

[Transcript] Global News Podcast / Ethnic Armenians flee Nagorno Karabakh after military takeover

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Check out the Whole Foods Festival today.

I'm Alex Ritzen and at 14 hours GMT on Monday the 25th of September these are our main stories.

Terrified Armenians flee Nagorno-Karabakh as fears grow of an ethnic bloodbath following Azerbaijan's military takeover, a tentative deal to end the Hollywood writer's strike after a shutdown of almost 150 days, and the supposed last godfather of the Sicilian mafia dies from the colon cancer that led to his arrest.

Also in this podcast we hear from the wife of the jailed Russian opposition activist Vladimir Karamazov.

So now he's been kept in a punishment cell of the strict regime prison colony in Siberia 3,000 kilometers away from Moscow.

And we deplore that attacks by Russian armed forces, harming civilian and medical facilities which have protected status, continue to take place.

UN investigators find evidence of war crimes by Russian troops including torture and sexual violence in Ukraine.

People are pouring across the border from Nagorno-Karabakh into Armenia, largely from the main cities to Pana Kirt.

It comes after Azerbaijan seized the region, which is in its territory, but has a majority ethnic Armenian population.

BBC Russians Natalia Zotova is at the border.

We are now in the village of Karnizor, right on the border between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh.

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We can see the refugees coming and coming through the border to Armenia.

Here in this tent they are being registered.

People are fleeing with their belongings because they are afraid they just don't believe they can be safe in Nagorno-Karabakh under Azerbaijan rule.

Some people told me that they don't expect to get home ever.

Among the terrified population is Surinush Saksayan.

I just wake up, it's very early morning and it's indescribable feelings, like you feel this is your last mornings.

The Armenian government says nearly 5000 people have joined the exodus.

Meanwhile, Azerbaijan's victorious president has been meeting Turkey's president, an ally in a high profile territory which belongs to Azerbaijan but is separated from the rest of it by areas of Armenia.

I spoke to Kazranarji who's in the capital of Armenia, Yerevan.

I'm standing by the side of the government building which is covered with police and riot police in front of it because they are expecting anti-government demonstrations here.

Protesters have been demonstrating here for the last few days blaming the government for not doing enough to secure Karabakh and also for not doing enough to defend the people of Karabakh.

And here they are expecting thousands, tens of thousands of people to pour over into Armenia. Most of them probably heading here to Yerevan and we're not sure whether the government here is prepared in any meaningful way for receiving so many refugees.

What are people saying about Russia so long the guarantor in this situation and its peacekeepers? That's right.

There's a lot of blame going around and we had the prime minister here, Nikol Pashinyan yesterday making a televised speech in which he seemed to blame Russia for not doing enough because they were supposed to be peacekeepers and yet they allowed Azerbaijan forces to take over the whole of the Karabakh for the first time in history with the force of arms and today the latest we're getting is that the town of Martakhet, which is just north of Stepanakhet in Karabakh, has been taken over completely by Azerbaijanis and we hear that about 1,000 cars have been heading towards Stepanakhet to leave the area and there are pictures of Azerbaijanis soldiers putting up Azeri flags everywhere in the town.

So the situation is pretty volatile and Russia is taking a lot of blame for not doing enough and there seems to be a change in terms of the strategic leaning of Armenia in the sense that yesterday in his speech the president seemed to be leaning to the west away from Russia.

So that is playing out at the same time we have Turkey and Azerbaijani presidents of Turkey and Azerbaijan today meeting in Nakhjavan which is a very provocative thing to do here which speaks to the fears that Azerbaijan has even more territorial ambitions in this region particularly in the south along the border with Iran where they want a corridor given to Azerbaijanis or put under the control of Russian peacekeepers so that they can open a link between Azerbaijan and Turkey.

Kazranagyi in Yerevan Armenia.

The Hollywood writer's strike has damaged the world of TV putting all manner of shows

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off air or stopping their recording well it could soon be over.

The dispute which centered on pay and the impact of artificial intelligence on writers halted most film and television production for nearly five months.

The trade union which represents around 11,000 writers the Writers Guild of America has reached preliminary agreement with studio bosses to end the dispute but Hollywood actors remain on strike in a parallel dispute.

My colleague Justin Webb spoke to Liz Alper a television writer and producer in Hollywood.

We've just received a tentative agreement which basically means that the Writers Guild of America as well as the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers who are the collective of CEOs and our employers who we've been negotiating against they've agreed to the broad deal points in the next few days our legal team as well as the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers the AMPTPs legal team are going to be sussing out the finer details and once that happens they're going to bring that back to the membership so right now we don't know what's in the deal.

We do know that if our negotiating committee is happy with it then that means we must have gotten a very good deal because we have a very bullish negotiating committee who has been dedicated to making sure we get the best deal possible for our members.

So the bottom line is that people who write for television and films will get more money for what they do.

We're going to get a lot more than that we're going to be getting protections both in the workplace and from artificial intelligence that was a major point of contention in these negotiations and according to the email that we did receive we got major wins for each part of the membership so that would be the comedy variety writers who cover talk shows and comedy variety shows the screenwriters and the television writers so in all of those areas we've made major gains.

Right so this is a really big deal and when other people in other creative sectors not just screenwriting across the world look at what you've achieved.

It sounds to me as if particularly with the AI side of it this is potentially quite a big thing for them.

It is and I think I really truly hope that people who are watching us from around the world take to heart that collective action and collective bargaining and standing together with your fellow employees is going to be the way that the workers get their rightful share because right now workers all over the world are being replaced by AI or they're just being replaced because of companies contracting.

So I do hope that people are looking at this and realizing what the power of solidarity looks like.

Did you get the kind of support that you needed from the stars that you're right for?

I mean one or two did sort of toy with going back didn't they and then rethought that. How's it been?

What's it done to relationships behind the scenes?

A lot of us in Hollywood are not familiar with how labor action works and the strength of that and so I think what you saw were stars who were coming from a place of uncertainty and I think that this has been a big educational process for a lot of us who have come out

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of this action maybe with different feelings towards the labor movement.

I think in the past we've all been separated basically pitted against one another in order to make sure that our focus was on who was taking our share of the pie rather than who is holding our pie hostage.

Hollywood's Liz Alper.

There is continuous evidence that Russian armed forces are committing war crimes in Ukraine.

That's the verdict of the latest United Nations report into the conflict.

The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine says its documented attacks on civilians, torture and sexual violence.

Rinda Grover is a member of the commission.

We deplore that attacks by Russian armed forces, harming civilian and medical facilities which have protected status continue to take place.

The commission also deplores the fact that conflict related sexual violence continues to take place in violation of international humanitarian law and human rights.

And it says it's still investigating the breach of the Nova Karkovka Dam in June along with allegations of genocide and the forced transfer of Ukrainian children to Russia.

I spoke to our Geneva correspondent Imogen Folks who's been studying the report's findings. Well what the UN team have looked at is events since March of this year and there they have documented attacks on at least one hospital, restaurants, a railway station, shops, all things that civilians use, civilian infrastructure.

Now under international law it's not just that a warring party is not supposed to actively target things like that, they are supposed to actively avoid them and seek out only military targets.

So here we see this is where the UN team is saying this is a possible war crime.

And these horrific allegations too of individuals being tortured or subject to sexual attacks.

This is a really really dark picture again of the way Russia appears to be conducting its war against Ukraine.

The UN team was able to visit places that the Russians had occupied which Ukraine has now retaken so cares on Zaporizhia.

There they found widespread evidence of torture of people detained by Russian troops, the suspected

perhaps of passing information to Ukrainian forces, tortured in one case so brutally that the individual died, then sexual violence including of in one case an 83 year old woman.

So again not the conduct of war that the Geneva Convention says armies should be should be following in no way at all.

Yeah and it goes further, the Commission says other claims are still being investigated including on genocide.

What more do we know about this?

This is two pronged things contained in today's report.

First of all there is the suggestion that Ukrainian children have been forcibly transferred to Russia.

Now the UN team says we are getting so little information they really want Moscow to cooperate

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here and says if you've done this who are these children, where are they, they need to be returned and reunited with their parents.

Forcible transfer of children in this way could amount to genocide under the Genocide Convention.

The other thing very interesting I thought that the UN team mentioned today was that the rhetoric in Russian state media and the only media allowed in Russia left now is one that supports the government, that has become so hate filled, so violent that it in and on itself could constitute incitement to genocide.

And folks, shares in the embattled Chinese property company Evergrande have plummeted once again after it said it would delay a plan to restructure its massive debts.

The plan is intended to save the world's most indebted property developer from collapse.

Our reporter Nick Marsh spoke to me from our Asia business hub in Singapore.

Evergrande owes a tremendous amount of money to a lot of people.

Alex, most of it is owed within China, so to people, for example, who've bought houses that haven't been finished, that kind of thing.

But their big concern in terms of survival is actually the 10% that they owe to creditors outside of China, the 31 billion dollars worth of bonds that creditors have bought from Evergrande. Now they defaulted on these debts two years ago, pretty much because the Chinese government said you can't borrow any more money.

They've already borrowed too much, and this is a kind of a bubble forming within the property market.

And since then, over these last two years, they've desperately been scrambling to come up with a repayment plan.

It looked like they were getting close.

They wanted to reissue these debts as new bonds that they'd have to pay back in about 10 years' time, but they can't do that because one of their subsidiaries, which is called Hengda Real Estate, they're under investigation by Chinese regulators for breaching rules around disclosure of data.

They can't issue any new debt, and they're back to the drawing board.

It's a really big blow for Evergrande.

And the fear is that this could spill over into, well, the rest of China's economy.

Yeah, we're hearing a lot about spillover, contagion, whatever you want to call it.

That's completely understandable.

Property is worth about a quarter of the whole of China's GDP.

And obviously, when you think of property collapse, you think of what happened in the United States in 2008, the subprime mortgages, the banking system going into meltdown, global financial crisis.

I think the general consensus that I get when I speak to China experts, economists, people like that, is that firstly, China's property sector isn't as plugged into the broader financial system as the American one was, because over there you had banks literally buying and selling people's mortgages and things like that.

And also, that banks are better protected and regulated in China, so that kind of collapses less likely.

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And also, in terms of the effect on the wider world, China's financial system is nowhere near as dominant as the US wants.

So in theory, a collapse wouldn't have the same devastating consequences as we saw in the US in 2008.

Obviously that's all in theory.

That's not to say that China doesn't have a big, big problem with its property sector.

There's so many more houses that have been built than people who want to buy them.

And so many companies have exposed themselves to such huge amounts of debt that that readjustment

between the supply of houses and the demand for them and therefore the property values.

That's going to be a really long and painful readjustment for the economy and for the people as a whole.

Nick Marsh in Singapore.

The Danish toy giant Lego has ditched plans to make its famous children's building blocks from recycled plastic bottles claiming the new material actually led to higher emissions, as Jacob Evans explains.

Back in 2021, Lego revealed it had made a new brick made from recycled bottles.

The move was heralded as a big step towards a greener future, but after two years of testing, its plans have fallen to pieces.

Lego discovered that making its famous bricks from recycled bottles actually produced higher carbon emissions than before.

Currently, most Lego pieces are made using something called ABS, a special type of plastic that gives Lego bricks their durability and their famous ability to be stuck together and pulled apart.

But to make a kilo of ABS, Lego needs two kilos of crude oil, hence the wish to shrink its polluting footprint, but replacing ABS has proved difficult, with Lego's head of sustainability Tim Brooks saying it's like trying to make a bike out of wood rather than steel.

Lego is now turning its attention to making the existing ABS bricks more sustainable by using more recycled material and tripling its spending on sustainability by 2025.

It's quite easy to disarm mines, but the threat is changing, and more and more the Russians prepare booby traps around the minefields.

The painstaking work to clear Ukraine's minefields.

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The jailed Russian opposition politician Vladimir Karamazov has been transferred to a maximum security prison in Siberia.

His whereabouts had been unknown for several weeks after he was removed from a detention centre in Moscow.

Mr Karamazov, who's widely seen as a political prisoner and who has survived two poisonings since 2015, was given a 25-year prison sentence in April after being accused of treason and spreading false information about the war in Ukraine.

My colleague, Victoria Uwan-Kunda, spoke to his wife, Evgenia Karamazov, who is currently in France.

This decision has not come as a surprise.

My husband has received, so far, the longest sentence against the Russian opposition politician in Russia for standing up to Vladimir Putin.

And I do realise that the regime sees my husband as a personal enemy for his involvement in the advocacy for the Magnitsky sanctions since 2010, the personal targeted sanctions that are used against human rights violators now around the world.

So this sentence did not come as a surprise.

And of course, the fact that Vladimir will be serving this sentence in a strict regime prison colony, where he was indeed brought on the 21st of September, where he was put straight away into a punishment cell.

So now he's been kept in a punishment cell of the strict regime prison colony in Siberia, 3,000 kilometres away from Moscow.

Have you been able to speak to him?

I have not had direct contact with Vladimir since, well, actually, end of August, I was lucky to have a short phone conversation with him.

And the last time the lawyers actually saw him was on August the 28th.

On September the 4th, he was sent on this transfer and, well, the lawyers were just recently able to locate him in this prison.

And there hasn't, of course, been any direct contact.

How were his spirits when you last spoke to him in August?

Well, his spirits have always been high.

And he says that it is the fact that he is a historian by formation, by education, that makes him an optimist.

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He says that it's not just this silly optimism of someone who doesn't know anything, but the optimism of a man who knows how history works.

And he believes that all dictatorships end in the same way.

So yeah, his spirits are always high.

And he manages to keep his sense of humour, which I'm sure helps him survive as it helps survive so many Soviet dissidents before him.

Of course, his sense of humour keeps me going as well.

Evgenia Karamoza.

Ukraine is now the most heavily mined country in the world, with hundreds of thousands of explosive devices littering the ground, slowing Kyiv's offensive operations.

Now, members of the Ukrainian Army are receiving specialist training from British Army bomb disposal teams in how to clear Russian minefields.

The members of the Royal Engineers, also known as SAPPAs, faced similar deadly obstacles in Afghanistan.

Our defence correspondent, Jonathan Beale, has been to see the training taking place.

OK, your mission today is to clear all these defensive positions so we can occupy them.

At a military base in southeast Poland, British Army engineers prepare a team of Ukrainian SAPPAs for the most deadly of tasks.

Clear and occupy and gather intelligence from this building.

Clearing their way through a field laid with potentially deadly surprises.

Mines and booby traps, this time without the explosives.

Captain Chris Wilson is from 3-5 Engineer Regiment.

The important thing is that we're training them the correct skills and drills, that they can replicate for themselves on the battlefield to ensure that their survivability and their safety goes up.

The squawk of the mine detector is very familiar to some of these British trainers too, who have had to do this in Afghanistan.

But the threat facing the Ukrainian SAPPAs is way beyond what was faced in the heat and dust of Hellman.

Russia has laid hundreds of thousands of mines scattered over an area the size of Florida and in some places those minefields are 10 kilometres deep.

Back home dense Russian minefields have slowed down Ukraine's advances, repeatedly stalled its offensive.

Like most of those being trained in Poland, Den is an already experienced military engineer. He's also lost comrades.

He says Ukraine simply doesn't have enough SAPPAs to deal with the threat.

Would you describe being a SAPPAs in Ukraine at the moment as being the most dangerous job in the world?

Yes, absolutely.

What message would you like to send the West?

Keep going.

We need your help because we won't make it by our own.

It's not just the industrial scale, it's the variety too.

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We have projectiles, some RPG, rock propel grenades, mortars, anti-vehicle mines. They're also having to work within range of enemy fire. They're being targeted, so most of their work has to be done at night. Igor has already lost 10 members of his explosive ordnance team. He says they're having to deal with hundreds of devices a day. It's quite easy to disarm mines but the threat is changing and more and more the Russians prepare booby traps around the minefields. That's making it more difficult for us. Individually really good skills, you've literally found everything that was out today. It's not just the Ukrainian engineers who are learning here, so too are the British trainers whose expertise they specifically requested. Staff Sergeant Kev Engstrom is another who's served in Afghanistan. We're fellow soldiers at the end of the day and we share experiences throughout the course of our experiences and their experiences and we train together. The course is just a few weeks respite. All the time the Ukrainian sappers can spare before they go back to the front to risk their lives for their comrades. Our defence correspondent Jonathan Beal. A man known as the last godfather has died aged 62 after falling into a coma. Mateo Messina Denaro spent 30 years on the run from authorities over his ties to the Sicilian mafia but was finally arrested in January after seeking treatment for cancer. Stephanie Prentice told me more. This was a man who was born into a mafia family. He was the son of a mafia boss, his brother and sister were in the mafia and by the time he rose to the top of the ranks he was Italy's most wanted criminal. Now he's said to have been active in organised crime as a young teenager to have first killed someone when he was 18. In terms of his character he was known for liking fast cars, designer clothes being somewhat flashy compared to his predecessors but also for being cunning and for being ruthless in his pursuit of power. He was nicknamed diabolic and the Costa Nostra mob that he eventually became the leader of was responsible for crimes that shocked the public in Italy, some of which actually sparked the crackdown of the mob in the 90s which saw Mr Denaro having to go on the run. Authorities and judges at the time they were just aggressively pursuing those mafia bosses. During that time Mr Denaro was convicted in absentia of dozens of murders though he's reported as actually saying he'd killed in his words enough people to fill a graveyard. Now that included the killings of a prominent anti-mafia prosecutor and a judge in the 90s when the mafia insistly just had a real hold on that region. It included the kidnapping of a 12 year old boy for two years while trying to blackmail his parents, he was eventually murdered and dissolved in acid and bombings in Rome, Florence and Milan that killed 10 people and really terrified people there. Just what do we know about how he got caught and how he died? Well he was on the run for three decades, he was Italy's biggest fugitive but police

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said they were disappointed to learn that he'd been hiding close to his hometown for a lot of that time and living a relatively normal life.

They put that down to the culture of fear around the mafia in that region but they put wiretaps on the phones of his friends and family, recorded some quite ambiguous conversations about an unnamed person having treatment for cancer and they used that to sort of hone in on him.

They checked medical records in the area to see if anyone was being treated and he'd been getting treatment for colon cancer using a false name and it was a name that did have ties to an old mafia boss so they used that to eventually get to him.

Now the police at the time said they believed he held the key to numerous unsolved crimes including dozens of murders but it's said that he refused to give any information to the police, some reports say he actually denied being the mafia at all and now of course that knowledge has died with him.

Stephanie Prentice, some good news now from the natural world, numbers of one of the most endangered animals, the rhinoceros have increased slightly to 27,000 in spite of the twin threats of poaching and mass habitat loss.

Dr. Sam Ferrera is the scientific officer of the African Rhino Specialist Group.

In the last year we've seen an increase of about 5.5% of Africa's rhinos and that is a big increase because big animals like rhinos don't necessarily breed fast like rats and mice.

So that kind of an increase in one year is a remarkable achievement.

And rhinos play a big role in Africa, they can play ecological roles and so forth but people relate to them quite strongly with regards to their cultures, some of the benefits that they can get from rhinos for example medicinal use of rhino dung is a good example and rhinos are of course a very large animal and we certainly know that right across African systems when you have got large animals they tend to do other things for other species like a rhino create grass areas where other species can graze like for example volibius or impala and those sort of aspects have got big spin-offs for ecosystem resilience or how well the ecosystem is functioning and of course as humans are quite dependent on nature and the services it provides.

So yes they do play a very important role in creating and making sure that some of these functions and surveillance systems are still there.

And certainly what we see is that when you have partnerships where rhinos are where people are working together have got higher population growth rates than the ones where there's just one or two groups working and I think that's important you know holding hands is a really important aspect in achieving these outcomes for rhinos.

Dr Sam Ferrera.

And that's all from us for now but there will 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 is globalpodcast@bbc.co.uk you can also find us on X formerly known as Twitter at Global NewsPod.

This edition was mixed by George Baines and the producer was Anna Murphy.

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The editor is Karen Martin.

I'm Alex Ritzen until next time goodbye.

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