

## International

# UN human rights council urges 'verifiable withdrawal' of Eritrean troops from Tigray

## Voiced grave concern at reported widespread abuses in the region in recent months

GENEVA: The UN Human Rights Council called yesterday for an immediate end to all violations in Ethiopia's conflict-torn Tigray region and for Eritrean troops to quickly withdraw in a verifiable manner. The top UN rights body approved a resolution presented by the European Union, which hailed a unilateral ceasefire declared by Ethiopia last month and also its participation in a joint investigation into the Tigray situation.

But it voiced grave concern at reported widespread abuses in the region in recent months, including mass killings of civilians and rampant sexual violence. In particular, it highlighted the reported participation of Eritrean troops in serious abuses there, including violations of international law, "exacerbating the conflict".

Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed—who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2019 for rapprochement with neighbouring Eritrea—sent the army into Tigray last November to oust the region's once-dominant ruling party, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF).

Abiy had accused them of orchestrating attacks on Ethiopian military bases in Tigray, an important economic and industrial region in the Horn of Africa nation. After eight months of brutal conflict with federal troops, the Tigray Defence Forces last month swept across large parts of Tigray and seized the regional capital Mekele.

The months of fighting—marked by grisly massacres and widespread sexual violence—has killed thousands of people, while the United Nations says hundreds of thousands are on the brink of famine.

### Joint investigation

Yesterday's resolution, adopted with 20 of the rights council's 47 members in favour, 14 opposing and 13 abstaining, called "for an immediate halt to all human rights violations and abuses and violations of international humanitarian law." The text also called for "the swift and verifiable withdrawal of Eritrean troops from the Tigray region." Eritrean troops are accused of massacring civilians and forcing Eritrean refugees back across the border, according to rights groups during the eight-month conflict.

For months, both Ethiopia and Eritrea flatly denied the involvement of Eritrean forces in the conflict, but Abiy finally admitted their presence in March, and said they would withdraw. Before the vote, Eritrea's representative, Adem Osman Idris, slammed the resolution, insisting that his country's troops had left the region. Yesterday's resolution was met with strong resistance from Eritrea, as well as China and Venezuela, which together presented 15 proposed amendments, which were all rejected. Ethiopia also categorically rejected the text, saying it interfered with an ongoing investigation into the situation in Tigray. The resolution did welcome Ethiopia's decision to agree to the joint probe with the UN rights office, and urged the government to ensure the conditions needed for a "full, unhindered and independent investigation" and for attaining accountability for all violations.

Anita Pipan of Slovenia, who presented the resolution on behalf of the EU, insisted the intention was not to interfere with the probe, but said "for the process to



HUMERA: People gather at a gas station during a food distribution organized by the Amhara government near the village of Baker, 50 km southeast of Humera, in the Tigray Region of Ethiopia. — AFP

be credible, transparency is needed." "Given the seriousness of the situation, the international community has the right to be kept informed."

UN rights chief Michelle Bachelet told the council last month that the joint investigation had begun in mid-May was expected to conclude its work in August.

Yesterday's resolution called on Bachelet's office to provide the Ethiopian government with advice and technical assistance towards ensuring accountability. It also called for her to present an oral update to the council during its next two sessions in September and March on progress made in the joint investigation. — AFP



CARACAS: Venezuela's opposition leader Juan Guaido and his wife Fabiana Rosales are seen outside their house in Caracas. — AFP

## Venezuela's Maduro says Mexico to host talks with oppn

CARACAS: Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro said Monday that Mexico will host talks between his government and the opposition, but insisted he will only take part if international sanctions are lifted and he is protected from any plots to oust him.

Maduro's re-election in 2018 has not been recognized by either the opposition at home or by around 60 other countries — including the European Union and the United States. Washington in particular has ramped up sanctions against Venezuela and its regime, putting huge pressure on a country that has plunged deeper into political, economic and humanitarian crisis.

"Norway has been promoting an international dialogue based in Mexico, and very well, we agree," Maduro said at a meeting with lawmakers at the presidential palace in Caracas. "What we do not agree with is that some people who say they want to participate in the dialogue are preparing coups, financing criminals, terrorist attacks, and are planning assassinations," added the president.

Maduro's comments come after the arrest of oppo-

sition leader Freddy Guevara, who was detained Monday by the secret police and will be charged with terrorism and treason, according to the prosecutor's office. Guevara has been accused in the past of encouraging violence in protests that called for Maduro's departure, although the lawmaker was pardoned by the president last year.

Without referring to Guevara directly, Maduro said on Monday that some of those who have been pardoned "go free and immediately join in looking for criminals, paying for violent groups and preparing assassinations." The US and EU have said they are willing to review sanctions if negotiations in favor of "credible" elections advance.

Maduro insisted his participation in Mexico depended on whether the measures, which include an oil embargo by the US, were lifted. "We have proposed three conditions to go to Mexico," Maduro told lawmakers. "One, that the United States and the European Union lift all sanctions.

"Two, that all political sectors, by sitting down, recognize the validity and functioning of public powers and constitutionality of the country and its legitimate authorities." "Three, that all sectors renounce violent plans with criminals, coups, assassination and other avenues of violence."

Regional elections are taking place in Venezuela in November, and Maduro has promised to respect the results should his opponents triumph in the mayoral and gubernatorial contests. — AFP

Moroccan system's fundamental promise of fair trials for individuals accused of crimes and is inconsistent with the promise of the 2011 constitution and His Majesty King Mohammed VI's reform agenda," State Department spokesman Ned Price told reporters.

"Press freedom is foundational to prosperous and secure societies, and governments must ensure that journalists can safely perform their essential roles without fear of unjust attention, violence or threats," he said. But the Moroccan prosecutor's office said Raissouni received a "fair" trial and had been "prosecuted for crimes that have nothing to do with his journalistic work."

Price said the United States was also raising with Morocco other cases of journalists including that of Omar Radiwho has, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists, been held in solitary confinement on charges of sexual assault and undermining state security. Morocco is a longstanding ally of the United States, which under former president Donald Trump recognized its claim to disputed Western Sahara as the kingdom agreed to normalize relations with Zionists entity.—AFP

US citizens — killed the president in his home last week, also injuring his wife.

"At the request of the Haitian government, the Department of Justice, along with its US government partners, is assisting the Haitian National Police in the investigation," the department said in a statement.

"An initial assessment has been conducted in Haiti by senior US officials. The department will continue to support the Haitian government in its review of the facts and circumstances surrounding this heinous attack." It added it would also investigate if any US laws had been broken.

"Political leaders need to come together," Biden told reporters earlier. "The US stands ready to contin-

## Nigerian kidnappers free abducted emir, hold 13 relatives

KANO: An emir kidnapped in northern Nigeria's Kaduna state has been freed while 13 other family members remained in captivity, his son said yesterday. The attackers, known locally as bandits, stormed the palace of 83-year-old Alhassan Adamu, the emir of Kajuru outside the state capital of Kaduna early on Sunday, and seized victims, including women and children.

Emirs are revered in predominantly Muslim northern Nigeria as custodians of Islam and tradition. They have no constitutional role, but wield influence and act as a link between the people and government. "His Highness was released yesterday and he is now in the palace," said Musa Alassan Adamu, the emir's eldest son. "He was dropped by his captors outside the town from where he walked to the palace," Adamu told AFP.

He said the monarch was taken to hospital for med-

ical checks where he was certified to be in good health. "The bandits are still holding 13 members of the family," the son said. Twelve family members were initially thought to have been abducted with the emir.

A video clip seen by AFP shows the emir addressing his followers, who came to sympathise with him after his release. He broke down in tears as soon as he began his address. A source in the palace said the kidnappers had contacted the palace for ransom for the release of the other hostages.

Police in Kaduna have not yet commented on the incident. Kaduna has recently become a target for kidnapping-for-ransom gangs, seizing students and travellers on highways, but the abduction of the emir marked the first time such a high-profile victim had been seized. Northwest and central Nigeria have in recent years been terrorised by gangs of cattle thieves and kidnappers who raid villages, killing and abducting residents as well as stealing livestock after looting and burning homes. The gangs have lately been attacking schools and abducting students to squeeze ransom from parents.

Around 1,000 students have been kidnapped since December. On July 5, more than 100 students were kidnapped from a boarding school in Kaduna state, in the latest mass abduction targeting schools. — AFP



MEXICO CITY: Passengers travel on the cable car system dubbed Cablebus after its inauguration outskirts of Mexico City, on July 12, 2021. — AFP

## Commuters escape Mexico City gridlock in new cable car

MEXICO CITY: Commuters soared over one of the world's biggest and most traffic-clogged cities as a new cable car system went into operation in the Mexican capital on Monday. The 9.2-kilometer (5.7 miles) aerial tramway, comprising 377 cars that can each carry 10 passengers, promises to cut travel times for thousands of people in northern Mexico City.

"How much time was wasted. They should have done this much earlier," said 46-year-old electrician Marco Antonio Garcia, delighted that what was a journey of more than an hour now takes 20 minutes. "Are we in France or Switzerland?" he said, laughing along with the other passengers.

Department of Justice, Department of Homeland Security, State Department and National Security Council met with top Haitian officials.

"The delegation reviewed the security of critical infrastructure with Haitian government officials and met with the Haitian National Police, who are leading the investigation into the assassination," NSC spokeswoman Emily Horne said.

They also met with Haitian political leaders, including interim Prime Minister Claude Joseph and Senate President Joseph Lambert, "to encourage open and constructive dialogue to reach a political accord that can enable the country to hold free and fair elections." — AFP

In contrast to the buses and metro where pick-pockets and thieves operate, passengers aboard the new Cablebus system enjoyed comfortable seats, legroom, air conditioning and Wi-Fi. "It reduces my travel time a lot," 21-year-old psychology student Karen Leon said, traveling with family members who gazed down on the city with a mixture of astonishment and amusement.

It was a welcome change from the hellish commute that many endure in the capital and surrounding urban sprawl, home to a total of more than 20 million people. The line between Cuauhtemoc and Indios Verdes can carry up to 5,000 people an hour between six stations, according to Mayor Claudia Sheinbaum's office, which plans to open a second line in the east of the city.

Another cable car system was inaugurated in 2016 in Ecatepec just north of the capital, an area plagued by crime and poor public transportation. Similar systems also exist in a number of other Latin American cities, notably La Paz and adjoining El Alto in Bolivia which have a 32-kilometer aerial tramway. — AFP

## US criticizes Morocco jailing of journalist

WASHINGTON: The United States on Monday criticized its ally Morocco for handing a five-year prison sentence to a journalist and urged the kingdom to protect media freedom. The State Department said it was "disappointed" by Friday's sentencing of Souleimane Raissouni, the editor-in-chief of the now-defunct Akhbar Al Yaoum whose allies say he was targeted for his critical coverage.

Raissouni, who has lost a significant amount of weight after a hunger strike of more than 90 days, was convicted of indecent assault against another man, making him the latest in a string of journalists prosecuted for alleged sex crimes. "We believe the judicial process that led to this verdict contradicts the

## US says helping investigate Haitian president's killing

WASHINGTON: The United States said Monday it was helping investigate Haitian president Jovenel Moise's assassination and did not rule out sending troops at Haiti's request. According to Haitian authorities, a hit squad of 28 men — 26 Colombians and two