

Kurdish politicians arrested in Turkey

Author:

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ANKARA: Turkish authorities have arrested 17 Kurdish politicians, including the co-mayor of Kars province, Ayhan Bilgen, who has been replaced by a government-appointed trustee.

Ankara has justified the crackdown by accusing the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) of links to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a claim denied by the HDP.

In local elections in March 2019, the HDP won 65 municipalities nationwide, but 48 mayors affiliated with the party were replaced by trustees, while some were not given mandates.

Bilgen told his lawyers that he and other Kurdish politicians had been poisoned while in custody and were not taken to hospital.

"The government's various moves to prevent the HDP from functioning and remove key figures like Ayhan Bilgen from political office are all about preventing opposition politics," Emma Sinclair-Webb, senior Turkey researcher at Human Rights Watch (HRW), told Arab News.

The arrests were ordered by a court in Ankara as part of an investigation into the HDP's alleged involvement in violent protests in October 2014 against Daesh's siege of the Syrian town of Kobane.

At least 37 people were killed during the protests, and the government held the HDP responsible.

An application has been made to lift the parliamentary immunity of seven HDP lawmakers to include them in the investigation.

HRW said this is "another worrying sign of the erosion of rights and the rule of law in Turkey," and "part of the Turkish government's policy to criminalize political opposition."

The HDP is the third-largest party in Parliament, having gained 12 percent of the votes during the June 2018 parliamentary elections.

Sinclair-Webb said the crackdown is a major violation of the right to association and an attack on the principle of the right to free elections, especially as seven MPs are at risk of losing their immunity and being prosecuted.

"What the government is doing against the HDP is a threat to all opposition parties and an attack on the democratic process," she added.

Meanwhile, an investigation has rejected the interior minister's claim that the iconic football club of the predominantly Kurdish Diyarbakir province

acts on the PKK's orders.



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[Saad Hariri could lead Lebanese government again](#)

Author:

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BEIRUT: Saad Hariri could lead Lebanon's government again amid proposals to bring him back, almost a year after he resigned as prime minister in response to mass protests about the country's dire economic and financial situation.

Mustapha Adib quit as prime minister-designate a week ago after failing to form a government of specialists independent from the parties in power.

Lebanon desperately needs an international bailout and France, in particular, is urging politicians to begin much-needed reforms to deal with the grave problems facing the country.

Last week French President Emmanuel Macron gave leaders more time to form a government of specialists as part of an initiative to rescue the country.

But key players are overriding some of the conditions set, notably Hezbollah and the Amal Movement who insist on keeping the finance portfolio and naming the Shiite ministers in the government.

Two opinions prevail in Lebanon. One is that the government will not be formed before the US presidential elections in November. The other is that President Michel Aoun will soon set a date for parliamentary consultations, and the possibility of facilitating Hariri's return to head the government is being proposed based on positive signs.

Mustafa Alloush, a leading figure in the Future Movement, said that Hariri was committed to the French initiative and that his convictions remained unchanged. "The movement that is taking place and the proposals have not reached a result," Alloush told Arab News. "An independent government is required for Hariri to head it."

In terms of Aoun setting a date for parliamentary consultations, Alloush said that the president would undergo a 14-day quarantine in light of a coronavirus case among those close to Baabda Palace and that the US elections would be approaching by then.

Regarding an initiative from former Prime Minister Najib Mikati to form a techno-political government headed by Hariri, Alloush said: "This is one of the ideas discussed, but Hariri stipulated in his response the implementation of the French initiative."

MP Nicolas Nahas, who is from the Mikati parliamentary bloc, said: "Lebanon missed a golden opportunity by wasting the French initiative for illogical reasons in light of the accumulated crises we are suffering from."

He added that Lebanon was in the middle of a complete collapse and what was required was to form a government as soon as possible, including politicians and specialists. "Prime Minister Mikati's proposal aimed to help solve the problem of the government issue after it became clear that separating politics from the economy is difficult and led to the failure of the former Prime Minister-designate Mustapha Adib's mission."

The lack of progress led to clergy renewing their criticism of politicians.

On Sunday the Maronite Patriarch Bechara Al-Rai said: "The enormity of the situation and the possibility of developments of a diverse nature necessitates the acceleration of the formation of a government that embodies the aspirations of the citizens, to organize the constitutional and charter

work, so that no one allows himself to exploit the state of constitutional coma, the presence of a caretaker government, the coronavirus pandemic, or what is worse than that, to create a fait accompli.”

He also warned of a possible brain-drain, saying that Lebanese youth had a tendency to leave the country in search of “work, security and a decent life.”

The Metropolitan of Beirut and its Territory for the Greek Orthodox Church Archbishop Elias Odeh used his Sunday sermon to attack “the lack of mercy” among the country’s leaders for their refusal to hear people’s grievances and for turning a blind eye to their despair.

He said: “Honest officials do not sleep if a citizen in their country is in pain. How can they sleep when the country is dying, the economy has collapsed, the pound has lost its value, emigration has multiplied, and misery is common?”

He warned: “What we are going through in Lebanon now is a harbinger of worse to come.”



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Saad Hariri says he holds Hezbollah responsible for father’s murder Saad Hariri rules out returning as Lebanon’s PM

Egypt's population increases by 1 million in 8 months to reach 101 million

Author:

Sun, 2020-10-04 21:13

CAIRO: The announcement that Egypt's population is now 101 million means that it has increased by 1 million in less than 8 months. The Population Clock of the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics said it passed the 100 million mark on Feb. 11, 2020.

Amr Hassan, the former reporter of the National Population Council, said that the population is a major concern for the Egyptian government, as it puts great pressure on natural resources and is a burden on the state budget.

He said that under the National Population and Development Strategy's goals (2015-2030), Egypt's population was supposed to reach 94 million by 2020, but it has grown far faster.

"If the National Population Strategy had been implemented, Egypt's population would have reached 110 million in 2030, but current expectations indicate that the population will reach 119 million by then. It raises the warning signs that the state should make a concerted effort," Hassan said.

Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly, during a speech at the opening of the Egyptian-Japanese University, made a comparison between Egypt and Germany. In 1995, Egypt's population was 62 million, while Germany had a population of 83 million people. Now Egypt's population has passed 100 million, while the population of Germany remains at 83 million.

According to Hassan, this comparison made by the prime minister sheds light on the burden on the Egyptian government and highlights the weakness of educational and health services when compared with developed countries.

According to the Central Statistical Organization, in 1955 Italy's population reached 48 million, England's population was 51 million and Egypt's was 23.5 million.

In the past 65 years, Italy's population has increased by 12 million to 60 million and England's population by 16 million to 67 million. During the same period, Egypt's population has increased by 77 million.

Hassan said that this means that the population rate increase in Egypt is seven times that of Italy and Germany and five times greater than England, meaning a far greater load on the state budget and a far greater demand for hospitals, schools, roads, bridges, transportation and services.



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[Turkey's new military deployment in Idlib puts spotlight on Syria](#)

Author:

Sat, 2020-10-03 22:50

Despite claims that the South Caucasus is the new flashpoint for Turkey and Russia, the recent military reinforcements in Syria hint that the balance in the province is still fragile and could provoke a regional crisis.

On Friday, a Turkish military convoy, with more than 25 armored vehicles and trucks carrying logistical materials, entered northwestern Idlib province to reinforce Turkish military points in the area.

How Turkey's new military build-up will be considered by Moscow or whether it will lead to new concessions between the two countries, which back opposing

sides in the Syrian civil war, are still a source of concern.

Navvar Saban, a military analyst at the Omran Center for Strategic Studies in Istanbul, thinks that this military reinforcement is likely to disturb Russia because the Kremlin expects Turkey to reduce its military presence in Syria, mainly in the area south of the M4 highway, which runs parallel to the Turkish-Syrian border.

“Russia began allowing the regime to mobilize some of its forces in the area south of the M4. There will not be a huge military confrontation, but there may be some artillery attacks from the regime on where Turkish forces are located,” he told Arab News.

The number of Turkish military vehicles in the area is estimated to have exceeded 9,750 in the past seven months.

Russia refused to conduct new joint patrols as long as there is instability in the area.

The latest joint military drill of Turkish and Russian troops recently was held in Idlib on Sept. 21.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov announced on Sept. 22 that the two countries will resume joint patrols in northern Syria when the situation stabilizes after the attacks by Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS) targeting the Russian Hmeimim airbase.

Kyle Orton, a UK-based researcher on Syria, said Turkey's military build-up in Idlib is intended as a message that Ankara will not surrender the remaining parts of the province.

“Turkey gave up more territory than expected and certainly more than many of its Syrian proxies were hoping. But the Turkish government does have a real red line: it needs a buffer area to keep the terrorists and refugees out of Turkey,” he said.

He sees this as a response from Turkey to recent signals from Damascus and Iran that another offensive is coming in Idlib, indicating that Ankara will resist any such action.

“The Russians are unlikely to be too alarmed by Turkey's actions; Moscow is content to leave Turkey with Idlib, but Moscow cannot control the Assad and Iranian system, which has as its ultimate goal the reconquest of every inch of Syria,” he said.

In the meantime, the Turkish Presidency submitted a motion to parliament on Oct. 1 to extend its authority to launch cross-border military operations in northern Iraq and Syria for another year until Oct. 30, 2021. The motion underlines Turkey's continued “security responsibilities” in northern Syria, east of the Euphrates River and in the Idlib province.

According to Ruwan Al-Rejoleh, an independent analyst in Washington, DC, there has always been talk about a “new operation” in Idlib, the last rebel

bastion.

“All players have been anticipating it, preparing for it and promoting it every once in a while but the pandemic conditions postponed it. Russia has an interest in controlling all the M4 highway,” Al-Rejoleh said.

The regime forces and Russian fighter jets have recently increased their attacks on HTS and other terror groups in Idlib province with heavy bombardments.

The March agreement that was brokered between Russia and Turkey required the establishment of a security corridor around M4 highway, cleansing the area from radical elements as well as conducting joint patrols to serve a buffer between regime forces and rebels.

During a video conference on Saturday, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said that “Turkey will wipe out terror zones in Syria if others fail to keep their promise.”

According to Al-Rejoleh, the problem remains in the defining who are the terrorist groups between Turkey and Russia.

“While Turkey sees the existence of armed separate entities operating in northeastern Syria, such as People’s Protection Units (YPG) which are connected to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), as the immediate threat to its borders, Russia’s priority is to get rid of HTS, an internationally designated terrorist group, and other Syrian opposition armed groups that have connections to Turkey either through direct support or through Turkish intelligence channels,” she said.

On the Syrian front, Al-Rejoleh added, Turkey and Russia are likely to come to an agreement about possible concessions, where Turkey will “again” give up control of certain parts of Idlib in return for pressure-relief in other conflict zones or potentially the elimination of certain figures affiliated with PKK and a guarantee to prevent any new wave of refugees.



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Turkey's military reinforcement signals changes in Idlib's fragile calm
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[Gift of bread: Egypt air bridge helps flood-hit Sudan](#)

Author:

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CAIRO: A third Egyptian plane has transported bread-making facilities to Sudan as part of a relief air bridge following recent devastating floods in the country.

"Under the directives of President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, Egypt has sent a third flight of field bread production lines to the brothers in Sudan," an Egyptian military spokesman said via his official Facebook account.

The three flights landed in Khartoum on Tuesday and Thursday carrying 10 automatic bakeries.

Egyptian military attache Brig. Harb Ahmed Al-Shazali and Egyptian Embassy staff welcomed the planes.

Last Tuesday, the Ministry of Industry and Trade received the first batch of bread production units provided by the Egyptian army, which will be installed in southern areas of the capital.

The 10 bakeries will produce more than 1.5 million loaves of bread per day.

The production lines will ease the effects of flooding and the resulting shortage of bread in many areas of Sudan.

Field bakeries will be located in areas severely affected by the recent floods.

Since the beginning of the crisis, Egypt has sent several aid planes to support the Sudanese people.

"This matter comes within the framework of the cooperation and support that Egypt has been providing to address some of the challenges facing the transitional government in his country," Sudan's Trade Minister, Madani Abbas Madani, said after the first bakeries arrived.

He said that this support was desperately needed amid a mounting bread crisis.

"There are many strategic efforts to address this issue in its various aspects, whether it is related to the provision of wheat or the development of the bread industry, especially since more than 80 percent of the bakeries in the country are traditional and not mechanized," Madani said.

Egypt's Ambassador to Sudan, Hossam Issa, said that the air bridge is part of the Egyptian efforts to support the Sudanese people during the transitional phase in the country.

The Egyptian government is helping Sudan move toward a new phase of development, stability, prosperity and security, he said.

Egypt has sent 14 aircraft carrying medicines and medical equipment to help Sudan deal with the flood crisis.



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