
Ship earlier hit by Houthi rebels **sinks** in the **Red Sea**

DUBAI, Mar 2 (AP)

A SHIP attacked by Yemen's Houthi rebels has sunk in the Red Sea after days of taking on water, officials said on Saturday, the first vessel to be fully destroyed as part of their campaign over Israel's war against Hamas in the Gaza Strip. The sinking of the Rubymar comes as shipping through the crucial waterway for cargo and energy shipments moving from Asia and the Middle East to Europe has been affected by the Houthi attacks.

Already, many ships have turned away from the route. The sinking could see further detours and higher insurance rates put on vessels plying the waterway — potentially driving up global inflation and affecting aid shipments to the region.

The Belize-flagged Rubymar had been drifting northward after being struck by a Houthi anti-ship ballistic missile on Feb 18 in the Babel-Mandeb Strait, a crucial waterway linking the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.

Yemen's internationally recognised government, as well as a regional military official, confirmed the ship sank. The official spoke on condition of anonymity as no authorisation was given to speak to journalists about the incident. The Rubymar's Beirut-based

manager could not be immediately reached for comment.

Yemen's exiled Government, which has been backed by a Saudi-led coalition since 2015, said the Rubymar sank late Friday as stormy weather took hold over the Red Sea. The vessel had been abandoned for 12 days after the attack, though plans had been made to try and tow the ship to a safe port.

The Iran-backed Houthis, who had falsely claimed the ship sank almost instantly after the attack, did not immediately acknowledge the ship's sinking.

The US military's Central Command previously warned the vessel's cargo of fertiliser, as well as fuel leaking from the ship, could cause ecological damage to the Red Sea.

Ahmed Awad Bin Mubarak, the prime minister of Yemen's internationally recognised government, called the ship's sinking "an unprecedented environmental disaster".

"It's a new disaster for our country and our people," he wrote on X, formerly Twitter. "Every day, we pay for the Houthi militia's adventures, which were not stopped at plunging Yemen into the coup disaster and war."

The Houthis have held Yemen's capital, Sanaa, since 2014, expelling the government. Its fought a Saudi-led coalition since 2015 in a stalemated war.

US to airdrop aid into Gaza after chaotic encounter

WASHINGTON, Mar 2 (AP)

THE US will begin airdropping humanitarian assistance into Gaza, President Joe Biden said on Friday, a day after more than 100 Palestinians were killed during a chaotic encounter with Israeli troops.

The President announced the move after at least 115 Palestinians were killed and more than 750 others were injured, according to Gaza's Hamas-run Health Ministry, on Thursday when witnesses said Israeli troops opened fire as huge crowds raced to pull goods off an aid convoy.

Biden said the airdrops would begin soon and that the United States was looking into additional ways to facilitate getting badly needed aid into

the war-battered territory to ease the suffering of Palestinians.

"In the coming days, we're going to join with our friends in Jordan and others who are providing airdrops of additional food and supplies" and will "seek to open up other avenues in, including possibly a marine corridor," Biden said.

The President twice referred to airdrops to help Ukraine, but White House officials clarified that he was referring to Gaza.

Israel said many of the dead were trampled in a stampede linked to the chaos and that its troops fired at some in the crowd who they believed moved toward them in a threatening way. The Israeli Government has said it is inves-

tigating the matter.

Biden made the announcement while hosting Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni at the White House.

"Aid flowing to Gaza is nowhere nearly enough," Biden said. "Now, it's nowhere nearly enough. Innocent lives are on the line and children's lives are on the line. We won't stand by until we get more aid in there. We should be getting hundreds of trucks in, not just several."

The White House, State Department and Pentagon had been weighing the merits of US military airdrops of assistance for several months, but had held off due to concerns that the method is inefficient, has no way of ensuring the aid gets to civilians in need and can-

not make up for overland aid deliveries.

Administration officials said their preference was to further increase overland aid deliveries through the Rafah and Kerem Shalom border points and to try to get Israel to open the Erez Crossing into northern Gaza.

The incident on Thursday appeared to tip the balance and push Biden to approve airdrops. White House national security spokesman John Kirby said that airdrops are difficult operations, but the acute need for aid in Gaza informed the President's decision.

He stressed that ground routes will be continued to be used to get aid into Gaza, and that the airdrops are a supplemental effort.

India has eliminated extreme poverty. US think-tank

NEW DELHI, Mar 2 (PTI)

INDIA has eliminated extreme poverty, a commentary authored by economists Surjit Bhalla and Karan Bhasin in a leading American think-tank The Brookings Institution said, citing the just released consumption expenditure data for 2022-23.

In the article, the two noted economists cite the data to say real per capita consumption has grown 2.9 per cent per annum since 2011-12, with rural growth at 3.1 per cent being significantly higher than urban growth of 2.6 per cent.

Also, there has been an unprecedented decline in urban and rural inequality. The urban Gini declined from 36.7 to 31.9; the rural Gini declined

from 28.7 to 27.0. The Gini coefficient, or the Gini index, measures the inequality of income distribution, whereas a higher value closer to one (or 100 per cent) represents greater inequality.

"In the annals of inequality analysis, this decline is unheard of, and especially in the context of high per capita growth," the article states.

High growth and a large decline in inequality have combined to eliminate poverty in India, it said, citing the PPP of USD 1.9 (purchasing power parity at 2011 prices and not the PPP USD 2.15 line at 2017 prices). This, the economists argued, was more because the PPP of USD 1.9 closely corresponds to the official India Tendulkar poverty

The Headcount Poverty Ratio has declined from 12.2 per cent in 2011-12 to 2 per cent in 2022-23. In the past it took 30 years for India to witness a similar decline in poverty levels, which has now been witnessed over 11 years

line. The Headcount Poverty Ratio (HCR), the proportion of a population that lives below the poverty line, has declined from 12.2 per cent in 2011-12 to 2 per cent in 2022-23, equivalent to 0.93 percentage points per year. Rural poverty stood at 2.5 per cent, while urban poverty was down to 1 per cent.

"These estimates do not take into account the free food (wheat and rice) supplied by the Government to approximately two-thirds of the pop-

ulation, nor utilisation of public health and education," the authors noted in the commentary. The decline in HCR is remarkable given that in the past it took 30 years for India to witness a similar decline in poverty levels, which has now been witnessed over 11 years, the article said. Given the near elimination of extreme poverty, India should now graduate to a higher poverty line, which would provide an opportunity to redefine existing social

protection programmes to give greater support to the genuinely poor, it added.

"Official data now confirms that India has eliminated extreme poverty as commonly defined in international comparisons," the economists said. This is an encouraging development with positive implications for global poverty headcount rates. This also means that the time has come for India to graduate to a higher poverty line much like other countries. The transition to a higher poverty line provides an opportunity to redefine existing social protection programmes, particularly with the objective of better identification of intended beneficiaries and providing greater support to the genuine poor, it added.

Consignment meant for Pak's N-programme seized off Mumbai port



A combination of photos shows bills of landing and a container onboard a Karachi-bound ship from China. (PTI)

The Karachi-bound ship from China was found carrying a dual-use consignment with implications for Pakistan's nuclear and ballistic missile programmes

MUMBAI, Mar 2 (PTI)

SECURITY agencies at Mumbai's Nhava Sheva port intercepted and seized the consignment of a Karachi-bound ship from China after it was found carrying a dual-use consignment with implications for

Pakistan's nuclear and ballistic missile programmes, officials said on Saturday.

Customs officials, acting on Intelligence, halted the Malta-flagged merchant ship -- CMA CGM Attila -- en route to Karachi on January 23 and, during its inspection, found that the consignment had a Computer Numerical Control (CNC) machine, manufactured by an Italian company, known for its precision and efficiency controlled by a computer system.

A Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) team examined the
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Shehbaz Sharif becomes Pakistan's 33rd PM

■ By Sajjad Hussain
ISLAMABAD, Mar 2 (PTI)



TOP PML-N leader Shehbaz Sharif is set to become the 33rd Prime Minister of Pakistan on Sunday, once again leading a coalition Government, amidst allegations of rigging of polls and facing staggering economic and security challenges.

Shehbaz, who is the joint candidate of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), has already submitted his nomination. His challenger Omar Ayub Khan of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) too has filed his papers.

The PML-N president Shehbaz, 72, is the younger brother of former three-time Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif,

74. Voting in the National Assembly to elect the new Prime Minister would be held on Sunday, according to the National Assembly Secretariat.

The successful candidate will be administered the oath of office on Monday at the Presidential mansion, Aiwan-e-Sadr.

Shehbaz is known as an able

administrator due to the swift execution of mega-development projects while serving as Chief Minister of the Punjab province. However, he failed to exhibit the qualities when elevated to serve as Prime Minister for a 16-month stint in 2022.

He faces the menacing challenges of a fragile economy and the increasing threat of terrorism.

His government would also have to face the street power of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party which had been protesting against the alleged rigging of elections.

In the February 8 polls, the Sharifs-led party failed to garner a clear majority, albeit technically, it is the largest party with 75 out of 265 seats. In a sur-

prise move, the elder Sharif stepped back in favour of Shehbaz to allow him to lead the coalition as he is believed to have the knack of taking along diverse groups in the polarised country.

The PPP and four smaller parties have joined the coalition with the PPP supporting the government from outside in return for PML-N support for the election of its senior leader and former president Asif Ali Zardari as the president once again. Shehbaz Sharif's election as the prime minister is almost certain since the PML-N and PPP's candidates for the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly were elected on Friday with a comfortable majority.