

INTERNATIONAL

Suspected pirates hijack trawler off Somalia

Says Sri Lanka navy

AFP, Colombo

Suspected Somali pirates have boarded and hijacked a Sri Lankan fishing trawler with six crew in the latest attack against shipping in the Indian Ocean, Colombo's navy said yesterday.

"Our information is that they were captured by Somali pirates," said Sri Lankan navy spokesman Gayan Wickramasuriya, adding that the Lorenzo Putha-4 had been seized on Saturday some 840 nautical miles southeast of the Somali capital Mogadishu.

"Sri Lanka has alerted the Combined Maritime Forces," Wickramasuriya told AFP. He also said the navy of neighbouring India had already sent a warship to investigate, while the Sri Lankan navy was also preparing a vessel to travel to the area.



Palestinians fleeing Khan Younis, due to the Israeli ground operation, move towards Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday. Medical facilities are at risk of collapse in Khan Younis, the Gaza Health Ministry warned, as fighting raged across the Palestinian enclave. PHOTO: REUTERS

Gunmen in Iran kill 9 Pakistanis in border area

AFP, Tehran

Gunmen in southeastern Iran killed nine people Saturday, Iranian media reported, with Islamabad's ambassador identifying them as Pakistanis, as the neighbouring countries have sought to ease tensions after deadly cross-border fire.

Iran's Mehr news agency reported that "according to witnesses, this morning unknown armed men killed nine non-Iranians in a house in the Sirkan neighbourhood of Saravan city" in Sistan-Baluchistan province.

So far, no group had claimed responsibility, the news agency added.

The province's deputy governor, Alireza Marhamati, told official news agency IRNA that according to survivors of the incident, "three armed people shot at the foreigners after entering their residence and fled the scene."

Marhamati confirmed the toll of nine deaths and said three others were wounded.

The Pakistani ambassador to Tehran, Muhammad Mudassir Tipu, said on X, formerly Twitter, he was "deeply shocked by horrifying killing of 9 Pakistanis in Saravan".

Aid operation in Gaza 'collapsing'

UNRWA warns, condemns aid halt as 'famine looms' in the enclave

AGENCIES

The head of the main UN aid agency in the Gaza Strip warned late Saturday that its work is collapsing after nine countries decided to cut funding over allegations that several agency employees had participated in the deadly Hamas attack against Israel four months ago.

Philippe Lazzarini, head of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, said he was shocked such decisions were taken as "famine looms" in the ongoing Israeli offensive in the enclave. "Palestinians in Gaza did not need this additional collective punishment," he wrote on X. "This stains all of us."

His warning came a day after he announced he had fired and was investigating several agency employees over allegations that they participated in the October 7 attack on Israel that sparked the offensive. The United States, which said 12 agency employees were under investigation, immediately said it is suspending funding, followed by several other countries, including Britain, Italy and Finland.

The agency, with its 13,000 employees in Gaza, is the main organisation aiding Gaza's population amid the humanitarian disaster, reports Al Jazeera online.

More than two million of the besieged enclave's 2.3 million people depend on the UNRWA for

"sheer survival", including food and shelter, Lazzarini said, warning this lifeline can "collapse any time now".

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres also joined Lazzarini's call yesterday, pleading for donor states to continue supporting the UN agency that runs aid operations in Gaza. "The dire needs of the desperate populations they serve must be met."

"Palestinians in Gaza did not need this additional collective punishment. This stains all of us."

Says Philippe Lazzarini, head of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees



Nine out of 12 UNRWA staff members accused of involvement in the attack inside Israel have been terminated, according to the UN chief. One was confirmed dead and the identities of the other two were being clarified, he said.

"The Secretariat is ready to cooperate with a competent authority able to prosecute the individuals in line with the Secretariat's normal procedures for such cooperation."

The UN on Friday said it was investigating several agency employees over the allegations. But

Israel has continued to attack the UN agency, with Foreign Minister Israel Katz calling for Lazzarini's resignation on Saturday.

Top Palestinian officials and Hamas have criticised the decision which they said "entails great political and humanitarian relief risks".

"At this particular time and in light of the continuing aggression

against the Palestinian people, we need the maximum support for this international organization and not stopping support and assistance to it," Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Secretary-General Hussein al-Sheikh wrote on X, urging the countries to "immediately reverse their decision".

The humanitarian situation is dire in Gaza, after Israeli attacks destroyed vast swaths of the Palestinian enclave and displaced nearly 85 percent of the territory's people.

N Korea fires cruise missiles off east coast

REUTERS, Seoul

North Korea fired multiple cruise missiles off its east coast yesterday, its second such launch in less than a week, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) said.

The missiles were launched at around 8:00 am (2300 GMT on Saturday) and were being analysed by South Korean and US intelligence authorities, the JCS said, without specifying how many missiles were fired or how far they travelled.

"While strengthening surveillance and vigilance, our military is cooperating closely with the United States and monitoring additional signs and activities from North Korea," it said in a statement.

The latest launches came days after North Korea fired what it called a new strategic cruise missile called "Pulhwasal-3-31", suggesting it is nuclear capable.

North Korea is stepping up confrontation with the United States and its allies, but officials in Washington and Seoul say they have spotted no signs Pyongyang intends to take imminent military action.

Pyeongyang is likely to continue or even increase provocative steps, officials and analysts say, after it made strides in ballistic missile development.

Iran Guards seize vessel carrying 'smuggled' fuel

AFP, Tehran

Iran's Revolutionary Guards yesterday seized a foreign oil tanker carrying around two million litres of "smuggled fuel" near the country's southern coast, local media reported. "A foreign vessel with the flag of a country from Oceania was identified with two million litres of smuggled diesel," reported Tasnim news agency. The ship "was seized in accordance with a court order," the agency said, quoting Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps commander Haidar Honaryan. Fourteen crew members were also arrested, he noted, saying they were nationals of "two Asian countries", without specifying which. Iran, a major oil producer, has among the cheapest petrol prices in the world, which encourages fuel trafficking. Iranian forces regularly target tankers illegally transporting fuel in the Gulf. In September, Iran seized two oil tankers flying the flags of Panama and Tanzania and arrested their crews for allegedly carrying smuggled fuel in the Gulf. The US military has recently intensified its presence in the Gulf, accusing Iran of seizing vessels, or attempting to, in the strategic shipping lane. On July 6, the US military said the Guards had seized a commercial ship in the Gulf, one day after having accused Iranian forces of carrying out two similar attempts off the coast of Oman. Tehran said the intercepted ship had been transporting more than one million litres of "smuggled fuel".

Nitish Kumar takes oath as CM of BJP-JD(U) govt in Bihar

NDTV ONLINE

Nitish Kumar yesterday took oath as the Chief Minister of India's Bihar state for a record ninth time, at the head of a fresh government formed in partnership with the BJP. Kumar is replacing his ministers from the Rashtriya Janata Dal with those from the BJP and party leaders Samrat Chowdhury, Vijay Sinha and several others also took oath along with him at the Raj Bhavan yesterday afternoon.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated the new government with a post on X, formerly Twitter. This is also the fifth time in a decade the 72-year-old has changed camp

the frequency of the process having earned him the pejorative "Paltu Kumar". Kumar had parted company with the BJP last in 2022. At the time, the Chief Minister was concerned that the BJP could engineer a split in his Janata Dal United as they did in Maharashtra with the Shiv Sena. While joining the NDA fold again yesterday, he cited his disappointment with the Opposition bloc, saying though he got the front up and running, very little was being done by the others. "The new Grand Alliance that we created (in August 2022) is not in a good condition. The situation is not looking good," he said. Sources, though, said Kumar has been upset over the lack of clarity in INDIA bloc's poll preparations and being passed over as a possible Prime Ministerial candidate. The delays to seat-sharing talks for the Lok Sabha polls had been a further aggravation. After taking oath, Nitish Kumar told reporters: "We are going to stay together now."



The unbearable independence!

FROM PAGE 1

As a result, AL men that hold party portfolios in grassroots ran against party nominated candidates in 181 constituencies out of 299.

Voting in Naogaon-2 constituency was postponed following the death of an independent candidate.

The majority of the independents spoke to the AL supremo during last night's meeting and vested her with the responsibility to elect women in the reserved seats.

Hasina agreed to their proposal and said this will help her evaluate successors of many veteran and dedicated AL leaders

and some professionals who have contributed to the party, said sources.

In this happens, AL will have 270 seats out of 349 in parliament.

According to the Jatiya Sangsad (Reserved Women's Seats) Election Act, the 50 reserved seats are distributed proportionally among the winning parties or coalitions in the general election.

There are 62 independent lawmakers and if they all form a non-party coalition, they get at least 10 seats. Typically, a party or coalition receives one reserved seat for every six seats won.

As the AL won in 223 constituencies this time, the party will get at least 37 reserved seats. The main opposition Jatiya Party that won in 11 seats will get two seats reserved for women.

According to sources, independent lawmaker in Munshiganj-3 Mohammad Faisal Biplab, who defeated AL central leader and party candidate Mrinal Kanti Das, told the meeting that he wants to be with the AL as his first identity is an AL member and his MP identity comes second.

Independent from Netrokona-3, Ittikar Uddin Talukdar Pintu, who defeated AL central leader

and party nominated candidate Ashim Kumar Ukil, said he does not want to go beyond the AL and want to stay with the party for life.

Independent from Barishal-4 Pankaj Debnath told the meeting that he did not even fight against the "boat", AL's electoral symbol, as there was no AL candidate in his seat.

Independent from Faridpur-4 Mujibur Rahman Chowdhury, alias Nixon Chowdhury, who defeated AL presidium member Kazi Zafarullah, told the meeting that they all belong to the AL and want to represent the AL in the House.

AL leader Akhtaruzzaman, who won from Gazipur-5 defeating three-time MP and AL candidate Meher Afroz Chumki, said Hasina proved that she is one of the best leaders on earth and has the ability to lead the world. And thus, he wants to work under her leadership.

Ex-adviser to BNP chairperson Syed AK Ekramuzzaman, who defeated AL candidate Badruddoza Md Farhad Hossain, in Brahmanbaria-1 said he was a part of the AL and made a mistake by leaving the party. "I have returned home and want to work

under your [Hasina's] leadership," he was quoted by one of the independents as saying.

"You are mine," Hasina was quoted by a sources as saying in response.

At one stage, the AL chief mentioned the clashes in different parts of the country between supporters of the AL and independents centring the January 7 election, and cautioned them.

She said she does not want to hear about any infighting at any place. "You are all Awami League. Don't engage in infighting. Stay united," Hasina was quoted by a meeting participant.

Sinner the new champion of Aus Open

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from two sets down to clinch his first major title.

He celebrated by dropping to his back on the blue court before climbing into the stands to embrace his team.

"We're trying to get better every day," the 22-year-old said of his team after becoming the youngest Melbourne Park champion since Djokovic in 2008.

"Even during the

tournament we try to get stronger, trying to understand every situation a little bit better.

"I'm so glad to have you there supporting me, understanding me which sometimes is not easy

because I'm still a little bit young sometimes. But it is what it is."

It was a moment of heartbreak for former US Open champion Medvedev, who lost the 2022 Melbourne final to Nadal

after being two sets up and has now lost five of his six major title clashes.

"It's been honestly an amazing two weeks. It always hurts to lose in the final but probably being in the final is better than

losing before," Medvedev said at the trophy ceremony.

"I always want to win but I guess I have to try harder next time. But I'm proud of myself, I'm going to try even harder next time."

Activists splash soup on glass-protected MONA LISA

AFP, Paris

Two protesters yesterday hurled soup at the bullet-proof glass protecting Leonardo da Vinci's "Mona Lisa" in Paris, demanding the right to "healthy and sustainable food", an AFP journalist saw.

The action, which comes as French farmers protest across the country, is the latest in a string of similar attacks against artworks to demand more action to protect the planet.

Two women yesterday morning flung streams of red and orange soup onto the glass protecting the smiling lady to gasps from the crowd in the French capital's Louvre museum.

"What is more important? Art or the right to healthy and sustainable food," they asked, standing in front of the painting and speaking in turn.

"Your agricultural system is sick. Our farmers are dying at work," they added, before security staff placed black screens in front of them and evacuated the room.

A group called Riposte Alimentaire ("Food counterattack") claimed responsibility for the stunt. In a statement sent to AFP, they said the soup throwing marked the "start of a campaign of civil resistance with the clear demand... of the social security of sustainable food".