

Caliphate 'a living hell'

Baghdad, Iraq

For the millions forced to endure the Islamic State group's brutal rule, life in the "caliphate" was a living hell where girls were enslaved, music was banned and homosexuality was punishable by death.

The jihadists applied an ultra-conservative interpretation of Islamic law across the swathes of Syria and Iraq that they captured in 2014, torturing or executing anyone who disobeyed.

The fall of the last sliver of IS territory in eastern Syria marks the end of their proto-state, once the size of the United Kingdom and home to more than seven million people.

The fate of prisoners used by the jihadists as human shields remains unknown, but more than 3,000 Yazidis are still missing.

The jihadists singled out the minority, followers of an ancient religion, for particularly harsh treatment which the UN has said may amount to genocide.

They slaughtered thousands of Yazidi men and boys, abducting women and girls then selling them at slave markets.

Many suffered years of sexual abuse.

"We did everything they demanded," said Bessa Hamad, an Iraqi Yazidi sold six times by jihadists before escaping their last redoubt in Syria.

"We couldn't say no."

Yazidi boys who were not killed were forced to fight and indoctrinated to hate their community, leaving families struggling to reconnect with those who were rescued.

Children who went to IS-run schools learnt to count with



Picture shows the fallen Islamic State group's last bastion in the eastern Syrian village of Baghuz after the defeat of the jihadist group.

maths books featuring guns and grenades, but pictures of people were banned.

As well as frontline fighters, IS ran its own police force, whose officers could impose fines or lashes on men whose breath smelt of cigarettes or alcohol.

Books were burned, while dancing and music were banned. Instead the jihadists broadcast propaganda via their own radio station.

The jihadists used sledgehammers to destroy priceless ancient artefacts they deemed idolatrous.

A strict dress code forced even young girls to wear a full black Islamic veil.

Beards and traditional robes were compulsory for men.

Thrown from rooftops

The extremists ran their own courts, sentencing people to death by beheading and hanging.

Men and women accused of adultery were stoned to

death. Men were shot or thrown from rooftops for the "crime" of being gay. The jihadists even introduced their own currency, minting coins that veterans of the battle against IS now keep as trophies.

Jail terms were imposed on those unable to pay IS taxes.

Iraq's major northern city of Mosul and Raqa in Syria were transformed into the twin de facto capitals of the "caliphate".

Raqa became a byword for atrocities carried out by the jihadists, and it was from there that IS organised devastating overseas attacks.

Human heads were displayed on spikes in the city along with crucified bodies, to sow terror.

IS initially won support from some residents who felt abandoned and abused by corrupt state authorities.

But today, those who survived its rule accuse the jihadists themselves of graft -- as well as ex-

treme acts of violence.

IS left more than 200 mass graves in Iraq and thousands of bodies are expected to be uncovered in Syria.

Numerous women interviewed by AFP said they received IS-stamped death certificates for their executed husbands, but the jihadists would not return their bodies. It could take years to discover what happened to some of their victims.

Some IS members leaving the group's last redoubt of Baghuz in eastern Syria have criticised the group's leadership.

"God's law was applied," said Abdel Moneim Najia, a jihadist who stayed in what was left of the "caliphate" until its final days. But he voiced the same grievances as Iraqis and Syrians expressed about their governments ahead of the IS takeover.



People said to be members of the Islamic State (IS) group exit with children from the village of Baghuz in the eastern Syrian province of Deir Ezzor (file)

Disease fears mount for cyclone survivors



Women and children take a shelter from rain in Buzi, Mozambique

Beira, Mozambique

'We suffered a lot'

Disease is threatening to aggravate the already dire conditions facing millions of survivors following the powerful tropical cyclone which ravaged southern Africa 10 days ago, officials warned on Sunday.

Cyclone Idai smashed into Mozambique's coast unleashing hurricane-force wind and rain that flooded swathes of the poor country before battering eastern Zimbabwe -- killing 705 people across the two nations.

"It is inevitable that cases of cholera and malaria will arise. In many areas we are already fighting with malaria cases," said Land Minister Celso Correia at a briefing in Beira, 1,000 kilometres (620 miles) north-east of the capital Maputo.

The UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs' Sebastian Rhodes Stampa, also at the briefing, warned that disease outbreaks in inaccessible areas could be "really problematic".

The World Food Programme said Friday that the humanitarian disaster unfolding in Mozambique is on a par with the situation in Yemen and Syria which are both in the grip of civil wars.

zid workers from across the world are continuing to arrive in the region to bring help to more than two million affected people across an area of roughly 3,000 square kilometres (around 1,160 square miles).

Survivors are struggling in desperate conditions with some still trapped on rooftops and those rescued in urgent need of food and medical supplies.

"The government is already setting up a cholera treatment centre to mitigate cholera. We should not be frightened when cholera issues arise," added Correia, describing efforts to control the emerging humanitarian crisis.

"It is normal. It's almost inevitable. Malaria, we know how it arises. We have lots of wetlands and we're going to have malaria that is sure to come up (there)."

Wilfried Deloviare, a 19-year-old resident of Beira which was caught in the eye of the storm, said he felt "sorry for our town, our city, because we suffered a lot to build it".

"Houses are completely destroyed, and some people don't have money to rebuild their businesses -- and many businesses are going to fail," he said.

More than two million people have been affected in Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi where the storm started as a tropical depression causing flooding which killed 60 and displaced nearly a million people. Hundreds are still missing in Mozambique and Zimbabwe. The International Committee said it had recorded two cases of cholera so far but the UN was unable to confirm the reports.

Boulder-sized sunfish washes ashore in Australia

Sydney, Australia

A boulder-sized fish of a kind known to "sink yachts" was washed up on an Australian beach.

The 1.8 metre (six feet) specimen -- believed to be a Mola Mola, or ocean sunfish -- came ashore near the mouth of the Murray River in South Australia at the weekend.

The enormous creature is distinct for both its size and peculiar shape featuring a flattened body and fins.

The fish can weigh up to 2.5 tons (2,200 kilogrammes), according to National Geographic.

A photo circulating on social media showed two people on a beach standing over the giant specimen, which had died.

"The amount of news and media from all over the world wanting to report it has been on another level," Linette Grzelak, who posted the image to Face-



A sunfish that was washed ashore and found dead in Coorong, near the mouth of the Murray River in South Australia.



The name Mola mola comes from the Latin word for "millstone." It's named for its gray, round body, and rough texture.

book, said.

"Never expected this."

South Australian Museum fish collection manager Ralph Foster said the fish was actually at the smaller end of the scale for the species.

It earned its name for basking in the sun near the ocean's sur-

face, but is also known to dive several hundred metres (feet) into the depths, he said.

"I've actually had a good look at it, we get three species here and this is actually the rarest one in South Australian waters," Foster told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC).

"They can get a lot bigger... it's probably an average-sized one, they can get nearly twice as big as that," he added.

Mola Mola have also been known to damage vessels, Foster added.

"We get a lot of them hit by boats and some of them are so large they actually sink yachts," he said.

"We know very little about them, it's only in the last few years that technology has allowed us to start learning about them.

"They are amazing things, they really are."