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Sixty seconds on . . . Nicki Minaj

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Who?!

The US rap superstar, of course. Last week, Minaj found herself in an unlikely war of words with England's chief medical officer Chris Whitty and the prime minister Boris Johnson after suggesting covid vaccination could cause impotency.

Pound the alarm! What did she say?

After it emerged that guests at the Met Gala in New York had to be covid vaccinated to attend, Minaj refused on the grounds that her cousin in Trinidad turned down an invitation to get vaccinated "cuz his friend got it & became impotent." She added, "His testicles became swollen. His friend was weeks away from getting married, now the girl called off the wedding."

A load of b*****ks?

The comments caused a global backlash, including in the UK. "There are a number of myths that fly around, some of which are clearly ridiculous and some of which are clearly designed just to scare," said Whitty. "This happens to be one of them. Many of those people, I regret to say, will know they are peddling untruths but they still do it. In my view, they should be ashamed."

That inflamed quickly

It didn't end there. "I am not as familiar with the works of Nicki Minaj as I probably should be," said Johnson, adding, "But I am familiar with Nikki Kanani, a superstar GP of Bexley who has appeared many times before you, who will tell you vaccines are wonderful and everybody should get them. That's why I prefer to listen to Nikki Kanani."

Extraordinary. Has Trinidad and Tobago responded?

The country's health minister Terrence Dyalsingh said his department spent a whole day investigating the "false" post and hadn't found a single recorded incident of the vaccine causing testicles to become swollen, there or "anywhere else in the world."¹

What do Minaj's fellow Americans make of this?

The White House has offered Minaj a phone call to discuss #BallGate, as she has called it, as officials are concerned that the influential star's words could negatively affect the vaccine rollout. "She should be thinking twice about propagating information that has no basis," said Anthony Fauci.

Bang bang, that shot her down

Perhaps, but BMJ columnist Partha Kar says everyone has missed a trick. "Nikki Minaj has 22 million followers on Twitter & 157 million on Instagram," he tweeted. "It would have been hugely powerful if folks had worked with her to get her to front a vaccination drive rather than mock her."

¹ Nicki Minaj: Trinidad minister criticises rapper's vaccine tweet. BBC News. 16 September 2021. www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-58581292.