

## ANTI-PIRACY OPS

### 35 Somalis to face trial in India

REUTERS, New Delhi

The Indian navy handed over 35 Somali pirates to the police in Mumbai yesterday, after 100 days of anti-piracy operations east of the Red Sea, where piracy has resurfaced for the first time in nearly a decade.

The pirates seized by Indian commandoes face up to life in prison as the first to be prosecuted under India's 2022 anti-piracy law, which enables the navy to apprehend and arrest pirates on the high seas.

The Somalis were using the Ruen as their "mother ship" to launch attacks on other vessels, navy Chief Admiral R Hari Kumar told a press conference marking the 100th day of the operations. The commandoes rescued all 17 crew members.

India has responded to 18 incidents, deploying 21 ships and 5,000 personnel in rotation.

## 65 migrants' bodies found in Libya mass grave: IOM

REUTERS

At least 65 migrants' bodies have been discovered in a mass grave in southwest Libya, the International Organization for Migration said on social media platform X on Friday.

IOM said in a statement the circumstances of the migrants' death and nationalities was unknown "but it is believed that they died in the process of being smuggled through the desert."

Libya has turned into a transit route for migrants fleeing conflict and poverty to Europe across the Mediterranean following the toppling of Muammar Gaddafi in a NATO-backed uprising in 2011.

In an unverified message on Facebook, the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of the interior ministry in Tripoli on Monday posted drone footage of a desert area, showing white markings and yellow tape around the remains of bodies with numbers on them.

The CID said the bodies were found in al-Jahriya valley in Al Shuwairf town, about 421 km (262 miles) south of Tripoli.

Reuters could not independently verify the footage. The department said that after taking DNA samples, all the bodies were buried in a cemetery.

## Haiti gang wars push hunger to worst levels on record

REUTERS, Port-Au-Prince

Almost half of Haiti's people are struggling to feed themselves as gang violence spreads across the country, with several areas close to famine, international organizations said on Friday.

Inflation and poor harvests have also helped push Haiti to its worst levels of food insecurity on record, they said. "Rising hunger is fueling the security crisis that is shattering the country. We need urgent action now - waiting to respond at scale is not an option," Jean-Martin Bauer, the World Food Programme's Haiti director, said.

The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) - an organisation which sets a scale used by the United Nations and governments to assess hunger - said in a report that about 4.97 million people out of a population of about 11.5 million were facing crisis or worse levels of food insecurity.

Eight areas were now assessed to be in an emergency phase - the worst level before famine, it said.

These include the Artibonite valley, Haiti's farming heartland, which has been badly hit by gangs expanding from the capital Port-au-Prince, rural parts of the Grand-Anse peninsula and neighborhoods of the capital such as the poor Cite Soleil district.

The Caribbean country has been gripped by violence since rival gangs unleashed a wave of attacks this month, including raids on police stations and the international airport. The conflict has killed thousands and displaced hundreds of thousands. Regional leaders are trying to form a transitional council and Prime Minister Ariel Henry has promised to resign once it is set up. But he is currently stranded abroad, shut out of the country.



A Palestinian man mourns the death of relatives killed in an Israeli bombardment, at the morgue of the European hospital in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## 'Worse than hell'

### Says Palestinians on Al-Shifa hospital raid

AFP, Palestinian Territories

Around the Gaza Strip's besieged largest hospital, Palestinians have witnessed constant bombardment, mass arrests, tanks and corpses littering the streets during a multi-day Israeli raid, with no end in sight.

Israeli forces battling Hamas launched the operation in and around Gaza City's Al-Shifa hospital on Monday, saying senior operatives of the Palestinian group were based at the sprawling compound.

Since then, according to the military, about 150 Hamas members have been killed and hundreds more have been arrested or questioned.

And after five days, Israeli forces have shown no signs of pulling back.

"Everyone is afraid of being executed or arrested," said 59-year-old Mohammed, who lives about 500 metres (0.3 miles) from Al-Shifa and gave only his first name.

"I feel that Gaza has become worse than the fires of hell," he told AFP.

"I saw many bodies on Al-Shifa Street and tanks blocking the roads leading to the hospital. I saw fires in a house next to Al-Shifa."

The surrounding areas, the Al-Rimal neighbourhood and Al-Shati refugee camp, are like "ghost towns", with only few residents remaining, said Mohammed.

Many Palestinians in the territory's north, where Gaza City is located, fled south earlier in the war, which began on October 7.

The latest raid on Al-Shifa - following a military operation there in November that sparked international outrage - has sent more seeking safety elsewhere.

AFP footage showed streams of people fleeing south along Gaza's coast to escape the hospital onslaught on Thursday.

Mahmoud Abu Amra, 50, who lives in Al-Rimal, said Israeli troops forced "women and children to go west to Al-Rashid road on the coast, and then to the south of the



Gaza Strip".

Those who remain in the north, about 300,000 people according to the United Nations, face dire conditions and crippling shortages of basic supplies.

On Friday at dawn Abu Amra said he saw Israeli forces raiding homes and residential buildings in Gaza City's west.

"These forces evacuated all residents from their homes, and forced all men over the age of 16 to strip completely except for their underwear," he said.

"They tied them up, beat them with rifle butts, insulted them and took them to a school near Al-Shifa hospital for interrogation and detention."

Israel has maintained that its actions were in accordance with international law.

The Israeli military told AFP it was "often

necessary for terror suspects to hand over their clothes... to ensure that they are not concealing explosive vests or other weaponry".

"Detainees are given back their clothes when it's possible to do so," it added.

Israel had long said the sprawling Al-Shifa complex, where displaced Palestinians have taken refuge alongside patients and staff, sat atop an underground Hamas command centre.

Hamas has denied using the hospital for military purposes.

The Israeli army said Friday that troops were "continuing to conduct precise operational activity in the Al-Shifa Hospital area while preventing harm to civilians, patients, medical teams and medical equipment".

## India court bans madrasas in Uttar Pradesh

REUTERS, New Delhi

A court in India essentially banned Islamic schools in the country's most populous state, a move that could further distance many Muslims from Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu-nationalist government ahead of national elections. The Friday ruling scraps a 2004 law governing madrasas in Uttar Pradesh, saying it violates India's constitutional secularism and ordering that students be moved to conventional schools. The Allahabad High Court order affects 2.7 million students and 10,000 teachers in 25,000 madrasas, said Iftikhar Ahmed Javed, head of the board of madrasa education in the state, where one-fifth of the 240 million people are Muslims. "The state government shall also ensure that children between the ages of 6 to 14 years are not left without admission in duly recognised institutions," Judges Subhash Vidyarthi and Vivek Chaudhary wrote in their order, which was made on the basis of an appeal by lawyer Anshuman Singh Rathore. Reuters could not determine if Rathore is connected to any political group. India holds a general election between April and June that Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is widely expected to win. Muslims and rights groups have accused some BJP members and affiliates of promoting anti-Islamic hate speech and vigilantism, and demolishing Muslim-owned properties. Modi denies religious discrimination exists in India. The BJP says the government is undoing historical wrongs.

## GEOLOGICAL TIMELINE

### No 'human era' in Earth's history

#### Scientists decide

AFP, Paris

A top panel of geologists has decided not to grant the 'human age' its own distinct place in Earth's geological timeline after disagreeing over when exactly our era might have begun. After 15 years of deliberation, a team of scientists made the case that humankind has so fundamentally altered the natural world that a new phase of Earth's existence - a new epoch - has already begun. Soaring greenhouse gases, the spread of microplastics, decimation of other species, and fallout from nuclear tests - all were submitted as evidence that the world entered the Anthropocene, or era of humans, in the mid-20th century. But the proposal was rejected in a contentious vote that has been upheld by the International Union of Geological Sciences, the field's governing body said in a statement published on Thursday. The decision "to reject the proposal for an Anthropocene Epoch as a formal unit of the Geologic Time Scale is approved", it said.

There is no avenue for appeal, though some involved in the voting committee have raised allegations over the conduct of the ballot and a perceived lack of due process. The union denied these assertions and called the outcome "a decisive rejection of the Anthropocene proposal" by the field's pre-eminent experts. There were four votes in favour, 12 against and three abstentions, it added. Despite this, the Anthropocene would endure as a widely used term: "It will remain an invaluable descriptor of human impact on the Earth system," the union said.



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Men light candles at a makeshift memorial to the victims of a shooting attack at the Crocus City Hall concert venue in the Moscow Region, Russia, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## KEJRIWAL ARREST

### India summons German envoy over remarks

REUTERS, NEW DELHI

India summoned a German envoy on yesterday to protest against his government's remarks about the arrest of an Indian opposition leader.

New Delhi summoned the German embassy's deputy chief of mission, Georg Enzweiler, "and conveyed India's strong protest," India's foreign ministry said. The embassy had no comment about the protest.

Asked about the arrest at a government press conference on Friday, Sebastian Fischer, spokesperson for Germany's foreign office said, Berlin had taken note.

"We assume and expect that the standards relating to independence of judiciary and basic democratic principles will also be applied in this case," Fischer said.