

Turkey to repatriate most of 287 Daesh detainees by the year-end

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ANKARA: Turkey will have repatriated most of its Daesh detainees to their home countries by the end of the year, Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu said on Tuesday, a week after Turkish authorities began the repatriation program.

Ankara says it has captured 287 militants in northeast Syria, where Turkish troops launched an offensive against the Kurdish YPG militia last month, and has hundreds more terror suspects in detention.

Speaking in Ankara, Soylu said Turkey was aiming to send six or seven more Daesh suspects this week to their home countries, including Ireland and the Netherlands. Turkish officials were in touch with counterparts there.

"The number of detainees to be repatriated by the year-end depends on how long the processes take, but especially for Europe, the process is under way," Soylu said.

"I think we will have sent a large part of them to their countries by the end of the year," he said, adding that certain countries that revoked the citizenships of their nationals were violating international law.

"They do not have the right to leave their citizens without a nationality. They have no such right," he said. "This is why we held evaluations with certain countries on this, and they are taking them back."

Turkey has repatriation and extradition agreements with the countries concerned but informs them before sending detainees back.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Turkey has accused its European allies of being too slow to take back their citizens who had traveled to the Mideast to join Daesh.
- So far Turkey has repatriated 10 German nationals, one US citizen, and one British suspected fighter.
- European countries are trying to speed up a plan to move thousands of terrorists out of Syrian prisons and into Iraq.
- NATO allies have been worried Turkey's offensive into northeastern Syria could lead to Daesh suspects escaping from YPG prisons and camps.

Two Daesh mothers, aged 23 and 25, were detained at Amsterdam Schiphol Airport on Tuesday evening after being deported from Turkey, Dutch

prosecutors said. They are suspected of membership in a terrorist organization.

The women, who were traveling with two children aged 3 and 4, will be brought before a judge on Friday.

Turkey has accused its European allies of being too slow to take back their citizens who had traveled to the Middle East to join Daesh.

Meanwhile, European countries are trying to speed up a plan to move thousands of terrorists out of Syrian prisons and into Iraq.

Turkey's European NATO allies have been worried that last month's offensive into northeastern Syria could lead to Daesh suspects and their families escaping from the prisons and camps run by the YPG.

Ankara, which views the YPG as a terrorist group linked to Kurdish insurgents on its own soil, has dismissed the concerns, saying the militia had vacated some of the prisons and allowed around 800 radical terrorists to escape.

So far Turkey has repatriated 10 German nationals, one US citizen, and one British suspected fighter.

Ankara has said that suspects will still be deported to Ireland, France and other mostly European nations in the coming days.



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US warns of 'persistent' Daesh attacks in East Asia
France takes in 27 more Yazidi women victims of Daesh

'This is my sacrifice': Thousands maimed in Iraq demonstrations

Author:

Thu, 2019-11-21 02:24

BAGHDAD: A fractured spine, paralyzed leg, hole in the back: Hamza took to the streets of Iraq's capital to demand a better life but now he has even less than ever.

"This is my sacrifice for Iraq," said the 16-year-old, his strained voice barely audible over the phone in Baghdad.

"If I could walk, I would be back in the protests now."

Hamza is one of at least 3,000 people who have been maimed in Baghdad and southern Iraq since anti-government protests erupted on Oct. 1, according to the NGO Iraqi Alliance for Disabilities Organization (IADO).

The staggering number is the latest burden for a country already struggling with one of the highest disability rates in the world, according to the UN.

After decades of back-to-back conflicts, Iraq is in the thick of its largest and deadliest grassroots protest movement, with more than 300 people dead and 15,000 wounded.

To disperse protesters, security forces have used tear gas, rubber bullets, flash bangs, live rounds and even machine-gun fire – all of which can seriously maim or even kill, as Hamza learned.

On Nov. 4, the teenager was among around 20 protesters wounded by live fire in Baghdad.

A bullet pierced Hamza's stomach and exited through his back, leaving a gaping hole.

Two others hit his legs.

By the time he arrived at a nearby hospital, he had lost liters of blood and his heart was failing, said his father, Abu Layth.

Doctors revived the boy with a defibrillator, injected him with four units of blood and rushed him into surgery.

"He was basically dead. The doctors brought him back to life," he said.

CT scans and medical reports shared by Hamza's family revealed multiple fractures to his lower spine, leading to paralysis in his right leg.

After more than a week in hospital, the teenager has gone back home and is on steady doses of analgesics.

"Sometimes he screams from pain at night," his father said.

Iraq has a long history of bloody conflict, from the 1980-1988 war with its neighbor Iran to the 2003 US-led invasion that toppled dictator Saddam Hussein and the fight against Daesh.

Each war has killed tens of thousands and left even more Iraqis impaired for life.

The government's Central Statistical Organization says that in the wake of decades of conflict, more than 2 million of Iraq's 40-million population are disabled people entitled to state support.

But IADO and other rights groups say the real number sits at more than 3 million – and counting.

"The number of disabled people continues to grow ... We exit one crisis and enter another," said IADO head Muwafaq Al-Khafaji.

He told AFP his group's estimate of 3,000 maimed since Oct. 1 is an approximation, as the government is either not documenting or not releasing precise figures.

To fill the gap, IADO members have been contacting hospitals and reaching out to families in Baghdad and southern cities.

Although Iraq is party to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, disabled people suffer from poor health services, lack of job opportunities and social exclusion.

They have organized their own rallies in Baghdad as part of the larger protest movement, demanding more support from the government.

"Infrastructure in Iraq is not even equipped to meet the needs of the non-disabled," said Khafaji. "We need more than just ink on paper."

Iraq suffers from an extremely dilapidated health care system, with hospitals severely under-equipped and doctors threatened on the basis of political or tribal disputes.

In the protests, rights groups have documented the abduction of volunteer medics as well as arrests of protesters from medical facilities.

The additional strain on both patients and doctors means wounded

demonstrators do not get quality care quickly enough, leading to severe wound infections.

Medics have even had to sever limbs to save protesters' lives, said Farah, a 19-year-old medical student volunteering in Baghdad's main protest camp of Tahrir (Liberation) Square.

Tahrir is full of makeshift clinics treating protesters, including 30-year-old Ali, who wears a bandage where his right eye should be.

On the night of Oct. 24, the father of four was on a nearby bridge when he heard shots ring out and saw hundreds of protesters scrambling away in panic.

Before he could do the same, a flash bang exploded at his feet and he collapsed, regaining consciousness an hour later in a nearby hospital.

But Ali could only open his left eye, as his other had been lost to a piece of shrapnel.

"They want to deter protesters, but we're becoming even more determined," he said, as crowds of bandaged men walked around him.

"The Iraqi people have endured everything. We were born to die."



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Iraqi protesters shut roads to ports, oil fields Iraq political deal hands Abdul Mahdi a reprieve in face of mass protests

Lebanon confusion: Uneasy calm descends on Beirut amid 'fear of what is to come'

Thu, 2019-11-21 01:49

BEIRUT: More than a month after bitter demonstrations erupted across the country, Lebanese protesters, just like warriors in battle, appear desperate for a rest.

On Wednesday, 35 days after activists took to the streets to demand an end to government corruption and mismanagement, life in Beirut returned to normal.

Students went back to their schools and universities, banks opened their doors to unprecedented numbers of customers, roadworks restarted on some streets and TV channels resumed regular schedules.

However, behind the appearance of calm, many residents remain nervous and fearful.

Taxi driver Abu Omar said: "The roads are no longer blocked by protesters, but people are still in shock. They fear what is to come. There have been no solutions, which means it is not over."

Madeleine, shopping on Hamra Street with a friend, said: "We have had enough of sitting in front of the TV all day, watching the news. People in the street were right to protest and their demands must be met. Employees were told two days ago that their salaries will be cut in half."

Another said: "We might lose our jobs at any moment. They told us that last month the company suffered enormous losses and might not be able to continue. I do not think that the protests are the cause, but the economic stagnation that began before the protests has got worse."

Away from the capital, protesters are still setting up roadblocks, but the Lebanese army's decision to open major roads between towns has been unopposed.

In the north of Lebanon, roads were blocked in Akkar, while life in Tripoli returned to normal and the main protest squares were closed.

In Saida, in the south of the country, public facilities, schools and universities reopened. But protesters called for money exchange and transfer shops to be closed amid anger at the outlets' high pricing of the US dollar while banks still have strict limits on providing customers with US currency.

According to a final review by Lebanon's Central Bank, more than \$3.2 billion

was withdrawn from banks at the start of the financial crisis.

Alia Abbas, general director of economy and trade at the Lebanese Economy Ministry, said that prices of some products have risen by up to 11 percent.

President Michel Aoun, caretaker prime minister Saad Hariri and Speaker Nabih Berri have failed to reach a formula to form a new government since Oct. 29.

One activist, who declined to be named, said that he fears Aoun will name someone other than Hariri to form a government of both experts and politicians since the former PM is insisting on a technocrat government.

“Naming Hariri to form a techno-political government is a good thing, as familiar faces will be replaced with experts, but this will not be well received by the protest movement,” he said.



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Lebanon protesters block MPs as street battles erupt
Lebanon is a sinking ship, parliament speaker warns

Turkey jailing more journalists than any other country: Report

Author:

Thu, 2019-11-21 01:40

ANKARA: Turkey jails more journalists than any other country, according to a new report on the status of press freedom there launched by international press freedom groups on Monday.

The report, "Turkey's Journalists in the Dock: The Judicial Silencing of the Fourth Estate," was prepared in collaboration with eight international press freedom and journalism organizations based on their mission visit to Turkey in September during which they met public authorities as well as Turkish civil society groups and journalists.

There are currently 122 journalists behind bars in Turkey, mostly on terrorism-related charges. Those who are released have travel bans. This makes Turkey the top jailer of journalists in the world.

"Critical journalism has been conflated with terrorist propaganda, all part of a campaign to silence opposition voices and close down free speech," the report said, adding that the politically motivated crackdown against the media also severely damaged the rule of law and people's right to access critical and balanced information and news.

The report is the fruit of the collaboration between IPI, ARTICLE 19, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), the European Center for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF), the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ), Reporters Without Borders (RSF), Norwegian PEN, and PEN International.

The organizations called on Ankara to release all imprisoned journalists, to end the indiscriminate harassment of the press, to review anti-terror and defamation laws, as well as to end political interference in the judiciary.

"The mission recognizes the terrorist threat in Turkey but rejects arguments made by the Supreme Court of Cassation that this justifies exceptional measures outside ECtHR (European Court of Human Rights) jurisprudence and that fundamental freedoms need to be compromised in the name of security. The state's actions clearly demonstrate that the existence of a terrorist threat is being instrumentalized to serve an indiscriminate crackdown on critical voices," the report said.

BACKGROUND

There are currently 122 journalists behind bars in Turkey, mostly on terrorism-related charges. Those who are released have travel bans. This makes Turkey the top jailer of journalists in the world.

The latest legislative changes restricting online broadcasting are also criticized in the report as an attempt by the state to regulate all online activities.

The problems in the accreditation of journalists and the government-regulated system of issuing press cards was another point of criticism. Over the past three years, thousands of applications were rejected by officials, while hundreds of press cards were removed over alleged security reasons. This is seen as a move to restrict the work of foreign correspondents in the country.

“The increased use of travel bans to harass journalists and activists, including their family, is a further area of concern. After the lifting of the state of emergency in 2018, the authorities have continued to seize and hold the passports of individuals that oppose or are perceived to oppose the government,” the report said.

In September, two Turkish journalists from US-based Bloomberg News faced up to five years in prison over a financial report about the country’s economic problems.

On Nov. 12, Ahmet Altan, a well-known novelist and journalist who was released from prison only a week before, after being detained for more than three years, was taken back into custody.

Scott Griffen, deputy director at the International Press Institute (IPI), a global network of journalists and editors defending media freedom since 1950, said that independent journalism and press freedom were under attack in Turkey.

“Although press freedom has been under pressure for years, the current crackdown began with the July 2016 coup attempt and the arrests and prosecution of hundreds of journalists. The situation has not improved since then,” he told Arab News.

According to Griffen, this creates a situation not only in which journalists are deprived of their freedom, but also in which many journalists are forced to self-censor to avoid personal, professional and legal consequences.

Under a mainstream media environment that is almost totally under governmental control, Griffen thinks that there is still room for alternative news options in Turkey.

“Many journalists who lost their jobs after their media outlets were bought by pro-government figures are now working for alternative online media or have found a home with foreign media. Up until now, they have represented one of the last remaining sources of free expression in Turkey and reflect a demand among the public for independent news,” he said.

But, Griffen added, as long as these media are doing their role of scrutinizing the government, it makes them a target.

As Turkey is bound by the European Convention on Human Rights, by its own constitution on freedom of expression as well as the case law of the European

Court of Human Rights on the application of anti-terror laws, Griffen also noted that courts and prosecutors are not respecting the constitution.

“Turkish officials have claimed to us that the country faces a unique terror threat that justifies a state of exception from international law and standards on freedom of expression. But the case law of the European Court of Human Rights is fully capable of handling this problem, it is simply not being applied by the courts in Turkey,” he said.

“Only speech that directly incites violence or acts of terror should face criminal sanction under anti-terrorism law. But Turkey’s justice system is abusing anti-terror law to punish dissent, in disregard of all international standards,” he said.



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US consular staff in Turkey quizzed over video that 'mocked Islam' Turkey:
About 100,000 Syrians left Istanbul since early July

[Israel closes Palestinian](#)

organisations in Jerusalem

Author:

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JERUSALEM: Israeli authorities closed several Palestinian organisations in Jerusalem Wednesday, including a television channel, an Israeli minister and officials from the organisations said.

The offices of Palestine TV – a channel funded by the West Bank-based Palestinian Authority – and an office of the Palestinian ministry of education were given orders to close for six months, staff members said on condition of anonymity.

The director of the al-Araz production company that hosts Palestine TV was temporarily arrested, while a correspondent for the channel was summoned for questioning, these Palestinian sources said.

Israel's Public Security minister Gilad Erdan confirmed the closure of offices used by Palestine TV and the education ministry.

Israel captured east Jerusalem in a 1967 war and considers the entire city its undivided capital.

The Palestinians consider the eastern part of the city the capital of their own future state.

"I will continue to pursue a firm policy against any attempt by the Palestinian Authority to violate our sovereignty in the capital," Erdan said in a statement seeking to justify the closures.

He accused Palestine TV of producing anti-Israeli content in which the country is presented as "responsible for war crimes and ethnic cleansing."

The Palestinians condemned the closures.

"This is a continuation of the Israeli government's campaign against everything Palestinian in occupied Jerusalem," senior official Hanan Ashrawi said.

MADA, a Palestinian organisation that defends freedom of expression, said the closures were "part of Israel's efforts to silence the media and prevent the Palestinian story from spreading, through a series of repressions against the media and journalists."



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Palestinian journalists protest wounding of colleague
Palestinian killed in clashes on anniversary of Yasser Arafat's death