

## International

# US warns Russia against another 'serious mistake' on Ukraine

## 'We don't have clarity into Moscow's intentions'

**WASHINGTON:** The United States on Wednesday warned Russia against making another "serious mistake" on Ukraine as it sought clarity about troop movements near the border. Welcoming Ukraine's foreign minister to Washington, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that the United States was "concerned with reports of the unusual Russian activity near Ukraine."

"We don't have clarity into Moscow's intentions, but we do know its playbook," Blinken told a joint news conference. "Our concern is that Russia may make the serious mistake of attempting to rehash what it undertook back in 2014 when it amassed forces along the border, crossed into sovereign Ukrainian territory and did so claiming falsely that it was provoked," he said.

"Our commitment to Ukraine's sovereignty, to its independence, to its territorial integrity is iron-clad, and the international community will see

through any Russian effort to resort to its previous tactics," Blinken said.

Ukraine has been ensnared in a deadly war with pro-Moscow separatists in its largely Russian-speaking east since 2014 when Russia seized the Crimea peninsula. Russia took action after mass protests led to the ousting of the president who had suspended efforts to move closer to the European Union. Russia in March also amassed 100,000 troops on Ukraine's borders. It pulled back, but both Ukraine and the United States said at the time that the withdrawal was limited.

### Seeking clarity

Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said Ukraine was looking to work with the United States to step up its defenses and "does not intend to attack anyone." "The best way to deter an aggressive Russia is to make it clear for the Kremlin that Ukraine is

strong, but also that it has strong allies that will not leave it on its own in the face of Moscow's ever-increasing aggressiveness," Kuleba said.

"Russian aggression against Ukraine will end on the day Ukraine's place as part of the West is institutionalized and undoubted," he said. Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said that the movement by Russia was "unusual in its size and scope."

"We urge Russia to be clear about their intentions and to abide by their Minsk agreements," he said, referring to agreements to try to halt the fighting inside Ukraine. The comments followed a rare visit to Moscow last week by the director of the US Central Intelligence Agency, William Burns, who met with President Vladimir Putin.

CNN reported that President Joe Biden deployed Burns, the former US ambassador to Moscow, to raise the issue of the Russian troop surge directly with the Kremlin. — AFP

## Sweden charges oil execs with Sudan war crimes

**STOCKHOLM:** Two executives from Swedish oil company Lundin Energy have been charged with complicity in war crimes committed by Sudan's regime between 1999 and 2003, Sweden's Prosecution Authority said yesterday. Alex Schneider, a Swiss national who was vice president in charge of operations at Lundin Oil as it was known at the time, and Sweden's Ian Lundin, chief executive from 1998-2002 and chairman of the board since 2002, have been under investigation since 2010 and were formally named as suspects in 2016.

"They are suspected of having been complicit in war crimes committed by the then Sudanese regime with the purpose of securing the company's oil operations in southern Sudan," the Prosecution Authority said in a statement. The prosecution has also demanded the confiscation of 1.4 billion kronor (140 million euros, \$160 million), equivalent to the profit the company made on the sale of its Sudan operations in 2003.

The company's oil exploration field "Block 5A" was operated in a consortium with Malaysia's Petronas, Austria's OMV and Sudan's Sudapet, in one of the regions worst affected by Sudan's civil war.

### 'Unfounded and flawed'

After Lundin struck oil in Block 5A in 1999, the Sudanese military, together with a militia group allied to the regime, "led offensive military operations to take control of the area and create the necessary preconditions for Lundin Oil's oil exploration," the prosecution said.

This included aerial bombardments, abducting, plundering and killing of civilians, and burning of entire villages—violence the prosecution said constituted war crimes. The two accused were complicit because Lundin Oil at the time asked Sudan's government to make the military responsible for its security operations, "knowing that this meant that the military would then need to take control of Block 5A via military force," the prosecution said. Lundin Oil did so "despite understanding, or in any case being indifferent to, the military and the militia carrying out the war in a way that was forbidden according to international humanitarian law." Block 5A is located in what is South Sudan since its 2011 independence. Sweden can prosecute crimes committed abroad in its court system, though the government had to give its approval to indict a foreign national for crimes committed abroad. A lawyer for Ian Lundin, Torgny Wetterberg, said his client denied responsibility.—AFP



WASHINGTON: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba hold a news conference following the US-Ukraine Strategic Dialogue talks at the State Department in Washington. - AFP

## Teen accused of murder at anti-racism protest testifies

**WASHINGTON:** Kyle Rittenhouse, the American teen who shot three people during anti-police protests last year, broke down in tears Wednesday while testifying in his murder trial. Rittenhouse insisted he shot three men, two fatally, in self-defense as protestors set small fires and damaged businesses in Kenosha, Wisconsin on August 25, 2020.

But he struggled in front of a jury to explain why he carried an AR-15-style assault rifle to the protests, as a prosecutor sought to break down his self-defense case. "I didn't do anything wrong; I defended myself," Rittenhouse testified. "I did not intend to kill them. I intended to stop the people who were attacking me," he told the court.

### Felt threatened

Under questioning from his own attorney Mark

Richards, Rittenhouse — who was 17 at the time of the shootings — confidently described his presence at the protests as helping to protect an auto business, to put out fires and to deliver first aid to anyone who was injured. But when Richards asked him to describe the runup to the first shooting of Joseph Rosenbaum, in his first open sign of emotion in the 10-day-old trial, Rittenhouse faltered and broke down in tears, forcing the court into a short break.

He insisted that Rosenbaum threatened to kill him. And then, several minutes later when he shot two other men who had sought to stop him from running away, one of them holding a gun as he lay on the ground, Rittenhouse also argued that he was protecting himself. Seeking to undermine that argument, Kenosha County prosecutor Thomas Binger sought to prove that Rittenhouse lacked justification for shooting the three men and had some intention to use his gun by bringing it to the protests.

"Joseph Rosenbaum never touched you in any way during that incident," Binger said to him. Rittenhouse said he believed that Rosenbaum wanted to take the gun and use it on him. "You understand how dangerous it is to point a gun at someone, don't you?" Binger asked him.

"I never wanted to shoot Mr Rosenbaum," Rittenhouse said. "I didn't want to have to shoot him... I pointed it at him because he kept running after me." When Binger asked why he brought the gun if he only intended to offer first aid at the protests, Rittenhouse replied: "I brought the gun for my protection. But... I didn't think I would have to use the gun."

### Motion for mistrial

Rittenhouse's testimony came toward the end of the trial in which videos and witnesses, including some called by the prosecution, appeared to support his claim of self-defense. The case has drawn national attention because it arose from the nationwide Black Lives Matter demonstrations last year.

The protests and rioting in Kenosha erupted when a white policeman shot a Black man, Jacob Blake, several times in his car during an arrest, leaving him paralyzed. In right-wing and pro-gun circles, including former president Donald Trump and his followers, Rittenhouse is a painted as a hero figure. Rittenhouse is charged with five felony counts, including first-degree homicide and attempted homicide, as well as a misdemeanor — illegal possession of a dangerous weapon by a person under 18. — AFP