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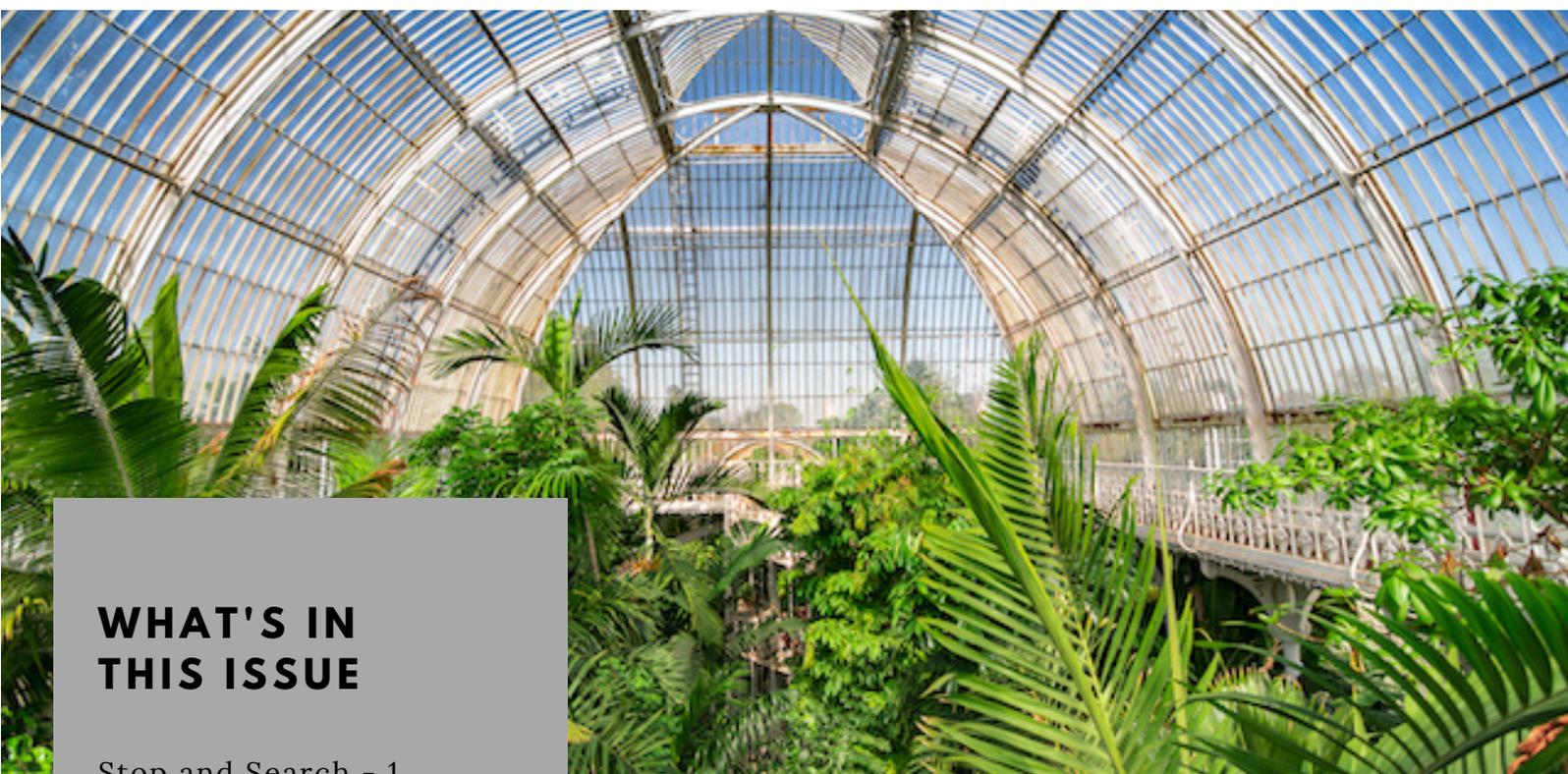
WHAT'S IN THIS ISSUE

STOP AND SEARCH

Campaigners have called for a crackdown on stop-and-search powers amid fears they could be extended under a controversial policing Bill.

A year on from the death of George Floyd in the US, there have been demands for an overhaul of the stop-and-search policy in the UK which allow police to search people and vehicles for drugs or weapons without a warrant.

Thousands of people in the UK took part in protests prompted by Mr Floyd's murder on May 25 last year.

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The killing of the African American man by a white police officer also reignited the debate on the use of stop and search by British law enforcement, amid concerns people from black and ethnic minority.

Now campaigners have warned against further sweeping powers proposed in the Police Crime Sentencing and Courts Bill.

The Government wants to introduce serious violence reduction orders as part of the Bill to make it easier for police to carry out checks on people who have been previously convicted of carrying a knife.

Some have also said the use of so-called s60 stop-and-search powers, under section 60 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act allowing police to act without any reasonable grounds for suspicion, must end.

Rachel Harger, who has represented people affected by stop and search, said: "All suspicion-less stop-and-search powers have to go and yet we have a Government, who instead of listening and engaging with communities raising concerns about these powers, has responded with proposals to increase them.

"Under the new policing bill the police will be able to stop and search individuals, who have previously been convicted of carrying an offensive weapon (...), without reasonable suspicion."

Human rights group Justice said greater restrictions are needed on stop and search to "avoid discriminating against our country's ethnic minorities", adding the Bill would "extend punishment from prison into the community, and risk further damaging confidence in the police".

Police carried out the highest number of stop and searches in seven years, with the figure rising by more than 50% in 12 months, official statistics published in October showed.

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In August 2019 the Home Office rolled back restrictions on s60 stop and searches in a bid to crack down on knife crime and violence. Meanwhile reports published by the department suggested BAME people were likely to be targeted under the relaxed rules despite not having committed crimes and changes in the level of stop and search may have only had "minimal effects on violent crime".

Ms Harger said the figures are a "direct consequence of government leaders advocating for the increased use of stop-and-search powers" and the relaxation of restrictions.

She said she has noticed an increase over the last year, particularly of young black men, approaching her with cases "in which they believe they have been stopped and searched on the basis of their ethnicity".
Even though officers are bound by equality laws, there is a general feeling that police can act with impunity and "no proof that the increase of stop-and-search powers lowers the levels of violent crime", she said, adding: "It's so important that there is proper scrutiny."

On the anniversary of Mr Floyd's death, chief constable of West Midlands Police Sir Dave Thompson, chairman of the Police Plan of Action on Inclusion and Race and vice chairman of the National Police Chiefs' Council, said: "Much has been done to address racism, discrimination and bias where it has been found in policing but we must now go further and faster, because doing the right thing by investing in community confidence will help to keep everyone safe."

INTERNET LAWS

Ofcom will have the power to fine social media firms and block access to sites under new "landmark" internet laws aimed at tackling abusive and harmful content online.

The Government published the draft Online Safety Bill, which it says will help keep children safe online and combat racism and other abuse.

The Bill will require social media and other platforms to remove and limit harmful content, with large fines for failing to protect users.

The Government has also included a deferred power making senior managers at firms criminally liable for failing to follow a new duty of care, which could be introduced at a later date, while provisions to tackle online scams and protect freedom of expression have also been included.

Pressure to more strictly regulate internet companies has grown in recent years amid increasing incidents of online abuse. A wide range of professional sports, athletes and organisations recently took part in a social media boycott in protest at alleged inaction by tech firms against online abuse.

As the new online regulator, Ofcom will be given the power to fine companies who fail to comply up to £18 million or 10% of their annual global turnover, whichever is higher – a figure which could run into billions of pounds for larger companies. Ofcom will also have the power to block access to sites, the Government said.

Digital Secretary Oliver Dowden wrote in The Telegraph "Today the UK shows global leadership with our ground-breaking laws to usher in a new age of accountability for tech and bring fairness and accountability to the online world."

He added: "What does all of that mean in the real world? It means a 13-year-old will no longer be able to access pornographic images on Twitter. YouTube will be banned from recommending videos promoting terrorist ideologies.

"Criminal anti-semitic posts will need to be removed without delay, while platforms will have to stop the intolerable level of abuse that many women face in almost every single online setting.

"And, of course, this legislation will make sure the internet is not a safe space for horrors such as child sexual abuse or terrorism."

The Government said the deferred power to pursue criminal action against named senior managers would be introduced if tech companies fail to live up to their new responsibilities, with a review of the new rules set to take place two years after it is introduced.

The proposed laws will also target online scams, requiring online firms to take responsibility for fraudulent user-generated content, including financial fraud schemes such as romance scams or fake investment opportunities where people are tricked into sending money to fake identities or companies.

WHATSAPP & SIGNAL SECURITY

Disappearing messages are not new, but they are quickly becoming a popular option. Secure messaging app Signal has been offering the feature since 2016, and WhatsApp launched disappearing messages in November last year. But why should you use them?

Growth in the use of vanishing messages, which remove what you've sent after a set period of time, is being driven by a number of factors. On a basic level, WhatsApp and Signal chats are amassing huge amounts of data, putting pressure on smartphone storage space. Disappearing messages can get rid of this clutter, making them useful for anyone wishing to reduce their digital footprint.

And that's without considering the privacy implications. While Signal and WhatsApp's end-to-end encryption stops anyone intercepting your messages from accessing their content, it can't protect your message data if your device or the person you are talking to is compromised.

"Even if data is encrypted and protected by a code, keeping messaging information available on your smartphone poses far more of a threat than not having it anywhere at all," says Jake Moore, cybersecurity specialist at ESET. "Disappearing messages add a layer of security and assurance that the data is safe, because it no longer exists."
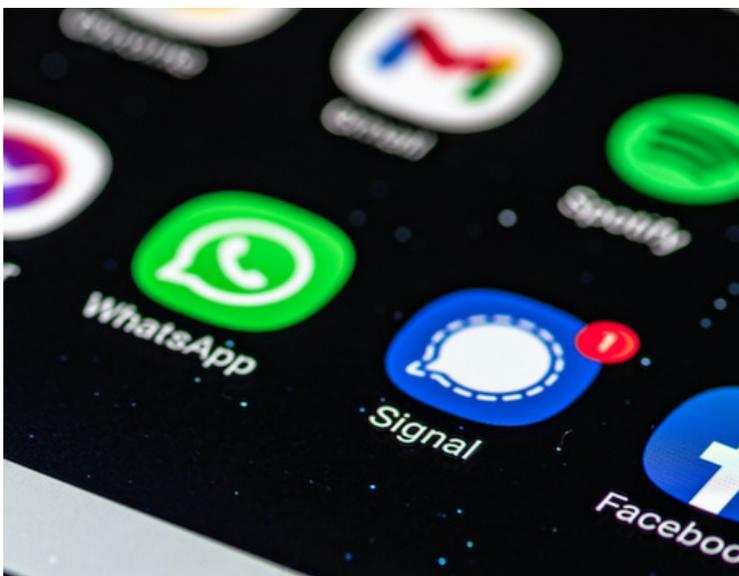
To use the feature on WhatsApp, tap the group or chat name at the top of the screen and scroll down to disappearing messages. You can then turn the feature to 'on'.

In Signal, you can tap the contact or group name and set a time after which you wish the messages to disappear. One you have done so, a little timer icon should appear detailing the time you have set with the contact or group.

Many people use both WhatsApp and Signal, but if you have a choice, Signal is probably the best platform for disappearing messages – and not just because it offers more features. "Signal is the better platform because of its stance on privacy, encryption and other functionality," says Sammons. Moore agrees, pointing out that Signal's company ethos is more privacy-conscious compared to WhatsApp, which is owned by Facebook.

Apple's privacy labels show Signal's iOS app collects a lot less data compared to WhatsApp. "Data from the device can be used to target the user or even be sold to other platforms," says Moore. "Signal will not profile the user, nor will it use any personal data from the device for financial gain."

COVID CRIME

Serious violence fell by almost a third in 2020 during coronavirus lockdowns and restrictions, according to researchers.

Professor Jonathan Shepherd, co-author of Violence in England and Wales in 2020, said the first UK lockdown saw "steep falls" in violence, while each easing of restrictions was followed by an increase in violence. From a violence perspective 2020 was the "safest year on record".

Analysis from the Cardiff University's Violence Research Group shows 56,653 fewer people were treated in hospital for injuries related to violent acts in 2020 compared with the previous year.

The data, gathered from 133 NHS hospital emergency units in England and Wales, showed 119,111 people were admitted for treatment of violence-related injuries last year, down from 175,764 in 2019.

The declines were greatest among children under-11 (66 per cent). Men aged 18-30 were twice as likely as females to receive emergency hospital treatment for violent injury.

Prof Shepherd warned the full picture on domestic violence "is still not clear".

"Police in England and Wales recorded 842,813 domestic violence-related offences in the year to September 2020 but many such offences are not reported," Dr Shepherd said.

"From an A&E perspective, in Cardiff, which may not be typical, levels of violence in the home did not change relative to 2019."

LOCAL CRIME

Edgware Murder
Seven males have been arrested after an 18-year-old man was stabbed to death by the tennis courts in a busy London park.

Police attended Montrose Park, Edgware, at 5.54pm on Monday 1st June after reports of a group of men fighting.

The 18-year-old male was found suffering from a stab injury in a tennis court area. Despite their best efforts London's Air Ambulance and London Ambulance Service at the scene he was pronounced dead at the scene.

Islington Murder
A man has been arrested on suspicion of murdering a flower seller who was stabbed to death close to his stall in north London.

Tony Eastlake, 55, died after being attacked on Essex Road, Islington, at around 17:30 BST on Saturday 29th June.

The father of one was pronounced dead at the scene. The suspect was known to the victim, police said.

Police arrested a man, 21, on Tuesday 1st June.

Hyde Park Stabbing
A teenage boy was seen being chased and stabbed as a gang armed with machetes fought in Hyde Park in central London on 1st June.

Police attended the park after witnesses reported youths running at each other with foot-long blades at about 9pm yesterday.

Footage of the attack posted on Twitter shows hooded figures brandishing weapons and charging across the grass as a group of terrified onlookers back away.

Several of the gang attacking the man appeared to be wielding long weapons, which witnesses described as 'swords' and 'machetes'.

Officers are appealing for the public's help in trying to identify the attackers.

A Scotland Yard spokesman said: 'Police were called at 21:00hrs on Tuesday 1 June to reports of an assault in Hyde Park.

'Officers and the London Ambulance Service attended. They found a male suffering from stab injuries.

'He has been taken to hospital for treatment.'