

## Letters to the Editor



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### Military push on Hodeidah, Yemen

Sir, Richard Spencer's piece on Yemen ("Saudi-led forces target Yemen's food supply route", News, Dec 13) highlights the dangers of a Saudi military escalation. An assault on Hodeidah port will result in massive loss of civilian life both directly and indirectly. Even temporary loss of essential port and road infrastructure will further disrupt food, fuel and medicine supplies to a highly vulnerable population where one in four now faces famine.

This ever-escalating horror needs to stop, and another Aleppo be avoided. The UK government has long argued that its relationship with Saudi Arabia gives it leverage. It acknowledges that the war is unwinnable, and must now take the initiative to ensure no further use of British weapons in this conflict — by suspending licences on arms, military training and advice — until fully satisfied there will be no contravention of international law.

The threat of complicity in abuses against civilians hangs over the government, as it is already painfully aware. This exposure is massively magnified if ground conflict extends to major population centres and if the infrastructure vital for feeding millions is destroyed.

FRANCES GUY, former British ambassador to Yemen; CAPT PHILIP HOLIHEAD, former defence attaché and regional head of counter-piracy; JAMES FIREBRACE, co-ordinator, Yemen Safe Passage Group

### Surname spellings

## Overhaul of disclosure in our justice system

Sir, Regrettably, we are not surprised by the revelations in Liam Allan's case: the disclosure system needs an overhaul to take account of the electronic communications in the past two decades (Comment and letters, Dec 18; letters and news, Dec 16.)

We would suggest that all electronic communications from the complainant and accused should be made available to the Crown Prosecution Service and the defence — decisions about disclosure should be for lawyers not police officers.

We believe there is a pressing need for change to avoid miscarriages, or we have to be prepared to accept the collateral damage that flows from miscarriages of justice and the damage to the international reputation of our justice system.

Such changes should not dissuade the genuine complainant from coming forward.

IAN KELCEY; RICHARD ATKINSON  
Joint chairmen of the Law Society criminal law committee

Sir, It is wrong to dismiss the impact of reduced resources on the ability of the police to meet the needs of

disclosure in the big data era. The Liam Allan case thrown out of court last week should never have got so far but must be seen in the context of a workload that makes catastrophic failure possible.

In 2003-04, the year after I joined the service, there were 140,500 police officers in England and Wales. They investigated 13,272 reported offences of rape. This year the equivalent numbers were just 123,500 officers and 41,150 reported rapes.

Greater additional pressure has come from the explosion in the amount of data to be reviewed for evidence and disclosure. In 2004 the average mobile phone could hold ten text messages, no images, and about 100 contacts. The device on which I write this letter has capacity to store thousands of messages, images and videos. Multiply this volume of data across 28,000 additional rapes, and the conclusion is clear.

CHRISTOPHER BALMER  
Newmarket, Suffolk

Sir, The failure of the police to investigate the female accuser's phone records, in which she states that the

sex they enjoyed was consensual and enjoyable, is of course hugely worrying. However, I am deeply troubled by the failure of the girl's friends in the months leading up to the trial to come forward with what they knew and provide this information to the police in support of the accused.

The conspiracy of silence on their part is no less a scandal than the failures of the police.

SIMON RUSSELL  
Hove, E Sussex

Sir, I am appalled to note the suffering of Liam Allan, on bail for two years and in the dock for three days, accused falsely of multiple rape and sexual abuse.

What must frighten us is the thought that there are likely to be other innocent men behind bars who have been less "lucky" than the young Mr Allan. In his case, what the complainant has done to her former boyfriend is the cruellest of crimes. The pendulum against men has swung far too far.

AMANDA NOYCE  
Bath

### Parliament revamp

Sir, Richard Morrison says the Houses of Parliament should be handed over to the private sector instead of refurbished as a parliament for the 21st century (Times2, Dec 15). He cites Somerset House and the Royal Naval College in Greenwich as examples of where this has been achieved. I was lucky enough to lead both of these projects in their formative years, and neither was achieved by handing these fine public places over to the private sector.

The "conservation deficit", which puts off buyers with even the deepest pockets when it comes to historic buildings, was met from the public purse and the national lottery.

### Fishermen's plastic

Sir, Here in the Western Isles our beaches testify to the amount of debris that washes ashore ("Campaign to cut plastic in seas backed by 200 countries", News, Dec 14; letter, Dec 18). Yet 80 per cent of the litter is the plastic strapping, fish crates and polypropylene netting used in the UK fishing industry.

An organisation called Fishing For Litter is operating a project in Scotland and the West Country to encourage fishermen to clean up debris in their nets etc and to return it to port where it is dealt with responsibly. Surely it is time to extend this idea across all ports?

England plastic bank notes so that they pose a risk to marine life, I would be much obliged.

STEPHEN DAWSON  
Bury St Edmunds

### Underwater cables

Sir, Cutting underwater cables as "an act of war" is by no means new ("Down to the wire", leading article, Dec 16). The Americans destroyed the cable house at Cienfuegos on the southern coast of Cuba during the Spanish-American War in 1898, thereby cutting Cuba off from other Caribbean islands and hence the outside world. (The cables on the north coast led directly from Havana

### Dickensian misers

Sir, Ben Macintyre omits one likely candidate from his list of misers thought to have inspired Charles Dickens's character, Ebenezer Scrooge (Comment, Dec 16).

John Camden Neild (1780-1852) was a lawyer and property magnate educated at Eton and Cambridge. But his huge house in Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, would be illuminated by a solitary candle that he carried with him from room to room, and he wore clothes until they fell to pieces.

A well-known figure in Dickensian London, he became famous upon his death by leaving his £500,000 fortune to Queen Victoria. She used his legacy to give pensions to his few servants (to whom he'd left nothing) and paid for a memorial window in the church at North Marston, Buckinghamshire, where Neild was buried.

The remainder of this huge amount has since been recognised by many royal historians as the source of the private wealth that transformed the penniless Hanoverians into the Windsor plutocrats of today.  
DR CHRISTOPHER GOULDING  
Newcastle upon Tyne

### Grenfell review

Sir, Dame Judith Hackitt's review of building safety arrangements relevant to the Grenfell Tower fire seems likely to be critical of the current regulatory system ("High-rise regulations not fit for purpose, says Grenfell review", News, Dec 18).

This echoes that part of Lord Cullen's review of the Piper Alpha oilrig fire of 1988 in which he criticised the relevant regulatory system at that time. His criticisms and related lessons triggered examination of the systems in other regulatory bodies and caused them to be brought up to the highest standards certifiable by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO).

It is literally a crying shame