

[Transcript] Global News Podcast / Japan boyband agency boss resigns amid sex scandal

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

I'm Gareth Barlow and at 1300 GMT on Thursday, the 7th of September, these are our main stories. In Japan, the sex abuse scandal engulfing the talent agency behind the country's biggest boy bands has led to the resignation of its boss. The ousted president of Gabon, Ali Bongo, has been released from house arrest and Australia's leader is to visit China this year in the latest sign of thawing relations. Also in this podcast in Mexico, women's rights are topping the agenda in both politics and the Supreme Court. Plus, Ahmed wasn't just the star pupil. He was standing in as a teacher

in a classroom with no windows and no desks. But despite years of civil war in Yemen, there's a story of hope and of change. The Japanese entertainment industry has been rocked by allegations of sexual abuse by the late Johnny Kitagawa, the founder of the country's most influential talent agency, Johnny and Associates. He was accused publicly for some decades of abusing

aspiring young male pop stars from as far back as the 1950s. He died in 2019, but now for the first time, the current CEO of the agency, Julie Fujishima, whose Johnny's niece has admitted that the sexual abuse happened and has resigned. She appeared at a news conference.

Both the agency itself and I myself as a person recognize that sex abuse by Johnny Kitagawa took place. I apologize to his victims from the bottom of my heart. I apologize to all the fans, business stakeholders, and everyone concerned about this issue.

Our Tokyo correspondent, Shoma Kaleel, has the details.

This is a very significant moment for Japan, especially its entertainment industry, because I mean, for all intents and purposes, Kitagawa was a star maker. He was a talent manager, but essentially he was the overriding figure in the entertainment industry. If you are a young teenager wanting to make a name for yourself, his agency was your gateway. And for decades, these accusations that he sexually abused aspiring pop stars, male pop stars that came through his agency, had marred his career. There were some that actually were proven in civil court, but he was never charged. Now these allegations resurfaced in a BBC documentary earlier this year in March. Victims spoke to the BBC about their experiences and it became clear as well that his clout, his power, had discouraged people from coming forward, had stifled reporting on this because his agency dealt with many of the channels that featured his talents or the talents that his agency essentially was responsible for. But pressure grew. The fans expressed a huge deal of anger after the documentary. And last week, an investigation found that he had repeatedly

abused boys for decades from the 1950s all the way beyond 2010. And the fact that this is a family business, a family management of it, allowed this atmosphere to continue. And today, for the first time, Julie Fujishima stood in front of a room full of journalists with victims watching in another place, bowed her head and said that she was sorry, she apologized to the fans and to the victims and stepped down as CEO. So he has died back in 2019. These allegations had been around for some time. They've now been accepted and acknowledged by his niece. What happens now? Nuri Yukihiyama, who is a household name here in Japan, an entertainer, a veteran TV personality, he's actually one of the first talents that was recruited by the agency. He's now been appointed as the successor as the new CEO. They've promised the structural change. They've

promised that things are going to be different. How it will change and what that will look like, we don't know. But I think it begs the question of will more people come forward? Will they be emboldened now that this is out in the public and being reported on? And I think the bigger question is, what is the future of this brand that has been equivalent to entertainment, to glamour, to fame and that has now been very publicly disgraced? Shima Kalil. On Wednesday night, the co-leaders in Gabon took to state television to announce that they would release the man they overthrew. They said President Alibongo was unwell and was now free to travel abroad for medical treatment. He'd been under house arrest since army officers seized power at the end of August. Many people have taken to social media saying he should be charged with corruption.

So, do we know where Alibongo may be? Our Africa regional editor is Richard Hamilton.

In 2018, Alibongo suffered a stroke and he then travelled to Morocco for medical treatment.

And he has close links with King Mohammed VI of Morocco. Alibongo is reported to have bought a villa

in the palm grove of Marrakesh called the palmery, which is a very nice place. Lots of rich people live there. And also King Mohammed VI of Morocco is alleged to have a palace in Gabon. So, they have a very close relationship. So, it's been reported in French media that the regional bloc, ECAS, which was negotiating about the coup, had discussed some sort of exit deal whereby Alibongo goes to Morocco. So, that's basically what we think behind the scenes is happening. And the coup leader himself, General Inguema, is one of Alibongo's cousins. He's a former bodyguard.

He worked for Omar Bongo, the father as well. So, he's worked for the Bongo family for a long time. And the suspicion is, and the opposition have been saying this, that there's some sort of deal going on to keep the Bongo family in power. We had talked to us a bit more about the family, because like you say, they've been around a while. They have. So, Omar Bongo, the father, took power after the death of the previous president in 1967 and ruled with an iron fist until 2009, when he died. And then Alibongo, his son, took over. But for years, there were allegations, more than that, that the Bongo family skimmed off all the oil wealth of the country. So, for example, one third of the population live below the poverty line, and yet it's one of Africa's biggest producers of oil. And another sort of sad, well very sad statistic, is that it has one of the world's highest child mortality rates. So, there was no sense that this vast oil wealth was going to trickle down to the rest of the population. There was a French investigation that said they had 39 properties in Paris and nine luxury cars. So, a lot of this anti-French sentiment may really be to do with the fact that the French authorities went after the Bongo family. The voice there of Richard Hamilton. The former Sri Lankan president, Goutabao Rajapakshar,

has rejected allegations made in a British documentary that the deadly Easter Sunday bombings in 2019 were orchestrated to help him win elections that year. The film featured a Sri Lankan political insider who accused a senior intelligence official linked to Mr Rajapakshar of complicity in the attacks, which killed 269 people. With more details, here's our South Asia regional editor and Barasenatharajan. Gautabao Rajapakshar was the elected Sri Lankan president months after the 2019 Easter Sunday attacks promising to restore security. The British Channel 4 documentary featuring a political insider accused a senior intelligence official of complicity in the bombings that helped create conditions for Mr Rajapakshar's victory. Mr Rajapakshar said the report was filled with lies and was mostly an anti-Rajapakshar tyrant. After the documentary was aired, the current Sri Lankan government said it would appoint a parliamentary committee to look into the latest allegations. Police say a group of IS-inspired Islamists carried out the bombings targeting churches and high-end hotels. Mr Rajapakshar was forced to leave office last year following protests over an unprecedented economic crisis. And Barasenatharajan. California has become the first US state to approve a bill that will ban discrimination based on caste, the hierarchical social class system seen in Hindu society. Earlier this year, the BBC produced a documentary on caste bias among tech workers in the Silicon Valley. It's hoped the bill will protect people of South Asian descent in the state. However, not everyone supported the move, with protests erupting outside the office of the Democratic senator who sponsored the bill, Aisha Wahab. Here she is speaking with the BBC's Davina Gupta. You know, our district in particular is a very diverse district in the state of California, probably in the nation. And largely the diaspora that has reached out to me specifically have stated that they have received, you know, different types of discrimination in the forms of housing discrimination, employment discrimination. There are more personal stories where people have talked about how if they drink a cup of water, it has been actually removed from the home and put outside near, you know, that homeowner's dog bowl when they are a healthcare worker taking care of somebody that needs the support because they are of different caste. Some have stated that they are not allowed to enter certain temples. We've seen this time and time again, and we just want to make it very clear to people in the legal system as well as people in the public to know that caste discrimination should not exist in California. And if you were to be discriminated against, you have legal recourse to defend yourself. How does this bill now change lives of people? The reality is that this bill will allow for somebody who is being discriminated in regards to housing, education, or employment and so forth to be able to defend themselves if there is a legitimate discrimination case. And obviously discrimination cases in general are very difficult to prove. Those individuals that feel that they have been discriminated against, of course, they have to prove it, but they are now able to go to a legal system to defend themselves. Not everybody's on board. So this bill has clearly touched in love with many people in this diaspora. What's been the opposition? The opposition, honestly, the talking points have been largely stating that it will allow for profiling and that it's only one particular religious group that participate in this and so forth. And that's inaccurate. Number one, the majority of the state legislature that have talked to me about it, many of them have joked that they didn't even know what caste was. They had to Google it. Number two is the fact that so I don't genuinely believe people will be profiled because people don't really understand it. I think that the opposition is very upset that me as an Afghan, as a woman, as a Muslim,

am carrying this bill. And you saw a lot of the Islamophobic commentary about the sexist commentary, the pure racism. And at the end of the day, I'm an American born and raised. And I truly believe in the American dream for all people. And that foundation of the American dream is largely that you are judged based on your merit, not on your ethnicity, not on your gender, not on your age, but your ability and your desire to do more. And so I think that the opposition talking points really don't hold any water. That was Aisha Wahab speaking to the BBC's Davina Gupta. Last year, about 70 children in the West African nation of the Gambia died because of suspected kidney complications allegedly caused by consumption of cough syrup made in India. It follows the deaths of 12 children in the northern Indian town of Ramnagar more than two years earlier,

again after consuming cough syrups allegedly containing toxins. All of them were under five years of age. A year on since the first deaths in the Gambia, the BBC's Vinit Kare traveled across the Gambia and to Ramnagar to meet the families who share a profound grief and a struggle for justice. I always remember his eyes because he was looking at me inside my eyes. I'm also looking at him directly inside his eyes. Abrima is from the Gambia, a country often called the smiling coast of West Africa. And his son, gleeful three-year-old Lamin, lived up to that picture. But in 2022, Lamin became unwell. His dad got him a cough syrup and that joyful world fell apart. My wife told me that something strange I did not understand. I said, what? Lamin changes yesterday.

He did not go to the toilet to urinate. Shortly after taking the syrup, Lamin's appetite reduced and later found it difficult to pass urine. Doctors said he had kidney issues. The health of the three-year-old quickly worsened and within seven days he died. But this was far from an isolated incident. 22-month-old Aminata suffered the same fate. The kidney is not functioning. So they wanted to make this surgery because if the kidney is not working for some days, then the waste product, you cannot urinate. So the urinate will be expanding in the body. Her dad, Mumudu, recalls the last time he tried to speak to her on video call, as she lay unconscious in a hospital bed. I love my child so much. I couldn't stay at her for that longer. I was trying to make her know that it's me, papa talking to you, can you see me? How are you doing? She was just like that. A year ago, unsettling reports began emerging from the gambia. Children aged between two months and five years were dying after suffering lethal kidney damage. The cases were being linked to the consumption of an allegedly contaminated cough syrup produced in India. Four medicines are cough and cold syrups produced by Maiden Pharmaceuticals Limited in India. WHO is conducting further investigation. The World Health Organization

had earlier warned that the four cough syrups made by Indian company Maiden Pharma could be potentially linked with the deaths of children in the Gambia. The products contained unacceptable amounts of toxins, diethylene glycol and ethylene glycol, which could prove fatal on consumption. Gambian officials opened an inquiry and blamed India-made cough syrups for the tragedy. The Indian government denies the link. Health Minister Dr Mansook Mandvia told news agency ANI, the cough syrup samples of Maiden cleared the tests when checked.

We asked the question, what was the result of sample testing?

They said they took 23 samples out of which four samples failed. If samples from a batch fail, all samples should fail. Why did only four samples fail? We also took samples here and checked. They all passed. Indian drug manufacturers too denied the charges.

Maiden Pharmaceuticals said in the past that it has full faith in the regulator and judiciary processes and it has done no wrong. In the end, the toxins allegedly killed nearly 70 children in the Gambia and as many as 12 children in India in one case. Families who live nearly 10,000

kilometers apart were now united in a harrowing grief but also in their fight for justice.

The northern Indian state of Himachal Pradesh is home to several pharmaceutical companies.

Among them, digital vision that is alleged to have produced the spurious syrup that killed the children. An allegation that its owner, Parashotam Goyal, denies.

We are not here to kill children. Why would we kill someone's child? We are manufacturing medicines,

not poison. Following police investigation, the matter is in court. The factory reportedly stayed closed for six months following the deaths but it was reopened following a court order.

Meanwhile in the Gambia, despite this tragedy, reliance on India-made drugs is likely to continue.

It's far cheaper than having to import them from America or Europe. But families of the victims

want to seek change. We all have families. If the Gambian people manufacture medicine to

send it to India and that medicine costs their debt of their babies, would they happy? No. Wherever

you are, Indian, Chinese, American, less respect mankind. In June, the Gambian Health Ministry

sacked the executive director of the Gambia Medicines Control Agency, Markyujane Kaira,

following an inquiry into the children's deaths. Now families in India and in the Gambia are ready

for a tough fight ahead and say they will not stop until they get justice. That was the BBC's Vinit

Kure. Still to come in the podcast. You should be able to showcase things which people are able

to take back and say, wow, India is diverse. We hear from the chef in charge of feeding world

leaders at the G20 summit in Delhi. The attacker had very good knowledge of banking systems.

\$3.1 billion in stolen funds. Money laundering operations. A cyber criminal group. These are

smart guys. Seasons one and two of the Lazarus Heist from the BBC World Service are available in

full right now. Following the twists and turns in the incredible story of the Lazarus Group

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explains exactly how they made their money. And then we decide if they are actually good, bad,

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or what Jeff Bezos really did to become the first person in history to pocket \$100 billion. Listen

to Good Bad Billionaire with me, Simon Jack and me, Zing Zing, available now wherever you get your

podcasts. Now here on the Global News Podcast, two women will compete for the Mexican

presidency

after the ruling party named former Mexico City Mayor Claudia Schoenbaum as its candidate. It's

the first time in the country's history that the president is guaranteed to be female and it comes

as Mexico announced that abortion will be decriminalized across the entire country.

Stephanie Prentice told me more. Mexico looks all but certain to elect its first-ever female

ahead of state. We know that governing Rihanna party has put forward Claudia Schoenbaum for

next year's election. She's a politician, she's a scientist, she's an ally of Andres Manuel Lopez

Obrador, and the opposition candidate is Sochil Galvez. She's a senator and a businesswoman.

This is being seen as a huge win by women's rights groups, one called it a feminist's dream.

And of course it puts Mexico ahead of its neighbor, the U.S. in electing a female president.

Certainly progress for a country where women couldn't even vote until 1953. We know Mexico actually passed an amendment in 2019 setting a goal of gender parity in everything it said, including those races for elected office, and it already has a female chief justice in the Supreme Court and women leading the House of Congress. Let's pick up on the Supreme Court because we mentioned in the introduction there that abortions being decriminalized across the entire country. Well, you know, Latin America has historically some of the world's most restrictive abortion policies. That has been shifting. This move in Mexico has been seen as a massive victory by the Green Wave movement for greater rights to abortion. There was an unanimous decision

by the Supreme Court and prohibiting abortions was described as unconstitutional in that ruling. So in practice, that means all public health institutions must provide abortions for anyone who requests them. That's nationwide before it was just 12 out of the 32 states. Essentially, what we're seeing is a shield against prosecutions and that's women having abortions, but also for doctors performing abortions before there was a chance of a jail term of up to five years. It would be a miss if not naive to not acknowledge though that there is still a long way to go with regards to women's rights and also safety of Mexico. Well, according to recent government data, 10 women and girls are killed every day in Mexico by partners or other family members and 2,481 women and girls were officially reported as missing last year there. There was a recent documentary looking into this. It said according to the data women who survive acts of violence in Mexico, they fail to receive justice due to, in its words, legal loopholes, negligence, a lack of gender perspective in the legal system and harmful social norms.

Stephanie Prentice. German and Israeli officials have criticised the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas for his recent comments about Jews and the Holocaust. Israel's ambassador to the UN,

Gilad Erdan, has accused Mr Abbas of pure antisemitism. Yolannel is in Jerusalem.

The aging Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has previously been denounced by Jewish groups as a

Holocaust denier for his doctoral thesis on the Nazis and Zionism. Yet over the years, he's continued to give rambling speeches, expounding his offensive views. In this recent address to the Fatah Revolutionary Council, which was later aired on Palestine TV, he said that the Nazi leader Adolf Hitler had ordered the mass murder of Jews because of what he described as their social role as money lenders, rather than out of animosity to Judaism. He also resurrected a long abandoned historic theory that European Ashkenazi Jews were not descended from the ancient

Israelites. Yolannel. For almost a decade, civil war has been grinding on in Yemen, pushing the Arab world's poorest country to the brink of collapse. There has been less violence since a temporary ceasefire last year, but there is no sign of a deal to permanently end the conflict. In the midst of all the death and destruction, however, there is also resilience.

The BBC's Ola Geron has been to visit a young blind boy who she first met back in 2021.

He helped his school get rebuilt after it was destroyed by bombing.

I'm on the outskirts of the city of Taiz, in a farming community surrounded by mountains.

I've come to meet a young boy I first met two and a half years ago. When he was nine years old, he's called Ahmed, and he was teaching a class in his local school, a bombed-out shell of a building. We've come back to catch up with Ahmed and see how things are with him, with the school,

and with the war that he's grown up in. He's been blind from birth.

I'm sitting with Ahmed and three of his sisters who are also blind. He's in a blue shirt with a navy trim and a navy waistcoat, and he's smiling just the way I remember him.

When was the last time you heard fighting and explosions?

It was very scary. We are scared of gunshots. When the fighting starts, we can't go to the park or the valley or anywhere. It's worse now. We only heard gunshots before. Now we hear bomb explosions, shooting, everything. When we hear it, we get scared and hide.

This was Ahmed as we first heard him, loud and clear. He was leading morning assembly at Al-Wahda primary school. Ahmed wasn't just the star pupil. He was standing in as a teacher in a classroom with no windows and no desks. He gave us a wish list of repairs for the school, and our audience responded. Well, I've just come into the yard of the Al-Wahda primary school, and what a difference since my last visit. To my right, there's a brand new school block. There are six classrooms. It looks like a proper school.

Inside one of the new classrooms, we see rows of wooden desks and benches, and four walls and a roof, as Ahmed requested. A Yemeni donor built the new block, and a British charity donated the equipment. Ahmed sits in the front row, giving the changes top marks. I asked for a school so we can study and learn,

and for those who come after us, I hope I can study and learn until the end of time, and that the school will get even better. What do you want to do when you finish school?

What job? I want to be a teacher, and a pilot, and an engineer, and a driver, or a doctor. I want to be everything. Do you think you'll be able to do all these things?

Yes, sure. I will do everything, and I will marry a beautiful girl from the city.

As the sun goes down, Ahmed splashes about in the river near his home.

He has already overcome so much. This child of war is full of hope.

That report there by Oleg Erum. The gathering of leaders from the G20 group of leading industrial nations is taking place in India this weekend. With so many problems facing the world at the moment, it's a crucial forum to find solutions to political, environmental and economic challenges. It's also an opportunity for India in particular to showcase its qualities.

One area where it hopes to shine is in the dining room in particular, with its world famous cuisines. A key player in this will be chef Aaron Sundaraj from the Ptaj Palace Hotel in Delhi. He's in charge, providing top quality food to over 300 people, including heads of state and other G20 delegates. He told Devina Gupta about the preparations. You should be able to showcase things which people are able to take back and say, wow, India is diverse. Every visiting delegation coming into India has that expectation of, I need to try this, and I just hope it's not too spicy.

So which is one dish that, for example, you would avoid?

I would avoid products that are overly spiced. I would not dilute, say for example, a chicken tikka and make it less spicy. But I would add maybe a flavor like a makmali tikka, which is got flavors of coriander, mint, and it's still chargrilled. And it brings the essence of India to the table. And you should keep in mind sensitivities of religion. It's a lot of hard work.

You mentioned that there are sensitivities involved.

Or you would take poke off the menu completely, because it just makes it a lot more easier, and it's a lot more acceptable across multiple religions. You keep it easy. You keep it simple.

I'm guessing beef also is off the table.

It is completely off.

There are two heads of state on the same table and it's an intimate setting. The service time isn't that crucial. Who gets that plate first?

It's in unison. You have to make sure that there are two guys who have practiced this. So you actually do a practice. So the guys walk in and then they look at each other and then they place it. You can't have someone clap, you know, kick fingers. It doesn't work that way. So, you know, there is no sound alarm says, Khana lagado. It doesn't work that way.

Get the food.

It works with a lot of coordination, a lot of practice. When you practice and you see the dance, that is currently happening. And you see it happen together. I think that's the best part of this The Chef Aaron Sundaraj speaking to Davina Gupta.

And that's all from us for now, but there will be a new edition of the podcast a little later.

If you want to comment on this one or any of the topics, send us an email. The address is globalpodcasts at bbc.co.uk. You can also find us on X, of course, for being known as Twitter at Global News Pod. This edition was mixed by Holly Palmer and the producer was Marin Strong, the editor,

Kara Martin. I'm Gareth Barlow and until next time, goodbye.