

Hello, this is the Global News Podcast from the BBC World Service with reports and analysis from across the world. The latest news seven days a week. BBC World Service podcasts are supported by advertising. This is the Global News Podcast from the BBC World Service. I'm Alex Ritzen and in the early hours of Tuesday the 1st of August these are our main stories. 41 people rescued from a doomsday cult in Kenya are to be charged with murder and other offences alongside their leader. Another Quran burning in Sweden prompts fury from leading Islamic countries and a special report on a major discovery in Ghana. It's the first English outpost established anywhere in Africa. It's the very period when the shift occurs between the focus on the trade in gold to the focus on the trade in slaves. Also in this podcast the US holds its first direct talks with Taliban representatives who took over Afghanistan two years ago and why people can barely work out if an animal in a Chinese zoo is a real bear or a fake one. We start with a harrowing story we've been reporting on for months about the ongoing discovery of bodies thought to be members of a cult in mass graves in Kenya's Shakola forest. Hundreds have been exhumed and 41 people have been rescued. Well on Monday those survivors were told there to be charged alongside the leader with murder and other offences. The cult's leader Paul McKenzie is accused of encouraging his followers to starve themselves to death to enter heaven before the world ended. With more details here's Dawkas Wangira. The court hired at the 41 victims now suspects left their homes for the Shakahola forest in the company of at least 40 children. The senior prosecution council father said that they accused 28 women and 13 men are either parents or grandparents of the missing children. According to investigators most of them used false names to identify themselves. Father frustrating efforts to gather crucial evidence. The magistrate ordered that all the 41 suspects be detained at the Shimola Tower prison south east in Kenya and presented in court Tuesday August 1st. Paul McKenzie the suspected leader is also scheduled to appear in court the same day. So far the death toll linked to the cult stands at 425 more than 600 people are still missing. Dawkas Wangira. The right to freedom of expression in Sweden and Denmark is being pushed to its limits as the public desecration of the Quran in recent weeks has sparked tensions with several Muslim countries. An extraordinary meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation has been held to discuss the issue and its Secretary General Hussain Rahim Taha condemned Sweden and Denmark for not putting a stop to these acts. It's regrettable that the concerned authorities claiming freedom of expression continue to provide licenses to repeat these acts contrary to international law. To Iraqi born activists staged another Quran burning today outside parliament in Stockholm. They also stamped on the books pages. Sweden and Denmark say they reject Islamophobia but have to strike a balance between freedom of speech with strict laws on protests. I heard more from our Middle East analyst Sebastian Usher. I think the main point of the meeting was that it was held. As you say it was an extraordinary meeting. It wasn't one that had been scheduled for any great length of time. It comes as these acts of desecration against the Quran continue. So there's very much a message to the governments of Sweden and Denmark to take action as we were hearing that from the head of the OIC. The OIC is based in Saudi Arabia. It's seen at times as being very much kind of tool of Saudi Arabia but it goes beyond that. There's more than 50 Islamic countries

that are involved in it and this meeting was called by the Saudis and by Iraq. Iraq has seen probably the biggest protests against these acts of desecration in the past few weeks. So I think those are the two countries which are kind of leading this and as I say that message wasn't couched in any particularly extreme terms. It was really just another voice trying to tell Sweden and Denmark the authorities to take action as I think Iraq and many Islamic countries directly hold Sweden and Denmark the governments there as being responsible for what's happening even if that isn't exactly the case. Other Swedish authorities likely to take any notice. Absolutely they've been taking notice. They've been very much distancing themselves from what's been going on

and trying to make clear that it's nothing to do with the government as such. I mean there's a law of free speech and it's the police that make these decisions but just as Denmark has done and Denmark has been stronger on this it's making clear that it wants to change that and it wants to stop these incidents continuing and saying that they essentially pose one of the most serious threats that the countries have faced in years. Even if I mean these are protests if one can call them that which are being staged by an absolutely minuscule amount of people. Yeah and the consequences

can be really serious in countries in the Muslim world. People die and the protests that result there don't they? I mean absolutely and that obviously must be being borne in mind by Swedish and Danish authorities. I mean I think part of the thing with the OIC is that the biggest protests we've seen have been kind of non-government organized protests in Iraq as they're saying where the biggest ones happened. They've been essentially by supporters of a very powerful sheer cleric then Muktara Alsada who has often raised himself against the government. It's part of that pressure that is being put. I think there's an attempt of a kind of moderation on all sides here but the two people at the heart of this these two Iraqi born activists don't seem to want to stop and they can cause extreme consequences even though it's only two people who are doing this. Sebastian Asher. For the first time ever Israel's Supreme Court has said that all 15 of its judges will take part in a hearing on arguments against a highly controversial new law. The change limits the court's powers to overrule some government decisions and it's part of a judicial overhaul that has sparked months of protests and an unprecedented crisis in the country. From Jerusalem here's our Middle East correspondent Yolanda Nel. This decision by the Supreme Court President is a measure of the huge significance of the legislation passed last week by Israel's religious nationalist coalition government and it sets the stage for a constitutional showdown when petitions to strike down the new law are heard in September. The amendment to basic law prohibits Israel's highest court from reviewing some decisions made by the government and ministers judging them against a standard of reasonableness. The coalition led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu argues that it's needed to prevent overreach by the court which it sees as increasingly intervening in political decisions. Critics say the changes remove important checks on the government

and could lead to abuses of power. Yolanda Nel. Reports from Niger say dozens of officials from the party of the deposed President Mohammed Bazoum have been arrested. They include the party leader

and several government ministers. Mr Bazoum himself remains a captive of the army but pictures of him have been released for the first time since last week's coup. The United States has reiterated that any assistance to Niger depends on the country returning to democratic rule.

The deputy spokesman of the State Department Matthew Miller said the US was monitoring the situation very carefully. It is clear that there has been an attempt to remove President Bazoum from office. We are watching monitoring the situation and trying to prevent President Bazoum from being removed from office but Secretary Blinken has made very clear that the hundreds of millions of dollars in assistance that the US has provided and is continuing to provide to Niger is very much in the balance depending on the outcome of the actions in the country. US assistance hinges on continued democratic governance in Niger. On Monday the US also confirmed that its top general had spoken to the leader of Niger's military about the safety of American citizens following last week's coup. The president of Chad has been in Niger to try to resolve the crisis after the West African regional bloc Ekoas gave the military until next Sunday to reinstate Mr Bazoum or face possible military intervention. Chris Iwaka sent this update from Abuja in Nigeria. The executive office of the Nigerian party for democratic and socialism PNDP Taraya confirmed to the BBC that the party leader for Makoegado and the Minister of Petroleum Maman Sani Mamadu were among those arrested. Earlier the new military government alleged that foreign minister Hasumi Masudu asked France to lead a military operation to rescue President Mohammed Bazoum from the presidential palace. France has denied this accusation. Why insisting that it is still possible to restate the ousted president? It comes as Chadian President Mohammed Idris Debi leads mediation efforts to resolve the crisis in Niger. Chris Iwaka and some news just in Burkina Faso and Mali have issued a joint statement saying they would regard any military intervention in Niger as a declaration of war on them. The two military rule countries said in such a scenario they would come to the defense of their eastern neighbor. The prominent Russian dissident Vladimir Karamurza has lost an appeal against his 25-year jail sentence. He was arrested soon after Russia's invasion of Ukraine and found guilty of treason and spreading false information about the war. Mr Karamurza also has British nationality and the UK has sanctioned judges and prosecutors involved in the case. One of his supporters, Grigory Yavlinsky, has been giving his reaction to our Russia editor Steve Rosenberg who sent this report from Moscow.

He came to court with little hope but lots of support and for that Vladimir Karamurza was clearly grateful. In April the Kremlin critic had been convicted of treason and sentenced to a quarter of a century in prison. This was his appeal hearing. The result, as expected, appeal rejected. Vladimir Karamurza is one of Russia's most prominent opposition politicians. For a long time a thorn in the Kremlin's side. He lobbied western governments to impose sanctions on Russian officials for corruption and human rights abuses. He denounced the war in Ukraine. He holds Russian and British citizenship. It's very painful. His supporters condemn the ruling. 25 years. It's something unbelievable. He's a strong man which wants to make the better future for Russia. So the conviction stands. The 25-year prison sentence remains unchanged. But in a country where the crackdown on dissent is accelerating, the failure of Vladimir Karamurza's appeal comes as little surprise. Over the weekend Vladimir Putin made it clear what he thinks of dissent. A reporter asked whether it was normal for people to be arrested for things they've written or said. The Russian Federation is in a state of armed conflict with her neighbour. I think there should be a certain attitude towards those people who are causing harm inside the country. Back in court, friends, he says, everything will be okay.

Freedom, they shout. That's optimistic. For Vladimir Karamurza, freedom feels a long way off.
Steve Rosenberg

Still to come in the Global News Podcast. Tobacco use continues to be one of the biggest public health threats, with 8.7 million people dying from tobacco-related diseases every year. Why smoking is still the biggest preventable killer in the world.

The United States has held its first direct negotiations with Taliban representatives who regained control of Afghanistan two years ago. The U.S. State Department said Washington was open to talks on economic stability and combating narcotics trafficking and also repeated concerns about deteriorating human rights. Since the Taliban took over in 2021, girls in Afghanistan have been banned from secondary school and women from tertiary education. Women and girls also can't enter amusement parks, public baths, gyms and sports clubs from Washington. Here's Sean Dilly. The U.S. State Department said it made clear its concerns about deteriorating human rights in Afghanistan. The officials called on the Taliban-controlled administration to reverse bans on secondary education for girls and employment for women, and they called for the release of detained Americans. They said they would be prepared to hold future discussions on combating narcotics and to discuss economic stability and inflation in Afghanistan. The Taliban administration, which calls itself the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, called for travel restrictions to be lifted for its leaders and for the country's assets to be unfrozen. Sean Dilly in Washington.

Tobacco is still the main cause of global deaths that could be prevented, according to the World Health Organization. Regulations on smoking are making a difference, but Dr. Rudiger Kresch from the WHO said that smoking was still resulting in too many fatalities. Let's not forget that tobacco use continues to be one of the biggest public health threats, with 8.7 million people dying from tobacco-related diseases every year. 1.3 million of these deaths are amongst non-smokers that are subjected to secondhand smoke.

But more than 2 billion people in 44 countries remain unprotected, which the WHO has said is unacceptable. But it's not all bad news, as Imogen Folks in Geneva told me.

I mean, it's 15 years since the WHO first started pushing these recommendations on tobacco control towards countries. And now, many countries have adopted, if not all, then some of them.

So we've got 70% of the world's population, that's 5.6 billion people, are protected in some way or other. That could be no smoking in indoor public spaces. It could be higher tax on tobacco products. It could be very blatant packaging to show the risks. It could be cutting back on advertising and sponsorship. So all those things are happening. What the WHO is saying today is they need to happen more widely and that countries should adopt all of these measures and not just some. Why are there still so many deaths though?

Well, you heard in the introduction there, some countries have not adopted any of these measures. Some countries have only adopted a couple. And I think the focus the WHO has got this year is not just on stopping people starting smoking. That does seem to be working.

Numbers of smokers are going down, but to really protect people from secondhand smoke.

Of those over 8 million deaths a year, over a million are from people who don't smoke at all, but are affected by secondhand smoke. So that's the push the WHO is making this year is really let's stop smoking in all public spaces, whether it's train stations, pubs, bars, cafes, restaurants, health facilities, of course. All of these things should really be thought about now and implemented by governments. Briefly, Imogen, the WHO wants a smoke-free generation by 2040.

Is this achievable? It thinks it can if, as we said at the beginning, all of the countries adopt all of the measures. At the moment, we've got some of the countries and some of the measures. It's an ambitious target. 2040 is not far away. The WHO thinks it could be done given the evidence that even adopting some of the measures shows it's having a positive effect.

Imogen folks in Geneva, where the WHO is headquartered. The UN's cultural agency UNESCO is recommending that Venice should be added to its list of endangered world heritage sites.

It said the Italian authorities had failed to address the problems faced by the city and its surrounding lagoon. The recommendation will be put to the organisation's next meeting in September. Sophia Battizza reports. The city of Venice is known as La Serenissima, which means very serene, but that nickname no longer fits. UNESCO says the city is at risk of irreversible damage because of overwhelming tourism and urban developments such as high-rise buildings. Climate change is also having a negative impact. It's causing a rise in sea levels, so Venice, which is surrounded by water, is very vulnerable to flooding. The UNESCO report blames the Italian authorities for a lack of strategic vision to solve the problems faced by one of Italy's most picturesque cities. Sophia Battizza. Ghana's coastline still bears the memory and the remnants of the slave trade. Along a 560-kilometre stretch, there are more than 20 slave forts and trading ports, including Cape Coast Castle, now one of the country's biggest tourist attractions. As far back as the 1600s, these buildings were used by European traders as the base from which to ship gold and also to traffic humans. Archaeologists have been exploring for years, and now they've made an extraordinary discovery, which could reveal new information about this troubled period. The BBC's Thomas Nardi reports.

Overlooking the Atlantic Ocean at Abansi in southern Ghana, a team of archaeologists are busy at work inside the iconic Fort Amsterdam. Hidden underneath these forts, they have discovered the ruins of a building that they believe is the earliest English slave fort in Africa, built in 1631. I'm about to enter one of the rooms where researchers are busy trying to dig up the foundation of Fort Comanthin to see exactly what is going on.

The graduate student that was digging here was getting discouraged, and then one day we came in and these stones, some of which you see still exposed here, he had drawn some of

them, and I suddenly said to him, well, that's clearly a wall. Professor Christopher de Kors is a chair of anthropology at the Maxwell School, Syracuse University. He and his team have been part of a three-year research project here. That, along with the artifacts that we found within these excavated levels that dated before the Dutch, this tells us that we have the foundations of the early English fort. The more recent fort Amsterdam was built on top of the remains of the English fort after the Dutch captured it in a ferocious battle in 1665. It's the first English outpost established anywhere in Africa, not just modern-day Ghana, and this occurs at a very, very important time in Atlantic history. It's the very period when the shift occurs between the focus on the trade in gold to the focus on the trade in slaves, which is one of the things that makes uncovering the foundations of Fort Comanthin interesting.

You just found something. You just got a pipe. Yeah, it's a pipe. Now, what is this one? It looks like a smoke pipe or something. Very, very fascinating. We see that this type of pipe is also very distinctive of the early 17th century. This one here in particular is tiny. Yeah, it looks smaller. The reason for that is, as you know, tobacco was a domesticated plant that was found in the Americas,

so it was not used in Africa or in Europe until the Atlantic exchanges.

And so when it first came to Europe and came to Africa, it in fact was very expensive, which is why you had little small bowls. Named after a nearby village of Comanthin, thousands of men and women were forcibly sent from here to the Caribbean to work in plantations. For the longest time from when it was built, there was an English corporation called the Guinea Company, and they were very much interested in gold trade. Michael Javas is a professor of Atlantic and digital history at the University of Rochester. And it was only in 1663 that the King of England, Charles II, creates the Royal Adventurers to Africa, and their focus is the slave trade rather than the gold trade. Comanthin is now the name associated with many enslaved Africans from the Gold Coast in modern day Ghana. The research team will now continue with their excavation over the next few years, and soon they hope to share even more details about this historic discovery. Thomas Nardi with that report.

Now, what does a zoo need in its bear section?

You'd have thought real bears would be the bear necessity, but a zoo in eastern China has been accused of using humans dressed up in bear costumes instead of the real thing after photos showed them standing up like people. The zoo flatly denies the accusations. I asked our China media analyst, Kerry Allen, if she thought they were fake. I'll be honest, I first watched some video footage and I thought, yeah, that's a real bear. Nobody could have that much flexibility. But then when I saw some stills of this footage, it does look like a human being standing up. And I have to mention that this breed of bear, the Malayan Sun Bear, it's about four to five feet tall.

So it's roughly the size of a small human anyway. And yeah, there are people who have definitely lit up Chinese social media talking about how they think it actually might be a human in a bear costume. I have to say, I looked at the crease beneath the bum and it just, that looks so fake. It can't be real, can it? But it's been a pretty furious reaction in China, hasn't it?

There has, yes, there have been a lot of people who've been saying that, yeah, they think it is definitely somebody in a bear costume. And it has actually led to the Hangzhou Zoo issuing a response saying, no, it's not somebody in a bear costume. In the summer, temperatures can reach nearly 40 degrees Celsius. And if a person did wear a bear costume, they will be lying down within minutes. So they dispute this. But yeah, it definitely is the case that this bear or person in a bear costume, they do move like a human. And that has also triggered a lot of reaction on Weibo, China's equivalent of Twitter, with people saying that they think this is an animal reacting in an abnormal and unnatural way, possibly from exposure to tourists.

Yeah, because the neck also looks too long. It looks like, well, like a fake head that's been pulled over the top of a human's head.

Yeah. And there have been concerns in recent years due to malnutrition at Chinese zoos. As I mentioned, this is a bear that's roughly the size of a human, and it does look very small. It almost looks underweight. So that's why some people think, yeah, okay, it might be that it looks very human-like because it's not being treated well. And it has to be mentioned that this is a vulnerable species anyway, the Malayan sunbear. So it is difficult to see many of them. And there are perceptions that it might be a way of attracting people to the park if, for example, it is being advertised that you can see this very rare bear.

But at the same time, there are so few of these about that it's difficult to kind of compare them to humans if this is the case that it is a real bear. And I think it's the case that there are concerns for zoos. They need to make money that there might be these very kind of questionable

gimmicks in place in order to attract people to see animals that might be quite rare. And the zoo's not having those animals in place. So yeah, it's definitely one that's triggered split reaction, some concerns, some humor. And yes, a lot of questions.

Kerry Allen. So real or a bear faced lie, we'd love to know what you think the video is on BBCNews.com. And staying with animals, a top flight cricket match in Sri Lanka's capital, Colombo, had to be briefly halted on Monday afternoon after a huge snake made its way onto the pitch. A video of the incident has since been widely shared on social media. Here's Tom Bailey. Whilst rain disrupting play may be a familiar headache for cricket fans across the globe, this was an altogether more unusual stoppage. The unwelcome visitor slithered into the spotlight during a tense Lanka Premier League T20 clash between the Damboola giants and ghoulish gladiators, much to the bemusement of players and fans. The reptile was eventually shoed from the pitch by a fearless umpire, allowing play to resume before wildlife officials arrived to safely evict the creature from the stadium complex. A video of the incident has proven a hit on social media, with some jokingly hailing it as a historic moment for cricket. Tom Bailey.

And that's all from us for now, but there'll be a new edition of the Global News podcast later. If you want to comment on this podcast or the topics covered in it, you can send us an email, the address globalpodcast at bbc.co.uk. You can also find us on Twitter at Global News Pod. This edition was mixed by Caroline Driscoll and the producer was Emma Joseph. The editor is Karen Martin. I'm Alex Ritzen. Until next time, goodbye.