

## [Transcript] Global News Podcast / International concern after Saudi Arabia executes Jordanian accused of drug smuggling

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I'm Jackie Leonard and in the early hours of Monday, the 13th of March, these are our main stories. Saudi Arabia has executed a Jordanian man convicted of drug smuggling. Despite international

concern that he was tortured into confessing. Nicaragua has suspended relations with the Catholic Church after the Pope compared Daniel Ortega's government to the Nazis and Soviet Communists. And the head of the World Health Organization says discovering the origins of the Covid virus is a moral imperative. Also in this podcast, a look back at how people power rocked the Georgian capital to blesi this past week and a notable honor for a French ballet dancer. There has been international concern for years about the case of a Jordanian man on death row in Saudi Arabia convicted of drug smuggling. Now the family of Hussein Abu al-Kher has learnt that without prior warning, he's been executed. They say he was tortured into making a confession. Our World Affairs correspondent Caroline Hawley told us more about him.

Well, he's a Jordanian man, 57 years old, father of eight, and he worked for a wealthy Saudi family as a driver and he was arrested in 2014 driving his car over from Jordan to Saudi Arabia.

The Saudis say that amphetamines were found in his car. His family are convinced they weren't his that he was too poor to have been able to afford nearly that amount of drugs. He was then sentenced in 2015 and convicted after a grossly unfair trial according to Amnesty International. Why did his case attract so much international attention?

That's a good question. I think there were deep concerns about the unfair treatment that human rights groups thought that he was subjected to, maybe because he has a sister in Canada, maybe because the campaign group Reprieve, which campaigns against the death penalty here in London,

made noise about his case. But the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention looked into his case and said it lacked legal basis or his detention lacked legal basis.

And then the UN Human Rights Office called for his release last November and they did that after the Saudi authorities had ended an unofficial moratorium on using the death penalty in cases of drug offences. And after that happened, 17 people were killed in or executed in two weeks

and there was concern for the fate of Hussein Abul-Hair. And the UN Human Rights Group said that he should be released immediately, that he should be given compensation and that his death sentence obviously should be quashed. I understand that you have been in touch with his family before. That's right. I was in touch with his sister Zainab earlier this year. She told me that he'd been strung up by his feet and beaten. She said he never imagined a forced confession would be allowed in his trial. And she just talked about the stress that had been caused to him and his family. He's been on death row for so many years and just not knowing from one day to the next whether this was his last day. And then she told me that in November, when the Saudis resumed executions for drugs related offences, he had seen cellmates go out of his cell never to return. And she just said that whenever she thought about him, her heart was pounding. So just the enormous stress placed upon the family.

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And as far as we're aware, were the family notified that this execution was going to go ahead? No. Well, according to the charity Reprieve, they were not. And they say they've told me in the past that that is standard practice that families often not told in advance. So there was no chance for the family to say goodbye. So far, have Jordan or Saudi Arabia said anything about this execution? I've not seen any response from Jordan, but I've seen the Saudi press agency announcement of the execution. And it said that the Ministry of the Interior was announcing the execution and that in there was that the death penalty had been implemented against Hussein Abul Khair, too. And it's was confirmed the keenness of the kingdom's government to combat drugs of all kinds because of the severe harm they cause to the individual and society. Now, it's worth noting that according to international human rights law, the death penalty is only supposed to be used if at all in the most serious cases and drugs offences don't fall into that category. That was Caroline Hawley. Nicaragua has suspended relations with the Vatican after Pope Francis compared the government of Daniel Ortega to the Nazis under Hitler and the Soviet communists. So why did Pope Francis say such a thing? A question for our America's editor, Leonardo Rosha. That was in an interview that was broadcast two days ago. And the person asked him about the sentence that was given against a Catholic bishop in Nicaragua and asked the Pope what was going on in Venezuela, Nicaragua mainly. And then the Pope said, look, what I see here is like he must be disturbed somehow, the leader, Daniel Ortega. And what I see is him trying to bring back this century, dictatorship like the Soviet dictatorship of 1917 and the dictatorship of Hitler in Germany. And he said it's a rude, crass dictatorship, brutal. And it's completely not in touch with our times. I don't know what's going on. But of course, the background to that is the deterioration of relations between the Catholic Church and the left wing government of Nicaragua. It was bad before because in the past, the Catholic Church supported the conservative governments that were there before. But since there were mass protests five years ago, that was many protesters were arrested and beaten up and killed. The church came out on their side in their defense and then relations began to deteriorate. And there's been an exchange of rude words from both sides. And two weeks ago, the Nicaraguan government, for example, banned the Easter processions in Nicaragua, which is basically some majority Catholic country. So how important to Nicaraguans, to the Nicaraguan public, is Catholicism? It is very important. People there are devout Catholics, but they are Christian, the vast majority of the population. Most of them are Catholics, but there's been an increase in the past decade or so of Christian evangelicals, like you have in Brazil, you have in Colombia, and you have in the US as well. And these evangelicals, they seem to support the Ortega government more than the Catholics. So it's important for people. I think many people will ignore and they will go to church. And many are poor people who will be outside that controversy. But it's very bad for the country. It's very bad for the image of Nicaragua that's been accused of human rights violations. What President Ortega says, this is all part of a plot to get rid of his government. He's a former Marxist rebel in the United States and the Vatican and conservative forces are behind him. He recently described the Catholic church as a mafia and said there was no democracy in the Vatican. How come would they be talking about democracy in Nicaragua? That was Leonardo Rosha. Three years since the World Health Organization characterized the coronavirus outbreak as a pandemic, what do we really know about its origins? There have been almost seven

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million recorded deaths globally and Tedros, at Hanom Gebreyesos, the head of the WHO, says the world

owes it to those people and those suffering from long COVID to get to the bottom of it, as our Asia Pacific editor, Michael Bristo, explained.

He's used Twitter as a platform to get across his thoughts about COVID and this comes exactly three years this weekend since the WHO declared COVID a pandemic. And he's used this platform to essentially say we need to find out the origins of COVID. It's a moral and scientific imperative and all hypotheses are on the table. That's what he says. We have to do that for the millions of people who've died, for those who've got long COVID, and to prevent these kind of things happening again in the future. A great many very intelligent scientific people have been looking into the origins of this thing. As you say, for three years, are we any nearer to know? It doesn't seem that we're any nearer or publicly the WHO haven't expressed the fact that they're any nearer to finding out exactly why it was. We were, we were a couple of years ago, essentially it's come from nature bats and animal, transmitted to humans. But recently there's been the resurgence

of an old idea really that this came from a laboratory leak in China. The Wuhan Institute of Urology is quite near where the market is, where this virus was first detected. And so this idea has come to the fore recently, pushed by the Americans who say they've got fresh evidence. And the WHO are quite angry about this, not just at America, but at China as well for withholding what they see as information. This is what Dr. Maria von Kirkhove said a couple of days ago.

Discussions about someone having evidence without sharing that evidence is useless.

It's rubbish. Any evidence by any institution, any agency, any government, any researcher needs to be shared with WHO so that we can move this scientific debate along. Enough. Enough with this game that's being played. This is not a game to us. It's interesting because she was taking direct aim not just at China, but also at America. Essentially the WHO wants America to release all the raw data which it's gathered, which has led it to come to this conclusion that it was a lab leak in China which caused this virus. And what's China saying? Well, China's really occupying the position it's occupied all along. It's outwardly saying it's doing everything it can to find the origins of the virus, sharing data, that kind of thing. But the last team that went to China from the WHO was two years ago. No team has been back there since you'd think this is such a massive issue. We're trying to prevent future pandemics. You would think that they'd be there almost permanently trying to find out they're not. So that does give credence to the idea that many people put forward that China isn't really cooperating because it doesn't want people to find out that it was the source of this virus. Michael Bristo. Members of the Jehovah's Witness community in the German city of Hamburg cancelled their services after seven people were shot dead

at a meeting hall on Thursday. The attack was carried out by a former member of the religious group who then killed himself. A senior Jehovah's Witness in the city has told our correspondent Jenny Hill that it will take years for the emotional scars to heal. We pray together, we cry together. Michael Cifodaris looks exhausted. He lost two friends in Thursday's attack and says he's barely slept since. A senior member of the Jehovah's Witness community in Hamburg, he's been busy supporting survivors and comforting the bereaved. It's hard to imagine that a group of people are sitting together, reading the Bible, singing and praying together and then all of a

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sudden a scene of love is becoming a scene of hate and death. That the killer was once part of this community made the tragedy particularly hard to bear, he added. Mr Cifodaris said he didn't know why he left and appeared reluctant to talk about him. It's common for those who leave the Jehovah's Witnesses to be cut off by most members of the community, a practice sometimes

referred to as shunning. There are 4,000 Jehovah's Witnesses in the city who usually worship in what are known as kingdom halls. That wary of copycat attacks, they've cancelled all services and are holding meetings online for now. At the site of Thursday's attack, people continue to leave flowers and light candles. What was a place of worship? Now a shrine to the dead.

Jenny Hill. The unique collection of China with royal connections has been found by a family at their home in France and it's expected to reach up to half a million dollars at auction, as Chantal Hartle reports. It's a striking collection, almost a hundred porcelain dessert dishes and plates in total, each engraved in gold and painted with an image of a different animal including an alligator, porcupine and a platypus. They were found in a dining room covered in an 18th century mansion called Chateau de Sassie in Normandy. The collection has not one but two royal

connections. It was commissioned by the French king Louis-Philippe I in the year 1842. It's thought the only time the dishes were used was when Britain's Queen Elizabeth visited the chateau in 1967. Handwritten menus for the royal visit show the queen was served fruit pastries and omelette. According to the auctioneer, the porcelain service, said to be in perfect condition, was discovered as part of evaluation on other objects in the chateau. The family who lived there were shocked and found it very moving, she said. The collection has an estimated value of five hundred thousand dollars. Those who fancy their chances at owning a piece of royal history can bid for the set in Paris at the end of March.

Chantal Hartle

Still to come in this podcast?

I'm here along with all these people to guarantee that there will never be a Russian rule here, ever. We'll hear from some of the thousands of Georgians who've been protesting on the streets over the past week. Political leaders from Britain, the US and Australia are getting ready to agree a major defence deal, including a plan for Australia to be supplied with nuclear-powered submarines. All three are due to hold talks on Monday in the US city of San Diego. Before then, the UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak will meet his Australian counterpart Anthony Albanese. Our North America correspondent, Will Grant, is in San Diego for us.

Will Grant

All three sides want to mark this as a very, very significant gathering, a very important trilateral moment when you see the idea of what's going to be happening. That is, supplying nuclear-powered submarines to Australia is truly unique in the regard that it's the creation of AUKUS, the grouping that you've mentioned, and the idea that it's going to be a support between the US, the UK and Australia for what they consider the threat coming from China's expansionism, China's movements in the South China Seas and in the Indo-Pacific region. So I think all three leaders want things to go very smoothly, to be very carefully stage-managed here in San Diego, but really a message to go out well, well beyond their own audiences, if you like, and a message to reach Beijing too. Will Grant

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Well as you say, this is about countering potential challenges from China, so how is Beijing likely to respond?

As you can imagine, they are very angry about it, certainly firmly opposed to anything that would arm Australia with nuclear-powered submarines. Australia has been at pains to point out that these submarines wouldn't be carrying nuclear weapons, just conventional weapons, but a foreign ministry spokesperson in Beijing has accused the group of undermining international non-proliferation system, and of course Australia is a signatory to the nuclear non-proliferation agreement, and that the whole endeavour is being driven by what they call the Cold War mentality. I think there have been overtures by Washington to sort of dissuade Beijing that this is somehow a new Cold War, a new arms race, but there are observers watching this with real concerns about perhaps the direction that both sides are going.

Last week saw people power defeat politicians in Georgia. In a rare retreat, the governing party bowed to mass protests by revoking a controversial law that many believe was Kremlin-inspired

on so-called foreign agents. Rehan Dimitri followed the week's political drama in Tbilisi. Their female protester, outside Georgia's parliament in the capital Tbilisi, is waving an EU flag. She ducks and pivots to escape the blast of a high-pressure water cannon. She's crying, but standing her ground.

The captivating video filmed on the night of March 7th went viral. It was a potent symbol of where Georgians think their country belongs. Just hours before, deputies inside parliament had brawled over a controversial foreign agents bill. Drafted by an openly anti-Western faction, the bill would have obliged non-governmental organizations and independent media, receiving more than 20% of their funding from abroad, to label themselves agents of foreign influence.

No to the Russian law, a huge crowd outside parliament chanted, many of them students and teenagers.

The legislation rushed through that day looked like a law passed in Russia in 2012.

The Kremlin has since used it to stigmatize and silence critical voices in the country.

In today's Russia, anyone who publicly opposes its war in Ukraine can be designated a foreign agent. In Tbilisi, the mood among the protesters was defined.

I'm here, along with all these people, to guarantee that there will never be a Russian rule here ever. Today we are standing here to protest the actions of Georgian government which tries everything to take us back to the Russian imperial state. They try everything to take us far away from the European Union, from the European values, and we will show them that we love our freedom just as much as they love money and Russia.

Police squirted clouds of pepper spray into protesters' faces and fired tear gas and more water cannons to clear the streets.

But the following day, on March the 8th, the demonstrators returned in their thousands.

The Georgian government continued to defend the controversial bill.

Irakri Kobahidze is the chairman of Georgian Dream, the ruling party.

Eventually, passions will burn out, and this act will provide transparency about NGOs' finances for the public. If we do not protect our state from spying now, we will not have to become a member of the EU, we will lose our sovereignty.

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After two nights of violence, on the morning of the 9th of March, the government announced that it was withdrawing the bill to preserve the peace and avoid further confrontation, it said.

And this was the reaction of the crowd outside parliament when the bill was officially struck down, a victory for Georgian youth who fought so hard this week to demand their European future. Rehan Dimitri.

85 years ago, German troops marched into Austria and annexed the country.

Amid alarm about what the Nazis were doing, British diplomats and clergy helped thousands of Jews escape, including children, on the rescue effort called Kinderstrang...

try again... on the rescue effort called Kindertransport, which took place just before the outbreak of the Second World War. Here in the UK, migration is one of the hottest political topics just now, especially how the British government should deal with people who arrive without authorization by small boat from France.

HelloPick is an Austrian-born British journalist who came to the UK on a Kindertransport.

My colleague, Julian Warwick, asked her if she remembers anything about the journey.

Unfortunately, I have very little memory. It's something that I've always bitterly regretted, but I can remember that I was a happy child. I still have a few photographs of a lot of other little children in a park. Somehow, my mother managed to preserve a birthday book in which, on every year on my birthday, my school friends wrote lovely messages about me into it, but that book also did contain a warning from one of the teachers saying,

after 1938, when Hitler was already in Vienna, the message was,

this lovely life will not continue. So the warning was there, and I was very fortunate that I was put onto this Kindertransport, had to leave behind my mother, and she fortunately was one of the beneficiaries of the actions of the diplomats in the British embassy, because she still managed to get to Britain before the war broke out.

Since you arrived in Britain, you grew up, you studied, you ended up becoming a renowned international journalist and travelled the world doing that. If you look back at everything that you've seen in the world during your long career, how does that inform your thinking about the way people who are fleeing war and persecution are now being treated, are now being talked about? I'm totally against the way in which the migrants are being treated at the moment.

And I think refugees, whatever their motives are, whatever's happened to them, you have at least got to listen to them and give them a chance to escape. Nobody is sitting in France, having got themselves to France through all sorts of secure ways and doesn't have a good reason for wanting to come to Britain. Most of these people do appear to have some kind of link to Britain and that is why they want to come. We have to remember these people have gone through dreadful times. Of course they're not all genuine refugees, I mean some of them no doubt are economic migrants. You have to ask yourself why they are leaving their own countries, their own families in order to find work somewhere else.

Take us back to Vienna then as a final thought on this. How should the behaviour of those diplomats and those members of the clergy inform our thinking here and are you worried that it's not doing that?

Well I think we should publicise much more what the British diplomats were able to do in those days so that people should be aware that there's a very positive, very good record of what Britain

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can do under difficult circumstances if they have the political will to do it. The more we can publicise these kind of actions the more people might begin to think and reflect what it is to be a refugee and what a country can do to be positive and to help and to re-examine perhaps the discussion, the debate that we are now having. The public should also look at the good positive things that the British government, British diplomats, its representatives have been able to do in the past and that they have the courage to do that.

Hellerpick was speaking to Julian Waracher. A ballet performance at LG Arts Centre in Seoul on Saturday ended in an historic moment for one of its lead dancers. The most notable French ballet company Paris Opera appointed its first black dancer to its highest rank, the Danseur Étoile or star dancer category. Harry Bly reports.

The distinguished Danseur Étoile is given to those who demonstrate rare excellence in their ballet. It is described as the supreme title earned not by competition but by outstanding performance in a leading role. On Saturday, Giselle, a romantic but tragic ballet telling the story of Duke Albrecht of Silesia falling in love with a shy peasant girl named Giselle was being performed in the South Korean capital Seoul. Just before the curtain fell, officials from the Paris Opera Ballet came on stage to announce that 23-year-old Guillaume Diop, who played Albrecht, was receiving this high honour.

Guillaume seemingly unaware that this was about to happen, buries his face in his hands as his fellow dancers applaud and embrace him.

This appointment is special for a few reasons. It is the first time a black performer has received the title. Guillaume is half Senegalese on his father's side. He is also one of only a handful of dancers to have been promoted directly to the top rank, skipping the previous rank of Premier Danseur. Guillaume began his ballet career at just four years old and has played a number of leading roles in Bayardère, Don Quixote, Swan Lake and Romeo and Juliet. Reacting to his new title, Guillaume told Le Figaro newspaper that he had not been expecting it and hoped his achievement would reassure the parents of children like him who wanted to follow a career in ballet. Harry Bly reporting

And that's it from us for now. Time for me to pirouette into the wings, but there will be a new edition of the Global News podcast later.

If you would like to comment on this edition or the topics covered in it, do please send us an email. The address is GlobalPodcast at bbc.co.uk. You can also find us on Twitter at Global NewsPod. This edition was mixed by Mike Adley. The producer was Iona Hampson. Our editor is Karen Martin. I'm Jackie Leonard and until next time, goodbye.

From dealing with loss, to making peace with turning into your mother.

It's the second chapter in a handbook for life for daughters around the world and it's available now. That's Dear Daughter from the BBC World Service.

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