

International

Sudan militia chief 'rampaged' across Darfur, court told

Ali inflicted severe pain and suffering on women, children and men in the villages

THE HAGUE, Netherlands: A former Sudanese militia chief led a campaign of murder, rape and torture across Darfur, the International Criminal Court heard on Tuesday, as the first trial for war crimes in the region got underway. Ali Muhammad Ali Abd-Al-Rahman, an ally of deposed Sudanese strongman Omar al-Bashir, faces 31 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity for his role in the conflict almost 20 years ago.

His trial is the first before the Hague-based ICC for crimes in Darfur, in which 300,000 people were killed and two and a half million fled their homes, according to UN figures. "You will hear evidence that he (Abd-Al-Rahman) and his forces rampaged across different parts of Darfur," the ICC's chief prosecutor Karim Khan told judges.

He "inflicted severe pain and suffering on women, children and men in the villages that he left in his wake," Khan said. Abd-Al-Rahman, 72, a senior commander of the Janjaweed militia—a notorious armed group created by the Sudanese government—pleaded not guilty after the historic trial opened.

"I reject all these charges. I am innocent of all these charges," Abd-Al-Rahman told judges at the ICC, a court set up in 2002 to try the world's worst crimes. Wearing a dark blue suit, light blue shirt and fiddling with his maroon tie, Abd-Al-Rahman sat motionless as the 31 counts of war crimes, crimes against humanity allegedly committed in 2003-04 were being read.

The long charge sheet describes acts of murder, rape, torture and pillaging. Fighting broke out in Darfur when black African rebels, complaining of systematic discrimination, took up arms against Bashir's Arab-dominated regime. Khartoum responded by

unleashing the Janjaweed, a force drawn from among the region's nomadic tribes. Rights groups described it as a deliberate campaign of ethnic cleansing targeting the Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa ethnic groups.

In April 2007, the ICC issued an arrest warrant for Abd-Al-Rahman, also known by the nom de guerre of Ali Kushayb. He fled to the Central African Republic in February 2020 when the new Sudanese government announced its intention to cooperate with the ICC investigation. Four months later, he surrendered voluntarily.

'Feared reputation'

Prosecutors said Abd-Al-Rahman, who carried the title of "colonel of colonels" in the Janjaweed, played a central role in a series of attacks on at least four villages in West Darfur. He is charged with both directing attacks, as well as mobilising, recruiting, arming and supplying to Janjaweed militia under his command. Abd-Al-Rahman "took pride in the power that he thought he exerted... and a strange glee in his feared reputation," Khan told the judges. During these attacks, at least 100 villagers were murdered, women and girls were raped and the members of the predominantly Fur ethnic group subjected to forcible transfer and persecution.

After one attack in late February and early March 2002 on a village, 100 Fur men including community leaders, doctors and teachers were taken to a police station in the town of Mukjar, where they were interrogated and tortured. Fifty detainees were driven out into the countryside, told to lie face down and were then executed, prosecutors said.

In another incident in March 2004, between 100



THE HAGUE: Photo shows former senior commander of the Sudanese Janjaweed militia Ali Muhammad Ali Abd-Al-Rahman, also known as Ali Kushayb, during a confirmation hearing over alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity committed during the Darfur conflict in 2003-04, in The Hague, on May 24, 2021. —AFP

to 200 Fur men were detained and taken to an open area at the Deleig police station where they were tortured, prosecutors added. "Abd-Al-Rahman stood or walked on the backs of detainees, hit them... kicked them, and verbally abused them," said Khan. "He literally trampled on their rights," the prosecutor said.

'Long-awaited chance'

Abd-Al-Rahman is the first suspect to be tried for war crimes committed in Darfur—"a rare long-

awaited chance for the victims and the communities the Janjaweed terrorised to see an alleged leader face justice," Human Rights Watch (HRW) said in a statement.

His trial is also the first-ever stemming from a UN Security Council referral. Former president Omar al-Bashir and three others are still being sought by the ICC for crimes in Darfur. Following his ouster in 2019, Bashir remains in Sudan despite calls for him and two other associates to be handed over to the ICC for prosecution. —AFP

El Salvador arrests 6,000 gang members

SAN SALVADOR, El Salvador: More than 6,000 gang members have been detained in the first nine days of a state of emergency in El Salvador, President Nayib Bukele said Monday, after imposing the measures to stamp out a soaring homicide wave. The Central American country declared the emergency measures—allowing the arrest of gang members without a warrant—last week after 87 reported killings from March 25 to 27.

And on Monday the president said the 6,000 detained in a little over a week added to the 16,000 gang members already incarcerated in El Salvador's prisons. Speaking at a police barracks in the capital San

Salvador, Bukele addressed public concerns of gangs "taking revenge" on the population due to the massive arrest operations.

If they commit an act of revenge, "there will not be even one meal in the prisons," the president said. "I swear to God that they will not eat a single grain of rice, and we will see how long they last, and I don't care what international organizations say," he added.

Besides arrests without a warrant, the emergency measures—which last one month—also restrict freedom of assembly, while telephone calls and emails can be intercepted without a court order. Such broad and swift enactment of powers

granted to the military and police has drawn alarm from local and international human rights organizations.

Bukele added that he had ordered the construction of a maximum-security prison with a capacity of 20,000 inmates. "There are only two ways: jail or death," he said. The 40-year-old president, elected in 2019, enjoys broad support in El Salvador over his promises to fight organized crime and improve security in the violence-wracked country. Last week, the ruling party-controlled parliament reformed the penal code to increase the maximum sentence for gang membership from nine to 45 years in prison. —AFP



ANTIGUA CUSCATLAN: Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele (L) and Defence Minister Rene Merino Monroy participate in the graduation of new military personnel, at the Captain General Gerardo Barrios Military School, in Antigua Cuscatlan, El Salvador. —AFP

10,000-page red alert on climate ...

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felt and a slew of new science has led most countries to embrace the more ambitious aspirational goal. But that ship may have sailed. In every IPCC projection for a liveable future, Earth's average surface temperature increases by 1.5C or 1.6C by around 2030 - a decade earlier than estimates made only a few years ago.

In theory, it will be possible to cap temperature increases to below the 1.5C threshold by the end of the century, but even a temporary "overshoot" could cause irreversible damage to fragile ecosystems at the poles, in the mountains, and in coastal areas. If countries do not improve on the emissions reduction pledges running to 2030, made under the Paris treaty, even staying under 2C will be a serious challenge. Current national policies would see Earth warm 3.2C by 2100.

Once a problem on the distant horizon, the devastating consequences of climate change have become a here-and-now reality. Nearly half the

world's population—between 3.3 and 3.6 billion—are "very vulnerable" to global warming's deadly impacts, which are certain to get worse. Heatwaves so extreme as to literally be unliveable; superstorms made more deadly by a water-logged atmosphere and rising seas; drought, water shortages, more disease-carrying mosquitoes and ticks.

These and other impacts are set to become worse, and will disproportionately ravage Earth's most vulnerable populations, including indigenous peoples. Hundreds of millions could eventually be forced from their homes by sea levels—pushed up mainly by melting ice sheets on Greenland and Antarctica—that will continue to rise across the next century no matter how quickly humanity draws down emissions. Even if global heating is capped at 2C, oceans could gain half-a-meter by 2100 and two meters by 2300, double the IPCC's estimate from 2019.

The IPCC insists that it does not provide recommendations, only background information and policy options so decision makers can make the right choices to ensure a "liveable future" for the planet and its inhabitants. But all roads leading to a 1.5C or even a 2C world "involve rapid and deep and in most cases immediate greenhouse gas emissions reductions in all sectors"—including industry, transportation, agriculture, energy and cities. — AFP

ered: The first is that neither interest nor any other benefit in terms of advantages or gifts, should be expected.

The second is that at no time should the creditor show any signs of arrogance or pride, disturbing the debtor by his constant reminder of his favor to him. Abu Huraira (ra) narrated that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said what can be translated as: "A man who used to give loans would instruct his servant thus: 'When you come to one who is in straitened circumstances (unable to pay the debt) forgive him, for perhaps God may forgive us.'

He (the Prophet) said, 'When he (the lender) met Allah, He forgave him.'" (Al-Bukhari # 3, 480. Al-Albani also rated it as Saheeh (authentic) in Saheeh Al-Targheeb # 905). Finally, give charity before it is too late. Ha'ritha bin Wahb Al-Khuza'ey (ra) said what can be translated as: "I heard the Prophet (PBUH) say, '(O people), give in charity before a time comes when a person will wander about with his object of charity and someone (to whom it is offered) will say, 'If you had brought it yesterday, I would have taken it from you, but today I don't need it.'" (Al-Bukhari # 1, 411, in English translation, it is Hadeeth # 1, 424)

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Yemen warring parties trade...

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While the insurgents did not directly respond to the claims, their media channels also reported alleged "breaches", but by pro-government troops, on Sunday and Monday. Since 2016, the coalition backing the government has enforced an air and sea blockade on Yemen, with exemptions for aid flights, accusing Tehran of smuggling weapons to the rebels. Iran denies the charge.

The US special envoy for Yemen, Tim Lenderking, told Bloomberg TV on Monday all sides to the conflict had compromised and showed flexibility, with nobody getting "entirely what they want". "I think this is a really pivotal moment for Yemen, and I think what it does is it gives the Yemenis a break from seven years of conflict," he added. Under the latest ceasefire agreement brokered by the UN, all ground, air and naval military operations, including cross-border attacks, are meant to cease.

In addition, 18 fuel ships are to be allowed into Hodeida port, a lifeline for Yemen, and two commer-

cial flights a week are allowed into and out of the rebel-held Sanaa airport. The truce announcement came as discussions on Yemen's devastating conflict were being held in Saudi Arabia—in the absence of the insurgents, who refused to hold talks on "enemy" territory. The civil war has killed hundreds of thousands, directly or indirectly, according to UN figures, and pushed the country to the brink of famine.

Yemeni President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi, in remarks Monday in the Saudi capital Riyadh, called on the Houthis to return to the negotiating table in order to "let us heal our torn homeland's wounds". But Yemenis remained cautiously optimistic, as a number of previous ceasefires had failed. "If it does in fact hold, and there is good will from everyone, I think things may get better and safety and security will return to the country," Houssam Fathi, 24, a resident of Sanaa, told AFP. A national truce ahead of peace talks in April 2016 was violated almost immediately, as were other ceasefires that year. A 2018 agreement to cease hostilities around rebel-held Hodeida port was also largely ignored. In the western city of Hodeida, 45-year-old Abdulaziz, said he was still struggling to make a living as a delivery person amid inflation. "I buy fuel from the black market at very high prices," he said, adding: "This truce seems impossible." — AFP

Charity 'Sadaqah' in different forms..

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It was said, "What if he cannot do that?" He replied, "Let him help someone who is in desperate need." It was said, "What if he cannot do that?" He replied, "Let him enjoy good." It was said, "What if he cannot do that?" He replied, "Let him refrain from evil: for that is an act of charity." (Al-Bukhari # 6, 022 and Muslim # 1, 008)

Other forms of charity: (A) Picking up a harmful object from the road or path: Abu Huraira (ra) narrated that Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said what can be translated as: "I saw a person enjoying himself in Paradise because of the tree that he cut from a path (and disposed of it), which was a source of inconvenience to the people." (Muslim # 1, 914)

In another Hadeeth, Abu Dharr narrated that Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said what can be translated as: "Smiling at your others, enjoining good and forbidding evil, directing someone who has lost his way, helping a blind man, and removing stones, thorns and bones from the road or path, or pouring water from your bucket into your brother's—all of those are acts of charity." (Al-Albani rated it as Saheeh (authentic) in Saheeh Al-Tirmidhi # 1, 956)

(B) Giving interest free loans: Loans given and then forgiven become a meritorious type of charity. In order for the lender to get a unique reward for charity in this regard, two things must be consid-

EU, allies expel 150 Russian...

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The expulsions come as the EU discusses a fifth round of sanctions on Russia for its invasion of Ukraine on February 24, with member states expected to sign off on it this week or next.

Italy's foreign minister, Luigi Di Maio, said 30 Russian diplomats were being expelled "for national security reasons" in the context of the ongoing war. A few hours later, Spain's foreign minister announced its own expulsion of "around" 25 Russian diplomats. "The unbearable images we have seen of the massacre of civilians in the town of Bucha after the withdrawal of the Russian army deeply outrage us," Jose Manuel Albares told reporters.

The Russian diplomats and staff "represent a threat to the interest of the country" and they will be expelled "immediately", he told a news conference following a weekly cabinet meeting. Sweden's foreign ministry said it was expelling three Russian diplomats who conducted "illegal operations" there.

And Denmark announced a similar move for 15 Russian "intelligence officers" accused of spying on its territory, something it said was "unacceptable". The Danish government condemned what it called

"Russia's brutality" in Bucha, saying: "Deliberate attacks against civilians are a war crime." But Foreign Minister Jeppe Kofod said diplomatic ties would remain with Moscow, noting that the Russian ambassador and embassy staff in Copenhagen were not being expelled.

The announcements follow similar moves by EU allies France, which on Monday expelled 35 Russian diplomats, and Germany, where officials said 40 diplomats had been sent home. Also on Monday, Lithuania said it was expelling the Russian ambassador in response to "Russia's military aggression" and what it called the "horrific massacre in Bucha". According to an AFP count, European Union countries have now expelled around 260 Russian diplomats since the invasion. Russia said on March 29 it was expelling 10 diplomats from Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia in a tit-for-tat move.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has urged the world to enforce tough new sanctions on Moscow over the killings in Bucha, which he has described as "war crimes" and "genocide". The Kremlin has denied responsibility for the corpses lying in the streets, some with their hands bound behind them. But newly released satellite photographs taken by Maxar Technologies in mid-March, before the Russian withdrawal, showed what appeared to be bodies in some of the same places they were later found by Ukrainian troops and seen by journalists. — AFP