

[Transcript] Global News Podcast / Hollywood actor Kevin Spacey cleared of sex assault charges

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This is the Global News podcast from the BBC World Service.

I'm Janet Jalil and in the early hours of Thursday, the 27th of July, these are our main stories. A court in London has found the US actor Kevin Spacey not guilty of sex offences.

Shots have been fired during an apparent coup attempt in Niger

by soldiers from the Presidential Guard. The Dutch Coast Guard has warned that a fire on a ship carrying a cargo of thousands of cars could burn for days.

Also in this podcast.

Nothing compares, nothing compares to you.

The Irish singer-songwriter Sinead O'Connor has died at the age of 56.

The Hollywood star Kevin Spacey has been cleared of all nine charges in his sexual assault trial here in London. Mr. Spacey wept as the verdicts were read out.

The allegations which covered a period of more than a decade from 2001 to 2013 concerned four men.

After more than 12 hours of deliberation, the jury acquitted the Oscar-winning actor.

Mr. Spacey emerged soon after from the court to make this brief statement.

I imagine that many of you can understand that there's a lot for me to process after what has just happened today.

But I would like to say that I'm enormously grateful to the jury for having taken the time to examine all of the evidence and all of the facts carefully before they reached their decision.

And I am humbled by the outcome today.

I also want to thank the staff inside this courthouse, the security and all those who took care of us every single day, my legal team. That's all I have to say for the moment. Thank you very much. Our reporter at the court, Anjana Gadgill, told us more.

He was emotional when he stood outside court talking to all the assembled members of the press. He was also very articulate thanking the jurors for reaching the outcome that they did and also the staff here at Southern Crown Court. He's been present throughout the trial and before he left the building he actually spoke to at least five of the jurors and kissed a female member of security staff on both cheeks as did other members of his legal team as they left the building.

And he was emotional too in the dock. He cried. He was in tears as those nine not guilty verdicts were read out. And it's worth reminding people of how this all began. Yes, Sir Kevin Spacey was accused of sexual assaulting four men between 2001 and 2013, seven counts of sexual assault and two other sexual offences and he was acquitted of all nine charges. Over the past month however

in Southern Crown Court he's heard himself described as a vile sexual predator. Jurors have heard about

alleged aggressive crotch grabbing and other sexual grabbing against three men while another of the

four accused him of performing a sex act on him whilst he was asleep at Mr Spacey's home. Mr

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Spacey

denied all the charges describing him as madness and a stab in the back. He did say that he was flirtatious by nature but he said that crotch grabbing wasn't something that he would do. That this trial has gathered huge interest from across the globe because of who he is, a two-time Oscar-winning actor best known probably for American beauty, the usual suspects and House of Cards as well as his role as an artistic director at a London theatre, the old Vic. And they were big names brought in as character witnesses. Sir Elton John and David Furnish has gathered a huge amount of interest across the world. As you say he did have a glittering career before these allegations emerged but this trial has had an absolutely devastating effect on his career and on him personally. Yes he said that his world exploded, he said that he lost his job and he lost his reputation and he hasn't been able to work since his allegations were first made in 2017. During the trial the defence said that Mr Spacey had led an odd life, a life that can turn against you when you're tried by social media and that's what Kevin Spacey himself has said that he was on trial by social media and that his career had been cancelled. After these not guilty verdicts when he spoke outside court he said that he has a process now to go through and no doubt part of that process on his 64th birthday is about how to re-establish what was as you say a glittering career. Anjana Gadkill. While staying in the UK and a British man who spent the best part of two decades in prison for a rape he didn't commit has had his conviction overturned. Andrew Markinson had always insisted he was innocent. He was jailed based on identification evidence but the DNA of another man was later found on the victim's clothing. Police have apologised for what they called a grave miscarriage of justice. Mr Markinson said he felt like he'd been kidnapped by the state. Our home and legal affairs correspondent Dominic Cassiani was at the hearing. After 17 years in jail Andy Markinson today walked out of the course of appeal an innocent man. It said his conviction should be quashed because overwhelming DNA evidence linked another suspect to the rape victim. That evidence could have been found years ago as the 57 year old sat with his hands clasped. Lord Justice Holroy told him that after waiting so many years he could finally leave court a free man. Mr Markinson having waited so many years you leave the court a free man no longer subject to the conditions of your life licence. Supporters crowded around Mr Markinson hugging him and each other and applauded the judges as they left. Outside

court he spoke for the first time in 20 years without a conviction for rape hanging over his entire life. I am not a liar. I am not in denial but I will tell you who is. Greater Manchester Police are liars and they are in denial. Even after this judgement today I predict we will see them denying responsibility for what happened. His case is now one of the worst miscarriages of justice of modern times. Nobody else has spent longer in jail in the 21st century for a conviction that was subsequently overturned. But his battle for justice is not over. He can now claim compensation

and is still demanding answers from Greater Manchester Police. It is refused to be interviewed today but says it is truly sorry. Mr Markinson's lawyers say his case reveals serious flaws in how long it takes for an unsafe conviction to be overturned. They are now lobbying for major legal changes so nobody else endures the ordeal he has been through. Dominic Cassiani. The head of Ukraine's Domestic Intelligence Agency has said that one of its teams was responsible for an

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attack on the Kurch Bridge last October. The bridge links Russia with occupied Crimea and the breaching of its defences was considered a major humiliation for Russia's armed forces. Here's Paul Moss. Ukraine doesn't normally comment on attacks behind enemy lines but it's just issued a stamp to commemorate wartime special operations. And this seems to have emboldened

the head of the country's main security service. Speaking at the launch, Vasyl Malyuk revealed it was his people who assaulted the Kurch Bridge last October. He didn't give any details but Russia said at the time that a lorry carrying explosives was responsible. Mr Malyuk remained tight-lipped, however, about the more recent attack on the Kurch Bridge, which seems to have been mounted using a sea-based drone. Paul Moss. The Dutch coast guard says a fire on a cargo ship carrying around 3,000 cars off the Netherlands could burn for days. The fire broke out on Wednesday,

killing one person and injuring several others. The vessel was on its way from Germany to Egypt. With more details, here's Anna Holigan. A major salvage operation is in full swing in an area of the North Sea designated a World Heritage Site. A coast guard said the authorities were looking into whether the fire had started with one of the 25 electric cars on board. At least seven crew members jumped overboard to escape the flames and were rescued from the water while the rest were

airlifted to hospital by helicopter where they were treated for breathing difficulties and broken bones. Only the side of the vessel is being sprayed by emergency teams operating from the sea to avoid flooding the deck, sinking the fragile freighter and sparking an environmental catastrophe. Anna Holigan. Soldiers in Niger behind an apparent coup attempt have fired shots to disperse demonstrators supporting President Mohammed Bazoum. He's been held by troops from the presidential guard since early on Wednesday. The African Union, the European Union and the United States have all condemned their actions. In Washington, the spokesman for the National Security Council, John Kirby, called for the release of President Bazoum.

John Kirby. We certainly condemn any effort to detain or to subvert the functioning of Niger's democratically elected government. We're still gathering facts here and that government as you know is led by President Bazoum. We specifically urged the elements of the presidential guard to release him from detention and to refrain from any violence. The president of Niger is a key western ally in the fight against Islamist militancy in West Africa. Our Africa regional editor Will Ross told us more about this apparent coup attempt. There were some shots fired by the soldiers who seem to have surrounded the presidential complex and are holding the president effectively hostage inside there. Now they were shooting warning shots to keep away demonstrators who were moving towards that area who are in support of the president. In other words,

denouncing what appears to be an attempted coup. So it's been a very bizarre situation inside that building. We don't yet know the exact demands of these members of the presidential guard. We're assuming it was an attempt to seize power. We understand that the president of Benin, Patrice Talon, is flying into the country to try and mediate a solution to this. But it is a very tense situation and obviously some worries that it could lead to clashes between the members of the military who are against the president or at least have grievances and those who are supporting him. And this is a country which has seen military coups in the past in a region which has recently

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seen military coups. And it's also a country that's a pivotal western ally in the fight against Islamist militants. Yeah, that's why it's so important and so many countries are watching what's happening very carefully because what's been happening in recent years in this Sahel region is military coups have taken place, notably in Mali and Burkina Faso where there are very serious jihadist insurgencies. And then those military rulers have turned against their kind of traditional military allies, especially France. Whereas in Niger, the United States, France, the EU and others seem to have a fairly strong ally in President Mohammed Bazoum.

Will Ross. Elephant populations have been plummeting for years across Africa. A century ago, 10 million elephants roamed across the continent. But poaching, habitat loss and disease have dramatically cut their numbers. And there are now less than half a million left. But one country has bucked the trend. Botswana has more elephants than any other nation, especially around the Okavango Delta. But as their population has risen, so has conflict with humans, as John Murphy reports from Northern Botswana. Watching herd after herd of elephants rushing across the dust road, heading for their evening drink at the river, is an exhilarating sight. I'd say they were close to 150. Ohiti Seng Musupi, better known as Majita, is our guide. He works for the Eco Exist Trust, which is trying to persuade local people that elephants are not a threat, but an asset. And you can tell with the speed they move whenever they're going to the river. They are thirsty and they need to go and threaten, have and drink some water. Each year, at least one person is killed, trampled by an elephant in this part of Northern Botswana. With populations of both elephants and humans rising, the pressure on space and resources is growing. Local farmers like Dimbo Kajiji Zoro use simple fences, but it's not always possible to prevent a crop raid by these giants. One night I had elephants and I started beating my drum. Then suddenly I had a big splash, like a big boom. It was my water tank. It was pulled down by the elephant. The consequences of a crop raid by elephants can be devastating. A family's annual supply of vegetables gone in one night, or in Dimbo's case, his precious water tank. It'll take him years to save up for another one. Despite that, he still recognises that elephants attract tourists to the area, who bring money and create local jobs. Dr Anna Songhurst is a conservation biologist. If we're thinking about how human population are growing and the needs of people, then the biggest issue that we face is finding ways for people and elephants to coexist in a landscape. All life here depends on the water brought by the annual flood, spreading out into the Okavango Delta. But climate change and population growth further upstream, in Angola especially, where most of the delta's water originates, is already having an impact. Hydrologists and conservationists tell us the real concern is major dams and irrigation projects upstream. For Majita, the immediate task is to do whatever possible to ensure elephants and people live together in peace. If the conflict is not reduced or controlled, we may end up having a situation of elephants killing people and people killing elephants because they'll be fighting for one limited resource. Majita, a field coordinator with the Eco Exist Trust in Botswana, ending that report by John Murphy. Still to come? I'm so looking forward to it. I can't wait anymore because I've been involved in this fantastic journey for years now and now it's becoming real. With a year to go we look at how Paris is getting ready to host the Olympic Games. The Women's World Cup has kicked off in Australia and New Zealand. This World Cup is going to be the biggest, the best and most competitive. Join me, Mani Jasmi, Katie Smith and Maz Faruki for all the

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latest from the tournament on World Football at the Women's World Cup. Just to be in front of that type of crowd, I'm so excited for, you know, like fans always make the experience like 10 times better. That's World Football at the Women's World Cup from the BBC World Service. Find it wherever you get your BBC podcasts. Welcome back to the Global News Podcast. It's not unusual for defendants in the US to make deals with the authorities in order to waive or shorten their sentences and that is what President Biden's son Hunter has been trying to do in a court in Delaware. However, the plea deal he was originally hoping to strike to avoid jail for possession of a gun and late tax payments has fallen apart. So what does this mean for him and for his father, Joe Biden, who is preparing to run for the White House again?

Namia Iqbal is our Washington correspondent. Hunter Biden has struck this deal with federal prosecutors in which he was going to plead guilty to failing to pay taxes for two years and admitting to unlawfully buying a gun. Bear in mind this was the culmination of an almost five-year investigation

that was headed by a prosecutor who was appointed by Donald Trump. Now the idea was that he would

sort of have this plea deal with the gun pass of it in which he'd enter a two-year probation program, stay clean, not commit any offenses and have the gun charges dismissed. But the judge in the case who was also appointed by Donald Trump felt that that might provide him with immunity if

there are further charges or further, you know, cases that he may have to answer for. So they've been given two weeks to come up with a new deal. And the idea is that this is going to, you know, well, the prosecutors have recommended that he doesn't serve any jail time, but a judge will determine the actual sentence in the end. Now, this should be a routine court appearance, but of course it is the president's son. It was never going to be a routine appearance. As you say, it was never going to be a routine appearance, a very politically charged case, which Republicans have been following very closely. How much of a blow is this to President Biden's re-election hopes? It's difficult to say, to be honest with you. The fact is, nothing riles the right wing media or the Republicans more than Hunter Biden. He is this huge fixation for them. There is a congressional investigation going on to him. There is this belief by the Republicans that he is broken foreign lobbying or money laundering laws and that there's all these kind of conspiracy theories about him. And they believe it implicates his father, the president. There is no evidence of that. That's all so far. The investigation into him is ongoing. But look, he was mentioned in the last presidential election during a presidential debate between Donald Trump and Joe Biden. And it didn't affect Joe Biden in that sense. Who knows now, because obviously it's hugely politicized and Donald Trump will use this as an evidence at the Department of Justice. In his mind, the two-tier system, one which goes hard after Republicans and goes soft on Democrats, even though the Democrats in the White House did react today, they didn't go into any details in terms of what they think about the case. But they made the point of saying the Department of Justice is handling it independently and it's been done under the leadership of a prosecutor appointed by Donald Trump. Nomiya Iqbal. Staying in the US, a former member of the military,

turned whistleblower, has told a House of Representatives hearing in Washington that the United States has a program on unidentified anomalous phenomenon, UAPs, known more

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colloquially,

as UFOs, that has been kept from the oversight of politicians. Dave Grush said craft and quote non-human biologics have been recovered and studied. There has been activity by alien or non-human technology and or beings that has caused harm to humans. I can't get into the specifics in an open environment, but at least the activity that I, when I personally witnessed myself and my wife, was very disturbing. Our correspondent John Donison told us more. Today's hearing by the House Oversight and Accountability Committee, well that came about after some fairly remarkable claims earlier this year from a man called David Grush that the US government was secretly holding what he called intact and partially intact alien vehicles, including one as big as a football field, he claimed. And he was one of three witnesses who was questioned today. At the beginning, we heard from the Republican Congressman, Tim Bushett of Tennessee, and he said, look, we're not bringing little green men or flying sources into this hearing. But actually, we did get quite close to that because we had David Grush being asked, for example, whether he was aware if any of the pilots on these alien craft had been seized, I suppose, or material from their bodies has been seized. And he said, yes, that some sort of alien life form had had been seized.

John Donison. Now, should smartphones be banned from the classroom? Do digital devices and technology

actually impede concentration, real understanding and good learning? It's been a debate for a while. Countries like France already have a blanket ban on devices in the classroom. But now UNESCO, UN's Education, Science and Culture Agency, has issued a major report which says excessive screen time has a directly negative effect on a child's educational development. To get more on this, Rebecca Kesby spoke to Kate Redmond, Senior Project Specialist at the Global Education Monitoring Report, part of UNESCO. This is a big global report, and it looks at the way that technology

is being used in education in sort of over 200 countries. There's new analysis and evidence in this GEM report that shows that smartphones in schools distract from what children are trying to learn and will make their overall schools worse at the end of the day. One of the findings I like the most is just it speaks to all of us that a simple buzz or notification on a phone can leave children taking another 20 minutes to be able to concentrate on what they're being taught.

I don't think that just applies to children either. Basically, you're not against IT or technology, but it should be used by the teacher in a constructive, organised way, and it's the personal devices of the child which are the most distracting and have the most negative impact on learning. Yeah, I think the best way to describe this is to look at the different ways that countries are banning smartphone use in schools around the world. So you have, for instance, Singapore and Bangladesh. The most countries in any region to have banned their use in schools are in Central and Southern Asia, in fact, and those countries, for instance, they ban smartphone use in class. They don't ban it in school. France is another example which I like, which bans their use completely, except for a few exceptions. You talk about investment and government investment, and we did see what an amazing impact it had during COVID that lessons could go on remotely by using technology. But it seems as if you're saying that you can't beat human connection when it comes to education and learning. What is it about human connection and conversation and all of those things that is so important about learning at a young age?

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I mean, there's several answers to that question. I mean, one is that there's so much evidence to show that if teachers aren't there and a child is just given sort of technology to learn with, it won't work. And I think a very good example, it might seem a bit old-fashioned now, but not that long ago, there was a massive trend to just give laptops out to every child in every school as much as possible. And that happened a lot in Latin America, for instance, where they gave over a million laptops in Peru, and there were no learning benefits because the way that those laptops were distributed, it wasn't like wrapped into the way that teachers were then supposed to use them in class. And what would you say to the poor, beleaguered parents that can't prize the phone out of the child's hand? What tips would you have to encourage that? I'm sort of laughing because I'm one of those parents. So I don't think there's any simple solution. You know, I've read loads of articles on it and it's hard, but I think that's exactly why the report is speaking to education ministers on this, because we spoke to one teacher in Ireland who was taking matters into her own hand and just banning their use in her school. And she said, look, you know, parents, they're powerless really to stop it. And one thing that schools and or even higher ministries can do is to kind of set some regulations so that some barriers are set. Like technology is great, but it's great up to a limit. And I think those limits are ones that we want governments to sit down and set for themselves so that it's supporting learning and not the reverse. And you can't replace a good teacher. Totally. Yeah. Technology without teachers doesn't work. Kate Redmond from the Global Education Monitoring Report at UNESCO.

The Irish singer, Sinead O'Connor, who's emotional and ethereal rendition of Prince's Nothing Compares to You made her a worldwide star has died at the age of 56. Ireland's t-shirt, Leo Veradka, was among the many who paid tribute to her, calling her talent unmatched and beyond compare. Sinead O'Connor was also known for her outspoken views on politics, religion and mental health. Musician Tim Burgess of the rock band The Charlatteans said she was a true embodiment of a punk spirit who did not compromise. David Slitto looks back at her life.

Sinead O'Connor.

Nothing compares to you.

The emotion. The heartbreak. There's nothing fake here.

Nothing can stop these lonely tears from falling.

Her first hit, Mandinka, marked her out as a performer with an edge.

When a record executive had started talking about her hair, she shaved it off. She'd had a troubled upbringing and spent part of it in care. But she had the voice and the charisma to be a chart-friendly pop star. But saw herself as a protest singer and she was always going to go too far. That moment came when she ripped up a photograph of the Pope on American TV.

A few years later, she declared she was Mother Bernadette, ordained by a breakaway Catholic sect. After that, she announced she had converted to Islam. Her life was turbulent but she was more than open about her struggles, her mental health.

Yeah, I lost my marbles for quite a while. It took a while to get them back but I hope I don't fully get them back. You know, you don't want to be too normal, isn't it? Normal is like a contagious disease. She continued to perform.

I know that living with you, baby, was sometimes hard.

But losing custody of her son, Shane, left her bereft. Then, age 17, he was found dead.

Shenado Connor. Nothing compares. Those were real tears. Nothing compares to you.

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David Slitto, looking back on the life of the Irish singer, Shenado Connor, who has died at the age of 56.

Now to France. And Wednesday marked a year before the start of the 2024 Olympic Games in the French capital. It's the third time Paris has hosted the games. The first time was in 1900, then in 1924. Now it will be hosting them again a century later. In recent days, we've been reporting on how the river Sen has been cleaned up, ready for some of the outdoor swimming events. And Paris organisers are aiming to make other advances in ecology and sustainability to make these greener games. Our sports news reporter, Alex Kappstick, took a trip down the newly cleaned up river to find out more about the city's Olympic plans.

I've joined the party boat as it cruises down the Sen through historical central Paris athletes. The officials are on board. The special guests include the great Usain Bolt. The vibe is positive. What has been described as a game's fit for the future? I'm so looking forward to it. I can't wait anymore because I've been involved in this fantastic journey for years now. And now it's becoming real. It's great for me to...

Tony Estengay is the man in charge of the organising committee. And he knows a thing or two about a successful games. He's a three-time Olympic champion in canoeing. At one year to go, we are still very ambitious. We are still in good shape in terms of timing, in terms of budget. Paris 2024 has already won praise from the IOC, the calling of the landmark games, a new future for the Olympics. Can you sum up what that means? So for us it's a combination of let's have spectacular images, all this backdrop, fantastic backdrop for the celebration of the games, but let's also engage in a new model of the games.

A big part of that new model is a laser focus on the environment. 95 percent of the venues already existed. The largest of only a few new construction projects is the athlete's village. But here wood has replaced steel, there's low carbon cements and natural cooling instead of air conditioning. Elsewhere the games will be the first to be run on renewable energy. Georgina Grenon is Paris 2024's head of sustainability. Reducing our emissions by 50 percent is one of our most important objectives. Major events cannot be run the way they were run before, you know, not with the current climate and environmental issues that we're seeing.

One of the existing venues is the River Seine, which will take center stage for the first-ever opening ceremony outside a stadium. The lower and upper banks of the river we're now passing will be filled with more than half a million spectators, which in light of France's historic issues with security and civil unrest has raised concerns. Deputy Mayor of Paris Pierre Rabadin is responsible for the city's Olympic plans. It's harder to organize than in a stadium, for sure, but we work for a year, especially on a security way, to know if it was possible to have full security to organize this opening ceremony in that place. I mean, can you guarantee spectators and athletes that they are going to be safe in this France? Paris especially has a recent history of civil unrest and demonstrations. Yeah, for sure. You know, when you organize an event, the first things you have to be sure the place will be safe. We work on that point in a full security aspect. But as you can tell from the excitement on the quay as the boat moors up opposite the Eiffel Tower, people here are much more interested in celebrating the one year to go milestone. Not surprisingly, the hope is that headlines are made by the sport and the athletes. One man who knows all about that is guest of honor Usain Bolt.

The Olympics made me why I'm man. It's always exciting. I'm looking forward to coming back next

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year just to see the competition and be in the stadium with the atmosphere and just to feel the energy. So I'm excited to just be a fan next year. So I'm excited to be a part of it. With the year to go, the countdown has begun. New stars and stories will emerge in a changing games with France as ever embracing the revolution. That report by Alex Kappstick in Paris. 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, you can send us an email. The address is globalpodcastatbbc.co.uk. This edition was mixed by Nick Randall, the producer was Liam McCheffrey. The editor, as always, is Karen Martin. I'm Jeanette Jaleel. Until next time, goodbye.