or cis-gendered. Being intolerant of intolerance is, for many of us, not a performative game of woke point-scoring, but is a matter of respect for ourselves and those around us.

The demands of Gen Z are simple. We want a world where everybody is treated with respect and without prejudice, and to live in a future where we could put a deposit down on a studio flat before the floodwater is lapping at the door. Is that too much to ask?

Adapted from *The Guardian* November 2022 (458 words)

GRETA THUNBERG ISN'T ALONE IN REJECTING COP27 BUT WE STILL HAVE TO BE THERE

Greta Thunberg is not a fan of COP27, the climate conference that got under way in Egypt. [...] She reckons it's just a chance for the powerful to get away with "green washing, lying and cheating", and that the annual summits of national governments, policy experts, smooth-talkers and hangers-on aren't working. She's not going.

She might be right not to go. [...] There is plenty to be cynical about. The Egyptian hosts have named Coca-Cola, which uses fossil fuels to produce about 120 billion throwaway plastic bottles each year. In Kenya, a civil society group has pointed out that nearly half of the plastic bottle waste in its country can be traced back to Coke. [...]

There is a tradition of this sort of thing across UN climate summits. [...] Some conferences have been sponsored by coal companies. Last year, an Australian government pavilion in Glasgow gave over its main display space to Santos, an oil and gas company.

The problems are broader [...]. Tens of thousands of people are expected in Sharm el-Sheikh, but protesters are not welcome. Instead, civil society has been offered a pen far from the conference center where they will be allowed to express their views behind a fence in the desert sun.

Activists estimate Egypt has 60,000 political prisoners. In the lead-up to the event, civil society groups have been calling for the release of a pro-democracy activist who has spent most of the past decade in prison [...]. The Egyptian government hasn't responded. Meanwhile, youth activists from across Africa have struggled to get passes [...], reinforcing a perception that UN climate conferences are an event for the wealthy and comfortable.

Hopes for progress at the talks themselves are limited and have fallen since the relative high of COP26 last year. Then, countries agreed to limit global temperatures to 1.5 degrees above preindustrial levels – an advancement on the landmark 2015 Paris agreement. But 2022 has not delivered on that promise.

A possibly bigger issue at COP27 will be loss and damage from climate disasters in societies that have not caused the problem. Climate justice demands the wealthy step in to ensure communities can continue to develop and improve lives, not just struggle to survive.

Whether COP27 can deliver on these issues is unclear, but pessimism over whether major progress is possible in the next fortnight is justified. [...]

More broadly, there is a responsibility on journalists who can get to COP27 to interpret and relay the often highly technical discussions at the conference for those who can't be there. [...] The bottom line is that none of us should look away. It matters.

Adapted from *The Guardian* November 2022 (459 words)

HAS THE COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS HAD AN IMPACT ON CRIME LEVELS?

New statistics suggest the cost-of-living crisis has not had a major impact on crime overall, despite greater financial pressures. In fact, data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) concluded that total crime has decreased by 8%, when comparing data between October 2021 and June 2022 to the pre-Covid year ending March 2020 – although it is a mixed picture. ONS compared these two timeframes presumably because all social-distancing measures have now been lifted and society has – for the most part – returned to its pre-Covid measures.

But new challenges face the UK now, such as the looming recession, fuel poverty and food inflation, as well as a decreased workforce and an increase in chronic illness. While the cost-of-living crisis has worsened over the autumn, energy regulator Ofgem increased sparking the steady climb in prices. These stats therefore may show the early indications of how the change in living standards impacts crime rates.

According to the face-to-face Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), theft decreased by 19%, although ONS warned this was "too early" to suggest a new long-term trend, although it does imply a sustained impact of Covid. Still, this stat alone drove the statistically significant decrease of crime overall, down by 8%. Police recorded crime data also found burglary was down 28%, robbery down by 23%, vehicle offences by 19%, knife-enabled crime down 9%, offences involving firearms down by 10%. Homicide rates also fell by 5%.

According to CSEW, fraud has returned to pre-Covid pandemic levels, but it did increase during the pandemic. The ONS links this to "behavioural changes", presumably as more people spent their days online due to the lockdown measures.

Confusingly, the total number of police recorded crime also suggests overall that it had actually exceeded pre-Covid levels, but this is thought to be down to a change in the way crimes are now reported. Between April and June this year, there were 1.7 million reported crimes, while between January to March 2020, there were 1.4 million. The police records indicate sexual offences also rose by 21% compared to the pre-Covid pandemic year ending March 2020 – ONS said this increase to 197,000 offences "is the highest annual figure recorded in England and Wales".

[...] However, economic struggles could push people into forms of crime, according to the London mayor Sadiq Khan. He claimed in August that there would be a rise in shootings and stabbings, as the climbing cost of living would make it easier for gangs to entrap vulnerable young people.

HEALTH GROUPS CALL FOR GLOBAL FOSSIL FUEL NON-PROLIFERATION TREATY

The World Health Organization and almost 200 other health associations have made an unprecedented call for a global fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty. A call to action published on Wednesday, urges governments to agree to a legally binding plan to phase out fossil fuel exploration and production, similar to the framework convention on tobacco, which was negotiated under the WHO's auspices in 2003.

"The modern addiction to fossil fuels is not just an act of environmental vandalism. From the health perspective, it is an act of self-sabotage," said the WHO president, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

Diarmid Campbell-Lendrum, the head of the WHO's climate change department, said the letter was a watershed moment. "This is the first time the health sector has come together to issue such a statement explicitly about fossil fuels," he told the Guardian. "The current burden of death and disease from air pollution is comparable to that of tobacco use, while the long-term effects of fossil fuels on Earth's climate present an existential threat to humanity – as do nuclear weapons."

The campaign to end fossil fuel exploration and production has won wide support from the Dalai Lama and 100 other Nobel laureates, the Vatican, several cities and island states, more than 1,000 health professionals and almost 3,000 scientists and academics.

The initiative aims to emulate the success of the treaty on non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, signed in 1968, which has to some extent limited the spread of atomic weapons and technology.

More countries have signed that treaty than any other arms-limiting convention, although nuclear powers such as India, Israel, North Korea and Pakistan have not.

Ira Helfand, the Nobel peace prize winner and co-president of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War said: "The two overriding issues of our era - the climate crisis and the danger of nuclear war – are deeply intertwined. The climate crisis is leading to greater international conflict and a growing risk of nuclear war, and nuclear war will cause catastrophic, abrupt climate disruption. The world must come together to prevent both of these existential threats."

In emailed comments supporting the new initiative, the laureate professor Noam Chomsky said: "Humans are marching towards a precipice. When we reach it, unthinkable catastrophe is inevitable. There is a narrow window of opportunity to save ourselves, and the innumerable other species that we are destroying with reckless abandon. There is still time to rid ourselves of fossil fuels, not much. We will grasp the opportunity, or the human experiment will come to an inglorious end."

As well as posing an existential threat to future generations, fossil fuels are a hazard in the present.

Adapted from *The Guardian* September 2022 (455 words)

HOPE AMID CLIMATE CHAOS

Every one of us will love someone who is still alive in 2100, says climate campaigner Ayisha Siddiqa. That loved one will either face a world in climate chaos or a clean, green utopia, depending on what we do today.

It's a powerful reason for action, providing hope that the will for transformative change can be found. But are there more tangible reasons for optimism in fighting the climate emergency? The challenge is undoubtedly immense: carbon emissions have yet to start falling and must plummet by half by 2030 to avoid the worst outcomes.

Yet the situation is far from hopeless. From the exponential growth of green solutions to the power of protest, experts say there is a clear path to limiting the damage. The question is how fast we can travel along it.

The shining light of climate hope is the exponential growth of ever-cheaper renewable energy, which now delivers 75% of all new power – coal has plummeted to just 4%. An important recent study found that a swift transition to clean energy would save trillions of dollars, even without accounting for the enormous damage continued fossil use would cause. Even climate deniers should be on board with that, says study author Prof Doyne Farmer at the University of Oxford.

Electric vehicle sales are also rising exponentially. Sales in China doubled year-on-year in August, to more than 500,000. Both of these green technologies have passed tipping points in many places – they are now simply so good and cheap that a runaway takeover is inevitable.

The energy bills crisis in Europe caused by the war in Ukraine has emboldened fossil fuel interests to push for new oil and gas exploitation. But senior figures say the war will ultimately boost climate action, not block it. "The case for a global energy transition is more solid now than before the invasion," says a UN top climate official. "Once we are on the other side of the current Russian blackmail, no one will want to be [held] hostage again." Norway's prime minister says: "The war is pushing significant speed-up of the installation of solar, offshore wind, hydrogen, and the rest of it."

Yet, geopolitics is also the key to an issue now at the heart of the climate challenge: climate finance. The nations of the global south, which did not cause global heating, want funding for cutting emissions, adapting to inevitable impacts and recovering from damage wrought by supercharged extreme weather.

The issue could dominate the next UN climate summit in Egypt in November.

For years, major nations like the US have blocked such funding, fearing unlimited liability. But there is movement, with Denmark this month becoming the first national government to commit loss and damage funds.

Adapted from *The Guardian* October 2022 (459 words)

HOW 'LAB-GROWN' MEAT COULD HELP THE PLANET AND OUR HEALTH

What if there was a way to eat meat without farming and killing billions of animals per year, contributing to the climate crisis and risking high cholesterol levels? "Cultivated meat is real meat grown directly from animal cells," Uma Valeti, founder and CEO of California company Upside Foods, said via email. "These products are not vegan, vegetarian or plant-based – they are real meat, made without the animal."

The process of making cultivated meat is similar to brewing beer, but instead of growing yeast or microbes, Upside Foods grows animal cells. Based on the field of tissue engineering – growing tissues in a lab for medical repairs – scientists start by taking a small cell sample from cows or chickens, then identify cells that can multiply. "From there, we feed these cells with essential nutrients they need to replicate naturally," Valeti said.

Cultivated meat could help slow climate change driven by greenhouse gas emissions, most of which are from animal agriculture. The transport needed for agriculture emits both methane and carbon dioxide, and clearing land and forests – including for agriculture – emits carbon dioxide, according to the United Nations. The presumption is that cultivated meat will reduce the land footprint, the water needs and some of the waste streams that go out from feedlots.

The industry is about ten years old, and still a few years away from being commercially available to US consumers in grocery stores or restaurants – and maybe up to twenty years more for it to replace a substantial portion, or all, of the traditional meat industry. Today, Singapore is the only country to have approved cell-based meat for consumer consumption.

Americans await approval from by the FDA. Until then, cultivated meat and its potential benefits for animals, humans and environment are more hope than promise. First, few to no animals would have to be farmed for cultivated meat, and therefore hundreds of millions of acres of land wouldn't be needed to grow feed for them. Secondly, nutritional quality and impacts on human health are areas where the process is much more controlled than traditional agriculture, so only the best parts of meats would end up in the meats that you make or grow. Thirdly, traditionally grown animals are given high doses of antibiotics to combat disease or contamination from bacteria such as salmonella and E. coli.

Because cultivated meat producers don't expect to use antibiotics – or at least large amounts – cultivated meat could also alleviate the antibiotic resistance problem among humans. And since cultivated meat would require less contact with animals and use of their habitats, it could also lower the risk of more virus spillover from animals to humans, as was the case with Covid-19.

Adapted from *cnn.com* July 2022 (456 words)

HOW A VACATION TO HAWAII CAN BE RELAXING FOR TOURISTS - AND HARMFUL TO ITS RESIDENTS

Hawaii is famous for its striking blue waters and impressive surf spots. But as it exists now, the powerful tourism industry dictates the lives of Native Hawaiians, often for the worse, said Kyle Kajihiro, a Professor at the University of Hawaii and activist for the rights of Native Hawaiians.

The tourism industry in Hawaii powers its state revenue, but that reliance on tourism has resulted in Native Hawaiians getting priced out of their homes, climate change causing great damage to the natural landscape, and a lack of respect for the 50th state that is also the ancestral land of more than half a million people. "The industry must change to improve the futures of Native Hawaiians," Kajihiro said.

Tourism is Hawaii's largest single source of private capital. But what's profitable for Hawaii's economy can negatively impact the lives of Native Hawaiians and yearlong residents for whom living in Hawaii is no vacation. To combat drought conditions, residents last year were asked to reduce their water consumption or face a fine while large resorts continued to use far more water. In 2021, there were more than 6.7 million visitors compared to 1.4 million permanent residents -- which can cause carbon emissions to surge and overuse of its beaches, hiking trails and other natural wonders. Hawaii has even been called the "extinction capital of the world" for the number of species that have gone extinct or are at high risk of dying out.

In an effort to reclaim the histories of Hawaii and educate visitors about the negative impacts of colonization, militarization and tourism, Kajihiro created the Hawaii DeTour Project. By including tours to locations like the Pearl Harbor memorial, this project aims at showing the real history of Hawaii beyond the beach and to connect tourists with local attractions that emphasize cultural and environmental responsibility. "I guess it could be seen as a good sign that people want to learn and be more responsible as travelers," he said.

Kajihiro also believes that making fundamental changes to the tourism industry should begin with returning rights to Native Hawaiians and letting them decide how they want their culture to be shared and consumed. There is already a model of this in New Zealand, where the Māori people have control over how their culture is represented and experienced by tourists with an emphasis on mutual respect. "Let's abolish the word 'tourism,'" Kajihiro said. "The very term privileges the consumer, the act of consuming places, and the transactional relationship." Instead, he said, visitors should rethink travel as entering somebody else's home, respect their hosts, express their gratitude and act responsibly.

Adapted from *cnn.com*August 2022
(456 words)

HOW AUSTRALIA IS SEEING A 'BIG SHIFT' ON PLASTIC WASTE

A range of single-use plastic, including straws, cutlery and micro beads in shampoo, will be banned in Australia's most populous state, New South Wales, in a bid to reduce waste. "Australia has been very active over the last few years in moving to ban single-use plastics." (...) says Shane Cucow, the plastics campaign manager at the Australian Marine Conservation Society. "There's been incredible progress considering just two years ago not a single state and territory had banned single-use plastics."

Australia has a complex record with plastic waste. Though it has long been accused of inaction, the country has also seen celebrated examples of leadership. One of the forefathers of the anti-waste movement was Ian Kiernan, a property developer who became a professional yachtsman. In the 1980s, he had an environmental epiphany during a solo race around the world. (...) In 1989, Ian Kiernan launched Clean Up Sydney Harbour. (...) A year later it became a national event, and Clean Up Australia Day was born. "Clean Up Australia is about empowering you. You choose where you clean up. We'll give you the tools," adds Ms Kiernan, who's the chair of the organisation her father set up, which attracts a million volunteer waste warriors each year. (...)

In June, NSW banned lightweight plastic bags. Other items include single-use plastic drink stirrers and cotton buds, as well as expanded polystyrene containers for take-away food. Queensland will disallow many of these products in September 2023. (...) and Victoria will act sooner. (...) The pace of legislative reform might be impressive, but Australia's mission to tame its plastic waste problem has a long way to go. (...)

A global comparison of plastic waste management placed Australia 7th for its overall efforts to control plastic pollution, behind European countries, Japan, the UK and the US. (...) In June, Australia's national science agency reported some good news that plastic pollution littering the coast had fallen by 29% compared to 2013.

For Ms Hardesty, a research scientist, it was a "heartening" discovery and a sign that government policies were working. "We are starting to see a real change in our relationship with plastic," she said. (...) "We are starting to put a price on plastic where we actually treat plastic as a valuable item, as a commodity rather than just as waste. Think about aluminium. It has intrinsic value and we don't tend to find it lost to the environment," she said. "I don't foresee that we are going to have a plastic-free future. I'd like to see us designing with a legacy mindset, designing products for longer-term and thinking about what is the next life of that product going to be." (...)

Adapted from *BBC News* October 2022 (457 words)

HOW COMPANIES BLAME YOU FOR CLIMATE CHANGE

It's an advert that is infamous in environmental circles. A man who appears to be an indigenous American paddles a canoe downstream. He starts in relatively pristine waters, but soon paddles alongside discarded newspapers, past industrial buildings, and finally pulls his canoe ashore on a bank littered with waste.

The question of who is responsible for climate change is incredibly complicated. Is it the companies that supply goods and services or the consumers who create the demand? On the one hand, 70% of greenhouse gas emissions in the past two decades can be attributed to 100 fossil fuel producers, according to a report from the CDP (formerly the Carbon Disclosure Project). So, their role is clearly important. But rich, Western consumers also contribute a disproportionate amount of emissions through the choices they make.

Another assessment, co-authored by Diana Ivanova, a research fellow specialising in household consumption from the Sustainability Research Institute at the University of Leeds in the UK, suggests households contribute more than 60% of global greenhouse gas emissions. Without an agreement from the governments of the 179 countries represented at the summit for tighter regulations on fossil fuel use, it was left to companies, and the lobbyists who represent them, to self-regulate.

This is called free-market environmentalism. Free-market environmentalism is based on a principle of economics called "self-interest" whereby if companies act in their own best interest their output will benefit the consumer. In the case of free-market environmentalism, if companies can win over more customers by acting in a sustainable way, then they will do so, and less responsible companies will be penalised by the market.

But free-market environmentalism assumes that consumers are able to tell which companies are acting responsibly and are motivated to choose the most environmental option – which might not always be the best or cheapest. Companies might profit from promoting an environmental image without actually working to reduce their emissions.

Then there are those other companies who might make more money selling to consumers who are not particularly motivated by climate issues. "Increasingly there's a recognition that [free-market environmentalism] failed, in part because it has been voluntary," concludes Dempsey. "There's still a lot of money to be made by not participating."

While it might seem harmless for the public to be encouraged to reduce their emissions and recycle, Dunaway warns it could have a downside. "The disconnect between the severity of the climate crisis versus so much focus on these little actions [like recycling or picking up litter], that not only distract from corporate responsibility, but also don't seem to [make] a difference – it's trying to encourage a feeling of empowerment, but I think it sometimes can actually be disempowering."

Adapted from *BBC News* May 2022 (454 words)

HOW COYOTES AND SCAMMERS USE TIKTOK TO SELL MIGRANTS THE AMERICAN DREAM

The TikTok video starts like most other travel snaps on the platform do, with selfie shots showing the user and his companions sitting on a plane and walking through the airport. [...] But unlike the images of hotels and tourist attractions typical of this genre on TikTok, the video quickly takes on an uncharacteristic turn, showing the user sleeping in camps, at one point travelling by horseback to what he calls "the famous border of death" between the US and Mexico. [...]

The video, which appears to document one young man's journey from Ecuador to America, has more than 170,000 likes and nearly 2,500 comments – the vast majority of which are from people asking him for more information. [...]

Some of the posts, like the one from the user from Ecuador, appear to be from people documenting their own migrant journeys. But many purport to offer services and advice for people seeking to immigrate from countries including Guatemala, Mexico, Ecuador and Honduras. It's hard to tell which of these posts are shared by real "coyotes" or human smugglers, and which are scams. [...]

TikTok says it "strictly prohibits this content", though the company did not specify whether that includes posts detailing people's migration in addition to videos offering to help people cross the US-Mexico border: [...] "We use a combination of people and technology to protect our community and partner with intelligence firms in this area to further bolster our defences." [...]

The posts offering services are usually simple. They don't explicitly advertise their services as illegal, but strongly imply they help people without visas or documents across the border. [...] Quantifying the proliferation of these type of posts on TikTok is difficult because the platform does not provide external tools that allow researchers to audit or analyse its data. [...] TikTok's chief operating officer said the company relies on a combination of automation and human moderators to review posts for content violations. [...]

But a new report from Time magazine indicates that to keep pace with its growth in Latin America, TikTok has contracted with hundreds of content moderators who said they were overworked and underpaid[...] and exposed to emotionally traumatic content [...] as they were tasked with taking down disturbing posts that ranged from murder to cannibalism. [...]

But tackling issues of migration on social platforms will be difficult so long as the societal discussion off-platform remains murky, they argue.

An associate director at York University's Refugee Law Lab said: "Our world is heating up, so many people are living in precarious situations, so they're not going to stop coming unless we have a global conversation about how we create a more just world and make sure that our migration processes are dignified and we're not really having those conversations".

Adapted from *The Guardian*October 2022
(453 words)

HOW DO WE AVOID THE ANTIBIOTICS APOCALYPSE?

Antibiotics resistance is one of the greatest global threats of the 21st Century with more than 700,000 people dying from drug-resistant infections every year. So what can be done to avert this so-called "antibiotics apocalypse"?

First, there are those who are trying to get us to take fewer antibiotics. That is because the more antibiotics we all take, the more resistant bacteria become. To reduce antibiotics intake, doctors have been persuaded to prescribe them more judiciously. [...] Alerts have also been set up on their computers, prompting them to question whether they really needed to prescribe antibiotics. The number of antibiotic prescriptions issued was thus drastically reduced.

Some of these changes are now being implemented across the US and in other countries, but even if people were only given antibiotics when they really needed them, that would not solve the problem. Because while humans are a big market for antibiotics, there is an even bigger one.

In 1950, a chance discovery in a laboratory showed that antibiotics make animals grow faster. Since then, farmers all over the world have pumped them into their animals, even after scientific studies proved that bacterial resistance could pass from animals to humans.

But one country, the Netherlands, has shown that farmers who were once dependent on antibiotics can wean themselves and their animals off them. [...] In 2009, farmers were told they had to reduce the amount of antibiotics they were giving their animals by 20% in two years and 50% in five. [...] And, surprisingly, Dutch farmers reduced the amount of antibiotics used by 60% in just a couple of years.

But most countries are going in the opposite direction. It is thought that China, Brazil, Russia, India and South Africa will all double their use of antibiotics by 2030 and so resistance will spread.

That is why some scientists are scouring the world, looking at the oceans, rainforests and deserts for new sources of antibiotics when others are taking the fight to the bacteria themselves. Kim Hardie, for example, a microbiologist at Nottingham University, studies the way bacteria communicate. Yes... bacteria *communicate*.

When indeed a single bacterium arrives in your lungs, it hides from your immune system and from the antibodies already within you that might kill it. So it sits there, waiting. Once it realizes it's a good place to multiply, then it communicates with other separate bacteria, and when they sense there are enough, they draw their weapons and attack the immune system.

Therefore, if you could stop bacteria communicating, they could never launch an attack... Kim Hardie thinks an antibiotic based on this principle could arrive on the market in around 10 years and thus prevent the "antibiotics apocalypse".

HOW RANGERS ARE USING AI TO HELP PROTECT INDIA'S TIGERS

For 22 years, vet Mr Mishra has been treating animals at Pench National Park in Madhya Pradesh state in India. [...] The tigers he treats have mostly been injured while hunting, or protecting their cubs. But he has also treated tigers that have been poisoned by poachers - who put toxins in pools where they are known to drink. [...]

Protecting India's tigers is an enormous job: most of the tiger population, which in 2018 stood at almost 3,000, live in one of the 51 tiger reserves [...].

To carry out its most recent survey, India's National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) deployed camera traps in 27,000 locations [...]. On top of that, researchers covered hundreds of thousands of kilometres on foot, looking for signs of tigers and their prey. To wade through all that data the NTCA used artificial intelligence, which had been trained to recognise different animals.

In the 2018 survey, Al helped by identifying which animals were pictured by the camera traps – a task which would have been very laborious for humans.

Now the NTCA hopes to take the use of AI to another level. A new system is being developed which can give rangers the best routes for patrolling the vast areas under their watch. It does that by analysing data about the tiger population, how it moves [...]. "Artificial intelligence will help rangers in detecting wildlife crimes," predicts an assistant inspector general, at the NTCA.

While more technology is good to have, those working in conservation say it can't replace boots on the ground. Tiger conservation has been successful in protected parks, but tigers outside these areas remain "extremely vulnerable".

[Environmentalist] Mr Goenka says that more human patrols are needed that are better equipped. "What is really needed is more field patrolling and better use of technology for monitoring and protection." [...]

The chairman of AVI Foundation, points out that poachers have also become more sophisticated. They map the patrol routes of rangers, avoid regular trails and know where cameras are located.

His organisation has developed an artificial intelligence which can use the data collected by cameras and rangers, but in addition uses data gathered from satellites and information collected from the local population.

He hopes that forest departments across India will use this more sophisticated hybrid technology to better protect wildlife, particularly animals that are outside National Parks and wildlife sanctuaries in the future. "With the limited territories available for the wild animals, it is of paramount importance that there is no human interference in the already shrunk wildlife habitats," he says. [...]

Adapted from *BBC News*August 2022
(446 words)

HOW TO BREAK UP IN THE DIGITAL AGE?

Social media has made it easier to find romantic connections and share them with the world, but it has also made the end of relationships much messier. With so much of our lives now lived online, there are more factors to consider at the end. Should you delete and block your ex on social media? And what about the WhatsApp group chats you're both part of – who gets custody of those? [...]

Psychologist Ian McRae, author of a new book which looks at the negative side of social media, agrees that severing digital ties can be an important part of moving on. "In the past 10 years, there has been a lot of psychological research about the importance of forgetting as a process for refocusing our minds," he says.

A big problem with social media is that constantly seeing updates can make it harder to forget someone, particularly if we are "fed" memories and photos digitally by apps, perhaps of a special holiday or anniversary. [...]

"Blocking someone is a way to make yourself feel in control, like you're doing something," she says. "But you're definitely still hoping they'll notice, so it's still a way of communicating with them."

Social media encourages endless forms of this type of covert communication, which are hardly conducive to moving on from a breakup. [...]

Deleting pictures of an ex might also be a step towards someone "rebranding" themselves as single. [...] When it comes to rebranding, the idea of social media "soft-launching" went mainstream in 2020: (A "soft launch" is corporate jargon for introducing a new product — shampoo, toy, restaurant — to a limited group, so any flaws can be ironed out before it is made widely available) [...] rather than opting for a big reveal, a new relationship — or newfound singledom — is instead hinted at and slowly introduced. [...]

Taylor Lorenz, who specialises in internet culture, thinks soft-launching shows how public relations strategies have become ingrained in our lives. "There's a spectator in all of our lives now." [...]

Is there a "right" way to break up online? With so many digital curveballs being thrown our way, it's about striking a balance: holding on to memories but also letting yourself forget things. Setting digital boundaries ... and trying to stick to them. Being authentic, without oversharing. What you think is best for you in the moment, versus what is actually going to help you move on and heal.

Perhaps the most important part of breaking up online is pushing back against social media's influence. [...]. "If you're getting into a social media spiral, turn off notifications or uninstall the app," says McRae. "This is healthy and can help you focus on other things, instead of replaying what went wrong." [...]

Adapted from *The Guardian* November 2022 (456 words)

HOW TO TREAT TRADITIONAL AFRICAN ART

African art is never far from the headlines these days. Calls for the restitution of artefacts looted during the colonial era have been coming from Africa for decades; but until recently, they had fallen on deaf ears. Now, commitments by national governments such as Germany and France – as well as major museums across the world – to return objects in their collections are coming thick and fast.

While Britain has lagged behind the curve, there are signs that this might be changing. Last year, Aberdeen University announced it was to return a sculpture of an African king, (...) that, it said, had been acquired by Britain in an "extremely immoral" manner in 1897. Earlier this year, the Horniman Museum, in London, said it was returning all 72 of its Benin bronzes to modern-day Nigeria. And last month, a debate in the House of Lords featured several voices sympathetic to restitution (...)

Such debates often revolve around philosophical questions, such as whether restitution is a moral imperative or reparations are owed. Yet the importance of these artworks, as well as the clamour for their return, is equally bound up with the complicated tale of what actually happened when they came to the West – and what has happened to them since. (...)

In Britain, for much of the 20th century, displays of this material were confined to institutions that displayed it as ethnography, rather than art. (...) The first survey of African art in the US took place at the Museum of Modern Art in 1935; wildly successful, it was pitched to New Yorkers as evidence that "modern art has in several of its phases been much influenced by primitive African art". This was indicative of the fact that art-world gatekeepers remained more interested in how Western artists were inspired by African works than in those works themselves. (...)

Contemporary African art has recently been booming in the marketplace. (...) Béninois artist Romuald Hazoumè, for instance, is known for his masques bidons, witty satirical reimaginings of traditional African masks made from petrol cans. (...) When I ask him how he considers his work in relation to the art of the past, he does not (...) make mention of formal or stylistic concerns. His connections run deeper. Just as his forebears once created art (he says) "to educate our community" (...), Hazoumè sees his own art as a means of "protecting [his] people", warning of contemporary dangers such as oil and plastic consumption.

Connections such as these remind us that the question of the meaningful return of Africa's stolen heritage is not only about atoning for the wrongs of the past. (...) The arts of Africa should have pride of place in art's present and future story.

Adapted from *The Telegraph*November 2022
(454 words)

HU JINTAO MYSTERY TESTS THE LIMITS OF CHINA-WATCHING

China's annual Communist Party congress was a highly choreographed affair, designed to cement Xi Jinping's status as the unquestioned leader of China. But it was an apparently unscripted moment that really got people talking: The unexplained public ouster of former leader Hu Jintao.

The incident, which saw Hu escorted away from the stage on Saturday, has led to fervent speculation among both seasoned China watchers and moonlighters.

Whatever did happen, the incident offers further infuriating evidence of how opaque China's leadership is. Before Xi assumed power as China's leader in 2012, many assumed that he would be a quiet pragmatist like Hu, his predecessor as General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party. But Xi instead ruthlessly cemented his own power in Beijing, abolishing presidential term limits and refusing to designate a successor. He led a crackdown in Xinjiang that the United Nations said could constitute crimes against humanity and stamped out dissent in Hong Kong. Some fear his ultimate ambition is to bring Taiwan under Beijing's control.

To many, Hu's exit from the party conference was a sign of Xi's callousness. One geopolitical analyst said Hu had been publicly humiliated because of "power politics."

Speaking to the South China Morning Post, one unnamed Hong Kong-based China expert openly dismissed any talk of a "Stalinist purge" from Western voices and said it would make no sense for Hu or anyone else to challenge Xi on the final day of the party congress.

What binds all theories is a lack of firm information. Experts are basing their impressions on a handful of short clips from outside news outlets. Chinese state media has offered no clues as to what happened. It was only after widespread coverage of the incident that Xinhua News Agency tweeted that Hu "was not feeling well during the session."

Reading the tea leaves is perhaps harder than ever in China. Xi has increased the pressure on Chinese civilians to fall in line, crushing not just dissent but reasoned debate. Outsiders have few resources to understand the country. Western journalists are severely limited in what they can do in the country. Even mighty Western spy agencies have a hard time understanding what is going on in the country, as the inconclusive U.S.-led push to understand the origins of Covid-19 has shown.

In many ways, it's similar to the problems faced by Russia-watchers during the Soviet Union. With little outside information, Kremlinology experts were forced to create "absolute certainties on the basis of cloudy figures swirling in [their] crystal balls," in the words of one historian. And yet most missed the collapse of Russian Communism during the 1980s.

HYDROGEN MAY BE A CLIMATE SOLUTION. THERE'S DEBATE OVER HOW CLEAN IT WILL TRULY BE

At an industrial site on the banks of the Ohio River, a building with pipes coming in and out of it could be part of the country's transition to cleaner energy. [...] Inside is a gas-fired power plant that could generate enough electricity for almost 400,000 homes. [...] What the market wants is energy that doesn't create carbon pollution. Wholey thinks hydrogen, the most common element in the universe, could be the answer.

When it's used to fuel a car or power plant, hydrogen's chief byproduct is water. But finding a clean and cheap source for making hydrogen has eluded scientists and policymakers for decades.

Someday, Wholey hopes the plant will run completely on hydrogen. That goal may be more attainable after Congress passed and President Biden signed a major infrastructure law last year. It includes \$8 billion for at least four hydrogen hubs to produce, store and use this combustible gas. [...]

Yet some remember the 1937 Hindenburg disaster, where a hydrogen-filled airship exploded. But today climate scientists see hydrogen as a potentially clean replacement for fossil fuels in heavy industry. [...]

The big problem is getting hydrogen. It can be made in a number of ways. There's gray hydrogen, which is how most hydrogen is made today, through heating natural gas. This creates lots of carbon dioxide, the driving force in climate change, which the United Nations has called a "threat to human well-being and (the) health of the planet." Blue hydrogen, where that CO2 is captured and stored underground, is being pushed by big oil and gas companies as a lower-carbon energy source.

The infrastructure bill mandates four hubs for "clean" hydrogen, including at least one for blue hydrogen and another for green hydrogen. [...]

Jaramillo says green hydrogen is "the ideal," but blue hydrogen could still help the world meet its climate goals, provided it uses carbon capture and sequestration.

Blue hydrogen captures up to 90% of its CO2 and relies on the natural gas system, but it leaks methane, a highly potent greenhouse gas. This has some scientists questioning how beneficial it will be to the climate. [...]

Even with questions about blue hydrogen, some scientists think it's still worth pursuing.

Goetz Veser, a professor of chemical engineering at the University of Pittsburgh, says one advantage of blue hydrogen is that it relies on technology that is many decades old.

Another advantage, says Bridget van Dorsten, an analyst with the Wood Mackenzie energy research consultancy, is the fossil fuel industry's political power in the United States. She says that makes blue hydrogen more likely than a full push for green hydrogen. [...]

Adapted from *NPR* May 2022 (452 words)

IN SPAIN'S LA RIOJA, OLD VINES COULD FUTURE-PROOF WINE AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE

When Spanish genetics researcher Pablo Carbonell spots a green rectangle among the endless grey rows on his computer's screen, it could be good news for winemakers struggling with the impact of a warmer climate. [...]

Rising temperatures mean grapes have been maturing faster than before, leading to higher alcohol contents and weaker colours and aromas that can jeopardise wines' character.

That means vineyards – which have for centuries transplanted cuttings to ensure robust and flavourful fruit – are now looking for grape types that are more resistant to climate change. [...]

The publicly-funded Vine and Wine Research Institute, [...], is studying the genomes of the most commonly used grape varieties in the Spanish Rioja region, where wine has been made since the Middle Ages. [...]

The lab's ultimate goal is to ensure winemakers plant specific vines proven to be "more adaptable to climate change conditions", said Carbonell.

Much is at stake for Spain, the world's third-largest wine producer after Italy and France and the leader in exports and vineyard surface area. Its industry is valued at over 5 billion euros.

The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warned recently of the risk that Europe will suffer "losses in crop production due to compound heat, dry conditions and extreme weather".

Its report will be among the issues for discussion at the COP27 climate summit taking place from Nov. 6-18 in Egypt. [...] This summer was Spain's hottest since records began in 1961, with temperatures 2.2 degrees Celsius above average. [...]

The Vine and Wine Research Institute is the only laboratory in Spain and one of a few worldwide conducting full molecular analysis of vines. Their samples come from a nearby vineyard, used as a scientific bank, where cuttings of old vines up to 100 years old have been planted since the 1980s.

"The technique of resequencing genomes allows for the identification of specific mutations responsible for diseases in human populations," he said. "The same technology is applied for grapevines, but we are looking for traits that can make the vines be better adapted to environmental conditions."

Scorching temperatures could eventually cause winemaking to cease in parts of Spain, the director of the Wine Research Institute warned. With an annual budget of 6 million euros and around 100 workers, the Institute started this year using its vineyard to produce wine experimentally, concluding so far that climate-resilient vines still yield good wine with Rioja's features. [...]

"Our biggest concern is what will happen in 20 or 30 years. We will probably need to change varietals but we don't really know how things will come out. We hope to not have too many years like this one because it has been very problematic ".

Adapted from Reuters.com November 2022 (457 words)

INDIA GAMBLES ON BUILDING A LEADING DRONE INDUSTRY

Newly qualified drone pilot Uddesh Pratim Nath is excited about the opportunities his new skills have opened up for him. "Being certified has opened new avenues for me. I have been working with different industries like survey mapping, asset inspection, agriculture and many others," he says.

Drones come in all shapes and sizes. The smaller ones typically have three of four rotors and can carry something small like a camera. The biggest, usually used by the military, look more like aeroplanes and can carry substantial payloads.

Mr Nath, 23, had been designing drones, but decided that being certified to fly them would bring more job satisfaction and financial rewards. [...]

He is reaping now the benefits of a big push by the Indian government into the drone industry. In February this year India banned the import of drones, [...] and the government wants to develop a home-grown industry that can design and assemble drones and make the components that go into their manufacture.

"Drones can be significant creators of employment and economic growth due to their versatility, and ease of use, especially in India's remote areas," says the former secretary at the Ministry of Civil Aviation. "Given its traditional strengths in innovation, information technology, frugal engineering and its huge domestic demand, India has the potential of becoming a global drone hub by 2030," he tells the BBC. [...]

Currently drones do all sorts of jobs in India. Police use them for monitoring the traffic and border, security forces use them to search for smugglers and traffickers. They are also increasingly common in the farming sector, where they are used to monitor the health of crops and spray them with fertiliser and pesticides. [...]

India also lacks the network of firms needed to make all the components that go into making a drone. At the moment many parts, including batteries, motors and flight controllers are imported. But the government is confident an incentive scheme will help boost domestic firms.

"The components industry will take two to three years to build, since it traditionally works on low margin and high volumes," says the former secretary at the Ministry of Civil Aviation. Despite those reservations, firms are confident there will be demand for drones and people to fly them. [...]

"With 5G around the corner, the drone technology will have the platform to unleash its full potential, especially for long-range, high-endurance operations," he says. [...]

"Drones will always require a pilot or someone remotely controlling and monitoring them. Different drones require different handling and AI is not yet that advanced. "Even if it learns to control itself, we cannot teach the drone to react in every situation," he says.

Adapted from *BBC.COM*November 2022
(452 words)

IRAN IS AT WAR WITH ITS OWN PEOPLE. FIFA WON'T LET THAT SPOIL THEIR WORLD CUP

Some governments, such as Syria and Myanmar, kill their own people. Some, such as Russia, kill people in other countries, as in Ukraine. Iran's government is doing both, home and away.

Now, pressed into action by this murderous regime, Iran's national football team is about to play England, Wales and the US in the 2022 World Cup – as if nothing untoward were happening. This is not OK. In truth, it's shameful. Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old Kurdish Iranian woman, was beaten to death in police custody in Tehran for allegedly breaking rules on mandatory head-coverings. In the ensuing nationwide protests, Iran's security forces have killed hundreds of people.

Iran's also supplying swarms of "kamikaze" drones to Russia, helping Vladimir Putin's forces kill and maim Ukrainian children and create a humanitarian disaster this winter. Yet there's little doubt that the national team will show up in Doha as part of the regime's efforts to use football to present a normal face to the world and distract attention from the crisis at home. For different reasons, the England, US and Wales teams will also presumably do as they are told. National prestige and a great deal of money are at stake.

How is it acceptable to play games with a country at war with its own people and, indirectly, with you and your friends? FIFA president pleaded with the 32 countries competing in Qatar to "focus on the football" and leave "politics" out of it. The bizarre yet persistent idea that sport can somehow isolate itself, or be absolved, from the political and socioeconomic order underpins the flawed approach of World Cup hosts Qatar – a close ally of Iran. This "Don't look up" strategy has inevitably sucked Qatar into controversy over migrant workers' rights and, more recently, over archaic attitudes to LGBTQ+ fans. Despite some progress, "human rights abuses persist on a significant scale," Amnesty International reported last month.

Ten European football associations, including the English and Welsh FAs, are demanding FIFA and Qatar do more. "Embracing diversity and tolerance also means supporting human rights. Human rights are universal and they apply everywhere," it said. That's certainly true. So, if for no other reason, consistency requires that Saudi Arabia, another World Cup qualifier and serial human rights abuser, also face harsher scrutiny. The Saudi regime has turned Qatar-style sportwashing into a successful industry through lavish sponsorship of international sporting events and the purchase of the English Premier League club Newcastle United. Yet Saudi human rights abuses, including mass executions and torture, persist.

As a spectacle of human self-deception, disassociation and blatant hypocrisy, the 2022 World Cup is a genuine world-beater.

Adapted from *The Guardian* November 2022 (451 words)

IT'S TIME TO KILL OFF CIGARETTE INDUSTRY

The cigarette industry should be destroyed for the benefit of public health, Prof. Sir Chris Whitty, the Government's chief medical adviser, has said.

Sir Chris, who is also chief medical officer for England, warned that smokers faced an appalling death, and said ministers are currently considering whether to bring in new policies to limit smoking.

An independent review, which was published in June, recommended that the Government enact measures to ensure England is smoke-free by 2030, which could include stronger taxation, and limiting further where people can light up.

However, the Government has not yet said which recommendations it will follow.

Speaking at a symposium on medical ethics held by the Faculty of Pharmaceutical Medicine, Sir Chris said: "Smoking is the biggest driver that we could easily deal with in the sense of the inequalities we see across the UK. It is an appalling way to die – it kills people in multiple ways. Everybody in this room would agree that getting smoking down to zero and destroying the cigarette industry should be an aim in public health."

He added that it was important for the state to intervene in industries that were based on addiction: "Where the current government has decided to go into these markets has not yet been decided, and that's going to be up to the ministers who are currently in post."

In 2019, the Government set an objective for England to be smoke-free by 2030, meaning only 5 per cent of the population would smoke by then. However, according to the review published in June, without further action, England will miss the smoke-free 2030 target by at least seven years, and the poorest areas will not meet it until 2044.

The review's recommendations include raising the legal age of smoking each year until nobody can buy tobacco, and banning smoking in many public areas, such as outside of hospitals and in the majority of new social housing.

At a backbench business debate of the Government's smoke-free policy, a Tory MP said that making smoking obsolete was "vital" to the health of the entire population. He added: "It also helps deliver economic growth because smoking increases sickness, absenteeism, and disability and the total public finance cost of smoking is twice that of the excise taxes that tobacco brings into the Exchequer. Many tens of thousands of people die prematurely each year from smoking, and 30 times as many as those who die are suffering from serious illnesses, which cost the NHS billions of pounds every year".

He said he was deeply concerned that the Government had still not published its new smoking plan after the review.

Adapted from *The Daily Telegraph*November 2022
(449 words)

IT'S NO DREAM, SUSTAINABLE JEANS ARE A PERFECT FIT FOR MODERN RETAIL CONSUMERS

When I stepped into the sustainable, intelligent enterprise showcase of the Trilogy jeans company at the Sapphire Orlando [technology] event, the last thing I imagined was encountering seaweed and synthetic spider webs. However, Trilogy was one of the most compelling displays of cloud-based innovation I've ever seen from an entirely fictitious creation.

While the Trilogy jeans company doesn't exist, its digital transformation depicted in lifesize 3D and physical displays was very real and incredibly inspirational. Dazzling in scope, yet simple in pragmatic ease of innovation, a series of interactive and immersive displays demonstrated how Trilogy designed and delivered sustainable pink denim jeans in record time after one pair became a sensation on TikTok.

"Leaders at consumer products companies know that sustainability is good for the environment and more regulations are coming," said Robin Wilson, retail industry executive advisor at the event. "On top of those drivers, customers want sustainably produced, personalized products, which represent the next wave of innovation in many industries, including products like jeans and other clothing." [...]

Wilson said that consumer product manufacturers like Trilogy initially ask if it makes sense to design a sustainable item, or think of something different. For example, the on-site display of pink- and blue-colored jeans revealed three ways to develop denim sustainably: nanobubbles use air instead of water for softer, wrinkle-resistant jeans, ozone treatments replace toxic chemicals but provide that faded color that fashionistas celebrate, and laser technology provides a custom fit minus dangerous blasting or sanding techniques.

"Denim undergoes many water rinsing processes for softness and wrinkle-resistance," said Wilson. "We have customers that have created their own laser process to reduce the amount of water that goes into their denim products. And, when consumers can understand the environmental footprint of each jeans' design because they can see what materials are used and how they're produced, they know exactly what they're buying." [...]

Building a more sustainable business is only possible with connected information to act on, from early consumer demand signals to on-time product delivery. Analytics based on customer data help companies quickly attract both fashion-forward consumers and fast followers. [...]

Managing the full life cycle of a pair of sustainably manufactured jeans goes further than the many tiers of a company's supply chain. Companies also need to have employees with the right skills sets to develop products that consumers want and compliance exigencies demand. Production facilities have to adapt quickly as disruptions occur. It's often said that we can only act on what we can measure. By acting on connected data, organizations can deliver the proverbial pink denim jeans of anyone's dreams.

Adapted from *Forbes*June 2022
(442 words)

JACKSON WATER CRISIS: A LEGACY OF ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM?

Marshall lives in west Jackson, in the US state of Mississippi – a predominantly black and poor part of the city. He has no choice but to drink the tap water that Jackson residents have been told to avoid. When he turns the tap on – the water runs brown. He says it's been like this for about eight months and he has no choice but to drink it. [...]

Marshall doesn't have a car, so he can't get to the sites where water is being handed out by the National Guard. He also doesn't have electricity or gas because of a recent fire in the house next door, which means he can't boil the water to help make it safer. [....]

Jackson councilman Aaron Banks has lived in the Mississippi state's capital for most of his life, and now represents a district that is more than 90% Black. He says he thinks a devastating combination of aging infrastructure and climate change ultimately led to the latest collapse of Jackson's water supply.

In 2020, when freezing temperatures caused Jackson's water treatment facility to shut down, Mr Banks says his district went without water for nearly six weeks — far longer than the surrounding areas. The town's infrastructure has struggled to keep up ever since.

"We have not gone a month without having a 'boil water' notice or low to no water pressure in the last two years," he says. "Unfortunately, that is something we have gotten used to as American citizens - nobody should be adapting to that type of quality of life."

Time and again, Mr Banks says, those who are forced to adapt have predominantly been people of colour. For years, the councilman says he has watched state funding pour into the infrastructure of towns and areas around Jackson – but they've missed the facilities that need it most, including the city's water treatment plant.

President Joe Biden's landmark infrastructure bill earmarked money for disadvantaged and underserved communities like Jackson [...]. But the funding is allocated by state legislators who, Mr Banks says, often succumb to politics and prioritise projects for their constituents instead of focusing on fixing systemic issues in Jackson. [...]

Experts and advocates say what is happening in Jackson [...] is a direct legacy of generations of discrimination and segregation. [...]

For decades, the predominantly black residents have suffered from some of the highest rates of cancer in the nation because of pollution.

Ms King – a lawyer and environmental justice advocate – says the legacy of this kind of environmental racism, coupled with decades of underinvestment in low-income areas is playing out in Jackson. [...]

Adapted from *BBC News* September 2022 (445 words)

JUDICIARY IN ENGLAND AND WALES 'INSTITUTIONALLY RACIST', SAYS REPORT

The judiciary in England is "institutionally racist", with more than half of legal professionals surveyed claiming to have witnessed a judge acting in a racially biased way, according to a report. The study by the University of Manchester and barrister Keir Monteith found judicial discrimination to be directed particularly towards black court users – from lawyers to witnesses to defendants.

A survey of 373 legal professionals found that 56% stated they had witnessed at least one judge acting in a racially biased way towards a defendant, while 52% had witnessed discrimination in judicial decision-making. Examples ranged from hostility towards black defendants, including the use of the term "you people", to the imposition of harsher sentences.

The Professor who wrote the report said: "Judges often play a role in fuelling and normalising the terrible disparities in our legal system. Judges need to sit up and listen, because it is a myth that Lady Justice is blind to colour. Our judiciary as an institution is just as racist as our police forces, our education system and our health service – this is something that cannot be ignored for any longer."

Responses to the survey indicated that racial discrimination by judges was most frequently directed towards Asian and black people, with the latter by far the most affected, and the most frequently mentioned sub-group was young black male defendants.

The report recommends that the lord chief justice should publicly acknowledge the justice system is institutionally racist, and should organise compulsory, ongoing racial bias and anti-racist training for all judges and overhaul the process of judicial appointments. Just 1% of the judiciary are black, none of whom sit in the court of appeal, and there has never been a supreme court justice of colour.

Monteith said: "Racism in the justice system has to be acknowledged and fought by those at the highest level, but at the moment there is complete and utter silence – and as a consequence, there is no action to combat racial bias. It is impossible to have diversity and inclusion if the system itself unfairly discriminates."

The legal professionals (214 of them white) were surveyed in May through distribution of a questionnaire to legal organisations and individuals.

Lord Burnett of Maldon, the lord chief justice, said he had been "working hard to deal with problems of the sort that have been identified, where they exist". He added: "The judiciary will look carefully at this report and take it into account when considering how to focus our efforts in the future. Any incidents of racism, harassment, bullying or discrimination are unacceptable and will be dealt with in accordance with the relevant grievance or conduct procedure."

Adapted from *The Guardian*October 2022
(450 words)

KING CHARLES III WANTS TO LOOK AHEAD. 'THE CROWN' DRAGS HIM BACK.

King Charles III is trying to set the tone for his reign just as the TV show revisits some of the most painful chapters of his life, reminding viewers that he was once a bad, sad husband in a bad, sad marriage.

For an American audience, "The Crown" is entertainment. In Britain, there's a sense there's more at stake. Netflix has added a "fictional dramatization" label. But these characters are the faces on the currency. These plotlines feed into the country's sense of its history and of itself. And unlike the early seasons that featured historical figures such as World War II leader Winston Churchill, many of the characters depicted in the fifth season are still very much alive.

It matters for the future of the monarchy, and its ability to project soft power in the world, if Charles is viewed as a jerk. Whereas Queen Elizabeth II was widely adored, Charles is merely liked — by 44 percent of the British public. The rest are neutral to hostile. On Wednesday, a protester decrying slavery hurled eggs at him during a visit to the city of York.

The new season of "The Crown" being "beamed around the world at a time when Charles and Camila are looking to establish themselves as the king and queen [consort] — it couldn't be worse timing," said a professor at the University of London.

Former prime ministers are weighing in. John Major called the show a "barrel-load of nonsense." A peeved Tony Blair dismissed plot points in the new season as "complete and utter rubbish." Historians and royal biographers, meanwhile, are arguing over the show's depictions and the significance of its messages. An author on the British royals thought the new season not only "very unfair" but "very damaging." "Too many people will think that what they see really happened," she said. "No matter how many disclaimers."

A recent poll conducted in Britain found that less than 20 percent of respondents considered the show to be fully or mostly accurate. But 18 to 24-year-olds were three times more likely than those aged 65 and older to see it as an accurate account.

Charles is shown trying to convince the prime minister, Major, to convince the queen to abdicate the throne and make way for a next generation, meaning Charles. The real-life Major wasn't having it. In a letter to the Telegraph last month, he wrote: "Netflix may well take the view that any publicity is good publicity. But I assure them it is not — most especially when it disrespects the memory of those no longer alive, or puts words into the mouths of those still living and in no position to defend themselves."

Adapted from washingtonpost.com November 2022 (458 words)

LEAGUE OF LEGENDS AND OTHER TOP ESPORTS [ARE] NOT IMMUNE TO ECONOMIC DOWNTURN

League of Legends is one of the most successful PC games on the planet, and events like the Worlds 2022 championship comprise a large part of Riot Games' revenue.

Major esports events will not be immune to the global economic downturn, the boss of one of the world's biggest gaming championships has warned. Speaking in San Francisco at the League of Legends world finals, John Needham told us he was concerned advertisers might start to pull back from sponsoring such events.

The global President of esports at Riot Games said: "Because our revenues generally mostly come from sponsors, you can have some weakness(es)."

He added: "We've done well because we reach the scale of millennial and Gen Z audience that very few platforms can reach. This year, Riot Games attracted sponsorship deals from brands such as Tiffany's, Mastercard and Mercedes, which were keen to reach younger audiences.

As almost all esports are played on PC at an elite level, the viewership is huge. Worlds 22 set a new record for League of Legends esports with 5 million concurrent viewers. Gameplay was displayed on huge screens at the venue [where]Team DRX won the League of Legends Worlds 2022 title.

But what about the UK market? Having proved itself a worthy host of world-class sports events, could it one day welcome the very best professional gamers? In 2020, the government described esports as having "the potential to develop an area of real national strength in the UK, building on our world-class video games, entertainment and sports sectors".

Mr. Needham, who used to live in the UK, said: "The UK hasn't been the strongest market for us because it's a very console-dominated market. Generally [in] your flats, your houses, you don't have enough room for a dedicated office PC setup. A lot of gaming happens in the living room." Figures from last year show 30% of Brits gamed on consoles, compared to only 12% on dedicated gaming desktop computers.

Riot Games hopes its recently released shooter, Valorant, can change things. "It's the fastest growing esport right now," Mr Needham said. "It is a game that is ripe for the UK. It's a [tactical] shooter. That is the genre of gaming that is the most popular in the UK."

Should an event like Worlds 22 come to the UK, cooperation with local government would be key. "We went to Shanghai a few years ago, and transformed Shanghai into Worlds," he recalled. "We were projecting off skyscrapers and everything else. The government really leaned in there just to help us promote the event."

Adapted from *news.sky.com* November 2022 (458 words)

LEARN HOW RECYCLED GLASS HELPS ENTIRE ECONOMIES REACH SUSTAINABLE GOALS

What do we see when we look through glass? The world around us? A sustainable future? Without glass, our world would be unrecognizable. It preserves, protects, displays, and illuminates. It's been around since the dawn of humanity and will help shape a new civilization beyond this earthly one.

"We need to celebrate this miraculous material, because it can transform the world into a better place," said Elverici, Head of Şişecam, one of the world's top glass and chemicals manufacturers. "Without it we would never have reached the moon, nor will we ever step on Mars."

Şişecam's deep roots with a material we all take for granted led the company to campaign for the UN to make 2022 the International Year of Glass. "Most people don't appreciate the importance of glass and how it will help entire economies achieve their UN Sustainable Development Goals," said Elverici. "We are helping to create awareness." [...]

Hardly a building or vehicle in the world is built without glass. Glass optical fibers enabled a global communications revolution; they are the backbone of the Internet. Glassmakers have developed touch-sensitive covers for our phones, revolutionizing the way we communicate.

It is used as a chemically resistant container for life-saving medicines. Glass sheets support solar cells for creating clean energy. Glass optics and optoelectronics in space telescopes can expand our understanding of the universe. These are just a few ways glass benefits people and the planet.

"Shaping this extraordinary material requires skill and expertise, and using it to continually advance civilization requires research and innovation" said Elverici, adding that the company invests over 1% of turnover in R&D. "We need to attract young people to the industry." [...]

Attracting and retaining talent can be challenging in manufacturing industries. According to recruiters, Gen Z is more interested in careers in business, healthcare, and tech. Manufacturing and retail are the least appealing.

Clearly, organizations must change to meet the expectations of Gen Z, and Şişecam is no exception. As a major player on the international stage, the company aspires to grow as it expands its market share. But operating five business units — each with its own processes, organizations, and IT systems — made it difficult to reach its strategic goals. [...]

What's not to love about glass? For Elverici, it can be 100% recycled countless times with no loss in quality, making it the world's most sustainable material. By continuously reusing it in a circular cycle, Şişecam is not only eliminating the need for new raw materials and reducing its industrial waste and carbon footprint – it's leading the industry toward a new horizon.

Adapted from Forbes November 2022 (450 words)

MATH SCORES FELL IN NEARLY EVERY US STATE, AND READING DIPPED

The National Assessment of Educational Progress exam sampled nearly 450,000 fourth and eighth graders in more than 10,000 schools between January and March 2022. The results offer the most definitive picture of the pandemic's devastating impact on students. In most states and across all demographic groups, millions of US schoolchildren have experienced troubling setbacks in both math and reading.

In math, the results were especially devastating, representing the steepest declines ever recorded on the National Assessment exam which dates back to the early 1990s. In the test's first results since the pandemic began, math scores for eighth graders fell in nearly every state. A meager 26 percent of eighth graders were proficient. Fourth graders fared only slightly better, with declines in 41 states. Just 36 percent of fourth graders were proficient in math.

Reading scores also declined in more than half the states, continuing a downward trend that had begun even before the pandemic. Only about one in three students met proficiency standards - which means students have demonstrated competency and are on track for future success.

And for the country's most vulnerable students, the pandemic has left them even further behind. The drops in their test scores were often more pronounced.

"The results in today's nation's report are appalling and unacceptable," said the Secretary of Education. "This is a moment of truth for education. How we respond to this will determine not only our recovery, but our nation's standing in the world." The findings raise significant questions about where the country goes from here. Last year, the federal government made its largest single investment in American schools — \$123 billion, or about \$2,400 per student — to help students catch up.

With the funding slated to expire in 2024, research suggests that it could take billions more dollars and several years for students to properly recover.

The test results could re-ignite the debate over how long schools should have stayed closed, an issue that galvanized many parents and teachers. The bleak results underscored how closing schools hurt students. Decisions about how long to keep schools closed often varied even within states, depending on the local school district and virus transmission rates. And other factors, such as poverty levels and a state's specific education policies may also influence results.

Students entering high school now may be missing foundational skills in algebra and geometry, which are critical for more advanced math classes. The scores for older students were particularly concerning because eighth grade is that gateway to more advanced mathematical course taking.

Reading was less affected, perhaps, in part, because students received more help from parents during the pandemic.

MEDIBANK CYBER-ATTACK

Two weeks after the Medibank cyber-attack, the question that remains unanswered is: will the company pay a ransom? [...] The hacker claimed to have extracted about 200GB of files, and has provided 1,000 records to the insurer to prove they have the data claimed.

Beyond these details, Medibank has been tight-lipped about its communications with the hacker. It has not responded to questions about whether it has or will pay a ransom to prevent the release of the data online, or the sale of the data to a third party.

Richard Buckland, a professor of cybercrime at UNSW, said the Medibank case was one of the few where a company should pay the ransom. "This would be one of the very rare cases where I think the costs of not paying are so extraordinarily high that it would probably justify the cost of paying," he told Guardian Australia.

"This is causing harm to innocent people who had nothing to do with the incompetence of the organisation in looking after the data. They were forced to hand that data across and that collateral damage, I think, is what makes this different."

The official advice from the federal government Australian Cyber Security Centre is to never pay a ransom. [...]

The attack on Medibank is not a ransomware attack in that Medibank's systems are not locked up by an attacker, but the behaviour is the same in terms of negotiating over the data that was obtained.

Buckland said Medibank should seek out legal advice before making any payment. While it is not illegal for businesses to pay a ransom, businesses that do might fall afoul of other laws, such as those banning payments to a prohibited organisation — including terrorist organisations and many Russian organisations. [...] "I think paying a ransom enables this market to flourish. It's one of those cases of the tragedy of the commons, where you do something that benefits you but it slightly hurts everyone else."

Medibank told the Australian Stock Exchange that the financial hit to the company would be between \$25m and \$35m, not including potential customer compensation or regulatory or legal costs. [...]

Medibank was not certain it would have had its costs covered even if it did have cyber insurance.

Buckland said it was a "dangerous" decision of the company not to have cyber insurance, since the insurance company would also be able to help negotiate. He suggested the high cost of insurance could be due to how "poorly secured" Australian companies are.

"It's like flood insurance, the cost of the insurance is going up because the risk is going up."

Adapted from *The Guardian Australia*October 2022
(450 words)

NASA SPACECRAFT ACCOMPLISHES MISSION AND SMASHES ASTEROID INTO NEW ORBIT

NASA took aim at an asteroid last month, and the space agency announced that its planned 14,000-mile-per-hour collision with an object named Dimorphos made even more of a bull's-eye shot than expected.

That winning strike was the first of its kind. "We conducted humanity's first planetary defense test," said Bill Nelson, the administrator of NASA, during a news conference, "and we showed the world that NASA is serious as a defender of this planet."

In November 2021, NASA launched the Double Asteroid Redirection Test, or DART, mission, shooting a refrigerator-size spacecraft toward a small asteroid. Scientists had created DART to destroy the spacecraft.

On Sept. 26, the spacecraft smashed into a small asteroid, which defenders of Earth hoped would adjust its orbit. This strategy could protect the planet from incoming asteroids or comets. One small shift in a space rock's trajectory could, someday, mean one giant sigh of relief for humankind, if it pushes an asteroid off a collision course with Earth.

The mission's target, Dimorphos, was a diminutive space rock, just more than 500 feet wide. It was and still is harmless, posing no risk to Earth. Before DART's impact, Dimorphos orbited a larger asteroid called Didymos every 11 hours and 55 minutes. [...]

The spacecraft not only connected with Dimorphos, it altered the space rock's orbit, shortening its trip around a larger asteroid by 32 minutes.

That time shift was exactly what the DART mission aimed to accomplish. Scientists hoped the collision would push Dimorphos closer to Didymos and speed up its orbit, and they have been crunching data and taking more observations of the double-asteroid system to understand how effective this particular defense mechanism was. Scientists, according to Mr. Nelson, would have considered DART a huge success if it had only shortened Dimorphos's orbit by 10 minutes. The reality — around three times that shift — delighted the team that managed the mission. [...]

Defending the planet from hazardous space rocks is a newer addition to NASA's portfolio, and DART was the first mission to test this strategy that could be used in the future. [...]

The close-up data on the effects of the DART mission came from LICIACube, a shoebox-size satellite built by the Italian Space Agency. Its early images showed sunlight bouncing off a cloud of debris, the size and complexity of which excited astronomers.

"We couldn't believe our eyes," said the president of the Italian Space Agency, of the data the LICIACube's two cameras had gathered. The asteroid's trajectory change was not just a result of the force of the impact: It was also boosted by those debris ejections from the space-object itself.

[...]

"NATIONALISM IS THE IDEOLOGY OF OUR AGE. NO WONDER THE WORLD IS IN CRISIS", AN OPINION FROM FORMER PM GORDON BROWN

At the very moment the world needs to work together to address global problems that cannot be resolved without global solutions, it is being pulled apart not just by conflicts but also by a rising protectionism. [...]

Pillars of the post-cold war world order are tumbling down as we leave behind the unipolar, hyper-globalised, neoliberal era. Those who try to build the present in the image of the past are finding themselves wholly ill-equipped to meet the challenges of the future. I argue we now need new models for growth, national economic management and global cooperation.

No one can deny the significance of the emergence of new power centres around the world, the growing importance of services and the digital economy at the expense of manufacturing; the education-rich and education-poor divide that is replacing the old manual/non-manual divide, and the serious, existential threats to our planet. No growth model can meet the needs of the 21st century without incorporating rising concerns about environmental and economic equity and reevaluating the role of finance. And the manufacturing-led, export-driven, low-wage models of development that until recently served every industrialising country are being overtaken not just by demographic shifts but by technological advances that mean more goods can be manufactured by a markedly smaller workforce.

All this is determining the seismic shifts in our geopolitics. First, as we move from a unipolar to a multipolar world, no single country [...] has the power to command and control us, only the power to propose and persuade. Second, there is now no consensus that open markets benefit all. [...] Policies promoting privatisation, deregulation and liberalisation, which became popularly known as the Washington consensus, now have few supporters – even in Washington.

Most important of all, nationalism has replaced neoliberalism as the dominant ideology of the age. If, for the past 30 years, economics drove political decision-making, now politics is determining economic decisions, with country after country weaponising their trade, technology, industry and competition policies. The win-win economics of mutually beneficial commerce is being replaced by the zero-sum rivalries of "I win, you lose", as movements such as "America first", "China first", "India first" and "Russia first", "my tribe first", threaten to descend into an us versus them geopolitics of "my country first and only". [...]

The one hopeful sign of cooperation is Nato unity over Ukraine. But this should not blind us to the scale of global disunity, with almost all of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East standing aloof from sanctions against Russia and even condemnation of its war crimes.

Very few can ever benefit from this fragmentation, and almost everywhere inequality is on the rise.

Adapted from *The Guardian* November 2022 (441 words)

NATURE, NURTURE, LUCK

A fascinating question about what makes us the way we are is how much of our personalities, abilities and interests is down to our genes and how much to our early environment – nature or nurture. Now researchers have found a third influence: chance events that affect nerve cells as the brain is developing. They suggest that their role in shaping who we are could be far greater than environmental and genetic factors in some cases.

This has profound implications for us all. We could stop fretting so much about our parenting choices and allocate less blame to our own parents for how we have turned out.

Questions about the relative importance of our innate nature and upbringing go way back, featuring in debates between the Greek philosopher Plato and his pupil Aristotle. But the catchy phrase "nature versus nurture" came from 19th-century scientist Francis Galton, a pioneer in the emerging field of heredity.

Nature and nurture are often hard to untangle because children in the same families tend to share both DNA and the way they were raised. For instance, if children who are read to as babies tend to do well at school, that could be because early exposure to books fuels their interest in learning or because they have inherited bookish genes from their parents.

But other geneticists consider that upbringing, including schooling, only has a small impact on how you turn out. After comparing identical twins with non-identical twins, they concluded genes do most of the work and that the effects of upbringing, on the other hand, are much smaller.

But the idea that parenting has little lasting influence on the intelligence and personality of offspring isn't widely accepted. One reason is its social and political associations because, today, many on the right of the political spectrum see some of society's ills as rooted in human genetics. This can sometimes lead their opponents on the left to reject the findings of studies showing that genes are so influential.

Chance could include things like chance encounters with teachers or friends, minor childhood illnesses or early romantic relationships.

Certainly, the idea that our psyche is profoundly affected by how we are raised is deeply rooted in culture, from works of fiction to parenting advice books. But the influence of chance may come as no surprise to parents who see clear differences in their children's personalities despite their best attempts at equal treatment.

Who you are depends on your genes and on the environment in which you grew up. However, evidence from several kinds of research suggests that random events during brain development also plays a role in shaping each of us.

Adapted from *New Scientist*September 2022
(445 words)

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR FIRED AFTER STUDENTS SAY HIS CLASS WAS TOO HARD

The firing of a New York University professor who was the subject of a petition from students who said his class was too hard continues to stoke controversy, as some parents and teachers say the incident points to a lowering of academic standards at the university.

Maitland Jones Jr, a professor of organic chemistry, was fired by New York University after more than 80 students from his 350-student course signed a petition complaining about grades, teaching and help received during the Covid pandemic.

Jones, 84, received a message from the dean of science in August terminating his contract, according to the New York Times.

Chemistry professors opposing the decision wrote to several deans from the university, saying they were worried the case could undermine faculty freedom and weaken proven teaching practices.

"We are all on the same side of wanting students to succeed but we are using misaligned, and in many cases flawed, metrics to evaluate success," Stephanie Lee, one of the professors who signed the letter, said in a tweet.

"One consequence of this misalignment is that our actions are now driven by fear."

The student petition protested that Jones's class was too hard and that students lacked resources and help. It did not say the professor should be fired.

"We urge you to realize that a class with such a high percentage of withdrawals and low grades has failed to make students' learning and wellbeing a priority and reflects poorly on the chemistry department as well as the institution as a whole," the petition read.

Jones, a widely accredited professor known for writing an organic chemistry textbook, told the Times he had been thinking of retiring but was worried what the NYU decision could mean for other professors and faculty.

A spokesperson for the university defended the firing, emphasizing high student withdrawals and bad course evaluations. The statement said the decision was also based on complaints about dismissiveness, unresponsiveness, condescension and lack of transparency about grading.

Some students believe the pandemic completely disrupted their ability to prepare for classes such as organic chemistry, a fundamental course for those hoping to go to medical school.

Some parents are pushing back. Several groups have said the NYU decision is indicative of a problem in a school system they believe is too lenient on students.

"When paying for an education at a reputable university, we should expect quality professors to intellectually challenge our students, helping them to grow by pushing them to stretch beyond what is convenient and comfortable," Elicia Brand, founder of Army of Parents, told Fox News.

Adapted from *The Guardian*October 2022
(438 words)

NEW ZEALAND TO DECIDE ON LOWERING VOTING AGE FROM 18 TO 16

New Zealand lawmakers will take a vote on whether to lower the national voting age from 18 to 16, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said Monday.

Her announcement came hours after the country's Supreme Court ruled that not allowing 16and 17-year-olds to vote amounted to age discrimination.

But while Ardern said she personally favors lowering the age, such a change would require a 75% supermajority of lawmakers to agree. And even proponents acknowledge they don't currently have the numbers.

A number of countries are debating whether to lower their voting age. Some that allow people to vote at 16 include Austria, Malta, Brazil, Cuba and Ecuador.

Sanat Singh, co-director of New Zealand's Make It 16 campaign, said he was absolutely thrilled with the court's decision.

"It's a huge day," he said. "This is historic not only for our campaign, but for the country." Singh, 18, said existential issues like climate change — as well as issues like pandemic recovery and the state of democracy — will most affect young people.

Ardern, who leads the liberal Labour Party, said all lawmakers should have a say on the issue.

Ardern said the vote would likely take place within the coming months but any change would not take effect until after next year's general election.

The liberal Green Party said it supported a change.

But New Zealand's two main conservative opposition parties said they oppose a change. "It's not something we support," the Opposition Leader told reporters. "Ultimately, you've got to draw the line somewhere, and we're comfortable with the line being 18."

At the Supreme Court, four judges found in favor of the lobby group's appeal with a fifth judge dissenting to some aspects of the decision.

In New Zealand, the protection against age discrimination begins at 16, and the judges ruled that the attorney-general had failed to show why 18 had been chosen as the age to vote rather than 16.

The nature of the court's ruling compelled New Zealand lawmakers to at least debate the issue, but it didn't compel them to take a vote or to make a change.

Singh said he's hopeful that while his group may not yet have the 75% support it needs in Parliament, it will get there within the next few years. He said a possible first step would be to get the voting age lowered to 16 for local council elections, as that change requires only a regular majority of lawmakers.

New Zealand's voting age was previously lowered from 21 to 20 in 1969, and then to 18 in 1974.

Adapted from *Associated Press* November 2022 (445 words)

NOW WE KNOW FOR SURE THAT BIG TECH PEDDLES DESPAIR, WE MUST PROTECT OURSELVES

Now that the inquest into the awful death of Molly Russell in 2017 has delivered its findings, we have a new reality to adjust to. The teenager died from an act of self-harm, "while suffering depression and the negative effects of online content". Her father described how she had entered "the bleakest of worlds": online content on self-harm and suicide was delivered by Instagram and Pinterest, just leaving it to the algorithm.

Social media platforms target users with content, seeking attention and therefore advertising revenue. This content can be extremely damaging. But now that we've struggled towards the conclusion that it can be deadly, there can be no more complacency. It is time to build on the consensus that they cause harm by regulating, as we would if they were producing toxic waste and pumping it into paddling pools.

People, parents mainly worry a lot about the digital age and its impact on teenagers. Sometimes you'll get a useful correction from a specialist in addiction or adolescence but there is no coherent pushback from tech giants, because these anxieties create the debate they need, amorphous and essentially luddite in character. (..)

Social media is particularly influential on the young, and the behemoths of the field are particularly culpable in their failure to address the problem. The social media coverage of Gen Z is astronomical: 85% of US teens use YouTube, 72% use Instagram, 51% still use Facebook.

Adolescence is a time of great intellectual and neurological plasticity. We can debate how a mature society supports the outer edges of youthful turbulence, from eating disorders to toxic masculinity, yet we allow the main media consumed by that generation to operate, not just without any sense of responsibility or duty, but with a business model that foments every problem for profit.(..)The online safety bill, expected to progress through parliament – although it may not be enacted until 2024 – addresses content that promotes self-harm and suicidal ideation, and would put it in Ofcom's hands to evaluate what is appropriate for under-18s. It's useful but insufficient both practically and in spirit. The response needs to be international.

All this takes time, youth is short, parents will be thinking they should control incoming influence themselves, that they don't have time to wait for international initiatives. You can micromanage your kids' consumption, be aware of the triggers everywhere — YouTube for toxic masculinity, TikTok for overwhelming climate anxiety, Instagram for eating disorders — try to control it. But it will corrode your relationship with your children to be constantly policing them, destroying their trust and openness. I don't want to turn into the internet jailer so that Mark Zuckerberg can enjoy unfettered profit.

Adapted from the Guardian October 2022 (458 words)

OUR SCHOOL'S NO-DEADLINE POLICY HAS BACKFIRED ON MY TEEN

In 2020, my children's high school switched to a policy of no penalty for late work and endless opportunities to retake tests. As a result, the only hard deadline is the end of each marking period. They said it was a way to "give grace" to students who were dealing with a lot during the early days of the pandemic. [...]

But now we've been back to a normal school schedule for almost 2 years, and the policies remain. At back-to-school night, I had a chance to ask the principal about it, and he said it was so that student grades reflected "mastery" instead of ability to learn on a specific schedule. [...] My youngest is a sophomore now and has not been doing well with this system. He doesn't have any sense of urgency around schoolwork anymore. Shouldn't you be studying more for that test? "If I do badly, I can just retake it." What's with all these zeroes in the grade book? "It's okay, I can turn that stuff in late."

But of course, it all just piles up for the end of the marking period when he turns in a bunch of insufficient work. His test grades usually don't rise above mediocrity because in his head, he can always try again later. He did not have these habits at all in middle school before these policies were implemented, so I feel fairly confident that these habits are mostly a result of the policy changes. He's not flunking anything, but he's doing worse than he used to —Bs, Cs, and Ds when he used to get As, Bs, and the odd C. How do I help my child succeed under these policies? I could just let him sink or swim on his own, but I don't entirely blame him for struggling with this. I think I'd struggle at work if most deadlines were just suggestions. I could set hard deadlines for all his assignments myself and impose consequences if he doesn't meet them. But that feels like micro-managing, especially in high school when he should be getting more independent. [...]

I would prefer a middle ground where we allow for late work with a grade penalty and offer retakes; this creates an incentive for students to meet deadlines and study for tests while providing opportunities for students to pass their classes.

However, the problem schools are dealing with right now is that many students are lacking the organizational and study skills needed to meet deadlines and prepare for assessments. [...] Educators certainly don't want to watch large numbers of students fail. Many schools are unsure of how to address this problem [...]. We are not yet back to "normal."

Adapted from *Slate* November 2022 (457 words)

'PARIS AGREEMENT' FOR NATURE IMPERATIVE AT COP15, ARCHITECTS OF CLIMATE DEAL SAY

The architects of the Paris agreement have urged world leaders to reach an ambitious sister deal for nature at the Cop15 biodiversity conference this December while warning that limiting global heating to 1.5C is impossible without protecting and restoring ecosystems.

On biodiversity day at the Cop27 climate conference in Egypt, the team who helped design the Paris agreement, said that Cop15 would be an "unprecedented" opportunity to turn the tide on nature loss.

It follows scientific warnings that humans are driving the sixth mass extinction of life on Earth, with 1m species in danger of extinction.

The biodiversity summit takes place in Montreal, Canada just two weeks after Cop27 in Egypt, where governments will negotiate this decade's targets on preventing biodiversity loss. Despite the ominous scientific warnings about the health of the planet and the consequences for human civilisation, no world leaders are scheduled to attend the meeting, which clashes with the football World Cup in Qatar.

In a separate announcement, a group of nearly 350 scientists, Indigenous peoples, businesses and NGOs have urged presidents and prime ministers to prioritise the nature summit.

"Leaders must secure a global agreement for biodiversity which is as ambitious, science-based and comprehensive as the Paris agreement is for climate change. Like the Paris agreement, it must encourage countries to pledge and also speed up their action according to the size of the challenge," said the joint statement by the designers of the Paris climate agreement.

"There is no pathway to limiting global warming to 1.5C without action on protecting and restoring nature. Only by taking urgent action to halt and reverse the loss of nature this decade, while continuing to step up efforts to rapidly decarbonise our economies, can we hope to achieve the promise of the Paris agreement," it reads.

Scientist Johan Rockström, director of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research said nature was crucial to keeping global heating within 1.5C of pre-industrial levels.

"To have a 50% chance of achieving 1.5C and thus limiting tipping point risks, global greenhouse gas emissions must be cut by half by 2030 and reach net zero by 2050," he said. "Critically, these pathways rely on the continuing capacity of nature to operate as a carbon sink and to counter the worst impacts of climate change – 1.5C is not a goal, it is a biophysical limit. Nature is one of the best climate solutions for remaining within that limit. An ambitious global framework for biodiversity at Cop15 that addresses root causes of decline of the global standards is urgent and necessary."

Adapted from *The Guardian*November 2022
(443 words)

PEAK POWER: HYDROGEN TO BE INJECTED INTO UK STATION FOR FIRST TIME

Hydrogen will be injected into an emergency gas-fired power station for the first time in a pilot backed by the owner of British Gas. Centrica has invested in an industry joint venture which will trial using hydrogen at an existing "peaking plant" at its Brigg station in Lincolnshire. The pilot, which will launch in the second half of next year, is aimed at examining the role that hydrogen can play in producing power.

Peaking power stations generally run only when there is a high, or peak, demand for electricity. The 49MW gas-fired station at Brigg is designed to meet demand during peak times or when generation from renewables is low, typically operating for less than three hours a day.

The pilot is one of 20 projects part-funded by an £8m programme from the Net Zero Technology Centre (NZTC), which receives funding from the UK and Scottish governments. Centrica has also increased its stake in HiiROC, the start-up behind the project, from 2% to 5%, a small investment for the £4bn energy giant.

The project is designed test to the practicalities of mixing hydrogen in with natural gas at a power plant, with the aim of reducing the overall carbon intensity of the site. In its early stages, just 3% of the gas mix is expected to be hydrogen, rising incrementally to 20%. Partners in the initiative hope ultimately to power the plant using just hydrogen and set a precedent to decarbonise other gas-fired peaking plants. Hydrogen is produced by splitting water using electricity, with minimal emissions. It is seen as key to decarbonising energy-intensive industries.

HiiROC, founded in Hull in 2019, has developed an electrolysis process using technology which can create hydrogen at lower costs or with higher emissions than other methods. Its process converts biomethane, flare gas or natural gas into hydrogen and carbon black, a byproduct that can be used in tyres, rubbers and printing inks.

Greg McKenna, managing director of Centrica Business Solutions, said: "Gas still plays a huge role in maintaining a secure, stable supply of power in the UK, with around 40 per cent of our power coming from natural gas. So, it's vital that we find ways to reduce the carbon intensity of gas plants like that at Brigg. We're delighted to get the grant funding from the NZTC in order to explore the role of hydrogen in providing the low carbon back-up power we'll need in order to maintain security of supply as more renewable energy comes on stream."

Centrica is already converting part of the site at Brigg into a battery storage facility designed to store power generated by nearby onshore windfarms.

Adapted from *The Guardian*October 2022
(453 words)

RADICAL WOMEN'S PRISON TO OPEN IN SCOTLAND

With front doors freshly painted in mint green, lemon and mauve and young cherry trees planted around the quiet central courtyard, the Lilias Centre in Glasgow resembles an upmarket cul-de-sac rather than a prison.

At this pioneering women's community custody unit, the architecture of incarceration is at a minimum. There are no bars on windows, high fences or reinforced locking systems. Instead, inmates access their individual rooms and communal spaces with a key card akin to one given to hotel guests. Only access to the street beyond is restricted.

This unit, a UK first and already attracting international interest, is part of what the Scottish government's justice minister, Keith Brown, calls "a step change in the way Scotland supports women in custody". It comes after significant criticism of Scottish prisons in recent years over rising violence, overcrowding and crumbling buildings, and particular concern about the treatment of young people.

The Lilias Centre is made up of four houses with a capacity for six women in each, who will be encouraged to budget, shop, order groceries and cook for themselves. Each house has a well-equipped kitchen and attractive dining table set. Gone are the usual institutional greys, replaced by walls and furnishings in warm pinks and bright citrus shades, with plenty of natural light. Each room has a comfortable bed, wardrobe and en-suite shower room; there are also a few studio flats for younger or more vulnerable inmates. (...)

The inmates who are assessed as capable of managing the challenges of independent living here will be a mix of those on short sentences, who may serve the majority of their term at Lilias, and longer-term prisoners, including lifers, who are coming close to their parole date.

Staff, who have all specifically applied to work here, are specially trained in trauma and mindful that women in custody face extensive mental ill-health, while nearly half are flagged as having a potential learning difficulty. (...)

The director takes a likely complaint head-on: "I know some people will say 'this is like a hotel, what about students and others who can't afford to live like this?' I'd say this is the right thing to do. It's a ripple effect. If you treat people with worth and dignity it's better for everyone: the inmate, their family and wider society."

But how many women can a small bespoke facility like this actually help? There are currently about 290 women in custody in Scotland. The Lilias Centre, which opens to inmates on 24 October, has space for up to 24 women; its sister facility, the Bella Centre in Dundee, opened in August and houses up to eight.

Adapted from *The Guardian*October 2022
(446 words)

RECYCLING PLASTIC IS PRACTICALLY IMPOSSIBLE

The vast majority of plastic that people put into recycling bins is headed to landfills, or worse, according to a report from Greenpeace on the state of plastic recycling in the U.S. The amount of plastic actually turned into new things has fallen to new lows of around 5%. That number is expected to drop further as more plastic is produced.

Greenpeace found that no plastic — not even soda bottles, one of the most prolific items thrown into recycling bins — meets the threshold to be called "recyclable" Plastic must have a recycling rate of 30% to reach that standard; no plastic has ever been recycled and reused close to that rate.

"More plastic is being produced, and an even smaller percentage of it is being recycled," says Lisa Ramsden, of Greenpeace USA. "The crisis just gets worse and worse, and without drastic change will continue to worsen as the industry plans to triple plastic production by 2050."

The problem with plastic is that it is expensive to collect and sort. There are thousands of different types of plastic, and none of them can be melted down together. Plastic also degrades after one or two uses. Greenpeace found the more plastic is reused the more toxic it becomes.

New plastic, on the other hand, is cheap and easy to produce. The result is that plastic trash has few markets — a reality the public has not wanted to hear.

Trent Carpenter, the general manager of Southern Oregon Sanitation, says when they told customers a couple years ago that they could no longer take any plastic trash other than soda bottles and jugs — like milk containers and detergent bottles — people were upset. They wanted to put their bags, yogurt cups and all manner of plastic trash in their recycling bin.

Carpenter says they wanted to be transparent with their customers and tell them the truth.

"We had to re-educate individuals that a great deal of that material is ending up in a landfill," Carpenter said. "It's not going to a recycling facility and being recycled. It's going to a recycling facility and being landfilled someplace else".

Environmentalists and lawmakers in some states are now pushing for legislation that bans single use plastics, and for "bottle bills" which pay customers to bring back their plastic bottles. The bills have led to successful recycling rates for plastic bottles in places like Oregon and Michigan, but have faced steep resistance from plastic and oil industry lobbyists.

After years of embracing plastic recycling, many environmental groups say they hope the public will finally see plastic for what they say it is — trash — and that people will ask themselves if there is something else they could be using instead.

Adapted from NPR October 2022 (457 words)

REVEALED: 5,000 EMPTY 'GHOST FLIGHTS' IN UK SINCE 2019, DATA SHOWS

More than 5,000 completely empty passenger flights have flown to or from UK airports since 2019, the Guardian can reveal.

A further 35,000 commercial flights have operated almost empty since 2019, with fewer than 10% of seats filled, according to analysis of data from the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA). This makes a total of about 40,000 "ghost flights".

Air travel results in more carbon emissions an hour than any other consumer activity and is dominated by a minority of frequent flyers, making it a focus of climate campaigners. They called the ghost flight revelations "shocking" and said a jet fuel tax was needed and airport expansion plans should be questioned. The UK government describes ghost flights as "environmentally damaging".

Why ghost flights operate remains unclear. Only airlines know the reasons but they do not publish data that explains the practice. Ghost flights may run to fulfil "use-it-or-lose-it" airport slot rules, though these were suspended during the height of the pandemic. Other reasons cited by airlines include Covid repatriation flights or the repositioning of aircraft. But these cannot be verified and campaigners said more transparency was needed.

The new data gives the fullest picture to date of the number of UK ghost flights, as previous data only counted international departures.

"Publication of this data is a step in the right direction, but we need more transparency to understand why these inefficient, polluting practices continue, and to hold the main airline culprits to account," said Tim Johnson at the Aviation Environment Federation. "Given the climate emergency, the revelation that so many near empty planes have been burning fossil fuels and adding to the CO₂ building up in the atmosphere is pretty shocking."

The data shows an average of 130 completely empty flights a month since 2019. The number of empty flights remained at a similar level before, during and after pandemic travel restrictions, with the second highest level in the second quarter of 2022. This suggests the reason the airlines chose to fly empty planes was not related to the impact of Covid on aviation. (...) Alethea Warrington, at the climate charity Possible, said: "This shocking new data on ghost flights is yet another example of how the aviation industry cannot be trusted to get its emissions on track to tackle the climate crisis."

"Following a summer of record-breaking, runway-melting heat, this wanton waste of carbon by airlines flies in the face of those feeling the full brunt of our warming world," she said. "To end this for good, it's time to start taxing kerosene to discourage unnecessary emissions."

> Adapted from *The Guardian* September 2022 (447 words)

RISHI SUNAK: YOUNG, ULTRA-RICH UK'S FIRST PRIME MINISTER OF COLOUR

Elected for the first time to parliament in 2015, Rishi Sunak became Britain's youngest prime minister in more than 200 years on Monday, tasked with steering the country through an economic crisis and mounting anger among some voters.

It is a remarkable return for Sunak who lost a leadership bid to Liz Truss less than two months ago when he was accused by some in the Conservative Party of bringing down their hero, Boris Johnson.

One of the wealthiest politicians in Westminster, he enters Downing Street facing a need to make deep public spending cuts to stem a fiscal crisis, as well as tackling a cost-of-living crunch, a winter of strikes and Russia's war in Ukraine.

His backers say the former finance minister is a safe pair of hands who can restore Britain's credibility with investors who sold the country's bonds and sterling after Truss's mini-budget offered tax cuts with little on how to fund them. [...]. When declaring his candidacy, Sunak, 42, said he had a track record that showed he could "fix our economy, unite out party and deliver for our country".

The opposition Labour Party is likely to paint him as a member of the uber-rich elite, out of touch with the pressures faced by millions as Britain slides towards a recession, dragged down by the surging cost of food and energy. Some fear he cannot reunite a party that is deeply divided and getting used to quickly dispensing with leaders they do not like.

As the first Indian-heritage prime minister, born in 1980 to Hindu parents [...], Sunak had a privileged education – he went to an elite fee-paying school and is the latest prime minister to have studied politics, philosophy and economics at Oxford University, following David Cameron and his predecessor, Truss [...], and becoming, in 2020, one of the youngest finance ministers.

During the last leadership campaign, he supported the creation of more selective grammar schools after new ones were banned by the opposition Labour Party, but repeatedly said "a world class education" should be a birthright.

He will also be the first person of colour to become Britain's prime minister, and a Conservative Party member described the appointment as a "watershed moment". "I grew up in the 80s and 90s, and I could not imagine a non-white prime minister in my lifetime... So to see a British Indian leader is phenomenal," he told Reuters.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit Britain, Sunak dropped the Conservatives' small-state instincts to borrow massively and stave off the risk of an economic depression. That made him one of the most popular politicians in the country, as he was praised for helping businesses and workers.

Adapted from *Reuters* October 2022 (458 words)

SAUDI ARABIA'S FUTURISTIC ECO-CITY

Neom claims to be a "blueprint for tomorrow in which humanity progresses without compromise to the health of the planet". It's a \$500bn project, part of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 plan to wean the country off oil - the industry that made it rich. (...)

The mega-territory will include a 170km long city, called The Line, which will run in a straight line through the desert. (...) Further up the Red Sea coast from this "industrial hub", Neom has announced plans for the world's largest coral reef restoration project. (...)

But how feasible is it to build a cutting-edge city that lives up to its green credentials in the middle of the desert?

An energy expert at the University of Oxford, says there are many things to consider. Will food be produced locally in a system that doesn't use an excessive amount of resources or will it rely on food imports from abroad?

The website claims that Neom will become "the world's most food self-sufficient city". It sets out a vision for vertical farming and greenhouses - revolutionary for a country that currently imports about 80% of its food. There are questions about whether this can be done sustainably.

Critics accuse the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman, the driving force behind Neom, of greenwashing - making grand promises about the environment to distract from reality.

The "giga-project" is part of the crown prince's vision of a greener Saudi Arabia (...) with a target of achieving net zero emissions by 2060. (...) Yet Saudi Arabia just weeks after making headline green pledges promised to increase oil production.

Defenders of Neom say it's necessary to start afresh and build a smart, sustainable city powered by wind and solar, with water provided by carbon-free desalination plants.

"Saudi Arabia needs some creative thinking, because the Middle East is running out of water," says Neom's advisory board.

Saudi Arabia is an arid country and about half of its water is produced through desalination plants to take away salt from water - powered by fossil fuels. (...)

But climate experts are concerned that relying on unproven technologies can be a form of climate delay, getting in the way of significant action against the effects of climate change. It's sometimes described as "technological optimism". And there are big questions about who Neom is for. (...)

The project promises to create jobs and generate wealth in this underdeveloped region, but so far the local population haven't seen any benefits.

Human rights campaigners say that two towns have been cleared and 20,000 members of the Huwaitat forcibly removed, without adequate compensation, in order to build the megacity.

Adapted from *BBC NEWS* February 2022 (451 words)

SCIENTISTS MAKE 'SLIGHTLY SWEATY' ROBOT FINGER WITH LIVING SKIN

Japanese scientists have developed a "slightly sweaty" robotic finger covered in living skin in an advance they say brings truly human-like robots a step closer.

The finger, which was shown to be able to heal itself, is seen as an impressive technical feat that blurs the line between living flesh and machine. But scientists were divided on whether people would warm to its lifelike anatomy or find it creepy.

"We are surprised by how well the skin tissue conforms to the robot's surface," said Shoji Takeuchi, a professor at the University of Tokyo, who led the work. "But this work is just the first step toward creating robots covered with living skin."

The team argue that more lifelike humanoids would be able to interact with people more naturally in a range of roles, including in nursing care and the service industry.

"I think living skin is the ultimate solution to give robots the look and touch of living creatures since it is exactly the same material that covers animal bodies," Takeuchi said. He added that such advances had the potential to "build a new relationship between humans and robots".

Scientists have previously produced skin grafts – sheets of skin that can be stitched together in reconstructive surgery, for instance – but have struggled to create living skin on three-dimensional, dynamic objects. (...)

The finger is a work in progress: its skin is much weaker than natural skin and has to be kept moist as without a circulatory system the cells would die if they dried out. Its movements are also distinctly mechanical.

"The finger looks slightly sweaty straight out of the culture medium," said Takeuchi. "Since the finger is driven by an electric motor, it is also interesting to hear the clicking sounds of the motor in harmony with a finger that looks just like a real one."

However, experts say that it is this combination of very lifelike and mechanical that can trigger a sense of revulsion, known as the "uncanny valley" effect.

Prof Fabian Grabenhorst, a neuroscientist at the University of Oxford who (...) studies the so-called uncanny valley effect, said: "It seems like a fantastic technological innovation."

He agreed that people might have an initial negative reaction to the mixture of human and robot features, but said research showed this response could shift depending on interactions with a robot. "Initially people might find it weird, but (...) positive experiences (...) might help people overcome these feelings."

The team now plans to incorporate more sophisticated functional structures within the skin, such as sensory neurons, hair follicles, nails and sweat glands. They are also working on a skin-covered robotic face.

Adapted from *The Guardian* June 2022 (445 words)

SCIENTISTS WORKING ON 'ALIEN CODE' FOR WHEN EXTRA-TERRESTRIALS CONTACT EARTH

If extraterrestrial life sent us a message tomorrow, how would humanity respond? According to researchers, we don't know yet — and that's a problem. That's why, for the first time in 35 years, a team of policy experts and scientists have united to establish a set of alien-contact protocols for the entire world to follow in the event of a sudden encounter with E.T.

"Science fiction is awash with explorations of the impact on human society following discovery of, and even encounters with, life or intelligence elsewhere," John Elliot, a computer scientist at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland, said in a statement. Elliot is the coordinator of the University of St. Andrews' newly established SETI Detection Hub, the cross-disciplinary organization that will establish the new alien contact protocol.

Currently, the only alien contact protocol that humans have was established by the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence Institute (SETI) community in 1989. The protocol, which was last revised more than a decade ago, is vague when it comes to the international response to extraterrestrial communication; it mainly focuses on the importance of sharing discoveries with the public and broader scientific community. In the event of confirmed alien contact, the protocol's main practical tip for scientists is to seek instruction from the United Nations or another governing body. (What the United Nations should do is another open question.)

From finding traces of water on Mars to discovering potentially Earth-like exoplanets, advances in space exploration in recent decades have made the idea of life on other worlds more plausible. Yet despite more than a century of efforts to get in contact with these potential lifeforms, humans have yet to hear back.

Rather than focusing on sending messages to aliens, the new SETI Detection Hub will scan signals for potential messages sent from alien lifeforms and will develop a framework for attaching meaning to those signals.

[...] "Will we ever get a message from E.T.? We don't know. We also don't know when this is going to happen," Elliot said. "But we do know that we cannot afford to be ill-prepared — scientifically, socially, and politically rudderless — for an event that could turn into reality as early as tomorrow."

While conspiracy theories about potential alien visitors to Earth have abounded recently, the U.S. Department of Defense filed a report this week claiming there's no evidence of extraterrestrial visitors in more than 140 cases of unidentified aerial phenomena (UAPs) reported by the U.S. military. Foreign spy drones and "airborne clutter," like weather balloons, are the far more common explanations for oddities in America's skies. At least, for now.

Adapted from *Live Science* November 2022 (442 words)

SECURITY CAMERAS MAKE US FEEL SAFE, BUT ARE THEY WORTH THE INVASION?

San Francisco is about to put into effect its new camera ordinance, which is aimed at helping the police investigate crimes. The legislation, crafted by the city's mayor gives the police the right to request access to the live footage of privately owned internet cameras.

In the past, the police could request recorded footage from the owners of internet cameras, or they could ask the tech companies for the data. The police say having access to live footage will enable them to respond to crimes happening in real time.

After more than a dozen interviews with privacy experts, academics, representatives of tech companies and the authors of the legislation, I've concluded that the ordinance's near-term impact on consumer privacy will be minimal because of limits in the technology. But the implications of the increasingly tightknit relationship between tech corporations and government agencies should make us seriously assess how we use our cameras — so that we can protect our privacy in the long term.

San Francisco's camera ordinance serves as an important lens through which to examine these questions and the current debate surrounding surveillance.

Proponents of the camera program say the goal is to make the public safer. Officials in the mayor's office cite examples like the city's Western Addition district, where shootings were rampant in the 1990s but dropped after the installation of city-owned cameras in the mid-2000s. They also point to cases in which cameras have led to crimes being solved.

Opponents of the ordinance say research has shown that cameras do little to reduce crime. A study from New York University, for one, found that cameras installed in two privately owned apartment complexes in New York City were an ineffective crime deterrent.

Several privacy experts warned now that there is legislative language allowing the police to request live access to camera technology, the concern is that the police will put pressure on the tech companies to cooperate.

The author of "The Age of Surveillance Capitalism," warned that San Francisco had voluntarily created an environment that fused government power and private power. Going forward, as long as the government depends on the tech companies, there will be no laws to stop this data collection, she said.

Cameras, according to the study, were effective as a deterrent for crimes such as car burglaries and property theft, but they had no significant effect on violent crimes.

If you're worried that the police might gain access to your camera without your permission, there are ways to navigate those concerns, like using an offline camera that records to a physical storage drive or a picture card in your home.

In addition, you can avoid using cameras to monitor indoor spaces like bedrooms, and you can disable their microphones.

Adapted from *New York Times* November 2022 (456 words)

SMOKING IS BACK IN CANDY-COLOURED DISGUISE – AND A WHOLE NEW GENERATION IS ADDICTED

The modern sweet shop has long removed from its window the jars full of lollipops that used to tempt kids to spend their pocket money on the way home from school. Instead, there is an array of slim boxes in a rainbow of bright colours. The jewelled boxes contain Elf bars: disposable ecigarettes.

The rules say they are for adults only. Under-18s are not allowed to buy them, even if they wander in to look at the confectionery that is also for sale in some of these shops. But everyone knows the pretty toys also end up in the hands of children, who may even have learned how to use them from influencers on TikTok.

Overall, smoking rates in the UK have come down massively: fewer than 15% of adults today say they smoke, down from a peak of more than 45% during the 1970s. This is thanks to the long and hard-fought war on tobacco. But in recent years, many experts in the UK argue that e-cigarettes have played a part in that victory, providing the addict with the nicotine hit without the deadly tar.

Others, especially in the United States, say they are the devil's handiwork, hooking kids on nicotine, exposing them to harmful chemicals and potentially routeing them back to tobacco in the long term. The eagerness with which the Big Tobacco companies have moved into e-cigarette manufacture, as their markets in rich countries stall, only supports that belief. The transatlantic schism over vaping and health, sparked by the arrival of the first overtly teen-friendly e-cigarettes from the San Francisco startup Juul, still exists. In September 2022, the American company agreed to pay \$440m to 33 US states following two years of investigations into its marketing practices. It was accused of deliberately targeting young people with launch parties and social media advertising. At the time, it had already removed fruit and candy flavours from its range.

In the UK, however, the government broadly accepts the advice from Public Health England, that vaping is very much less harmful than smoking and is a useful tool for those who want to quit. The NHS encourages smokers to try vaping instead.

How to solve this problem? What we need is a clampdown on the advertising and marketing of e-cigarettes that are attractive to young people. We have cigarettes in plain packages – why not extend that to all nicotine products? Bin the pretty boxes and sweet flavours. We also need the existing rules on sales and marketing to children to be policed. And it is time for a windfall tax on the tobacco companies.

The polluter must pay.

Adapted from *The Guardian* November 2022 (453 words)

SOME LONDONERS SAY THEY HOPE THE MONARCHY WILL CHANGE

While London is full of huge crowds and long lines, many people are just fine to sit out the pomp, circumstance and commotion that's accompanying Queen Elizabeth II's funeral. In the southeastern multicultural neighborhood of Peckham, it appeared many people were going about their Sunday as usual.

People weren't planning their Mondays around the funeral (but said they might watch it on TV if convenient), and didn't feel they were missing out on anything by not lining up to visit the queen's coffin. As a woman named Hortence put it, "I don't feel emotionally connected to the institution."

Hortense says the royal family doesn't do much beyond serve as a tourist attraction — and doesn't do anything for her in particular, even though she pays taxes towards them. She's "waiting for the abolishment."[...]

A woman named Kesta said that anyone's death is sad, but so is the symbol of what the queen represented. Many countries are still feeling the negative impact of the British Empire and the legacy of colonialism, which she finds impossible to separate from the monarchy itself. [...]

Musician Anjelo Disons agrees that it's especially hard to see so much money directed toward the proceedings amidst the U.K.'s cost of living crisis. He acknowledges the significance of this historical moment, but also thinks it could be an opportunity to rethink and perhaps reform the British monarchy. Disons, who is wearing a necklace with an Africa-shaped pendant, notes the queen meant a lot to his mom, who is from Uganda.

"However, to me personally, I'd be telling fibs if I'm saying she meant the most to me. ... I think people are moving on to new ways of thinking and whether or not we need a monarchy," he said.

Sajida Khan, a retired teacher who emigrated from Pakistan some four decades ago, got choked up when trying to describe what the queen meant to her, describing her as a dutiful and graceful person who, like everyone, had ups and downs in her life. She's able to separate the queen from the darker parts of Britain's past.

"I don't see her in this light, that she was a cruel person or whatever has happened in the past or happening even now," she said. "I don't think she has anything to do with it. That is my understanding. I may be wrong."

Everyone is entitled to their own opinion, says Khan, adding that she'd never convince her daughter to be a royalist or a monarchist. She personally would like to see William be king one day. "And after that, maybe if it doesn't exist, then I won't be here to see."

STARBUCKS WORKERS PLAN STRIKES AT MORE THAN 100 U.S. STORES

Starbucks workers at more than 100 U.S. stores say they are going on strike Thursday in what will be the largest labor action since a campaign to unionize the company's stores began late last year. The walkouts are scheduled to coincide with Starbucks' annual Red Cup Day, when the company gives free reusable cups to customers who order a holiday drink. Workers say it is often one of the busiest days of the year. Starbucks declined to say how many red cups it plans to distribute.

Workers say they are seeking better pay, more consistent schedules and higher staffing levels in busy stores. Starbucks opposes the unionization effort, saying the company functions best when it works directly with employees.

The Seattle coffee giant has more than 9,000 company-owned stores in the U.S. Stores in 25 states planned to take part in the labor action, according to Starbucks Workers United, the group organizing the effort. Some workers planned to picket all day while others planned shorter walkouts. The union said the goal is to shut the stores down during the walkouts.

Silvia Baldwin, 26 and Tzvi Ortiz, 31, said they love being baristas at the 34th Street and Chestnut Street Starbucks in Philadelphia. But the work has gotten harder, with the understaffed store trying to fill delivery and in-person orders simultaneously. "We're going on strike to say that it's just not viable anymore. It's very stressful, but a lot of people don't really notice," Ortiz said.

Willow Montana, a shift manager at a Starbucks store in Brighton, Massachusetts, planned to strike because Starbucks has not begun bargaining with the store despite a successful union vote in April. "Why should we come to work when we are understaffed, underpaid and overworked?" Montana said. Others said workers are angry that Starbucks promised higher pay and benefits to non-union stores. Starbucks says it is following the law and can't give union stores pay hikes without bargaining.

At least 257 Starbucks stores have voted to unionize since late last year. Fifty-seven stores have held votes where workers opted not to unionize. Starbucks and the unions have begun contract talks at 53 stores, but no agreements have been reached so far.

Earlier this week, a regional director filed a request against Starbucks in federal court, saying the company violated labor law when it fired a union organizer in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Meanwhile, Starbucks has denied all allegations of unfair labor practices and has asked the NLRB to temporarily suspend all union elections at its U.S. stores.

Adapted from *huffpost.com* November 2022 (442 words)

STUDENTS ARE BEING FORCED TO CHOOSE BETWEEN STUDYING AND EATING

[...] Most British university students had an unprecedented end to their school years, studying remotely through a pandemic that defined not only A-levels and other final exams but their transition to university – the so-called best years of their lives. On top of all this, they now have to grapple with a financial crisis. The situation is harder still for working-class students, who are already grossly under-represented at top universities. Analysis by the Institute for Fiscal Studies and the Sutton Trust found that the access rate for disadvantaged students was the lowest at the country's most elite institutions. [...]

Students have worked alongside their studies since long before this cost of living crisis. But, while having a part-time job can teach you valuable skills, it is important to maintain work-study balance – working too many hours can negatively impact one's studies, and lead to burnout. Many universities recommend working a maximum of 15 hours a week. Despite this, one study revealed that 9% of students work 21-30 hours a week and 11% work more than 31 hours.

Clearly, this is unsustainable – but for some it is unavoidable. Working part-time is the only way to keep afloat. [...] As prices rise, even these hours may not be enough: as of June, 11% of students were already using food banks.

And although working-class students will be more affected, those from the middle class are facing financial struggles too. Many rely on their parents for contributions towards living costs to get by, which also presents a crisis for students' families. In a survey by an accommodation provider carried out in March, 73% of parents and 66% of students said that they were "extremely worried" about the cost of living at university. The same study found that 36% of parents are struggling to financially support themselves as well as their children at university, and have had to turn to other income streams: 10% of parents have taken out bank loans, and 3% have remortgaged their house in order to make ends meet and support their children. [...]

Students should not be expected to jeopardise their education to, paradoxically, fund their education, and neither should it be necessary for parents to sacrifice their own financial security to support them. It's time for student finance loans to be increased in line with inflation, or else the government must provide a tailored cost of living support package for students similar to the one that 8 million families have already received.

[...] After all, these students will one day be running the country, so investing in their education is investing in our future.

Adapted from *The Guardian*October 2022
(451 words)

STUDENTS UNABLE TO COPE WITH COST OF LIVING CRISIS

Universities in England and Wales are doubling or tripling their hardship funds in anticipation of "unprecedented" demand from students struggling with the cost of living, amid fears of widespread dropouts unless ministers offer more support.

Just days into the new academic year, university and student leaders said they were already seeing signs of students being unable to cope, including not affording books for their courses, working 40-hour weeks, and being at risk of homelessness.

The vice-chancellor of York University, said students were facing general inflation combined with a cut to the value of their maintenance loans, which rose by 2.3% this year despite inflation running at 10%, and less help from families grappling with soaring household bills.

He and other vice-chancellors from the research-intensive Russell Group had written to the education secretary to ask for increased maintenance loans and a reintroduction of the pandemic hardship payments.

In the meantime, vice-chancellors have boosted their universities' packages to help students make ends meet, including free meals, energy grants, rent freezes and increased bursaries.

(...)

He said: "We've got enough evidence to suggest the demand is rising – last year our hardship funding was fully spent up, and this year we decided to put in quite a bit more money." (...)

Fears are growing about the impact on mental health for a cohort of students who missed out on socialising and rites of passage at school.

The president of NUS (National Union of Students) Wales, worried about the impact of isolation on students who can't afford to go out. One student told Tarn that despite Wales's more generous student finance package, they have just £100 to last the term after paying rent and bills.

More than 150 student leaders from 80 different universities have written to the chancellor urging him to include support for students in his medium-term fiscal plan on 31 October to ease the "profound impact on students' ability to learn", with three-quarters unable to afford essential course materials, and one in three living on £50 a month after paying rent and bills.

(...)

A spokesperson for the Department for Education said: "We understand global inflationary pressures are squeezing household finances and people are worried about covering the basics. Students who are worried about making ends meet should speak to their university about the support they can access. This year, universities [in England] can boost their hardship funds by drawing on up to £261m we have made available through the Office for Students."

But vice-chancellors said that university budgets are already stretched thin as they grapple with inflation and the eroded value of the tuition fee.

Adapted from *The Guardian*October 2022
(440 words)

SYSTEMIC ABUSE IN WOMEN'S SOCCER LEAGUE

A yearlong investigation led by Ms Yates has now found that half of the 10-team soccer league's coaches had been linked to allegations of abuse while some of the world's top players recounted their own stories of mistreatment, sexual misconduct, verbal abuse and emotional abuse by coaches.

For example, one coach called in a player to review game film and showed her pornography instead. Another was notorious for quizzing players about their sex lives. A third coach coerced multiple players into sexual relationships. Those details and others fill the investigative report into abuse in women's soccer. "Our investigation has revealed a league in which verbal and emotional abuse and sexual misconduct had become systemic", Ms Yates, the lead investigator wrote. The report also issued warnings that young girls face abuse in youth soccer as well. And it made a lengthy list of recommendations that it said should be adopted by U.S. Soccer, including making a public list of individuals suspended or barred by U.S. Soccer, requiring investigations into accusations of abuse, making clear policies and rules around acceptable behavior and conduct, and hiring player safety officers, among other requirements.

The report also raises the question of whether some team owners should be disciplined or forced to sell their teams, as it recommended the league "determine whether disciplinary action is appropriate for any of these owners or team executives."

Even with so much of the worst abuse publicly known, the report is stunning in how meticulously it details how many powerful soccer officials were told about abuse and how little they did to investigate or stop it.

Ms Yates concluded that "teams, the league and the federation not only repeatedly failed to respond appropriately when confronted with player reports and evidence of abuse, they also failed to institute basic measures to prevent and address it". She added that "abusive coaches moved from team to team, laundered by press releases thanking them for their service," while those with knowledge of their misconduct stayed silent.

The report said the sport does little to train athletes and coaches about harassment and that "women players are conditioned to accept and respond to abusive coaching behaviors as youth players."

While the report details complaints made about several coaches, it focuses its narrative on Paul Riley. Sexual misconduct allegations were brought against Riley each year from 2015 to 2021. He became the third National Women's soccer league coach fired for misconduct since August 2022.

Rectifying the problems identified in the report will be difficult. Soccer in the United States is run by a number of organizations — federations, professional leagues, youth clubs and state.

Adapted from *The New York Times*October 2022
(448 word

TAG TIME AGAIN IN THE BIG APPLE

[...]

Tagging a train is often less about the art and more about the prize of marking something that entails risk and echoes the original graffiti writers, who blanketed subway trains, including the windows and seats inside, in the 1970s and 1980s.

Modern graffiti began in Philadelphia in the 1960s. But it became an art form in New York City, says Eric Felisbret, author of "Graffiti New York". "Graffiti benefited from the popularity of hiphop globally," says Mr Felisbret. "Out of all the elements of hip-hop, graffiti is by far the most rebellious…Back then, all graffiti was illegal."

Many New York street artists have moved on to commissioned works—some younger ones have never created their murals illegally. Graffiti tourists are coming to New York for the bragging rights of tagging there. During the pandemic, some artists became brazen, painting buildings and walls even in the middle of the day.

In 2020 the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), which runs the subway, spent \$1.2m on cleaning. By the end of May this year it had already spent \$1m. In all of 2021, 700 subway cars were "vandalised". This year more than 700 cars have been. More than one in ten subway cars had to be taken out of service for cleaning.

The recent spike in subway graffiti activity parallels the lifting of travel restrictions. The graffiti on trains usually gets cleaned or hidden quickly, so artists post images of their work on social media. Sharif Profit, who organises the annual Graffiti Hall of Fame in Harlem, says he can always tell when the work is by someone from another country: "It is not on the same level." [...]

The MTA removes any tagged train so as to avoid encouraging other people. Passengers then have to wait longer. That was the case recently, says Richard Davey, head of the MTA's New York City Transit system, when eight trains were vandalised. The resulting delays affected thousands of commuters. "It's our goal to make sure we don't return" to the 1970s, he says, "whether it's in our stations or on our cars." Graffiti on the subway began to die out in the late 1980s. One former graffiti writer said it is almost jarring to see tagging there now.

Passengers may not see much graffiti on the subway, but street art, murals and graffiti writing have become mainstream. Nike sells a graffiti trainer (no two shoes are alike). Museums and galleries hold street-art exhibitions. Some initially unauthorised street art is protected, such as the Banksy image on West 79th Street, which is covered in Plexiglass. Not all graffiti tourists want to break the law. Some sign up for graffiti walking tours or workshops [...]

Adapted from *The Economist*July 2022
(456 words)

TALIBAN POSTPONES RETURN TO SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

Just hours after schools for girls were due to open, the Taliban ordered them to shut down again. Teenage girls in Afghanistan have now been denied their right to an education.

Under increasing international pressure, the Taliban had originally said that schools would open for all students – including girls – after the Afghan new year, which is celebrated on March 21, on the condition that boys and girls were separated either in different schools or by different learning hours.

But on Wednesday, girls above the 6th grade were told to stay at home until a school uniform appropriate to Sharia and Afghan customs can be designed. The decision is likely to spark widespread international condemnation.

Tamana, 18, who goes by her first name due to security issues, told CNN she had arrived at school Wednesday morning to start her senior year, after eight months of being deprived of education. But when she and many other girls arrived at their school gate they were told to go back home and wait until further notice even though the education ministry said that it assures once again that it is fully committed to ensure the rights of young people to education.

The UN mission in Afghanistan responded Wednesday, tweeting that it "deplores the Taliban's decision to extend their indefinite ban on female students above the 6th grade being permitted to return to school."

The US Embassy in Kabul said he was "deeply troubled" by reports that girls were not being allowed to return to school, and that the news was "very disappointing & contradicts many Taliban previous assurances & statements. All Afghan youth deserve to be educated." His concerns were echoed by the US Special Envoy for Afghan Women, Girls, and Human Rights Rina Amiri, who said the move "weakens confidence in the Taliban and further dashes the hopes of families for a better future for their daughters."

Last month, Afghanistan reopened some of its universities to male and female students following their closure last August, during the Taliban's takeover. The Taliban said at the time that it needed to set up a secure transportation system for female students before allowing them back into the classroom.

The Taliban had already banned women and girls from education and work when they were in power between 1996 and 2001. In September 2021, Taliban spokesman Zabiulah Mujahid told CNN that women would be allowed to study, but a so-called "decree on women's rights" published in December that year failed to mention access to education or work.

In December the Taliban also banned women from taking so-called long-distance road trips in Afghanistan on their own, requiring that a male relative accompany them for any distance beyond 45 miles.

Adapted from *CNN* March 2022 (450 words)

TEACHERS WITH GUNS

It's the news that every parent dreads: In April, I was told there had been a shooting in the area around my daughter's school. A gunman had opened fire, and there were casualties. In the minutes before it became clear that she was safe, I was terrified. The shooting followed a familiar pattern: A young man with too many guns and too few friends decided to open fire during school dismissal at a nearby campus. He injured four people before taking his own life.

Afterward, all I could think about was how inevitable it felt. This is the America where my daughter has been doing regular lockdown drills since pre-K and the names Columbine, Sandy Hook and Parkland are etched into our culture. Still, as a parent, the danger can feel abstract. While I am powerless to keep my child safe when she is away from me at school, I had to believe that others would.

Then came the slaughter in Uvalde, Texas, when law enforcement failed catastrophically in their response to a gunman inside an elementary school. The images of frantic parents trying to break through police lines to save their children have opened a new chapter in this national tragedy. If not the police, whom can we trust to protect our kids when they are inside what is supposed to be a refuge of learning?

Now, many educators are considering whether to bring guns into their classrooms. America's teachers have to make choices unimaginable anywhere else in the industrialized world. I interviewed a Utah county sheriff who, after learning that teachers were bringing unsecured guns into classrooms, started a concealed-carry training program for educators. I also spoke to a special-education teacher who had to decide what puts the children in her care more at risk — carrying a gun or facing a merciless killer without a defense.

No one in these stories fits into our neatly polarized narratives: They are people who are trying to do the best they can for their communities and for themselves, at a time of rampant gun violence, when the choices for parents, students and teachers are all overwhelmingly bad.

This morning, I learned of another school shooting, this one in St. Louis. One teacher told *The Times* that, as she heard rounds of gunfire outside her classroom, she was "mentally preparing for how to defend my kids." She added: "You get into this head space: I will do whatever it takes, and I will protect you however I have to. I know that's how the teachers were in this moment. Those are our kids." In the end, two people were killed; one of them was a 61-year-old teacher who died trying to protect her students.

THE 1.5C CLIMATE GOAL DIED AT COP27

The 1.5C target is not a threshold beyond which hope also dies. Every fraction of a degree means an increase in human suffering and must therefore be fought for. How? With everything we have, to tear down the barrier between us and climate stability: the fossil fuel industry. The 1.5C target, beyond which the most disastrous climate impacts lie, is not yet physically impossible to meet. To achieve that, global carbon emissions must be reduced by 50% by 2030.

The scientific warnings before Cop27 could not have been louder: we are on the brink of irreversible climate breakdown. Behind closed doors at the summit, however, the fossil fuel states forced other countries to fight tooth and nail. On Friday, a Saudi Arabian delegate said: "We should not target sources of energy; we should focus on emissions. We should not mention fossil fuels." Despite the efforts of many other countries, the final decision text duly failed to mention phasing out fossil fuels.

It is extraordinary that in 30 years of UN climate negotiations, eliminating the primary cause of global heating has never been mentioned in the decisions. Given that next year's UN climate summit will be hosted by a petrostate, the United Arab Emirates, it is hard to see how a crackdown on fossil fuels will happen there either.

So, what now? It remains imperative to get off coal, oil and gas as rapidly as possible. The 1.5C goal may not yet be physically impossible to achieve, but Cop27 has shown it is politically impossible.

Can the UN climate talks deliver this at speed? It does not look that way. It is too easy for the fossil fuel states to hold the consensus-based negotiations to ransom, threatening to blow up the whole thing if their black gold is so much as mentioned by name. There were more fossil fuel lobbyists at Cop27 than delegates from the Pacific islands.

The fossil fuel industry can also be fought on the streets, in peaceful protest. Countries could shun petrostates by forming a "climate club", a G7 proposal to enable the ambitious to race ahead and to penalize the laggards. A fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty would provide a transparent way to keep remaining coal, oil and gas reserves untouched. Even a tobacco-style ban on fossil fuel advertising, already backed by the World Health Organization, would help.

Cop27 did achieve something. The new loss and damage fund promises to finance the rebuilding of poorer, vulnerable countries hit by increasingly severe climate impacts that they have done little to cause. It is a long overdue acknowledgment of the moral responsibility the big polluters have for the climate emergency.

Adapted from *The Guardian* November 2022 (451 words)

THE ALL-CONQUERING APP

The cat strains to see what is on the counter, first hopping on its hind legs, then bounding up for a closer look—only to recoil as if electrocuted at the sight of a piece of tinfoil. This six-second drama, which has been viewed more than 40m times, was highlighted by TikTok as one of its "hottest" recent videos.

Cat videos are the butt of jokes on late-night tv. But they and the hundreds of millions of other short clips uploaded to TikTok are causing sleepless nights in both Silicon Valley and Western capitals. The app is growing at a pace that has startled competitors and regulators (...)

Governments eye TikTok nervously for different reasons. As the first consumer-facing app from China to take off in the West, TikTok is a source of pride in Beijing. But the app's Chinese ownership makes politicians elsewhere uneasy about its tightening grip on their citizens' attention. Users' data could end up in the wrong hands, they fear, or their viewing could be moulded by Chinese propagandists. TikTok has already been banned in India, formerly its largest market. Other countries, including America, are considering their next move.

(...) Whereas the biggest personal accounts on Facebook are of athletes, singers or other celebrities, the top TikTokers are famous for being TikTokers. (...) TikTok is also easy to watch. Whereas most social-media apps recommend content from the user's network of friends, TikTok requires no network, no searching, nor even any login: its algorithm plucks videos from its vast archives and learns what the viewer likes. The format is supremely addictive.

In America TikTok's users spend an average of 46 minutes a day on the app, a fraction longer than they spend on YouTube and 16 minutes longer than on Facebook or Instagram.

TikTok is fast monetising this attention. Its revenues were about \$4bn last year and should reach \$12bn this year and \$23bn in 2024, nearly all from advertising (...) That is more than Twitter, Snapchat, Pinterest and other apps in the second tier of social media (...)

In 2020 India banned TikTok and dozens of other Chinese apps. Though the ban was provoked by a border clash, India claimed the apps were "stealing and surreptitiously transmitting" Indian users' information.

TikTok has tried to calm such fears by keeping foreign users' data out of China.

But there is a second, bigger fear about security, which concerns not what TikTok learns about its users, but what they learn from it. The app presents itself as an entertainment platform, with content to "make your day".

And whereas it is easy for regulators to monitor the output of newspapers or television stations, it is hard to know what people see on their personalised social feeds.

Adapted from *the Economist* July 2022 (458 words)

THE BAD BET TECH COMPANIES MADE THAT GOT THEM INTO THIS MESS

One by one, the tech CEOs apologized. They had failed to anticipate that their users' extreme online behavior would return to normal once COVID restrictions lifted. So their projections for growth—in streaming, e-commerce, and the like—were way off. With expenses mounting and growth stagnating, they would need to cut costs dramatically. Mass layoffs were coming.

"This did not play out the way I expected," wrote Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg in a November memo to his employees.

That Big Tech completely missed its COVID surge ending—something that seemed obvious—is astonishing, but it's more than a simple oversight. These companies understood their lockdown-augmented growth curves might not last forever, but they planned as if they would. Because while being wrong would mean cutting staff and missing earnings expectations, not attacking the opportunity would mean losing a market if COVID-inspired behavior did persist. So they took the risk.

"In tech, you don't want to be accused of not being bold enough, not being brash enough," said one Meta employee who was laid off this week. "We can't let others get ahead of us, this was the thinking."

Meta had nearly doubled its workforce since 2020, adding approximately 42,000 employees, but its aggressive growth wasn't universally appreciated within the company. Some inside Meta advocated for more cautious spending and projections, given that a vaccine that once seemed four years away would become available within a year. And as people left home, all that messaging, browsing, shopping, and streaming would likely subside. But planning continued as if people would stay inside forever.

Meta's now experiencing the hangover, and Zuckerberg is admitting that COVID-inspired behavior changes were more temporary than he thought. "In this case, clearly, we should have stayed closer to the plan that existed in late 2019, early 2020, as opposed to cranking it up," the ex-employee said.

Similar scenarios have played out inside Amazon, Netflix, and Shopify, all of which overextended after the onset of COVID. Amazon added 427,000 people in just 10 months in 2020. And then the company kept hiring, hoping the e-commerce way of life would stick. But it didn't. Last week, it was reported that Amazon planned to lay off 10,000 employees.

Now comes the fallout. Workforces rocked by layoffs are experiencing plunging morale. And costs, in many cases, are still too high. Perhaps if the economy were still roaring, this would be easier to stomach, but the big bet on COVID-inspired behavior lasting is really starting to hurt. "It's gonna be a hangover on these guys for a while," said an ex-Meta executive. "Until they get some wins."

Adapted from *slate.com* November 2022 (457 words)

THE BRITISH ARE NOT TOO LAZY TO LEARN FOREIGN LANGAGES, APP ENTREPRENEUR SAYS

The multimillionaire founder of the world's biggest language learning app, Duolingo, says millions of Britons have started learning Ukrainian and Korean as well as native tongues such as Welsh and Scottish Gaelic.

Luis von Ahn, creator of Duolingo, dismissed claims that the British cannot be bothered to learn foreign languages, despite plummeting numbers taking the subjects at school and university. Instead, they are being inspired to try different languages by current events or popular culture waves, such as the love for all things Korean. (...)

Duolingo uses bite-sized lessons to teach vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and listening skills, with frequent praise to give "dopamine hits" to users, Von Ahn said. (...)

Dozens of British universities have adopted his language test to ensure foreign students coming to study in the UK can speak English. This has replaced tests taken in person in their own country and, Von Ahn says, will cut down on fraud. (...) He wants the entry test to become a standard way to certify English proficiency, saying: "Other tests require a physical testing centre. (...) "Online tests like this are more secure than the physical tests. I grew up in a developing country. Bribery is how the world runs in many of these countries [with people asking friends to sit the test]. There's just no way to bribe anybody here over a computer." (...)

Referring to the growth in Korean, he said: "It is due to the rise of K-Pop and also these Netflix shows that have become very popular. And we saw a six-fold increase in the number of people learning Ukrainian ever since the invasion of Ukraine. In the UK in particular, we're seeing really good uptake of Welsh, Scots Gaelic, and Irish. They're some of the fastest growing. Some people are from Wales but never learned when they were children. It means a lot to these people to learn their own language." (...)

"People do multiple lessons a day but each chunk is short. One of the things that we're working on is making the chunks even shorter. Because Duolingo grew a lot through millennials and for them, two and a half minutes long was about right for their attention span. "We are now finding that for Gen Z, the next generation, two and a half minutes is a little long. They're used to TikTok with minimum videos of 10 seconds. So we are working on making our lessons shorter, maybe 30 to 45 seconds. (...) The world has changed." (...)

The fastest growing language in 2020 was Welsh, while Japanese was top in 2021. The UK ranks second in the world for those learning Ukrainian. (...)

Adapted from *CNN* October 2022 (460 words)

THE CREATIVE WAYS CHINESE ACTIVISTS PROTEST POLLUTION

Public payphones don't usually ring. So when one started buzzing in Beijing recently, people picked it up. On the other end of the line were residents of Huludao, some 400km away. All had the same story. The city's factories were polluting the air. Some nights it smelled of chocolate; other nights, of chemicals. Most people kept their windows shut, yet they still struggled to breathe. The government refused to act, said residents. So some started calling the payphone.

The effort is one of several creative ways in which activists and artists are raising awareness of China's pollution problems. An artist known as Nut Brother has played a role in many of the projects, including the hotline between Huludao and Beijing. Last year he filled a dirty canal with toy fish and peppers in the city of Zibo, turning the waterway into a "hot pot". Lately he has led concerts by musicians dressed in hazmat suits and gas masks. They sing about air, soil and water pollution.

Activists face a harder task in cities like Huludao, in China's north-eastern rustbelt. Its population is shrinking and greying. Poorer cities cannot afford to pick and choose projects, so dirtier industries are moving north from the more developed south, says Wu Fengshi of the University of New South Wales in Australia. Officials in Huludao have struggled to keep the economy on track, let alone deal with pollution. A study in 2020 found worrying levels of heavy metals in residents' hair. One of its districts is known for its high cancer rates.

China's regulators have asked the public to be on the lookout for polluting businesses. President Xi Jinping often talks about the value of blue skies and clean rivers. But the government does not like it when its failures are exposed. Environmental protests, once somewhat common in China, are now rare. Since 2012 the authorities have cracked down on environmental NGOs and activists. They did not appreciate the Huludao-to-Beijing hotline.

When I visited the payphone in Beijing last month, a car with a Huludao police sticker was parked nearby. Anyone who picked up the phone was filmed by unidentified men, then moved along by police from Beijing, who noted down their names. The official reason given by the police was that those answering calls risked spreading covid-19.

Still, as pressure mounted, the local government said it was investigating several companies and suspending production in some factories. In recent days the city's air has improved. But residents doubt that the factories will remain closed for long. After past pauses, they started producing more at night, when pollution is less visible, say residents.

Adapted from *The Economist*August 2022
(444 words)

THE FIRST SATELLITES LAUNCHED BY UGANDA AND ZIMBABWE AIM TO IMPROVE LIFE ON THE GROUND

Uganda and Zimbabwe join an ever-growing number of African countries that are building up their space technology capabilities. To date, 52 satellites have been launched by 14 African countries, including the two launched last week. The satellites, which have by now reached the International Space Station, are set to be deployed over the next few weeks, depending upon environmental conditions. It is a historic moment for the two countries, who now hope the data collected by the satellites will help improve life on the ground.

Many of the modern devices we use every day function because of satellite technology — something that's often taken for granted. "Space technologies are essentially the backbone of the modern economy," says the founder of SpaceHubs Africa, a service company that helps stimulate the African space ecosystem. "You sometimes don't even know that you're using them. But for example, if you're using Google Maps ... or even things like Zoom, or broadband communication, that's all powered by satellite services."

Uganda and Zimbabwe's satellites won't be providing wireless services to anyone. Instead, they've been developed for the purposes of earth observation. "[The satellites] have a multispectral camera, which allows the satellite to essentially take pictures of the Earth," says the founder of SpaceHubs Africa. Multispectral cameras can take pictures that capture information from wavelengths of light not visible to the human eye.

What this does is provide data that can help determine the health of land for the agricultural sector, among other things. The multispectral camera will be used to "perform analysis of water quality, land use cover, and soil fertility." That information will then be provided to citizens so that they can make the best use of the natural resources in their countries.

But there are still possibilities to do even more with the satellites; one of the main purposes of a satellite Ghana launched in 2019 was to monitor illegal mining that was occurring in the north of Ghana.

And all of those capabilities are made possible by a satellite that only measures 10cm in each direction. They're called CubeSats — and their small size and low cost to develop makes them perfect first satellites for nations developing their space technology sectors. [...]

However, there is one downside to CubeSats. Their lifetime of operation is only about 24 to 30 months. So, unless Uganda and Zimbabwe commit to building and launching more of these satellites, the benefits will be short-lived.

[...] Even though the human capital is there to provide sustainable development of satellites, the founder of SpaceHubs Africa reckons that there's still more political and social investment needed before space technologies in Africa can fully mature. He says "The only thing is us believing in ourselves."

Adapted from www.npr.org November 2022 (451 words)

THE GUARDIAN VIEW ON BREXIT AND THE ECONOMY: TIME TO FACE FACTS

There must come a time when the cost of Brexit is recognised by a British government, but that day is not imminent. Even when the economy and migration are two of the most prominent topics of debate, a realistic account of the European dimension to those issues is taboo for Conservatives who still wear their epic policy folly as a badge of honour.

The value of sterling dropped as soon as markets received the referendum verdict in June 2016 and has not recovered. Trade with Britain's nearest and richest neighbours has been sabotaged by withdrawal from the EU customs union and single market. Brexit evangelists made improbable promises of compensation for the loss of frictionless borders with Europe via free trade deals worldwide. The US was the most eagerly anticipated partner. That hasn't happened. There are no talks in Washington to make it happen.

The real political imperative keeping Britain out of the single market was not trade but immigration. Ending free movement of labour was an axiomatic requirement for "taking back control" of the borders. Now Britain faces labour shortages, which limits business expansion, harms productivity and constrains growth. Choking off legal migration routes has brought no political dividend for the Tories. The party's right wing is still obsessed with border control, focusing on small boat crossings and vilifying refugees for daring to seek asylum in the UK.

Tory Euroscepticism is an unstable coalition of free-trading liberals and cultural nationalists, with the latter dictating the tone of debate and the speed of flight from economic reality. A hunt for scapegoats when the project fails to fulfil its utopian promises is intrinsic to nationalism. That is the grim path down which Mr Sunak's party is descending. Another cycle of budget austerity will hasten the descent. Cuts to services on top of rising living costs will degrade the public realm and cause anger that the Tories will address by means of cynical deflection, blaming anyone but themselves.

Mr Sunak is trapped. He cannot give an honest appraisal of the nation's economic predicament, since doing so would mean abandoning vacuous rhetoric around Brexit "opportunities", recognising instead that Britain's severance from EU markets is a wound that needs healing. Austerity 1.0 meant business investment was slow to return to pre-crash levels. However, it was frozen after the referendum, before taking a Covid-sized hit. The upshot is that leaving the EU has caused long-term scarring to the country's productive capacity and competitiveness. Economic decline stokes political volatility, which makes recovery harder. That vicious cycle will be broken when Britain has a prime minister who is willing to deal in facts about Brexit and set pernicious fictions aside.

Adapted from *The Guardian* November 2022 (456 words)

THE RIGHT IN THE US HAS A NEW BOGEYMAN: LIBRARIES

Last month, I went to a library in more or less the exact middle of America, and everyone was there – kids, elderly people, students of all ethnicities and ability levels – quietly doing their own thing, together. A librarian interviewed me in an elegant amphitheater in front of Kansas City residents. We spoke about immigration, politics and the climate crisis and managed to laugh a lot too. We had a frank and fun conversation in a public space, free to all. I only later thought about how rare that is – and how profound.

Pelayo-Lozada is a librarian and was elected president of the American Library Association (ALA) earlier this year. Pelayo-Lozada is taking on the role at a time when the right has intensified an orchestrated assault on books, intellectual freedom and, of course, libraries. In her words, it's "a political, concerted, organized attack that makes it hard for us to do our jobs".

The ALA has been tracking bans for two decades and reported that 2021 was the worst year for attempted censorship, with 1,597 books challenged. As long as there have been books, there has been censorship. Often censorship is demanded under cover of vague "public decency" concerns, but the truth is these are simply a veil over a darker motive.

We see this play out in today's move to ban books, with many of them about LGBTQ+ rights or racism, often written by people of color.

The censorship frequently pushed by conservative groups is linked to wealthy rightwing donors. Republican legislators, who loudly claim they are all for freedom of speech, are working to change how library board members are appointed and challenging laws that protect librarians and teachers from prosecution should they be accused of sharing something someone could find offensive.

The battle against intellectual freedom has escalated from the legal into the physical world. Twenty masked neo-Nazis recently protested outside a library in Boston hosting a Drag Queen Story Hour event. Last November, members of the Proud Boys, a far-right group, showed up at a school board meeting in Illinois. There, they jeered at students arguing for their right to read Gender Queer, an autobiography about the nonbinary author Maia Kobabe's journey of gender identity as a teenager and one of the books targeted by conservatives nationwide.

Are they so frightened of young people reading about someone else's life experience? I think the right wing is really afraid of libraries not because libraries promote any one type of information but because libraries promote information itself.

Libraries help us to think. That is why they are powerful, and that is why they are under attack. That is also why we must protect them.

Adapted from *The Guardian*July 2022
(457 words)

THE UK NEEDS A BIGGER ROLE FOR SCIENCE IN THE GOVERNMENT

Patrick Vallance, the UK government's chief scientific adviser, says that every government department needs to take science into consideration and invest much more in research and development so as to boost growth.

According to him, considerations of science, technology and engineering need to become embedded in the heart of every government department.

"Placing greater priority on science will lead to greater military security, more resilience to future threats from pandemics and climate change and will also boost the country's economy", said Vallance at New Scientist Live on Sunday.

"The current government seems to have quite a focus on growth. And if you want growth, then you need to have science, engineering and technology," he said.

"If you look around the world today, 8 out of the top 10 companies, the biggest, fastest-growing companies, are science and technology companies. And if you look at the relationship between government Research and Development spending and productivity, you see that there is a positive relationship. We definitely need a change in behaviours to beat the climate crisis", Patrick Vallance concluded.

Vallance called for all government departments to consult more experts on science, technology and engineering, and he also recommended that more graduates in these fields should be employed in the civil service.

"In every single aspect of government, science, technology and engineering have a part to play: what our healthcare looks like, every aspect of transport, how towns are designed, how green spaces are used to improve our lives and the role of technology in ensuring justice", he said. And he added that he thought "it was impossible to think of a single policy area that couldn't be impacted by science in some way."

In 2019, a science capability review ordered by Vallance found that in some British government departments, the amount of spending on scientific research had actually fallen over the past decade and was less than 1 per cent of the total budget ! – a figure which he found shocking.

This is how he summed up his opinion: "If you were a company and you said: 'I'm going to spend 0.1 per cent on Research & Development, you would effectively declare yourself to be a nogrowth, no-innovation commodity. That can't possibly be what a government is supposed to be. Indeed, innovation has got to be all-important!"

The review also found that only about 1 in 10 undergraduates recruited to the civil service "fast stream" career pathway had a science degree. The aim is now to increase this to 50% of the total by 2024. "It can't be right that 10 per cent of the premier graduate intake scheme have science degrees," said Vallance.

Adapted from *New Scientist*October 2022
(452 words)

THE WORLD'S POPULATION HAS REACHED 8BN. DON'T PANIC

According to the United Nations, the planet's population is due to reach 8bn on November 15th. Alarm bells are clanging. Population pessimists have long predicted mass famine. Now they add prophecies of environmental disaster as a result of too many people. Others worry about the opposite problem: population collapse due to low birth rates. In fact, looking at population change during the past decade suggests neither of these mutually contradictory divinations of doom will prove correct.

It took a dozen years (from 1998 to 2010) for the global population to grow from 6bn to 7bn. It has taken the same length of time to notch up the next billion. Against the backdrop of catastrophising, it is worth recalling what is behind this growth: longer lives, improvements in nutrition and public health; falls in infant mortality, disease and maternal deaths in childbirth. The world's population carried on growing even in the teeth of the covid-19 pandemic, despite the virus killing between 16m and 28m people.

Not much evidence, then, of a global demographic collapse. Nor is one coming soon. On current trends, the global population will reach 9bn in 2037 and peak at 10.4bn sometime between 2080 and 2100. The spectre of overpopulation looks equally unthreatening. The global population growth rate is falling fast. In 2022 it grew by just 0.8%, the lowest rate since the 1950s.

As ever, the global average disguises big regional differences. About half the world's projected population growth between 2022 and 2050 will occur in just eight countries. Five of those are in Africa. The other three are in Asia. That will have both environmental and social implications.

People in India and Africa pollute far less than their counterparts in America, Europe or China. According to the UN, poor and lower-middle-income countries account for only a seventh of the world's emissions of carbon dioxide. But 90% of population growth over the next decade will come from these less-polluting countries. Globally, there is little evidence that population growth contributes as much to global warming as rising living standards do.

A similar point can be made about ageing societies. Shrinking societies certainly face social problems: one big one is that there are proportionately fewer people of working age to provide for those who have retired, implying higher taxes or lower spending on the elderly. Whether this constitutes a threat to civilisation is not so clear. Rising productivity could well mean that fewer workers are needed to support a given number of retired people.

None of this is to deny that the world faces big problems of environmental degradation and political upheaval. But the 8bn mark does not porten demographic disaster.

Adapted from *economist.com* November 2022 (460 words)

THESE MEN HELPED BUILD QATAR'S WORLD CUP, NOW THEY ARE STRUGGLING TO SURVIVE

Kamal was standing outside a shop with other migrant workers, having finished yet another grueling working day, when he was arrested this August. Without explanation, the 24-year-old says he was put into a vehicle and, for the next week, kept in a Qatari jail. "When they arrested me, I couldn't say anything, as I was so scared," he told CNN, speaking at home in southern Nepal where he has been working on a farm since being deported three months ago.

"Inside the jail, there were people from Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Sudan, Nepal, Africa, Philippines. In one jail, there were around 300 people. Around 25 people per room," he says. He was sent home after the Nepali embassy had sent a paper copy of his passport to the jail. "When they put me on the flight, I started thinking: 'Why are they sending workers back all of a sudden? They are sending 300 workers on one flight," he says.

Kamal is one of many migrant workers wanting to tell the world of their experiences in Qatar, a country that will this month host one of sport's greatest, most lucrative, spectacles – the World Cup, a tournament which usually unites the world as millions watch the spectacular goals and carefully-choreographed celebrations.

It will be a historic event, but one also mired in controversy. Eight new stadiums rose from the desert, and the Gulf state expanded its airport, constructed new hotels and highways. All would have been constructed by migrant workers, who – according to Amnesty International – account for 90% of the workforce in a near-three million population. The Guardian reported last year that 6,000 South Asian migrant workers have died in Qatar since the country was awarded the World Cup in 2010, most of whom were involved in low-wage, dangerous labor, often undertaken in extreme heat, employer intimidation and an inability to leave their jobs because of the country's sponsorship system.

According to Amnesty International, Qatari authorities have not investigated thousands of deaths of migrant workers over the past decade "despite evidence of links between premature deaths and unsafe working conditions." That these deaths are not being recorded as work-related prevents families from receiving compensation.

Barun Ghimire is a human rights lawyer whose work focuses on the exploitation of Nepali migrants working abroad. The families he advocates have not received satisfactory information on their loved ones' deaths. "Families send out a healthy, young family member to work and they receive news that the family member died when they were sleeping. The Qatar World Cup is really the bloody cup – the blood of migrant workers," he says.

Adapted from cnn.com November 2022 (454 words)

THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

Disorders of the brain are a growing worry. Twelve mental health conditions affect about 970 million people around the world. On top of that, neurological problems, such as stroke, dementia, migraine, Parkinson's, epilepsy and brain injury are collectively the leading global source of disability. Ageing populations with unhealthy ways of life are likely to make this problem much worse everywhere.

In an ideal world science would be coming to the rescue. But the brain is a complex organ. Twentieth century science has provided some pharmacological tools with which to treat some of the things that go wrong with it, but its fundamental mysteries have proved difficult to unravel. As a result, progress has been much slower than in treatments for the heart or for cancer.

Indeed, it has sometimes been hard to discern much progress at all. The private sector spent an estimated \$43 billion on research into therapies for Alzheimer's disease between 1998 and 2017 and came up empty-handed. That epic failure is perhaps the biggest reason why many drug firms abandoned or cut back on neuroscience research.

Happily, there are now signs of a change. This fresh energy is coming from a variety of techniques and ideas. Optogenetics, which uses genetic manipulation to get animal brains to reveal their workings, is transforming brain science in the laboratory, as is the growth of tiny brain-like "organoids". More precise diagnosis and well-validated biomarkers, which reveal the course of disease, are improving clinical trials. A growing openness to the investigation of previously recreational and stigmatised drugs is widening the range of possible medicines. New kinds of treatment, such as gene therapy, are expanding the range of diseases that can be tackled.

At the same time growing data is proving critical to understanding the biological roots of brain dysfunction. Projects like the UK Biobank track tens or even hundreds of thousands of individuals over a generation or more. They should answer the questions about the roots of brain disorders.

As hopes rise for tackling this final frontier of biomedicine, it is worth remembering that the secrets to a healthy brain are not only going to come from a pill or a psychotherapist's couch. The health of the brain is influenced by what goes on outside it, such as nutrition, exercise, the abuse of alcohol, education, social connections and pollution. Of particular relevance these days is air pollution which could have a negative effect on brain health at both the beginning and the end of life. None of this should be surprising: the health of the brain is tied to the health and well-being of the body it sits in.

Adapted from *The Economist* September 2022 (449 words)

THIS CALIFORNIA DESERT COULD HOLD KEY TO POWERING ALL OF AMERICA'S ELECTRIC CARS

The Salton Sea is a big, flat gray desert that lies where the North American Plate and the Pacific Plate are very slowly pushing past one another creating an enormous low spot in the land. It's hot and deep underground. Like a super-heated mineral stew, it is literally boiling. The Salton Sea, which lies roughly in the middle of the massive geologic low point, is the largest inland lake in California. Decades ago, it was a tourist destination, with people flocking to the California desert oasis to enjoy boating and water skiing. That was before evaporation dried up the lake, concentrating pollutants in the shrinking body of water.

Over the past few years, companies have been coming here to extract a valuable metal, lithium, that the car industry needs as it shifts to making electric cars. Lithium is the lightest naturally occurring metal element on Earth, and, for that reason among others, it's important for electric car batteries, which must store a lot of electricity in a package that weighs as little as possible.

What's more, with the Salton Sea Basin's unique geography, engineers and technicians can get the lithium with minimal environmental destruction, according to companies that are working there. In other places, lithium is taken from the earth using hard rock mining that leaves huge, ugly scars in the land. Here, it exists naturally in a liquid form, so extraction doesn't require mining or blasting.

Lithium is abundant in the Salton Sea Basin. In fact, people working to extract it say there could be enough to make batteries for all the electric cars expected to be built in this country for many years, freeing the United States from reliance on foreign lithium suppliers. That's been a priority for the Biden administration.

Geothermal energy companies have been here for decades drilling down into the nearly 700-degree water, allowing it to instantly boil up out of the ground. Steam from the hot brine — so-called because of its high mineral content — spins turbines, generating electricity. This sort of energy is considered clean and renewable since it relies on heat occurring naturally in the Earth.

Collecting lithium now looks like a bigger moneymaker for companies than their original business of just generating electricity from the steamy soup, including a project to build a battery manufacturing facility nearby. The plant could someday produce enough batteries for 650,000 electric vehicles annually. Putting battery manufacturing on-site will eliminate material shipping costs as well as the carbon dioxide emissions from all the ships, trains and trucks needed to carry the lithium to battery factories that are, today, mostly located in China.

Adapted from *cnn.com* May 2022 (454 words)

THIS FOURTH OF JULY, IT'S WORTH PONDERING THE TRUE MEANING OF PATRIOTISM

It is not the meaning propounded by the "America first" crowd, who see the patriotic challenge as securing our borders.

For most of its existence America has been open to people from the rest of the world fleeing tyranny and violence.

Nor is the meaning of patriotism found in the ravings of those who want America to be a white Christian nation. America's moral mission has been greater inclusion – equal citizenship for Native Americans, Black people, women and LGBTQ+ people.

True patriots don't fuel racist, religious or ethnic divisions. Patriots aren't homophobic or sexist. Patriots seek to confirm and strengthen and celebrate the "we" in "we the people of the United States". Patriots are not blind to social injustices. They don't ban books or prevent teaching about the sins of our past. They combine a loving devotion to America with a demand for justice.

Langston Hughes pleaded:

Let America be America again,

The land that never has been yet -

And yet must be – the land where every man is free.

Nor is the meaning of patriotism found in symbolic displays of loyalty like standing for the national anthem and waving the American flag.

Its true meaning is in taking a fair share of the burdens of keeping the nation going – sacrificing for the common good. Paying taxes in full rather than lobbying for lower taxes, seeking tax loopholes or squirreling away money abroad.

It means refraining from political contributions that corrupt our politics, and blowing the whistle on abuses of power even at the risk of losing one's job.

It means volunteering time and energy to improve the community and country.

Real patriotism involves strengthening our democracy – defending the right to vote and ensuring more Americans are heard. It is not claiming without evidence that millions of people voted fraudulently.

It is not pushing for laws that make it harder for people to vote based on this "big lie". It is not using the big lie to run for office. True patriots don't put loyalty to their political party above their love of America. [...]

When serving on the supreme court, they don't disregard precedent to impose their ideology.

Patriots understand that when they serve the public, one of their major responsibilities is to maintain and build public trust in the offices and institutions they occupy.

America is in trouble. But that's not because too many foreigners are crossing our borders, or we're losing our whiteness or our dominant religion, or we're not standing for the national anthem, or because of voter fraud. We're in trouble because we are losing the true understanding of what patriotism requires from all of us.

Adapted from *The Guardian*July 2022
(453 words)

THIS IS A BRITAIN THAT HAS LOST ITS QUEEN – AND THE LUXURY OF DENIAL ABOUT ITS PAST

This will be remembered as a watershed moment in British history for two reasons. First, for the death of Queen Elizabeth II. Second, for what happened next: the voices of those colonised in the name of the British crown being heard, not as a fringe, exceptional view, but as a clamouring chorus of global trauma.

I had prepared for this moment as a time when I would not be free. I have no idea how I actually feel about the passing of Queen Elizabeth – the only British monarch I have known in my lifetime – because for all my life deference and admiration have been drilled into me as mandatory.

I had expected that those of us minoritised in Britain would understand this as a test of our loyalty, patriotism and Good Immigrant status. We would therefore fall into two categories: those who sought to pass the test, by enthusiastically toeing the line of national mourning, and those too conscious of the harm Britain's power has caused, who would stay silent.

But it turns out that tone policing is no longer tenable. Social media have been saturated by the harrowing memories of a legacy the British establishment has refused to acknowledge. The plunder of land and diamonds in South Africa, crimes that adorned the Queen's very crown. [...] The scars of genocide in Nigeria, events that took place a decade into her rule. In Britain, minoritised people are remembering this Elizabethan era through the lens of the racism that was allowed to thrive during it. Shooting the messenger – the radio host and former footballer Trevor Sinclair was quickly hung, drawn and quartered for voicing this perspective – has failed to quell the tide of global truth-telling.

The burdensome task of truth-telling – to a hostile Britain more used to hearing that its past is glorious – has always fallen unequally on the descendants of the empire. Yet [...] our stories are continuing to be erased. During her reign, the BBC tells us, colonies "gained independence", but there's no mention of those who were imprisoned, shot and killed in the struggles – from the Gold Coast to Cyprus, India and Malaya – that were required to win it. This trauma is not recalled with a single voice. One of the effects of the empire that Queen Elizabeth personified is that it is unevenly remembered within our communities. People who were enslaved were taught that their assimilation into the culturally superior empire was a form of advancement. Families such as mine in Ghana experienced the violence of colonialism, and were then educated to believe it was justified. [...]

Adapted from *Guardian.com* September 2022 (447 words)

TURNOUT AMONG YOUNG VOTERS WAS THE SECOND HIGHEST FOR A MIDTERM IN PAST 30 YEARS

About 27% of voters between the ages of 18-29 cast a ballot in the midterm election this year, according to an early estimate from the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement at Tufts University, also known as CIRCLE.

Researchers say the 2022 election had the second highest voter turnout among voters under 30 in at least the past three decades. So far, the highest turnout during a midterm for this voting bloc is 2018 when about 31% of young people who are eligible to vote cast a ballot.

During a briefing Thursday, the deputy director at CIRCLE said 2018 remains "a high-water mark" for youth voter turnout during midterms in the U.S. since at least the 1970s. Historically, youth voter turnout has hovered around 20% during midterm elections.

This year, CIRCLE said turnout was significantly higher in some of the battleground states — including Florida, Georgia, Michigan, North Carolina, New Hampshire, Nevada, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. On aggregate, CIRCLE researchers found, turnout was roughly 31% in those states.

"Outreach, contact, investment in these states was higher," the deputy director said. "So it's not surprising that voter turnout is higher in these states."

Young voters also had a significant influence on election outcomes in some of the key races in those battleground states.

According to CIRCLE, young people preferred Democratic candidates by a 28-point margin, which helped Democrats in statewide races that include the Pennsylvania U.S. Senate race and the Wisconsin gubernatorial race.

"Young people stood along in supporting, decisively, a Democratic statewide race candidate," said the group's director. "The result is that [young people] kept the races really close and in some cases we think they will decide the outcome of the race."

CIRCLE's elections coordinator, said this year's election represents "a continuation of high civic engagement" among young people in recent years. She said investments in organizations that mobilize young people year-round are key to improving voter turnout in this voting bloc. She said possibly a decrease in those kinds of investments this year could be why turnout this year was slightly lower than 2018, with many non-profit non-partisan organizations having to turn to private donations to keep their programs running.

"We saw in registration numbers that 18- to 19-year-olds were not being engaged as much as they were in 2018," she said. "And that's a red flag that there isn't as much work happening to register new voters."

Adapted from *NPR* November 2022 (440 words)

U.N. PLAN WOULD HELP WARN PEOPLE IN VULNERABLE COUNTRIES ABOUT CLIMATE THREATS

The United Nations announced a plan to ensure people in developing countries can be warned ahead of time when there's a risk of climate-related hazards like extreme storms and floods.

The Early Warnings for All initiative is part of a broader effort to help low-income countries adapt to the impacts of climate change. About half the world isn't covered by multi-hazard early warning systems, which collect data about disaster risk, monitor and forecast hazardous weather, and send out emergency alerts. Coverage is worst in developing countries, which have been hit hardest by the effects of global warming.

"Vulnerable communities in climate hotspots are being blindsided by cascading climate disasters without any means of prior alert," U.N. Secretary-General said Monday in prepared remarks at COP27, the annual global climate conference that's being held this year in Egypt. "People in Africa, South Asia, South and Central America, and the inhabitants of small island states are 15 times more likely to die from climate disasters," he said. "These disasters displace three times more people than war. And the situation is getting worse."

The new initiative builds on past efforts by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and weather forecasting agencies in the United States, Europe, Japan and Australia that have funded weather radar upgrades and meteorologist training in places with less robust national weather forecasting. That includes a multi-year project to upgrade flash-flood warnings in more than 50 countries. [...]

The U.N. plan calls for an initial investment of \$3 billion over the next five years to set up early-warning systems in places that don't already have them, beginning with the poorest and most vulnerable countries and regions. The U.N. didn't say which specific countries are at the top of that list.

More money will be needed to maintain the warning systems longer-term, a WMO spokesperson said in an email.

"Early warnings save lives and provide vast economic benefits. Just 24 [hours'] notice of an impending hazardous event can cut the ensuing damage by 30 per cent," the secretary-general of the WMO said in a news release.

The U.N.'s Green Climate Fund and Climate Risk and Early Warning Systems initiative are working together to help provide money for the initial phase of the plan. The warning systems will be run by national government agencies, with support from operators, including from the private sector," the WMO spokesperson said.

Microsoft's vice chair, spoke at the announcement in Egypt. "We have the [artificial intelligence] and data tools today," he said. "Let's put them to work to predict and warn of the next crisis."

Adapted from *NPR* November 2022 (455 words)

ULTRA-FAST FASHION IS TAKING OVER – AND USING EVERY TRICK IN THE BOOK TO GET US ADDICTED

The Chinese fashion retail website Shein was recently valued at \$100bn and has added almost 315,000 styles to its website this year alone. At the time of writing, Shein UK has a lot of items in the under £5 section, with several crop tops and miniskirts priced at an alarming £1.99.

Fashion, especially the cheap kind, is addictive. That's why ultra-fast fashion brands such as Shein keep increasing the array of styles on offer, while social media ads and customer-generated content such as "haul videos" ensure that fashion addicts never forget about their drug. Some of these videos are sponsored by the brands, but the personable, chatty style helps viewers forget that they are in fact watching ads. Wealthy YouTubers disguised as average shoppers normalise the idea of ordering bags full of clothes every single week.

Georgia Willard, a 23-year-old student and former fast fashion addict, tells me that her social bubble as a teenager in Australia fed her addiction. "You felt like you needed to have a different outfit every time you went out to prove to people that you could dress properly and look the part. I ended up buying outfits almost every weekend."

Willard was prompted to kick her fast fashion habit when she learned about the environmental and human impacts of the fashion industry in a textiles class at school. In addition to learning about the ugly reality of the fashion industry from the documentary the True Cost, which she watched at school, she also realised she couldn't keep up her habit and afford a big trip she'd planned to the UK. Since then, the growth of cheaper, ultra-fast fashion brands has made the cycle of buy, wear, throw away and repeat all the more difficult to escape.

Willard now feeds her fashion addiction with secondhand apps such as Depop and Vinted instead. For so many, it seems impulsion and consumerism are more powerful than a desire for a world in which female garment workers can work in a safe environment, let alone live happy, full lives – some workers at factories supplying Shein reported working more than 75 hours a week. In one of them, workers got one day off a month.

Ultra-fast fashion is not good news for the planet, either. At this rate, by 2050 the fashion industry may use almost a quarter of the world's carbon budget. Around 60% of Gen Z say they have altered their personal spending habits and behaviours to reduce their environmental impact, but they also seem to be pushing the growth of ultra-fast fashion – the attitude-behaviour gap is huge.

Adapted from *The Guardian* April 2022 (450 words)

US BACKERS OF 'JUST STOP OIL' VOW MORE VAN GOGH-STYLE PROTESTS

On Friday, two young activists from the 'Just Stop Oil' group entered the National Gallery in London, opened two tins of Heinz tomato soup and hurled them over Van Gogh's 'Sunflowers', which is protected by a pane of glass.

"More protests are coming. The next two weeks will be the most intense period of climate action to date" said Margaret Salamon, executive director of the Climate Emergency Fund. "In terms of press coverage, the Van Gogh protest may be the most successful action I've seen in the last eight years. It succeeded in breaking through this really terrible media landscape where you have the mass delusion of normalcy."

The Climate Emergency Fund has handed out more than \$4m to dozens of climate organizations this year ('Just Stop Oil' is the biggest recipient, receiving \$1.1m), helping trigger a wave of unusual protests across Europe. Activists have glued themselves to 'The Last Supper' by Leonardo da Vinci in London, damaged fuel pumps, rushed on to the track of the British Grand Prix.

These striking protests are even more remarkable in that they have been funded in part by an oil heiress. Aileen Getty, a philanthropist whose grandfather was the tycoon J Paul Getty, cofounded the Climate Emergency Fund and has gifted it \$1m to be used by activists. The money is used to pay and help train people via the activists groups, seeding acts of civil disobedience.

"The activists have forced millions of people who don't want to think about the climate emergency to think about it. No-one is protesting art or sports, but the point is the house is on fire, this is an emergency" said Margaret Salamon. Just Stop Oil's dousing of Sunflowers has attracted plenty of criticism, with some decrying it as vandalism (although only the frame was slightly damaged) or questioning the relevance of the painting to the need to shift away from fossil fuels.

Dana R Fisher, a sociologist at the University of Maryland, who studies climate protest said "The target wasn't art. It was using art as a platform, and it caught the attention because it used a tactical innovation: tomato soup."

She added "I'm sure it will turn some people off but the idea isn't to win over hearts and minds, it's to grab media attention and mobilize people who are sympathetic to the cause."

The latest stunt by 'Just Stop Oil' has "revealed that a huge number of people feel more outrage at a painting getting splattered with soup than they do with the irreversible and intensifying destruction of life on Earth," according to Peter Kalmus, a Nasa climate scientist who handcuffed himself to a bank in Los Angeles earlier this year.

Adapted from *TheGuardian.com*October 2022
(460 words)

US POLITICAL VIOLENCE IS SURGING, BUT TALK OF A CIVIL WAR IS EXAGGERATED – ISN'T IT?

Dr Garen Wintemute used to laugh off warnings of a civil war coming to America as "crazy talk". Then the emergency room doctor in California saw the figures for gun sales. Wintemute, who founded a centre to research firearms violence after years of treating gunshot wounds, had long observed that the rush to buy weapons came in waves, often around a presidential election. Always it fell back again.

"Then in January 2020 gun sales took off. Just an unprecedented surge in purchasing and that surge continued," he said. "We were aware that, contrary to prior surges, this one wasn't ending. People are still buying guns like crazy." Many were buying a weapon for the first time.

Wintemute wanted answers and they stunned him. A survey for his California Firearm Violence Research Center released last month showed that half of Americans expect a civil war in the United States in the next few years. One in five thought political violence was justified in some circumstances. In addition, while almost everyone said it was important for the US to remain a democracy, about 40% said that having a strong leader was more important.

"Coupled with prior research, these findings suggest a continuing alienation from and mistrust of American democratic society and its institutions. Substantial minorities of the population endorse violence, including lethal violence, to obtain political objectives," the report concluded. Suddenly Wintemute didn't think talk of a violent civil conflict was so crazy any more. [...]

The US has a long history of political violence and killings, including bombing campaigns by radical leftwing organisations in the 1970s and more recent attacks from the right by anti-abortion groups and white nationalists.

But now the greatest threat to political stability comes from within the power structure including Republican politicians subverting the electoral system and further eroding trust in democracy.

Trump's allegation that the 2020 presidential election was stolen unleashed actual and threatened violence from the storming of the Capitol to the barrage of threats to kill election workers. The justice department set up a special taskforce to protect election officials after more than 1,000 were directly threatened over their unwillingness to declare Trump the winner in 2020. [...]

In December, three retired US generals said that Trumpism has infected parts of the armed forces and noted the "disturbing number of veterans and active-duty members of the military" who took part in the attack on the Capitol. They warned of the "potential for lethal chaos inside our military" if the result of the 2024 presidential election is disputed.

"It really does feel a pivotal moment in American democracy," says Wintemute.

Adapted from *The Guardian* August 2022 (455 words)

WESTERN WIND

Ireland's dreams of exporting wind power are plausible. But first, it will have to conquer deep and stormy seas.

The need to slash Europe's dependence on Russian energy is a boon for Ireland's ambitions to become a big exporter of electricity. The country produces no nuclear energy, oil or coal, and only enough gas to meet some 30% of its needs. But it has one of the windiest coasts on the planet. "Wind is Ireland's oil," said Ireland's Prime Minister.

Last year 31% of Ireland's electricity came from wind turbines. The share was higher only in Denmark, which managed 44%. Already this year Ireland's figure has risen to 36%. The Irish government wants to push its renewables share up to 80% by 2030. The hope is that improvements in energy storage, and a new electricity interconnector with France which is due to come online in 2026, will allow Ireland to sell surplus wind power to European countries that are struggling to decarbonise their own energy supplies.

Ireland has built about 300 wind farms on dry land already but it is running out of places to put new ones. For health and environmental reasons, turbines must be at least 500 metres from existing houses. Haphazard rural planning, which has allowed homes to sprout more or less randomly throughout the countryside, has not left many spaces large enough for big new projects.

There was consternation earlier this year when the national planning authority, citing the need to boost green power, approved a new wind farm that would show above the valley wall at Gougane Barra, a beauty spot and place of religious pilgrimage in County Cork. "There are already lots of wind farms in Ireland, and that's good, but there's only one Gougane Barra," says a local hotelier leading a campaign to overturn the decision.

The obvious solution is to move production out to sea. Ireland's only offshore wind farm, on the east coast, was the largest in the world when it began spinning in 2004, but has since been dwarfed by newer ones elsewhere in Europe. Wind Energy Ireland, another industry group, says that in theory Ireland could install offshore turbines with a capacity totalling 80 gigawatts, more than triple Britain's total current wind capacity.

Ireland will have to hustle if it is to catch up with Britain. That country has already developed the ports, special ships, planning laws and talent needed to push ahead with large-scale offshore wind farming. Because Ireland has deeper waters and stormier coasts, its prospects hang on the development of new types of turbines that float on the water rather than having to be fixed to the sea bed

Adapted from *The Economist*September 2022
(445 words)

WHAT HAPPENED WHEN I LET AN ALGORITHM PLAN MY HOLIDAY

Whether we realise it or not, algorithms rule pretty much every single part of our lives [...]. So, if an algorithm can coordinate a missile defence, surely it can plan my holiday?

In recent years the social media app TikTok has burst onto the global stage. It monitors what videos you watch and like on the app then uses an algorithm to suggest content it thinks you'll enjoy.

TikTok now has more than a billion active users and, although it started life as a platform for sharing lip-sync videos, it is fast expanding into the travel sphere. [...]

So how good are its recommendations? I decided to test it out by travelling to a completely unfamiliar city and following only the tips I found on TikTok. [...]

I punt for New York as my destination. The city has one of the highest numbers of TikTok users anywhere so there should be no shortage of content. I start off by getting the algorithm used to me – liking and following things I'm interested in [...].

Hoping the app has seen deep into the inner workings of my mind, I then search "best hotels New York". The first video I come across recommends three – one of which, The Williamsburg Hotel, has a rooftop pool. [...]

Landing at JFK a few weeks later, I'm delighted. It was everything I would have chosen had I bothered looking [...].

But what about culture, art, music? I adore galleries and wistfully walk past the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Guggenheim Museum. But alas, TikTok kept schtum. Maybe next time, NYC.

One TikToker tells me to play mini golf, another to go to a board game café, a third to visit some coffee shops. I can do these things at home. Finally, someone recommends SUMMIT One Vanderbilt – the viewing platform of one of the city's newest skyscrapers [...].

Going up a tall building was on my NYC bucket list and I probably would have picked one of the better known ones like the Empire State Building. [...]

So, how did TikTok measure up? Yes, I found some great places and probably went further from the beaten track than I would with a guide book. But I did miss some key New York sights. [...]

You also have to question how unbiased all these TikTokers are. They're supposed to declare if they're working in partnership with a business but surely there are some blurred lines. Plus, there are murky questions around who can access your data and know what you're watching given the app's Chinese ownership.

So maybe I'll keep using it – but it won't be my Bible.

Adapted from *The Telegraph*August 2022
(440 words)

WHO'S PAYING FOR BRITAIN'S DISASTROUS MINI-BUDGET?

The British economy has spiraled into chaos. The UK government's £45bn package of tax cuts has resulted in the pound sinking and interest rates rising. Many families are stressed about homelessness and illnesses caused by food poverty and cold homes.

Economic policies that increase inequality and make the bulk of the population poorer have grave consequences for health and wellbeing. This is true not just for the lowest earners, but for most of the population including middle-class families. Currently, housing has become more expensive while wages are falling. The costs of expensive mortgages are passed on to both homeowners and renters, in the form of higher mortgage payments and higher rents. Almost 2.5 million people are struggling to pay their rent – an increase of 45% since April 2022.

The stress of knowing that even working 50 hours a week won't bring in enough money to cover the bills is linked to heart attacks, strokes, cancer, depression and reduced life expectancy.

Then there is the problem of fruit, vegetables, wheat, rice, pasta and protein sources that will grow more expensive. The UK imports more than 50% of its food. So, as the pound falls against other currencies, the price of food will increase even further. Low-income households will be forced to buy the cheapest ultra-processed products, detrimental to health. Not having enough fruit, vegetables and protein in a diet is a risk factor for conditions such as obesity, diabetes, hypertension and cancer. Child hunger has also been increasing in Britain.

More expensive fuel also has dangerous consequences for people's health. In the UK 53 million people are projected to face fuel poverty by January 2023, forcing families to live in cold and damp homes. Many will become ill as a result. Doctors expect to see a rise in hospital admissions for breathing difficulties over the winter, and many children missing school.

This tsunami of interrelated health issues adds to the burden on the health system. A sick society results in sick people, and those sick people show up in hospitals needing care. The NHS is already at breaking point and unable to provide the quality and volume of care needed. This will only become worse in the current economic climate. .../...

The government's mini-budget is disastrous for the health of the British public. We can debate whether Prime Minister Liz Truss is incompetent for not anticipating the market's reaction, cruel in not caring what this does to the wellbeing of the population, or corrupt in helping the superrich profit. But in the end, we're all poorer in Britain today compared with a decade ago. The effects will be felt not just in our bank balances, but also in our body and mind health.

Adapted from *The Guardian* October 2022 (452 words)

WHY GERMANY'S NINE-EURO TRAVEL PASS IS A BIG STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

After two years of Covid-driven decline in public transport use and increasing automobile traffic globally, what can governments do to entice people out of their cars? In Germany, the response to the effects of the pandemic, the cost-of-living and climate crises has been bold and decisive. The federal government introduced a nine-euro monthly public transport pass, available to everyone and across the networks for the months of June, July and August.

As soon as the offer was announced, social media streams were buzzing with people sharing news of snapping up the opportunity to enjoy inexpensive, unlimited travel on all buses, trams, subways and regional trains across Germany. And after just one month, the success of the scheme appears to make a compelling case for other countries to follow suit.

A preliminary analysis found that, while previously longer train trips (in excess of 300km) made up a majority of journeys on the German railway network, the reverse was true in June 2022. In just the first week, train trips of between 100km and 300km increased 46% above pre-Covid levels - and, most impressively, 58% for short-distance journeys of 30km to 100km. At the same time, a TomTom analysis found a decline in car congestion, resulting in improved driving times in 23 of the 26 German cities examined.

What are the implications of these behaviour shifts, and what are the lessons for other countries or regions that are considering similar schemes?

First, making public transport cheaper should aim at significantly improving access to economic opportunity - including employment and education - for the residents who need it the most. For many, the choice to use public transportation is predicated on the availability of affordable and reliable options. If it is deemed too expensive – especially for those with lower income – or is inconvenient in terms of station location, routing or frequency, the average person will opt for the seemingly more affordable and reliable option: the car.

What makes the flat-rate nine-euro ticket so attractive is, of course, the price; even a usage of 20 days a month equates to a modest 45 cents a day. However, while a discounted fare is important, it is worthless without public transport networks, e.g., local buses, regional trams and intercity trains, to support it, complementing each other to provide (nearly) door-to-door connectivity.

This integrated, fine-grained provision has been the secret of the success of public transport in the Netherlands, where we and our children live comfortably without a car. We take frequent buses, trams and trains in virtually every corner of the country.

Adapted from *The Guardian* July 2022 (451 words)

WITH ARTEMIS, NASA ENVISIONS A MULTIPLANETARY FUTURE

NASA's quest to return humans to the moon has finally gotten off the ground. After being stymied by repairs and hurricanes, the Artemis 1 mission launched from Florida's Cape Canaveral early Wednesday morning.

This first mission is an uncrewed test of NASA's Space Launch System rocket and Orion spacecraft – shooting all the way to the moon and back – so that everything goes smoothly when humans do climb aboard for a trip to Earth's companion.

But Artemis 1 is more than just a technological test. Success would signal momentum toward a broader vision for a multiplanetary future for humanity. Complete with construction of a permanent lunar outpost, the Artemis program is designed to establish a way station for travel to Mars – and beyond. Behind the audacity of that goal, shared by NASA and numerous private space companies, is a faith in the potential of human ingenuity.

"The capabilities that we will develop for the Moon to Mars Program can and will enable a multiplanet species," says Patrick Troutman, a NASA space architect for the agency's Moon to Mars vision. [...]

"Expansion," Mr. Troutman says, "has always been part of what humans do."

When it comes to outer space, he adds, expansion continues to be at the top of the minds of spaceflight leaders in both the public and the private sectors. Many have used terms like "colonization" to refer to a multiplanetary future, connecting their visions to past expansions. [...]

The vision is for crewed missions to establish a lunar outpost from which research and resource reconnaissance can be conducted. [...] It's this kind of outpost that Mr. Troutman envisions could one day lay the groundwork for a full-fledged lunar civilization.

"If humanity is truly to expand and thrive, there has to be economic opportunity or reason for more people to go," he says. "We're trying to do our initial exploration on the moon to identify those places where that opportunity exists. That will give more rationale for extending the human presence on the moon."

This process, Mr. Troutman says, could potentially be repeated on Mars – assuming success on the moon first. [...]

NASA's role, Mr. Troutman says, is to explore the cosmos and open the door to a multiplanetary future for humanity. [...] Once our capabilities and technologies are proved, he expects private industry to step in and take over operations and growth of the outpost on the moon. [...]

"There could be a future where there are scores of people on the lunar surface. They're enabling science, enabling economic opportunity, and catering to a growing population [there]," Mr. Troutman says. Trips to Mars would likely follow within a couple of decades, the space architect adds. And if that is successful, too, who knows where humans might go next? [...]

Adapted from *csmonitor.com* November 2022 (456 words)

WITH LEAPS AND BOUNDS, PARKOUR ATHLETES TURN OFF THE LIGHTS IN PARIS

As an energy crisis looms, nimble young activists are using superhero-like moves to switch off wasteful lights that stores leave on all night.

Over the past two years, groups of young athletes practicing Parkour — a sport that consists of running, climbing and jumping over urban obstacles — have been swinging around big French cities switching off wasteful shop signs at night, in a bid to fight light pollution and save energy.

Videos of their feats, showing Spiderman-like aerialists clinging to stone facades and balcony edges before plunging streets into darkness with the flick of an elevated switch, have been popular on social media since the start of the trend. But these so-called Lights Off operations have become extra resonant in recent months, with France embarking on energy conservation efforts to cope with Russia's chokehold on Europe's gas. Paris, the City of Light, is a favorite target. While its landmark monuments now go dark earlier than usual, many store signs still stay lit all night.

"Everyone can contribute in their own way" to save energy, said the leader of the Parisbased On The Spot Parkour collective, with about 20 members. "We put our physical abilities to good use."

Several times a month, the group members can be found vaulting their way around Paris, on the hunt for electric advertising signs perched above awnings or illuminated store names. They search out the small emergency switches installed outside storefronts, usually about nine to 13 feet high. Most of the time these switches control only outdoor signs, meaning the group cannot extinguish the window displays bathing a store's interior in golden, if wasteful, light.

Some fancy areas like the Champs-Élysées are an ideal playground for the group. Walking down the avenue, they turned off the signs of luxury shops one by one, hitting their targets like professional snipers.

While scaling other people's property to turn off their lights may strike some as a form of trespassing, the Parkour athletes — or nonviolent vigilantes, to some — insist their activities are only about enforcing seldom-respected rules.

More than a decade ago, Paris City Hall issued orders requiring stores to turn off all signs and window displays from 1 a.m. to 6 a.m., but the ordinance is widely ignored with little consequence. "For 10 years there has been no follow-up, no control, no sanction," said the head of one association, which has long lobbied to increase efforts against light pollution.

Enforcing the orders in place of the authorities certainly enters a legal gray area. But the group said all the police officers they have met during their rounds have approved of the initiative — as long as it causes no damage. And they have the full support of the City Council.

Adapted from *The New York Times* October 2022 (451 words)

WOMEN RISE UP AGAINST THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC

From distant villages to the steps of Tehran University in the capital, women are leading men. They are at the front of protests and rally the crowds by burning their mandatory hijabs (headscarves), cutting their hair and dancing in public. Their immediate cause is Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old student, who died on September 16th after morality police beat her, apparently for wearing a loose hijab. But their grievances are fed by four decades of religious restrictions that have fallen heaviest on women. After a week of gunfire and killing, their protests are spreading.

The social curbs are the latest in a wave of measures designed to shore up the Islamic Republic as a successor is found for the octogenarian Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. In recent years the Ayatollah has purged the regime of reformers and consolidated all branches of government under trusted zealots such as Ebrahim Raisi, his hardline president.

Trying to tighten control, Mr Raisi issued a "hijab and chastity" decree that has emboldened the morality squads. These have removed posters of unveiled women in cafes and ordered the proprietors to replace songs with instrumental music. Their men, dressed in black and armed with batons, have put hundreds of women in morality centres for "re-education", according to a human-rights group. The battle over morality has become more technological since the revolution of 1979. These days the authorities are planning to use facial-recognition software to detect the underdressed on the metro and an icon was recently added to the taxi app, Snappi, to report female passengers who are improperly attired. Fearing reprisals, some protestors are deleting their social-media profiles. Others are turning violent. State media have reported a series of lynchings of clerics.

The regime is rattled, not just by anti-religious protests but also by the prospect of economic unrest. Since 2012, GDP per head has fallen. Even as incomes plummet, prices are soaring. The regime blames American sanctions for the economic suffering but Mr Raisi's policies are exacerbating the collapse. He has tightened restrictions on the internet. The controls may make it harder for people to get the news but they are also suffocating businesses.

Still, the government shows no signs of backing down. A former apparatchik reckons it needs only half a million loyalists to control Iran's 84 million people. "They have learnt from the Shah's downfall to take an offensive posture no matter what," says Yaser Mirdamadi, an exiled cleric and relative of the Supreme Leader. Many expect that after a few more days of killing a curtain of fear will again descend over Iran.

Adapted from *The Economist* September 2022 (444 words)

WORLD'S LARGEST OCEAN RESERVE OFF HAWAII HAS SPILLOVER BENEFITS NEARBY, STUDY FINDS

Six years ago, the then US president, Barack Obama, created the world's largest fully protected ocean reserve by expanding the existing marine national monument in Hawaii, a world heritage site that includes islands, atolls and archeological treasures. Now scientists have found that the reserve, which spans 1.5m sq km (580,000 sq miles) and is inhabited by whales and turtles, has brought unexpected benefits to the surrounding ocean.

Catches of yellowfin tuna were found to have risen by 54% between 2016 and 2019 near the reserve, within which fishing is banned, while catches of bigeye tuna rose by 12%.

The findings, published in the journal *Science*, by researchers from the University of Hawaii and the University of Wisconsin-Madison may strengthen support for a target, agreed by more than 100 countries, to protect 30% of the world's oceans by 2030.

"This research is important because it helps us understand that a large, carefully placed nofishing zone can create benefits for these large iconic species," said Jennifer Raynor, an environmental economist at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

"The protected area could be doing one of two things," said Raynor. "The first is that these iconic fish populations are increasing because the areas provide nurseries for baby fish, and some of them are spilling over into nearby areas. A second reason might be that fish are just finding a safe place to aggregate, near the protected area, where they can't be caught."

"By setting up no-fish zones, we are forcing people to stop fishing in places that they previously enjoyed," she said. "But it is like an investment. You make big upfront costs, with the hope that it will pay off in the future, like having higher tax rates over time. Our paper says: if you create these areas carefully, then that investment can pay off."

The scientists used data from the US National Marine Fisheries Service's Pacific Islands observer programme. The largest increases in catches were seen at distances of between about 100 and 200 nautical miles (185-370 km) from the reserve's border. As a control, they compared fish catches from 2016-19 with catches between 2010 and 2013, before the reserve's expansion. They found no significant increase or "spillover benefit" before 2016.

MPAs are often declared by governments without any accompanying prohibition on commercial fishing, leading to criticisms that the reserves are simply "paper parks" with no real protection from damaging extractive activities. Here however, commercial fishing is banned. The park has officers patrolling in addition to monitoring flights and visits by US coastguards to deter illegal fishing.

Adapted from *The Guardian*October 2022
(441 mots)

WOULD YOU GIVE UP PLANES FOR THESE TRAINS? EUROPE PUSHES TRAVEL THAT'S CLIMATE FRIENDLY.

For nearly two decades, cheap, short flights defined European travel. With the rise of budget airlines, people with limited discretionary funds could consider trips that were previously out of reach. And people took advantage of that access, exploring other countries and cultures, embracing the European Union ideal of free movement across borders.

But all those flights amounted to a big carbon footprint. While cheap for travelers, they incurred a hefty environmental cost — undermining Europe's pledges to cut harmful emissions and become carbon-neutral.

Now, climate-conscious European governments and groups are going to varying lengths to break people of their flight habits. Some are building on the "flight shame" movement popularized by Swedish teen activist Greta Thunberg. Germany and Spain have been experimenting with ways to make train travel more appealing, offering tickets at a nominal price. Meanwhile, the Netherlands and Austria are trying to limit people's options by limiting flights.

In France, the state-owned SNCF railway company had a record summer, tallying 10 percent more high-speed train passengers than in 2019. That had a lot to do with rising gas prices and post-pandemic revenge travel, said the person in charge of SNCF's high- and medium-speed connections. But another factor may have been at play, too.

As part of an effort to reduce carbon emissions by 40 percent by 2030 compared with 1990 levels, the French government wants to ban short-haul domestic flights. A pending regulation is controversial, and its legality is being reviewed by the European Union. But the government has essentially made it happen anyway, by conditioning Air France's pandemic bailout on an agreement that the flag carrier would stop serving routes that can be reached in less than $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours by train.

We set out to discover how well those efforts are working: whether they are successfully getting people to skip carbon-heavy flights in favor of more environmentally friendly trains. We embarked on a multi-leg train trip that began in Sweden and took us through Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium before ending in France.

Along the journey, we found that the government efforts have contributed to something of a rail renaissance. Trains at the end of summer in Europe were packed.

Flights are also nearly back to their pre-pandemic levels, however. And for those who do opt for the train, European rail services may not be up to their expectations. Our trip involved multiple delays, complicated connections, long bathroom lines, stolen luggage and at one point a rail strike that forced us off the train and onto a bus.

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(440 mots)