

3 immigrants killed, 7 still missing and 4 injured after boat capsizes off San Diego coast

Norisa Diaz
6 May 2025

At least three people have been killed, four injured, two taken into custody and an estimated seven additional people remain missing after a small boat capsized near Del Mar, California Monday morning, carrying a group of sixteen immigrants that included adults and children in what has been designated a mass casualty event.

The 12-foot-long panga boat capsized near the shoreline, with one bystander capturing the tragic scene on video when the boat overturned in the choppy waters around 6:30 a.m. near Torrey Pines State Beach. The occupants faced harsh conditions at sea, with lashing waves, strong winds and rain.

Numerous bystanders rushed to perform CPR to those who washed ashore. Lieutenant Nick Backouris with the San Diego Sheriff's office told the Associated Press (AP) that "A doctor hiking nearby called in and said, 'I see people doing CPR on the beach, I'm running that way.'"

According to the San Diego Sheriff's Department, the three people who died were adults. Two children remain among the missing. The four injured remain in the hospital and, according to the latest updates, at least one person is in critical condition.

Coast Guard spokesperson Chief Petty Officer Levi Read told local media that at least some of those on board were from India, as a number of Indian passports "were found on the beach near where the panga washed up."

In an attempt to justify the tragic loss of life, which appears to be the result of the Trump administration's crackdown at the US-Mexico border, officials continue to stress that the incident is a case of suspected "human smuggling." Coast Guard Petty Officer Chris Sappey told the AP they "were not tourists," and "they are believed to be migrants," stating that smugglers commonly use similar panga boats to move groups of immigrants.

Shawn Gibson, an agent with the US Homeland Security Investigations agency, told the *USA Today* that the incident was a "stark reminder of the dangers posed by maritime smuggling."

The disregard for human life was also apparent in the relatively short search for the missing. In a press release Monday night, the US Coast Guard stated that: "The responding assets searched for a combined nearly 28 hours, covering more than 520 square nautical miles." In plain language, the search was halted that same evening, and the announcement added together hours spent from separate searches from the Coast Guard and fire departments to come up with the figure of 28 hours.

Morbidity and mortality for immigrants attempting to reach the

United States, Europe and other regions continues to skyrocket. According to the Missing Migrant Project, an international organization that records migration incidents and deaths, 74,421 migrants have died worldwide since 2014, and among them the majority 42,599 who died by drowning. The agency also notes that "the most deadly route is the Central Mediterranean route, where at least 24,810 people have died since 2014."

Indeed in Europe, 2025 began with the sinking off the Tunisian coast of two refugee boats bound for Italy in the Mediterranean, in which 27 people lost their lives. According to the Spanish human rights organisation Caminando Fronteras, 2024 was the deadliest year in history for migrants trying to reach Europe. Every day an average of more than 30 people died on the journey from Africa to Spain, and the NGO counted a total of 10,457 migrants who died or disappeared at sea. Among the mass casualty events that year was the December 27 boat incident in which 69 out of 80 people drowned as the vessel capsized en route to the Canary Islands.

The group Border Angels estimates that since 1994, about 10,000 people have died in their attempts to cross the US-Mexico border, and for every body found five more are unaccounted for. An increase in deaths over the years is attributed to the implementation of increased border militarization and wall security measures that shift migrant routes to more dangerous terrain and deadly parts of the Sonoran Desert.

Last month President Donald Trump transferred control over the entire Roosevelt Reservation, a 60-foot-wide strip along the southern border from San Diego to El Paso, Texas, to the Department of Defense by declaring it a National Defense Area, meaning anyone who sets foot on it is subject to arrest by the US military.

Meanwhile, the Trump administration is carrying out mass detentions and disappearances of US citizens, legal residents, students, immigrants and asylum seekers without due process. Just last week, top policy adviser Stephen Miller confirmed that Trump plans to defy Supreme Court rulings and utilize the National Guard to carry out mass deportations.

The administration's characterization of immigrants crossing the border as an "invasion" has been seized to lay the basis of Trump invoking the Alien Enemies Act, and creating the framework for denying due process and deporting hundreds of people falsely claimed to be gang members and imprison them in the CECOT torture camp in El Salvador.

While Trump is carrying out unprecedented attacks on

immigrants, for decades the Democrats have been at the forefront of a massive and brutal assault on immigrants that laid the foundation for the current assaults.

Among the militarizing efforts that push immigrants to seek deadlier passage routes in the deserts of the American Southwest include Operation Hold the Line in 1993, Operation Gatekeeper in 1994 and Operation Rio Grande in 1997, all of which were implemented by the administration of Bill Clinton (1993-2001), which militarized the border from San Diego to El Paso. The aims of these operations were to “show force,” adding miles of new fence and expanding technology to hunt and find immigrants, employing stadium lighting, infrared night-vision scopes and buried seismic motion sensors.

President Obama (2009-2017) still holds the notorious record of the most deportations of immigrants, many more than Trump, having deported 2.7 million people, earning him the epithet of “Deporter-in-Chief.”

Obama set up a vast network of immigrant prison camps to detain, process and deport millions. His administration established the falsely named Secure Communities Program, allowing Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents to cooperate with local police. Obama further expanded the “bed mandate,” essentially a quota system requiring ICE to hold an average of a given number of immigrants every day. Obama expanded the mandate from 28,450 to 36,000. As a result, spending on detention soared under his administration, to \$2.6 billion a year, twice what it was in 2006.

Obama was also notorious for spearheading brutal crackdowns on migrants fleeing Central America. Working with US aid, Mexico set up checkpoints and conducted raids on its southern border with Guatemala to intercept refugees. This had the desired effect of axing the right to asylum, forcing migrants to go back to the very countries they were trying to escape.

Biden then upheld Trump’s use of Title 42, a fascist policy to utilize COVID-19 to continue a ban on immigrants and refugees seeking asylum at the border, all while overseeing mass deportations of Latin American and Haitian immigrants.

A key aspect of the Monday’s tragedy is the fact that the boat, though having traveled from Mexico, was carrying a group of Indian immigrants. According to an April 2025 report by the Migration Policy Institute, the latest figures from 2023 show that “immigrants from India, China, the Philippines, Vietnam and Korea represented 67 percent of all immigrants from Asia in the United States and 20 percent of all US immigrants.” According to their data, Indian immigrants represented the largest number of Asian immigrants with 19.9 percent of Asian immigrants coming from India, ahead of China with 16.7 percent.

An investigation by *In These Times*, titled “The Treacherous Paths Out of Modi’s India,” notes, “U.S. Customs and Border Protection agency saw a record high of 63,927 Indian migrants apprehended at the southern border, more than double the number from 2021. In 2023, the number increased again, to 96,917 migrants, accounting for 3% of all migrant crossings there.”

Furthermore in analyzing data from US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), the investigation noted that in the year 2022, “India became the third leading country of origin for

successful defensive asylum seekers, after China and El Salvador, where many migrants have fled political and religious repression and gang-related instability, respectively.”

Tens of thousands of farmers, workers—Muslim and Christian—and ethnic minorities are fleeing the brutal crackdowns and rampage against their social and democratic rights by the right-wing Prime Minister Narendra Modi of the ruling Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Among these include Sikhs and Indian peasant farmers facing political persecution after tens of thousands protested the Modi government in the face of a massive state security crackdown. This included the recent mass strikes and protests from 2024, and the previous Dilli Chalho (Let’s go to Delhi) 2020-2021 farmers protest against pro-agribusiness “reform” bills.

Modi boasted on social media following Trump’s electoral victory last November that he had “a great conversation with my friend” and was “[l]ooking forward to working closely together once again to further strengthen India-US relations across technology, defence, energy, space and several other sectors.”

Also immediately following Trump’s election, the BJP’s Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal voiced support for Trump’s plans to deport immigrants en masse, noting that New Delhi is in agreement that undocumented Indians in the US “should come back.”

Both Modi and Trump agree that India must play an increasing dominant role as a frontline state in Washington’s offensive against China. For its services, the US has extended strategic “favours” to India, including access to technology such as advanced weapons and weapon-systems, and strengthening relations as a cheap-labour US arms industry subcontractor.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact