

Global acute hunger hits new high

UN-backed report says 2025 outlook 'bleak' as humanitarian aid falters

AFP, Paris

More than 295 million people faced acute hunger last year, a new high driven by conflict as well as other crises -- and the outlook is "bleak" for 2025 as humanitarian aid falters, a UN-backed report said yesterday.

It was the sixth consecutive annual increase in the number of people hit with acute food insecurity, according to the Global Report on Food Crises.

A total of 295.3 million people endured "high levels" of acute food insecurity last year in 53 of the 65 countries analysed for the report.

"From Gaza and Sudan, to Yemen and Mali, catastrophic hunger driven by conflict and other factors is hitting record highs, pushing households to the edge of starvation," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said in the report.



"The message is stark. Hunger and malnutrition are spreading faster than our ability to respond, yet globally, a third of all food produced is lost or wasted," he said.

Conflict and violence were the primary drivers in 20 countries and territories, where 140 million people faced acute hunger, the report found.

Extreme weather was to blame in 18 countries and "economic shocks" in 15 nations, together affecting a total of 155 million people.

The report warned that the outlook was "bleak" for 2025 as major donor countries have substantially reduced humanitarian funding.

"This is more than a failure of systems – it is a failure of humanity," Guterres said.

"Hunger in the 21st century is indefensible. We cannot respond to empty stomachs with empty hands and turned backs," he said.



Democratic Alliance (AD) party leader and Portuguese Prime Minister Luis Montenegro gestures as he takes part in a street rally in Lisbon yesterday, on the last day of the electoral campaign ahead of the snap elections tomorrow.

PHOTO: AFP

Gaza suffering from a 'deliberate starvation'

Says Council of Europe, warns Israel sowing 'seeds for next Hamas' in the territory

AFP, Strasbourg

The Council of Europe yesterday said Gaza was suffering from a "deliberate starvation", and warned that Israel was sowing "the seeds for the next Hamas" in the territory.

"The time for a moral reckoning over the treatment of Palestinians has come – and it is long overdue," said Dora Bakoyannis, rapporteur for the Middle East at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

The 46-member Council of Europe works to safeguard human rights and democracy.

"No cause, no matter how just or pure, can ever justify every means," Bakoyannis said in a statement.

"The mass killing of children and unarmed civilians, the deliberate starvation, and the relentless pain and humiliation inflicted upon Palestinians in Gaza must end."

Since March 2, Israeli forces have blocked all humanitarian aid entering Gaza for its 2.4 million inhabitants, now threatened with famine, according to several NGOs.

US President Donald Trump said earlier yesterday that "a lot of people are starving" in the besieged territory.

Bakoyannis said that "it takes a smart and brave nation to recognise when its actions are causing more harm than good. What is unfolding in Gaza helps no one".

Breaking a two-month ceasefire, Israel resumed its offensive on March 18, with the declared goal of obtaining the release of all hostages still held in Gaza.

Israeli retaliation for Hamas' attack on October 7, 2023, has resulted in the death of 1,218 people on the Israeli side, mostly civilians, according to AFP data based on official figures.

UN rights office in 'very serious' financial situation

AFP, Geneva

The UN rights office based in Geneva says it is facing a dire financial situation amid deep US funding cuts, but its chief insisted there is no "panic".

News reports this week suggested that the funding chaos gripping the United Nations had left its human rights agency panicked over a dramatic budget shortfall.

"I have seen and read all sorts of unfounded rumours: that we are all moving to Vienna, that 70 percent of staff will move to the field except management," UN rights chief Volker Turk told a town hall meeting with staff on Thursday, according to excerpts seen by AFP.

"None of this is true."

Swiss daily Le Temps reported on Thursday that "a wind of panic" was sweeping over the agency, suggesting it was considering relocating away from pricy Geneva to Vienna, Nairobi and other sites.

Reports of mass layoffs and cuts to operations have become commonplace at UN agencies since US President Donald Trump's return to power in January.

Thai tycoon surrenders over skyscraper collapse

AFP, Bangkok

A Thai construction tycoon turned himself in yesterday to face charges of alleged negligence over the collapse of a skyscraper that killed dozens of people in a powerful earthquake, police said.

The 30-storey Bangkok tower crumbled in seconds, killing 89 people, mostly construction workers, when a magnitude-7.7 tremor hit neighbouring Myanmar on March 28.

The building being constructed to house the State Audit Office was the only structure to collapse in the Thai capital, raising serious concerns about safety standards and oversight.

A Thai court on Thursday issued arrest warrants for 17 people on charges of "professional negligence causing death".



A man holds placards as he yells toward a patrol car near a burning barricade during a protest against gang-related violence and to demand the resignation of Haiti's transitional presidential council, in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, on Thursday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Repeal 'draconian decree' dissolving political parties

UN rights chief urges Mali

AFP, Geneva

The UN rights chief yesterday called on Mali to immediately repeal a decree dissolving political parties and to "fully restore political rights in the country".

The military government on Tuesday dissolved the west African country's political parties, according to a presidency decree, the latest attempt to clamp down on the opposition.

Opposition parties had feared the move for weeks, banding together into a hundred-party coalition to demonstrate in a rare act of open defiance since back-to-back coups in 2020 and 2021 brought the army to power.

"The Transitional President should repeal this draconian decree," UN rights chief Volker Turk said in a statement.

"Any restrictions of political participation must be consistent with

Mali's international human rights law obligations."

The UN rights office pointed to the arrests of at least three members of the opposition following protests sparked by the planned dissolution of political parties.

"Their whereabouts are currently unknown, the latest victims in a pattern of enforced disappearances that dates back to at least 2021," the statement said.

Turk called on "the transitional authorities to release those who have been arrested on politically motivated grounds and to fully restore political rights in the country".

"They must protect civic space and ensure an environment in which all people can enjoy all their rights, including the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly."

Two climbers die on Everest

REUTERS, Kathmandu

An Indian climber and another from the Philippines became the first mountaineers to die on Mount Everest in the current March-May climbing season of the world's highest peak, hiking officials said yesterday.

Subrata Ghosh, 45, from India, died on Thursday below the Hillary Step while returning after reaching the 8,849 metre peak.

"He refused to descend from below the Hillary Step," said Bodhrat Bhandari of Nepal's Snowy Horizon Treks and Expedition organising company. No other details were available.

The Hillary Step is located in the 'death zone', an area between 8,000-metre (26,250 ft) high South Col and the summit where the level of natural oxygen is inadequate for survival.

On behalf of Pidilite

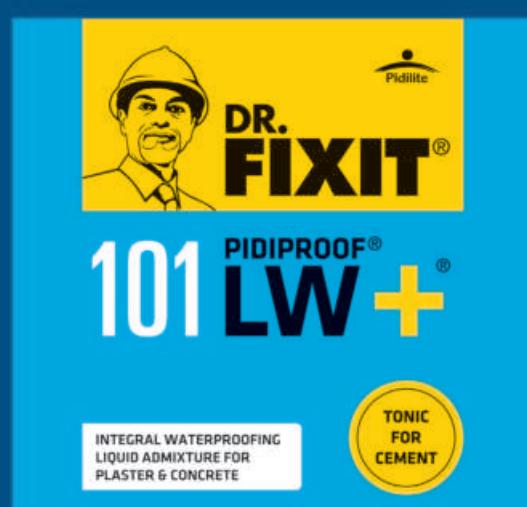
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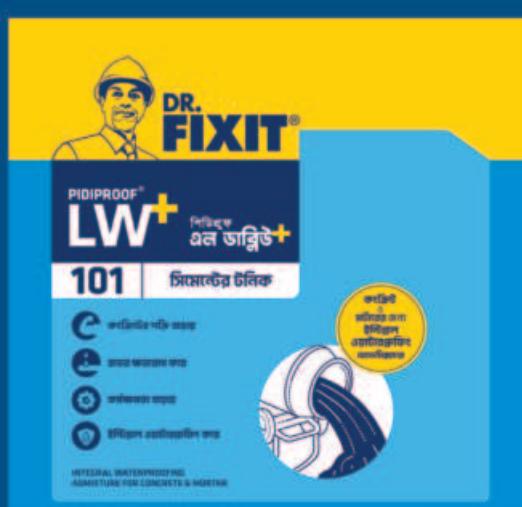


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On behalf of Pidilite

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