

# Shock in Kabul, the pandemic's long tail, and modesty pouches

As the weekend began, few would have predicted it would end on the Sunday evening with the Taliban back in charge of Kabul while US forces scrambled to evacuate personnel. The speed of the advance as the Afghan army seemed to melt away shocked the world and starkly revealed a miscalculation by Joe Biden. The desperate plight of ordinary Afghans, particularly women, who fear what life under Taliban strictures will bring, and the chaos at the capital's airport are, despite Biden's defence of his policy and objectives, likely to remain indelible stains on his presidency.

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The pandemic remains stubbornly with us but slowly we can begin to examine how it may affect societies in the long term. This week we look at the economic fallout from Covid on Africa, where employment and trade have been hit hard with fears the continent will struggle for years to recover lost growth. The past 18 months have also accelerated the end of cash. Our pockets may be lighter, but the loss of coins and notes will alter society far beyond the shop counter.

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The rude and raucous Netflix comedy *Sex Education* has achieved a rare feat in attracting adults and teenagers, if not always perhaps in the same room. As a new term begins, we meet the stars and creators of a British TV hit, and uncover the secrets of its suggestive montages and modesty pouches.

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**On the cover**

If the rapid collapse of the Afghan government and armed forces surprised even the Taliban's fighters, they weren't showing it as they rolled into Kabul with blank faces and barely a shot fired. Shock seemed to lie elsewhere, despite the predictions of regime change following the US-led withdrawal of western forces.

*Photograph: Stringer/EPA*