

MIGRANT CRISIS

Baby dies, 65 rescued as boat sinks off France

AFP, France

A four-month baby died when an overloaded migrant boat headed for Britain sank in the Channel off the coast of France in the latest tragedy involving asylum seekers, French authorities said yesterday.

Sixty-five people were rescued when the accident occurred off the French town of Wissant on Thursday night, the maritime authority in charge of French waters in the Channel and the North Sea told AFP.

The infant, aged four months and possibly from Iraqi Kurdistan, was on board with his parents and two other children, prosecutors said.

The passengers onboard "were mainly of Iranian, Iraqi, Albanian and Eritrean nationality," Guirec Le Bras, the public prosecutor in Boulogne-sur-Mer, told AFP.

The latest sinking comes as an anti-immigration mood is dominating political debate in Europe.

The tragedy brings to at least 52 the number of people who have died attempting to reach England from France so far this year — a record since 2018.

During a rescue operation on Thursday evening several vessels and a Belgian helicopter spotted an overcrowded boat, with some of its passengers in the water.

The boat "was tearing at the centre, with some passengers falling into the water, while others were holding on to the inflatable elements", the prosecutor said.



A young Palestinian boy holds up a portrait of slain Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar during a rally in Ramallah, in the Occupied-West Bank yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

THE KILLINGS GO ON

Sinwar death brings no respite for Gazans

AFP

The killing of Hamas chief Yahya Sinwar brought no respite for Palestinians in Gaza, as Israeli air strikes and shelling continued unabated in the territory already devastated by more than a year of war.

Despite repeated vows that eliminating Sinwar was a key war aim for Israel, raids continued in the besieged enclave in the hours after Israel announced the death of the Hamas leader they have long accused of masterminding the October 7 attacks last year.

Following a strike at dawn, Gaza's civil defence agency said rescuers recovered the bodies of three Palestinian children from the rubble of their home in the north of the territory.

"We always thought that when this moment arrived the war would end and our lives would return to normal," Jemaa About

Mendi, a 21-year-old Gaza resident, told AFP.

"But unfortunately, the reality on the ground is quite the opposite. The war has not stopped, and the killings continue unabated."

Large swathes of northern Gaza remained under siege by Israeli forces, with road closures preventing the delivery of supplies to the area — despite warnings from the United States that failure to end the blockade could trigger a reduction in arms deliveries to Israel.

"While we hear that delivery of aid will increase, people in Gaza are not feeling any difference," Philippe Lazzarini, the head of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, wrote on X.

"They continue to be trapped, hungry and sick often under heavy bombardment."

'ENOUGH DEATH'

As news of the death of Sinwar sunk in, many in Gaza saw little reason for the Israeli army to press on with its war in the territory.

"If Sinwar's assassination was one of the objectives of this war, well, today they have killed Yahya Sinwar," said Mustafa Al-Zaem, a 47-year-old resident from the Rimal neighbourhood in western Gaza City.

"Enough death, enough hunger, enough siege. Enough thirst and starvation, enough bodies and blood."

Hamas's October 7 attack resulted in the deaths of 1,206 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally of official Israeli figures that includes hostages killed in captivity.

Hamas also took 251 people hostage during the attack. Ninety-seven remain in Gaza, including 34 who Israeli officials say are dead.

Israel's campaign to crush Hamas and bring back the hostages has killed 42,500 people in Gaza, the majority civilians, according to data from the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory, figures which the UN considers reliable.

Who was Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar?

CNN ONLINE

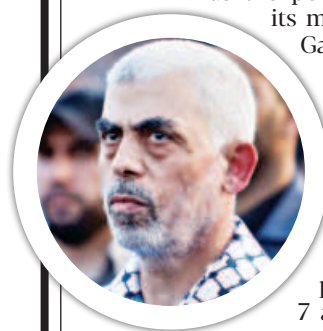
Sinwar had long been a key player in Hamas, joining the militant group in the late 1980s and quickly rising through the ranks.

He was born in a refugee camp in Gaza, after his family was displaced from the Palestinian village of Al-Majdal — now part of the Israeli city Ashkelon — during the Arab-Israeli war.

As a student, Sinwar became an anti-occupation activist, but he was imprisoned in Israel on several life sentences after being accused of orchestrating murder. He served 23 years before being released as part of a prisoner swap in 2011.

Sinwar returned to Gaza and quickly established his name in Hamas. He founded the group's feared international intelligence security branch, the Majd, and was known for employing brutal violence against anyone suspected of collaborating with Israel.

He was also viewed as a pragmatic political leader by some: in 2017, Hamas elected Sinwar as the political chief of the Politburo, its main decision-making body in Gaza.



Sinwar was designated a global terrorist by the US Department of State and the European Union in 2015, and was sanctioned by the United Kingdom and France in recent years.

But he rose to greater prominence after the October 7 attacks as one of Israel's key targets. Israeli officials have called him the "face of evil" and "the butcher from Khan Younis."

He became one of Hamas' most senior leaders in August after Ismail Haniyeh was assassinated in Iran. Sinwar had not been seen since the October 7 attacks, likely surviving Israel's siege of Gaza by bunkering in a vast network of underground tunnels.

WHAT WAS HIS ROLE ON OCTOBER 7?

Israel has publicly accused Sinwar of being the "mastermind" behind Hamas' October 7 attack — though experts say he was likely one of several.

The attack was the deadliest assault on Israel in its history. Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups killed more than 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took about 250 people into Gaza as hostages.

Sinwar was considered a vital decision-maker and likely the outside world's main point of contact in Gaza during the intense negotiations over the hostages' return.

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