



**Afghan orphaned toddler reunited with family**

## Caution in crisis-hit Zionist entity after PM pauses reform



This undated and unlocated handout picture released by Monjasa shows the Liberian-flagged oil tanker, Monjasa Reformer, owned by Monjasa, and technically managed by Montec Ship Management. A Danish-owned Liberian-flagged oil tanker was boarded by pirates over the weekend in the Gulf of Guinea. — AFP

# Pirates board Danish ship in Gulf of Guinea

## Crew sought refuge in the tanker's citadel when pirates boarded

**COPENHAGEN:** A Danish-owned Liberian-flagged oil tanker was boarded by pirates over the weekend in the Gulf of Guinea, the owner said Tuesday, adding that contact with the 16 crew members had been lost. The 135-metre-long Monjasa Reformer "experienced an emergency situation" on Saturday about 140 nautical miles west of Port Pointe-Noire in Congo-Brazzaville, owner Monjasa said. The shipowner added that the crew had sought refuge in the tanker's citadel when the pirates boarded, "in accordance with the onboard anti-piracy emergency protocol". A citadel refers to a secured room where the crew of the ship can hide in the event of an attack or when pirates board the ship.

"Onboard communications channels are currently down and we are working with the local authorities to establish communication to understand the situation on board and provide all the support needed by the crew to overcome these dreadful events," Monjasa said.

Monjasa also said that "the vessel was sitting idle" when the incident occurred. Monjasa declined to give any information on the nationalities of the crew members when asked by AFP. According to an official at the port of Pointe-Noire, the ship had arrived in Congolese waters on March 18 and left on March 22, and was in international waters when it was attacked. "Three men took control of the ship and since then the crew can no longer be reached," the official told AFP. Pirates have long been a risk in the Gulf of Guinea -- a major shipping route stretching 5,700 kilometres (3,500 miles) from Senegal to Angola, with Nigerian gangs carrying out most attacks.

But since 2021, shippers say pirates have been raiding farther out in international waters. Their violence and sophisticated tactics prompted pleas from shippers for a more robust foreign naval presence like the mission to curb attacks from Somali pirates a decade ago.

### Lull in attacks

Many of the attacks in recent years have been carried out by Nigerian criminal gangs who strike out in speed boats from hideouts in the Delta region to raid vessels. Some gangs have captured larger fishing vessels which they use as a "mothership" base to raid further out to sea.

But the region, which sees a lot of traffic from oil tankers, has also seen a lull in activity recently. According to a report by The Maritime Information Cooperation and Awareness Center (MICA), three ships were attacked in the area in 2022 compared to 26 in 2019. The sharp decline in Gulf of Guinea attacks contributed to 2022 recording the lowest number of incidents of piracy and armed robbery worldwide with 132 cases, according to the annual report from the International Maritime Bureau. Two other attacks were recorded in the region in 2023 so far.

Denmark, home to shipping giant Maersk, sent a

naval frigate in 2021 to patrol the waters, after the country had pushed for a stronger international naval presence. The Absalon-class Danish frigate Esbern Snare -- equipped with a helicopter and around 175 marines onboard -- was sent to patrol the waters between November 2021 and March 2022, a period when the risk of attacks was higher.

The gulf has periods of calmer seas when it is easier for pirates to race out from hidden bases on the Nigeria coast to raid commercial vessels offshore and kidnap crew. In November 2021, sailors from the frigate were involved in a firefight resulting in the deaths of five suspected pirates.

A suspected Nigerian pirate was transferred to Denmark to receive medical care after the skirmish. After needing to have his leg amputated the man, who has also applied for asylum in Denmark, was put on trial for and convicted of endangering the lives of the Danish sailors. — AFP

## Seven dead, more than 60 missing in Ecuador landslide

**ALAUSI:** Rescuers searched Monday for more than 60 people reported missing after a landslide triggered by months of heavy rain killed at least seven people in southern Ecuador. The mudslide happened overnight Sunday into Monday, burying dozens of homes and injuring 23 people in the village of Alausi in Chimborazo province, some 300 kilometers (180 miles) south of Quito, officials said.

Shocked residents, many in tears, stood waiting for news Monday as crews with shovels, pick axes and sniffer dogs dug through the debris to get to survivors stuck between sheets of twisted metal and split tree trunks.

"Five are buried here," Manuel Upai, a 40-year-old laborer, told AFP, referring to relatives of his as he stared at the muddy ground. Alausi, a village of some 45,000 people surrounded by green hills, also saw several public buildings hit by the avalanche, which damaged roads and closed three schools.

"I managed to escape with about 15 minutes to spare," survivor Jose Aguasaca told local TV network Teleamazonas, saying he was rushing to get things out of his house before the mud came. Ecuadoran President Guillermo Lasso said on Twitter that firefighters from neighboring areas had been rushed to the village to help people affected by the tragedy. — AFP



**ALAUSI:** A rescuer with a sniffer dog search for victims following a landslide in Alausi, Ecuador on March 27, 2023. At least 7 people have died, and 60 other are still missing after a landslide in the south of Ecuador caused by months of heavy rainfall, the government said. — AFP



**LONDON:** A Ukraine Army recruit prepares to enter a trench as they take part in a trench warfare training session with members of Britain's and New Zealand's armed forces personnel, at a Ministry of Defence (MOD) training base in southern England on March 27, 2023. — AFP

## West's Ukraine response exposes double standards

**PARIS:** Outrage over Russia's invasion of Ukraine last year has exposed the West's "double standards" towards human rights abuses throughout the world, Amnesty International said on Tuesday. In its annual world report for 2022, Amnesty pointed to what it described as the West's silence on Saudi Arabia's rights record, repression in Egypt and Zionist entity's treatment of the Palestinians.

"The West's formidable response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine underscored double standards, exposing in comparison how inconsequential their reactions have been to so many other violations of the UN Charter," said Amnesty secretary general Agnes Callamard as she presented the group's world report in Paris.

Russia's full-scale assault, which began on February 24, 2022, "gave us an all too rare view of what becomes possible when there is political will to act" as the West closed ranks to support Ukraine, she added. Many countries imposed sanctions on Moscow and opened their borders to Ukrainian refugees after the invasion, while the International Criminal Court launched an investigation into war crimes in Ukraine. But Amnesty said the conflict had highlighted shortcomings in responding to abuses in other parts of the globe.

### 'Deafening silence'

Amnesty, fellow rights watchdog Human Rights Watch and a UN special rapporteur have concluded that Zionist entity's treatment of Palestinians amounts to apartheid, or segregation on grounds of race, a charge the Zionist state denies.

Last year, "successive Zionist governments rolled out measures forcing more Palestinians from their homes, expanding illegal settlements, and legalising existing settlements and outposts across the occupied West Bank", Amnesty said. But despite this—and despite Zionist forces killing "at least 153 civilians, including dozens of children" in the occupied West Bank—Western nations failed to demand an end to that "system of oppression", it said.

In Egypt, the group said, thousands of human rights defenders, journalists, protesters and alleged dissidents lingered behind bars, and "torture remained rampant". Although European countries welcomed Ukrainian refugees, they did not show the same kindness to people fleeing fighting in Syria, Afghanistan and Libya, Amnesty said.

The United States also welcomed Ukrainians, "yet under policies and practices rooted in anti-Black racism, it expelled more than 25,000 Haitians between September 2021 and May 2022, and subjected many to torture and other ill-treatment", the group said.

Amnesty also stressed the failure of global institutions "to respond adequately to conflicts killing thousands of people, including in Ethiopia, Myanmar and Yemen". "The deadliest conflict in 2022 was not in Ukraine but in Ethiopia," said Callamard, "away from world's attention". — AFP

## Belgium arrests eight in 'terror attack' probe

**BRUSSELS:** Police have detained eight people during investigations into an alleged jihadist plot to commit "terrorist attacks" in Belgium, authorities said Tuesday. Raids were conducted late Monday on homes in the capital Brussels, the port city of Antwerp and the border town of Eupen, the federal prosecutor's office said. A judicial source told AFP those arrested were "very young radicalised people" suspected of belonging to a jihadist movement. The prosecutor's statement cited two inquiries, one led by federal police in Brussels and the other by an investigating magistrate in Antwerp.

Both led to house raids on Monday, and the statement said: "There are links between the two files, but further research will have to show to what extent the two groups were intertwined." The Antwerp inquiry led to five arrests, including one in Eupen, near the German border, and the Brussels probe led to three arrests. The statement said at least five of those detained were suspected of planning to "commit a terrorist attack in Belgium". In both cases the suspects have been detained but not yet charged. Sources spoke of more than one possible attack, but the statement said the eventual target or targets had not yet been determined.

The parallel investigations triggered a raid in Molenbeek, an inner-city Brussels district with a large North African population that has been the focus of some previous terror probes. The investigations in Antwerp and Brussels initially focused on "two young adults suspected of violent radicalism", state broadcaster RTBF reported.

### 'Rise in radicalisation'

Between 2016 and 2018, Belgium faced a wave of deadly jihadist attacks. The country's biggest ever criminal trial of nine suspects accused of taking part in the March 2016 suicide bombings that killed 32 people is underway in Brussels.

These bombings were carried out by the same jihadist cell that killed 130 people during the November 2015 attacks in Paris, helping to prepare the attacks from hideouts in Belgium. Monday's arrests mark the first such terror inquiry to be made public in Belgium since November, when a Brussels man was charged with terrorism offences after stabbing a police officer to death. Officials had however warned of the continued danger. The threat of terrorism "still remains, with planned attacks that are regularly prevented by our services", Belgian federal police chief, Eric Snoeck, told RTBF on March 24. — AFP