



## Invisible shipwrecks: Migrants vanish en route to Europe as authorities withhold data

RENATA BRITO/  
PAOLO SANTALUCIA

BODIES washing ashore day after day. Phone calls from relatives are going unanswered. Migrants' tents abandoned overnight. Migrants trying to reach Europe are vanishing in droves in what are known as "invisible shipwrecks", but governments responsible for search and rescue are withholding information about what they know.

The beginning of 2026 ranks as the deadliest start to any year for people trying to cross the Mediterranean — an unprecedented 682 confirmed missing as of March 16 — according to the United Nations' International Organisation for Migration. But the real death toll is almost certainly much higher.

Human rights groups are increasingly struggling to verify tolls as Italy, Tunisia and Malta have quietly restricted information on migrant rescues and shipwrecks along the deadliest migration route in the world. The news barely makes headlines, in part because the lack of transparency prevents journalists from confirming reports. "It's a strategy of silence," said Matteo Villa, a researcher focusing on migration and data at the Italian Institute for International Political Studies think tank.

The organisation Refugees in Libya and other human rights groups have been sounding the alarm since late January, reporting more than 1,000 people missing after Cyclone Harry hit the region. But authorities have not confirmed, denied or corrected those reports.

In the weeks that followed the cyclone, more than 20 decomposing bodies washed ashore in Italy and Libya, while other human remains were spotted floating in the middle of the sea.

For the families of missing migrants, not knowing their fate is excruciating. "Europe should know that these people who got drowned in the sea have family members, have dreams, have passions," Joseph Thomas, a migrant from Sierra Leone and community leader in Tunisia's coastal town of El Amra, told AP.

**Sparse information means fewer deaths recorded**

Even the UN's migration agency is increasingly unable to verify cases of migrants who die in what are known as "invisible shipwrecks" because of the growing lack of information. Last year, at least 1,500 people were reported missing whose fates IOM could not confirm, said Julia Black, who leads the organisation's Missing Migrants Project. The issue persists in 2026.

"We started a new second-

**There is only one known survivor from the boats reported missing during Cyclone Harry. He was floating in the water when a merchant vessel rescued him on Jan. 22. The man told crew members he had been travelling with another 50 people, some of whose bodies could be seen in the water in a video of the rescue**

ary data set of what we are calling unverifiable cases because it's just become so many," Black said. For this year, they already have more than 400 missing that they could not verify. Many humanitarian organisations that previously filled some of the information gaps are no longer able to do so because of the global wave of funding cuts and government-imposed restrictions across the region.

"We've seen the restriction of access for humanitarian actors, which is not right. And now we're seeing even the restriction of information," Black said.

The Associated Press repeatedly asked authorities in Tunisia, Italy and Malta why they aren't sharing information related to migrant rescues at sea and what their policies are. Not one responded.

Countries are quiet on reports of boats missing after the cyclone. Over the years, authorities in the Mediterranean have gradually reduced information related to migrants. But their silence was even more pronounced in late January after Cyclone Harry unleashed heavy rainfall, winds of 100 kph (62 mph), and 9-meter-tall (30 feet) waves.

Hundreds of people had departed from Tunisia's coastal region of Sfax and disappeared, according to information the group Refugees in Libya gathered from migrants in Tunisia and their relatives abroad.

The group acknowledged it was difficult to be precise "because there is no central system recording departures, losses, or recoveries," but it warned that the death toll was likely even higher.

"We are looking at boats that never counted how many kids are inside," Refugees in Libya founder David Yambio said.

The AP sent five email requests to the Italian coast guard seeking information on the boats reported missing and search efforts, but received no response. An officer who answered the phone said the Coast Guard did not have "any further verified and confirmed information regarding the circumstances."

# Iran war triggers energy triage across Asia as import costs surge

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ANTON L. DELGADO/  
ANIRUDDHA GHOSAL

THE escalating war with Iran is pushing parts of the world into energy triage, forcing governments to choose where to cut demand or absorb costs, while prioritising dwindling supplies.

Asia is the most exposed since it relies heavily on imported fuel, much of it shipped through the now-blocked Strait of Hormuz. The narrow passage offshore from Iran is the main route for shipping a fifth of global trade in crude oil and liquefied natural gas.

Governments in the region are scrambling to adjust — tallying oil reserves, conserving energy, competing for supplies and trying to blunt prices. That brings difficult trade-offs: saving power may slow business activity. Prioritising cooking gas for households can hurt restaurants and other businesses.

"Even relatively modest constraints on energy use can create a drag on industrial activity," said Linh Nguyen, with the consultancy Control Risks. She pointed to Vietnam's energy-intensive export industries and warned that higher fuel costs or conservation measures could quickly raise production costs or slow factory output.

Analysts warn the same hard choices could soon spread beyond Asia to fuel-importing economies in Africa and elsewhere as countries compete for scarce supplies. "The situation is common across the board," said Putra Adhiguna of the Jakarta-based Energy Shift Institute. "There is no easy decision for the short term."

**Southeast Asia is rationing scarce energy**

With oil prices surging despite releases of some reserves, Southeast Asia is stretching dwindling energy reserves by urging households, businesses and government

agencies to slash power use. In the Philippines, officials have switched to a four-day workweek to cut back on fuel consumption and reduce the government's energy use by a fifth. The office has been told to switch off computers during lunch breaks and keep the air conditioning no lower than 24°C (75°F). Vietnam has urged people to work from home. While in Thailand, the prime minister has even asked officials to take the stairs instead of elevators.

Dieu Linh, a vegetable seller in Hanoi, said even a 10 per cent rise in fuel costs will eat into her thin margins. "If my costs go up by even a little, the profit is almost gone," she said. At the same time, countries in the region are competing for limited supplies at higher costs.

Vietnam has asked refineries and fuel distributors to keep fuel supplies high, while Thailand is stretching its roughly two-month oil reserve and seeking other domestic energy sources. Both are using price supports to shield households from rising costs. Thailand halted exports to protect its limited reserves, contributing to shortages that have closed nearly a third of Cambodia's roughly 6,000 gas stations.

**East Asia searches for new energy suppliers and sources**

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Japan's first line of defence is its vast strategic oil stockpile, amounting to around 254 days' worth of supplies. This system was set up after the shocks from the 1970s Arab oil crisis. Japan began releasing about 45 days' worth of oil reserves this week to prevent fuel prices from surging as crude oil imports slow. It last released reserves after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022.



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This will help keep Japan's energy-intensive industries running, from automobiles to steel manufacturing and heavy machinery. Companies like Toyota, Mitsubishi and Nippon Steel depend on steady fuel supplies.

South Korea plans to release 22.46 million barrels from its reserves under the International Energy Agency's largest-ever coordinated stock draw.

But analysts said that tapping reserves isn't a long-term solution.

It will give refineries "some buffer" against disruptions. But this does not increase a country's overall supply unless it can buy oil released by other nations, said Muyu Xu of the energy consultancy Kpler.

If the crisis drags on, crude oil shortages could return. The releases

may keep refineries running for another few weeks, but companies may need to slow production if disruptions continue, she added.

"The fundamental difficulties will not be solved by this action," said Mika Ohbayashi of the Renewable Energy Institute in Japan, adding that renewable energy was a long-term solution, but the Japanese government was uninterested.

Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi is due to meet with US President Donald Trump later this month, and Japan's plans to buy more American LNG and restart nuclear power plants are likely to be on the agenda, analysts say.

**Populous nations**

Prioritise homes, but face price pinch. India is prioritising household needs for its limited supply of liquefied petroleum gas or LPG, which is used for cooking and to power cars. But shortages are already seeping into restaurants and hotels in the world's second-largest LPG importer, as eateries shorten hours, close temporarily or trim long-simmered curries and deep-fried snacks from their menus.

The scale of demand in India, the world's most populous nation, limits how long it can cap prices to shield consumers. The situation could worsen within a week if government subsidies lapse, said Dutatraya Das of the think tank Ember, noting gas supplies were the most

immediate concern. "You can't store a lot of gas," Das said, adding that fertiliser factories and small industries will feel the pinch first.

Indonesia, a country of 287 million people and Southeast Asia's most populous nation, also faces hard choices.

While the government has promised to maintain fuel prices throughout Eid al-Fitr, the Muslim holiday marking the end of the fasting month of Ramadan, Adhiguna of the Energy Shift Institute said there is "no clarity about what will happen after that," adding that this implies fuel prices could increase.

Thailand is also caught in a dilemma. If it ends subsidies that keep prices low, living costs will jump, and that could spark a panic if reserves fall further, said Areeporn Asawinpongphan of the Thailand Development Research Institute.

If the conflict continues, Indonesia will have to choose between keeping the subsidies that protect customers or cutting funding to keep to budgetary limits. However, this could fuel inflation. Given Indonesia's limited 20-day reserve, Adhiguna warned that price fluctuations in Indonesia's fuel market will be swift. "It will eventually reach a breaking point," Adhiguna said.

**Europe feels the squeeze, too**

The European Union is doubling down on its long-term clean energy strategy to cut consumption and rein in prices across the 27-nation bloc that have risen sharply since the war's start. Officials met in Brussels this week, where they considered ways to improve the region's energy security.

"We are looking at how we can reduce people's energy bills," said European Commissioner for Energy Dan Jørgensen. "We are working on immediate measures to help businesses and our most vulnerable citizens."

## Kennedy Center votes to shut down operations for 2 years and names a new president

STEVEN SLOAN/HILLEL ITALIE

THE Kennedy Center's board of directors voted to shut down operations for two years following this summer's July 4 celebrations. The widely expected decision comes in the wake of numerous resignations and cancellations during President Donald Trump's second term, although Trump himself has cited the need for repairs as a reason for the closure.

"We're going to ensure it remains the finest performing arts facility of its kind anywhere in the world," Trump told reporters at the White House before the board meeting.

The board also voted to install Matt Flocas as CEO and executive director, replacing Trump ally Richard Grenell, who oversaw far-reaching changes at the venue that prompted an outcry from many artists and exacerbated the operation's financial challenges. Trump praised Grenell on Monday, saying he had been a longtime friend, and wished Flocas "good luck with everything."

The Kennedy Center said the vote was unanimous, though Rep. Joyce Beatty didn't cast a vote. The Ohio Democrat is an ex officio member of the board and sued to preclude the Trump administration from excluding her from Monday's meeting. Over the weekend, a federal judge ruled she was entitled to partici-

pate in the meeting but didn't require that the board allow her to vote.

Trump hosted the board meeting at the White House in a reminder of the influence he has held over the Kennedy Center during his second term. Shortly after returning to office last year, Trump ousted the center's previous leadership and replaced it with a hand-picked board of trustees that named him chairman. He also brought in Grenell, who served in a variety of capacities during Trump's first term, when the president mostly ignored the Kennedy Center.

The center's lineup has since included more Trump-friendly programming, including serving as the venue for the premiere of first lady Melania Trump's documentary, "Melania." The board also announced it had renamed the facility the Trump Kennedy Center, a change scholars and lawmakers say must be initiated by Congress, and physically added the president's name to the building's facade.

The Kennedy Center (the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts) is the premier performing arts facility and a living presidential memorial located in Washington, D.C. USA. Opened in 1971, it hosts theater, dance, and music, serving as home to the National Symphony Orchestra and Washington National Opera.



The fallout from the arts community was swift and intense. Actor Issa Rae, musician Bela Fleck and author Louise Penny were among the numerous artists who withdrew from appearances, while consultants such as musician Ben Folds and singer Renée Fleming resigned. Earlier this month, the executive director of the National Symphony Orchestra, Jean Davidson, left to head the Los Angeles-based Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts.

Without mentioning the abandoned performances, Trump said in February he would close the Kennedy Center to fix what he has described as a dilapidated building. Ahead of the closure, Grenell warned staff about impending cuts that will leave "skeletal teams."

Flocas, Grenell's successor, had been serving as vice president of operations. According

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to his LinkedIn page, he joined the Kennedy Center in January 2024, during the Biden administration.

A center press release from the time describes him as "an experienced facilities management professional with a construction management background and an appreciation for whole building design principles." Previous experience for Flocas listed on LinkedIn includes a handful of positions with the District of Columbia government, among them associate director of sustainability and energy and director of facilities management. He graduated from Louisiana State University in 2009 with a Bachelor of Science degree in construction management.

## LPG vessel Shivalik: Jamshedpur man back home as family heaves sigh of relief

B SRINIVAS

A family in Jharkhand's Jamshedpur heaved a sigh of relief after learning that the Indian-flagged LPG vessel Shivalik, on which their son was working, had safely reached Gujarat's Mundra port after crossing the Strait of Hormuz amid the conflict in West Asia.

Mithilesh Tripathy said his only son, Ansh Tripathy, who serves as the second engineer on the vessel, was responsible for monitoring the ship's technical operations during the journey through the strategically crucial maritime corridor.

Tripathy said he last spoke to his son over a WhatsApp call about four to five days ago, when the vessel was leaving Qatar.

"They were instructed

to maintain a safe distance from the Strait of Hormuz until they received the green signal from headquarters. The Indian government was negotiating with Iranian authorities to ensure safe passage," Tripathy told PTI.

A former flight engineer with the Indian Air Force, Tripathy later worked at Uranium Corporation of India in Jadugora near Jamshedpur. He now lives in a residential society near Pardih in the city.

Speaking about his son, Tripathy said Ansh completed his schooling in Jamshedpur and Jadugora, pursued mechanical engineering at BIT, and later graduated as a marine engineer from Kochi. He joined the Shipping Corporation of India around 2014-15.

"Before leaving Qatar,



Ansh told me they were heading towards the Indian Ocean. That was all he said," he added, noting that he did not discuss the number of

crew members on board. Tripathy said the family remained anxious after hearing about the war in West Asia. "We were extremely worried

about Ansh and the crew members since the war broke out in the region. We were glued to the TV for updates," he said, expressing relief af-

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fairs Minister S Jaishankar," he said. Tripathy said that while people may hold different views about the tensions in West Asia, his experience in the Air Force helped him understand the realities of operating in a conflict zone.

Two Indian-flagged LPG carriers, Shivalik and Nanda Devi, with 92,712 metric tonnes of LPG, crossed the Strait of Hormuz early on Saturday following negotiations between India and Iran.

Shivalik arrived at the Mundra Port on Monday with 46,000 metric tonnes of LPG ordered by Indian Oil Corp Ltd, officials said. While 20,000 MT will be unloaded at Mundra, 26,000 MT will be unloaded at Mangaluru, they said.

Nanda Devi is scheduled to reach Gujarat's Kandla

port on Tuesday, they added. These two ships were among the 24 ships stranded on the west side of the strait since the war broke out in the region.

Besides the 24 on the west side of the strait, four others were stranded on the east side.

India imports about 88 per cent of its crude oil, 50 per cent of its natural gas and 60 per cent of its LPG needs. Before the US-Israel strikes on Iran on February 28 and Tehran's retaliation, more than half of India's crude imports, about 30 per cent of gas and 85-90 per cent of LPG imports came from West Asian countries such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

The conflict has led to a blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, the main transit route for Gulf energy supplies.