

## International

# Burkina ex-president gets life for Sankara killing in historic trial

## Sankara's bloody death remains a dark blot on the country's history

**OUAGADOUGOU, Burkina Faso:** A military court in Burkina Faso on Wednesday handed down a life term to former president Blaise Compaore over the 1987 assassination of revolutionary leader Thomas Sankara. Applause erupted in the courtroom as the long-awaited verdict was read out, bringing the curtain down on a case that has afflicted the impoverished and volatile state for 34 years.

The court also issued life terms to Hyacinthe Kafando, an officer suspected of having led the hit squad, and General Gilbert Diendere, an army commander at the time of the assassination, which coincided with a coup that brought Compaore to power.

Compaore, who lives in exile in Ivory Coast after being toppled by public protests in 2014, and Kafando, who has been on the run since 2016, were tried in absentia. The six-month trial has been avidly followed by many in the landlocked Sahel nation, for whom Sankara's bloody death remains a dark blot on the country's history.

A fiery Marxist-Leninist who blasted the West for neo-colonialism and hypocrisy, Sankara was shot dead on October 15 1987, little more than four years after coming to power as an army captain aged just 33. He and 12 colleagues were killed by a hit squad at a meeting of the ruling National Revolutionary Council.

The death of the left-wing icon was taboo throughout Compaore's 27-year reign. The court in the capital Ouagadougou found Compaore,

Kafando and Diendere all guilty of harming state security. Compaore and Diendere were also found guilty of complicity in murder, and Kafando of murder. Their sentences exceeded the request of military prosecutors.

They had sought 30 years for Compaore and Kafando and 20 years for Diendere, who is already serving a 20-year term over an attempted military



### Three defendants acquitted

coup in 2015. Eight other accused were given jail terms ranging from three to 20 years, while three defendants were acquitted.

#### Grim details

In its closing statement, the prosecution recounted in grim detail a plot to ambush Sankara and his closest followers. Sankara headed to the National Revolutionary Council meeting for a ren-

shippers had gathered in the courtyard of the shrine of Imam Reza, one of the most revered figures in Shiite Islam. Authorities arrested six suspected accomplices, including the chief suspect's two brothers, after the attack in Mashhad.

Flowers were placed at the scene of the attack, in the courtyard of the mausoleum of Imam Reza, the eighth of the 12 holy imams in Shiite Islam, Iran's state religion since the 16th century. The Fars news agency released a picture of the three victims seated together in Mashhad, naming the two wounded clerics only as Pakdaman and Daraei. The memorial service for Aslani was to take place in the evening, state news agency IRNA reported. His body will be carried by shrine officials, who will circle the courtyard several times while worshippers read the Quran. He will be buried on Thursday in a square reserved for martyrs in the shrine's courtyard.

The head of media at the mausoleum, who gave his name as Mr Rostamzadeh, told AFP that "after the knife attack, the assailant was arrested by security services and 15 minutes later everything was back to normal. "People were absolutely not afraid — on the contrary, it aroused religious fervour," he said. "There was no closure or interruption."

"There are a lot of people, the shrine is full of worshippers and pilgrims who attend religious ceremonies, especially during Ramadan." The Islamic Republic of Iran has a population of 83 million, 90 percent of whom are Shiite Muslims. — AFP

devious with death, for "his executioners were already there," it said.

After Sankara entered the meeting room, the hit squad burst in, killing his guards, the prosecution said. "The squad then ordered president Sankara and his colleagues to leave the room. They would then be killed one by one."

Ballistics experts told the trial Sankara had been shot in the chest at least seven times by assassins using tracer rounds. But the defendants said the victims died in a botched attempt to arrest Sankara after he and Compaore fell out over the direction the country's revolution was taking. Compaore boycotted what his lawyers dismissed as a "political trial."

Prosper Farama, the lawyer representing the Sankara family, said in the run-up to the verdict that the former president's relatives had felt some relief at the way the trial had unfolded. "We don't want revenge, we're simply asking for justice," he said.

#### Unstable country

One of the world's poorest countries, Burkina has a long history of political turmoil since it gained independence from France in 1960. Reminders of that instability came during the trial, when proceedings were briefly suspended after a coup on January 24 that deposed the elected president, Roch Marc Christian Kabore.



**NEW YORK:** File photo shows Burkina Faso President Blaise Compaore addresses the UN General Assembly in New York. A military court in Burkina Faso on April 6, 2022 handed down a life term to former president Blaise Compaore over the 1987 assassination of revolutionary leader Thomas Sankara. —AFP

Kabore was toppled by rebel officers angered over his failure to roll back a nearly seven-year-old jihadist insurgency. The campaign has claimed some 2,000 lives and displaced some 1.8 million people. The trial resumed after new military strongman Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba restored the constitution and swore an oath. — AFP

## Iran's cleric to be laid to rest

**TEHRAN:** Iran was to hold a memorial service Wednesday for a Shiite Muslim cleric stabbed to death a day earlier by a suspected Sunni extremist in the revered Imam Reza shrine in the northeastern city of Mashhad. The chief suspect in the bloody attack was named as Abdolatif Moradi, 21, an ethnic Uzbek who had entered Iran illegally via the Pakistani border a year ago, the Tasnim news agency reported.

Moradi had "worked in transport" in a poor city district and had been active on social media using pseudonyms including Abdolatif al-Salafi to "spread takfiri ideology and confront Shiites".

Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi blamed the knife attack, which wounded two other clerics, on the influence of US-based "takfiri" — a term used for Muslims who brand others as apostates, condemning them to death, and usually referring to Sunni extremists. Raisi — who once chaired the charitable foundation that runs the gold-domed Imam Reza shrine — instructed Iran's intelligence ministry to probe the killing of the cleric Mohammad Aslani, who held the rank of hojatoleslam.

The assailant struck on Iran's third day of the holy month of Ramadan as large crowds of wor-

## Germany to get weaponized drones for first time

**BERLIN, Germany:** Germany will get weaponized drones for the first time after years of debate, parliamentary sources told AFP Wednesday, as the EU giant, shaken by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, moves to ramp up its defence capabilities. Germany's armed forces have until now only been allowed to deploy unarmed drones for reconnaissance purposes, leaving other allies to use weaponized unmanned combat aerial vehicles in the field.

Non-weaponized drones were approved by parliament in 2018, but a plan to equip them with arms was put on ice after strong opposition from the Social Democrats, then junior partners in former chancellor Angela Merkel's coalition. But the devices have come back on the military's shopping list as Chancellor Olaf Scholz, himself a Social Democrat, announced a massive spending spree to equip Germany militarily after Russian President Vladimir Putin's offensive in Ukraine.

On Wednesday, the parliamentary defence committee approved the purchase of 140 Heron TP armed drones from Israel in a contract worth 152.6 million euros (\$165 million), sources said. The drones



**BERLIN:** File photo shows a man working on a Heron TP drone at the International Aerospace Exhibition (ILA) in Schoenefeld near Berlin, northeastern Germany. —AFP

are expected to be delivered within two years, with 60 of them to be used for training purposes while the remaining 80 will be used for "operational deployment".

"The security situation in Europe has essentially changed with the attack of Russia on Ukraine," the defence ministry said in a position paper put to the parliamentary committee and seen by AFP. "In order to counter the new threat, the Bundeswehr's equipment must be upgraded without delay, including in particular the arming of the Heron drones. — AFP

## US and UK announce new...

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"They cut off limbs... slashed their throats. Women were raped and killed in front of their children," he said, after earlier comparing Russia's assault to the 1937 Nazi bombing of the town of Guernica.

The US and Britain have also pressed to have Russia excluded from the UN Human Rights Council, with a vote in the General Assembly scheduled for Thursday.

At his weekly audience at the Vatican, Pope Francis deplored the "powerlessness of international organizations" before what he called "ever more horrendous cruelties", before kissing a flag brought from Bucha. Thousands of people have been killed and more than 11 million displaced as refugees or within Ukraine since Russia invaded, sparking Europe's largest refugee crisis since World War II.

Western powers have already pummeled Russia with debilitating economic sanctions, which forced Moscow Wednesday to make foreign debt payments on dollar-denominated bonds in rubles, raising the prospect of a potential default. Washington's new sanctions targeted Maria Vorontsova and Katerina Tikhonova, two adult daughters of Putin, plus the wife and daughter of Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and members of the Russia's Security Council.

The White House also declared "full blocking"

sanctions on Russia's largest public and private financial institutions, Sberbank and Alfa Bank, and said all new US investment in Russia was now prohibited. Britain meanwhile froze the overseas assets of Sberbank-Russia's largest bank-and Credit Bank of Moscow. Prime Minister Boris Johnson had earlier said what happened in Bucha "doesn't look far short of genocide to me".

The EU is also poised to implement a fifth round of sanctions cutting off Russian coal imports-and European Council chief Charles Michel said that "sooner or later", it must also impose oil and gas sanctions. Condemning "war crimes" in Russia, he said: "There must be, and there will be, severe consequences for all those responsible."

But addressing the Irish parliament Wednesday, Zelensky condemned the "indecisiveness" on the part of European nations dependent on Russian energy. He called for the total exclusion of Russian banks from Western finance. In other moves to isolate Moscow, EU countries including Germany, France, Italy and Spain have expelled more than 200 Russian diplomats and staff between them this week.

The Kremlin called the mass expulsions a "short-sighted move" that would complicate efforts to negotiate an end to the hostilities. Peace talks between the sides have so far gone nowhere, though Moscow says it is "ready" to continue. Putin also warned of "reprisals" for recent European measures targeting Russian gas giant Gazprom-and said Moscow would "monitor" its food exports to "hostile" nations, raising the spectre of shortages and price spikes. — AFP

He said another problem was that China uses the homegrown Sinovac and Sinopharm vaccines, "both of which are not nearly as efficacious as the Pfizer, Moderna vaccines used in the West". Ben Cowling, professor of epidemiology at the University of Hong Kong, said his research had shown that vaccine hesitancy increased in Hong Kong among over 65s last year.

One of the most common reasons for hesitancy was "doubt over the benefits of vaccination, particularly in the context of a zero-COVID strategy," he told AFP. This was a problem faced by other countries that pursued the strategy: how do you convince a population to get vaccinated against a disease when there are zero cases nearby? Lewin said Australia's vaccination campaign only really "took off" once the Delta variant arrived in June 2021. "You have to have some COVID for vaccination uptake to be really high."

Australia only lifted its strict measures late last year when around 80 percent of the population had received two vaccine doses. That kind of carrot — the end of zero-COVID measures if vaccination targets are met — has not been offered by China or Hong Kong. Anant Deboor, a Hong Konger who works in strategic marketing, spent time in Portugal last year and marveled at how the country communicated about moving towards living with the virus. — AFP

## Why are there fears...

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Bennett said Zionist entity had "already prevented more than 15 serious attacks... carried out 207 arrests, and interrogated 400 suspects in contact with IS", referring to the jihadist group. Zionist Defense Minister Benny Gantz told Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas in a phone call that "Ramadan must be a month of peace and quiet and not a period marked by terror."

#### What does Hamas stand to lose?

The number of rocket attacks from Gaza has dropped dramatically since the end of last year's devastating war. Zionists announced last week an increase in work permits, from 12,000 to 20,000, in the hope of breathing life into Gaza and deterring Hamas from another confrontation. It also extended the enclave's permitted fishing zone. "Our ability to implement these measures is now threatened by terrorism, and we will only implement them if the security situation stabilizes again," Gantz said. Hamas has much to lose in the event of escalation, one security source told AFP.

"Hamas faces quite a dilemma because workers are coming to Zionist entity, the fishing zone has been expanded, and they have suffered a heavy loss last year

## Holy Ramadan in Prophet's...

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make this load lighter. Understand fully that Allah has promised in His Honor and Majesty that, people who perform prayer and prostration will be guarded from Hellfire on the Day of Judgment.

"O people!, if anyone amongst you arranges for iftar (meal at sunset) for any believer, Allah will reward him as if he had freed a slave, and Allah will forgive him his sins. A companion asked, "But not all of us have the means to do so." The Prophet (PBUH) replied, "Keep yourself away from Hell-fire though it may consist of half a date or even some water if you have nothing else."

"O people! Anyone who during this month cultivates good manners, will walk over the Sirat (bridge to Paradise) on the day when feet will tend to slip. For anyone who during this month eases the workload of his servants, Allah will make easy his accounting, and for anyone who doesn't hurt others during this month, Allah will safeguard him from His Wrath on the Day of Judgment. Anyone who respects and treats an orphan with kindness during this month, Allah shall look at him with kindness on that Day.

that the Gazan population is weary of suffering again. This might act as a deterrent. "I don't see Hamas' appetite for a confrontation right now, but the PIJ are an unexpected factor," the source said, referring to Islamic Jihad, another Gaza-based militant group. "I am more confident in Hamas' attempt to avoid escalation than the PIJ's," the source added.

#### Why the emphasis on Islamic Jihad?

In the wake of attacks near Tel Aviv, troops carried out operations in and around Jenin, a city in the northern West Bank from which the assailant hailed. At least three members of the Islamic Jihad were killed in the raids. The group is designated a terror organization by the United States and European Union, and has thousands of supporters across both Gaza and the West Bank.

Zionist security officials consider it close to Iran. If Zionists carry out new operations, "it could lead to a military escalation, especially with Islamic Jihad", said Mukhaimer Abu Saada, professor of political science at Gaza's Al-Azhar University. "But I believe that it would be a slight escalation, because Hamas does not want a new confrontation," he added.

#### Diplomatic dance with Jordan

In the past week, Zionist president and defense minister have both visited Jordan for talks with King Abdullah II, who has also spoken on the phone with Prime Minister Bennett. In the run-up to Ramadan, Abdullah visited Ramallah, the seat of the Palestinian Authority, for the first time in five years, for talks with

Anyone who treats his kinsmen well during this month, Allah will bestow His Mercy on him on that Day, while anyone who mistreats his kinsmen during this month, Allah will keep away from His Mercy. Whoever offers the recommended prayers during this month, Allah will save him from Hell, and whoever observes his obligations during this month, his reward will be seventy times the reward during other months. Whoever repeatedly invokes Allah's blessings on me, Allah will keep his scale of good deeds heavy, while the scales of others will be tending to lightness.

Whoever recites during this month an ayah (verse) of the Holy Quran, will get the reward of reciting the whole Quran in other months. "O people! The gates of Paradise remain open during this month. Pray to your Lord that they may not be closed for you. While the gates of Hell are closed, pray to your Lord that they never open for you. Satan has been chained; invoke your Lord not to let him dominate you."

*Courtesy of the TIES Center: As one of the projects funded and managed by Kuwaiti Society for Cultural Dialogue, TIES aims at empowering Kuwait's expats through social and educational services that promote a positive and productive role in society, and to facilitate opportunities for intra- and interfaith interactions that promote social solidarity. For more information, please call 25231015/6 or e-mail: info@tiescenter.net.*

## Is this the end of zero-COVID...

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Omicron variant — have since changed the equation. "The extent you need to go to block transmission is so high and the added gain you have for health becomes much, much smaller," Sharon Lewin, director of the Peter Doherty Institute for Infection and Immunity at the University of Melbourne, told AFP. But the risk-benefit ratio may be different for China and Hong Kong, where vaccination rates have been falling behind, particularly among the vulnerable elderly. China revealed last month that only around half of its population over 80 years old had been fully vaccinated.

And since Omicron arrived in December, the vast majority of Hong Kong's around 8,000 deaths have been elderly, unvaccinated people. Andrew Lee, professor of public health at the University of Sheffield, warned that if vaccination coverage is "inadequate, as was the case in Hong Kong, loosening (China's) zero-COVID policy could lead to a lot of deaths".