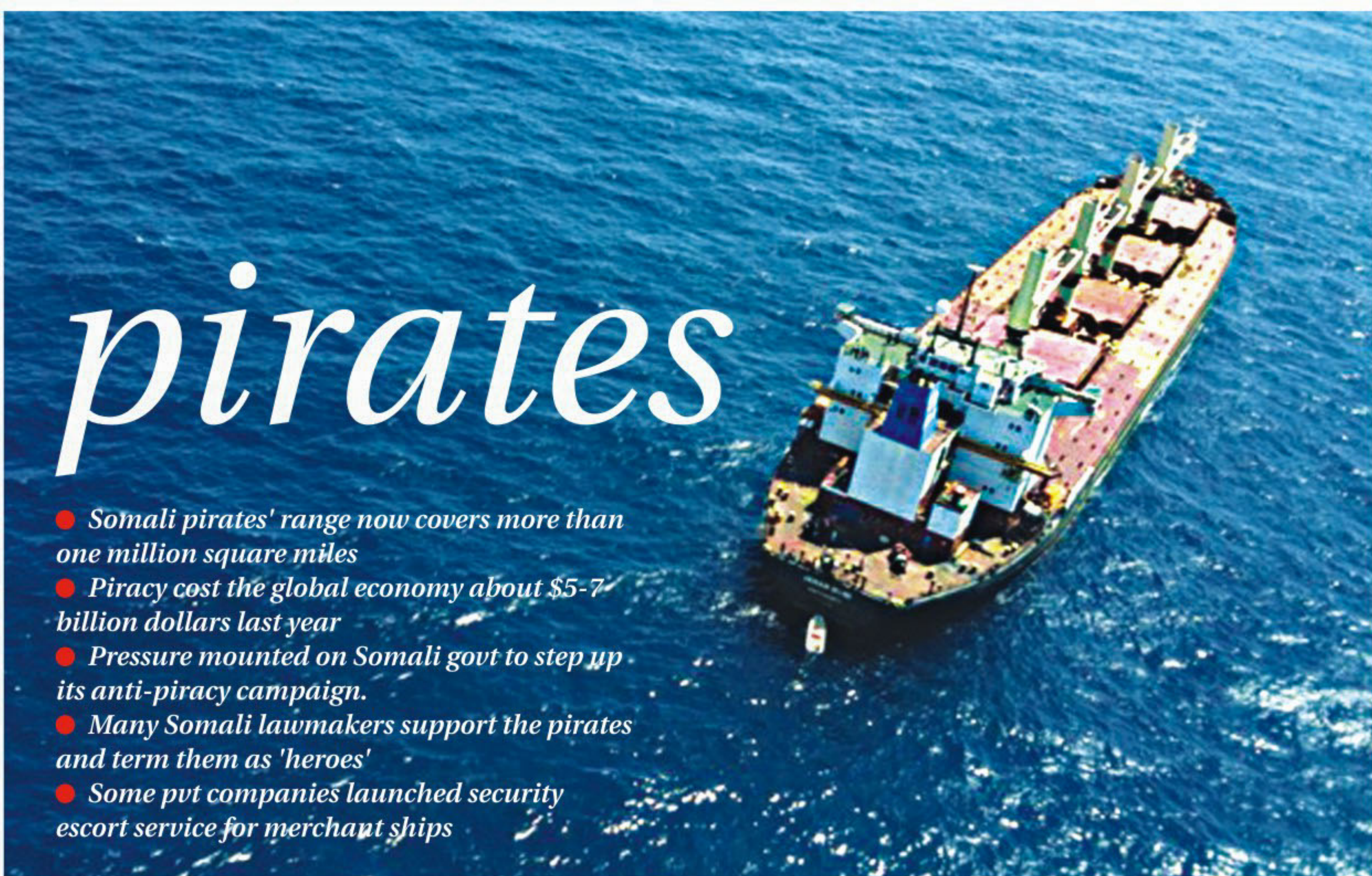


THE GULF OF ADEN

Aden of pirates



- Somali pirates' range now covers more than one million square miles
- Piracy cost the global economy about \$5-7 billion dollars last year
- Pressure mounted on Somali govt to step up its anti-piracy campaign.
- Many Somali lawmakers support the pirates and term them as 'heroes'
- Some pvt companies launched security escort service for merchant ships

INAM AHMED

The history of Somali piracy goes back to 1991 when the government of Somalia collapsed, leaving its nine million population in desperation. They had acute supply of food with much of their sea and coastline contaminated by European ships dumping toxic nuclear waste and overfishing by European and Asian trawlers breaking all norms.

The poor Somalis, many of them former fishermen, took up arms -- first to fend off invading trawlers and dumping ships and then for easy bucks by hijacking vessels -- and became the terrors of the Gulf of Aden. They found a safe refuge in Puntland, a backwater close to the gulf, from where they launch their sorties.

And today, the world is fighting to find a solution to the piracy that is costing the shipping industry so dearly, \$ 238 million last year, and the global economy about \$5-7 billion dollars, a UN estimation says.

Using force is both the easiest and the most difficult solution. It's easiest because the international community can send their naval ships to guard the waters. The Americans and many European countries have already done that. The Indians, the Chinese and the Malaysians have added their ships to

the fighting fleet. Bangladesh has also showed its willingness to the International Maritime Organisation to help to the cause after MV Jahan Moni was hijacked.

But it is also proving the most difficult as more and more ships are being taken hostage by the skinny, sea-worn pirates with their salt-rusted Kalshnikov and rocket launchers.

"The sea is a huge place and it is difficult to patrol the whole area unless you have support from inland. We have two Navy ships in Lebanon and we can dispatch them to Somalia," a Bangladesh Navy high official said last night when asked about the effectiveness of patrolling. "The best option could be to post a few navy men on the merchant ships with guns to guard against the pirates. But then the international law does not permit such practices."

There are also talks about arming merchant ships but arguments against it are also plenty. Many think it would make the pirates even more desperate and lead to bloodshed.

Seizing it as a business opportunity, some private companies have launched security escort service for merchant ships passing the Somali coast.

The company aims to earn as much as \$100 million a year from its services

that include strengthening the Somali customs and the maritime police through the creation of a coastguard unit to monitor and tax fishing boats operating in the Somali territorial waters and offering boats passing through a security service in return for payment.

Pressure has also mounted on Somali interim government to step up its own anti-piracy campaign. Somali lawmakers are redrafting a bill to make piracy illegal. The parliament refused its passage earlier. The bill proposes to declare foreign trawling in Somalia illegal.

But many Somali lawmakers support the pirates and term them as 'heroes' keeping foreign invading trawlers off the coasts.

Under the proposed law, anyone caught in the act of piracy will be fined as much \$500,000 and an imprisonment of up to 20 years.

But as days go on, the Somali pirates seem to be emboldened by the fact that very little could be done so far against them. Once they used to operate close to the shore. But now they use the captured ships as mother ships to base their members and launch attacks more than 1,000 miles off the coast,

even close to India. Their range now covers more than one million square miles.

Rules of engagement are also pretty stiff and most pirates caught off their skiffs are let off the hook. You can't prosecute them unless caught in the act even although they have machineguns and grenades in their boats.

However, a major effort is being taken to reconstruct Puntland and Somalia. Plans are being drawn to develop the regions, improve its health and education systems and invest in job creation.

Piracy Inc. offers work to thousands

of Somalis, many of them closely associated with the pirates such as gunsmiths and boat makers.

But whatever efforts are being taken, the pirates are becoming bolder and bolder to the frustration of the shipping lines. And demand for attack on pirate base is peaking.

"I think there is going to be some type of retaliation," a European diplomat in Kenya who trades ideas on anti-piracy strategies, told The New York Times recently. "I could see the Americans going after the pirate bosses, the organisers, maybe even blockade some of the ports that they use."

Latest alert messages

SHAMIM ASHRAF

The International Maritime Bureau (IMB), which is a focal point for the international trading and shipping industry and those associated with facilitating the movement of goods, posts alert on incidents of attack and piracy on its website. Here are the latest ones.

20.03.2011: 0210 LT: Posn: 02:55.1N 105:17.2E, off Pulau Mangkai, South China Sea.

Eight pirates armed with long knives in a speed boat boarded a general cargo ship underway. They took hostage the duty officer and brought him to the master's cabin. The pirates stole ship's cash, properties and master's personal belongings and left the ship.

19.03.2011: 1418 UTC: Posn: 03:54.0S 042:55.5E, around 190nm NE of Pemba island, Tanzania (Off Somalia).

C/O onboard a container ship underway spotted one mother vessel and two skiffs at a distance of 6nm from the ship. Alarm raised, speed increased and crew standby for safe room. When the skiffs closed to 2.5nm, Master ordered crew into the safe room and activated SSAS. The skiffs continued to chase the vessel at a speed of around 20 knots... The skiffs finally aborted the attempted attack.

18.03.2011: 0300 LT: Posn: 01:05N 103:35E: Singapore Straits.

Robbers in small boats approached a bulk carrier making way at manoeuvring speed from the port and starboard sides and attempted to board. The vessel raised alarm, flashed Aldis lamp, increased speed, made zigzag manoeuvres... The boats chased the vessel for 30 minutes before moving away.

17.03.2011: 0600 UTC: Posn: 16:15N 060:26E, around 360nm east of Salah (off Somalia)

A mother vessel approached a bulk carrier underway and launched a skiff with three armed pirates. The skiff chased the ship. As it came to a distance of 800 metres the master fired rocket flares, all crew mustered at citadel and armed guards deployed. The pirates kept on chasing the ship and the armed guards fired warning shots and the pirates aborted the attempted attack.

16.03.2011: 1642 UTC: Posn: 14:21N 059:25E, around 310nm ENE of Socotra island, (Off Somalia).

Around 40 pirates boarded and hijacked a general cargo ship underway. Pirates have taken hostage 20 crew members.

30 ships still under siege

STAR REPORT

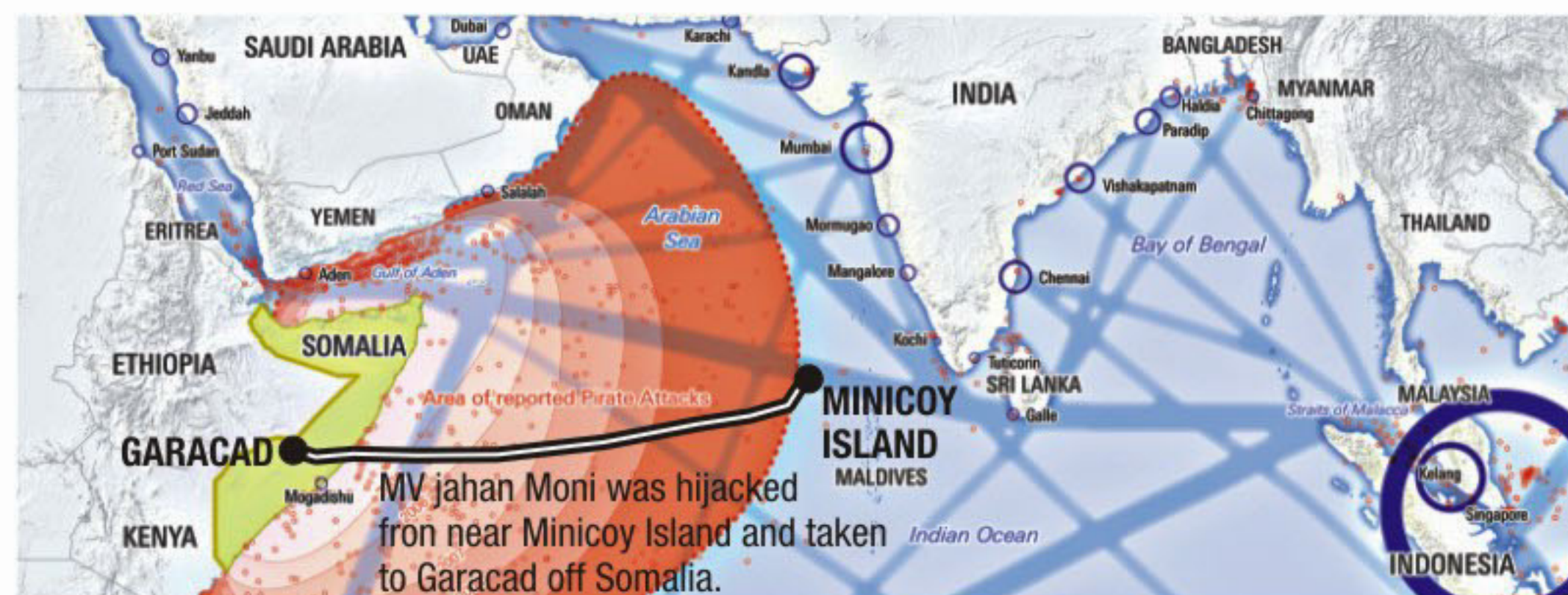
As many as 30 ships were being held by the Somali pirates until March 17 this year, reports Reuters. Here are the details:

SOCOTRA 1: Seized on Dec 25, 2009 in the Gulf of Aden. Yemeni-owned ship with six Yemeni crew.

ICEBERG 1: Seized on March 29, 2010. Roll-on roll-off vessel with 24 crew captured 10 miles off Aden.

JIH-CHUN TSAI 68: Seized on March 30, 2010. Taiwanese fishing vessel with 14 crew: Taiwanese captain, two Chinese and 11 Indonesians.

PRANTALAY 11, 12 and 14 -- hijacked on April 17-18, 2010. Thai fishing vessels with 77 crew.



es Salaam. South-African-owned yacht. European Union anti-piracy taskforce rescued one South African but two other crewmembers were taken ashore and held as hostages.

AL-NASSR: Seized on Oct 28, 2010. Motorised dhow captured off Yemeni island of Socotra.

POLAR: Seized on Oct 30, 2010: Liberian-owned Panama-flagged 72,825-tonne tanker seized 580 miles east of Socotra. Twenty-four crew -- one Romanian, three Greeks, four Montenegrins, 16 Filipinos.

YUAN XIANG: Seized on Nov 12, 2010 off Oman. Chinese-owned cargo ship with 29 Chinese crew.

ALBEDO: Seized on Nov 26, 2010. Malaysian-owned cargo vessel was taken 900 miles off Somalia

AL-DHAFIR: Seized on May 7, 2010 off Yemen. Fishing boat with seven Yemeni crew.

SUEZ: Seized on Aug 2, 2010 in the Gulf of Aden. Panama-flagged cargo ship carrying cement. Twenty-three crew from Egypt, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and India.

OLIB G: Seized on Sept 8, 2010. Maltese-flagged merchant vessel with 18 crew -- 15 Georgians, three Turks.

ASPHALT VENTURE: Seized on Sept 29, 2010: The 3,884-dwt bitumen carrier was heading to Durban from Mombasa with 14 Indian crew.

CHOIZIL: Seized on Oct 26, 2010 after leaving Dar

as it headed for Mombasa from the UAE. Twenty-three crew from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Iran.

PANAMA: Seized on Dec 10, 2010. Liberian-flagged container ship en route from Tanzania to Beira. All 23 crew are from Myanmar.

RENUAR: Seized on Dec 11, 2010: Liberian-owned bulk cargo vessel captured en route to Fujairah from Port Louis. All 24 crew are Filipinos.

ORNA: Seized on Dec 20, 2010. Panama-flagged bulk cargo vessel owned by the UAE, was seized 400 miles northeast of the Seychelles.

THOR NEXUS: Seized on Dec 25, 2010: Thai-

registered 20,377-dwt bulk carrier was hijacked 350 miles off Oman. All 27 crew are from Thailand.

SHIUH FU NO 1: Seized Dec 25, 2010: Somali pirates appeared to have seized the Taiwanese-owned fishing vessel near the northeast tip of Madagascar. It had 26 Taiwanese, Chinese and Vietnamese crew.

VEGA 5: Seized before Dec 31, 2010 about 200 miles southwest of the Comoros. The Mozambican-flagged fishing vessel had two Spaniards, three Indonesians and 19 Mozambicans on board.

BLIDA: Seized on Jan 1, 2011 about 150 miles southeast of Salalah. The Algerian-flagged bulk carrier with 27 crew from Algeria, Ukraine and the Philippines was heading to Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

EAGLE: Seized on Jan 17, 2011: The Greek-owned merchant vessel was en route to India from Jordan. It had 24 Filipino crew.

HOANG SON SUN: Seized on Jan 19, 2011 about 520 nautical miles southeast of Muscat: The bulk carrier, which is Vietnamese-owned, had 24 Vietnamese crew.

BELUGA NOMINATION: Seized on Jan 22, 2011. The cargo ship was boarded about 800 miles off the Seychelles. It is Antiguan and Barbuda flagged with a Polish captain and seven Filipino, two Russian and two Ukrainian seamen.

SAVINA CAYLYN: Seized on Feb 8, 2011 about 670 miles east of Socotra Island. The Italian-flagged and owned tanker had five Italians and 17 Indians on board.

IRENE SL: Seized on Feb 9, 2011 off the coast of Oman: The oil tanker was carrying about 2 million barrels of Kuwaiti crude oil. The Greek-owned and flagged tanker had seven Greek, 17 Filipino and one Georgian crew.

SININ: Seized on Feb 12, 2011: The Maltese owned and registered bulk carrier was seized with a crew of 13 Iranian and 10 Indian nationals in the North Arabian Sea.

ALFARDOUS: Seized on Feb 13, 2011: The Yemeni fishing vessel was believed to have been pirated close to Socotra Island and has a crew of eight.

DOVER: Seized on Feb 28, 2011 about 260 nautical miles off Salalah. The Panamanian flagged, Greek owned vessel had three Romanian, one Russian and 19 Filipino crew.

MV JAHAN MONI 100 days of captivity

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

When MV Jahan Moni sailed from the port of Tanjung Buli of Indonesia on November 11 last year with 43,150 tonnes of nickel ore, little did its crew know what lay ahead for them.

It stopped at a Singapore port for loading more goods and left for Greece on November 27.

On December 5, it was hijacked from a place in the Arabian Sea, 170 nautical miles from Lakshadweep of India and about 300 nautical miles from the Cochin Port.

Officials of the ship in Chittagong got the first message over the phone from the ship's captain that it was attacked by pirates around 3:30pm on December 5.

At 0942 Coordinated Universal Time, Nato circulated a warning that "a merchant vessel was reported under attack by pirates/1 skiffs in position 08°11N 071°43E". A little later, the Nato message read: "This vessel has been hijacked".

Chittagong received another call from the ship an hour after the second message. All the crew who gathered at the bridge room of the ship, communicated the officials till 5:30pm.

From satellite track through ship security alert system, the officials came to know that the ship was heading towards Somalian coast.

The ship anchored near Somali coast on December 11 while the pirates for the first time contacted the officials around 2:30pm on December 12 and several crew were also allowed to talk with the family members.

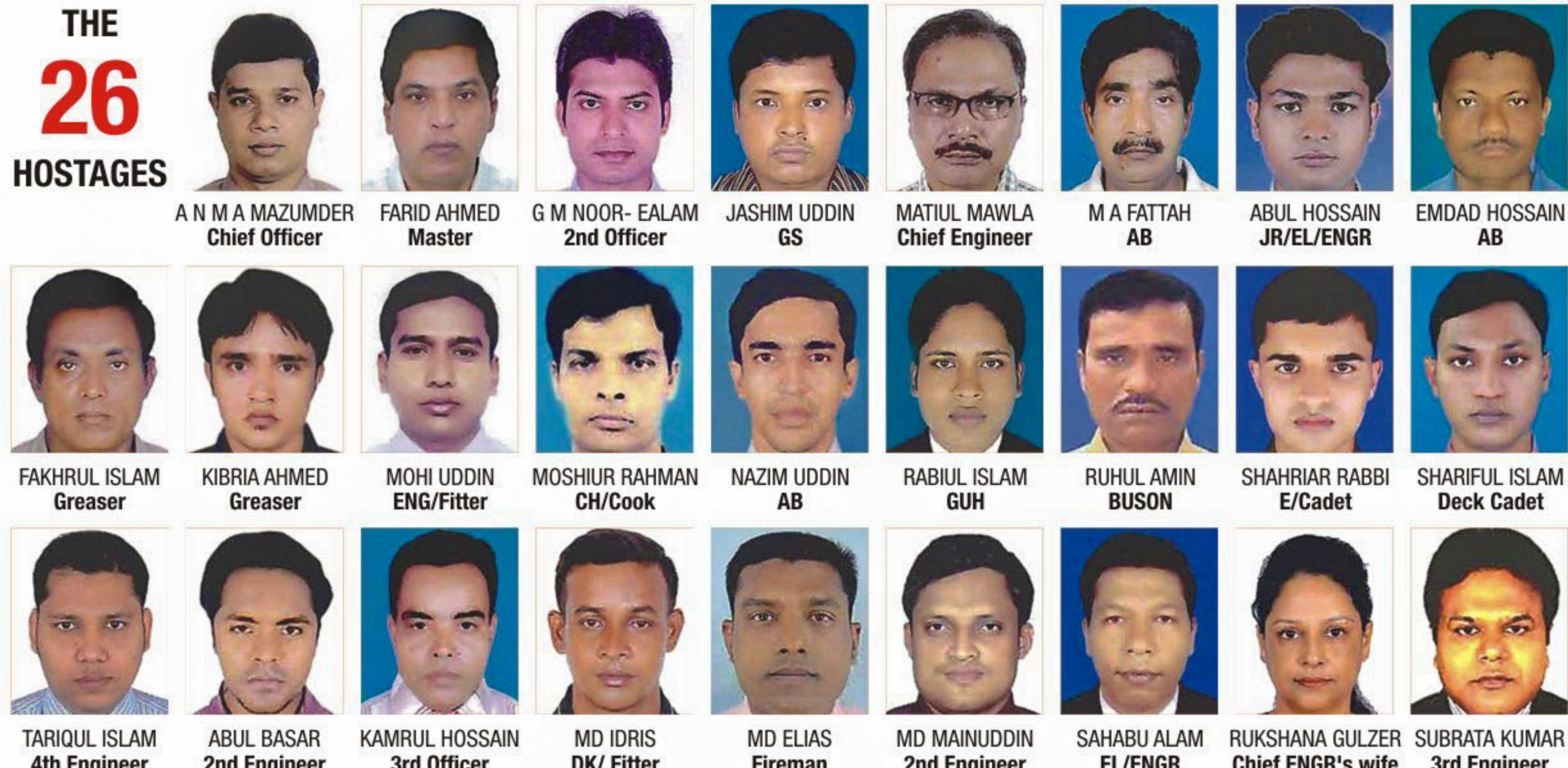
The pirates demanded a ransom of 9 million US dollar on the day and the negotiation started by a person named as Leon for them.

Meherul Karim, general manager of the ship, could talk with the captain of the ship Farid Ahmed on December 24. He informed that the stock of pure drinking water and fuel of the ship was about to finish.

The negotiation regarding ransom was verbally finalised on February 22 while the officials of the ship got written confirmation regarding release of the pirates.

The Bangladesh flag carrier with 26 crew aboard was freed on March 14, 99 days after being hijacked.

THE 26 HOSTAGES



- A N M A MAZUMDER Chief Officer
- FARID AHMED Master
- G M NOOR- EALAM 2nd Officer
- JASHIM UDDIN GS
- MATIUL MAWLA Chief Engineer
- M A FATTAH AB
- ABUL HOSSAIN JR/EL/ENGR
- EMDAD HOSSAIN AB
- FAKHRUL ISLAM Greaser
- KIBRIA AHMED Greaser
- MOHI UDDIN ENG/Fitter
- MOSHIUR RAHMAN CH/Cook
- NAZIM UDDIN AB
- RABIUL ISLAM GUH
- RUHUL AMIN BUSON
- SHAHRIAR RABBI E/Cadet
- SHARIFUL ISLAM Deck Cadet
- TARIQUIL ISLAM 4th Engineer
- ABUL BASAR 2nd Engineer
- KAMRUL HOSSAIN 3rd Officer
- MD IDRIS DK/ Fitter
- MD ELIAS Fireman
- MD MAINUDDIN 2nd Engineer
- SAHABU ALAM EL/ENGR
- RUKSHANA GULZER Chief ENGR's wife
- SUBRATA KUMAR 3rd Engineer