



CRITIC Dimbleby warns of licence fee risk

Veteran broadcaster David Dimbleby has said the BBC is under threat in "in a way it has never been before".

The former Question Time host, 81, said the Government was using the "pernicious route" by arguing the licence fee is "wrong and unfair".

It follows claims last week No10 could be prepared to scrap the TV licence fee as part of a move to scale back the BBC's operations.

He said: "Anything that chips away at what we believe to be a good democratic process is dangerous and has to be fought against."

"It has to be explained why not speaking to people is dangerous, why not appearing on television is dangerous."



VEGAN Ariana

Bogus vegans who tell porkies

More than six million Brits have fibbed about being vegan or vegetarian, says a survey.

One in 10 told porkies about adopting a meat-free diet after a surge of interest in climate change.

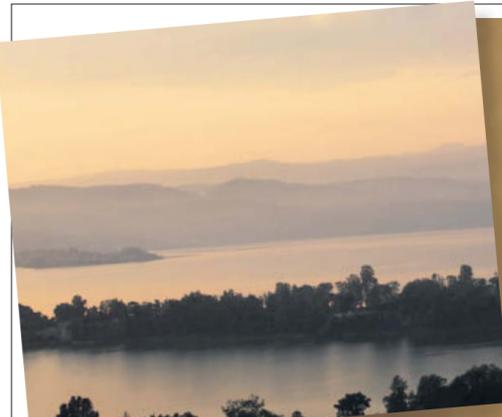
Young adults - influenced by celebrity vegans including Miley Cyrus and Ariana Grande - tried to curry favour the most.

A whopping 23 per cent of Generation Z - aged 18 to 24 - claimed not to eat meat when they did, while 12 per cent of millennials, aged 25 to 34, did likewise.

This fell to nine per cent in the 35 to 44 group, four per cent of those aged 45 to 54 - and zero in the over-55s.

There are 600,000 vegans in the UK and three million vegetarians.

CHARITY ON A MISSION TO HELP WOMEN AND GIRLS



CHILLING TIME Bukavu, in the Democratic Republic of Congo

STEPHEN STEWART From Bukavu, Democratic Republic of Congo

Gabrielle is like any other bright teenager. She loves learning new things, chatting with pals and watching TV.

But her life has been turned upside down after she was accused of being a child witch - by her own family.

She is one of thousands of young children and teenagers at the centre of a new, chilling witchcraft craze sweeping the Democratic Republic of Congo.

This epidemic - reminiscent of the infamous 16th century European witch hunts - has seen girls as young as four burned to death.

The Sunday Mail recently travelled to the central African nation with Scottish charity SCIAF to see their work helping female victims of sexual violence.

As revealed in our sister paper The Daily Record, armed factions illegally mine a mineral called Coltan - used in phones and electronic devices - to finance their atrocities, including gang rape and sexual slavery.

These mind-numbing levels of violence have plunged much of the country into the Dark Ages with economic and educational catastrophe triggering a related rise in beliefs in superstition and witchcraft.

Gabrielle is just one of a skyrocketing number of kids facing accusations of sorcery.

The 15-year-old said: "I felt like a princess when I was at school. I was first in my class and I was very proud of that."

"Then things went bad. I remember sleeping and my uncle came home and he started beating me around the head with a piece of wood."

"He beat me and beat me and beat me and then he took me to the hospital because he felt bad about what he had done."

"He felt pity and they told him at the hospital not to beat me because I might die. I do not want to stay at home any more because they plan to kill me or leave me to the bandits."

"People go into churches and say I am a witch. They say that it is because of me that they have death and misery in their family. I don't know why they say these evil things and abuse me."

SCIAF is helping to fund various projects in the Bukavu archdiocese to help women victims of sexual violence.

These projects often deal with other vulnerable people such as Gabrielle and other children accused of witchcraft.

Belief in witchcraft is widespread in



ABUSE Gabrielle shows scars on her head after she was beaten and accused of being a witch

Africa, according to the UN, but until recently, violent allegations were not usually aimed at children.

There are now alarming numbers of killings of children accused of being "sorcerers" and a growing phenomenon of witchcraft accusations against children and adolescents.

The main power attributed to child witches is the ability to inflict harm from the invisible world to the visible.

This could consist of transmitting an illness to a relative who must be "sacrificed" with fellow witches.

Children are accused of causing diarrhoea, malaria, tuberculosis and HIV

and AIDS, and the fatal consequences that may follow.

They are also often suspected of bringing about general misfortune, poverty, unemployment, failure and bereavement.

Gabrielle's dad Vincens - who is blind and battles ill health - was even one of her accusers.

Victims are now trying to rebuild their lives through SCIAF and local partners at the Centre Olame Bukavu which seeks to defend the human rights of women and girls.

SCIAF launches the WEE BOX Big Change appeal this week, which will help vulnerable women and girls.

Gabrielle now often feeds her father, 55, and helps him get around. He said: "I know

now these were very bad things. When she was forced out of the home, she had to sleep outside.

"I was living in ignorance and believing in ignorant things. As a Christian, I can only ask for forgiveness. My whole family have went to Gabrielle and said, 'Please forgive us for these bad things we did and the awful superstitions we believed in'."

"I was sad when she went away and lived outside. As a father, there are things you do through ignorance but you then regret your weakness and ignorance. I felt pity and regret and wanted to find her."

Captain Innocent Rutema Baguna is a police officer who has seen the horrors of the epidemic.

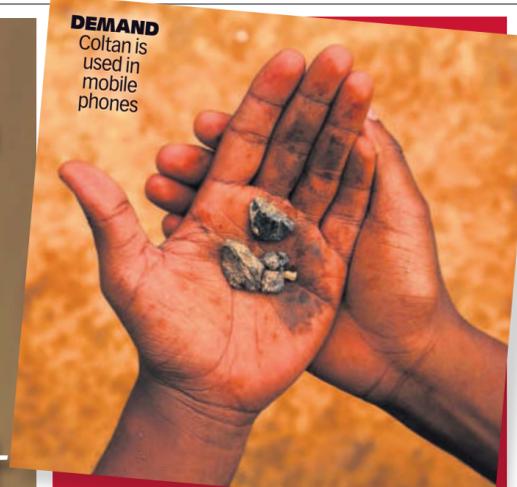
Dad-of-10 Innocent, 54, who became a police officer in 1998, said: "I have witnessed horrible things. One of the worst was when I saw a girl who was four and was accused of being a witch."

"She was burned alive as people had

CAUGHT UP IN CONGO WITCHCRAFT HORROR

People go into the churches and say I'm a witch and that I cause death and misery. I don't know why they say these evil things and abuse me

Teenager tells how family accused her of sorcery



WEE BOX
Big change
£1 = £2

Matching your donations with

UKaid

Please support the SCIAF Wee Box appeal

Thousands of women and girls in the Democratic Republic of Congo need your help right now. Sexual violence and rape are widespread. Decades of conflict have left a legacy of brutality and lawlessness in many areas. SCIAF is working with local partners to provide medical care so they can get treatment for their injuries, trauma counselling, legal assistance so they can prosecute their attackers, and help to become financially independent so they can support themselves and their families. GIVE NOW at www.sciaf.org.uk/weebox or call SCIAF on 0141 354 5555. This year, your £1 = £2. Give before May 20 and your donation will be doubled by the UK Government.

TOGETHER WE CAN END POVERTY



HELP Captain Innocent Rutema Baguna

providing medical care, counselling, legal aid and support so they can recover and rebuild their lives. But the need is great.

"I'd ask everyone to please give what they can so we can do more to help women and girls in need."

As the Sunday Mail team left, Gabrielle shyly handed us a drawing she had been working on.

Her poignant message reads: "May peace reign around the world but especially in the Democratic Republic of Congo."

Biker left passenger after crash

Police are appealing for information after a male motorbike passenger was seriously injured in a crash - before the driver made off.

The pair struck a pedestrian island on Colinton Mains Drive in Edinburgh at about 10.40pm on Friday.

An ambulance crew attended, taking the passenger to Edinburgh Royal Infirmary where he was described as having serious injuries.

The driver was last seen heading west on the same road, before turning left at the Tesco supermarket.

Police are appealing to any witnesses to the incident or those with dash-cam footage to come forward.



ROLL WITH IT Liam Whole lotta lav

Fans can pay £35 for luxury loos at a festival featuring Liam Gallagher.

The "Refresh Retreat" deal unlocks fancy WCs, use of hair dryers and a lounge at the Reading Festival and its sister event in Leeds.

For £50, fans also get a hot shower, while a further £15 adds a locker and phone socket.

Mosque stab man charged

A 29-year-old homeless man has appeared in court charged with stabbing a prayer leader with a kitchen knife at a London mosque.

Daniel Horton is accused of grievous bodily harm and possession of a bladed article.

He appeared at Westminster Magistrates' Court yesterday and spoke only to state his nationality as British and confirm his name and date of birth.

Raafat Maglad, 70, was treated in hospital for stab injuries after being injured at London Central Mosque in Regent's Park.

Raafat, who makes the call to prayer, returned to the mosque for Friday prayers less than 24 hours after the incident.