



# Between the lines

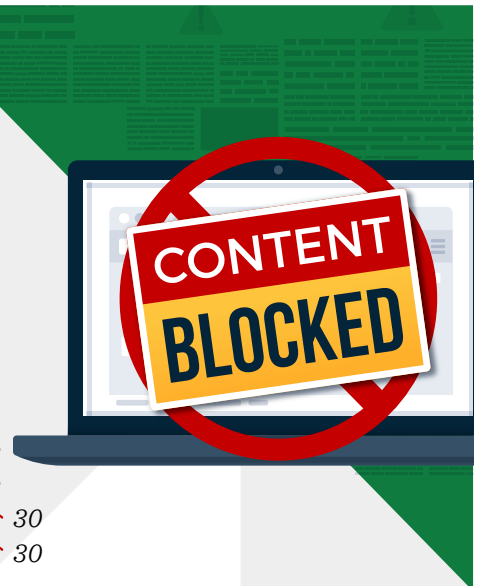
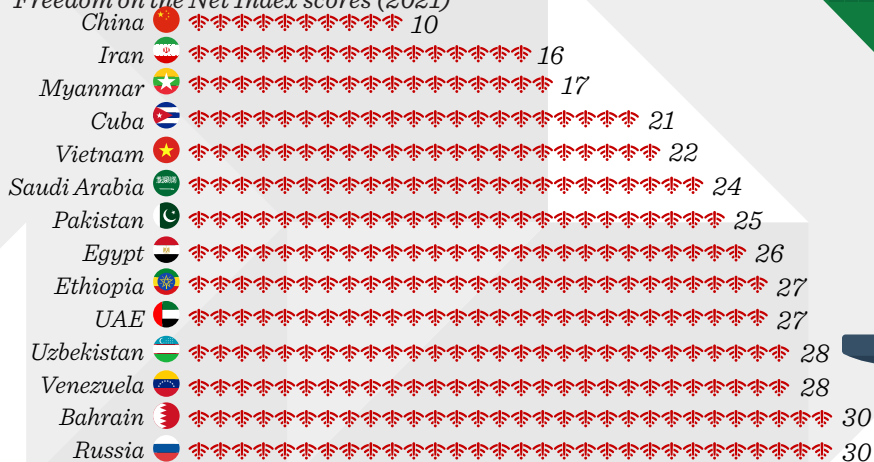
## Week 12

### Tightening the net

According to Freedom House, global internet freedom declined for the 11th consecutive year in 2021. The environment for human rights online deteriorated in 30 countries with only 18 making gains. Iceland once again ranked in first place while China ranked in last for a seventh year in a row.

#### Countries with lowest levels of internet freedom

Freedom on the Net Index scores (2021)\*



\*Out of 70 countries assessed. 0 = least free. Takes into account laws, blocking of platforms & content, disruptions, disinformation, persecution of users  
 Source: Freedom House/Statista



### Bank of England opts for three consecutive rate rises

On Thursday (17 Mar) the Bank of England raised UK interest rates back to their pre-pandemic level of 0.75%. Meanwhile, analysts were predicting that the consequences of the Ukraine war could push UK inflation as high as 10% before it relents.

The central bank's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) voted 8-1 in favour of the rate hike due to the increasingly stark outlook for UK inflation – already at a three-decade high of 6.2%. It first raised interest rates in December (from 0.1% to 0.25%) and then increased them to 0.5% in February making this month's hike the first time the bank has raised rates at three successive meetings in more than two decades.

The Bank of England said Russia's invasion of Ukraine had forced it to rethink its peak inflation forecast of 7.25% for this year.

"Global inflationary pressures will strengthen considerably further over coming months," it said, "while growth in economies that are net energy importers, including the UK, is likely to slow."



### Every country on Earth fails WHO air-quality standards

According to data published on Tuesday (22 Mar), only 3.4% of 6,475 cities surveyed around the world met the World Health Organization's (WHO) air-quality standards in 2021.

The WHO now recommends that average annual readings of hazardous airborne particles, known as PM2.5, should be limited to five micrograms per cubic metre, as even low concentrations cause significant health risks.

On this basis, 93 cities recorded particle levels at least 10 times the recommended level with smog already returning to many regions following a pandemic-induced dip.

India's New Delhi remained the world's most polluted capital. Likewise, Bangladesh remained the most polluted country while new entrant, Chad, came a close second.

India's Bhiwadi and Ghaziabad were the two most polluted cities on Earth after they pushed China's Hotan (in Xinjiang) into third, even though readings for the latter are still more than 20 times the WHO standard.

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