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Prisons 'Sleepwalking Into Crisis' as Inmates Forced to Share Single Cells

Yohannes Lowe, Guardian: The scale of the prison overcrowding crisis has been laid bare by figures revealing that a quarter of prisoners in England and Wales have been sharing cells designed for one person with at least one other inmate. According to the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), 11,018 cells intended for single use were being shared by two prisoners, with a further 18 such cells shared by three inmates. The overall prison population – which has ballooned over recent decades because of longer sentences and court backlogs – stood at about 88,000 when the statistics were originally compiled in late February.

Steve Gillan, the head of the Prison Officers Association, said sharing cells designed for one person creates tension among inmates, making the jobs of overworked prison staff even more difficult: "It is no wonder that the prison service is struggling to retain prison officers and operational support grades in England and Wales. The pressure on staff is intolerable and dangerous." He warned that the government was "sleepwalking into another crisis" after it "learned nothing" from the landmark Woolf report into the 1990 Strangeways riots, in which two people died. Among the report's recommendations was that no prison should hold more inmates than is provided for in its certified accommodation level – which represents the "good, decent standard of accommodation" that the Prison Service says it aspires to provide to all inmates.

But three in five prisons are now overcrowded, with the problem most acute in inner-city Victorian reception jails such as Leeds, Bristol and Bedford, according to Charlie Taylor, the chief inspector of prisons. Taylor said a lot of maintenance work is deferred in order to keep cells in use, and that too many prisoners have poor access to education and employment – activities that can reduce the chance of reoffending on release. He believes that sharing is not inherently problematic, and can be a "protective factor against self-harm", but is critical of the length of time many inmates are continuing to be confined in their cells, as they were during the pandemic. "The key issue is the conditions in which people are sharing cells," Taylor said. "If prisoners were out of their cells spending the majority of their day in education and employment, then cramped conditions, while not ideal, would be less concerning. But the reality in many jails is two men spending up to 23 hours a day penned into a very small cell that was designed for one person, often in a poor state of repair and with an unscreened toilet. When you consider that, it is hardly surprising that levels of violence are rising and that we are seeing a worrying rise in the use of drugs," said Taylor.

Prison Service rules require that cells are only shared where a prison group director has assessed them to be of an adequate size, condition and safety. Risk assessments are carried out on prisoners before deciding whether it is safe for them to share cells in closed conditions. Even a small oversight can lead to a vulnerable inmate being trapped with a potentially violent prisoner. "We do complete risk assessments in custody but sadly on occasions there are times where people don't get on. We would identify vulnerability, and those people get marked up to a single cell," Mark Icke, the vice-president of the Prison Governors' Association, said. With many prisons at breaking point, the government has adopted emergency measures, including allowing some offenders to be released early, to try to tackle the overcrowding crisis. But the prison population is still projected to increase to

between 94,600 and 114,800 by March 2028, in part because of a growth in police charging and changes in policy to keep the most serious offenders locked up for longer.

Andrea Coomber KC, chief executive of the Howard League for Penal Reform charity, said sentencing reform is vital to create a more humane and sustainable justice system. "The government needs to take a serious look at other options and fundamentally reconsider sentencing regimes, which have meant sentences have gotten longer and longer over the last 20 years," she said. "Nearly 40% of prisoners are there for non-violent offences. As a starting point, we need to think if any of those people need to be in prison at all."

An MoJ spokesperson said: "We are delivering the biggest prison expansion since the Victorian era – including two prisons in two years – to help rehabilitate offenders and keep our streets safe. We will always ensure there is enough capacity to serve the outcome of the courts and keep dangerous offenders behind bars, and cells are only doubled up where it is safe to do so. "Our sentencing bill will help reduce reoffending through greater use of tougher community sentences."

Ex-City Solicitor Jailed For 15 Years Over Investment Frauds

A former City solicitor who was one of the architects behind a Ponzi scheme that multiplied into several investment frauds has been jailed for 15 years. In all, 13 people have been sentenced for a combined 120 years for their roles in the frauds. Jonathan Irvin Denton was struck off in 2018 for his conduct, which also led to a record £500,000 fine for US law firm Locke Lord, where he had been a partner, for multiple failings, including allowing its client account to be used as a banking facility. This was the first time that a law firm was found to have lacked integrity. His conviction and sentencing in December 2022 can now be reported after the last of four separate trials over recent years at Birmingham Crown Court concluded. North Yorkshire Police's investigation into the fraudulent investment schemes started in 2015.

Majority Verdicts Behind Miscarriages of Justice

Jack Sheard, Justice Gap: At least 56 miscarriages of justice have been the result of majority verdicts, research by the charity Appeal has found. Majority verdicts, which allow for convictions even when two jurors find the defendant innocent, account for approximately one in eight crown court convictions. At least 56 of these convictions have since been quashed. Since data on majority verdicts is not kept, the figure is likely higher. Majority verdicts were behind the conviction of Andrew Malkinson, who was jailed for 17 years despite questionable identification evidence, and Winston Trew, convicted on the evidence of corrupt police officer Derek Ridgewell.

Majority verdicts were introduced in 1967, purportedly to deal with the threat of 'nobbling', where jurors were bribed or intimidated into giving different verdicts. Only a handful of such cases were ever identified. Writing in the latest issue of Proof, Nisha Waller identified 'a desire to dilute the influence of "coloured" and working class jurors' as a key influence behind this legal reform. Appeal's report states that 'Majority verdicts arguably dilute the principle of reasonable doubt. A split verdict intrinsically implies the presence of reasonable doubt in at least one juror and the ability to exclude this voice has far reaching implications' In America, the 2020 Supreme Court case of Ramos v Louisiana found that majority verdicts undermined the right to a jury trial, and prohibited their use for serious offences. 56% of overturned convictions in Louisiana were the result of majority verdicts. Appeal's report recommends reinstating the principle of jury unanimity, collecting data on majority verdicts, and amending the Contempt of Court Act to allow for research on jury decision making.

Darren James Gleeson - Charges Quashed

John Cassidy, Irish News: Acquitted of all charges he faced over a bugged Continuity IRA meetings almost a decade ago. Darren James Gleeson (41), who is originally from Dublin but with a bail address at Cable Street in Derry, had been on trial at Belfast Crown Court on eight charges arising out of two secretly recorded meetings by MI5. It was the prosecution case that Gleeson travelled from his home in Dublin to Newry to attend the meetings with fellow dissidents at a house in August and October 2014. Seven other men who attended the meetings later admitted their presence at the bugged property, and in November 2020 all seven were sentenced to a total of 33 years on a range of offences. Gleeson denied all the charges against him, including IRA membership, conspiring to possess explosives with intent to endanger life, and the preparation of terrorist acts.

The non-jury trial started at Belfast Crown Court in October 2022, where it was alleged that Gleeson attended the two Continuity IRA meetings. Those present were recorded discussing topics such as the purchase of firearms, the best way to make bombs, earmarking potential targets and links with other dissident groups. Crown barrister Ciaran Murphy KC told Mr Justice Colton the two meetings allegedly attended by Gleeson in August and October 2014 were meetings of "like-minded individuals to discuss terrorism and moving their terrorist aspirations forward". The prosecutor said it was the Crown's case that during the August 2014 meeting, Gleeson and others were recorded discussing the IRA on both sides of the border. Other topics discussed by the group and caught on the covert recording included discussing potential robberies to raise funds and the need for explosives training.

The prosecution said the evidence against Gleeson was circumstantial but when all the strands of evidence were taken together, the court would be in no doubt that the defendant was present at Ardcarn Park on the relevant dates. In his ruling on Wednesday, Mr Justice Colton said: "The case against the defendant is a circumstantial one. That does not mean that it is a weak one. "Self-evidently, the individual pieces of evidence identified do not establish the defendant was present at Ardcarn Park on the relevant dates so counts one to seven are not proven by direct evidence. I acquit the defendant on count eight (possessing records likely to be useful to committing an act of terrorism). I am not satisfied that the prosecution has proven to the requisite standard that the defendant was present at Ardcarn Park. I am not satisfied beyond a reasonable doubt that the defendant is guilty...the evidence in its totality leaves me with a reasonable doubt as to his guilt. The individual strands of evidence which I have analysed undoubtedly give rise to a high suspicion that the defendant was present, but they do not 'cross the line' to establish guilt to the criminal standard. Accordingly, I acquit the defendant on all eight counts," added Mr Justice Colton.

Alarm Raised After Dodgy DNA Exoneration in Bermuda

Samantha Dulieu, Justice Gap: Alarm has been raised about the prospect of possible widespread miscarriages of justice across the US and the Bahamas after the exoneration of a man who had been convicted of murder on the basis of inaccurate DNA evidence. The highest court in Bermuda ruled last week that Julian Washington, who was convicted in 2014 for the murder of one man and the attempted murder of another, should be immediately released. At his appeal the lawyers representing the Bermudan government conceded that the forensic evidence that had implicated him was flawed and could not be relied upon. Washington was originally sentenced to a minimum of 30 years imprisonment, but since being jailed ten years ago has always maintained his innocence.

A forensics expert at the original trial, from the now defunct Trinity DNA Solutions, said there was a one in 46 million chance that Washington's DNA was not present on a bullet casing

found at the scene. At the appeal a different forensics expert said this evidence was in fact 'inconclusive' and should not have been put before the jury. Based in Florida, Trinity DNA Solutions were frequently engaged as forensics experts by the government of Bermuda, who have now accepted that the company were not operating with the correct protocols in place. The same forensics lab has also worked with prosecutors in the US and the Bahamas, raising the prospect of widespread miscarriages of justice as a result of their failings.

Julian Washington has been released from prison immediately on unconditional bail and awaits the final order that will quash his conviction. The Death Penalty Project, a UK based legal charity, has been supporting Washington through his appeal. Parvais Jabbar, Co-Executive Director of the DPP, said: 'The prosecution's decision to concede the appeal and not seek a retrial is a complete vindication of the years Julian has maintained his innocence. However, whilst Julian is now free, this case raises wider concerns that expert evidence that is fundamentally flawed, has been wrongfully used to secure convictions in potentially many cases.' He said the Bermudan government should now conduct an urgent inquiry into whether other miscarriages of justice may have occurred because of the 'systemic failings' identified by this case.

Government Introduces Amendments for IPP Prisoners - Victims and Prisoners Bill

Prison Reform Trust: The government has tabled a series of important amendments to the Victims and Prisoners Bill. The amendments would make it easier to release people serving an IPP sentence who have been recalled; and enhance scrutiny of government efforts to support people who have never been released, and the termination of licence conditions. Prisons minister Edward Argar MP has also written to the Prison Reform Trust explaining the purpose behind the amendments on IPPs, and other government amendments to Part IV of the Victims and Prisoners Bill.

The new amendments will introduce: 1) A new power of executive release of recalled IPP prisoner. 2) A new power for the government to dismiss an IPP recall for the purposes of the new arrangements introduced by clause 48 for the termination of an IPP licence. 3) A requirement for the government to produce an annual report to be laid before Parliament on the steps it has taken to progress the release and licence termination of people on IPPs.

The amendments reflect recommendations made by an influential coalition of mental health, human rights and criminal justice bodies led by the Prison Reform Trust calling for reform of the IPP sentence. They also reflect amendments tabled in earlier stages of the bill by a distinguished cross-party coalition of peers led by Lord Blunkett and Lord Moylan. The bill also introduces in clause 48 important changes to the process for the review and termination of an IPP licence. Clause 48 is in line with in line with recommendations made in our 2020 research report on IPP recalls.

While the government amendments are welcome, they do not go far enough to address what has been described by the former Supreme Court Justice Lord Brown as "the greatest stain on the stain on the justice system". In particular, much more can and should be done to provide better support to and progress the release of 1,200 IPP prisoners who have never been released and remain stuck in the system. The fight for justice continues. We will use the remaining stages of the bill to work with others and argue for further reform, continuing to make the case for change with this government and the next. It is important to note that none of these proposed changes in the bill have yet become law. The bill will need to be passed and by both Houses of Parliament and receive Royal Assent before it can come into force.

Mark Day, Deputy Director of the Prison Reform Trust s: "These important government amendments will make it easier to release people on IPPs who have been recalled as well as

enhance parliamentary scrutiny and oversight of government efforts to enhance the progression, release and licence termination of people on IPP sentences. They add to the welcome proposals in the victims and prisoners bill to improve the process for the review and termination of an IPP licence. The remaining stages of the bill provide an opportunity for the government to be bolder still. In particular, much more could be done to provide support for and enhance the progression and release of 1,200 people on IPPs who remain stuck in the system. Ministers have tentatively grasped the nettle of reform. It's time now to pull it from the roots."

Plans to Build 500 New Prison Places in the Women's Estate - Paused

Commenting on the announcement that HMPPS has paused plans to build 500 new prison places in the women's estate, Emily Evison, women's policy lead at the Prison Reform Trust, said: "We welcome the announcement that controversial plans to build 500 new places in the women's prison estate have been put on pause. We are concerned however, that without the expansion the remaining funding allocated for the expansion will instead be siphoned off into the male estate. This money could have a real impact if diverted towards community alternatives to women's imprisonment, where funding remains short-term and inconsistent. It would enable the government to double down on a core aim of its own Female Offender Strategy Delivery Plan to reduce the numbers of women in prison and limit the use of pointless short prison sentences."

District Judge Issued With Formal Warning For Misconduct in Family Proceedings

A judge has been issued with a formal warning by the Judicial Conduct Investigations Office (JCIO), after it was found she had shouted at and interrupted a legal representative during a hearing. A litigant in family proceedings complained that District Judge Najma Mian had "shouted, verbally lashed out and interrupted" her legal representative throughout the hearing. Whilst not all of the complaint was made out, a nominated judge found that DJ Mian was "sarcastic and condescending" and had shouted at and interrupted the representative on many occasions. According to the JCIO, DJ Mian explained that she had "repeatedly" tried to move the case forward and accepted that she had shown frustration in the hearing when faced with the same issues as previous hearings.

However, she did not accept the findings of the nominated judge. Issuing DJ Mian with a formal warning, the judicial body said the Lady Chief Justice and the Lord Chancellor agreed with the findings of the nominated judge, and took into consideration that DJ Mian had been issued with formal advice in 2021 after she was criticised in an appeal judgment for showing "anger and sarcasm" during a court hearing. A spokesperson for the Judicial Conduct Investigations Office said: "The Guide to Judicial Conduct reminds office-holders to be courteous, tolerant and respect the dignity of all. They should also ensure that their conduct maintains and enhances public confidence in the judiciary."

HMP Norwich: Prisoner Died of Malnutrition

Mohammed Azizi, 32, died in May 2023 in Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital whilst serving a five-year sentence at HMP Norwich for arson. He was suffering from a combination of malnutrition and Crohn's disease, an inquest jury at Norfolk Coroner's Court were told. Azizi's brother giving evidence said that Azizi had previously been fit and well, but after a relationship breakdown he had started drinking alcohol and taking drugs, his mental health had deteriorated, and he appeared "paranoid and delusional". He was detained under the Mental Health Act.

Whilst in prison he told his family that the pain from his Crohn's disease, a lifelong bowel condition where the parts of the sufferer's digestive system get inflamed, was getting worse

and he was in constant agony. The first part of his sentence was served at HMP Chelmsford, and Kelly Stannard, head of safety and segregation there, told the hearing that Azizi claimed prison meals gave him stomach ache and he was not given the food he had requested. Senior nurse Paula Unwin said Mr Azizi regularly declined medication and refused to go to hospital as he did not want to be seen in handcuffs. After his transfer to Norwich prison in 2022 his family were assured he was receiving 24-hour health care. The jury heard he only had five days of his sentence remaining when he died. The inquest is still underway.

Juror Who Researched Law on Child Neglect Gets Suspended Sentence

Law Gazette: A juror who researched the law on child neglect to hold her own amid 'personality clashes' in the jury room has been spared prison. Suzanne Asquith had been serving on a jury in a child cruelty case in 2022 when she became 'frustrated' with the other members of the jury during heated deliberations, Reading Crown Court heard yesterday. The 56-year-old foster carer for guide dogs decided to do online research to arm herself for the debates, as the jury deliberated in a case concerning offences of harm to a child and child cruelty. Another member of the jury subsequently became concerned with Asquith's 'bullying attitude', the court heard. Matthew Knight, prosecuting, said: 'The juror noted Ms Asquith had made some comments about having found something out or words to the effect, "I know we are not supposed to Google but".'

A police search of Asquith's devices revealed search terms such as the word 'cretin', 'how do jurors reach a verdict?', and 'does a jury have to be unanimous?'. She had also searched on the the Mumsnet forum about children being taken into care and, separately, information about the defence counsel in the case, the court heard. The court heard Asquith had also downloaded an article entitled 'Criminal Law, Child Neglect' and looked up the offence of perjury. Knight added: 'There was no direct searching for that case or those within it. How that impacted on deliberations, no one can really say.' The court heard the 11 jurors had reached a majority decision to clear the defendants, with Asquith the sole juror feeling the defendants were guilty. For Asquith, Hassan Baig said the defendant had expressed the 'frustrations she felt during the deliberations' as she started 'feeling isolated'. She had not wanted to put a note before the judge seeking clear directions because of 'personality clashes within that jury room'. Asquith admitted one count of carrying out research while a member of the jury during the trial period.

Judge Amjad Nawaz said the judge in the 2022 trial had given clear directions to the jury about not doing their own research. 'This is not a case where she has researched any evidence, such as bad character,' Judge Nawaz said. 'But these directions are given so to ensure the trial process is undertaken fairly, that it is open justice on the basis that everybody else involved in the trial process clearly understands that they are all working from the same page of the book. This defendant decided to break ranks.' Asquith was sentenced to 22 weeks imprisonment, suspended for 12 months. She was also ordered to carry out 20 days of rehabilitation activity.

Pedestrian Auriol Grey has Huntingdon Cyclist Death Conviction Overturned

Brian Farmer BBC News: A pedestrian who shouted and waved her arm at a cyclist riding on the pavement, causing them to fall into the path of a car, has had her manslaughter conviction overturned by appeal judges. Auriol Grey, 50, used an expletive as she told Celia Ward, 77, to "get off the pavement" in Huntingdon in 2020. Mrs Ward, from nearby Wyton in Cambridgeshire, died as a result. Ms Grey, who has cerebral palsy and partial blindness, was given a three-year jail term at a retrial last year. At the Court of Appeal on Wednesday 8th

May, three judges overturned her conviction. Dame Victoria Sharp, sitting with Mrs Justice Yip and Mrs Justice Farbey, said: "In our judgment, the prosecution case was insufficient even to be left to the jury." She continued: "In all the circumstances, we have no hesitation in concluding that the appellant's conviction for manslaughter is unsafe."

'Prolonged suffering': Following the ruling, Ms Grey's family said in a statement: "Whilst we welcome the decision of the Court of Appeal our thoughts today are also with the Ward family, and I am a sure a day doesn't go by when they don't remember their tragic loss. We are very relieved that Auriol's prison ordeal is over and we would like to thank for the staff and inmates of HMP Peterborough for the kindness and consideration they have shown over the last year. There has been unnecessary and prolonged suffering and vulnerable people like Auriol need better support from the justice system - we hope lessons will be learnt." The court heard Ms Grey, who attended the hearing, was charged with unlawful act manslaughter - which requires an unlawful action to take place that caused death. However, her lawyers told appeal judges that no such "base offence" was ever identified at the trial. Adrian Darbishire KC, for Ms Grey, said: "The trial seems to have proceeded on the basis that some kind of unlawfulness, undefined and unspecified, was sufficient to found this offence of homicide."

Dame Victoria and her fellow appeal judges agreed, ruling that the jury were not asked to decide "the fundamental question of whether a base offence was established". The senior judge continued: "The appellant's actions that day contributed to Mrs Ward's untimely death... had Mrs Ward not died we regard it as inconceivable that the appellant would have been charged with assault." Ms Grey's actions had been described as "hostile gesticulation" towards Mrs Ward during her original trial. However, Mr Darbishire said in the appeal: "Hostile gesticulation is not a crime, otherwise we would have 50,000 football fans each weekend being apprehended." The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) had responded to the appeal, with its barrister Simon Spence KC telling the court it was accepted that "common assault as the base offence was not identified by name". After the judges had given their ruling, Mr Spence asked for Ms Grey's case to be sent back to the crown court for a retrial, which was denied.

MI5 Sorry Over Handling of Machete Attack Case

Daniel De Simone, BBC News: MI5 has apologised for failing to promptly disclose information to a woman who was attacked with a machete by one of its agents. The woman, known by the alias Beth, has complained to the watchdog which considers complaints against the intelligence services. In 2022 a BBC investigation revealed the man - who cannot be named for legal reasons - had used his role to coercively control Beth, his ex-partner. He was physically and sexually abusive, and was filmed threatening to kill her and then attacking her with a machete.

Two years ago, the government took the BBC to court to block the story being broadcast. It failed to do so, but succeeded in gaining him legal anonymity, having argued that the man - a right-wing extremist known publicly as X - would be in danger if publicly named. The BBC argued he should be identified so that women could be warned about such a predatory and violent man. Beth, represented by the Centre for Women's Justice, then lodged a formal complaint with the Investigatory Powers Tribunal (IPT), a panel of senior judges which investigates human rights claims against MI5, MI6 and GCHQ.

MI5 has always refused to publicly confirm whether or not X was an agent, meaning an authorised informant. At a preliminary IPT hearing at the Royal Courts of Justice in London, a barrister for MI5 - also known as the Security Service - said the agency was sorry for failures of disclosure in the case so far. "We wish to apologise to the claimant and her representa-

tives," Neil Sheldon KC said. He accepted and apologised for the fact that Beth had been forced to prepare legal submissions despite not knowing further information would be disclosed. Mr Sheldon also apologised for failing to properly communicate with the IPT itself, which he accepted was "poor". IPT lawyers had to send multiple emails chasing MI5 for an answer to a basic question. In response, Mrs Justice Lieven asked MI5 to "prove the genuineness of the apology" by ensuring such issues did not arise again.

Sarah Hannett KC, counsel for the IPT, used her written submissions to say there was a "lack of any real urgency" on MI5's part regarding the process of "opening up" information for the case. Beth is asking the IPT to investigate MI5's recruitment and handling of X, and whether any steps were taken to address the clear risk of harm he posed. The IPT will consider whether MI5's conduct breached Beth's human rights by enabling X to subject her to violence and abuse with impunity. The preliminary hearing is considering whether MI5 should be able to maintain its position of publicly neither confirming nor denying whether X was an agent. A further secret hearing will take place. The full trial is scheduled to start in January 2025.

The original BBC investigation exposed how X was able to leave the UK while under police investigation to work for a foreign intelligence service, and showed how MI5 had then obtained X's belongings from the police. X also abused and threatened to kill another former female partner and her child, and he then used the woman's name as a form of cover while working for MI5. He also threatened to kill and sexually abuse young girls and written down his cannibal fantasies about eating children.

Wall of Secrecy Around SAS 'Murders' Begins To Crumble

Richard Norton-Taylor, Declassified UK: The famous 'who dares wins' regiment finally faces serious scrutiny over its Afghan night raids, even as those involved in a cover up are promoted to highest office. - At last the lid is coming off special forces operations, revealing specific and detailed accusations that senior British military figures have been desperate to suppress. It is alleged that troops from the elite Special Air Service (SAS) took the law into their own hands and committed "multiple murders" that were "deliberately covered up". This was how Sir Charles Haddon-Cave, an appeal court judge, last week described evidence he had heard from British special forces officers. Haddon-Cave made the comments at the inquiry he chairs into 80 suspicious deaths on SAS counter-terrorism raids in Afghanistan between 2010 and 2013. So far, the evidence has been heard mostly in secret. But despite the best efforts of the Ministry of Defence (MoD) to block it, damning details are becoming public. And the repercussions in one of the most secret corners of the British state should be huge.

'Unacceptable' - The inquiry was forced on a reluctant MoD after increasingly credible claims of cold-blooded murder; of planting weapons on innocent civilians; and of deleting incriminating documents from computers. Military officials persistently dismissed the allegations claiming, untruthfully, that there was no evidence to support them. Yet UK special forces can no longer hide behind official denials. The wall of secrecy, which has given them greater protection even than that enjoyed by Britain's spy agencies - MI5, MI6, and GCHQ, of which the SAS is in effect the military wing - is beginning to crumble. Haddon-Cave lambasted "quite unacceptable" delays by the MoD, which has taken many months to disclose the documents he sought.

The inquiry heard that more than a year ago, the ministry was accused by another senior judge of a "cavalier attitude" towards disclosure orders by the high court. Tessa Gregory, a solicitor from Leigh Day who represents the Afghan victims, said the bereaved families were "appalled and insulted" by the MoD's conduct that was seriously hindering the inquiry. "Our clients have been seeking to uncover the truth about the deaths of their loved ones for more

than a decade”, she said. The MoD’s excuse was that it was having trouble finding enough officials and lawyers with sufficient security clearance to search for documents relevant to the inquiry. This might derail the hearings until March 2025, even with the ministry asking officers “in the chain of command” to help trawl through the papers.

Unsurprisingly, Richard Hermer KC, a barrister for the Afghan families, said they would have “grave concerns” that senior SAS officers – the very people who have been suppressing evidence – were to be involved now in deciding what should be disclosed. ‘Cancerous Squadron’ The inquiry has seen evidence by a high ranking special forces officer who decided to blow the whistle. He said SAS soldiers he commanded had committed war crimes by murdering prisoners in Afghanistan, telling the Royal Military Police that a “cancer had infected” an SAS squadron. He said their crimes were so serious that the entire SAS regiment needed a “complete overhaul”, the Sunday Times reported. It said the whistleblower’s statement was placed in a safe at the headquarters of the Special Boat Service (SBS) – the naval equivalent of the SAS – by Colonel Gwyn Jenkins.

Jenkins later explained to the military police that the then director of special forces, General Jacko Page, was “unhappy about the nature of the information”. Jenkins, who went on to command all British special forces in Afghanistan and rose to the rank of General, was appointed Rishi Sunak’s national security adviser last month. Sunak praised his “distinguished career”.in Afghanistan, telling the Royal Military Police that a “cancer had infected” an SAS squadron. He said their crimes were so serious that the entire SAS regiment needed a “complete overhaul”, the Sunday Times reported. It said the whistleblower’s statement was placed in a safe at the headquarters of the Special Boat Service (SBS) – the naval equivalent of the SAS – by Colonel Gwyn Jenkins. Jenkins later explained to the military police that the then director of special forces, General Jacko Page, was “unhappy about the nature of the information”. Jenkins, who went on to command all British special forces in Afghanistan and rose to the rank of General, was appointed Rishi Sunak’s national security adviser last month. Sunak praised his “distinguished career”.

‘Black Hole’ Neither the House of Commons crossparty defence committee, nor parliament’s intelligence and security committee (ISC), has the power to scrutinise British special forces. MPs on these bodies seem not to be bothered. However, the Commons public accounts committee (PAC) last month said a new parliamentary unit must be set up to fill what it called the “scrutiny gap” preventing proper investigation of Britain’s special forces, as well as the UK’s nuclear weapons arsenal. Even the D-Notice committee, which manages voluntary self-censorship of the media, has complained about the refusal of the MoD to officially confirm any operation involving British special forces. Yet, as they have acknowledged to me, senior military figures leak information about the SAS and SBS whenever it suits them, notably after an allegedly successful military mission they want to trumpet. It has been left to individual whistleblowers and a few journalists, including at Declassified, to pursue these elite military units that are playing an increasingly significant role in British operations abroad. The end of that totally unacceptable situation now seems to be in sight.

Climate Protesters Attempt to Storm Germany's Tesla factory

James Gregory, BBC News: Hundreds of climate protesters have clashed with police in Germany after attempting to storm the Tesla factory near Berlin. Several people were injured, including three police officers, during Friday’s demonstration against the proposed expansion of the electric car giant’s only European plant. Police made several arrests and prevented activists from gaining access to the facility. Campaigners have been camped out in woods in Grünheide, in the state of Brandenburg, since February, claiming Tesla’s plans to double

the size of its factory would damage the environment. Demonstrators on Friday 10th May blocked a nearby motorway and interrupted the railway service by sitting on the tracks, police said. There was also a sit-in on a country road near the factory. Footage on social media shows hundreds of people, many donning blue caps and holding blue flags, running towards the site attempting to gain access. One video, verified by the BBC, shows protesters breaking through the police cordon and entering the grounds of the factory, which is located around 30km (18 miles) from the capital. They can be seen heading towards an outlying building at the northeast corner of the Gigafactory grounds.

Police confirmed that protesters who tried to enter the facility were prevented from doing so, with several people taken into custody. Tesla said earlier this week that the site would be closed for the day due to the demonstration, with employees reportedly allowed to work from home. In a post on his social media platform X, Tesla CEO Elon Musk also said the group did not manage to break into the facility. “Why do the police let the left-wing protesters off so easily?” Musk wrote in another post.

The Disrupt Tesla group had been calling for mass protests against the expansion to take place between 8 and 12 May. Speaking to Reuters news agency on Friday, Ole Becker, a spokesman for Disrupt Tesla, said the protesters aimed to draw attention to the “environmental destruction” in Grünheide. Some activists have occupied part of the forest expected to be cleared for the expanded factory for months, building tree houses and erecting signs in opposition. Known as the Gigafactory, the facility currently employs an estimated 12,000 people and makes around 500,000 cars a year. Production had to be briefly halted in March after a power outage was triggered by a suspected arson attack. The far-left activist group known as Volcano Group claimed responsibility.

Bamber Supporters Accuse CCRC of Aiding ‘Wholesale Police Suppression’

Supporters of Jeremy Bamber staged a protest outside the offices of the miscarriage of justice watchdog in Birmingham on Friday 10th May. They were demanding swifter and fairer treatment for the wrongfully imprisoned. The human rights activist Peter Tatchell said that the Criminal Cases Review Commission (CCRC) has failed to force Essex Police to disclose ‘hundreds of items of vital evidence’ that were withheld at Bamber’s original trial in 1986 for the murders of his adoptive parents, sister and her six-year-old twin sons. More on the Justice Gap here. Campaigners pointed to systematic flaws within the CCRC, citing concerns about ‘unacceptably long’ waiting times for decisions, ‘potentially biased’ connections to police forces – including former officers currently employed at the CCRC – and a hesitancy to thoroughly investigate cases or secure evidence withheld by law enforcement.

According to Emma Morris of the Bamber campaign team who organised the event: ‘There are many people fighting their cases with the CCRC that may have thought the problems they were having with the CCRC were unique to them. However, coming together with others shows it’s not just you, or the case you’re fighting for; the problems are endemic within the CCRC. They have less than a 2% referral rate back to the Court of Appeal, and we’re hearing so many stories of those who turned to them for help but were, instead, failed by the CCRC.’

Peter Tatchell says Bamber ‘cannot have a new fair appeal until all evidence is made available to his legal team’. ‘The wholesale police suppression of evidence means that Jeremy Bamber did not get a fair trial,’ he said. ‘His conviction is unsafe. To give Jeremy a chance to remedy this injustice, the CCRC must insist that the Chief Constable of Essex, and others, comply in full with court orders to hand over all the undisclosed evidence to Bamber’s solicitors. For many years, it has failed to do so.’

Girls Strip Searched in UK Prisons, Tantamount to Abuse,

Women in Prison and Agenda Alliance have responded to a report from HM Inspectorate of Prisons' on Wetherby Young Offender Institution, which holds girls and boys. - We are deeply concerned to see this inspection report detail troubling treatment of children in custody, including using pain-inducing force and strip searches. In one instance, a girl was restrained and strip-searched twice by an all-male group of officers to prevent her from self-harming. Self-harm in Wetherby YOI is the highest in the country, and girls account for "extremely high" levels of self-harm. Agenda Alliance's own recent research has focused on the significant rates of self-harm among young women in prison, whose needs go unmet due to lack of appropriate care paid to both their gender and age. This is no different at YOI Wetherby, where girls make up a tiny minority of the children held there. HM Inspectorate of Prisons noted that there was no effective model of custody for girls, and the YOI was "unable to meet the needs of some of the most vulnerable girls in the country."

Sonya Ruparel, CEO of Women in Prison commented: "Reading that girls in prison have been subjected to "pain inducing techniques" and "strip searches under restraint" by those responsible for their care simply beggars belief. This is no way to treat some of the most disadvantaged girls in our society. Girls who've been criminalised require gender specific, trauma informed support in their communities, not imprisonment and traumatising."

Indy Cross, CEO of Agenda Alliance, commented: "It is chilling to read that male guards at YOI Wetherby felt an appropriate response to a girl in such significant distress was to strip-search her as a group. The idea that a young woman at risk of self-harm faces the use of force and further trauma as a means of 'protection' should shock us to our core. And yet, it is how children in custody are being treated. Agenda Alliance's research has shown girls need specialist, holistic, community-based support appropriate to their age and gender, not aggressive, punitive responses in male-dominated environments which are totally inappropriate for their needs. Strip-searches cause significant trauma and distress to those who experience them. It is likely this event will have seriously worsened this girl's mental health, causing a vicious spiral. Girls in custody usually have complex needs and long histories of trauma, meaning they shouldn't be imprisoned in the first place."

Prisoner Should Not Have Been Cuffed at his Father's Funeral

Jersey's prison, HMP La Moye, has revised its policy on prisoners attending funerals after a court found that a man was handcuffed unnecessarily. He was forced to attend his father's funeral in cuffs, a decision which judges found to be "incapable of justification." The man had already served three years of a seven-and-a-half-year sentence when he applied for a temporary release licence in order to attend the ceremony, or if that was not acceptable to be escorted there by officers. Guidelines at La Moye stated that prisoners with more than two years still to serve would have to be cuffed, but this would be subject to a risk assessment. In this man's case, it was considered he was "too high a risk to be permitted to attend unless in handcuffs". He applied to the Royal Court to have that ruling overturned, but his request was dismissed. However, in 2022 the Court of Appeal judged that an "error of law" was made, and granted him a Judicial Review against the Prison Governor and the Jersey Home Affairs Minister. The Appeal Court said it had been "asked to assess if his rights under the European Convention on Human Rights have been breached and we have concluded there is no doubt they have." Following this, last August, the prison revised its escort risk assessment process for prisoners attending funerals or similar compassionate occasions. The new rules will require staff to better assess the case of each individual applicant, including their health, the location and reason for the visit, risk of escape, risk to the public, and the likelihood of meeting victims.

Female CM Jailed Over Sexual Relationship With Prisoner

A female custodial manager has been jailed after getting into a sexual relationship with a prisoner, and "intimidating" colleagues into covering it up. Suspicions grew around the 34-year-old's conduct when she was seen spending long periods of time in a man's cell at HMP Doncaster. Rumours grew when the pair were regularly seen in the lift together, and when the inmate was given privileges others did not receive. When the officer became aware of what people were saying, she intimidated them into silence, leaving staff feeling unable to speak out. After she suddenly resigned from the job in May 2023, police launched an investigation, viewing CCTV of her leaving the man's cell and establishing they had continued to stay in touch after her departure, engaging in "sexually-charged calls" with the woman using a pseudonym. She pleaded guilty to misconduct in a public office at Sheffield Crown Court, receiving a nine-month custodial term. The judge described her as 'corrupt' and a 'disgrace'.

The woman started work as a prison officer at Doncaster in April 2021, moving up the ranks to become custodial manager, the most senior uniformed officer rank in a jail. DS Gareth Gent, who heads the South Yorkshire Police prison anti-corruption unit, said: "She started an inappropriate relationship with an inmate to whom she had a duty of care. When concerned colleagues raised suspicions, she forced them into silence, going to desperate lengths to stop this becoming public knowledge. "Improper relationships between prison staff and inmates are rare, and the overwhelming majority of employees in our prisons carry out their roles to the highest standards. However, when concerns about inappropriate relationships come to light, we will investigate them thoroughly and take appropriate action to bring perpetrators to justice." The woman had initially entered a plea on the basis that she had refrained from having sex with the prisoner, but her legal counsel, Michael Cane-Soothill, told the court that she now accepted that she had a sexual relationship with him. The court heard that on her last day of work, she spent six hours with the prisoner inside his cell, while the man's cellmate wandered around on the wing. She emerged crying to the extent that she was consoled by colleagues. Now pregnant after entering a relationship with a new partner, with her baby due in July, she is set to spend the remaining months of her pregnancy in prison.

High-Risk Inmates Freed From Jail Early Without Enough Risk Planning

Offenders have been freed from jail early without proper risk planning under the government's "chaotic" emergency scheme to free up space in prisons, inspectors have warned. In one case, a dangerous prisoner had his release date brought forward under the scheme, despite having a history of stalking, domestic abuse and being subject to a restraining order. He was a risk to children and subject to an exclusion zone which included the local authority responsible for trying to house him. The government has repeatedly insisted there are safeguards in place to stop such criminals being released under the initiative, which was introduced in October and has since been extended from a limit of 18 days early release to 70.

Vindicating experts' previous warnings, inspectors also found early-release prisoners were among the 20 per cent of inmates who were released into homelessness, further exacerbating concerns for their safety and that of the general public. In one such case, a high-risk inmate was recalled to the prison within days. Inspectors said the uncertainty created by the scheme "was undermining good, safe release planning and risk management", with release dates for some high-risk inmates "brought forward at short notice, forcing already stretched resettlement agencies to redraw existing plans from scratch in as little as two or three weeks".