

Vessel saves 154 Rohingyas from sinking boat

REUTERS, Hanoi

A Vietnamese oil service vessel rescued 154 people from a sinking boat in the Andaman Sea and has transferred them to Myanmar's navy, state media reported, a group that was confirmed by activists as minority Rohingya.

The vessel, Hai Duong 29, was en route from Singapore to Myanmar when it spotted the boat in distress 285 miles (458.7 km) south of the Myanmar coast on Wednesday, VTCNews said in a report aired late on Thursday.

The boat's engine was not working and water was leaking into its hull, the VTCNews report said, adding it sank one hour after those aboard had been saved.

Of the 154 people rescued, 40 were women and 31 were children.

It is unclear when or exactly from where the vessel carrying the 154 people departed.

However, an earlier Myanmar junta statement said the group had come from a refugee camp in Bangladesh and intended to reach Indonesia.



Migrants, picked up at sea attempting to cross the English Channel, are helped ashore from a Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) lifeboat, at Dungeness on the southeast coast of England, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

EXECUTION OF PROTESTER West hits Iran with fresh sanctions

AFP, Paris

Iran was slapped with fresh sanctions yesterday after carrying out its first execution over demonstrations that have shaken the regime for nearly three months, as activists called for fresh protests.

Mohsen Shekari, 23, was hanged Thursday after being found guilty of "moharebeh", or "enmity against God", following what rights groups denounced as a show trial, sparking international outcry and warnings that more hangings were imminent.

The judiciary said Shekari was arrested after blocking a Tehran street and striking a member of the Basij paramilitary force with a machete -- a wound that required 13 stitches.

The Islamic republic said late Thursday it was exercising "utmost restraint" in the face of the protests that flared over the September 16 death of Mahsa Amini, after her arrest for an alleged breach of the country's strict dress code for women.

Britain yesterday announced wide-ranging sanctions against 30 targets worldwide, including officials in Iran whom it accused of pursuing "egregious sentences" against protesters.

European diplomats said the EU was also set to impose more sanctions on Iran for drone supplies to Russia and the protest crackdown. The sanctions are expected to be formally signed off by foreign ministers meeting in Brussels on Monday.



With Ronaldo or without him?

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squad, showcased by the 6-1 thrashing of Switzerland in the Round of 16.

Morocco, meanwhile, have been quite impressive themselves, having conceded only a single goal so far and ending campaigns of pre-tournament favourites such as Belgium and Spain. They have, in their ranks, quality players like Hakim Ziyech and Achraf Hakimi and a reliable Yassine Bounou in goal. It is expected to be a tough battle for Santos' men, however, Morocco are not the only concern for the veteran coach.

Having benched his talismanic captain Cristiano Ronaldo for the game against the Swiss and seeing how it paid off, the veteran coach now has to decide between sticking with the same eleven and including Portugal's all-time leading scorer in the starting eleven.

Such decisions are often difficult for coaches to make and it becomes doubly difficult when the player in question can upset the team harmony. From what transpired in Manchester over the last few months and given the less-than-happy

expressions, at times, Ronaldo wore on being benched could give a sense to an outsider that the Portuguese camp is in a bit of a mess despite the confidence-boosting win. However, any such turmoil inside the Portuguese camp was denied by Santos and his troops.

Regardless, it is a situation any coach would like to avoid -- coming to a press conference on the eve of a crucial knockout fixture and talking about what happened in recent past between him and his ace forward. But there was no hiding from those questions on Friday as the 68-year-old had to elaborate to the journalists as to what exactly was spoken between the two before the Switzerland match.

The Euro-winning coach made no hiding of the fact that Ronaldo wasn't happy with the decision to be benched.

"Cristiano, for obvious reasons, was not very happy about it," said Santos. "He's always been a starting player except for one or two games on the bench -- obviously he was not happy."

all "false cases" filed against them should be withdrawn.

The demands added that there will be no barrier to holding rallies and no cases can be filed to gag the opposition's voice; all the black laws, including the Digital Security Act 2018, Anti-Terrorism Act 2009 and the Special Powers Act 1974 must be repealed; anti-people government decisions, including price hikes of electricity, fuel, fertiliser and water should be scrapped; prices of daily essentials should be brought under common people's capacity and the market should be syndicate-free; a commission must be formed

Often times in the past, when Ronaldo was more in control of his instincts on the pitch and off it, Santos had looked like an assured figure, almost resigned to the faith that the job of maintaining order will be taken care of by his protege. Ronaldo had even shadowed Santos at the dugout on one or two occasions, most notably in the final of Euro 2016. That is certainly not going to happen this time.

With reports in Portuguese media suggesting that Ronaldo wanted to leave the squad following the snub, both the player and the coach were quick to suppress it, giving enough clue that they have probably found a common ground, at least for the sake of the team.

One with more than three decades of experience and a rich trophy cabinet to show against it and the other with almost all the accolades in world football barring one, both Santos and Ronaldo are wise and experienced enough to bury any personal differences and leave aside any egos for the sake of the biggest reward of all.

to identify the corruption in banking and energy sectors and share market; all the victims of enforced disappearances in last 15 years should be rescued and those responsible for extrajudicial killings identified and punished.

Criminals responsible for attacking houses and places of worship of the minorities should be brought to book; and steps should be taken so the law enforcement agencies, judiciary and administration work independently and without any interference of the government.

SAUDI SUMMITS

Xi promises security, energy cooperation

AFP, Riyadh

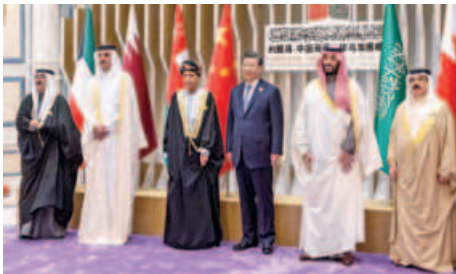
Chinese President Xi Jinping yesterday touted close security and energy ties with Gulf nations during summit meetings in Saudi Arabia that have highlighted tensions with Washington.

On the third and final day of his visit, Xi attended summits of the six-member Gulf Cooperation Council and a broader China-Arab leaders' meeting. This is only Xi's third journey outside China since the coronavirus pandemic began.

The discussions came one day after bilateral sit-downs with Saudi royals yielded a joint statement stressing "the importance of stability" in oil markets -- a point of friction with the United States.

Washington has urged the Saudis to raise production. "China will continue to firmly support the GCC countries in maintaining their own security... and build a collective security framework for the Gulf," Xi said at the start of the China-GCC summit.

"China will continue to import large quantities of crude oil from GCC countries on an ongoing basis," he said, also vowing to expand other areas of energy cooperation including liquefied natural gas imports. Oil from Saudi Arabia alone accounted for 17 percent



of China's imports last year, and last month Qatar announced a 27-year natural gas deal with China.

Earlier yesterday, a joint Chinese-Saudi statement spoke of "focusing on emissions rather than sources" in tackling climate change, the approach championed by the resource-rich Gulf monarchies.

Forty-six bilateral agreements and memorandums of understanding were announced on everything

from housing to Chinese language teaching. Both sides are seeking economic and strategic benefits by deepening cooperation.

However, few details were released despite a Saudi state media report on Thursday that about \$30 billion in deals would be signed during Xi's visit.

Riyadh and Beijing stressed "deepening relations within

the framework of the comprehensive strategic partnership between the two countries, and reaching new and promising horizons", the statement said.

Xi's visit comes during tensions between Saudi Arabia and the United States, its long-time partner and security guarantor, over oil production, human rights issues and regional security.

It follows US President Joe Biden's trip to Jeddah in July, before midterm elections, when he failed to persuade the Saudis to pump more oil to calm prices.

CYCLONIC STORM MANDOUS

India braces for midnight landfall

REUTERS, Colombo/Chennai

Cyclone 'Mandous' is expected to make landfall on India's southeastern coast around midnight, authorities said yesterday. Tamil Nadu state said it has deployed nearly 400 disaster relief personnel and urged people to stock up on essentials and be prepared to move to shelters as cyclone approached. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) said 'Mandous' has weakened from an earlier severe category, but warned that a storm surge of about 0.5 metre above the high tide was likely to inundate low-lying coastal areas of northern Tamil Nadu and neighbouring Puducherry when the cyclone makes landfall.

FIGHTER JET DEVELOPMENT

Japan, UK, Italy team up

AFP, London



Britain, Italy and Japan said yesterday they will jointly develop a future fighter jet in a project that UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said would guarantee national security and safeguard thousands of jobs. The three nations held out the prospect of cooperation with European and US allies, which are developing their own "sixth-generation" planes, vowing to maintain "interoperability" among all the allies against threats from the likes of China and Russia. The new "Global Combat Air Programme" is slated to produce its first jets by 2035, merging the three nations' costly existing research into new aerial war technology, from stealth capacity to high-tech sensors. "We're one of the few countries in the world that has the capability to build technologically advanced fighter aircraft," Sunak told reporters.

UBS REPORT

Billionaires on the back foot in 2022

AFP, Zurich

The number of billionaires in the world dipped in 2022 due to Russia's war in Ukraine, monetary policy tightening, stock market falls and the Chinese economic slowdown, UBS said Thursday. Switzerland's biggest bank, which is among the world's largest wealth managers, said there were 2,668 dollar billionaires in March 2022 -- 87 fewer than a year earlier. It said they had a cumulative fortune of \$12.7 trillion compared to \$13.1 trillion the year before, after tracking their wealth. "However, the total wealth and number of billionaires is likely to have fallen further since March 2022 due to declines in asset prices," UBS said. There were 273 new billionaires in 2022, while 360 dropped out.

Sanctions on Rab 'worked like a tonic'

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killed in "gunfights" with law enforcers till November this year. Rab was involved in all those incidents.

At least 34 people were victims of enforced disappearance in 2018, the year of the 11th general election, which came down to 4 in 2022, according to ASK data.

Nur Khan said extrajudicial killings in the name of "gunfights" have been going on for decades. It came down almost to zero after the killing of Major (ret'd) Sinha Mohammad Rashed Khan in July 2020, only to rebound after a few months.

"However, after the US sanctions, the numbers came down because there was psychological pressure on the government. It proves that such incidents increase, decrease or stop if the government wants," he said.

However, rights groups say, repression against the opposition or dissenters has not dipped in this time period.

At least seven leaders and activists of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party have been reportedly killed in police firing during clashes in political rallies since late July this year.

The latest crackdown on BNP central office in Nayapaltan on Wednesday resulted in the death of one man. Besides, police have arrested at least 4,500 people including top BNP leaders on various charges across the country in the last week.

The BNP alleged that most of the arrestees are their partymen who have been framed in "ghost cases" ahead of BNP's December 10 rally. Police denied the allegations and claimed they have arrested criminals.

Nur Khan said targeting the opponents and dissents, filing ghost cases, making mass arrests, stopping public assemblies by force, gagging the voices of dissidents and curbing media freedom by using the Digital Security Act are all expressions of an autocratic rule.

Human rights defenders say rights abuses by law enforcers on

the opposition parties would not stop until the authorities stop using police in repressing the opponents or dissents for political purposes.

Talking to The Daily Star, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal yesterday refused to link the reduction of extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances with the sanctions.

"I have always said that they [victims of disappearance] went into hiding or fled after committing heinous crimes. There are no instances of enforced disappearance in our history... Anyway, if they [rights activists] think that it has been decreased, we think, it's good."

On police repression of the opposition party, the home minister said police have not targeted the opposition or any particular party. Law enforcers are carrying out their job according to the rules of the country, he added.

Terming such political deaths and arrests unfortunate and violation of human rights, Professor Dr Mizanur Rahman, former chairman of the National Human Rights Commission, questioned the statements of foreign ambassadors regarding rights issues.

"Human rights concern from the foreign ambassadors in Bangladesh is also questionable. We have to look closely if those statements are part of geopolitics or attempt to put pressure on Bangladesh," he told this correspondent.

Since the sanctions, Bangladesh has also taken a number of steps to improve ties with the US. It has also increased reporting of the human rights situation in the country to the UN and other related organizations.

In February this year, Bangladesh appointed a lobbyist firm, Nelson Mulins, to maintain relations with the US government. The firm will work along with the PR firm BGR Group, which was appointed by the government earlier.

The foreign ministry also appointed a law firm, which will try to

get the sanctions lifted through legal means.

Besides, the government has set up a separate desk led by a director under the UN wing of the foreign ministry to look after human rights issues and provide proper reports to the UN and other organisations concerning human rights.

The foreign ministry has also created an inter-ministerial taskforce under its leadership. Other agencies involved in the taskforce include the ministries of home affairs, law, DGFI and NSI. The taskforce holds meetings monthly.

"We review the human rights situation and suggest the ways on how to improve it," a foreign ministry official told The Daily Star.

"We took all these measures not only because of sanctions on Rab but because human rights is one of our priorities," he said.

China makes first delivery of homegrown passenger jet

AFP, Beijing

China yesterday announced the first delivery of its new domestically produced passenger jet, with the aircraft expected to make its commercial debut early next year.

Beijing hopes the C919 commercial jetliner will challenge foreign models like the Boeing 737 MAX and the Airbus A320, though most of its parts are sourced from abroad.

The first model of the narrow-body jet, which seats 164 passengers, was formally handed over to China Eastern Airlines during a ceremony at an airport in Shanghai, state media reported.

The move marked "an important milestone" in the journey of China's aircraft industry, state broadcaster CCTV said.