

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. You're listening to the Global News Podcast from the BBC World Service. Hello, I'm Oliver Conway. This edition is published in the early hours of Wednesday, the 16th of August. Two years after seizing power in Afghanistan, the Taliban claim the clampdown on women's rights won't last forever. More than a million people have now fled Sudan, as aid agencies say the crisis is spiralling out of control. And the wife of the Ghanaian international footballer, Christian Atsu, talks to the BBC about the earthquake that took his life in Turkey. Also in the podcast, Alarm in China as the fertility rate hits a record low. And we're coming up to the 50th anniversary, actually, of the cube having been invented. Well, everyone's kind of had one or has one at home. And I mean, I think it's kind of known for being impossible, being really hard. How the Rubik's Cube keeps on going from strength to strength.

When the Taliban regained power in Afghanistan on the 15th of August, 2021, they claimed they would be less hard-lined than their previous incarnation of the late 1990s, when even television was banned. But two years on, they have reverted to type, declaring music to be immoral, and cancelling the freedoms enjoyed by women and girls for two decades, as we heard in our earlier podcast. The Taliban have accused the West of using the issue to put pressure on them. But speaking at a protest in Pakistan to mark the anniversary of the takeover, an Afghan women's rights activist, Moloader Tawana, called on the rest of the world to do more to highlight their plight. Still now, the international community are silent and do not take or take any serious decisions against the Taliban. Once again, we shout and we loud our voice. We want the international

community to pay attention to the situation of Afghanistan. The Taliban say Afghanistan is much safer since their takeover. But the economy is in dire trouble, and more than two-thirds of the population now needs humanitarian aid to survive, according to the UN. Our chief international correspondent, Lise Doucette, was in Kabul as the Taliban took over two years ago. She told me more

about what's changed since then. The Afghanistan feels and looks like a different country, the only country in the world where girls are banned from going to high school. Women are not allowed to work

in many public spaces. You mentioned about the humanitarian crisis, and of course the Taliban would say that things have got better. They say because we ended the occupation, the foreign forces are gone, security is better. That is true, but of course largely because the Taliban have stopped their suicide bombings and explosions. Corruption is less, that is the case, but it is the plight of women and girls that seems to symbolize their increasingly authoritarian rule. And when I spoke to the Taliban spokesperson, Zabih al-Amuj ahead, I put it to him, the Afghan government keeps saying that things are going to get better for women and girls, but they keep getting worse. It is not that some things have improved. A lot of things have improved. Putting an end to four years of war is not a small thing. Putting an end to occupation in expulsion of foreign forces is not a small thing. I agree, some things still need to be done, but it has two angles.

One has to do with values. These values have to be considered when decisions are made, for example, on women's job. These circumstances have to be right and based on Sharia law. Are you saying that these policies, these edicts will be lifted? It's just a matter of time, because most people believe they seem to be there to stay.

Women are working in some places now. The same goes for girls' education. We have never said that these restrictions are going to be forever.

The Taliban spokesperson, Zabih al-Amuj ahead, and when he says this is not forever, do Afghan women and girls think anything could change anytime soon for them?

Well, that's what they said the first time around when they ruled harshly in the 1990s.

They kept saying it's not forever. It will change. And of course, it never did change.

And what we've seen over the past two years is that it just keeps getting worse.

The reality is that they seem bent on removing women from as many public spaces as possible.

It is narrowing so much. And you can imagine the desperate, desperate situation for young girls, for women who tell me they sit at home. It feels like a jail. They stare at the walls and listen to the clock. And what is their rationale for doing this? They can't just want to harm women for the sake of it. They must, in their own minds, somehow think they're justified.

Earlier this year, Raleigh, I traveled with the number two in the United Nations, Amina Muhammad, who is a Muslim herself. She dealt with Boko Haram, who is of a similar ilk to the Taliban in Nigeria. And she spoke to the scholars there. And they said to her, we are doing this to protect women. Some of them seem to believe that. But then others, including Zabih al-Amuj, how do we spoke to? He says, no, no, no, we are going to change it.

But things have to be Islamically correct. And we say, well, you have boys and girls who are separate. You have male and female teachers. But we think they are doing a complete overhaul of the curriculum. And we think that there are conservative Taliban and behind them, the Islamic State group, who are saying we can achieve a pure Islamic State. And the Taliban are really cognizant of that. They have to think about their fighters, the fighters they promised victory, which they gave to them, but also a pure Islamic State. They don't want to lose their supporters. National unity, unity of the Taliban, matters to them above all else.

Our Chief International Correspondent, Lise Doucette. The Iraqi Prime Minister has ordered the reconstruction of Kotcho, a village in northern Iraq, where the Islamic State group carried out one of its worst atrocities against members of the Yazidi religious minority nine years ago.

Our Arab Affairs editor, Sebastian Asha, has the details.

Islamic State fighters acted with special savagery towards the Yazidis in Iraq, whom they considered to be heretics. They rampaged through the Sinjar region, killing thousands of men, enslaving both women and children. They surrounded the village of Kotcho, giving its inhabitants two weeks to convert to the IS version of Islam. When they didn't, on this day in 2014, the jihadists seized hundreds of the male villages and killed them.

Some were shot, others beheaded. Kotcho became a symbol of IS brutality against the Yazidis.

Many from the ancient community have yet to return to Sinjar, where mass graves are still being uncovered. The region remains unstable, lacking much of the reconstruction and redevelopment

that the Yazidis have long demanded. Sebastian Asha. Since war broke out between rival military factions in Sudan, four months ago, more than a million people have fled to neighboring countries, according to the latest figures from the UN. A further three and a half million are displaced inside Sudan's borders, where they're running out of food and access to medical supplies. One of the international groups trying to get aid into Sudan is Save the Children.

It says that by next month, 17,000 children will be experiencing extreme hunger every day.

The BBC's Richard Hamilton spoke to the Charity's Deputy Director in Sudan,

Wael Moussa. He is now in Port Sudan, but spent weeks trying to avoid clashes between the army and the rival paramilitary rapid support forces in the capital, Khartoum.

I live in an area where families will be slightly on the upper class, middle upper class segment. And being in the war zone for 40 days, experiencing everything, I could find my neighbors struggling just to find a small loaf of bread because like everything was cut off in Khartoum. A situation like now, I left Khartoum in around now a month. I can only wonder how the situation is back now. So how did you get out of Khartoum yourself? Honestly, it was a very intense trip. So I live in an area called Khartoum North. After ours have forced their way into our house, I had to evacuate initially to another area called Indurman. We decided there with my family for a couple of days until I was able to find the booking for what that goes outside of Khartoum to reach the Port Sudan safely. And is your family okay or are some of them still stuck in the capital? So my immediate family, no, they're all okay, but then some of the extended families in the capital. And this is another issue like you cannot even check with them properly because in Khartoum, I think even the communications are much worse. And therefore, I don't think you can even contact at some point. Is Save the Children trying to get aid supplies into Darfur or is it impossible? Right now, we are looking at UN agencies to provide some aid support in North Darfur. The

situation is very dynamic and very fortified. A lot could change in a matter of one hour.

And I understand that with looting, it makes it even worse in terms of food prices and supplies.

Exactly. Like a number of other NGOs reported that even within Khartoum, when they were able to get some supplies in, it was looted. But then also for Darfur, the route that you have to take by land, even before the war, it was not 100% safe. Previously, we had the option of airdrops, but now since the airspace of Sudan is closed, we cannot transfer anything by air. So the disc of looting is actually increasing, especially if it's medical supplies or food items.

Yeah. So it must be absolutely heartbreaking for you as a Sudanese person yourself.

Living in the middle of the war zone for 40 days. I was staying in an area where we did not have water supply. Water was cut off. We did not have power. So automatically, you find yourself either going out to some areas where it has water supply under the flying bullet and this

kill life or just stay inside and die of theirs. Well, Musaov saved the children in Sudan, he was talking to Richard Hamilton. The US president, Joe Biden, says he will travel to Hawaii as soon as he can to survey the damage and meet survivors of the wildfires that killed at least 99 people. Hundreds are still missing. The authorities say the number of dead will continue to rise as crews working with cadaver dogs search the ashes. There are fears the island is about to be hit by more storms. Sophie Long has been to the devastated town of Lahaina on the island of Maui. Survivors say the sound of the wind that night was like the roar of a jet plane exploding cars like bombs going off. They describe how the smoke made them choke and vomit as they rammed their lives with their backs burning. And everything starts, I look to my left and I'm literally right next to this car where this grandmother is yelling for help and she's just telling me please help me, I have a baby. Fleeing for her life with her own three children, Akanasi Vaar carried another little girl to safety. Her own children were old enough to run. We run to the corner and we meet up, we meet there and we just notice that we're at a dead end. You know, my son was like, oh mom, is this it? And I mean, what do you tell your kids?

Nearly a week later and local people like Aymarie Maori continue to load cars with supplies they say people still desperately need. So we're just trying to get supplies as fast as possible into

into the affected areas so that people get what they need. There is a lack of response it felt like from larger organizations. We followed Aymarie's convoy into the worst affected area. The views along the way were a reminder of what makes Maui so magical. As we arrived on the outskirts of Lahaina, we saw what's broken its heart. The once colorful, historic town has been transformed into a bleak moonscape where many of its inhabitants remain unrecovered. Some of the houses that survived have become unofficial aid hubs. People like Alex Freeman are doing their best to distribute the donations coming in. But he, like others who remain, are frustrated by the lack of clear information. We got another hurricane that could touch down tropical depression and I barely have data in and out. So we don't know what's going on weather wise we don't know what's going on down the street unless somebody comes and tell us. So you've got no power, no running water. So it depends who you ask and I got the official notice of contamination for water. Somebody at the hotel knows a guy that says hey it's okay, somebody that says hey do not, don't even wash your dishes, conflicting information constantly. Some people tell us that people down the street don't even know we're here. No communication whatsoever. And how do you feel when you look at what's happened? I mean it's devastating. I mean you can't even fathom that like right on the other side of that wall or corpses. Like it's literally right there. The children a few doors down were here in the Heiner as it burned. Their parents unable to get back from work. It was an excruciating 48 hours before Lawley Boonegar learned if her five-year-old son had survived. And all that time you didn't know what happened. I don't know I were alive. That's all that mattered right now. What happened here was one of the most horrifying and lethal disasters to take place in the United States for many years. Nearly a week later and the search and recovery operation is still ongoing. Hawaii's governor Josh Green says he expects the search teams to recover between 10 and 20 bodies every day until their grim and difficult task is done. He couldn't say when that would be. Sophie Long in Lahaina in Hawaii. Next to a toy that's been around for nearly 50 years. There's never been a puzzle quite like Rubik's Cube and America may never be the same. The medical journal has written about a unique phenomenon. Well they are still popular so much so in fact that the first Rubik's World Championships have been taking place in South Korea. After being postponed because of the pandemic contestants will be solving the cube at lightning speed doing it blindfolded or just with one hand. James Menendez spoke about the event to George Schlowey himself a world record holder. It's amazing it's got thousands and thousands of competitors from all over the world. We're all together in this massive venue and there's a big space for people to just spectate and then there's also the space for competing but it's not one-to-one competition as you would get in a lot of sports. You're competing against yourself when it comes to the finals that's when it is more of a head-to-head tournament. And am I right in thinking that the most prestigious event is the speed record. How fast someone can solve the Rubik's Cube? Yeah I'm always trying to beat the clock but to be honest average time is considered more prestigious. Getting a single solve can sometimes rely on luck. Getting the best average solve relies on skill.

And how do you solve a Rubik's Cube so fast? The world record's about just over three seconds. But what I can't understand is having played around with one when I was younger. Can't quite get my head round how someone can just physically move the cube so quickly. It comes from practice. You spend a lot of time moving the cube and you just work out which moves feel right. And then you just build up this repertoire of what we call finger tricks over time. You just use the right fingers for the right moves. Easier said than done. You hold the world record for completing the most Rubik's Cubes in 24 hours. How many was that?

That was 6,931.

My goodness. And what state were your hands in after that?

It's a good question. Keeping, I wouldn't call it sport because of the fact there is no physical exertion. But I feel like I was on the cusp there because my hands were feeling pretty tired around the kind of 18 to 20 hour mark. Mainly just cramping so I just put them in cold water to try and recover them every few hours.

And what about the relationship between the competitors? Is it all pretty congenial or do people get quite competitive with each other?

I'm very safely say this is one of the most wholesome communities that exists around any sport, any hobby, anything. We're so inclusive. Everyone's so kind. We all get on. It's just a massive group of friends that meet up at these huge competitions around the world. Not about beating anyone. It's about being yourself. Get your own times. Try and get faster.

It was designed in the 1970s, 1974 I think.

Yeah. We're coming up to the 50th anniversary actually of the cube having been invented.

Right. That's going to be a big one for you guys. You know, lots of these things are just crazes that come and go. But the Rubik's Cube is endured. Why do you think that is?

Such a vital part of pop culture. It's always been present since it was invented.

It's, you know, movie sets. Everyone's kind of had one or has one at home. And I think it's just endured just due to its physical appeal. And I mean, I think it's kind of known for being impossible, being really hard, which I promise you it's not. It's very accessible to get good at.

I think lockdown obviously played a part in that. This World Championships has been a real insight for me into how big it has become in the eastern parts of the world. In China now, you wouldn't even believe this is true. They have their own cubing coaching conventions. It's about the coaching of cubers to make them faster. That's how big it's got here. It's just got a lot bigger. George Shlowe talking to James Menendez.

And still to come on the Global News podcast. This is great. After all these years. Absolutely. We've missed each other. I know. I know. The pen pals meeting for the first time after nearly 70 years.

For decades, China was worried about its ever growing population going so far as to ban families from having more than one child. Now it has the opposite problem after its population began shrinking last year. On Tuesday, we got an indication of the severity of the decline when a state backed newspaper revealed that China's fertility rate had reached a record low of 1.09 compared to the 2.1 needed for a stable population. More than 40% of women in China are now childless. So why is the fertility rate there so low? Kerry Allen is our China media analyst. It's been falling for a number of decades now. It very much started back in the 80s when China imposed the one child policy. And that was abolished in 2015. But after that, there was an

expectation that there will be an uptake of people being able to have more children. And on the contrary, it was the case that young Chinese, they're a smaller demographic, obviously, due to them all being only children. And they're working longer hours as a result of their parents and grandparents retiring and looking after them. They've got to think about holding down a job. It's very difficult to actually think about bringing more people into their family because they simply don't have the time or the money. Now, China still has a huge population. Is it a problem that fewer babies are being born? It is a huge problem. China has what's known as an aging society, meaning that there's going to be a huge demographic of people over the age of 60 and nobody

to look after them. So that is a growing concern from the government. And that's very much why I've seen in recent years, state messaging, trying to offer policies, supporting young families to have children, even just one, but also second or third children. For example, there's been extended maternity leave offered in some cities and towns. There's been promotion of free childcare. But the message really hasn't changed. A lot of young people still saying on platforms like Weibo, which is China's equivalent of Facebook, that they don't want to get married. They don't want to have children. They can't afford to. Yeah. I mean, is there much discussion of the fertility rate reaching this figure or are people just focusing on other things?

Well, what's really interesting about this is when this figure was announced by the National Business Daily, which is a national newspaper, I saw a post on Weibo this morning, which had thousands of social media comments. And generally, yes, they're along the lines of what I've been seeing. People aren't surprised. They've seen this happen again and again, that the birth rate has been shrinking. But now what happens? It appears this social media post that the National Business Daily posted has been removed. I'm not sure if it's been censored, but the hashtag that it contained, if you click that now, you get a disclaimer saying, according to relevant laws, rules, policies, content showing this message cannot be displayed. So that indicates that the government is very sensitive about this and doesn't want people talking about it.

Kerry Allen, our China media analyst here in Britain, six former officers from London's Metropolitan Police Force have been charged with sending racist messages on a WhatsApp group. The BBC was passed dozens of messages by a member of the group last year.

The coverage led to the Met Directorate of Professional Standards launching an investigation. Seema Kotecha reports. The former officers all in their 60s had all served in what was called the Diplomatic Protection Group, now known as the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command. The unit patrols places such as Downing Street and the Palace of Westminster.

Having retired between 2001 and 2015, they were not serving when they allegedly participated in the sharing of what are termed grossly offensive racist messages. Some of the messages in the group chat included strong racial slurs, while others referenced to the government's policy of deporting migrants to Rwanda. The Duke and Duchess of Sussex appeared in several images alongside racist language. Some joked about the flooding that hit Pakistan last year, killing almost 1,700 people. The men have been charged under the Communications Act. Commander James Harmon, who leads the Met's anti-corruption and abuse team, said the force launched an investigation as soon as it was made aware of the allegations. He said that Met officers were tired of being let down by a minority in their ranks. The six men are scheduled to appear at Westminster Magistrates Court in early September, where they will enter a plea.

Seymour Catechart reporting. Germany is retiring two of its aircraft after the foreign minister was forced to cancel an overseas trip because her plane broke down twice in two days.

An Elena Baerbock was due to visit Australia, New Zealand and Fiji, but was left stranded in Abu Dhabi.

From Berlin, here's Jenny Hill.

The foreign minister made no attempt to hide her irritation, describing the situation as more than annoying. An Elena Baerbock was en route to the Indo-Pacific on Sunday, when the wing flaps on her plane malfunctioned, forcing the pilots to make an emergency landing. After repairs and a successful test flight, the aircraft took off again, only for the same problem to arise. Attempts to hastily book the delegation onto commercial airlines appear to have failed, and the foreign ministry cancelled what should have been a week-long trip. Germany may enjoy a reputation for efficiency, but its government planes are notoriously unreliable. The former Chancellor Angela Merkel missed the opening of a G20 summit in 2018 because of a technical problem, and earlier that year the then finance minister and current Chancellor Olaf Scholz was stranded in Indonesia after rodents chewed through cables on his plane. Jenny Hill in Berlin. It is just over six months since a massive earthquake hit the Turkish region of Antakya, killing about 50,000 people. One of those who died was the Ghanaian international footballer Christian Atzu. He was 31 and played for the local club Hartey Sport. Prior to his move to Turkey, Atzu had played in the Netherlands and England. His wife Marie Claire Rupio spoke to

Nagamunchetti about the last time they were in touch. We spoke on the Saturday and he did say that obviously on Sunday he has a game so he will call us on Monday. On Sunday evening I did write him

a message saying oh congratulations for your goal and he said thank you. That was basically the last message I received from him before the earthquake. I heard about the earthquake in the radio when I

was driving the car. I didn't believe that it could happen in a place he would be but then after a while obviously his sister called me several times and then told me that his building has totally collapsed. I was shocked. There was a lot of confusion about what had happened to Christian in the aftermath of the quake. What were you hearing and how were you coping with that information

or misinformation? I didn't really read any news. I relayed on his age and Nana and on his sister. Basically when he told me they have said that they found him but we don't have any proof yet and then they put in the news he told me that they have found him but he still said well we still don't have any proof so that's why I could relay on him because we always said until we see him we can't really put any news out. So that time was though quite hard. My children heard from the school all he has been found and then they came home and to hear it in the radio again and saying that he hasn't been found so it wasn't nice. It wasn't nice no. How old were your children at the time? Nine, three and six. How do you break the news that their fathers died? When I had the call it was I think about three or four o'clock in the night when the agent called me and broke that to me. When he called me I went outside my room and then he told me I'm sorry but it's him. That time I couldn't really cry because I think I was in shock. I still was hoping obviously for a good outcome because they still pulled out a few people alive and I would have believed that he is a strong man and he would survive this. I think my body just just shut down and then the next

morning my children did have football and I didn't want to take that from them. I went with them to football to have some their time and then after obviously I had to set them down and had to explain it to them and yeah it's not easy. Let's say that I think every parent would say that to tell a child that their dad is not there anymore. It's not something you want to wish anybody.

You've spoken about wanting to keep Christians legacy alive and that's why you're talking to me. How would you like in years for Christian to be spoken about?

In a big way. So I hope that we can do something for keeping his name alive in a way that he has been known. He has helped a lot of people and we will try our best to keep that going especially for the charities that he has supported. Marie Claire Rupio talking to Nugger Mancetti about her husband Christian Atsu. Since humans first set foot on the moon we have left not just flags and bags of waste there but also small pieces of art and culture. The Apollo 12 mission for example dropped off tiny drawings by artists like Andy Warhol. As humans prepare to return to the lunar surface a new digital collection of art poetry music films podcasts and books from 158 countries is being assembled. It's called the lunar codex and it's the creation of physicist and author Dr Samuel Peralta. He spoke to the BBC Sarah Montague. The point of it is to imbue the moon with a sense of what is our heart. Our heart is really the kind of creations we make our poetry our music our films and so on. The other thing is to inspire the artists here on earth who are included in the lunar codex to keep sustaining their vision and to pass on their vision to others because you never know when someone will come cap you on the shoulder and say your work is good enough let's go to the moon. So what size is it? Well we're actually leaving something that's about a size but American quarter. There are little dots on it and each little dot is the page of a book or the image of an art piece and what I've done is essentially I've taken the latest in semiconductor technology using the work done by others and I put it on the work done by others which is creating lunar landers and we put them together and are launching

them to the moon. It's not likely to be read or decoded by aliens I presume so what are you imagining is going to be its purpose beyond the danger that it ends up as just a bit of rubbish on the moon? Well my dad is an archaeologist and he's involved with UNESCO in creating world significant sites and I imagine a future archaeologist looking at it and opening it up like a time capsule under a building and essentially looking at the slice of life we had in the 20th century all the arts we did and knowing that despite all the challenges humanity is going through we still found time to dream and put that dream into art. Dr Samuel Peralta talking to Sarah Montague. Now have you ever had a pen pal a person you exchanged letters with often living in a different country? The communication generally fades over time sometimes after just the first letter in fact but not for Patsy and Carol Ann who've been pen pals for almost 70 years but despite keeping in touch for so long they've only just met for the first time. Shantel Hartle has the story. This friendship goes back to 1955 when Patsy from the UK and Carol Ann from the US state of South Carolina were both 12 years old. Their letters started out with pencil and ink they then graduated to typing and most recently the pair have been using social media to stay in touch. It was always their plan to meet one day so when Patsy was about to turn 80 her family decided the best birthday present would be to fly her to America for the big moment.

I didn't know we were going to be on TV in that so well it's going to be fun.

Yes, all the way, finally. Oh my gosh, this is great after all these years.

Absolutely. Yes, that's great. We've missed each other. I know, I know. Finally. Finally.

[Transcript] Global News Podcast / Afghanistan: Two years on from Taliban takeover

The two women were both girl guides when they first wrote their letters and their lives continue to follow a similar path as Patsy explains. Obviously at the same age we've got similar interests. We got married around about the same time. We both had three children and it just went on from there. Over the last seven decades Carol Ann and Patsy have sent each other hundreds of messages. They aren't sure if they'll be able to meet again in person but say the letters and cards will continue. Shantel Hartle.

And that is all from us for now but the Global News Podcast will be back very soon.

This edition was mixed by Caroline Driscoll and produced by Emma Joseph.

Our editor is Karen Martin. I'm Oliver Conway. Until next time, goodbye.