

[Transcript] Global News Podcast / Italy's coastguard rescues more than 1,000 migrants from the Mediterranean

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

I'm Jackie Leonard and in the early hours of Sunday, the 12th of March, these are our main stories. Italy's Coast Guard has rescued more than 1200 migrants trying to reach Europe in overcrowded boats. Mozambique is once again battered by Cyclone Freddy and South Africa's anti-corruption watchdog, says there's no evidence of wrongdoing by President Cyril Ramaphosa. Also in this podcast, renewed calls to tighten Germany's gun ownership laws and...

Success for me is Gary gets back on air and together we are giving to the audiences that world-class sports coverage which, as I said, I'm sorry we haven't been able to deliver today. An apology from the head of the BBC after a decision to suspend a sports presenter led to the scrapping of hours of sports programs.

It took three huge rescue operations but the Italian Coast Guard says it saved more than 1200 migrants from boats in the Mediterranean Sea. Three vessels each carrying hundreds of people were brought to southern Italian ports after they ran into difficulties in rough seas.

It comes almost two weeks after a deadly shipwreck involving migrants off the Calabrian Coast. Our correspondent Bethany Bell has been following the story.

We don't know exactly which countries they came from but we know that

there were three boats that got into trouble on the seas and they were extremely overcrowded and the Coast Guard video showed really how difficult it was. One rusty fishing boat was pitching violently backwards and forwards and there were a lot of people visible on deck and how difficult it was for the rescue workers to get people onto life rafts and onto other boats to bring them to shore. We know that there were three separate boats. One was more than 160 kilometres

out to sea and then there were two other boats as well that were brought to two ports in southern Italy. One of the boats was actually lashed to a tugboat to try and give it stability in the

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rough seas and the Coast Guard has also said that the rescues were made even more complex because

the boats were in the words of the Coast Guard overloaded with migrants and there were very rough seas. And right now how busy and indeed how dangerous is that route across the Mediterranean?

We know that there has been a sharp rise in the number of migrants trying to reach Italy across the sea. Some of them coming from North Africa, others coming from Turkey and the dangers of this route were brought into sharp focus at the end of February when there was a shipwreck in which over 70 people died and they're still in fact recovering bodies from that shipwreck.

The boat broke apart just off the Calabrian coast and this has really inflamed the debate in Italy.

The government came into power promising to crack down on the number of people arriving on Italy shores and Giorgio Malone the Italian Prime Minister has introduced this week tougher prison sentences for people smugglers and it also has cracked down on charity rescue boats because it was accusing them of being kind of as a taxi service for migrants but the numbers as we see still seem to be rising. And just how big a conversation does it seem to be among the Italian public not necessarily the politicians but among the public? It's a big issue here,

many Italians feel that European Union is kind of leaving it and other countries in the South like Greece alone to deal with this problem and they want to see more action coming from the rest of Europe to help them with countries which see themselves on the front line of migrants arriving in Europe. Bethany Bell. For weeks a tropical storm has rattled around the Indian

Ocean weakening and then strengthening causing chaos in its wake. Since it first made landfall on the south coast of Africa Cyclone Freddy has travelled thousands of kilometers and intensified six times more than any other storm on record. Severe weather has returned to Mozambique

destroying homes and bringing down power lines. Our correspondent Pumsafilani is monitoring developments. More than 8,000 people have been forced out of their homes and local experts predict that in fact around more than 1.5 million people will be affected by the cyclone. This is going to create a humanitarian crisis. We know that power lines are down in part of the country making communication difficult and also meaning that people have been left without electricity. Aid workers were busy with aid efforts since the hurricane hit the first time around but they are worried now that those efforts will be slowed down because some roads have been destroyed or are now

it's impossible to pass through so it's going to slow down the rates at which they can deliver aid to people. There are also concerns about the infrastructure which has been battered over the years by repeat storms that it's also just going to struggle under this latest cyclone that's coming in. And there must be concerns about the longer-term impact as well because farmland has been badly affected. Certainly has. Mozambique is a big farming community. A lot of them are subsistence farmers and rely on that for their livelihoods. Farmland has been lost. Livestock has died so there really are concerns that even beyond when the storm has passed and it's dissipated that the impacts will be felt long term and this is why there's now conversations around how to get aid to people, conversations around how to make countries such as Mozambique be able to look at building with the future in mind but with most of the country being rural and people really depending on whatever livelihood they're able to create for themselves those conversations are too far out for a lot of the people there.

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That was Pumza Falani. So what's the science that explains why this storm is so fierce and so persistent? We asked Francois Engelbrecht, a climate expert in Johannesburg. I think formal attribution science is going to show that there is a consequence of warmer sea surface temperatures in the Indian Ocean. This storm has been drawing in moisture and warm air from the North Indian Ocean during its lifetime and earlier also from the east of Madagascar. In this part of the world sea surface temperatures are currently about one degree Celsius higher than they are supposed to be

and that means there's more energy available for the storm to fill itself. There's more water vapor available which is another important fill of energy for tropical cycling and this storm has been able to maintain itself for about two weeks in the Mozambique Channel. We have not seen this type of behavior before from a tropical cyclone but it's not inconsistent with what climate change science is telling us because in a warmer world generally because of these high sea surface temperatures, tropical cyclones are today already causing about 10% more rainfall than in the past. So you're struck by this, everyone's struck by the fact that this is lasting longer than previous cyclones. Is though this going to become something we have to get used to? People, certainly that part of the world, maybe other parts of the world have to get used to these recurring cyclones? That is unfortunately the case for this part of the world. It's already clear that over the last two decades we for the first time we've started to observe category four and five hurricanes as they would be referred to in other parts of the world here in the Southwest Indian Ocean. So more intense tropical cyclones are now forming in the Southwest Indian Ocean. Now in a world that is committed to further warming over the next two decades, that's an unfortunate fact. We should therefore expect a further intensification of tropical cyclone impacts across Madagascar and also in Southern Africa. Francois Engelbrecht, a climate expert in Johannesburg, South Africa. The Amazon region is disappearing faster than ever it has. According to satellite images taken by the government, 322 square kilometers of rainforest was destroyed in February, a 62 percent increase on last year. President Lula, who took office at the beginning of this year, has promised to undo the relaxing of environmental protections by his predecessor, Jair Bolsonaro. Romulo Batista from Greenpeace, Brazil, says it will take tough action to reverse Mr. Bolsonaro's policies. We just left behind a government that support deforestation and completely abandoned actions to control it. As long as the enforcement and control do not reach the entire region, illegal deforestations may exploit that to ramp up the deforestation. Our America's editor, Leonardo Rosha, explains which regions are the most badly affected. We had two biomes in Brazil that are considered the most important. They cover most of the country. The Amazon rainforest, and you have the Cerrado, which is a savanna area, which has become the biggest area for production of soil, beans, and other grains. So the Cerrado is less known abroad, but it's equally important for the biome. Basically, the whole central area of Brazil, where the capital is, Brazil, goes all the way to the border with Bolivia and Paraguay. And there, the destruction basically doubled 99% compared to last year. And it's very worrying for the new government of President Lula da Silva, who's promised to reverse this trend and the destruction of the environment that happened during the four years of the post-narrow government. And the second thing is Lula was in power before in very different economic times when the economy

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was starting to grow. And now it's basically a recession. It's difficult, high inflation, and he's not going to get any favors from the Congress, which is hostile to him.

And the former president is going to tackle all his ideas. Also, we have to remember here that it will take time for these measures to take place. What the Bolsonaro government did is they cut the main measure that they did for the environment. Not only they encouraged people to go and expand, but they cut the resources from the environmental agency and the indigenous agency.

And now if you start putting money in those agencies again, you have to hire people again, you have to deploy, you have to buy planes, you have to buy vehicles, and to start patrolling the region. And that might take time. So it doesn't look good. And President Lula knows there's a lot to be done. And he's worried about that.

That was Leonardo Rosha. Environmental concerns have also been at the center of protests in the Netherlands. Farmers gathered in the hay to demonstrate against government plans to limit nitrogen emissions, fearing it will damage their livelihoods. Other groups also latched on to their event. And environmentalists have been protesting too over tax rules they say encouraged the use of fossil fuels. Our correspondent Anna Holigan went to the protests and first explained the farmers concerns. The farmers are worried about Dutch government plans to shut down, buy out thousands of farms here in the Netherlands because the government is under pressure to meet climate targets. And in order to meet those climate targets, they have to reduce harmful nitrogen pollution. And much of that is coming from farms. But what you can hear around me right now, if I can just explain to make all of this make sense, I've moved across the Hague to another protest which has been going on for hours now. The sound in the background is a water cannon which has been deployed against climate protesters. Another one is just moving into action in front of me now. And there are hundreds of people sitting on a highway outside the Dutch government building, temporary offices covered in foil blankets, shivering because I have lost count of the number of times that the water cannon has been deployed since I've been here. Some of them are now putting up umbrellas. All of the people who are still here will be arrested, police have just told me. And it looks like they are about to be sprayed with water again. So two protests happening here in the Hague today. And the fear was that those farmers,

and interestingly, I spent hours at the farmers protest. It wasn't just farmers there. I'm not even sure they made up the majority. There were so many different interest groups, conspiracy groups,

all kind of filtered together, just united in their kind of opposition to the current Dutch coalition government. There are local elections coming up in the Netherlands, aren't there? Will these protests be making an impact on those? That's absolutely the politicians ambition.

So at the farmers protest today, two political leaders were there, Kierchvilders, who you may know is the leader of the far-right Freedom Party. He was on stage. He was urging the farmers and all of the other groups to vote for them, to vote the government out. And he actually recycled a phrase that he is famous for here, more or less. He used it once. He's an anti-immigration, anti-Island politician. He used it once to refer to Moroccans. Now he's talking about Mark Rutte, the Prime Minister, Sigrid Kah, and other politicians here in the Netherlands asking for people to vote them out. There are lots of people walking around holding red and white balloons,

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representing the Forum for Democracy Party. And their leader was also present, Thierry Baudet. And he has been quite heavily linked with some of the conspiracy groups.

That was Anna Holligan. Still to come on the Global News Podcast.

Can I claim my dog as a dependent on my taxes?

I'd like to report my neighbour for waving to everyone on the block.

Some of the calls to New York City Helpline.

Last month, more than 220 political prisoners were unexpectedly released from jail in Nicaragua, stripped of their nationality, and sent into exile in the United States. Most of the prisoners who came from a variety of backgrounds and political parties have been detained in the run-up to the disputed 2021 elections, which saw the incumbent Daniel Ortega and his wife Rosario Murillo re-elected as President and Vice President. Mike Lanchin is a former BBC correspondent in Central America. He's been speaking to two Nicaraguan women who are among those sent into exile.

The first that opposition activist Suyen Barana knew of her imminent release from jail was when guards came to hurry her out of her cell and onto a waiting bus.

We didn't know anything. We didn't know where we were going when they took us out of the jail. And then suddenly the bus parked near the Air Force and then we saw a big airplane.

And then there were people from the State Department at the steps of the airplane waiting for us and telling us welcome, you know, to freedom. It was incredible. I mean, a mix of emotions, happiness and excitement. But at the same time, we were leaving our country.

Barana, who's 45, was part of a broad political alliance formed after anti-government protests rocked Nicaragua in 2018. She'd been arrested along with other opposition leaders and accused of being a traitor to the homeland. She spent 605 days in jail, mostly in solitary confinement.

After one year and six months, I was allowed to interact and to speak to others. In the initial months also with very little lighting and access to sunlight. Those were some of the conditions.

But I think the worst of them was the separation of my son and my family. And the first time that I was allowed to speak to him was on the 25th of December, after a year and a half, basically, not seeing him at all, not even in pictures. And it was just amazing. But he didn't recognize me.

Dora María Teyes was a legendary figure in the left-wing Sandinista guerrillas that toppled the Nicaraguan dictatorship and first brought Daniel Ortega to power in 1979.

She was health minister in the first revolutionary government, but later broke with Ortega, accusing him of being corrupt and authoritarian. She was also arrested in June 2021, along with her female partner. But for almost two years, she says, they weren't allowed to communicate with each other.

We were in the same jail, but in different wings and we couldn't ever speak. Other prisoners were allowed joint family visits with their partners, but not us. We asked for it repeatedly.

So did our families. But they never allowed us, because we are both women, because of who we are. And shortly after your release, you and all the other political prisoners

were stripped of your nationality by the Ortega government, making you effectively stateless.

So where does that leave you?

Well, I don't recognize this regime as legitimate or lawful because they stole the elections, and my nationality, frankly, does not depend on them. I was born in Nicaragua. I am the daughter of a Nicaraguan father and mother, and nobody can take my nationality away from me. What they

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can

take away from me are my civil rights, but they have taken those away from all Nicaraguans. Known in her guerrilla days as Comandante Dos, Dora María Teyes was sentenced to 15 years in jail for conspiracy against the Ortega government. She's now 67 years old and starting a new life in exile, but she told me she won't give up the fight.

When you get older, you tend to become more accommodating and comfortable, but I am happy not to become accommodating. I like being rebellious, not bowing my head at any price, not kneeling in front of a dictatorship, but that always carries a price.

This week, the Government of Brazil added its voice to growing criticism of the Government of President Daniel Ortega for its continuing suppression of dissent.

Brazil has said that it was ready to receive the former political prisoners who've been stripped of their nationality. The Nicaraguan authorities continue to accuse them of inciting hatred and instability. It was a scandal involving cattle, a sofa, a Sudanese billionaire and the theft of hundreds of thousands of dollars from under the cushions of said sofa. The scandal became known as Farmgate and led to calls for the South African President Cyril Ramaphosa to step down. Now, though, he's been cleared of wrongdoing by the Office of the Public Protector. The preliminary report hasn't been officially published. A draft has been sent to some of the people involved for their comments, but multiple media outlets seem to have obtained a copy anyway. Our Africa regional editor, Will Ross, told us more.

Cyril Ramaphosa is also a very wealthy businessman and one of his business interests is farming. He's got a couple of farms and on one of them in Limpopo Province back in February 2020, criminals, we were told, stole a vast amount of money from the farm that, as you say, had been stuffed down the back of a sofa, possibly half a million dollars. But there were allegations that the amount stolen was far higher than that. And there were a lot of questions about where the cash came from. And in the months that followed, it eventually came out that the money had come from the President's farm or people on the farm on his behalf, selling buffalo to a Sudanese businessman. But a very murky story that's rumbled on.

Okay, so this preliminary report, what does it say?

Well, the preliminary report really says that the President himself didn't do anything wrong and didn't violate the oath of office. It talks about the fact that he declared his business interests, in this case, that the farm, so no conflict of interest, and said that he reported the theft to his head of security, a police official called General Wally Rode. It also says he played no direct role in the sale of the buffalo. So he's, in effect, been cleared by this, as you say, preliminary report. So if he's cleared of all blame, is anybody taking the wrap? Well, it appears that the public protector has really accused this General Wally Rode of doing a sort of rogue investigation by not reporting it directly to his superior and then going off and doing an investigation kind of on his own. And it has to be remembered that there were accusations that, you know, the whole thing was trying to be covered up. There were attempts to make sure that this whole thing didn't come into the public eye. So that kind of mirrors the fact that questions about how the investigation was carried out.

So is Mr. Ramaphosa completely out of the woods politically now?

Well, when we say politically, first of all, it's possible that there will still be an investigation concerning the cash itself and how the transactions were made using foreign exchange. That could

still

lead to questions about him. But I think the bigger problems for President Ramaphosa are really all about the South African economy, which is in a crisis, huge unemployment and massive problems with the power utility, the state-owned power utility, the countries going through the biggest, the longest power cuts ever, and a lot of corruption it is alleged is taking place in that power utility. And he's really being criticised more and more for failing during his time in office to end the corruption and at times putting party before the people of South Africa.

That was Will Ross. A debate on the effectiveness of Germany's gun control laws has re-emerged after seven people were shot dead in Hamburg on Thursday. Eight others were wounded in the attack

on a group of Jehovah's Witnesses. Germany's Interior Minister Nancy Faeser said the shooting demonstrated the need for change. Jenny Hill reports from Hamburg.

All day people have come to leave flowers outside the meeting hall. Some stood in the winter sunshine gazing at the drab three-story building where a group of Jehovah's Witnesses were so violently attacked on Thursday. Up and most now, in many minds, it's how to prevent a recurrence of such a tragedy and focus has fallen on the country's gun laws. There have been several deadly shootings in recent years and this Hamburg resident, Daniel Krallmann, said it was time for action. We need to take the guns away from everyone. It's not right that people should somehow get a permit to carry weapons. There are nearly a million registered gun owners in Germany. Hunting and shooting sports are popular pastimes here. The country's Interior Minister already had plans to tighten ownership laws. Nancy Faeser was spurred into action by the discovery in December of a plot to violently overthrow the government. Her draft legislation included restricting access to certain types of weapons. She now wants to consider extending that to include the kind of semi-automatic pistol that was used in this attack, as well as ensuring that anyone who applies for a gun license undergoes a psychological evaluation. Her plans are opposed by the country's hunting and shooting associations and some politicians have warned against an over-hasty reaction.

That was Jenny Hill. Now, if you usually get your football fix from the BBC, you've probably noticed it's been very quiet this weekend. That's all to do with a row over tweets by the football presenter and former England captain Gary Linnaker, criticising the British government's policy on unauthorised immigration. Government ministers and supporters were outraged, accusing him of undermining BBC impartiality. The BBC announced that Mr Linnaker

would not host his flagship TV football highlights programme until the issue was resolved. Then, lots of his sports colleagues said that in solidarity with him, they wouldn't turn up for work either. The head of the BBC, Tim Davie, apologised for widespread disruption to BBC sports output. We are working very hard to resolve the situation and make sure that we get output back on air. I would say Gary Linnaker is a superb broadcaster. He's the best in the business. That's not for debate, but we are where we are and I think that he is an outstanding broadcaster. He's brilliant broadcaster. And to be clear, success for me is Gary gets back on air and together we are giving to the audiences that world-class sports coverage, which, as I say, I'm sorry, we haven't been able to deliver today. Charlotte Gallagher explains why this story has attracted so much attention. This is the top story on every channel in the UK. There are news crews

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outside the BBC. It's in all the newspapers. Firstly, Gary Linnaker, hugely famous, the BBC's most well-paid presenter. So people take notice of what he says. And I think this has caused so much attention because he was perceived to be anti-government in the tweet that he made, and he was immediately suspended. And people are saying, well, is that treatment fair when you have

other BBC presenters? So Alan Sugar, who presents The Apprentice, Gabby Logan and Karen Brady, they've also made political statements and they haven't been suspended or had to stand back from their roles. So people are saying, is this treatment fair? And it was really interesting. In the interview that you just heard bits of with Tim Davy, he was asked, if Gary Linnaker had said, I 100% support the government and this migration policy, would you have suspended him? And he said,

well, I'm not going to talk about hypothetical situations. But that's what a lot of people are asking today. I mean, Labour, the opposition party here said that Gary Linnaker had essentially been canceled by the ruling Conservative Party. And things like the BBC are caught up in the culture wars in this country, policies towards refugees, immigrants, trans identity, all those kind of stories whip up a lot of interest. And Gary Linnaker has been caught up in this row.

So that's why on this programme right now, we're talking about this story when a lot of people might think, but it's just, it's just a presenter who said something on Twitter, but it goes to the heart of a lot of arguments in this country right now about what people can and can't say. And especially the BBC is the BBC truly impartial. That was Charlotte Gallagher. Now, you've probably heard of the phone number 911 used in several countries to report emergencies. But have you heard of 311? It's New York's non-emergency hotline, where for the past 20 years, residents have reported issues on everything from noise complaints to dirty streets. But there have also been some very unusual requests, as Olivia Noon explains. For the last two decades, the 311 hotline has been there for New Yorkers 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. Its call centre has more than 100 workers and callers can be helped in over 175 languages and dialects. It was set up to help revolutionise public services, offering a place to make non-emergency complaints, ask questions and seek advice. The first call came at one minute past midnight on March the 9th, 2003. It was to complain about a noisy party in Jackson Heights. Since that day, more than 525 million calls have been made to the hotline, which has expanded to social media and a mobile app. And while the hotline might have provided a solution to many of its callers' questions, there are of course those that stuck out to operators or left them without answers.

The City's Mayor Eric Adams listed a few of the most memorable.

Can I claim my dog as a dependent on my taxes? Can you check if my boyfriend is married? I like to report a ghost in my window. I like to report my neighbour for waving to everyone on the block. That's a real New Yorker. The service says it will continue to answer calls and listen to customers. During the cost-deliving crisis, the financial times can help you understand how global news stories can impact your personal finances. I'm Claire Barrett, host of the FT's Money Clinic podcast. Each week, we discuss ways to stay on top of your money. It's news you can use, delivered in a way that anyone can understand, featuring the top experts at the FT and beyond.

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