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I'm Alex Ritzen and in the early hours of Monday, the 31st of July, these are our main stories.

West African states give Niger's coup leaders a week to restore civilian rule or face possible intervention. At least 44 people have been killed and more than 100 wounded in what's thought to be a suicide bomb attack in northwestern Pakistan.

And the Afghan Taliban publicly burn confiscated musical instruments saying they cause moral corruption.

Also in this podcast, Ukraine's president says the war is gradually coming home to Russia after the latest drone attack on Moscow and... So the stairwell we are walking down is almost identical to the one that's on sale. Sellers are saying that this could become a living space, an office space somewhere to hang out. Could this be the stairway to a heavenly London home? We start in Niger where coup leaders were told on Sunday that they have one week to hand back power to the president they deposed last week. The demand was made by the regional block of 15 West African states known as ECOWAS, which is threatening to use force unless Mohammed Bazoum

is reinstated. ECOWAS also imposed economic and travel sanctions on the new military leaders in Niger, one of the world's poorest countries. I asked our Africa regional editor Richard Hamilton whether this tough talk from ECOWAS would work. This is an unusually tough response from ECOWAS.

They've not done that in previous coups in Mali and Burkina Faso and they did create a regional security force so they could go in and actually take military action. They've imposed a no-fly zone, they've closed borders and though many other West African countries have turned towards the military, Niger was actually relatively stable under President Bazoum but thousands of people protested in Niame outside the French embassy and they were brandishing pro-Russian slogans and placards and ripped out the French embassy plaques so it's not clear if it's like a manufactured demonstration. It doesn't seem to be spontaneous but this is what some people have been saying against ECOWAS. During 12 years nothing has changed so this is why we took to the streets and decided to kick the president out. The West African bloc, ECOWAS, better not try and interfere on this process. Should the West African bloc ECOWAS come and intervene militarily, that would simply be on the wrong side of history. It would even steer away from their core mission which is to create a stable environment for the whole region to grow. Richard, why is Niger significant? What's its stake here? Well it's the sort of final domino in what the New York Times journalist calls the longest corridor of military rule on earth because six countries in Africa from Sudan on the east coast to Guinea on the west coast spanning 5,600 kilometers are now under military rule and one academic at Oxford University said that he was really worried that the Sahel region of Africa is going into meltdown and jihadists are growing in strength and in this vacuum Russia seems to be stepping in and this is a sentiment that Niger's ambassador to Washington

Kiari Liman Tingwiri also expressed. What I expect from ECOWAS is to do everything possible to make the school fail. I am worried because I don't want to see my country go the way of being ruled by mercenaries. And the United States is also extremely worried. They have 1,100 troops there as well as drone bases. They're worried about the increasing instability from jihadists

and the void being filled by Russia and on top of that Niger produces uranium which of course can be used for nuclear energy and nuclear weapons as well. Richard Hamilton sitting in on the ECOWAS

meeting was Dr. Leonardo Santos-Sameo. He's the recently appointed special representative of the UN Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel. Julian Marshall asked him why he thought ECOWAS had taken such decisive action against Niger. Well things I have changed it now the intolerance against a legal change of government here has grown. Why wasn't a similar tactic pursued in Mali? When things happened in Mali the situation of the region was different. Now we have a new leadership in the region and the ECOWAS we have Nigeria and the feeling was that in the past Nigeria was somehow less dynamic in the regional affairs. That situation now is changing with the new president, the noble and therefore the region feels more stronger to fight the aid of affecting the region. And was weighing on the minds of the ECOWAS leaders the importance of Niger in fighting jihadism in the region? Oh yes of course. Niger is playing a key role. That's where some of the joint forces are concentrated to fight terrorism. So if Niger stops playing this role this will be more the only way to terrorism to expand in the region and that expansion of terrorism is a matter of concern in the region. Military intervention must be something that ECOWAS

is anxious to avoid. It has happened before has it not in Gambia and Liberia but it's not a decision to be taken lightly is it? It's not. I don't want to speak on behalf of ECOWAS but my view is that after the announcement of these measures maybe other steps will follow. Such as? Maybe even to reach out to negotiate with them. The ways and means to reinstall the legitimate government. By understanding that this will not be business as usual. Dr. Leonardo Santos Simeo the special representative of the UN Secretary General for West Africa and the Sahel. A rally held by an Islamist party in northwest Pakistan has seen at least 44 people killed and wounded more than 100 in what police are tentatively saying was a suicide blast. The party is a partner in Pakistan's governing coalition. I got the latest from our Pakistan correspondent Kari Davis. We've been able to speak to some people who were either on the scene when the explosion happened or were there very shortly afterwards and the sort of things they've been talking about is the level of destruction and chaos and the force of the blast. We were able to speak to one of the rally's organisers Imran Mahir who was on stage at the time when this happened and has told us that several people around him died during that explosion. He's not entirely certain why he survived but this is what he said when I asked him about what he remembered from the moment of

the explosion and afterwards. It was all injured people around. All dead bodies and flesh. It was like doomsday. Local people tried to help the injured. There were not enough ambulances so people were taking their own cars. And Kari people are being buried already. Yes Alex we've already seen images of hundreds of people turning up to funerals of those who died in this explosion.

We know that earlier on today the police were still trying to identify some of those who had died and we understand now that they've had to do that through their clothes or their shoes simply because of the force of the blast. It was just too difficult to be able to identify some of those people who had lost their lives. Kari this was an attack on a political rally by an Islamist party. What was behind this? It's really difficult at this stage to identify. There have been plenty of different theories that have been circulating online about who could be behind it but as yet firstly the police haven't completely confirmed that this is

a suicide bomber and in terms of who could be behind it no group has claimed responsibility as yet and in fact some factions of the Pakistani Taliban have already distanced themselves and denied that they were involved but of course the backdrop is the elections expected to be happening later on this year most likely in the autumn and the concerns are that we are at this point in the year without even a set date for the general elections and we are seeing political rallies being targeted so the concern is what might be in store for Pakistan in the next few months.

Kari Davis in Islamabad Taliban officials in Afghanistan say they've confiscated and burned musical instruments and equipment in the western province of Harat. The ministry of the promotion of virtue and prevention of vice said the performance of music contributed to moral corruption and led young people astray. It's the latest in a series of crackdowns on freedom of expression in the country as Sanjay Deshpande reports. So far it's been Afghan women who have borne the brunt of the Taliban's austere, mirthless vision of an Islamic society. Now it's the turn of music makers. In Herat on Saturday thousands of dollars worth of confiscated musical gear went up in smoke. A guitar, two other stringed instruments, a harmonium, drums, amplifiers, speakers. For local Taliban officials music leads to moral corruption. So Herat, famed historically as a great centre of Islamic art and culture, must hear no music. Only the sound of silence. Sanjay Deshpande. Last week we reported briefly on a landmark hearing by a US congressional committee into unidentified anomalous phenomenon UAPs known more colloquially as UFOs. It was the most serious acknowledgement yet that mysterious sightings warranted scrutiny at the highest levels of government. One of three key witnesses was ex-intelligence officer turned whistleblower David Grush who claimed the US government had intact and partially intact alien vehicles. He also alleged that information on UAPs was being illegally withheld from Congress. Here is one of his responses to a question from the Republican Congresswoman Nancy Mace. If you believe we have crashed craft, do we have the bodies of the pilots who piloted this craft? Biologists came with some of these recoveries, yeah. Were they, I guess, human or non-human biologists? Non-human and that was the assessment of people with direct knowledge on the program. I talked to that are currently still on the program. Leslie Kern has written about the subject in the New York Times and has spoken to David Grush at length about his experiences. She told the BBC's Jim Nockery about the significance of last week's hearing. We have never had a hearing involving witnesses like this but ones of this caliber it's absolutely historic that we have members of Congress they're asking unimpeachable witnesses given their credentials and their knowledge. Topics about UFOs. David Grush was the witness who gave us, I suppose, the most dramatic evidence. Let's just hear one of the things he said now. Due to my extensive executive level intelligence support duties I was cleared to literally all relevant compartments and in a position of extreme trust both in my military and civilian capacities. I was informed in the course of my official duties of a multi-decade UAP crash retrieval and reverse engineering program. By any standards that's a remarkable statement. Let me ask you the blunt question. They don't reflect something that he has seen personally. Why should we believe him? I've spoken to him at great length and when I broke the story with my colleague Ralph Blumenthal of David Grush which we did

about two months ago we did discuss with him at length the question of crash retrieved objects which he says are of non-human origin. Not only have I spoken to him about this but to others off the record who have told me exactly the same thing. As Grush stated at the hearing he has spoken to dozens of very highly placed intelligence officials and people actually directly involved with the programs that possess these objects and that is what led him to come forward. He had enough information from others to believe that this was the case. One of the remarkable things about the hearing was how low-key it was. It seemed that all the members of the house who were sitting there were anxious to appear reasonable, skeptical, factual and calm rather than performing in a way that would lead people to think about conspiracies and little green men and all these things. They wanted to make this a very sort of sober hearing didn't they? Absolutely. I was in the room Jim and I definitely felt that was the mood there. It was very sober. It was also a level of excitement in that room. A high attention that was being paid to everything that this felt like a moment of history and I think everyone in the room realized that. Leslie Kern speaking to Jim Nockarty. Nero may have been Emperor of Rome but his heart lay with the theatre. Ruling between 54 and 68 AD

he became famous for his outrageous behavior, reputedly fiddling while Rome burned. Perhaps though

he was just unsuited to the job, spending most of his time acting and playing music.

The theatre he used while it was written about in old texts had never been found until now.

Terry Egan has the details. Nero's theatre was a conundrum for many. Written about several times, its exact location was unknown. In fact, only some glass chalices from the period had ever been turned up. Until that is a new renovation project. Digging up a palazzo leading to St Peter's Square near the Tiber River as part of plans for a new hotel, archaeologists found marble columns, storage rooms containing the remains of costumes and backdrops as well as plaster decorated in gold leaf. They're all signs of the kind of interests he had that ultimately made Nero

Claudius Caesar Augustus such a bad emperor. He spent most of his time showing off on the stage as actor, poet and musician and ended up killing many of those closest to him, including his mother and his wife for disagreeing with him. And famously, Nero may well have been behind a fire that destroyed much of Rome. The myth of him playing a fiddle while it took place just symbolizes how he was viewed. Nero was ultimately declared a public enemy,

and fleeing Rome was forced to kill himself, apparently commenting at the time,

what an artist dies with me. It certainly all makes for a tale worthy of the stage,

and experts say the discovery of his theatre may make that a reality. Either way, many of the pieces will end up in museums, while the ruins of the theatre will be catalogued

and then reburied. Terry Egan

Still to come in the Global News Podcast

Could that be the sound of New Zealand's bird of the century?

Russia's President Vladimir Putin has praised his naval forces at an annual parade in St Petersburg on a day when Moscow has been targeted by Ukrainian drones, our Russia editor Steve Rosenberg reports from Moscow.

Russia's war in Ukraine has not gone at all according to the Kremlin's plan.

Still, there's nothing like a giant parade to put a shine on things and create an image of military might.

In St Petersburg, Vladimir Putin sailed down the Neva River, congratulating Russian sailors on Navy

Day.

He reviewed a parade of warships and submarines, and delivered an address about heroism, patriotism and power.

Russia, he said, was constantly increasing the strength of its navy.

Thirty ships of different classes were being added to the fleet this year.

Without referring directly to the war in Ukraine,

President Putin praised Russian sailors for displaying true heroism and fighting valiantly.

But the news from Moscow was less upbeat.

Russia's Defence Ministry said that three Ukrainian drones had tried to attack the city earlier this morning.

Two had crashed into the Moscow city office complex, a collection of skyscrapers that are home to companies, government ministries and residential apartments.

Although no one was killed, the attack added to the general sense of instability here.

Steve Rosenberg, well, in response to those drone attacks on Moscow,

Ukraine's President Zelensky warned that war was coming to Russia.

Our correspondent in Kiev, James Waterhouse,

told me more about the rhetoric being used by President Zelensky.

I think he's being quite provocative with his language.

He's describing that very idea as being inevitable, of being fair, of being natural.

And I think this is about President Zelensky looking to apply pressure.

Now, that doesn't mean a Ukrainian advance,

where his troops are suddenly going to repel Russian forces completely and then cross the border, not stop there and try and take Moscow.

This is about psychological pressure.

I've got to say, we don't know for sure who is behind this drone strike, but it's still a propaganda opportunity for Ukraine.

And what I think he is doing is that he's not just addressing Vladimir Putin, but he's also trying to reach out to the Russian population, where the majority of people believe the war is justified, or at the very least, they turn a blind eye.

They don't ask questions and they place a great deal of trust in the country's leadership that when there are explosions in the capital city, when an airport has to be shut because of the danger, it might compel them to make a connection between what's happening close to home and what's happening in Ukraine.

And when that happens, that makes Vladimir Putin's job all the more difficult as he tries to conscript more men for an invasion, which is going far from perfect for him.

Even if the confirmation is not official,

the timing of what he says just so soon after these drone attacks on Moscow, it is effectively Ukraine saying we did this, isn't it?

It's just short, I think,

but what's interesting about President Zelensky's administration

is how effective they are at propaganda and at messaging.
And I've seen a military animation video using his words from his speech saying the war is coming to Russia,
and it's got cartoon drones flying along a map out of Ukraine towards Russia.
They've moved very quickly on his comments,
and I think that's been a trait throughout.
Ukraine is trying to win hearts and minds around the world
as it tries to secure long-term help, commitment,
as it hopes to prevail in this war.
James Waterhouse in Kyiv
A group of 21 opposition MPs in India has warned that if the ethnic conflict in the northeastern state of Manipura is not resolved soon,
it could create security problems.
It follows their two-day trip to assess the situation amid ongoing violence in the state that borders Myanmar.
The clashes between the dominant Maiteis and the indigenous Kuki communities have killed more than 140 people since May and displaced more than 50,000.
There have also been harrowing reports of sexual violence against women.
Member of Parliament, Kanemosi Karan Anidti, described her visit to the camps to Julian Marshall.
Their women have had to face sexual violence, harassment, and many lives have been lost on both sides.
They are living in these makeshift places,
and people who are very hurt and feel let down,
they've lost their homes, they've lost their lives,
and it's a forced peace which is there.
And still, there are sporadic cases of violence and shootings going on.
It is a very difficult situation there.
Of course, it was the images of a woman experiencing extreme sexual violence and humiliation originally filmed back in May that triggered both Indian and indeed world attention on the situation in Manipur.
But you say that sexual violence is still a feature of what is happening there.
There are many women who had to face sexual violence and harassment,
and we met these two women also,
and they feel really let down by the police force which they reached out to and asked for help.
They did not help them and they want justice to whatever happened to them, and especially the young woman.
She saw her father and her younger brother being killed in front of her eyes.
You talk about an uneasy peace.
Are you saying that the dozens of members of the Indian Security Forces that have been deployed in Manipur have managed to restore some kind of order?
Yes, some kind of order, but still incidents are not completely stopped.
So there is nothing done for permanent peace,

and the government has not reached out to the leaders
to ensure that there is some kind of peace talks
and some solution which they can reach.

The memorandum that was issued at the end of your visit says that the silence
of India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi shows
his brazen indifference to the violence in Manipur.

What more could he possibly be doing?

He just chose to talk about the violence against these two women
outside the parliament in one of his rare press conferences,
and he has refused to come to parliament
and allow the opposition parties to debate about it,
and we've been asking that the Prime Minister should come and reply to the debate,
which the ruling BJP government has refused.

It's definitely not safe to allow this conflict to continue for Indian citizens,
and more than that, I don't think this kind of violence can continue.

People are not willing to go back to their homes.

Indian Member of Parliament, Kani Mosey Karan Anita, speaking to Julian Marshall.

Now to one of the most anticipated events on New Zealand's social calendar,
as the battle commences for the 2023 Bird of the Year.

The people's favourite, the native Kakapur parrot,
was controversially banned from competing last year for winning too often,
but it is now back in the running alongside five extinct species
which have been included to draw attention to endangered birds.
So in what this year is billed as the Bird of the Century Contest,
may the best bird win.

Here's our reporter Chantel Hartle.

Meet the Kakapur.

This green-feathered, flightless bird with its curious booming sound
has captured the hearts of New Zealanders,
winning the Bird of the Year Contest twice.

Organisers removed it from last year's ballot to give other endangered birds
a chance at winning the title.

While some felt that was the right decision,
others were angry the Kakapur wasn't included.

One commentator even called it an attack against democracy.

There was similar upset in 2021 when a native bat, a mammal,
was included as an entrant and then won the competition.

Organisers are hoping to steer away from more controversy
instead focusing on New Zealand's extinct species.

The first of those is the Wicau, also known as the Laughing Owl,
given the name because of its range of calls,
including shrieks and barking sounds.

Next is the Huia.

This songbird looks similar to a crow with its glossy black plumage

and an orange beak.

The last official sighting was in 1907.

Another songbird, the New Zealand Thrush, makes the list.

This was said to be capable of mimicking other birds.

There's also the Bushren and the South Island Snipe,

two of the last native species to disappear for good
in the 1960s and 70s.

The winner won't be announced until November.

Chantelle Hartle

The Irish singer Sinead O'Connor died last week, aged 56,

and there has been an outpouring of superlatives to describe her talents.

She is, of course, best known for one song, Nothing Compares to You,

which was released in 1990, but written by Prince several years earlier.

So what is the origin of the song, and how did she come to cover it?

Susan Rogers was Prince's sound engineer in the mid-1980s.

She's now a professor at Berkeley College of Music in Boston.

This is her first-hand account, as told to the BBC.

Sinead O'Connor

On the day that Nothing Compares to You was written,

we were working at a warehouse in Minnesota.

This is before Prince's Paisley Park Studios were built.

That morning, Prince was in a really bad mood,

because his housekeeper, Sandy Sipione, had to leave unexpectedly,

because her father passed away suddenly without warning.

Now, Sandy was someone who had worked for Prince since his earliest days as a recording artist.

Sandy's role was to stock the refrigerator, make the bed, do the laundry,

just basically take care of Prince's personal life.

And she took care of so many of the little details in Prince's house.

So when Sandy had to go away, Prince was getting increasingly

miffed. His mood was just getting more and more angry.

Now, this time was before he was a superstar.

He was, I think, if I remember correctly,

right around the time that the Purple Rain album was released.

He didn't know how to solve this problem, the fact that his housekeeper wasn't there,

and he didn't know whom to turn to.

The two of us were working at the warehouse,

and he looked at me and he said,

when's Sandy coming back?

Well, I didn't know, but right after that Prince grabbed his notebook,

and he went off to a little private room where we had installed a bed.

He liked to write in bed, so he went off to this bed with his notebook.

When he came back, he told me what instruments to set up,

the Yamaha DX7 and some others.

And we did this song, and then the opening line,

it's been seven hours and 13 days since you took your love away,
sounded very much to me like something that might have been inspired by Sandy not being there.

In particular, the line,
all the flowers that you planted, mama in the backyard,
all died when you went away.

Sandy would take care of the house plants.

Sandy would be the one who would have planted flowers around the house.

This was not a romantic relationship, but if you're a songwriter,
you just take the germ of inspiration and then you weave it into
a story that may not be totally true.

When Sinead's version of the song came out,

Prince had a manager whose name was Steve Farnoli.

In the late 80s, Steve Farnoli left Prince and began managing Sinead.

When Sinead was looking for songs for her next album,

Steve said to her, there's this great song on a very small, obscure album by the family,
one of Prince's protege bands.

It's called Nothing Compares to You.

It's a wonderful song.

You should cover it.

So she liked the song and she did.

And it was a huge hit for her.

All the flowers that you planted, mama in the backyard,
all died when you went away.

That's a funny thing about Prince.

He was a genius with melody and he was a genius with writing hooks,
but he was a poor judge of which songs of his would catch the public's ear.

His two most commercially successful songs are Nothing Compares to You and Kiss.

Nothing Compares to You was covered by someone else in order to become successful.

Prince didn't have a good ear for knowing which of his songs would be popular.

Susan Rogers, who was Prince's sound engineer in the mid-1980s.

A lot is said about the London property market and the sky-high prices for places that are cramped,
dilapidated or even missing basic amenities like a bathroom, yet still managed to sell.

Now, however, even Londoners are surprised as a flight of stairs has gone up for sale,
marketed as a potential home or office space,

and with a highly produced video tour online set to a jaunty soundtrack.

The agents are really selling it, but in reality, is this a liveable space?

So to find out what this might be like, I've come to a very similar staircase

on the back of the BBC building here in London and to meet my reporter, Stephanie Prentiss.

Stephanie, is something like this really up for sale in London as a potential development
opportunity?

It is. So the stairwell we are walking down is almost identical to the one that's on sale.

We've got concrete stairs, steel structure around it, and then big glass windows.

And what the sellers are saying is that this could become a living space, an office space,
somewhere to hang out. If you've got planning permission, you could turn it into a fully

functioning home, they're saying. But Alex, we're in the stairwell now. Would we live in a stairwell like this? I'm struggling to see how this might work. I mean, would you put a bedroom? Well, these little platforms, which again, they're the same size as the one on offer, you could fit. I'm looking at it now. A single mattress, maybe? A very small sofa? We're having a somewhat nice time walking down these stairs, but what goes down must come up. We'd have to be walking up these stairs. It's a four-story building that's on sale, so your life would be spending a fair amount of cardio. But the one selling point it has, and we're Londoners, Alex, we know about this market, it is on the market for 25,000 US dollars in an area where most properties are around 500,000 US dollars. So my thinking is this probably will sell. And it's not the only quirky property that's been sold away, is it? It's not. I mean, there's a lot of conversation around the London market. Some people are saying it's a nightmare, it's a disaster. We saw one property recently where the bed was on a platform above the kitchen, and another one where the shower was right next to the kitchen as well. They were in the exact same space. So not the most beautiful property, but maybe it wins on the three golden rules of property, which are? Location, location. Location. Journalist and potentially an estate agent, Stephanie Prentice. And that's all from us for now, but there'll be a new edition of the Global News podcast later. If you want to comment on this podcast or the topics covered in it, you can send us an email. The address is GlobalPodcast at bbc.co.uk. You can also find us on Twitter at Global News Pod. This edition was mixed by Chesney Forks Porter and the producer was Emma Joseph. The editor is Karen Martin. I'm Alex Ridsson. Until next time, goodbye.