



OVERVIEW: The UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) advised UK tourists against all travel to areas within 30km of the border with Libya, Mauritania, Mali and Niger due to the risk of kidnapping and terror attacks. It also warned against travel to within 30km of the Algerian border in Morocco and Tunisia.

Indian officials said India had deployed a dozen warships east of the Red Sea as Western partners focus on attacks by Iran-backed Yemeni Houthi militants. The Indian Navy has already investigated 250 vessels. At present, India has two frontline warships in the Gulf of Aden and at least ten warships in the northern and western Arabian Sea, along with surveillance aircraft.

The Singapore Strait has witnessed a worrying upsurge in piracy incidents. In 2002, the maritime information hub reported 34 breaches, a significant increase over the previous years. Thirty of the incidents occurred in east of the Traffic Separation Scheme (TSS) with the perpetrators predominantly targeting large vessels such as bulk carriers. Between 2016 and 2020, perpetrators were often armed with blades and other sharp implements and focused on pilfering cash and engine components. In 2022, ten incidents were reported near Nongsa Point with a new focus on store lockers on bulkers, tankers, tugs and offshore support vessels. Pirates have broadened their targets to include tugboats and barges, often stealing scrap metal and engine components. As a result, Singapore has forged alliances with Indonesia and Malaysia to safeguard the strait, culminating in the Surface Picture (Surpic) initiative.

An Indian Navy Rapid Patrol Aircraft (RPA) detected suspicious behaviour on board the Iranian-flagged fishing vessel "FV Omaril" with a crew of 11 Iranians and eight Pakistanis, when it was off the east coast of Somalia. Seven pirates had boarded the fishing vessel. In the early hours, the "INS Shurada" was deployed to the area and launched helicopters and boats to intercept the "FV Omaril". The pirates were coerced into returning the fishing vessel and the crew who were being held hostage.

Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh underlined during the commissioning of the hydrographic survey ship "WS Sandhayak" the government's commitment to preserve peace in the Indian Ocean by taking decisive action against those who disrupt the region's security and India would not tolerate maritime piracy and smuggling under any circumstances.

Iran issued a warning to the United States over the potential targeting of two suspected spy ships "Behshad" and "Savid", in the Middle East after the air strikes by the US and UK on Houthi positions in Yemen and by the US on targets in Iraq and Syria. A statement by Iran described the two ships as "floating armouries" and claimed Iran aimed to counteract piracy in the Red Sea and Gul of Aden. The two vessels are registered as commercial cargo ships with a Tehran-based company but are suspected to be spy vessels for Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps.

A US defence official said Houthi rebels had fired six anti-ballistic missiles from Houthi controlled areas of Yemen towards the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. Three of the missiles were aimed at the "MV Star Nasia", a bulk carrier transiting the Gulf of Aden. The vessel sustained, minor damage but no injuries and was continuing its voyage to its destination. The other three missiles were aimed at the "MV Morning Tide" a cargo ship operating in the southern Red Sea. The three missiles hit the water near the vessel without effect. It was continuing its voyage and reported no injuries or damage. Earlier in the day, the Houthis had released a statement threatening to "escalate more and more" unless the "aggression" in Gaza ended.

The 7th "Indian Ocean Conference" started in New Delhi. The theme was "Towards a Stable and Sustainable Indian Ocean". Among the subjects to be discussed were conflicts and piracy, maritime sovereignty and international law.

In April 13, Lebanese authorities investigating the kidnapping and killing of Pascal Sleiman, a coordinator for the Lebanese Forces Party in Jbeil, arrested Syrian nationals as suspects. The arrests highlighted the organised crime between Lebanon and Syria including kidnapping-for-ransom and cross border abductions. Lebanon's Interior Minister called on the Syrian authorities to take responsibility to pursue these gangs on the Syrian side of the border.

The US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) imposed sanctions on the leaders of two militant groups over the taking of hostages, including American citizens, in West Africa. The sanctions were imposed on the leaders of West African branch of al Qaeda, Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wa Muslimeen (JNIM), and Islamist militant group Al Morabitoun.

Yemeni-based Houthi militants fired two missiles at an Iran-bound cargo ship "MV Star Iris" causing minor



damage to the vessel but no injuries to the crew. The missiles were fired from Yemen towards the Bab al-Mandeb Strait. The vessel is Greek-owned and Marshall-Islands-flagged that was transiting the Red Sea carrying corn from Brazil to Bandar Imam Khomeini, Iran. A Houthi military spokesman claimed the vessel was American.

Italy took over command from Portugal of the European Union anti-piracy Operation "Atalanta" for the next six months. Operation "Atalanta" patrols the Red Sea and waters off the coast of Somalia.

Two missiles were fired by Yemen-based Houthi militants at the Blue Fleet owned, British-registered vessel "Rubymat" as it transited through Bab al-Mandeb Strait carrying fertiliser. One missile hit the side of the vessel near the engine room and the other landed on the deck. The vessel started to list and the crew abandoned ship and were taken to Djibouti, Somalia. The Houthis claimed the vessel had sunk but, on 14 February, the owners reported it was being towed to Djibouti but might yet sink.

Admiral R Hari Kumar, Indian Navy Chief of Staff, said the Indian Navy would not allow the security and safety in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) to be disrupted and would teach a "very hard" lesson if piracy is attempted. He added a large number of ships had been deployed in the IOR and three or four ships were off Somalia. The Indian Navy was also mounting anti-drone operations in the North Arabian Sea and Red Sea for the protection of Indians and other people in distress.

The Biden administration condemned Yemen's Houthi rebels in strong terms for continuing to attack shipping in the Red Sea. Virtually all east-west container ship traffic has re-routed around the Cape of Good Hope.

China despatched a guided-missile destroyer to the Gulf of Aden as part of an anti-piracy mission. Some Chinese commercial vessels have come under attack from the Houthis and some shipping companies have used vessel call signs to indicate their links to China. The 46th Fleet's naval mission included the guided-missile destroyer "Jisozuo", missile frigate "Xuchang" and replenishment vessel "Honghu".

The Secretary-General of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) said his organization had spoken to the authorities in Somalia, east Africa, and countries around the Gulf of Guinea to discuss efforts to ensure piracy did not again become a grave problem. There was concern that piracy could rise again off the African coast

as shipping companies re-route their vessels from the Red Sea/Suez Canal around the Cape of Good Hope.

According to a new study, the Indonesian government's efforts to tackle illegal fishing in its waters has driven an increase in maritime piracy. The authors of the study made the case that it is easier for individuals fishing illegally to turn to another illegal activity. Piracy stands out as a high-risk but high-reward substitute for locals.

Abdulmalik al Houthi said the Houthi militants had introduced "submarine weapons" into its attacks. He said operations in the Red and Arabian Seas. Bab al Mandeb Strait and Gulf of Aden were continuing, escalating and effective.

The Indian Navy "INS Kolkata" went to the assistance of the Palau-flagged "MV Islander" that had caught fire after being hit by a drone/missile in the Gulf of Aden. One crew member was injured.

The United States said it had shot down several Houthi drones in the Red Sea.

Security teams in Puntland, Somalia, arrested three men believed to have been involved in the hijacking of the Maltese-flagged "MV Ruen" which was boarded on 18 December 2023 in the Red Sea.

According to Indian officials, attacks by pirates and Iran-backed Houthi rebels on commercial shipping in the Arabian and Red Seas were likely to continue. The attacks were stretching the Indian Navy's capabilities as it increased deployments in the region. The previous week, an Indian warship had gone to the aid of the "MV Islander" after it was hit by a drone. A member of the crew had been injured.

RANSOMWARE: The UK National Crime Agency (NCA) revealed details of an international disruption campaign targeting LockBit, the world's most harmful cybercrime group. NCA has infiltrated the group's network and taken control of LockBit's services, compromising their entire criminal enterprise. LockBit has been operating for four years during which time its attacks using ransomware have been prolific. It targeted thousands of victims around the world and caused losses of billions of pounds, dollars and euros, both in ransom payments and the costs of recovery. The group provided ransomware-as-a-service to a global network of hackers or "affiliates", supplying them with the tools and infrastructure required to carry out attacks. The NCA has worked closely with the FBI and supported by partners from nine other countries,



have been covertly investigating LockBit as part of "Operation Cronos".

ÁFRICA

ALGERIA: The United Kingdom, United States and Australia were among a number of countries that warned their citizens not to travel to Algeria, especially the Tindouf camps, because of terrorism and kidnapping risks. Angered by the alerts, the Polisario Front described the issuance as "reproachable" and "ill-timed".

ETHIOPIA: The bodies of five workers employed at the Wonji Sugar Factory, Dodota, Arsi zone, Oromia region, were discovered two weeks after they had been kidnapped. The five workers, four tractor drivers and an electrician, had been kidnapped by armed men in the early hours while working at the factory. An official said he was unaware if there had been a ransom demand.

KENYA: Somali-based al Shabab militants announced that two Cuban doctors, Landy Rodriguez, a surgeon, and Assel Herrera, a general practitioner, had been killed during a US airstrike on a house at Jilib, Jubaland, southern Somaliland. The two doctors were kidnapped by al Shabab militants on 12 April 2019 on their way to work in Kenya's northern province and taken across into Somalia.

LIBYA: The General Maritime Transport Company (GNMTC) announced that Khalid Al-Tawati, General Manager, and some companions had been kidnapped on 31 January 2024 as they left a Board of Directors meeting at the GNMTC headquarters in Ghaut Al-Shaal, Tripoli. They were subjected to an armed attack in front of the building by armed men in two vehicles with civilian number plates who fired a barrage of bullets before kidnapping the party. After two hours, the companions were released from a security site near Iron Bridge, Al-Falah area, but he was retained. He was kidnapped previously five months ago. On 5 February, GNMTC warned of an open-ended strike until the victim was released.

LIBYA: The families of four young men from Bangladesh reported to the police in Bangladesh that their sons had been kidnapped in Libya and a ransom of Tk10 lakh (USD9,200) for each victim had been received. The men arrived in Libya on 16 February 2023 having been taken there via Egypt by an "agent" who sold them to another "agent". On 25 March, the families received videos of the

men being tortured and audio messages demanding the ransoms.

MALI: The Italian government reported that an Italian couple, Rocco Langone and Maria Donata Caivana (in their 80s), and their son, Giovanni Langone (40s), members of the Jehovah's Witnesses, had been released. They were kidnapped by a jihadist faction linked to al Qaeda known as the Group to Support Islam and Muslims (JNIM) in Mali in May 2022. No further details around the release were given.

MOZAMBIQUE: During his Heroes Day address, President Filipe Nyeri said that in 2023, a total of 13 cases of kidnap-for-ransom had been recorded of which seven were successful and the remainder dealt with by the authorities who managed to rescue at least three victims. During the year, 38 suspects had been detained of whom three were of South African nationality. He added that, in addition to operational efforts, the Mozambican executive had invested in international cooperation and the strengthening of legislation in the face of organised crime, as well as officer training.

MOZAMBIQUE: Terrorists in Cabo Delgado province intercepted a bus and kidnapped the driver. The incident happened at the Unguia interruption on the N380. The driver had refused to stop at a roadblock and the terrorists shot out the bus tyres, ordered the passengers to remain on board and kidnapped the driver.

MOZAMBIQUE: At around 8:30am, Claudio Dhamendra, a businessman, was kidnapped as he opened his shop on Rua Samuel da Bula, near the Military House, the barracks of the Presidential Guard. Two armed men approached him, pointed a gun and forced him into a car before driving away. When employees tried to intervene to rescue the businessman, the kidnappers threatened them with their firearms. A security guard at the premises said he thought the two men were customers.

NIGERIA: The Nigerian Police Force Public Relations Officer said on Channels TV that crowdfunding on social media to pay ransoms for kidnapping victims was a criminal activity that is frowned upon by the presidency. He added sourcing money to pay ransoms weakened the morale of the police force, killed the system and allowed kidnappers to collect gain in their criminal enterprise.

NIGERIA: Alfred Ahon was kidnapped from the Mpape district of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) as he left home to travel to Lagos. His wife, Senami, said the



Divisional Crime Officer (DCO), Mpape police division, had demanded a bribe of N50,000 (USD64) to trace the victim. The kidnappers demanded a ransom of N100 million (USD128,200) and threatened to kill the victim if it was not paid. On 16 February, the family said the victim had not been released and the police had yet to respond on the matter.

NIGERIA: The kidnappers of five pupils and four staff members of the Apostolic Faith Group of Schools, Emure Ekiti, Ekiti State, threatened to kill the victims if the parents failed to pay the N15 million (USD19,250) ransom "as quickly as possible". The victims were kidnapped on 29 January 2024 as they travelled by bus along the Emure Ekiti – Iporo Ekiti road. The kidnappers initially demanded N100 million (USD128,200) but reduced their demand to N15 million after negotiations with the families. On 3 February, the victims' families offered N7 million (USD8,900) that they had managed to raise. The kidnappers were adamant the full ransom of N15 million had to be paid and threatened to harm the victims if it was not paid. On 4 February, an Ekiti State Police Command spokesperson said the kidnapped pupils and staff had regained their freedom, but the driver was killed by the kidnappers. The victims were said to have been released in the early hours of the morning. The spokesperson added the victims had been rescued but did not provide details as to the circumstances of the release or if a ransom was paid. Parents of the released pupils said a ransom of N15 million, Tramadol, fried rice and energy drink had been paid for the victims' release. The ransom had been delivered to a farm called Ago Paanu, between Oba Akoko and Owo, Ondo State. One parent said the driver had been killed and burnt by the kidnappers.

NIGERIA: Gunmen hijacked God Is Good Motors (GIGM) and ABC Transport buses travelling from Kogi State to Abuja and kidnapped the passengers. On 9 February, 14 passengers from the two buses were freed. A police spokesperson said the victims were freed following combined efforts of the military, police, hunters and vigilantes but failed to mention if a ransom was paid.

NIGERIA: On reacting to the killing of traditional rulers in Ekiti and Kwara states by suspected kidnappers, Mike Ejiofor, a former director of the Department of State Services (DSS), said he used to discourage families of kidnapping victims from paying ransoms until he became a victim. He stated the spate of kidnapping could still be

curtailed but the failure to address the insecurity revolved round insufficient resources.

NIGERIA: Nasarawa State students in tertiary institutions protested against the continuous kidnapping-for-ransom of their colleagues and called on the federal and state governments to take action to impose a lasting solution. Students of the Nasarawa State University, Kefi, the state-owned Isa Mustapha Agwa Polytechnic, Lafia, and the Federal University of Lafia have experienced a series of attacks from kidnappers and bandits.

NIGERIA: A report published by Enough Is Enough Nigeria (EIE) revealed the country saw 256 kidnappings in January 2024, in comparison, between January and June 2023, only 199 incidents involving 1349 victims were recorded according to data from Nigeria Security Tracker. The EIE report estimated that in January 2024, N200 million (USD256,400) was paid as ransoms out of ransom demands totalling about N6 billion (USD7.69 million).

NIGERIA: Recently released kidnapping victims revealed that kidnappers had used venomous snakes to terrorise them and make them put pressure on their families to raise the ransom money. The victims had been thrown into areas infested by snakes that included Shaki, Oyo State, Borgu and Kagara, Niger State, Karim Lamido, Adamawa State, and Lau, Taraba State. The worst snake infested forests were in Birnin Gwara, Kaduna State, and Kala-Balga, near Lake Chad, Borno State. Other areas included Shaki, Oyo State, Borgu and Kagara, Niger State, Karim Lamido, Adamawa State, and Lau, Taraba State.

NIGERIA: One of seven people kidnapped from Kuduru community, Federal Capital Territory (FCT) on 28 December 2023 was killed by the kidnappers. The victim was identified as Olayinka Ogunyemi, an engineer. A total of N23 million (USD29,500) had been paid as ransom but the kidnappers had demanded a ransom of N290 million (USD371,800). They had killed the victim because the families of the seven victims could not pay the total ransom demanded. The kidnappers had contacted the victim's family and told them they had killed him. They also threatened to kill the remaining victims if the full ransom was not paid.

NIGERIA: Local media reported that more than 300 people, most of them women and girls, had been kidnapped by Boko Haram militants from Gamboru Ngala, Borno State, in the north east of the country near the border with Chad. Most of those kidnapped were



displaced people out collecting firewood. On 10 March, it was reported nine out of 102 kidnapped victims had returned to their homes.

NIGERIA: At around 5:45am, many terrorists attacked Dogon-noma community, Kajuna Local Government Area, Kaduna State, and kidnapped scores of villagers. The attackers shot sporadically before taking their victims away. A local resident said it was not possible to provide details of the exact number of victims as many of the residents fled for their lives during the attack. It was later reported that 15 women and a man had been kidnapped.

SOUTH AFRICA: A 85-year-old retired businessman was kidnapped by three men in front of eyewitnesses while walking in the Johannesburg Botanical Gardens. The victim regularly walked his dogs in the Gardens. At around 9:50am, the three kidnappers forced the victim into a white van with cloned number plates and drove away. The victim had parked his old BMW car in the parking area before setting off for his walk. The dogs were recovered safely.

SOUTH AFRICA: Neal Ah-Tow, owner of Neal's Fish and Chips, was kidnapped at around 7:15am by five armed men from outside his shop on Crichton Street, Sidwell, Eastern Cape. The kidnappers forced the victim into their vehicle before speeding away. On 5 March, the kidnappers demanded a ransom of R1.4 million (USD74,500). On 25 March, the victim was released by his kidnappers at an unknown place. After walking around lost, a member of the public found him and took him to Mount Road police station. A SAPS spokesperson said that no ransom had been paid.

UGANDA: Phionah Tusingwire (4) and Patience Tarindeka (5), pupils at Apex Model Primary, Nakaseke District, were kidnapped by a houseboy who was taking them to school. Police said the girls had left home at 7:00am but never returned after school. The houseboy was missing. The kidnapper contacted the family and demanded a ransom of Sh.35 million (USD9,300). On 4 March, the police found the two victims who had been abandoned near the Kabaale Bridge. The suspect's motorcycle was found nearby and the police were searching for him.

Asia and Australia

INDIA: Suspected United Liberation Front of Assam Independent (ULFA-I) and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) militants kidnapped ten miners out

of 14 from the Finboro coal mine, Changlang district, along the Assam-Arunachal border under Tinsukia district. Seven armed militants entered the camp at around 3:00am, held the group at gunpoint before transporting them in a dumper truck to the old Longtoi area, a remote area of Arunachal Pradesh.

INDIA: A 12-year-old boy was kidnapped by three men from near his home in Katraj. The kidnappers contacted his father and demanded a ransom of Rs.70lakh (USD84,300) and threatened to harm the victim if the money was not paid. The father who runs a dairy business, informed the police. In the early hours of 19 February, the kidnappers abandoned their victim on a hillock at Pateghar, Kas Pathar, Satara, and fled when they became aware the police were hot on their trail. The victim was rescued and the police were searching for the three kidnappers.

INDONESIA: New Zealand Foreign Minister Winston Peters called for the release of Phillip Mehrstens, the New Zealand Susi Air pilot kidnapped on 7 February 2023 by West Papua National Liberation Army (TPNPB) militants when he landed at Nduga airport. Peters said the victim was able to contact friends and family at Christmas to reassure them he was alive and well. New Zealand government agencies and the Indonesian authorities have been working together over the past year to secure the release of the victim. On 7 February, the central command of TPNPB ordered its armed faction to release the victim. The group is highly factionalised and local police were sceptical the military wing will obey the command. A TBNPB spokesperson said a team would be sent to communicate with the leader of the armed faction. On 13 February, a year after Phillip Mehrstens was kidnapped, TPNPB released a Proof of Life video of him looking gaunt and pale with a scraggy beard and dishevelled. He said with a nervous chuckle addressing his wife and 6-year-old son: "it is me; I'm trying to stay positive and hope you and Jacob are healthy and doing well". He adds a few words of encouragement "I'm OK and they are treating me well, I'm trying to stay positive and I hope you and Jacob are healthy and doing OK".

THAILAND: Phuket police were questioning four Russian suspects involved in the kidnapping of a Russian couple on 31 January 2024. The kidnappers forced the couple to transfer about 900,000 bitcoin (USD840,300) into their bank account. Two of the suspects had been found at their residence and the other two were arrested at Phuket International Airport as they were trying to fly



out of the country. A fifth suspect, believed to be the mastermind and named only as "Mr Alan", was later

Europe and CSI

SPAIN: A 29-year-old Colombian man was kidnapped in Murcia. The kidnappers contacted his family in Colombia and demanded a ransom of euros700,000 (USD744,700). On 25 March, the US Border Protection Agency and the US Embassy in Madrid provided information to la Guardia Civil who mounted a surveillance operation on a house in Fortuna, Murcia. The following day, la Guardia Civil raided the house, rescued the victim and arrested three suspects, two Colombians and a Spaniard.

Middle East

ISRAEL: A senior Palestinian source said Qatar had been premature in announcing Hamas had given approval to a ceasefire proposal and described the statement as rushed and incorrect. The Hamas leadership had yet to schedule meetings in Cairo, Egypt, to discuss the latest proposal with Egyptian mediators.

ISRAEL: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken left on a new crisis tour of the Middle East to seek to push through a proposal to halt the conflict. This was his fifth visit since the Hamas attack on 7 October 2023.

ISRAEL: Channel 12 News Middle East Affairs commentator Ehud Yaazi said that contrary to reports in the media, a deal between Hamas and Israel to secure the release of hostages in Gaza is still far away.

ISRAEL: It was reported that Hamas was expected to reject the hostage-for-ceasefire proposal and demand the release of more Palestinian prisoners and an end to the war. An Israeli source said a permanent ceasefire was unacceptable. According to a confidential IDF intelligence assessment, at least 32 of the remaining 136 hostages were confirmed to have died. There were estimates that as many as 50 could be dead.

ISRAEL: The US and Arab States ramped up efforts to broker a deal that would pause fighting and free hostages. Members of Israel's war cabinet indicated signs of progress after weeks of stalemate and voted to send a delegation headed by the Head of Mossad to the Paris, France, peace talks. Mohammed Nazzal, a senior Hamas official, accused Israel of blocking a ceasefire and

hostage exchange by refusing to meet essential demands. France confirmed 45 Israeli hostages had received vital medication.

ISRAEL: Israel insisted at the Paris peace talks that any deal must allow the IDF to complete its military campaign against Hamas. There was cautious optimism a peace deal could invoke a six-weeks pause in the fighting before Ramadan. An Israeli official said there had been "progress" in the talks and Israeli negotiators had returned from Paris. It was reported Israel had agreed an "Outline" of a partial hostage release deal that could include a 6-week pause in fighting, the release of 35-40 hostage women, children and female soldiers.

Latin America and the Caribbean

BRAZIL: A 38-year-old Colombian man was kidnapped from his apartment in Frei Galvao, Sao Paulo, and taken to Santa Ines. The victim's family paid a ransom, but he was not released. The police went to the victim's apartment which had been ransacked and his car stolen. The police then started searching a neighbourhood where they thought he might be. The kidnappers released the victim and fled.

BRAZIL: Joseph Longo (40), an American citizen was kidnapped in Copacabana, Rio de Janeiro, and held for two days. The kidnappers contacted the victim's family and demanded a ransom of R\$15,000 (USD3,000) and attacked and threatened the victim to make bank transfers. The US consulate and FBI contacted the Civil Police who arrested a suspect and found the victim's cell phone and bank card on him. The victim was being offered assistance by the consulate.

CHILE: A report was published that indicated that the kidnapping-for-ransom gang "El Tren de Aragua" had been operating in the country since at least January 2022. Their presence coincided with an increase in kidnappings and homicides in the country. There had also been an increase in irregular migration in the north, mainly Venezuelans.

CHILE (January 2024): ORGANIZED CRIME. Chilean authorities noted an increase in the homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants in 2022, with 1,322 incidents recorded in 2022. The government report for 2022, compiled with police and government data, noted an increase over a period of five years in homicides from 4.5 to 6.7 per 100,000 inhabitants.



CHILE: The regions with the highest homicide rates during the five-year period analyzed included the provinces of Arica and Parinacota, both in northern Chile, near the borders with the neighboring countries of Peru and Bolivia. Authorities have long blamed the rise of regional organized crime groups and cartels operating in border areas (in narcotics and migrant trafficking) as the reason for the increase in criminal activity. Particularly homicides with firearms. Statistics from Arica and Parinacota link 82% of homicides in both areas with organized crime, and in the Tarapacá region, also in the north, 70% of homicides are suspected of having a connection with organized crime. The arrival in the north of the Venezuelan regional cartel/gang, Tren de Aragua, has been specifically pointed out by analysts as a reason for the general increase in crime through competition for clandestine border crossings.

CHILE: As leaders across the region have done, Chilean President Gabriel Boric has spoken out against the violence caused by organized crime in the country. In December 2023, a National Urban Citizen Security Survey carried out by the Undersecretariat for Crime Prevention revealed that the population's perception of an increase in crime in the last 12 months of 2022 had reached 91%, up from 87% from the previous year. The survey also suggested that 22% of households surveyed reported having been victims of a crime between January and December 2022, up from 17% in 2021.

CHILE: Kidnapping for ransom has registered an increase in recent years in Chile, particularly in 2023. The nation's prosecutor, Ángel Valencia, stated in May 2023 that kidnapping and extortion have progressively increased year after year since 2017. In line with the expansion of regional cartels and organized crime groups in Chile. Between November 2023 and January 2024, 45 cases were reported in the Santiago Metropolitan Region, compared to 46 in 2022 and 26 annually in the region in 2021.

CHILE: Nationally, figures reported in national media suggest a total of 826 incidents by 2022, a 62% increase from the 492 cases reported a year earlier.

CHILE: For one week, three "extortionary kidnappings" made national news. One of them involved the kidnapping of a metallurgical businessman in the central city of Rancagua. He was released approximately 40 hours after an undisclosed ransom payment was made. The other two incidents occurred in the extreme north of the country, in Tarapacá.

CHILE: In the country, authorities have routinely blamed increased extortion and kidnapping on undocumented people within Chile by "clandestine means," which often refers to criminal entities and individuals involved in organized crime from countries such as Colombia and Venezuela. In 2022, of the 76 people detained for the type of related crime, the subprefect and head of the Special Brigade for Police Investigations and Anti-Kidnapping (BIPE), Hassel Barrientos, stated that 75% were foreign citizens with "irregular immigration status."

CHILE: A victim was allegedly kidnapped outside a nightclub in the city of Iquique, Tarapacá Region. A ransom of 10 million pesos (approximately US\$11,000) was reportedly paid for the safe release of the victim (the initial demand was approximately 30 million pesos/approximately US\$32,500). Police were later able to identify the location of the threat actors and four people, believed to be Venezuelan nationals, were arrested.

CORRUPTION IN CHILE: Chile maintains a good position within Latin America in terms of corruption. **In the latest Transparency International Global Corruption Index Report for 2022, Chile was ranked 27th out of 180 countries, with 1 being perceived as the least corrupt and 180 as the most, and with a score of 67, with 0 considered 'highly corrupt' and 100 as 'very clean'.** Only Uruguay ranked better than Chile in the region. In comparison, neighboring Argentina ranked 94th out of 180 countries, Peru 101st out of 180 countries, and Bolivia 126th.

CHILE: A report was published that indicated that the kidnapping-for-ransom gang "El Tren de Aragua" had been operating in the country since at least January 2022. Their presence coincided with an increase in kidnappings and homicides in the country. There had also been an increase in irregular migration in the north, mainly Venezuelans.

CHILE: The Venezuelan opposition reported Ronald Ojeda Moreno, a former Venezuelan soldier, had been kidnapped by military intelligence agents of Venezuelan President Maduro's regime from his residence in a northern neighbourhood of Santiago de Chile. Four agents from the Venezuelan General Directorate of Military Counterintelligence (DGCIM) had infiltrated Chilean territory, posed as Chilean Investigative police and captured Ojeda Moreno. The victim's family confirmed his disappearance, and the Chilean authorities



began a search. The victim had been expelled from the Venezuelan Armed Forces in 2017 accused of treason and participating in an alleged plan to assassinate President Maduro. He fled a few months later and sought political asylum in Chile.

COLOMBIA: The government and El Ejercito de Liberación Nacional (ELN) agreed to prolong the ceasefire, kidnapping-for-ransom and the use of minors in conflict, for six months. The situation would be monitored by the United Nations in Colombia. It was not clear if hostages being held by ELN would be released.

COLOMBIA: The National Liberation Army (ELN) said it had freed all hostages under a deal with the government to end kidnapping-for-ransom. A statement posted on its website said Central Command had ordered the liberation of all people held for economic ends, all units of the ELN had been reviewed and the order had been completely followed. The Colombian Defence Minister had said in December 2023 that ELN were holding 38 people but had subsequently amended the number to 26 in January 2024.

COLOMBIA: Luis Felipe Diaz Gonzalez (31) was kidnapped as he left home in barrio Cubanias, Bello, north Medellin, Antioquia, in the company of other people. The kidnappers demanded a ransom of Col\$20 million (USD5,100) for his release which was paid. The kidnappers did not contact the family again. On 23 March, the body of the victim was found in: Barrio Paris, Bello, Antioquia.

COLOMBIA: In March 26, the General Jose Luis Ramirez Hinestroza, announced 121 suspects had been arrested during operations across the country. Suspects were arrested in the cities of Bogota, Medellin, Barranquilla and Cartagena, and Boyaca, Caqueta, Putumayo, Caldas, Quindio, Arauca, Norte de Santander, Santander, Antioquia, Meta and La Guajira. A recent report published by la Fundacion Paz y Reconciliacion (Pares) showed extortion related crimes had risen over the last five years and peaked in 2023 when la Policia received 10,560 "denuncias". a 7.9% increase on 2022. Five members of the "Los Yeico" criminal gang had been arrested in La Guajira where businessmen, builders, hoteliers, service providers and educators had been targeted and forced to pay between Col\$50 and 100 million (USD12-24,000) to continue their work.

ECUADOR: During the night a businessman was kidnapped from el bloque dos de Bastion Popular, northwest Guayaquil. The kidnappers, travelling in two

vehicles, approached the victim, fired shots that killed the victim's son-in-law before driving off with the victim. The kidnappers demanded a ransom of USD200,000. Unase started an investigation and, 26 hours after the incident, rescued the victim and arrested four suspects, said to be members of "Los Tigerones".

ECUADOR: The local police commander said 20 gunmen had stormed a hotel at Ayambe and kidnapped six adults and a child. Apparently, the kidnappers had mistakenly thought they were members of a rival drugs gang. but were, in fact, Ecuadorian tourists. The victims were interrogated by the kidnappers and, hours later, five bodies with gunshot wounds were found by la via Puerto Lopez-Santa Elena, Manobi province. One suspect was arrested.

HAITI: A new United Nations report stated more than 2,300 people were killed, injured or kidnapped across the country between October and December (4th Quarter) 2023, nearly 10% more than in the previous Quarter. During the Quarter, at least 262 gang members died but losses were barely noticed due to the ease of recruitment. In the 4th Quarter, nearly 700 people were kidnapped, a 20% increase on the previous Quarter. Victims have been from every social category – street vendors to farmers to high level professionals. BINUH recommended an acceleration in the deployment of foreign armed forces. This is unlikely as a court in Kenya had banned the UN-backed deployment of police officers to Haiti as being "unconstitutional".

HAITI: Three nuns belonging to the Saint-Joseph de Cluny Congregation, were kidnapped by heavily armed men's who invaded the La Madeleine Orphanage, Port-au-Prince.

HAITI: Report stated that 200 gangs were operating in the country that subject businesses to classic protection rackets and levy "taxes" along gang-run roads. Twenty-three major gangs are active in Port-au-Prince and control almost 80% of the capital. There are two coalitions, "the G9 family" led by Jimmy "Barbecue" Chevzier, and the G-Pep. Five gang leaders are under UN sanctions that include travel bans, asset freezes and arms embargos. "Barbecue" is considered the most powerful leader, whose gang is made up of former policemen like himself. Johnson "Izo" Andre, leader of the "5Segond" gang has recruited youngsters from shanty towns. The gang is part of the G-Pep alliance. Vitelhomme Innocent, head of the "Kraze Barye" gang, is also on the UN list and



the FBI's most wanted list with agents offering USD2 million for information leading to his arrest.

HAITI: According to a catholic congregation, five people including four members of the Congregation of the Brothers of the Sacred Heart and a teacher, who had been among seven people kidnapped on 23 February 2024 in the gang-controlled Bicentenary neighbourhood of Port-au-Prince, were released by their kidnappers. Brothers Pierre Isaac Valmeus and Adam Montclaison Marius were still being held. The Congregation reported that a ransom demand had been made.

HAITI: Lucien Jura, a prominent Haitian journalist, was kidnapped from his home in Petion-Ville on the outskirts of Port-au-Prince. The kidnappers contacted the victim's family but no details of the call were made public. The Secretary-General of SOS Journalists called the victim's cell phone and, in a brief conversation, the victim confirmed he had been kidnapped. On 21 March, the victim's brother said the victim had been released but did not provide any details.

HAITI: "YourFellowArab" (Addison Pier Maalouf), a Georgia-based, Lebanese-American YouTube star, was kidnapped in Port-au-Prince 24 hours after arriving in the country to try to arrange an interview with Jimmy "Barbecue" Chevizier. He was kidnapped by members of the "400 Mawozo" gang who demanded a ransom of USD600,000 for his release. An initial payment of USD40,000 was made but the victim was not released. On 30 March, "400 Mawozo" leader, Lanmo Sanjou, claimed the victim had been released without the payment of a ransom. After his release, the victim said he had been kidnapped because of the colour of his skin but he could not give any more details.

HAITI: The CEO and co-founder of the LiveBeyond ministry said nearly a dozen gunmen had attacked the compound located 20 mile outside Port-au-Prince. Security personnel managed to repel the attack.

MÉXICO: Mexican drug cartels are involved in trafficking fuel in the Gulf of Mexico where all Mexican offshore oil rigs are located.

MÉXICO: La Organización Alto al Secuestro released its report for January 2024. There were 71 recorded incidents compared to 70 recorded incidents in January 2023, involving 119 victims compared to 162 victims in 2023. In January 2024, 71 suspects were detained compared to 59 in 2023. The states recording the highest number of incidents were: Estado de Mexico and

Veracruz (6 each); Baja California and Chihuahua (5 each) and Puebla, Quintana Roo and Zacatecas (4 each). No incidents were recorded in Baja California Sur, Durango, Queretaro, San Luis Potosi and Yucatan. The accumulated figures during the present administration from December 2018 to end January 2024 were: 6,265 recorded incidents, 9,551 victims and 6,718 suspects detained. The states with the highest number of recorded incidents over the period were: Veracruz (1,022); Estado de Mexico (976); Ciudad de Mexico (445); Puebla (264) and Michoacan (252).

MÉXICO: It was reported that Jaime Barrera, a radio and television anchor, had been kidnapped "in a violent manner" in Jalisco State. The kidnapping occurred in broad daylight in a busy area of Guadalajara close to the radio station. The victim was snatched by three or four assailants, at least one of whom was armed, as he walked to his car. On 13 March, prosecutors said the victim had been found "alive and well" but did not give any details. It raised suspicions as drug cartels often briefly kidnap people to intimidate them.

MÉXICO: It was reported that 30 Georgians, including women, had been kidnapped three days previously by a drug cartel at the Mexico-US border. The kidnappers have demanded a ransom of USD90,000 for their release. The Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the Embassy in Mexico was in contact with the Mexican Immigration Service to obtain more information and establish the location of the hostages. It is also in contact with those hostages' families who have contacted the Embassy. For years, Georgian citizens have used the border to cross illegally into the United States.

MÉXICO: It was reported that 95 Ecuadorian migrants had been kidnapped as they crossed the border from Guatemala into Mexico at Tapachula, Chiapas. Criminal organisations and people trafficking gangs operate in the area.

PERÚ: According to I Ministro Publico, there had been an alarming increase in cases of kidnapping, some of which resulted in assassinations. Last year, 4,060 cases were recorded. La Policia Nacional del Peru (PNP) said that 853 suspected kidnappers had been arrested during 2023 and it was suspected that criminal groups included foreign nationals. Of the 853 suspects arrested, 681 were charged with kidnapping, 113 for aggravated kidnapping and 53 for attempted kidnapping. Of these, 80 were women. The annual number of kidnappings were: 2021 (1,698); 2022 (2,860) and 2023 (3,398). In one case in



2023, Lucero Trujillo Vargas (27), son of a well-known businessman, was kidnapped and a USD1 million ransom demanded. In another, Valeria VB (12), the daughter of an accountant, was kidnapped and a ransom of 3 million soles (USD789,500) demanded.

PERÚ: Machiavelli Laura Lume, a businessman in the transport sector, was assassinated as he tried to escape from armed men who had kidnapped him. He was kidnapped in Salamanca, Ate, and taken to Santa Anita where he attempted to escape as he was taken out of the vehicle towards a house. Four shots were fired, and one hit him fatally in the head. The kidnappers were believed to be made up of foreigners. Three men and a woman were arrested in connection with the kidnapping. The victim's family reported that he had received demands in January to pay 5,000 soles (USD1315) to be left in peace. He refused to pay.

VENEZUELA: After a period of calm, the kidnapping gangs begin to reactivate in the Capital District and Aragua.

On March 29, 2024, agents of the National Police arrested three men accused of carrying out the kidnapping of a Chinese merchant in the Bellas Artes sector of the Libertador municipality. The woman was held captive for eight days. During that period, she was beaten with the purpose of sending images that would cause despair in her relatives and accelerate the collection and payment of the 50 thousand dollars demanded in ransom.

VENEZUELA: According to data from the Judicial police, known unofficially, in 2023 there were 29 victims of kidnappings admitted by the authorities. A figure similar to that seen in the country between 1988 and 1992. Then, except for some exceptional lapses, plagiarism increased until it exceeded a thousand victims in the first decade of this century. Starting in 2018, the number of complaints decreased, as has happened with other crimes. According to González, this is another consequence of the emergency that the country is experiencing, not of successes in citizen security policies. "There is no purchasing power, and the criminals also emigrated," he stated.

VENEZUELA: Venezuela is one of the most violent countries in the region with a homicide rate that according to official records is 39 per 100,000 inhabitants, but according to calculations by the organization Venezuelan Observatory of Violence closed last year at 79 per 100,000 people.

REST OF THE WORLD

GRENADA: It was reported an American couple, Ralph Hendry and Kathy Brandel (in their 60s), who were residing on their catamaran "Simplicity" anchored in Granada, were kidnapped on 18 February 2024 when they went into town for a snack. On their way back to the catamaran, they were accosted by three men, escaped convicts. They have not been seen since and there were reports they may have been killed.

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO: Arshad Mohammed was kidnapped by two armed men as he dropped his mother at their garden at Rahamut Trace, Woodland. The kidnappers hog-tied his hands and feet and left him under a coconut tree before contacting his family and demanding a ransom of TT\$500,000 (USD74,200). Mohammed screamed for help and a goat farmer heard him, came to his rescue and called the police. The victim's father owns several bars and an agricultural business.

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