

## International

# Erdogan says Turkish troops have begun Libya deployment

## Top EU diplomat warns of 'imminent' Libya escalation

ANKARA: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Sunday said Turkish soldiers had begun deploying to Libya after parliament approved such a move last week. "Our soldiers' duty there is coordination. They will develop the operation center there. Our soldiers are gradually going right now," he told CNN Turk broadcaster during an interview.

The Turkish parliament passed a bill allowing the government to send troops to Libya aimed at shoring up the UN-recognized government in Tripoli. The Tripoli government has come under sustained attack since military strongman general Khalifa Haftar launched his offensive in April. Haftar is backed by Turkey's regional rivals, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt, while the UN-backed government has the support of Ankara and its ally Qatar. Erdogan said Turkey's objective was "not to fight", but "to support the legitimate government and avoid a humanitarian tragedy".

He added that Turkey would not be deploying its own combat forces. "Right now, we will have different units serving as a combatant force," he said, without giving details on who the fighters would be and where they would come from. Senior Turkish military personnel would coordinate the "fighting force", Erdogan explained, sharing their experience and information to support Tripoli.

Turkey's move comes after the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord made a formal request for military support. Libya and Turkey signed security and maritime agreements in November last year, angering Mediterranean countries including Greece and Cyprus who also seek to exploit energy resources in the region.

The European Union's top diplomat meanwhile warned yesterday that more intense fighting could be about to break out around the Libyan capital Tripoli, calling for a political solution to the crisis. "Recent developments in Libya indicate that an escalation of violence around Tripoli could be imminent," said the EU high representative for

foreign affairs, Josep Borrell. The UN Security Council was to meet later on the situation in Libya, where Turkish troops have begun deploying to protect the UN-recognized government from the forces of military strongman Khalifa Haftar.

"Today it is more urgent than ever to work genuinely towards a political solution to the crisis in Libya," he said.

"The European Union calls on all sides to engage in a political process under the leadership of the United Nations. The European Union will continue to deploy all efforts towards finding a peaceful and political solution to this process." The North African country was plunged into chaos with the killing of dictator Moamer Kadhafi in a 2011 NATO-backed uprising. It is now divided between the GNA and rival authorities based in the country's east.

More than 280 civilians and more than 2,000 fighters have been killed since the start of Haftar's assault on Tripoli, according to the United Nations. The fighting has displaced some 146,000 people.

Egypt announced yesterday that it will hold a meeting with four European Mediterranean countries about developments in neighboring Libya after Turkey began deploying troops in the war-torn North African nation. The talks-to be held in Cairo tomorrow-will bring together foreign ministers from France, Italy, Greece and Cyprus, Egypt's foreign ministry said.

The ministers will tackle the "rapid developments" in Libya and "ways to push efforts to reach a comprehensive settlement" between rival administrations there, a statement said. Libya has seen an escalation of the turmoil that has gripped the oil-rich country since a NATO-backed uprising that toppled and killed dictator Muammar Gaddafi in 2011.

Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Russia back strongman general Khalifa Haftar, who launched an offensive in April to capture Tripoli from the UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA). — AFP



TRIPOLI: Libyan mourners offer condolences to each other during the funeral of army cadets, who were killed in an air strike on a military school, in the Martyrs Square of Libya's capital Tripoli on Sunday. At least 28 people were killed and dozens injured on Saturday in an air strike on a military school in the Libyan capital Tripoli. — AFP

## Indonesian jailed for life as UK's most prolific rapist



Indonesian student Reynhard Sinaga, dubbed as Britain's most prolific rapist, was yesterday jailed for life. — AFP

LONDON: An Indonesian student described as Britain's most prolific rapist was jailed for life yesterday for a catalogue of sex offences on unsuspecting men he drugged and assaulted. Manchester Crown Court in northwest England was told Reynhard Sinaga may have attacked as many as 195 men, luring them into his flat with the offer of a place to stay or alcohol.

Judge Suzanne Goddard described the 36-year-old from Indonesia's Jambi province as "an evil sexual predator" who preyed on drunken young men on nights

out. He is thought to have used sedatives to render his victims unconscious before filming the attacks. Most knew nothing about the assaults. He was caught only when one victim woke up.

"One of your victims described you as a monster," Goddard said. "The scale and enormity of your offending confirms this as an accurate description." She recom-

mended he serve at least 30 years behind bars. Sinaga was convicted of 159 offences, including 136 rapes and eight attempted rapes, at four separate trials, according to the Crown Prosecution Service.

The first trial began in June 2018. The last ended last December. None could be reported until restrictions imposed to avoid prejudicing juries were lifted yesterday. The CPS said Sinaga was suspected of attacking "scores" more men since he moved to Britain in 2007, calling him "the worst-known sex offender in the country's history". The deputy chief crown prosecutor for northwest England, Ian Rushton, said: "Reynhard Sinaga is the most prolific rapist in British legal history."

### Playing dead

"His extreme sense of sexual entitlement almost defies belief and he would no doubt still be adding to his staggering tally had he not been caught. "Sinaga's unthreatening demeanor duped these

young men—many of whom thanked him for his kindness in offering them a place to stay—into thinking this monster was a Good Samaritan.

"But once back at his flat he used victims as objects purely for his own gratification—then appears to have derived further twisted pleasure from re-watching his films in court and putting victims through the trauma of giving evidence."

Sinaga, a slightly built, young-looking doctorate student, had claimed his mainly heterosexual victims were acting out his sexual fantasy to play dead during intercourse. But four trial juries rejected his defense and a character testimony from a local church he had attended in Manchester. He was arrested in 2017 after the victim who woke up managed to snatch his mobile phone and took it to police. The CPS said detectives discovered 3.29 terabytes of graphic material of the sexual assaults equivalent to 250 DVDs or 300,000 photos. One of the assaults lasted for eight hours. — AFP

## Japan PM Abe 'deeply worried' by Middle East tensions

TOKYO: Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who has tried to carve out a role mediating between Washington and Tehran, said yesterday he was "deeply worried" by tensions in the Middle East.

The US assassination of Iranian military commander Qasem Soleimani last week has raised fears of an all-out conflict, with President Donald Trump threatening "major retaliation" if Tehran makes good on a pledge to avenge the killing. "Middle Eastern tensions are increasing. I'm deeply worried about the current situation," Abe said in his first comments since the killing of Soleimani in Iraq.

"A further escalation in this situation should be avoided and I call for diplomatic efforts by parties concerned." Tokyo and Tehran have maintained diplomatic ties for decades, even though the crisis with the West sparked by Iran's 1979 Islamic revolution and subsequent frictions over its nuclear program. In June, as tensions rose over Trump's decision to withdraw from a nuclear deal with Tehran, Abe visited Iran for talks with Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and President Hassan Rouhani.

But his visit coincided with a suspected attack on two oil tankers in the Sea of Oman, off the Iranian coast, which again sent tensions in the Gulf soaring. And Khamenei categorically ruled out talks with Trump despite Abe's efforts to smooth a path. Abe later met Rouhani on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly, and in December welcomed the Iranian leader to Japan—the first visit by an Iranian head of state in two decades.

Japan has walked a fine line in balancing its key alliance with Washington and its longstanding relations and interests with Iran. It was formerly a major buyer of Iranian crude but stopped purchases to comply with US sanctions imposed after Washington unilaterally quit the nuclear deal in May 2018.

It has opted not to join a US-led coalition patrolling waterways in the Middle East, proposed by Washington after the tanker attack during Abe's Iran visit. But it has said it will send a military vessel and two patrol planes to the region for intelligence activities. The Japanese patrol activities will not, however, be deployed in the Strait of Hormuz, through which much of the global oil trade passes and where the US-led coalition operates. — AFP

## Soleimani killing offers chance for Iran rulers to rally support

PARIS: The killing of Iranian commander Qasem Soleimani in a US air strike offers a chance for Iran's clerical rulers to rally popular support at an extremely delicate time for the Islamic republic in the wake of unusually fierce protests. Yet while there has been a genuine outpouring of emotion and anti-American sentiment among Iranians after the killing of Soleimani in Baghdad, the economic hardships that prompted last November's protests are still in place, analysts say.

The protests, which came as US sanctions cripple Iran's economy, were seen as one of the biggest challenges for its leaders since the Islamic Revolution that ousted the shah in 1979 and led to a long-term rupture in US ties. People have packed the streets in cities across Iran for ceremonies commemorating Soleimani, the mastermind of Iran's operations in Iraq, Syria and Yemen, and seen by some as the de facto number two after supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. "There's a rally around the flag within the regime. Soleimani had good relations with many regime officials from all sides of the political spectrum," said Ariane Tabatabai, an associate political scientist at the Rand Corporation, a policy think tank in California. "But within the population, the grievances that led to the November protests are still there," she added, saying Iran's leaders could use it as a "further excuse" to crack down on dissent.

### 'Deflect the blows'

Western rights groups have said the protests, which began on November 15 in response to a surprise petrol price hike, were quashed with ferocious force. Officials in Iran have yet to issue an overall death toll for the days of unrest, but Amnesty International says more than 300 people were killed in the crackdown. The



TEHRAN: An Iranian mourner carries a picture of slain military commander Qasem Soleimani during a funeral procession in the capital Tehran yesterday. — AFP

IMF estimates the Iranian economy contracted 9.5 percent last year after Washington's pullout from the 2015 deal curtailing Tehran's nuclear program, which was supposed to give sanctions relief. According to Ray Tayeh, senior fellow for Middle East studies at the Council on Foreign Relations, Iran's economy "has essentially collapsed", with the country now "struggling to meet its domestic budgetary needs". But throughout its four-decade history, the Islamic republic has mobilized support by focusing on the twin elements of consistent revolutionary fervour and confrontation with the United States.

The killing of Soleimani — followed by provocative comments by President Donald Trump that the United States could target Iranian cultural sites if Tehran retaliated — only fuels this narrative. There have been massive turnouts at the ceremonies for Soleimani not just in Tehran but also cities like Ahvaz, which saw major unrest in November. "They (Iran's rulers) have the chance to deflect the blows. Not for a very long time but there will be a popular emotion" said Francois Nicoullaud, a former French ambassador to Tehran. "In the Iranian imagination, he had a great profile as a soldier."

Soleimani was widely popular, famed for suddenly popping up in

Middle East conflict zones and credited within the country for helping defeat Islamic State jihadists in Syria and Iraq. But Tabatabai said that among younger Iranians, Soleimani was the "face of Iranian defense against outside adversaries" but also "the face of an organisation responsible for repression and atrocities".

### Moment of truth

His killing also comes at a critical political juncture for President Hassan Rouhani, seen as a more moderate figure, who is under pressure from hardliners just a six weeks ahead of parliamentary elections. "It's now almost guaranteed that the Iranian parliament will fall into the hands of the most hard-line and militant elements within Iran," said Ali Vaez, Iran analyst for the International Crisis Group (ICG). For Tehran, the key challenge is how to carry out its pledge to retaliate against the United States, a move that Khamenei is likely to weigh carefully given its impact at home and abroad. "There will be a moment of introspection. If Iran needs to choose between saving the regime in Tehran versus expanding the regime in the region, I think they will choose saving the regime in Tehran," said Alex Vatanka, senior fellow at the Middle East Institute in Washington. "The question is what is their calculation," he added. — AFP

## Indonesia braces for more rains as toll hits 66

JAKARTA: Indonesians were told yesterday to brace for more heavy downpours after record rains triggered flooding and landslides that authorities said had killed at least 66 people in and around Jakarta. Whole neighborhoods in the capital—a megalopolis home to around 30 million people—were submerged last week by floodwaters that forced tens of thousands into temporary shelters.

Authorities have warned residents to take precautions and safeguard their possessions ahead of more pounding storms over the coming weeks. "There is still potential for mid to heavy rainfall with lightning, thunder and strong winds" in greater Jakarta, Indonesia's weather bureau said in a statement yesterday. Last week's deluge was the heaviest in the capital since record keeping began in the 19th century, the agency said, leading to the city's deadliest flood disaster in years.

Some 377 millimeters (14.8 inches) of rain pounded sections of the vast city, with floodwaters reaching up to the second floor of some buildings after rivers overflowed. At least two people in Jakarta's west were hospitalized yesterday after the collapse of a five-storey building, which Indonesia's search and rescue agency said may have been caused by a build-up of rainwater. Authorities said yesterday the death toll had climbed again to 66 with two more reportedly missing in Lebak, west of the capital.

Flash flooding killed more than half a dozen people in Lebak, including a seven-year-old boy who was reportedly swept away by the water. Thousands remained in cramped Jakarta shelters Monday as authorities pushed to reach isolated communities outside the city affected by the disaster.

A day earlier, health workers and soldiers sprayed ravaged parts of the capital with disinfectant in a bid to prevent disease outbreaks. — AFP

## 5 Mali soldiers killed by roadside bomb ambush

BAMAKO: Five Malian soldiers were killed yesterday in a roadside bomb attack, a government spokesperson said, in the latest violence to hit the West African country's volatile central region. The troops were travelling in the region of Alatona, near the border with Mauritania, when their convoy hit a homemade bomb and then came under fire. Mali has been struggling to contain an Islamist insurgency that erupted in the north in 2012, and which has claimed thousands of military and civilian lives since. More than 140 Malian soldiers died in jihadist attacks between September and December.

A Malian army refuelling truck that had left the town of Diabaly in the center of the country hit the bomb early yesterday morning, said a non-commissioned officer who was sent in to reinforce the area.

Militants, who were travelling on motorbikes and in cars, also fired on the soldiers. "There were deaths on our side and on the side of the assailants," the officer, who requested to remain anonymous, told AFP. "The reinforcements came in time and we recovered our (dead) bodies and the wounded," the officer said, adding that he was unaware of the total number of victims.

Four vehicles were destroyed in the ambush, according to government spokesperson Yaya Sangare.

Despite some 4,500 French troops in the Sahel region, plus a 13,000-strong UN peacekeeping force in Mali, the conflict has engulfed the center of the country and spread to neighboring Burkina Faso and Niger. Hiding homemade bombs under well-travelled roads is a frequent means of attack used by jihadists. — AFP