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IRAN THREATENS STRIKES AGAINST US BASES IN EUROPE



Miguel Delaney Man United close in on Pochettino deal to replace Carrick



Jonathan Ross 'horrified' by David Walliams allegations

The broadcaster denies knowing about accused behaviour when he made 'sick joke' about comedian dating teens

EXCLUSIVE

Britain faces economic 'heart attack', warns former Burnham aide

Ex-adviser hits out at prime minister's 'negligent' fiscal policy, comparing him to a 'reckless' doctor who should be 'struck off' as economy is 'more precarious than any time in last 50 years'

David Walliams must be a wake-up call for the showbiz world

Whatever the truth about the serious allegations levelled at entertainer David Walliams in ITV's *Power and Silence* documentary, they raise, once again, important but familiar questions about how institutions and the law deal with such matters – and whether the present balance of power is right and fair.

An injunction has been lifted that prevented the allegations, some of which date back more than two decades, from being published. Walliams stands accused of grooming, sexual assault and a pattern of inappropriate behaviour towards women and girls, one as young as 15. Women who were sometimes children at the time of the incidents they describe have spoken frankly about how they felt, and feel today, about these encounters. Their accounts are harrowing.

In the absence of any legal judgment to the contrary, it is only fair to say that Walliams denies any allegations of wrongdoing, and rejects claims of criminal activity, adding that: "I realise I did not always take people's feelings properly into account. That is something I regret. And whilst a power imbalance is inevitable when one party is famous, abusing that power is something else entirely and it is something that I never did."

The *Little Britain* star also says he is devastated that "some of the women I met 10 to 20 years ago have now expressed hurt or anger towards me".

The imbalance of power between, usually, older famous and wealthy men and younger women or girls across all sectors of society has been a matter of deep concern for many years. Too often it has resulted in an abuse of that power for the purposes of sexual gratification. Physical harm and mental cruelty have been grievous. It has destroyed lives.

Nor is it confined to the entertainment industry – although it is here that it has been disturbingly prevalent since the era of the Hollywood "casting couch". To say that it is nothing new or, as the culture secretary Lisa Nandy has commented, that it is most likely still happening now, is not to minimise its severity.

Nor is it an excuse to do nothing. In some high-profile cases, such as the crimes of Russell Brand, justice – or a measure of it – can be provided to victims. But it is a characteristic that these scandals can fester for so long, often as not as "open secrets", that the prolific perpetrators such as Jimmy Savile and Mohamed al-Fayed go peacefully to their graves without ever being made accountable for the lifelong torture they have inflicted on others so selfishly and callously.

There have been enough such men, and more than enough crimes and non-criminal misdemeanours, over the decades that one thing is more than obvious: voluntary measures, HR departments, internal reviews and weighty reports from worthies with well-meaning recommendations are inadequate to the task of deterring sexual predators. The phenomenon is too widespread and pervasive to conclude otherwise.

From the City and politics to business, the legal profession itself, the charity sector, the churches and the media, this is an endemic disease that demands stronger solutions.

A few years ago, the then director-general of the BBC, following the Huw Edwards affair, declared that the corporation would no longer be beholden to "the talent". He was right to say so. Yet no organisation can be relied upon to uphold ethical standards unless there is a clear penalty for failure to do so, and one levied on the individuals concerned.

Therefore, the government should now consider creating new offences. "Grooming", for example, should be made a specific criminal offence, because it is so obviously a legal loophole through which predators consciously leap. Nor should it be possible to prevent anyone claiming to be a victim from going to the police.

Managers could be made liable for the problematic behaviour of their staff, freelancers, associates and performers. Those in charge or associated with someone should also be held accountable if they can be shown to have had knowledge or have been colluding with them to commit their offences or cover them up.

Indeed, there should be a duty to act on suspicions they may have. It is perfectly comprehensible that some individuals are protected by organisations because they bring in huge amounts of money and glittering awards – but that is, therefore, all the more reason to impose serious consequences, financial and reputational, if they fail in a statutory duty of care. That would apply on a corporate and personal basis, and to all concerned.

In other words, it is past time to get serious with the Russell Brands of this world, and reverse the incentives that cause the cover-ups and the indulgences they enjoy. Anyone, including cronies, who collaborates with a sexual predator should face similar ruin and, where necessary, a custodial sentence. That might stop them from just shrugging and sniggering about the cruel and humiliating behaviour of their "talent".

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David Walliams's former friend Jonathan Ross 'horrified' by allegations

Comedian and children's author has denied claims of sexual misconduct and grooming girls as young as 15

Maryam Zakir-Hussain



Jonathan Ross (left) says he was previously on 'friendly terms' with David Walliams *(Shutterstock)*

Jonathan Ross has said he was "horrified" by the allegations about David Walliams and the crimes of Russell Brand, two men he says he was once "friendly" with.

Walliams, 55, has been accused of sexually inappropriate behaviour by a number of women, including two who claimed they were "groomed" by the comedian when they were 15.

The allegations came a day after Brand, 51, was jailed for 10 years and six months for raping one woman and sexually assaulting three others.

Walliams has denied any wrongdoing and insisted he is “not a sexual predator”, adding he is “devastated” at the allegations published by *The Guardian* and ITV News. His lawyers had taken a case to the High Court to try to stop the allegations being published.

During ITV’s reporting, a photograph resurfaced showing Ross alongside Walliams at an event also attended by one of the women who later accused Walliams of “highly inappropriate” behaviour. Lawyers for Walliams have said he denies behaving inappropriately.

In a statement on Tuesday night, Ross, who has appeared on TV shows with Walliams, said: “I am as horrified by the revelations about David Walliams and the crimes of Russell Brand as the rest of the nation. There was a time in my life when I was on friendly terms with both men, and during that period I was genuinely unaware of their conduct.



Allegations have been published this week against David Walliams by The Guardian and ITV News *(PA)*

“My thoughts are with the many, many women who have bravely come forward.”

The Metropolitan Police confirmed it contacted *The Guardian* and ITV News to “ensure that any potential victims” are “made aware of how they could report any criminal allegations to police”, after the sexual misconduct claims were made.

In the wake of the allegations, media minister Ian Murray said there is a “cultural problem” in the entertainment industry that needs to be “stamped out”.

He said: “There should be a zero-tolerance approach with support for the brave women, support for whistleblowers, and making sure the industry can clean up its own act.”

Mr Murray added that non-disclosure agreements are a “major part of the problem”.

He said: “If you’re up against a major star such as Russell Brand, it’s very frightening to be able to report that.

“But also, you have to be confident the systems are in place for you to be able to do that confidently. That you’ll be listened to, and then there’ll be action taken.

“In all of these instances, it appears that people are frightened to take on that Goliath, and you can understand why when people are in positions of power, particularly men.

“It’s frightening. It’s career-damaging, career-limiting, if not even career-ending.



Russell Brand was jailed this week for raping one woman and sexually assaulting three others *(PA)*

“And these are the things that government are wrestling with in terms of how we put the best possible framework in place to support people, but also to make sure the culture changes, so we don’t have to support people because it doesn’t happen in the first place.”

Bridget Phillipson, the equalities minister, paid tribute to the “bravery” of victims who have shared their experiences in recent days.

Speaking in the Commons, she said: “Women and girls should never have to shrink our lives or ambitions because of outdated, misogynistic attitudes, and the appalling testimonies we have heard in recent days underline how much further we have to go.

“I pay tribute to all of the women who have shown such bravery in coming forward and sharing their experiences.”

In light of the allegations, Downing Street said every organisation should “look hard at whether they are doing enough to keep people safe” and take any allegations seriously.

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Officers were called to alleged assault involving Russell Brand at Jemima Goldsmith's house, police confirm

Goldsmith dated Brand for around a year until September 2014

Josh Payne



Thames Valley Police said officers were contacted by the alleged victim on 25 July 2014 *(AFP/Getty)*

Officers were called to an alleged assault involving Russell Brand at his ex-girlfriend Jemima Goldsmith's house, police have confirmed.

Thames Valley Police said officers were contacted by the alleged victim on 25 July 2014, but no arrests were made following the incident at her Oxfordshire home.

The officers stayed at the scene to ensure Brand left the address "as per the victim's wishes", their statement added.

Goldsmith posted on X on Monday, saying she had personal experience of the rapist comedian's "violence, coercive control and abuse".

Her statement added: "I had to call the police to have him removed from my house in 2014 during a violent incident."

Brand, 51, was sentenced to 10-and-a-half years' imprisonment on Monday for raping one of his fans and sexually assaulting three women during his rise to international fame.

Hours after the sentence was delivered at Southwark Crown Court, Brand's ex-partner Jemima Goldsmith, the heiress and former wife of cricketer and former prime minister of Pakistan Imran Khan, issued a statement on social media.

Ms Goldsmith, who dated Brand for around a year until September 2014, said: "I am and have always been strongly and unequivocally on the side of all of Brand's victims. I am in awe of the courageous women who came forward at Brand's trial, told their stories, testified and ensured justice was done.

"I have had my own personal experience of his violence, coercive control and abuse. I had to call the police to have him removed from my house in 2014 during a violent incident.

"I chose not to press charges at the time and not to go public with this, as I was worried about the impact of the press attention on my then teenage children.



Jemima Goldsmith posted on X on Monday, saying she had personal experience of Brand's 'violence, coercive control and abuse' *(Getty)*

"I have neither seen nor spoken to Brand since that period in 2014. Whilst my pain in relation to this pales in comparison to what the women have testified in court have suffered, this was a difficult period in my life which has had a lasting impact."

Ms Goldsmith said she had spent several years assisting *Channel 4 Dispatches*, *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* journalists who first accused Brand of sexual misconduct in 2023, even testifying in court about the abuse she suffered if the outlets were sued for their claims.

She partly issued the 1,534-word message on Monday in response to "misleading reports" over a harassment injunction she and Brand secured against a masseuse in 2015.

The case stemmed from a birthday present massage arranged by Ms Goldsmith for Brand in June 2014, which was not in the end taken up. Masseuse Szilvia Berki had claimed she was assaulted by Brand, which he denied, and the alleged incident was investigated by police, who concluded there was no case to answer.

In her social media post, Ms Goldsmith said: “I was present the whole time he was with her, and I did not see anything untoward, despite the fact that he was later found guilty of sexually assaulting other women and he later physically assaulted me. If I saw any man abuse any woman under any circumstances, I would do my utmost to stop them, without hesitation.”

After the claim was made, Ms Berki initiated a campaign of harassment, Ms Goldsmith alleged in her statement, including sending disturbing emails and having untrue stories published in the press. They included antisemitic comments which were submitted to the judge, who granted the injunction, Ms Goldsmith claimed.

The Independent has been unable to contact Ms Berki.

PA

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Britain's economy faces 'heart attack', Burnham's former adviser warns

Writing in *The Independent*, former Bank of England chief economist Andy Haldane likens PM's Budget measures to the actions of a 'reckless' doctor who would be 'struck off'

Simon Walters



Burnham's approach is akin to 'not renewing your home insurance at the same time your next-door neighbour's house is ablaze', Andy Haldane says *(Getty)*

Andy Burnham's handling of the British economy is so "reckless" that he would be struck off for negligence if he were a medical doctor, according to one of his former aides.

Former Bank of England chief economist Andy Haldane claims the prime minister's failure to reduce the UK's borrowing costs in the Budget could result in the nation suffering an economic "heart attack".

Writing in *The Independent*, he compared Mr Burnham's approach to "not renewing your home insurance at the same time your next-door neighbour's house is ablaze".

In a devastating attack, Mr Haldane, who informally advised Mr Burnham on economic policy after taking office in July, said Britain's finances were "on a knife-edge with most of the lights on the fiscal dashboard flashing red".

He criticised the way Mr Burnham "rails against crude cuts", arguing his policies could have precisely that effect by risking a repeat of Liz Truss's catastrophic 2022 Budget, and "swamp the poor" in the process.

Mr Haldane also dismissed Mr Burnham's proposed sweeping economic reforms, hailed as "progressive" by his supporters, saying they were "neither prudent nor progressive".

Mr Haldane, who is president of the British Chambers of Commerce and turned down the offer by Mr Burnham of a formal No 10 role, says it would be a "mistake to take comfort" from recent reports suggesting the UK had "weathered the worst of (recent) financial storms".



Haldane has called for 'boldness' from the government to boost investment in UK companies *(PA)*

In fact, the UK's current fiscal position was "more precarious today than at any time in the past half-century", he says in his article.

The UK's borrowing costs were higher than any other nation in the G7 group of major industrialised democracies despite having a lower debt burden.

Mr Haldane suggested the reason for this was that Mr Burnham and chancellor John Healey's plans, which include reducing the UK's "fiscal headroom" from £23bn to £16bn, "lack credibility in the eyes of financial markets".

To meet its fiscal challenges, the government needed to raise £30bn to £40bn by tax rises or spending cuts – but had avoided this in its "do no harm Budget," said Mr Haldane.

He writes: "Facing this fragility, what was the government's Budgetary response? To run down its fiscal reserves rather than bolstering them. This is equivalent to not renewing your home

insurance at the same time your next-door neighbour's house is ablaze.

"Running down our insurance cover is an act of reckless complacency.

"The UK's financial blood pressure is sky-high. In this situation, a doctor would prescribe clinical intervention to reduce the risk of a financial heart attack, including statins and slimming routines.

Instead, Burnham's government had "offered homoeopathic remedies" including "higher deficits and debts, taxes and spending", Mr Haldane said.

He added: "A doctor prescribing this course of treatment would probably be struck off".

Mr Haldane warned the country faced the danger of the kind of economic collapse seen in Greece in 2009 and after the Truss Budget – which at worst could "swamp the poorest".

He said: "While the government rails against using 'crude cuts' to restore fiscal order, cuts come no cruder or crueller than following a financial crisis. Ask Greece.

"By failing to take our insurance, the government is putting at risk those very people it claims to represent. This is neither prudent nor progressive".

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Andy Haldane has issued an ominous warning – how worried should we be?

The expert warns that Britain faces an 'economic heart attack' if it fails to get a grip on its public finances. This is what needs to be done, writes **Sean O'Grady**





The markets are more sceptical about the UK's prospects *(PA Archive)*

Andy Haldane is a former chief economist at the Bank of England, an occasional informal economic adviser to Andy Burnham and currently president of the British Chambers of Commerce. More than that, he is gifted with an unusually insightful mind and a welcome tendency to speak it. He now warns that Britain faces an "economic heart attack" if it fails to get a grip on its public finances.

Is Haldane right?

Broadly, yes, though he is perhaps overly dismissive of the government's efforts to get its house in order. After all, so far from the UK having to approach the International Monetary Fund for a loan and to impose some external financial discipline on the fiscally Incontinent British, as they infamously had to half a century ago, the Fund says that the UK is somewhat heroic. The managing director, Kristalina Georgieva, declared recently: "The UK is actually one country where action to reduce debt and deficit has been taken decisively and we see the UK in that sense enjoying a bit of a better growth prospect."

So what's the problem?

The markets are more sceptical about the UK's prospects than is the global economic establishment, which is why the UK is being charged a bit of a "moron premium" for its borrowing – a reflection of higher risk of inflation and/or some form of default. In other words, they don't really believe the government's fiscal forecasts.

If investors don't believe in Britain, why are they still lending us money?

Because default as such remains a remote possibility, and they can be reasonably sure that any British government will do whatever it takes to honour its debts, including the inflation-linked ones. So they have some faith that a UK administration of any party will raise taxes sufficiently to service the debt.

Is that a bad thing?

Not for the public finances as such; but it is for the economy as a whole if it descends into a "doom loop" of higher taxes leading to lower economic growth leading to more taxes and so on… so the British people end up working for bondholders. A bit of an exaggeration, and the theory is controversial because you can't have a healthy economy without sustainable public finances - but you see the point.

Is this a Labour problem?

No, not uniquely. For example, at the last general election the independent Institute for Fiscal Studies and many others pointed out that both the Conservatives' and Labour's fiscal plans lacked credibility because they failed to say where projected reductions in public spending and borrowing some four or five years hence were going to come from. "Efficiency savings", "radical reform" and, now, "AI" are the usual answers, but such rarely materialise. This government is no different – positing a tiny dip in borrowing somewhere over the rainbow, "by the end of the horizon", and not much restraint beforehand. As Haldane observes, such plans are at best optimistic, at worst worthless.

What needs to be done?

Haldane doesn't present his own plan. However, some obvious measures spring to mind: Social security reform would be a good start, as well as rationalising the tax system, incentivising productive private sector investment, and at least partially dismantling Brexit. We'll soon see if anything like that features in Andy Burnham's eagerly awaited Ten Year Plan.

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Man United face final hurdle to close deal for Pochettino as new manager

Argentine coach is the frontrunner to replace Michael Carrick at Old Trafford, with the club inside the relegation zone during the international break

Miguel Delaney Chief Football Writer



Manchester United will need to strike a deal with US Soccer to secure the services of Mauricio Pochettino *(Reuters)*

Manchester United are closing in on a deal to appoint Mauricio Pochettino before their next game against Liverpool, with Michael Carrick set to be sacked.

United must strike a deal with US Soccer, with a solution required over the United States' next two international games in particular, while the club's hierarchy is meeting at a Monaco summit to finalise a decision over the club's manager.

Compensation, worth an initial £5.3m, will be a formality due to the clause in Pochettino's existing contract, which runs until the 2030 World Cup.

Additional compensation will be required for Pochettino's trusted coaching staff, including longtime assistant Jesus Perez.

The United States face Concacaf Nations League fixtures against Haiti during the current international break, with an away match on 14 November and a home match in Cincinnati on 18 November.

US Soccer are currently planning for Pochettino to be in charge of both games, though United will push to have Pochettino available sooner, with their next Premier League match against Liverpool at Anfield on 22 November.

Another option is for Darren Fletcher to be handed an interim role once more if a deal cannot be done in time.

While losing Pochettino would be a blow for the US, *The Independent* understands that US Soccer has been prepared for his exit at some stage before the 2030 World Cup, and that a succession plan is already in place.



Pochettino has a contract until the 2030 World Cup with the US *(PA)*

Pochettino's move back to England would be a major shift in his plans after committing to a four-year build to the 2030 World Cup, having overseen an encouraging yet ultimately unsuccessful home World Cup this summer, which ended in a heavy defeat to Belgium in the last 16.

While Pochettino admitted in September that he was "excited" about the road to Spain, Portugal and Morocco, he conceded that four years is a "long time" and that this commitment was "different".

"We are serious people," Pochettino told *The Independent* and other outlets in a wide-ranging interview. "Now it's a different thing. When we gave our word to the federation, it was about starting and finishing, after the World Cup. It's different, maybe, if you ask me now. Because now we commit to four years.

"Always it's different. Before, it was very easy to say 'OK, we start now, we prepare the team for the World Cup, we play the World Cup, and then we'll see.' [Leaving] before that, it was difficult.

Because we committed before. For us, it was the moment to say, 'if some club came, it's impossible'. Now it's another question.

"For us it was impossible to think about coming back or going to another club. Because we received some calls from different clubs. But we cannot go away, first, because we didn't want to go. Always you can break a contract, say you stop, and that's it, you agree something. But in the moment I think it wasn't right for us to create all these situations and expectations.

"And now it's a four-year contract, it's different. We can next season lose the Copa America or the Gold Cup, and they're not happy with us, they can sack us, or we can say, 'OK, it's not in the way that we think'. Four years is different. Maybe now, if someone calls in the future, it's different. We are excited, we are thinking to spend four years, I think to the next World Cup. But now it's a long period."

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Judge rules Trump's $10bn lawsuit against the BBC can go ahead

The president is suing the broadcaster over a 2024 Panorama documentary

Jack Queen in New York



The president called the ruling a 'huge victory' in a social media post *(AP)*

Donald Trump's $10bn (£7.5bn) defamation lawsuit against the BBC can proceed, a judge has ruled, while throwing out the US president's unfair trade practices claim against the broadcaster.

Mr Trump is suing the BBC over edited video clips of a speech that made it appear he had urged supporters to storm the US Capitol on 6 January 2021.

The error, which appeared in a 2024 *Panorama* documentary, led to the resignations of the broadcaster's director-general Tim

Davie and head of news Deborah Turness.

The case is one of several that Mr Trump has filed against media outlets as part of a wider pressure campaign against coverage he dislikes. He has also attempted to take legal action against ABC News, CBS News, *The New York Times*, and *The Wall Street Journal*, among others.

In a decision made on Tuesday, US district judge Jeffrey Kuntz in Florida declined to throw out Mr Trump's defamation claim against the BBC.

He said that Mr Trump had plausibly alleged that the broadcaster damaged his reputation and knew, or should have known, that the clip was misleading.

The judge's ruling did not decide whether Mr Trump has proven those claims.



The BBC previously admitted that the edits are misleading *(AFP/Getty)*

The president called the ruling a "huge victory" in a social media post.

“We will continue fighting against, and defeating, all of those who try to deceive the American People!” he wrote.

A BBC spokesperson said that the broadcaster was surprised by the decision, but respects the court’s authority and remains confident in its position.

The broadcaster has previously admitted that the edits were misleading and apologised to Mr Trump, although it denies being liable for defamation.

Mr Trump’s lawsuit, filed in December in Florida federal court, accuses the BBC of defaming him by splicing together parts of the speech, including one section where he told supporters to march on the Capitol and another where he said “fight like hell”. It omitted a section in which he called for peaceful protest.

The edited speech appeared in *Panorama* shortly before the 2024 presidential election, which Mr Trump won.

A leaked internal BBC memo cited the edits as evidence of potential political bias, sparking a public relations crisis for the broadcaster.

Reuters

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Hundreds of schools across UK targeted by bomb hoax

Authorities have condemned the ‘bogus threat’ as police carry out urgent enquiries

Harriette Boucher



More than 300 schools were targeted in Northern Ireland *(PA Archive)*

Hundreds of schools in Scotland and Northern Ireland have been targeted by hoax bomb threats, police have said.

Police Scotland said threatening messages were sent to distribution lists, but nothing suggested they posed a credible threat or any danger to the public.

The hoax threats, which originated from outside of the UK, caused dozens of schools to evacuate their students and staff, according to reports.

Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) said more than 300 schools in Northern Ireland had reported a “concerning email” to police.

In a statement, the force said police were conducting urgent enquiries and liaising with the schools that were targeted.

Assistant Chief Constable Anthony McNally said: “We take incidents of this nature very seriously and we understand the concern in the community, school communities and for students and parents.

“We urge everyone, in the meantime, to be vigilant and report anything suspicious to police immediately by calling 101, or 999 in an emergency.”

Police Scotland added: “We understand how distressing messages of this nature can be for pupils, parents, carers and school staff, and the concern they can understandably cause.

“Our advice is that there is no requirement to evacuate schools or keep children away from education based solely on the content of the emails.

“Police Scotland’s Cyber and Fraud Unit is carrying out extensive enquiries to establish the source of the messages, and officers continue to liaise with law enforcement partners across the UK and internationally.”

A number of schools in Northern Ireland and Scotland also closed following a hoax bomb threat last month. Stormont’s education minister Paul Givan said on that occasion the threat was “Islamist” and had been signed off “Allahu Akbar”.



In Kinross, pupils huddle under foil blankets to keep warm after being evacuated from their classroom *(Fife jammer locations/Facbook)*

Alliance Party MLA Paula Bradshaw hit out at “the reckless bomb threats”, while the Education Authority condemned the messages for causing fear and distress among pupils, parents and staff.

The EA said: “The message has similarities with a bogus threat sent last month, which was declared a hoax by PSNI. EA is liaising with police on this latest message.

“At this stage, we have not been made aware of any evidence of any credible threat to schools.”

The hoax bomb threats also come as at least 300 schools in Italy were evacuated after receiving bomb alert messages yesterday.

It is unclear if the threats are linked, but they follow a string of bomb threats across Europe in recent weeks, which have targeted supermarkets, air traffic, broadcasters, and blood banks.

John McGhee, the executive director of education at Glasgow City Council, said: “You may be aware of media reports this

morning about a threatening email about a device in schools that has been sent to schools across the country – our police colleagues have confirmed this is a hoax and that schools should not be evacuated.

“Police officers will investigate the source of these emails. We will continue to work closely with our police colleagues as part of the investigation.”

He added: “We know that these incidents will cause anxiety and I want to reassure you the safety of our children, young people and staff is our top priority, and we will always follow the correct procedures in this type of situation.”

Highland Council said: “Emergency protocols were activated in Highland schools this morning, as we awaited further guidance from police.

“Schools will be in touch with parents directly regarding arrangements following any precautionary measures taken this morning.”

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UK is losing out on best minds because of SEND failures, Rory Bremner warns

The comedian spoke to *The Independent* ahead of a major cross-party campaign launch in parliament to push for changes for reforms to special educational needs provision

David Maddox Political Editor



The comedian was diagnosed ADHD as an adult *(Rory Bremner)*

Children with special educational needs (SEND) are being left on the scrap heap when they should be treated as an important national resource, comedian Rory Bremner has claimed.

His comments come ahead of the SEND Matters Coalition launch in parliament yesterday, which has cross-party backing from Labour, Tory, Lib Dem, Reform and Green MPs.

Mr Bremner, who is a patron of the campaign, has spoken out against government plans to educate more SEND children in

mainstream education.

The comedian, who was diagnosed with severe attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) as an adult, claims many children end up as Neets (not in education or full-time training) or prison because their mental health issues are not supported properly when they are growing up.

He noted that the Alan Milburn report found that young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) are around 80 per cent more likely to be NEET, while it is estimated that up to half of the adult prison population could be considered neurodivergent, according to the government.

But he also pointed out that many successful people have conditions like ADHD, autism or other special educational needs, with one UK survey showing 40 per cent of entrepreneurs have dyslexia.

“People with these conditions can be a resource for the country, not part of the prison population,” he said.

“The tragedy of all this is that, because of their neurodiversity, some of these minds are some of the best minds that there are – the Elon Musks of this world or the Edisons, or the Einsteins – people who have different neurodiverse conditions... or Alan Turing, some of these brighter minds.

“Tech companies are now actively employing people who are neurodiverse because they want people with that sort of mind. And Dominic Cummings, when he was in government, he wanted minds that were different.”

Looking at his own world of entertainment, he said: “I talk in terms of different. But if minds are different, people think differently. You think about people with ADHD, particularly as there’s a creative restlessness or a restless creativity.

“So there are many people with ADHD in the arts, in acting and film and television and comedy. I mean, I would say seven out of 10 comedians or six out of 10 actors I know personally have ADHD, and it’s kind of our secret sauce.

“If you have ADHD, you can be impulsive, have poor time management, poor organisation generally. But in terms of comedy, you are quick on the ball because you’ve got a brain that’s like a pinball machine and makes connections quickly.”

He noted how his mother used to joke that he could “get lost in a phone box” when he was younger, but he could sit for hours in a cafe concentrating on a script.

Mr Bremner pointed to government figures which show around one in five schoolchildren with identified special educational needs, but said he is concerned about a “small number of them” who need specialist education rather than mainstream schooling.

Department for Education research published in February shows 15 per cent of teachers would not feel confident in identifying SEND children.

“I do not like the government’s plans for there to be a presumption that mainstream is best for all children, and for these ones in particular, it’s the very opposite. It’s triggering. It’s children who are simply unable to cope with the noise, the bustle, the stigma,” he said.



Chris Coghlan is campaigning for SEND familiess *(House of Commons)*

“Also not just for them, but if they’re in a class of 26 or whatever, and you have one child there who is seen as being disruptive, that’s no good. That’s not good for the other 25 if the teacher is unable to cope.”

Referring to a 2023 report commissioned by the National Association of Independent and Non-Maintained Special Schools (NASS), he pointed out: “If you receive the right education, the bonus to somebody is something like £380,000 over the lifetime in value of somebody who is educated appropriately, as opposed to somebody who’s failed.

“Similarly, the cost of special provision in a special school is around, I think, the £60,000 mark. But if that child fails and then goes on to a young offenders institution, that’s going to need two or three times that amount.”

The SEND Matters Coalition has been organised with cross-party support from five political parties by former Downing Street chief of staff Mark Fullbrook and former Department for Business and Trade special adviser Joanna Thomas.

Lib Dem MP Chris Coghlan told the campaign launch event that there is a “suicide epidemic” caused by failures by local authorities to support families of SEND children. He repeated the case of Eivie White from Maidstone, who took her life three years ago at age 13, and another teenager called Sharon from his own Dorking and Horley constituency.

He said: “Every time I speak about this, more families come to talk to me about their experiences.”

He noted words from a council whistleblower who said that “council officers joked over the numbers of families they turned down” for support while they avoided direct contact.

The event also heard from Sian Lock, who is now at university but had struggled with SEND issues, and Clifford Jenkyns, a junior SEND ambassador and son of Reform Lincolnshire mayor Dame Andrea Jenkyns.

School standards minister Georgia Gould attended the campaign launch and highlighted the £3.7bn the government plans to invest in special educational needs, including redesigning schools to make them better environments for children with neurodiverse issues.

She said: “There is a huge amount of work going on and a number of groups are feeding into it. This is a big opportunity, but also there will be a big response. We want to make a difference on the ground.”

The Department for Education said: “We have been working closely with parents and professionals to get these reforms right, and the education secretary has been clear that we’re completely committed to the timelines we set out in the schools white paper.

“We inherited a system under immense strain, but our reforms will change that. We will end the postcode lottery felt by so many

– widening access to specialists for every school, rolling out training for every teacher, and investing £3.7bn to create 60,000 specialist places across the country.

“Legal duties on schools to identify and support children’s needs are getting stronger, not weaker, and we are retaining EHCPs for children who need them.”

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Pictures of the Day



Cutting it close

Properties that are at risk of collapse as high tides cut into sandy cliffs at Hemsby in Norfolk. *PA*



Red alert

Mount Fuji is seen behind maple trees in autumn colours in Kawaguchiko, Japan. *Reuters*



Paint the town red

Revellers have their faces made up during celebrations to mark the start of the carnival season in Cologne, Germany. *AFP/Getty*



Crowd source

People attend a march to mark the 108th anniversary of Polish independence in Warsaw, Poland. *Reuters*



Point of view

A helicopter carries a large Argentinian flag as it flies near the Basilica of Our Lady of Lujan. *Reuters*

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Home news in brief



(Social media)

Scottish DJ named as victim of Krakow shooting

A 32-year-old Scottish DJ has been identified as one of the six people killed in a drive-by shooting in Krakow last week. James Campbell, of Prestwick, was named yesterday among the victims of the 7 November shooting, in which a gunman opened fire on random people in the Polish city's main market square. Another British man was injured by the shooter, and local officials previously said three of the women and one man who were killed were Polish.

Police Scotland said they were supporting Mr Campbell's family after his "tragic death", and Prestwick's local SNP branch paid tribute. "Our heartfelt condolences to the family and friends of local Prestwick man James Thomas Campbell, only 32 years old, tragically announced by local press today as one of the victims

killed in the Krakow shooting," it said on social media. "Our thoughts are with his loved ones." Formal identification is still to take place.

Oxford museum returns 39 skulls to Indian tribe

Oxford University has returned the remains of 39 people from India's Naga community taken during the British colonial rule. The university's Pitt Rivers Museum on Monday formally handed over the remains to a delegation of around 30 people from India's mountainous state of Nagaland.

Museum director Laura Van Broekhoven hailed the handover as a "historic moment that would be part of stories told to the next generation". She said the remains were finally on their way home after overcoming "so much red tape everywhere".

The Pitt Rivers, founded in the 19th century, contains more than 6,000 objects representing the Naga culture, mostly skulls, believed to be the largest collection in the world. The first Naga remains were given to the museum by John Henry Hutton, a colonial administrator, according to the museum's website. The rest of the remains were added between 1910 and 1940. The website stated that "remains and objects were frequently confiscated during punitive military expeditions, rather than freely given".

Most voters do not recognise the UK's longest serving party leader

The majority of Britons do not recognise Britain's longest-serving party leader, Sir Ed Davey, even though he has led the Liberal Democrats for more than six years. New YouGov polling has found only 37 per cent of voters recognised Sir Ed, raising further questions about the relevance of his party. Respondents were shown photos of seven politicians, including leaders of five major nationwide parties, and asked to name them.

His recognisability was low even amongst Lib Dem voters, with only 49 per cent of the people who voted for the party in the 2024 general election being able to recognise Sir Ed from the photo. The Liberal Democrats have made minimal polling progress since that vote, with a recent YouGov survey ranking the party at 12 per cent – around the same as its 2024 share.

Nigel Farage was the most widely recognised of the seven, with 89 per cent successfully identifying the Reform UK leader, whilst 83 per cent could recognise the prime minister, Andy Burnham. Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch is recognised by two thirds of Britons, whilst Green Party leader Zack Polanski was recognised by 46 per cent of Britons, with this number rising to 64 per cent amongst 18-24-year-olds. Just 28 per cent recognised chancellor John Healey, and 62 per cent said they didn't know who he was.

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Iran threatens to attack US bases in Europe

Islamic Republic says it will hit any European base that houses American aircraft if US resumes strikes

Sophie Clark



Iranian security council secretary Mohsen Rezaei made the threat *(AFP/Getty)*

An Iranian official has threatened strikes on US bases in Europe if Donald Trump launches new strikes against Iran.

Speaking to Al Mayadeen, a news channel in Beirut with links to Hezbollah, Iranian security council secretary Mohsen Rezaei said that any base from which American aircraft take off is at risk of being attacked, according to Iran International.

“If the Americans make a mistake and attack us, we will not limit ourselves to nearby bases,” said Mr Rezaei.

“We may even target some American military bases in European countries.”

This statement comes after the US president Donald Trump said future strikes on Iran are “unlikely”, but added that the US is “locked and loaded” if the situation does change, according to the BBC.

Although Iranian officials have expressed doubt over the president’s statement, Mr Trump may be serious about ending the war with Iran given the anti-war sentiment expressed by midterm election voters.



Roadblocks remain in place near RAF Fairford *(Reuters)*

Many newly elected Democrats have said they will vote to end the war, and vice president JD Vance told the press that he believes the war was the central cause of the Republicans’ seismic defeat in the midterms.

This warning over Iranian attacks on European military bases is coming from an official source. However, three men who are accused of being Iran-backed operatives are currently facing charges in the US for attempting a terror attack on RAF Fairford,

an air force base in the UK which held American planes and hosted American service members.

The US has now removed its bombers from the base. Iran has denied any involvement in the alleged plot.

The US currently has 31 bases in Europe, and also shares 18 bases with European allies.

There were approximately 84,000 US service members across the United States European Command (Eucom) area of responsibility as of early 2025, according to data from the Centre for European Policy Analysis.



An American refuelling plane prepares to take off from RAF Mildenhall *(Reuters)*

The US Air Force operates in the UK from RAF Lakenheath and RAF Mildenhall. However, the US armed forces removed several aircraft from RAF Mildenhall on 10 November amid unspecified threats.

The threat to bomb military bases in Europe is not the only major threat made by Iran against the Trump administration in recent weeks.

The US treasury secretary Scott Bessent had to move out of his Washington home and on to a military base in early November due to threats from Iran, according to *The New York Times*.

Mr Bessent has been leading financial pressure, such as increased sanctions against Iran. It is unclear how severe the threats are at this time.

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Democrats lash out at no-shows after Hegseth survives impeachment push

‘People should have gotten their raggedy selves up these steps to vote,’ said California representative Sydney Kamlager-Dove after resolution against Hegseth fails to pass

Joe Sommerlad



Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez expressed frustration after 11 of her House colleagues missed a crucial vote on Hegseth’s proposed impeachment *(Reuters)*

House Democrats have voiced their frustration after defence secretary Pete Hegseth managed to escape impeachment, lashing out at their colleagues who were not present for a key vote on his future.

Rebel Kentucky Republican representative Thomas Massie had filed articles of impeachment against Hegseth on Monday, accusing him of “high crimes and misdemeanours” for waging the war with Iran without first securing congressional approval

and of carrying out extrajudicial killings in the Caribbean by bombing alleged drug boats.

However, with the chamber's GOP majority still in place until January, the House voted 211-204 to pass the matter onto the Republican-led Judiciary Committee, where it is all but certain to languish – at least until the new year, when the Democrat-led 120th Congress is sworn in.

While the outcome represented a huge relief for the secretary and a much-needed win for President Donald Trump, who was quick to crow about it on Truth Social, the opposition was left to rue the 11 absent members of its caucus who might have made the difference.

Speaking on the steps of the Capitol to CNN reporter Manu Raju immediately after the vote, a clearly frustrated New York Democratic representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez said of her absent colleagues: "The people send us here to do a job... I don't know if anyone had any real health issues or anything significant [in] that respect, so I want to leave room for that but, that being said, at the end of the day we're here to do a job.

"And the same way I had to clock in when I worked at a restaurant, we've got to clock in and do our work here."



Michigan senator-elect Abdul El-Sayed told the missing representatives on CNN: 'You should show up and do your job' *(Getty)*

California representative Sydney Kamlager-Dove was equally annoyed, telling *MeidasTouch* reporter Pablo Manriquez: "We knew that this vote was coming, so people should have gotten their raggedy selves up these steps to vote. There is no reason why we should have lost this vote because of attendance issues."

She went on to mock Hegseth over the defiant Pentagon press briefing he had delivered Tuesday morning, insisting the process was nothing more than a "political spectacle" driven by Massie, whom he called a "disgruntled and defeated congressman."

"You know this man should not be in this position," Kamlager-Dove said, addressing Republicans. "That's why he got up at 8 o'clock in the morning with his sorry self to plea to the American people.

"So shame on folks who are not here. Because these people lost. They lost, and they still found a way to show up to table this bill. Shameful."

Michigan senator-elect Abdul El-Sayed, one of the stars of last week's midterms triumph for Democrats, was asked by CNN's Kaitlan Collins what he would say to the absent representatives.

"You should show up and do your job," he answered simply.

El-Sayed also had a personal message for the secretary, saying directly into the camera as though addressing him directly: "Pete – it's just an open question – why are you still doing this job?



Hegseth has mounted a Trumpian defense of his record, insisting the attempt to remove him from office was a 'political spectacle' *(AP)*

"You are really bad at this. You are failing your responsibility; you have mishandled this war, and nobody really actually understands what it is you're about. Every day you're talking about fighting a new culture war but, like, you're supposed to be waging an actual war that's actually illegal on its own terms.

"So, just resign. Make it easy for everybody instead of, in the end, getting taken out because that is clearly what's happening. Pete, just take it from me, you're not good at this."

Axios reporter Andrew Solender was able to cast some light on why the 11 Democrats were missing in action, writing on X that several House members had told him that a number of their colleagues "were on their way back from an Elect Democratic Women event at a venue about 1.5 miles down Pennsylvania Ave but got caught in a bumper-to-bumper traffic jam on Independence Ave (the road on the House side of the Capitol complex).

"Some members found other ways to get back to the Capitol because their cars were effectively stopped on the road. One got out and walked. Another got dropped off on the Senate side to avoid the traffic."

On the right, the outcome was met with gloating from Jesse Watters on Fox News and was cheered by Trump, who called Massie "a major LOSER" and warned that Democrats will "continue to weaponise and abuse the United States of America".

Interestingly, Senate Majority Leader John Thune was asked if he retained confidence in Hegseth and withheld a ringing endorsement, saying only: "I think it's up to the president.

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Inside the firm at the heart of Nvidia scandal accused of smuggling chips to China

Megaspeed has faced US scrutiny over suspicions that it helped Beijing gain access to Nvidia's advanced AI chips, writes **James C. Reynolds**



The Ocean Financial Centre building in Singapore, where Megaspeed is based *(Reuters)*

Cloud computing firm Megaspeed has come under fresh scrutiny as the US looks into Nvidia chief executive Jensen Huang's affair with a businesswoman alleged to be a Chinese spy.

Nvidia has seen hundreds of billions of dollars wiped from its value in recent days after the US chipmaker said it would investigate Mr Huang's admitted relationship with the former Megaspeed director Alice Huang.

China says allegations about Chinese spies are "entirely groundless" and "intended to smear and malign China". But US intelligence officials nevertheless believe Alice Huang, also known as Huang Le, was funnelling information to Beijing.

For years, Washington has tried to keep China from gaining the know-how to rival the United States in cutting-edge AI, which Nvidia's chips support.

Now attention turns to Megaspeed over suspicions that it helped Beijing gain access to advanced AI chips whose export to China is restricted.

What is Megaspeed?

Megaspeed was incorporated in 2015 as 7Road International before changing its name to Megaspeed International in March 2023, when it was bought by a British Virgin Islands company called Huang Le Ltd.

Alice Huang ended her eight-month tenure as managing director months later, in October 2023, but is reported to still be involved in the company. In November 2023, the firm was sold again to a Singaporean entity called Swiftdata, which says its main job is providing hosting services by non-data centres.

Megaspeed's assets increased sharply to $3bn in 2024 from $33 million in 2023, its business filings showed.

The company soon became one of Nvidia's biggest Asian customers and grew rapidly as a link between the US chipmaker and the Chinese tech group Alibaba. Two Singapore citizens are listed as officers of both Megaspeed and Swiftdata.



Alice Huang at a dinner in Taipei hosted by Jensen Huang in 2025 *(TVBS)*

Singapore has come under mounting pressure from the US to clamp down on companies suspected of transferring advanced AI chips to Chinese firms. But the city-state does not necessarily exclude such transfers.

Singaporean police are now conducting their own investigation into Megaspeed, in step with US authorities. US intelligence officials have already concluded Alice Huang was a Chinese intelligence asset, according to the *The New York Times*.

What did US intelligence find?

US intelligence officials have reportedly been alert to Alice Huang's position for some time. According to the *NYT*, US president Donald Trump was briefed on intelligence findings around a year ago but chose to do nothing with them.

It was late last year that US authorities began investigating Megaspeed over suspicions it was helping to divert Nvidia chips to China.

Singapore police said they would investigate the firm over "suspected breaches of our domestic laws" after a US senator asked the commerce department to look into related concerns.

According to the *NYT*, officials suspected it was Alice Huang who was feeding information directly to Beijing on how to gain access to the advanced AI chips.



Donald Trump with Huang in Washington in October *(Reuters)*

Megaspeed has denied any wrongdoing and told the newspaper that it was "committed to getting to the facts behind these allegations" and would welcome a "formal, evidence-based investigation".

It said in a statement last year that "there has been no evidence of any violations concerning the illicit transfer of chips or any illegal activities".

And Nvidia said Megaspeed was just like any other regional customer, and that such customers only "receive ordinary business information – not sensitive Nvidia trade secrets – and zero information relevant to national security".

Who is Alice Huang?

For all the concerns above, the affair between Alice Huang and Jensen Huang has rocked the tech and political worlds. It remains unclear how long the affair lasted, and when exactly the relationship might have ended.

Alice Huang was a Chinese finance executive before becoming involved in artificial intelligence, data centres and computer chips. She became Megaspeed's controlling shareholder in March 2023, according to research by the C4ADS, a Washington-based non-profit focused on global security.

But by November 2023, she was no longer listed as a director, and all her shares were transferred to a Singaporean businessman, Tan Yong Pong, who is also known as James Tan.



The affair between Alice Huang and Jensen Huang has rocked the tech and political worlds *(Reuters)*

While public records suggest Alice Huang left Megaspeed, short seller Culper Research issued a report in May this year that cited

a Megaspeed employee saying Alice Huang was “actually still our boss” and was still involved in the company’s daily operations.

Before Megaspeed, Alice Huang held senior positions at the Chinese firm Shanghai Hexi Investment Co. from around 2015 to 2017, according to social media posts and records from Simuwang, a Chinese private equity database.

Before that, she worked at HSBC’s Hong Kong private banking arm and at Citic Securities, a Chinese investment bank.

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How Turkey's drive to expand a major coal plant is polluting its climate push

Residents around the Afşin-Elbistan coal plant believe it has killed family members, leaving a ghost town as people have been forced away. As Turkey welcomes world leaders to Cop31, its reliance on fossil fuels is severely undermining its climate credentials. **Liz Cookman** reports



An open-cast coal mine near Elbistan, southern Turkey, with the Afşin-Elbistan coal-fired power station visible in the distance *(AFP/Getty)*

On the veranda of a small house, Omer coughs as his wife serves up sweet tea and biscuits. The golden glow of late-afternoon sun peeks through nearby foliage and scatters across the floor – an idyllic scene, perhaps, but for a swell of black smoke pooling in the sky over us.

All day – and some say at night, too – emissions chug out in huge columns from alternating chimneys at the nearby Afşin-Elbistan coal plant. It leaves the air all around the surrounding plateau, in Turkey's southern Kahramanmaraş region, feeling dry and heavy in the mouth and lungs.

Now in his late fifties, Omer has worked at the vast plant for years, as well as living a stone's throw from it. His brothers also worked there, but in recent years, three have died – two from lung cancer and one of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), a progressive lung condition that can be caused or worsened by long-term exposure to coal fumes.

"I believe working at this plant killed them," says Omer, pointing his finger towards it in indignation. "And I'm not going to see 65, I know that."

Another brother is also living with COPD and asthma. According to Omer, his late brothers were between 55 and 61 when they died, and there was no previous history of these illnesses in his family. His father – who was also born in the village – lived to 97.

Turkey is set to host world leaders over the next couple of days in the southern coastal city of Antalya, as part of the Cop31 summit. Under an unusual power-sharing arrangement with Australia, who will lead the formal negotiations, the country has said it will attempt to turn previous pledges – such as the landmark Paris Agreement – into measurable policy.

Speaking on Monday as the summit opened, leaders urged the world to accelerate the fight against global warming in a year of

climate-driven disasters that is also on track to be one of the four hottest on record, according to a UN report released the same day.

“A drought in one part of the world is felt at the dinner table in another,” said Turkish president-designate Murat Kurum, while UN climate chief Simon Stiell said progress had been “nowhere near fast enough”.

“This year’s fossil fuel cost chaos has delivered a global shockwave, hitting households hard and spreading inflation like a cancer,” said Mr Stiell.



Local campaigner Mehmet Dalkanat in the village of Çoğulhan *(Emre Caylak)*

Mr Kurum, who is also Turkey’s minister of environment, urbanisation and climate change, has explicitly positioned Antalya as an “Implementation Cop” built around electrification, waste reduction, climate finance and green industry. He set a voluntary global goal for 35 per cent of energy needs from electricity by 2035.

Yet critics have questioned the climate credentials of both Australia, a major coal exporter, and Turkey, a major coal

consumer, as they seek to shift attention towards electrification and away from fossil fuels. Amid rising domestic emissions, Ankara has continued to invest in oil, coal and gas and has yet to produce a credible plan to phase them out

They have also pointed to major structural obstacles to Turkey's electricity ambitions. It currently accounts for around 22 per cent of total final energy consumption, but the country is Europe's largest producer of coal-fired electricity, with just over a third coming from coal – the dirtiest of fossil fuels – and almost another quarter from gas.

The country has high coal dependence, according to Climate Watch, and it is the only member of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) that has not banned new coal plant permits.

It is also seeking to expand two coal-fired power stations: Afşin-Elbistan, which has operated for decades in one of the country's most polluted regions, and the smaller Cenal, near the western coastal town of Çanakkale.

The projects would allow the plants to burn considerably more coal, extending the country's reliance. Opponents have raised concern that they are also a serious public health risk.

'Like they're forcing everyone to chain-smoke'

More than a dozen residents living near the Afşin-Elbistan plant questioned Turkey's commitment to Cop31, telling *The Independent* that they believe the plant is causing widespread sickness, including cancer, respiratory and cardiovascular problems.

The names of the people we spoke to have been changed to protect them – many others did not want to speak out for fear of reprisals as the plant is now the main employer in the area.

Dr Mehmet has worked at a hospital in the Elbistan area for 15 years and says that 70 per cent of the patients he sees suffer from respiratory problems; many are pregnant women or children. He believes it is the result of oxidative stress caused by breathing in toxic emissions.

The most common complaints he sees are a persistent cough, breathing problems, mucus, high blood pressure and heart palpitations. Although they are not rare conditions, he says it is the number of cases that make it unusual, the fact that they appear even in the young and that the problems appear to be site-specific.

People develop problems after moving to the area, he claims, and the problems seem to clear up in those who move away. He also sees a lot of patients who have had asthma attacks and believes they take a longer time than normal to recover.

“Whatever comes out from those chimneys goes straight into your lungs and stays there for a long time until your body can’t take it any more,” Dr Mehmet says. “We have a population of 140,000 people and it’s like they’re forcing everyone here to chain-smoke. It’s really a horrible place.”

The Afşin-Elbistan complex is made up of two power stations: the older A, which began operating in 1984, and B, which opened in 2006. A was ordered to close for failing to install legally required pollution-control equipment in 2020, but Kurum permitted two of its four units to reopen five months later.

An expansion of A to add two further new units, increasing capacity by 688MW – or enough to supply around 500,000 to 700,000 extra homes – was first proposed two years later. The local community has been fighting the plans ever since, saying the plant has affected health, water supplies, farming and has seen thousands of people move out of the area.



Businesses and residences in Çoğulhan, near the power station in southern Turkey *(Emre Caylak)*

A 2022 analysis commissioned by Greenpeace Mediterranean estimated that an extension could cause around 1,900 premature deaths, with a later Human Rights Watch report finding that despite early warning of an expected "cancer explosion" the government "has failed to monitor and reduce the harm."

Despite the complaints, the expansion was approved in 2024. However, that was overturned by a court in July this year. The ruling highlighted that its potential impact on public health and the environment had not been properly assessed. Since then, however, the government and plant operator, Celikler Holding, have appealed the ruling.

They have continued to pursue expansion even as Turkey hosts Cop31 a few hours' drive away.

'Turkey has an opportunity to show that climate leadership'

Duygu Kutluay, a campaigner with Beyond Fossil Fuels, says there is a "fundamental contradiction" between Turkey

promoting electrification as a global priority ahead of the summit while continuing to support coal expansion at home.

“At Afşin-Elbistan, the debate is not simply about energy policy, it is also about public health, environmental protection and the people living with the consequences,” Kutluay says. “As Cop31 host, Turkey has an opportunity to show that climate leadership means committing to no new coal, accelerating renewables and ensuring a fair transition for workers and communities.”

She added that the country’s climate ambitions “risk being undermined” by domestic energy choices.

Turkey’s coal expansion also extends beyond Afşin-Elbistan. In Adana, plans would increase coal mining by almost half, while a proposed expansion at the Cenal plant in Çanakkale would increase its generating capacity by almost 80 per cent.



Part of the Afşin-Elbistan coal-fired power station *(Emre Caylak)*

Coal mining continues in Zonguldak, despite a long history of deadly accidents. Last month, a methane explosion at a private coal mine in Gelik killed three miners and injured five.

It is hard to definitively prove a connection between the plant and the health problems locals report because access to information is opaque and restricted in an increasingly authoritarian country. No official health study has been commissioned, and if it was, it could take years for the results.

Ahead of the Antalya summit, rights groups have also accused the government of arbitrarily arresting and prosecuting activists who speak up about climate issues and those involved in environmental protests.

Yet according to data from the government's own air pollution monitoring system, coupled with satellite data, there are "dangerously high levels of air pollution in the area surrounding the plant," says Deniz Bayram, assistant researcher for Europe and Central Asia at HRW.

In 2023, Elbistan was the epicentre of one of two devastating earthquakes that struck nine hours apart and killed more than 50,000 people. Damage to the power stations forced them to shut down for much of the year, she says, and air pollution levels in the area fell sharply.

"Plant A operated for decades without the necessary technology to reduce harmful emissions," Mr Bayram says, calling the government's appeal over the expansion "disappointing".

"Credible research in the field shows that Turkey could commit to exit from coal by 2030 while keeping its existing development indicators," says Mr Bayram, adding that the country should "not miss the opportunity to send an important message to the world" while hosting Cop31.

'Talking is easy... let's act'

According to Mehmet Dalkanat, 71, who is a member of a local ecological campaign group, the problems caused by Plant A stretch way beyond health. Before it was built, intensive

agriculture flourished in the area – the soil was exceptionally fertile, yielding wheat, barley, chickpeas, beans and lentils.



Cuma with his family, including his son – who had leukaemia when he was younger *(Emre Caylak)*

Now more than a thousand huge pumps draw groundwater out of the earth to dry up coal deposits so they can be mined. Dalkanat says it has parched natural springs and turned the land arid.

“People also left and this once rich town of 11,000 has dwindled to barely 300 or 500 residents now – mostly of them impoverished or elderly, or those with nowhere else to go,” he says, outside an abandoned municipal administration building in Çoğulhan. The settlement sits at the foot of the plant, and suffers the worst of the pollution.

Once a busy town hall, grass has now grown across the concrete courtyard, and broken glass from smashed windows crunches underfoot. Homes all over the area lie derelict, with whole rows of shops shuttered and empty.

“It looks like a ghost town now from an American Western movie, while you can’t find a single person untouched by illness,” Dalkanat says.

For Cuma, a construction worker in his forties, Turkey’s rhetoric ahead of Cop31 is hypocritical. His son suffered from leukaemia as a small child, which he believes was caused by breathing emissions from the plant.

Cuma says medical tests found no genetic cause for the cancer, and that an unusual number of children in the area were also diagnosed with a disease.

Air pollution from coal-fired power stations contains toxic substances, including carcinogens such as benzene, which has been linked to leukaemia. The cancer usually affects just under five in every 100,000 children annually.

While his son survived and has made a full recovery, Cuma claims two other children in this small settlement died of leukaemia at around the same time.

“This country is talking a lot, but it doesn’t actually do anything,” says Cuma, eating freshly baked bread rolls prepared by his wife. “Talking is easy. You saw what’s going on here – everyone knows this plant is killing us and that we don’t want it here. Now let’s act.”

Celikler Holdings and the ministries of energy and environment, urbanisation and climate change did not respond to requests for comment.

This article has been produced as part of The Independent’s Rethinking Global Aid project

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World news in brief



The scene of the attack at Bela Coola, about 620 miles north of Vancouver *(British Columbia Conservation Officer Service)*

Four grizzly bears killed mother and daughter

A mother and her adult daughter who died near a remote community in western Canada were killed by four grizzly bears in what investigators believe was a rare predatory attack, wildlife officials said on Tuesday. The victims were Jenny Balcarras, 48, and her 20-year-old daughter, Selah Reed. DNA tests conclusively linked a female grizzly and her three yearling cubs to the deaths, the British Columbia Conservation Officer Service said. All four bears were killed to protect the public, officials said. "Our investigation also found that this attack likely involved predatory behaviour, which I can tell you is very rare," Inspector Jeff Tyre told an online briefing.

The women's remains were discovered about 150 metres apart near a trail outside Bella Coola, a community about 620 miles north of Vancouver. Family members raised the alarm after Reed missed a routine Saturday-night call with her sister. Searchers found her mother's remains first, then located Reed's remains in a bear cache, where bears store food. Tyre said the bears were not involved in a separate grizzly attack last November on a group of about 20 elementary school students and teachers in the same area. Eleven people were injured in that attack, including two critically.

Italian schools evacuated after bomb threats

Authorities in Italy evacuated around 300 schools across the country yesterday after receiving an emailed bomb threat in the latest disruption affecting European institutions following hoax bomb threats against airlines and broadcasters in recent weeks. The Italian prime minister Giorgia Meloni said in a statement that there was no indication of any "concrete danger" to Italian schools and said the threats appeared aimed at "generating alarm and concern".

She said investigations were underway, and that she had convened a meeting of ministers for later in the day. The anonymous email also contained a threat against Ms Meloni, according to copies obtained by Italian media including the news agency LaPresse. She did not address the personal threat in her statement, and her office had no immediate comment. Foreign minister Antonio Tajani revealed on Saturday that his personal data had been leaked to the dark web. Ms Meloni blamed pro-Russian hackers. *AP*

Man stabbed to death during fireworks dispute

A 34-year-old man has been stabbed to death in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu, allegedly during an argument over fireworks. Pavithran, a resident of Kaladipet in north Chennai,

was an animal welfare activist, according to *The Times of India*. He was previously employed as a pharmaceutical sales representative. He was on his way to see a friend when he came across a local, identified by police as Balaji, and his friends setting off fireworks. Pavithran, who was on a motorcycle, was reportedly hit by some of the fireworks, prompting him to stop and confront the men.

In the ensuing melee, Pavithran allegedly slapped one of the men accompanying Balaji. This enraged Balaji, who pulled out a knife and stabbed Pavithran, police said. The activist abandoned his vehicle and attempted to flee, but Balaji chased him down and attacked him again, killing him. Police later launched a murder investigation and arrested Balaji and his alleged accomplices, identified by local media as Surya, 27, and Kishore, 28. Another man who was with Balaji's group, identified as Madan, 27, sustained injuries to his hands while attempting to intervene. He was admitted to a local hospital for treatment.

Farmer arrested for smuggling drugs in bananas

A 31-year-old man who won an Indian state's award for best young farmer has been arrested for smuggling synthetic drugs hidden inside bunches of bananas. Dhanesh Nair, known as Dani, was arrested on Monday in Kerala's Ernakulam district while carrying 8g of MDMA and 803g of suspected hashish oil, police said. Mr Nair won Kerala's Best Young Farmer award in 2022. He was living near Mysuru in the neighbouring Karnataka state.

Mr Nair is the "main accused in a drug smuggling gang" that moved large quantities of MDMA from Karnataka to Kerala, police said, adding that he had recruited young people to distribute the drugs to dealers and consumers. Mr Nair used banana plantations and farmland in Nanjangud near Mysuru as cover, police allege, adding that videos on his phone showed drugs being concealed in bananas.

“He has been transporting all kinds of synthetic drugs, concealed inside banana bunches, from Karnataka to Kerala for some time,” a police officer involved in the investigation told the paper *Hindustan Times*. “He has a network of people to distribute them in several districts of the state.”

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I always hated Little Britain – rot was at the heart of everything Walliams did

Allegations about the comedian have cast what was already a horrendous and cruel comedy series into an even darker light, says **Charlie Brinkhurst-Cuff**



Russell Brand makes a cameo appearance in a 2006 Comic Relief performance of the Little Britain stage show, alongside David Walliams *(PA)*



If you were to take a time machine back to the early Noughties and set foot in a British secondary school, there is something you were almost guaranteed to hear. Ringing down the hallways would have been the dulcet tones of boys (most likely, though everyone got involved) slinging out catchphrases from the BBC comedy show *Little Britain*.

Originally a BBC radio show, it ran as a TV series for three seasons, between 2003 and 2006. But for my generation of millennial teenagers, its cultural impact was immense.

David Walliams and Matt Lucas, the two comedians at the helm, were transformed into characters who, Walliams said at the time, were "big… grotesque". And the public lapped it up, delighted by two middle-class men dressing up in fat suits, as trans women, as disabled, in blackface.

The show had millions of viewers and won Baftas and comedy awards. It was broadcast in more than 20 countries around the world and fêted by publications such as the *The Guardian*, who called it "a beautifully observed sketch show".

Earlier this year, Walliams said it was "definitely" set to make a return, after a *Little Brexit* one-off comedy special aired on BBC Radio 4 – only this time, it would be on Netflix, because "you can't get cancelled there".

I always hated *Little Britain*. Quite apart from consistently "punching down", in my own pre-pubescent brain it gave a casual and cruel language to bullies that they didn't have before, that they could wield with intention to maim the vulnerable kids, the weird kids, the kids who were Black, gay, disabled or just indefinably *different*. Laughter, in my world, always had the capability to be savage. At that time, even naming that you disliked it, speaking up against it, could leave you open to more abuse.



Walliams and Lucas have shown only a little remorse for a show which, in 2023, Ofcom found to be 'explicitly racist and outdated'

That the show was ever broadcast on the BBC, our national broadcaster, makes my blood boil. That the BBC only removed it from its streaming platform in response to the recently announced sexual abuse allegations about Walliams, who desperately tried to prevent their publication by seeking a High Court injunction, brings me close to explosion. The pair have shown only a little remorse for a show which, in 2023, Ofcom found to be "explicitly racist and outdated".

More importantly, Walliams – who went on to be a judge on ITV's *Britain's Got Talent* and bestselling children's author – was this week accused of grooming young people at the height of his fame: young people of much the same age as the pupils at my school who had so fastidiously memorised and repeated lines from his show.

Journalists have been pursuing Walliams for years: multiple women have told ITV News and *The Guardian* that Walliams "used" and "abused" his power and celebrity to pursue teenagers and young women. In one devastating recollection in this week's ITV documentary, *David Walliams: Power and Silence*, a woman given the pseudonym "Jade" tells how Walliams sexually assaulted her after he contacted her on MySpace when she was just 15, and he was in his thirties.

The Walliams investigation points to a pattern: a man who – like Russell Brand, who was this week sentenced to 10-and-a-half years in prison for rape and sexual assault – called himself a "sex addict", who consistently pursued and had sex with young and/or vulnerable women.

One thing is clear to me: rot was at the heart of *Little Britain*, at the heart of the work and the personal life of Walliams. He has long cast a dark shadow over the TV industry and the world of comedy – which, by many accounts, still has much more darkness to excavate.

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Burnham has badly misread the UK economy – a heart attack is on the way

It was a mistake for the prime minister to take comfort in the modest market reaction to last month's Budget – the country's financial blood pressure is sky high, says **Andy Haldane**





Andy Burnham and his government may be breathing a sigh of relief at the response to the Budget, but the public finances remain on a knife-edge *(PA)*



This year has seen turbulence in global financial markets, in particular for government bonds and technology stocks, in the face of events in the Middle East and, most recently, the US mid-term elections. In the midst of this turmoil, the UK appears to have weathered the worst of these financial storms.

UK government bonds and stocks have outperformed most other G7 countries. Sterling is at multi-year new highs. The IMF recently lauded the UK's fiscal consolidation plans. And the recent Budget – a potential banana skin for the government – was a non-event in bond markets.

Yet it would be a mistake to take too much comfort from these financial trends.

For the UK's fiscal position is more precarious today than at any time in the past half-century. And while the government may be breathing a sigh of relief, the public finances remain on a knife-edge, with most of the lights on the fiscal dashboard flashing red.

Despite slightly outperforming others, UK borrowing costs have risen materially this year to their highest level in almost two decades. This is adding significantly to the interest rate bill which will reach over £120 billion this year, £14 billion more than planned in January.

Moreover, UK borrowing costs are higher than any other G7 country, at over 1 per cent above the G7 average at the 10-year horizon. They are notably higher than in the US, France and Italy, despite the UK having lower debts. Indeed, UK yields are 1 per cent higher than in Greece, which suffered its own public finance crisis over a decade ago.

Why is the UK government paying more to borrow, despite having lower debt and a more prudent fiscal consolidation plan? Quite simply, because this plan lacks credibility in the eyes of financial markets. And not just them: I have yet to meet an

analyst or politician of any party who finds these plans credible either.

It is easy to see why. The Budget made clear the fiscal challenges facing the government in next year's Spending Review. According to the IFS, this could require cuts to non-protected areas of public spending, or rises in taxes, of perhaps £30-40 billion. And this needs to take place at the time the next general election is scheduled.



> *Facing this fragility, what was the government's response? To run down its fiscal reserves rather than bolster them. This is like not renewing your home insurance at the same time as your next-door neighbour's house is ablaze*

It is little wonder these plans face a credibility gap. Indeed, even if they were to be executed, the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) still judges the probability of the government meeting its fiscal rules is little better than a coin toss, underlining the extent of the UK's fiscal fragility.

Facing this fragility, what was the government's Budgetary response? To run down its fiscal reserves rather than bolstering them. This is equivalent to not renewing your home insurance at the same time your next-door neighbour's house is on fire. Looking across the channel, our next-door neighbour's house is ablaze. Running down our insurance cover is an act of reckless complacency.

Bond yields are the blood pressure gauge of the financial system. At present, the UK's financial blood pressure is sky-high, higher even than in France. In this situation a doctor would prescribe clinical intervention to reduce the risk of a financial heart attack, including statins and slimming routines.

Instead, in the Budget, the UK government offered homeopathic remedies – a dilution of fiscal defences alongside higher deficits and debts, taxes and spending while taking comfort from "doing-no-harm" in bond markets. A doctor prescribing this course of treatment would probably be struck off.

The risk this runs is of the sort of sovereign debt crisis which we have seen lapping close to our shores for several years: the euro-area debt crises in Greece, Portugal, Italy, Ireland and Spain over a decade ago, the UK mini-Budget of 2022 and, most recently, the acute financial stresses in France.

If a crisis were to flood our fields rather than lap our shores, it would swamp the poorest. While the government rails against using "crude cuts" to restore fiscal order, cuts come no cruder or crueller than following a financial crisis. Ask Greece.

By failing to take out insurance, the government is putting at risk those very people it claims to represent. This is neither prudent nor progressive.

Andy Haldane is president of the British Chambers of Commerce, chancellor of the University of Sheffield, and a former chief economist at the Bank of England

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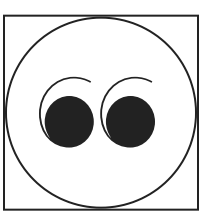
My father has never returned the money he borrowed 40 years ago

The Independent's agony aunt **Victoria Richards** is here to help





'It is not simply about the money. It is about having trusted my father and spending 40 years waiting for that trust to be honoured' *(PA)*



Dear Vix,

I am 68, and something that happened when I was 28 still causes me hurt.

During my first year of marriage, things were difficult, and my husband was speaking to a legal advisor about divorce. My parents disliked him, and my father told me to give him all my savings for safekeeping, saying my husband might otherwise take the money. I had been working as a teacher for six or seven years. I trusted my father, so I did as he advised.

My marriage continued, but my father never returned my savings. My mother repeatedly told him to give the money back while she was alive. Sadly, she died in 2020. Over the years, I have raised this with both my father and my older brother. Both have promised that I would get my money back, but those promises have never been kept. In 2022 or 2023, my brother said he would return it when he came back from Switzerland. He never did.

My father now has dementia. My older brother and his family live with him, and, as I understand it, my brother has moved my father's savings and pension income into a joint account. Although I am also named as an attorney for my father's financial affairs and health and welfare, my brother has practical control over everything.

My siblings know about the money, but we do not have close relationships. This was originally a private arrangement between my father and me; I did not discuss it with any of them. I feel embarrassed that they now know, and deeply hurt that none of them will fight my corner.

For me, this also reflects how daughters can be treated as second-class citizens in some Asian families. Within my own family, I feel my brother's interests carry more weight than mine. I am left feeling that I should quietly accept what has happened, even though these were my earnings.

It is not simply about the money. It is about having trusted my father and spending 40 years waiting for that trust to be honoured. The lack of support from my family makes it even more painful.

I am a pensioner with limited means and cannot afford to spend money on legal fees. I have already spoken up and asked repeatedly, so what can I do when promises lead nowhere? How can I seek a fair resolution and find some peace?

Heartbroken

Dear Heartbroken,

The clue is in the name: you are heartbroken, over this. And I can completely understand why. Three men that you trusted broke that trust: your husband, your father, and now, your brother. They didn't "just" control you financially, but they dismissed you *and* your repeated pleas for retribution. I am very sorry that this has happened to you.

But for secrets to have power, they need to exist *in secrecy*. What I would urge you to do now is to not let them. I know this will be hard, and I appreciate that you've spoken up already and repeatedly, but to get your power back – as well as the money, which is rightfully yours – you're going to need to bring all of these murky family lies out into the open. I'd like you to call Citizens Advice for some support and to be pointed towards people that can help you. You could also consider legal advisors who work pro bono.

But I, personally, would start with your family, first. Ideally, in a family meeting attended by all of those who know and who are involved. People know by now, anyway. You are merely telling the truth of this horrible situation. Try to remember that.

I would present your "case" like a lawyer might: state, quite calmly, what happened to you and the specific amount that's outstanding. But I would try to avoid talking too emotionally (though it is certainly emotional). What you want is a non-negotiable, facts-driven account of what you are owed – and finish with a deadline. Agree with your brother that when your dad's estate or will is read, the money will be paid back to you, as

owed. Ask him to put it in writing. From now on: put *everything* in writing. It will help if your brother backtracks or steps out of line.

And if the idea of a face-to-face family meeting feels too overwhelming, then write a detailed account of what has happened (and a timeline), and circulate it to your inner family circle by email. Importantly, make it clear what you are asking for: reimbursement of your original savings, to be paid either immediately or on sale of your father's property. Ask everyone to sign and send it back to you. If needs be, tell a white lie about how you'll be sending it straight to your solicitor. Tell them they have requested a return within 48 hours.

When a tricky situation is transparent and laid out, people can't run quite so easily – or hide. They can't simply shrug and murmur some nonsense about "moving funds around". They might still ignore it, but it will certainly give them pause to remember their consciences.

Your brother is the key holder in this situation. I don't know if he has "reasons" for not standing by what he should have done decades ago – he may claim that he's been busy, or stressed, or looking after his own family and everyone's finances, and he "simply hasn't had time or headspace to sort this out" – but either way, you deserve an answer.

Did you sign any papers or contracts when you handed over your savings to your father for so-called "safekeeping"? I realise it was a long time ago, so it might be tricky, but even a note or a letter acknowledging receipt might help.

You mentioned your mother, who you sadly lost in 2020, repeatedly asking for the money; and your brother said he'd return it when he came back from Switzerland – how did he tell you, was it verbal? Do you have a text or WhatsApp message?

I'm looking for a paper trail, however tenuous, to show your family – or a lawyer.

In legal terms, your brother should not be using any of the money in your father's account for his own personal gain – the rules around power of attorney are very strict on that. It must always be used to act in the donor's best interests. Secondly, as you both hold joint power of attorney, you must agree on every decision relating to your father and his finances together – and keep the evidence of your agreement.

The worst-case scenario here, I think, is that the money has already gone: that your father and brother saw fit to use it for their own means. If that's true, then it's a tragedy and a betrayal – but I still think you'll be better off for knowing the answer. It's always the limbo that hurts most. You need and deserve to know the truth, and to know where you stand. And when it comes to processing the hurt of the way your family have treated you, I'd love you to talk to a counsellor. You can do that via your GP.

You are the victim here, and *you* have been wronged. It's time to show yourself some compassion – and righteous anger.

Do you have a problem you would like to raise anonymously with Dear Vix? Issues with love, relationships, family and work? Email dearvix@independent.co.uk

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Inside the twisted world of Russell Brand 'truthers'

From Donald Trump Jr to former TV anchor Megyn Kelly, Russell Brand still has a loyal and vocal following despite his conviction for rape and three counts of sexual assault. **Katie Rosseinsky** explores their dark online world



Russell Brand supporters attend the sentencing hearing for the convicted former comedian at Southwark Crown Court on 9 November *(Getty)*

Among the melee outside Southwark Crown Court on Monday afternoon, as Russell Brand was sentenced to 10 and a half years in prison after being found guilty of one count of rape and three counts of sexual assault, one large banner stood out. Emblazoned on a large white sheet were the words: “Russell Brand we stand with you. Christ was crucified for telling the truth. Russell is the truth.”

Welcome to the gospel according to the Russell Brand truthers. Two of the comedian’s loyal supporters, a man and a woman dressed in black and white, were photographed clutching the sign, which also featured a number of crucifixes; videos shared on social media showed them telling passers-by that the case was a “stitch-up”, and that they should “wake up” to reality.

Not all Brand loyalists go as far as to compare the convicted rapist to the son of God. But they *do* still feel empowered to share their disbelief at the guilty verdicts, loudly and vocally online, and to claim that this outcome is further evidence of an anti-establishment plot. Since assault allegations about him were published he has reportedly gained two million followers.



Brand's supporters clutch a banner likening him to Jesus Christ *(Reuters)*

Before the trial, many of them argued that Brand was innocent until proven guilty; this is, of course, a central tenet of the UK justice system. But now that he *has* been proven guilty of four out of the seven charges brought against him (he was found not guilty of two additional counts of rape, and one of indecent assault), his supporters seem to have decided that a guilty verdict is simply further proof of his innocence.

This is the upside-down world of Brand's true believers.

No longer do they place quite so much value on the decision of the court which found Russell Brand guilty of one count of rape and three counts of sexual assault, following a four-week trial. His supporters' faith in due process – which they spent so long demanding – seems to have entirely disappeared. Instead, they now shout about cover-ups and lack of evidence, about being silenced and speaking truth to power.

Speaking outside the court on Monday, Brand's father Ron claimed that his son was the true "victim" and even suggested that the jury could have been corrupt. The claims are baseless.



Brand's father Ron claimed that this son was the 'victim' after the sentence was handed down *(PA)*

Some of his supporters are well known on major social media platforms and are clearly willing to harness that power to spread their pro-Brand message. The tech mogul Elon Musk, owner of Twitter/X, claimed that the verdict was the result of a "crazy legal standard" in reply to an X user's post about the convictions relating to offences from the Noughties.

And last week, the US broadcaster Megyn Kelly, the former TV anchor who has made the time-honoured move from right-wing network *Fox News* to right-wing pundit and podcaster, spoke to her 4.1 million YouTube subscribers shortly after the verdict came in.

"I don't really give a shit if you are offended on behalf of the jurors, I'm entitled to my opinion and I don't believe the charges," she said. "I don't have to believe them just because the jury came through with the opposite conclusion."

She claimed, too, that "this obvious conservative stalwart has been targeted only once he started to espouse conservative

views", painting the rapist Brand as some kind of martyr to the truth-telling cause.

In a video shared on Tuesday, Donald Trump Jr, echoed Kelly's views, arguing that Brand's religious conversion and newfound conservative outlook played a part. "He finds God, I guess, changes his ways, sees some aspects of conservative life, and talks about them, and now he's going to spend 10 and a half years in prison for rape when no one had a problem with it in the prior 27 years," he ranted.

There is, of course, money to be made in disseminating these viewpoints, and right-leaning commentary has become a lucrative media ecosystem – something Brand himself knows only too well.



Megyn Kelly, a former US TV anchor, says she 'does not believe' the charges against Brand *(AFP/Getty)*

He has, after all, spent the past few years positioning himself as a sort of anti-establishment hero, broadcasting on the "free speech" platform Rumble, making nice with major players in the American right-wing ecosystem and making a very public pivot

to Christianity, perhaps to further cement his newfound spot in the Maga-verse.

And so, as baffling as Kelly's views on the Brand case might seem, you can still see why she has expressed them in such blunt terms; in the age of online outrage, controversial statements are easy to monetise.

But what is more striking is the upswell of support from "truthers" – many of them female – who have no professional or financial interest in defending him.

They are not celebrities who have millions of followers; they are ordinary people, with ordinary jobs, who have probably never met Brand. Click through their comments and their social media profiles, and you will see them describe themselves as loving parents; you will find family photos, pictures of fluffy kittens and much-loved pets, motivational quotes and links to charity fundraisers. And yet, despite their live-laugh-love outlook and their championing of good family values, their allegiance to Brand is utterly unwavering.

"I wish I could be there," one American woman writes below a video of the "Russell is the truth" banner shared on Instagram. Over on Facebook, meanwhile, the steady stream of comments has turned into a flood, with supporters, including many women, imploring Brand to "stay strong" and keep his faith, suggesting that he has been "silenced" for speaking out against some vague "corruption".



Brand has characterised himself as a speaker of truth to his fans *(Russell Brand/YouTube/Rumble)*

The women, who were applauded for their incredible bravery by the judge, Met Police and the CPS, are cast as "liars". During sentencing, one victim told the court that her character had been torn apart on social media by people claiming the women in court had fabricated their accounts. Despite four weeks of harrowing testimony, this hasn't stopped. Rather than engaging with the evidence heard in court, which included one victim being told to clean up her mess after the former TV presenter had anally raped her, his supporters see his victims as "jumping on a bandwagon" and joining in a vicious campaign against a man known for his anti-establishment views. In one post, a supporter says all of this, in the same breath as saying she hasn't read all the allegations because she "doesn't read mainstream news".

Phrases like "witch hunt" and "Free Russell Brand" crop up over and over. The popularity of the latter clearly hasn't been lost on Brand's team. His wellness website Reborn has even started selling T-shirts bearing the slogan "Free Russell", below a portrait of Brand in hues of red, white and blue; they're available to buy in the US for a mere $34.99.



Brand's wellness company Reborn is selling 'free Russell' T-shirts for $34.99 *(Reborn)*

What lies behind this willingness to believe Brand – and to disbelieve his victims – and the legal verdicts?

Lisa Bruton, a BACP and UKCP accredited psychotherapist, believes that there may be "an element of celebrity washing" at play here. "In general, our standards of acceptable behaviour or ethical behaviour for 'non-famous' people tend to be quite different to the ones we have towards famous people, and I would say, mainly men," she notes.

Brand, she adds, has been in the spotlight for more than 20 years, and so, Bruton notes, there may be a sense of the "sunk cost fallacy", whereby fans have "invested so much" in a public figure that it's too difficult for them to accept a new narrative about them.



Brand has been in the public eye for more than two decades, and 'people have really invested into his story' *(Getty)*

From a therapeutic perspective, she explains, people have a tendency to "project their own stories onto celebrity stories", and there may also be "an element of internalised misogyny" at work too. "Men can have internalised misogyny, as can women. There's this idea that women's distress is less important than men's distress. So [supporters] can see the collapse of Russell Brand's life and feel sympathy - or 'himpathy' as some have dubbed it – towards them, and feel less sympathy towards the victims and what they have been through. I think that might have a part to play in how people are responding."

Long before the trial and long before the verdict, his supporters already believed that he was speaking out against the mainstream; this groundwork might also go some way to explain why so many are quite so vehement in their beliefs today. Brand, Bruton says, has "really teed up this idea that there's a conspiracy and that the establishment wants to work against the 'truth speakers' – so he's really teed up that community to think, 'of course they will bring me down as well'". In a way, it's almost as if a prophecy has been fulfilled.

> *For his most committed supporters, the allegations, the charges, and now the verdict all become more proof of conspiracy*
>
> Dr Stephen Murphy

Brand's "anti-establishment persona", explains Pradeep Krishnan, a doctoral researcher at the University of St Gallen in Switzerland, who specialises in political psychology and conspiracy beliefs, "matters a great deal", as he "has built an identity around opposing the media and courts". It means then that a verdict from those institutions is likely to be received by his fans "as confirmation that those institutions did what they were always going to do – silence the defiant, or those 'in the know'".

Dr Stephen Murphy, an expert in conspiracy communities and behaviour at Trinity Business School in Dublin, explains: "The verdict didn't create a conspiracy theory; it walked into one that had been waiting for it for three years", since Brand – whose podcast and YouTube series names have leaned towards concepts like 'freedom' and 'awakening' – described the allegations against him as "a coordinated attack".

"For his most committed supporters, the allegations, the charges, and now the verdict all become more proof," Murphy adds, explaining that conspiracies like this often feed on "anger and resentment towards experts, media and authorities that people feel have failed them".

But, he warns, responding to truthers with mockery will only backfire and make them dig in even more. "It confirms they're looked down on and pushes them closer together. The real cost of that belonging falls on their families and friends outside of the group."

Krishnan agrees. “Dismissing believers as irrational tends to entrench these beliefs and the communities they forge,” he says, as “it helps underline that sense that they are fighting for the truth”.

These beliefs, he says, “are better understood as a response to perceived exclusion from institutions in which people feel they have no stake.” Understanding why the thinking takes hold is not the same as treating it as warranted – the court’s findings stand regardless.”

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On this day



Emperor Akihito (back) was formally installed as Emperor of Japan on this day *(AFP/Getty)*

1035: Death of Canute, Danish King of England.

1660: John Bunyan, author of The Pilgrim's Progress, was jailed for preaching without a licence.

1840: Sculptor Auguste Rodin was born in Paris.

1859: The man who invented the leotard – Jules Leotard – gave the world's first flying trapeze display in Paris.

1911: The Rev Chad Varah, founder of the Samaritans, was born.

1919: The first flight from England to Australia began from Hounslow with Ross and Keith Smith in a Vickers Vimy. They landed safely on December 10.

1931: Abbey Road recording studio in London was opened by Sir Edward Elgar.

1944: Tirpitz, the last of Hitler's fleet of "unsinkable battleships", was sunk off the Norwegian coast by Lancaster bombers.

1979: In response to the hostage situation in Tehran, US president Jimmy Carter ordered a halt to all petroleum imports into the United States from Iran.

1990: Crown Prince Akihito was formally installed as Emperor Akihito of Japan, becoming the 125th Japanese monarch.

1997: Ramzi Yousef was found guilty of masterminding the 1993 World Trade Centre bombing.

On this day last year: Tributes were paid after the death of "brave and wonderful soul" Baroness Helen Newlove, the victims' commissioner for England and Wales, who began campaigning in the wake of her husband's murder. Her office said that the Conservative peer died after a short illness, aged 63.

Birthdays

Booker T Jones, soul musician, 82; **Neil Young**, singer/songwriter, 81; **Kevin Ratcliffe**, former footballer, 66; **Nadia Comaneci**, former gymnast, 65; **Mariella Frostrup**, TV presenter, 64; **Tonya Harding**, former figure skater, 56; **Anne Hathaway**, actor, 44.

PA

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Four-minute daily workout can ‘significantly improve’ strength, balance and mobility in older people

Every week, senior fitness writer **Harry Bullmore** shares one healthy habit that offers benefits disproportionate to the effort required. This week, he details a workout you can do while the kettle boils





Dr Christopher Sciamanna of Penn State College of Medicine says he approaches exercise ‘by thinking of what I want to be able to do in 20 years, and then I train to do that’ *(Getty/iStock)*

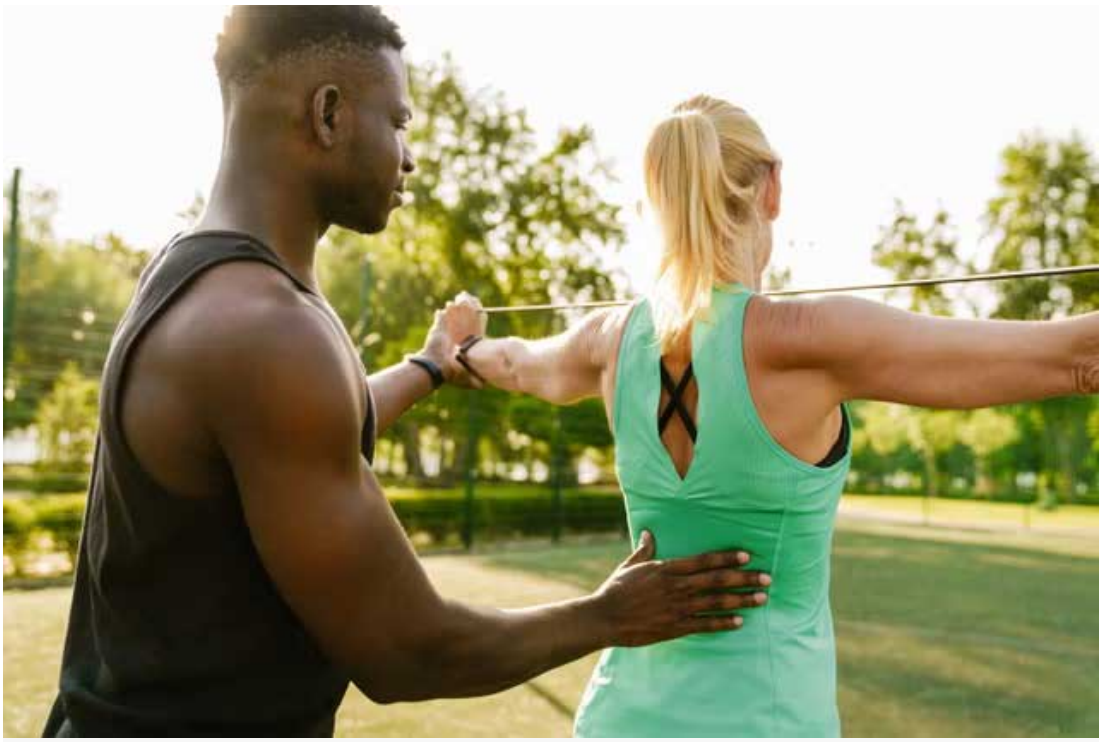
Few fitness tips I've seen have a better selling point than this one: a science-backed four-minute workout capable of delivering "significant improvements" to strength, mobility and balance in older adults. But is it as good as it sounds?

In many ways, yes. A study tasked 97 inactive people aged 65 and above with doing the workout every day for 12 weeks. By the end, researchers at Penn State University noted a "dramatic increase" in traits related to independence, physical function and a higher quality of life.

This counters the commonly held belief that you need to do hours of strength training exercises each week to see any meaningful improvements in your health and fitness.

"The human body is designed to improve very quickly," says Dr Christopher Sciamanna, professor of medicine and of public health at Penn State College of Medicine. "Just a few repetitions of an exercise, performed regularly, can lead to huge improvements. Exercise is about forward thinking – think about what you want to be able to do and train for it."

Of course, the workout will have varying effects depending on your existing fitness level. But it goes to show that, in most cases, a little exercise can go a long way toward better health. Here is how to do it.



Participants are provided with equipment, including resistance bands, and receive coaching on how to perform the four exercises in the workout correctly *(Adobe)*

The four-minute 'Fast-2' workout programme

The workout contains just four exercises, with each one performed for 30 seconds and followed by a 30-second rest. These exercises were chosen to "mimic the movements required in everyday activities", researchers explain.

Participants were provided with resistance bands and an adjustable step, as well as fortnightly coaching on how to perform each exercise correctly and modify it for their fitness level. As their performance improved over time, they were encouraged to progress the difficulty of the workout.

The benefits of this four-minute workout

Three tests were used to measure fitness progress during this study:

- **Five-time sit-to-stand test:** the amount of time it takes to transfer from a sitting position on a chair to a standing position five times without support from your hands

- **One-legged stance test:** how long you are able to stand on one leg
- **30-second chair stance test:** how many times you are able to transfer from a sitting position on a chair to a standing position without support from your hands

“These indicators predict your future ability to go into a nursing home, your future likelihood of falling and of developing difficulty walking,” Dr Sciamanna says. “They give you a sense of whether or not you’re going to be able to be active in the future.”

At the end of the 12-week trial, subjects’ times in the sit-to-stand test decreased by an average of 2.3 seconds. They increased their chair stance test score by an average of 4.2 reps, and held their balance for an average of 3.6 seconds more. These results, Dr Sciamanna suggests, represent a significant step towards better physical capacity and independence.



Press-ups are an equipment-free way to raise your heart rate and strengthen your body *(Adobe)*

“Exercise is the key to freedom,” he continues. “Freedom is the ability to be able to do what you want to do, and I would say that

if you can't do what you want to do, you're not free. I approach exercise by thinking of what I want to be able to do in 20 years, and then I train to do that."

The key takeaway

Not all people will draw the same benefits from this workout. Those taking part in the study did less than 60 minutes of weekly exercise to begin with and had pre-existing walking difficulties.

Research repeatedly shows us that exercise – and strength training in particular – has the greatest impact on those who are not doing it already. If this is you, you can enjoy amazing benefits from just a few minutes of exercise per day. If you are an experienced exerciser, you might need more, but every little helps.

This trial also teaches us another important lesson: an exercise plan you are able to do consistently is always going to be more effective than one you can never quite find time for.

This workout only takes four minutes. Study subjects were provided with all the equipment and coaching they needed, and they received daily email reminders to complete the session. As a result, participants stuck to the plan 81 per cent of the time, and it had tangible positive impacts on their health.

There is immense value in challenging your body on a fairly regular basis. This "challenge" will look different for everyone, relative to your existing fitness levels. But if you can do *something* and do it often, whether that comes in the form of a short walk or exercise snacks, you will reap the rewards.

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ITV cutting costs by £30m as ad market weakens

Total advertising revenues could fall by up 10% in final three months of 2026, broadcaster warns

Holly Williams



ITV confirmed that jobs were not set to be impacted by the cost-cutting *(PA)*

ITV has revealed plans to cut costs by another £30m by the end of the year as it warned of a worsening advertising market.

The group – which struck a £1.6bn deal in July to sell its media and entertainment division to Sky – said total advertising revenues fell 8 per cent in the quarter to the end of September and cautioned they could fall by up to 10 per cent in the final three months of the year as it said demand for advertising had "weakened".

ITV, which makes hit shows such as *I'm A Celebrity … Get Me Out Of Here!*, now expects total ad revenues to fall by 2 per cent to 3 per cent over the year as a whole, saying the market has been impacted by competition from streaming rivals, global economic uncertainty and last year's introduction of restrictions on junk food advertising aired on TV and online.

ITV chief executive Dame Carolyn McCall said the group was taking "decisive action" to offset the weaker market, stripping out £30m in costs from its media and entertainment division.

Around £25m of this will come from content savings, such as by delaying the airing of some content into next year, as well as £5m from "discretionary non-content savings" as it looks to tighten its belt across the business.

It confirmed jobs were not set to be impacted by the cost-cutting.

Dame Carolyn said: "Demand for advertising in the second half has weakened.

"This is due to continuing broader macroeconomic uncertainty, increased digital advertising on global streaming platforms and the impact of less healthy food regulations which came into effect on 1 October 2025.

"We are taking decisive action, aligning our investment with advertiser demand to deliver additional temporary content and discretionary non-content cost savings in the fourth quarter."

She added: "While the outlook for advertising remains muted, we are firmly focused on self-help and mitigating actions."

PA

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How the Man City case could spark a drastic change in English football

Over a third of the league is now up for sale, writes **Miguel Delaney**, but despite the Man City case, this major shift could bring a solve one of English football's major problems



Manchester United fans with a banner in protest against owners Jim Ratcliffe and the Glazer family *(Reuters)*

Over the past few weeks, those in Premier League boardrooms have noticed a very distinctive shift.

The previous talk of trying to buy clubs, only for billionaires to realise how few are available, has

gradually turned into talk of trying to sell clubs.

Except that is now even more difficult.

The current calculation is that at least eight clubs – more than a third of the league – are either officially or unofficially up for sale in some form.

With some of these, there are actual prospectuses. With others, it's that owners would be open to listening to offers. Some would consider full sales, others merely minority stakes.

The current problem, though, is that there are so few buyers.

The market has changed, but it could offer the opportunity for a wider reset.

That may be dependent on a much bigger story, which is a factor in all of this, following the recent developments surrounding the Manchester City case.

Right now, it's only a few months since another distinctive story – Jeff Bezos' consortium buying a stake in Liverpool – seemed to mark a high point of high-level purchases.

The Premier League was at that moment seen as a good area to invest due to how it is uncorrelated to global markets, helping to diversify investment portfolios, and this on the back of a boom of US institutional money buying clubs after Covid.

Many of the same factors are now working in reverse.

The great takeover has become the great sell-off. Or, at least, an attempted sell-off.



Manchester United fans protested against the current owners before the 4-4 draw with Aston Villa *(PA)*

At an "absolute level", one source tells *The Independent*, no one is buying, and there has been "stagnation" in the market.

Some activity still persists at a fractional/minority level but only if it represents real "value".

Part of it, one experienced source stresses, is "circumstantial". No deals are going to get through the Independent Football Regulator (IFR) this side of Christmas, so there is little movement.

Other industry figures stress that billionaires aren't as willing to invest, due to continuing global uncertainty. The one tendency is for such billionaires to invest within US sports. Arsenal's owners, the Kroenke family, struck a deal to buy the Los Angeles Angels for $4bn in September, while Josh Kushner and Bog Iger pulled off a record-breaking $12.5bn deal for the Los Angeles Lakers in August.

The crisis in the Gulf, among other things, could affect the flow of money in football given how much investment comes from

that region. So many corners of the game are now indirectly dependent on it.

Rumours about Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund's willingness to sell Newcastle United have been swirling for at least two years.



The Man City case could force its Abu Dhabi owners into a sale *(PA)*

Perhaps most pertinently, though, many buyers see English football as being in an opposite situation to a half-decade ago.

Amid so many takeovers, it was viewed as "a growing trend", which is generally seen as the best type of business for such investors to get into.

Now, most clubs do not have growing revenues. The English game is seen as having "topped out".

That could be made clear in the next broadcasting rights cycle, since the last one in the Premier League saw the price per game drop for the first time in the competition's history.

The current expectation is that domestic rights will stay around the same level and that international rights will marginally drop – unless there's an unlikely entry from one of the streaming giants.

All of that only deepens the sense that "the Bs" of Brentford, Brighton and Bournemouth are excelling, since they all have superb operations and strategy departments.

Few other clubs have that scope for growth.

There's then that other looming story: City.

A lot of people are waiting to see how that case concludes, especially since it could see the Abu Dhabi ownership sell up, too.

No matter what happens, the very nature of the City story is viewed as inevitably bringing some kind of reset.

Even in the most basic terms, a usually locked-in Champions League place may be opened, and that for a few years. Financial projections can be altered.

Should City unexpectedly prove successful in their appeal, though, they're back in the centre of all of this and potentially emboldened.

Many prospective owners and investors want to see how this lands before acting.



Los Angeles Rams owner Stan Kroenke, who also owns Arsenal, at a game last month *(Reuters)*

Another layer is if this leads to a forced sale, and potentially a much bigger discussion about state or state-linked ownership.

If such purchases are restricted, it does change the market. The overall ceiling is lowered.

All of this runs alongside a deeper argument that the introduction of the IFR, coming in conjunction with the City case, offers a rare opportunity for a reset anyway. And not just a reset.

But, given how both developments have involved discussion about core principles of English football, a proper rethink about what the game actually wants to be; what clubs and owners should be; what their role is.

This very increased focus on executives and takeovers only makes clearer the climate we're in.

English football has gone from the era of the player, up to 1945, through the era of the manager, up to 2003, into the era of the

owner. That is to say, the eras of the figures who exert the greatest influence on the game.

As the clearest illustration of this, something has obviously gone wrong if a series of clubs with huge, self-sustaining fanbases have entire eras completely defined by who their owners happen to be.

In a properly run game, football outlook would be independent of this.

Instead, you only have to look at the examples of Manchester United under the Glazers, Newcastle United under Mike Ashley and arguably his successors, Liverpool under Tom Hicks and George Gillett, and on and on.

The national sport really shouldn't come down to the pot-luck of which of the one per cent picks you, especially when the IFR has specifically recognised the social importance of the game as a matter of law.



Jeff Bezos' consortium bought an almost 40 per cent stake in Liverpool in August *(AFP/Getty)*

That's also precisely why any future financial regulations shouldn't be dependent on owner investment, despite so much agitation.

One of the biggest problems in English football right now is a £300m per annum commercial revenue gap between the wealthiest clubs and the rest.

It has been made close to unbridgeable by a system that, as one source tells *The Independent*, ensures "a hole below the waterline in competitive balance".

The wage inflation from that similarly drags football's entire financial system upwards, forcing high-risk capital investment, and creating more and more stress.

That stress has in turn had the effect of ensuring a fan-owned club like AFC Wimbledon must consider selling off stakes to private investment, despite the IFR expressly encouraging fan ownership.

The system the regulator oversees instead seems to work against that.

It should be a sign, to go with everything else. There has never been a better moment for a reset.

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How Rahm's renaissance has set up Race to Dubai finale for the ages

A rejuvenated Jon Rahm, Rory McIlroy, Patrick Reed and Aaron Rai are among the big names hunting down Eugenio Chacarra at this week's DP World Tour Championship in a tantalising climax to the season, writes **Luke Baker**



Jon Rahm and Rory McIlroy will battle for the Race to Dubai crown *(Getty)*

Luke Donald may have had a little smile to himself when he examined the top of the leaderboard at last week's Abu Dhabi Championship. The penultimate event of the DP World Tour season saw Jon Rahm come in from the cold to win his first event on the tour (excluding majors) in four years, fellow former LIV Golf exile Tyrrell Hatton finish second and Rory McIlroy come home third.

Three of European Ryder Cup captain Donald's most important players dominating one of their home tour's biggest events – with the promise of more battles to come over the next 10 months before the 2027 showdown with the US at Adare Manor – bodes awfully well.

It's an exciting time for the DP World Tour, with the demise of LIV Golf meaning that many of the sport's big names, from both Europe and overseas, who would otherwise be playing elsewhere next year will be plying their trade on the circuit formerly known as the European Tour.



A rejuvenated Jon Rahm won in Abu Dhabi last week *(AP)*

Leaderboards as star-studded as the Abu Dhabi Championship will become more commonplace, attracting more eyeballs to the tour and giving homegrown players a much more regular taste of elite competition. In that vein, this week's $10m DP World Tour Championship at the Earth Course in Dubai could be the most exciting finale to the Race to Dubai – the tour's season-long order of merit – for many years.

McIlroy vs Rahm vs Eugenio Chacarra vs Patrick Reed vs Aaron Rai vs Ryan Fox. It has the perfect blend of global superstars who are in good form (Rahm and McIlroy), two more recent major winners (Rai and Fox), a pantomime villain (Reed) and an up-and-coming European talent who has had a superb season and is now trying to hold off the big horses charging from behind (Chacarra). And if you have a soft spot for true outsiders, you'll be pleased to know that even Casey Jarvis, Jayden Schaper and Daniel Hillier still have a mathematical chance of taking the crown should they win the tournament and other results fall in their favour – making it a nine-way battle.

Seven-time Race to Dubai winner (including each of the last four) McIlroy must be the favourite, with only he and the much more unproven Chacarra being in the enviable position of knowing that winning the DP World Tour Championship guarantees victory in the order of merit regardless of everyone else's results. The Northern Irishman will also match Colin Montgomerie for the all-time record of eight if he gets over the line this weekend.



Rory McIlroy has won the Race to Dubai on seven occasions *(Getty)*



The season's in-form player Eugenio Chacarra is trying to hold off the huge names chasing him down *(PA)*

Ryder Cup hopeful Chacarra has won three times on the DP World Tour this season and would send a serious message to Donald if he can hold his own when the pressure is truly ramped

up. It's a golden opportunity for the 26-year-old, who has said this week that he is relishing the chance to prove himself.

Meanwhile, the fact that Rahm is in contention at all is remarkable. Apart from finishing in a tie for second at the US PGA Championship, he didn't trouble the scorers at the majors this year, played most of his regular golf in the now-deceased black hole that was LIV and then contrived to finish dead last in the entire field (excluding players who withdrew) in September's BMW PGA Championship once he was allowed back on the DP World Tour.

But he looked supreme when triumphing in Abu Dhabi last week and is suddenly in the position where if he can take victory at the DP World Tour Championship this week, and McIlroy finishes lower than second with Chacarra lower than eighth, he'll snatch the unlikeliest of Race to Dubai crowns.

Whether linked to the end of LIV or not, Rahm has had a renaissance and looked much more content in the aftermath of last week's success – a happy Jon Rahm is invariably an effective Jon Rahm. It is undoubtedly a flaw in the system that he could triumph in the season-long order of merit simply by sweeping the two big-money events at the end of the year but he is speaking like a man on a mission as he tries to win a second Race to Dubai (after glory in 2019) and move a step closer to the six won by his hero Seve Ballesteros.



Rahm suddenly looks content once again *(Getty)*

“I’m coming in with a little extra incentive,” admitted Rahm in his pre-tournament press conference on Wednesday. “I really didn’t think even winning last week I was going to have a chance to possibly win the Race to Dubai at all. So that obviously gives this week a little bit more meaning than it did before.

“It would mean a great deal. I think it would just be more of a step towards hopefully getting closer to what Seve was able to achieve.

“But it would still be a long way to go. I think that second one would mean a lot, if I ever get to five or six, and then after that, you think about Monty and by then, you’ll probably be thinking about Rory, whatever he’s at.

“It would be special, not knowing I had a chance, come in the last two weeks and get it done.”

Victory for a rejuvenated Rahm would indeed be special, but the nine-way battle for Race to Dubai glory this week will be pretty spectacular itself.

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Sports news in brief



Danny Kelly announced he had oesophageal cancer and was stepping away from broadcasting in March *(TalkSPORT)*

Beloved football broadcaster Danny Kelly dies at 69

The popular sports broadcaster Danny Kelly has died aged 69 after a battle with cancer. A Tottenham fan, but beloved by fans from all clubs, Kelly announced earlier this year that he had been diagnosed with oesophageal cancer. Kelly featured on popular shows *Kick Off*, *Sporting Life* and *Trans-Euro Express*, while also becoming a major part of The Athletic's Tottenham podcast *The View From The Lane* as its presenter. Kelly was also a music lover and was editor of the NME for two years.

The football community is mourning the loss of the beloved presenter, with talkSPORT paying tribute to Kelly and sharing one of his most iconic quotes on air: "I love football, Stan. I love it." The broadcaster added that Kelly was "a cherished part of

talkSPORT for so many years" and brought "extraordinary wit, warmth and knowledge to our airwaves. His passion for football, music and life was infectious, and his kindness touched everyone around him."

All Blacks dealt blow with Jordan hamstring tear

New Zealand have suffered a huge injury blow with Will Jordan a doubt for the rest of the Nations Championship with a hamstring tear. Jordan, who became the All Blacks' record try-scorer earlier this year, sustained the injury in the win over Scotland at Murrayfield. He was forced off in the second half of that game. While assistant coach Neil Barnes indicated New Zealand were hopeful that the wing may feature against England and on the inaugural finals weekend, further assessment is required, and Jordan will miss Saturday's Test against Wales.

In better news for the tourists, Jordie Barrett has passed two subsequent concussion tests having failed an initial head injury assessment during the Scotland game – though he will also not feature in Cardiff.

"There's a lot of positions in this team where it's really close, and you know we can make quite a few changes and still put a damn good side out," Barnes said, with the All Blacks expected to rotate heavily. "There's a lot of trust in the people we've selected in this. A couple of people will get opportunities, and they've deserved them. If they perform, it raises the bar in that position, and then the other person to get back in has got to raise his game."

Root refuses to wade into 'Sandpapergate' row

Joe Root has resisted the opportunity to twist the knife on Australia over "Sandpapergate", as Usman Khawaja's ball-tampering revelations continued to make waves there. Khawaja's newly published autobiography has reopened old wounds, with

the former opener claiming the entire touring party was aware of the plot which blew up in Cape Town in 2018. Steve Smith, David Warner and Cameron Bancroft were the only players punished after an investigation by Cricket Australia, but Khawaja's memoir directly challenges the narrative that they acted alone.

Root captained England to a painful 4-0 defeat in 2017/18 but refused to wade into the issue. Speaking at Optus Stadium ahead of the Australia-England ODI series, which begins in Perth tomorrow, he said: "We obviously have no idea (about it). It's all speculation. I wasn't in that dressing room. I don't know what went on. I don't want to speculate, as I said. My focus is with this team right now and what we've got coming up." When asked about the idea that ball-tampering was rife across the international game at the time Bancroft was caught red-handed at Newlands, he added: "I can only speak from my own experiences. That's not how I feel."

Sherrock shock for Littler on Netflix show

Luke Littler admits he thought he would be facing pub players on his recent Netflix show but says top women's player Fallon Sherrock was a worthy winner. Sherrock claimed the £501,000 jackpot when she triumphed in a one-off leg of 501 against the world champion on *Beat Luke Littler*. There were some low-level opponents, such as an Australian jockey, a binman and a Nando's manager, but the show has come under fire for the inclusion of Sherrock, who has reached the third round of the World Championship and been awarded an MBE for her services to darts, along with leading junior players such as Mitchell Lawrie and Zach Griffiths.

They were all eligible for entry because they do not hold a PDC Tour card, but Littler admits he was surprised when he saw the list of 24 players, "over half" of whom he knew. "Before I saw the line-up, I thought it was just pub players," he told PA. "Whereas

obviously when the line-up came out, I probably knew just over half of them. Mitchell, Zach Griffiths – I played with him on the Development Tour – obviously Fallon, Katie Sheldon and a lot more. I mean Fallon, she's never had a Tour card, so she went for the qualifiers and she made it through. But then she wasn't guaranteed to play. She went in on a vote."

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