

[Transcript] Global News Podcast / Hamas releases mother and daughter US hostages held in Gaza

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This is the Global News Podcast from the BBC World Service. I'm Nick Miles, and in the early hours of Saturday, the 21st of October, these are our main stories. An American mother and daughter have become the first hostages to be freed by Hamas out of the 200 or so seized during the Islamist bloody attacks inside Israel. With Israel still pounding Gaza, the Palestinian Red Crescent says Israeli forces have ordered the evacuation of a hospital said to be sheltering more than 2000 displaced civilians. In other news, a third close associate of Donald Trump has pleaded guilty to taking part in an attempt to falsify the 2020 election results. Also in this podcast, it's fashionable to admire the opera house built to epitomize the old sailing ships. It's an architect's dream and a challenging curves to the straight glass and steel structures that now make the skyline. The Sydney Opera House, one of the most famous buildings in the world, celebrates its fifth-death birthday.

The US President Joe Biden says he's overjoyed at the release of two American hostages being held in Gaza. Mother and daughter Judith and Natalie Ranan have been reunited with family members and returned to a military base in Israel. They were among the 200 or so people abducted by Hamas during the raids on southern Israel two weeks ago. Hamas, designated as a terror organization by many Western governments, including the UK, has said the two hostages were freed for humanitarian reasons. Here's the US Secretary of State, Anthony Blinken.

There are still 10 additional Americans who remain unaccounted for in this conflict. We know that some of them are being held hostage by Hamas, along with an estimated 200 other hostages held in Gaza. They include men, women, young boys, young girls, elderly people from many nations. Every single one of them should be released.

I spoke to our correspondent Paul Adams, who's in Jerusalem, and asked him how did these releases come about? The first thing we heard was a post on social media from Hamas itself. Hamas spokesman saying that the release was coming of two American women, a mother and daughter, and it said that that was happening for humanitarian reasons. There was a flurry of excitement and speculation immediately after that, and eventually Israel confirmed that indeed Judith and Natalie Ranan had been handed over to representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross and then delivered to Israel. They were taken to a military base somewhere in the center of the country, and a photo emerged a bit later on of the two women walking with Israeli soldiers, looking drawn and exhausted,

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but seemingly unharmed. And what's the reaction from Israel being so far?

Well, obviously, this is the first bit of genuinely good news that Israelis have experienced in the last two unbelievably bleak weeks. So there was a great sense of excitement. Again, not much in the way of an explanation as to how this came about, but there was a little bit of insight in the words of Mark Regev, a senior advisor to Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who said that this was basically the result of force and diplomacy. I think Hamas understands it's under amazing pressure, both diplomatic and of course Israeli military might, and I think that's forcing Hamas to try to do things and including release hostages. We will keep the pressure up. We think that is the best way to get more people out. So, Paul, Mr Regev there, suggesting that it was pressure on Hamas that led to these releases. What impact, if any, might this have on Israel's preparation for a land invasion of Gaza or allowing aid into Gaza? I think the aid situation is a separate one, although some people are speculating tonight that maybe the release of hostages could unlock that aid convoy that's been sitting there on the Egyptian side of the border waiting to go in and delayed today, but I think clearly the whole hostage situation is a massive complication in terms of Israel's overall objective, which is to go into Gaza and deal with Hamas, its political and military structures once and for all. Israel has been under enormous pressure from its own citizens, many of whom have been pleading on behalf of missing relatives and, of course, foreign governments, in particular the United States, also wanting to try and do everything possible to secure the release of hostages before any large-scale military operation was underway. I get a slight sense tonight from the words of the Foreign Ministry of Qatar, which has obviously played a key role in this because it has these close links with Hamas, that they feel that this dialogue that led to the release of the two hostages today could result in further releases, perhaps in the coming days. And so I think that could push back the prospect of any wide-ranging, large-scale military incursion a bit further, although I think it's probably safe to say that Israel will continue to conduct all sorts of operations, both in terms of air raids and smaller incursions on the ground as they try to prepare the ground for their ultimate objective of eliminating Hamas altogether.

Paul Adams in Jerusalem there. Well, James Menendez spoke to the rabbi connected to the family of the released hostages. He asked Rabbi Dov Klein, who is in Evanston outside Chicago, for his reaction to the releases. I was ecstatic. I mean, I couldn't ask for anything more exciting and better. I mean, we've known you this for 15 years here in Evanston and her daughter Natalie and the fact that they were released. We've been praying, we've been doing vigils, and the fact that they've been released is an unbelievable miracle. So I'm extremely happy. It's extremely excited and extremely ecstatic. This has been unbelievable, wonderful news. And the same token though, it's a little bit bittersweet because we know that there are additional 203 other hostages that Hamas has. And of course, we are going to continue to pray for the release of every single hostage that they should be able to go back home to their family and friends. Do you know why Judith and Natalie may have been released as the first hostages to be released? Until we hear directly from them, I don't know if we will really know. But one of the things I said two weeks ago to my congregation is we were talking and crying and praying. I said, if anyone's going to be released first, it's going to be Yehudit because she has so much hope. This is a woman

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filled with unbelievable joy. Her eyes light up. She's helpful. But she also has a tremendous amount of hope. And the Lubbara Tireba said, a person, a track good, a person who thinks positively, positive things will happen for them. And I have no doubt that Yehudit was being positive, was being strong, and was doing whatever she needed to do in order to bring about the release of her and her daughter. Rabbi, the statement from Hamas talked about releasing them on humanitarian grounds. I mean, obviously, that could mean anything. I mean, I don't want to pry too much, but had either of them been ill, are they well as far as you know?

Up until this incident, I was personally not aware of any ailment. That doesn't mean something privately wasn't going on that she didn't disclose to me because Yehudit wasn't a person who would talk about herself and her needs. She was always worried about other people's needs.

And this must have been hugely shocking when they were taken on the 7th of October for your congregation, because they were visiting relatives at that kebutz in southern Israel.

Is that right? Yes, they were visiting relatives. We were beyond shocked. We were extremely, extremely surprised. The reason that we were so surprised was, of all people, you know, you have so many people in Israel, millions of people, you know, two people who we knew were taken. So we were extremely shocked. We were extremely surprised. We just been praying for them,

you know, just non-stop. And I'm just so happy that they're the first two passages to be released. That was the Rabbi Dov Klein. Hamas has said that Qatar helped mediate the releases of the hostages. Well, Christian Fraser spoke to Marwan Mwasha, a former foreign minister of Jordan and longtime diplomat, and asked him for his reaction to the releases, and for more on any so-called back-channel discussions that may have taken place.

That's obviously great news, Christian. You know, targeted civilians should never be condoned. And I hope that this is part of the process in which there are negotiations. I know there are negotiations going on as we speak in order to either, you know, deter Israel from going all the way to Gaza or having it done, you know, in a different way. The bottom line is, we do need to stop Habasist fire first and engage in a political process later. And if this is the prelude to that, then that's extremely good news. Why do you think they released these two hostages? They are American citizens. There are other hostages that we know were badly injured before they were taken across the border. So why these particular two? Is it a message, do you think, from Hamas? I truly cannot tell at this stage. I'm not privy to what has been going on. But the very fact that Hamas did release hostages is a good sign. It means that there are negotiations going on. And like I said, I hope it's part of a bigger deal than the two hostages, but obviously it's a good sign. That was Marwan Mwasha, a former foreign minister of Jordan. The Palestinian Red Crescent says Israeli forces have ordered the evacuation of the Al-Quds hospital in Gaza. The hospital has 400 patients and is also reported to be sheltering more than 2,000 displaced civilians. The Red Crescent said it's calling on the international community to act urgently to avert another catastrophe. Meanwhile, Hamas health officials say continuing Israeli airstrikes have now killed more than 4,100 people in Gaza. Hamas attacked Israel on the 7th of October, killing more than 1,400 people. BBC Arabic's Adnan El-Bush reports from a neighbourhood in central Gaza on the impact of the bombardments that happened on Thursday night into Friday morning.

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Overnight, it's been completely destroyed. 32 tower plucks each containing dozens of flats are now totally gone. They told us to evacuate at around 8.30 or 9 at night.

We ran through the streets. Then Israel started bombing the area non-stop, from 9 until 7 this morning. You can see all of this destruction.

Umusalim lived in one of these blocks of flats. She tells me all the families in her tower are now living stranded in the streets of Gaza with nowhere to go.

Other residents say many people remain trapped. We cannot bring people out from under the rubble.

Ambulances cannot get here. We cannot pull the bodies out. People are screaming, but we cannot pull them out. Last night's attack took many residents by surprise.

As people told me that it has been a relatively calm area in Gaza.

We are civilians living peacefully in our homes. Why are you bombing us and ruining our lives?

As we were filming here, a new warning came in from the Israeli army telling people to evacuate.

We have now left because it's dangerous, but the reality is for many people still there.

There is nowhere safe to go.

Well throughout Friday, all eyes were on the Egyptian border with Gaza.

Wood Delores parked up at the Rafa crossing loaded with food, water and essential medicines for the territory finally start rolling. Well, they didn't, leaving more than two million people in urgent need. Egypt and Israel still can't strike a deal to get the aid flowing,

which explained the presence of the UN Secretary General at the border crossing on Friday, appealing for the trucks to roll. The BBC's Andrew Harding now reports from northern Egypt.

He's been to Al-Arish, close to the Gaza border, where a consignment of essential supplies has arrived by air from Jordan. High above the Egyptian desert, a consignment of humanitarian aid on its way towards the besieged territory of Gaza.

This military plane from nearby Jordan has brought medical equipment, including bandages and syringes. They join other supplies being offloaded here in Egypt just a few kilometers from the border crossing into Gaza. And inside Gaza, more signs of growing hunger and desperation. People scrambling to buy a few remaining chickens in crowded cities that remain entirely cut off from the outside world. No wonder there's such pressure to get this aid in.

This is an operation fraught with risk. The aim is to channel vast amounts of humanitarian aid into Gaza through one narrow border crossing amid continuing Israeli airstrikes, amid genuine Israeli fears that this route could be used by their enemy Hamas to smuggle in more weapons, and amid the constant risk that at any moment an Israeli ground offensive could put a stop to all of this. But first, the border itself needs to open. A logjam of over a hundred trucks packed with aid still stuck on the Egyptian side as negotiations drag on. So when the United Nations Secretary General arrived at the border this afternoon, he did not hide his frustration. Behind these walls, we have two million people that is suffering enormously. That has no water, no food, no medicine. Nearby, an angry crowd demanding the border be opened and the siege of Gaza lifted. Andrew Harding in Northern Egypt. Still to come in this podcast, the tech tycoon Elon Musk is bringing in two new paid-for subscription formats for his social media platform X. Two tiers of X premium will be launched soon. The entrepreneur posted online that one tier will be at a lower cost with all features but no reduction in adverts. The second tier is more expensive but has no ads. Before we move on, here's Andrew Peach with news of this

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week's happy pot. Yes, there's an animal theme this week with stories about whales in Australia that like to play with seaweed and a cat in Pennsylvania that wears glasses to encourage young children to wear their glasses too. We've got innovation to offset climate change in Kenya, Andy who managed to play croquet at the top of a mountain in Sequoia National Park in California and Caroline who listens to the happy pod and got in touch to let us hear her children's orchestra in Bogota in Colombia. So please join us for half an hour of uplifting stories from around the world in the happy pod available in this feed every Saturday.

Oh wow, oh my god, I'm so excited, thank you. That's the sound of Casey getting a random act of helpfulness. We just told him the helpful SoCal Honda dealers will be replacing his old manual wheelchair with a brand new power wheelchair and we paid him for sharing that story

on the radio and we can help you too with a great deal on a reliable award-winning Honda like the 2023 Accord. To find the helpful SoCal Honda dealer near you and to submit a random act of helpfulness for someone you know, visit SoCalHondaDealers.com.

Welcome back to the Global News Podcast, now to other news. A third person close to Donald Trump has pleaded guilty in the 2020 US election interference case in the state of Georgia. The lawyer, Kenneth Chesbro, has been charged for his role in what prosecutors describe as a conspiracy to overturn the election in favor of Mr. Trump. Nomia Iqbal reports. Kenneth Chesbro will no longer face a trial next week. He took a plea deal last minute in the wide-ranging criminal racketeering indictment. He'll now face a single felony charge of conspiracy to commit filing of false documents. He potentially could get a prison sentence and a large fine. He has agreed to truthfully testify against the remaining co-defendants, something two others, including Donald Trump's former lawyer Sidney Powell, has also agreed to do.

This is a victory for prosecutors as it adds real momentum to their case against Mr. Trump and his remaining co-defendants. Nomia Iqbal. Police in Brazil have arrested two agents of the Intelligence Agency and carried out 25 search and seizure warrants as part of an investigation into illegal surveillance. The alleged irregularities happened in the run-up to last year's election. Leonardo Rosha reports. Federal police agents raided homes and offices in five Brazilian states. Police say the phone hacking targeted members of the Supreme Court, as well as politicians, lawyers and journalists linked to the opposition. The agency allegedly used sophisticated spying software to listen to more than 30,000 phone calls in the run-up to last year's election, in which Mr. Bolsonaro was defeated by the veteran left-wing leader, Luis Inácio Lula da Silva. Leonardo Rosha. Now to West Africa, and lawyers representing the deposed president of Niger, Mohamed Bazoum, say allegations made by the military government that

he attempted to escape house arrest are false because he's being held unlawfully. Mr. Bazoum and his family have been confined to their homes since he was forced from office at the end of July. James Reynolds heard more from our West Africa correspondent, Mayani Jones, who's monitoring events from Lagos in neighbouring Nigeria. Spokesperson for the Junta came on television late on Thursday and said that Mr. Bazoum and his family, he's been detained with his son and his wife, as well as two members of staff, tried to escape in the early hours of Thursday, they say around three. And their plan, according to the Junta, was to leave the presidential

palace where some cars were waiting for them. Those cars would drive them to the outskirts of the city, of the capital, Nyami, and then from there they were allegedly going to be going on two helicopters owned by unnamed and unnamed foreign power that would take them here to neighbouring Nigeria. But this is something that Mr. Bazoum's team of lawyers has disputed. They say

that Mr. Bazoum wasn't trying to escape detention because he's been detained illegally.

Now that might seem kind of like just legal wrangling, but I think they're using this opportunity to push the message that Mr. Bazoum's human rights are being infringed, that he hasn't had access to any of his lawyers, and they say that this is unacceptable for former head of state to be treated this way. Can anyone go and knock on the door and try and find him, his lawyers or his supporters? Yeah, that's very tricky right now because nobody knows where he is since this incident.

The only person that had been seen him was his doctor. Apparently he was going to see the family every other day, and today he apparently went to see the family with some food for them and wasn't given access, and I think that that might have been what triggered this statement by his lawyers saying that his human rights are being abused. Not only does he not have access to his lawyers, but he now doesn't have access to his doctor. Manny, in the introduction I talked about the military government in Niger. In practical terms, how is the military government ruling the country? So the junta has been in power since late July, as you've mentioned, and they're still enjoying, I was in Niger a couple of weeks ago, they are still enjoying what seems like quite a bit of popular support on the streets of Niame. People were frustrated with Mr. Bazoum's party who's been

in power for many years. They felt that it was corrupt even though Mr. Bazoum himself was seen as a reformist. They were worried that previous members of other administrations were too influential

in power, there was still too much corruption going on. So they are happy to see the military junta in power. What's not clear is how they plan to rule. What they've done so far is to kick out the French, who are the former colonial power in Niger. They've asked the UN to leave as well, because they accused them of colluding with the French to try and reinstatement Mr. Bazoum into power. This is something that the UN obviously denies, and they say it's going to cause a lot of distress to people in Niger who are very poor, despite the country being mineral-rich and also affected by terror-related violence. And so the way they've ruled so far is by it's kicking out former allies, Western allies that were helping them in this fight against terrorism. But it's not clear. They haven't really established what they plan to do for the country, how they plan to develop it, how they plan to fight terrorism themselves. We've seen an uptick in terror attacks in Asia since the coup. Marnie Jones in Nigeria. The tech tycoon Elon Musk says his social media platform X, formerly known as Twitter, is to offer two new tiers of premium subscription.

Some users already pay nearly \$9 a month for its blue tick service. It's unclear whether there will be a free version of the platform. Here's our technology reporter, Shona McCullum.

As ever with this kind of announcement from Elon Musk, the detail is thin. But what we do know is that two tiers of X premium will be launched soon. The entrepreneur posted online that one tier will be at a lower cost with all features but no reduction in adverts. The second tier is more expensive but has no ads. It's not clear if there will be any free option. This development comes as X started charging new users in New Zealand and the Philippines a dollar a year for accessing the

platform. One of the main issues with X has been how to monetize it and this is Mr Musk's latest attempt. He's always said that his solution for getting rid of bots and fake accounts is to charge for the service but since his tenure as boss began advertisers have left in their droves.

Shona McCullum. On Friday the Sydney Opera House was 50 years old. It's probably one of the most famous buildings in the world. It's not the Taj Mahal or the Eiffel Tower but in terms of recently constructed buildings it is right up there. The Opera House is Australia's most popular tourist destination welcoming more than 10 million visitors annually. It was big news right from the start as this 1967 report suggests. And it's fashionable to admire the Opera House built to epitomize the old sailing ships. This controversial and lovely Opera House has bust its budgeted costs so badly that only a lottery can now finance it. It's an architect's dream and a challenging curves to the straight glass and steel structures that now make the skyline. Owen Bennett Jones spoke to Tristram Khafre, Deputy Global Chair of Arup, the company responsible for the engineering of the Opera House and its layers of soaring concrete sails. So was the building difficult to construct with its unusual shapes? Well I would say it was difficult to design to make it constructable to build but in the end actually it was built very easily. Right you surprised me there so because I mean I imagine an architect came up with a hopelessly impractical plan to have these soaring concrete structures and then you as the engineers were stuck there thinking how on earth do we do that? Yes a bit like that. The architect actually had a romantic notion a beautiful notion for a very lyrical extraordinary building to be built on the end of Benelong Point but actually even the material to be used whether it was concrete or steel was still to be determined.

But working together architect and engineer you know we rationalize the geometry to be something that could then be mass produced and erected on site in a very elegant construction process.

Tell us about the geometry you had to get your slide rules out did you? Yes indeed and in fact we only made it work by the use first one of the first uses of digital computers in construction and design so we're using the big computers in the basements of universities firstly in England and then then in Australia but the main thing as I say was to take what started as an irrational geometry a sketch and turn it into something that was both rational and repetitive in fact all the surfaces of the building built are taken from the same sphere the same ball the same football if you like or or orange. Orange you've lost me there so you get an orange on a on a piece of paper you get a sphere on a piece of paper and you're trying to work out how to make it solid so that a can be built and b won't collapse. Absolutely definitely won't collapse and as you say to be built but actually it's a hollow sphere or a hollow orange but the the concrete ribs that make up the sails the dominant part of the opera house what gives it its unique image its beauty if you like the glistening tiled sails they are made from concrete ribs which are in effect the same as the segments of an orange and what I mean by that is they repeat so each one can be made out of concrete ribs cast in the same mold out of individual pieces that are then lifted into place glued together with epoxy glue and we're talking now you know something being done in the early 60s

and then clamped together using steel um tendons high strength steel strands so then jacked to hold each bit of concrete to each other bit of concrete and in the end we get an integral structure and all this was done out on ben along point in the full public view over a period of years obviously not that many years but a few years and so in some ways this construction was the first public performance of the opera house. Tristram Kalfrey and that's all from us for now but before

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we go here's Jackie Leonard with details of another special podcast on the Israel Gaza conflict. Yes thanks Nick as you might remember a week ago we put listeners questions about Israel and Gaza to

our correspondents in the region Lees, Doucette and Jeremy Bowen and the response was such that we're doing it again obviously a great deal has happened since the last edition this time we have questions about the hostages about the Israeli policy of telling civilians to vacate northern Gaza what Hamas wants and the UN response the global news podcast special edition will be up early on Saturday and if you want to comment on this podcast or the topics covered in it you can send us an email

the address is globalpodcast at bbc.co.uk you can also find us on x formally known as twitter at global news pod this edition was mixed by Chris Hansen the producer was Lear McChefrey the editor is Karen Martin I'm Nick Miles and until next time goodbye