

Turkey announces measures to protect women from violence

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ANKARA: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced a set of measures aimed at curbing acts of violence against women on Friday, a year after he withdrew Turkey from a landmark European treaty on protecting women from violence.

Erdogan said the planned judicial reforms would bring increased prison terms when acts of “wilful killing, deliberate injury, torture and ill-treatment” are perpetrated against women and raise the minimum prison term for crimes or threats against former or current spouses.

Under the plans, persistent stalking would be punishable by prison and women victims of violence would be assigned lawyers for free, Erdogan said.

Erdogan added that perpetrators would not be able to benefit from penal reductions unless they “show concrete signs of remorse” and not just display good behavior during trials.

Last year, Erdogan withdrew Turkey from the Istanbul Convention, sparking protests and international condemnation. Turkey was the first country to sign the treaty that bears the name of its largest city a decade ago.

Some officials from Erdogan’s Islam-oriented party had advocated a review of the agreement, arguing it is inconsistent with Turkey’s conservative values by encouraging divorce and undermining the traditional family unit. Critics also claimed the treaty promotes homosexuality.

Erdogan’s government had stated that it remained committed to protecting women, even though it was pulling out of the treaty.

A total of 72 women have been killed in Turkey since the start of the year, according to the We Will Stop Femicide Platform. At least 416 women were killed in 2021, with dozens of others found dead under suspicious circumstances, according to the group.

The Turkish leader said the reforms would soon be submitted to parliament for approval.



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Anger over Turkish withdrawal from violence against women treaty
Turkey pulls out of landmark treaty protecting women from violence

[UN Libya adviser seeks joint committee on constitution](#)

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Fri, 2022-03-04 08:24

TUNIS: The United Nations Libya adviser Stephanie Williams said on Friday she had invited the parliament and High State Council to each nominate six members for a joint committee on Libya's constitutional arrangements. Libya's political process fell apart in December with the collapse of a scheduled election, with major factions and political bodies pushing opposing

plans for the path ahead and backing rival governments.

On Thursday the parliament based in Tobruk in eastern Libya swore in Fathi Bashagha as prime minister but the incumbent Abdulhamid Al-Dbeibah in Tripoli, in the west, has refused to cede power risking a new conflict or territorial division.

The parliament in January approved its own political roadmap that involved putting an amended constitution to a referendum this year followed by elections next year.

Williams also urged factions to preserve security and stability and avoid escalation, adding “the solution to Libya’s crisis does not lie in forming rival administrations and perennial transitions.”

The parliament, which was elected in 2014, is recognized internationally through a 2015 political agreement that also recognized the High State Council as a legislative chamber formed from members of a previous parliament.

Although the High State Council initially appeared to agree the parliament’s constitutional plans and its installation of Bashagha’s government, it later rejected both.

Rival factions dispute the legitimacy of all the political bodies, including both the parliament and High State Council, and both Bashagha’s government and the Dbeibah administration which was installed a year ago through a UN-backed process.



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over Libya parliament vote on new PM

Lebanon's ruling parties announce candidates for parliamentary elections

Thu, 2022-03-03 22:59

BEIRUT: Lebanese parties have been rushing to submit their candidacies for the upcoming parliamentary elections to the Ministry of Interior with the deadline for registration, March 15, soon approaching.

Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, 84, submitted his candidacy application for another four-year parliamentary session, alongside ruling party members.

Applications were previously limited to independent candidates and representatives of the civil movement.

The number of registered candidates jumped to nearly 100 as of Wednesday evening, with expectations for more candidacies soon.

On May 15, voters will vote for their 128 MPs, which will be preceded by civil servants who are working on the elections voting on May 12.

On May 6 and 8, Lebanese voters living abroad will cast their votes.

The cost of holding the elections is estimated at \$15.5 million.

The electoral battle will kick-off in earnest in April when registration for the lists under which the candidates will run begins.

Political jostling and heightened engagement is expected once alliances unravel and the battle to prevent the ruling parties from gaining parliamentary majority starts.

Around 3,970,000 voters will partake in the upcoming elections, including some 225,000 voters living abroad, most of whom are expected to vote for representatives from the Oct. 17, 2019 revolution.

Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah announced some of the party's candidates on Wednesday evening, with some "young generation candidates" adding to the crop of currently sitting MPs.

The Amal Movement is expected to announce the names of its candidates in the coming days. According to leaked information, Berri will retain a sizable portion of the current MPs, especially those who are being prosecuted for crimes surrounding the Beirut port explosion.

Secretary-General of the Arab Socialist Baath Party Ali Hijazi submitted his

candidacy to run in the Baalbek-Hermel district.

This party is considered an extension of the Baath Party in Syria. Hijazi was recently elected as secretary-general, and he is considered an ally of Hezbollah and the Syrian regime.

The Lebanese Forces Party continues to announce the names of its candidates in party festivals, while the Free Patriotic Movement is working to finalize its candidates' list. Meanwhile, the Progressive Socialist Party is yet to announce its candidates, with party head Walid Jumblatt quoted as saying that political conditions are not suitable to make any changes in his parliamentary bloc.

Small parties are awaiting news of agreements and understandings between major powers to determine their place in the electoral lists.

Hezbollah is seeking to consolidate its alliance with the Amal Movement in all electoral districts and is also hoping to ally with the FPM in every district where it can convince its voters to support the movement.

However, confusion still prevails on the Sunni scene, as the head of the Future Movement, Saad Hariri, announced his withdrawal from political life and asked party members not to run for the upcoming elections under the movement's name.

Some Future Movement supporters vowed to boycott the elections, while others demanded that the movement resumes its work and does not leave the political arena to Hezbollah and its allies.

Several traditional political leaders in the Sunni community announced that they would not run for elections, including former Prime Minister Tammam Salam, while former Prime Minister Fouad Siniora insisted on not boycotting the elections.

A source from the Future Movement told Arab News: "Some believe we need to remain outside the system since neither our presence nor our absence can make a difference; the proof is how Hariri was stabbed in the back by all ruling parties.

"In addition, Hezbollah would have no Sunni cover for any of its figures if we boycott the elections."

The source added: "Others think that boycotting the elections would allow other parties to disrupt Sunni political unity.

"We need to have a limited number of candidates and we must vote extensively and effectively.

"They insist that since Hariri never asked us to boycott the elections, we should not make such hasty decisions, especially since most of the state institutions are not yet constitutionally controlled by Hezbollah.

"We must stop talking about treason, this is what serves Lebanon best."

A source in Dar Al-Fatwa, the country's highest Sunni religious authority, expressed concern that Sunni votes could end up dispersed amid this confusion.

"We have concerns about Sunni religious parties succeeding in filling the void, especially if they do not adhere to the logic of the state and tend to adopt the logic of militias," they told Arab News on condition of anonymity.

Civil society candidates were among the first to submit their candidacies, albeit timidly.

However, this civil movement, with all its groups, has not yet finalized its candidacies or broadcast which districts it plans to fight the ruling parties.

Election expert Walid Fakhreddine said: "There are a large number of candidates in all regions, especially those in which Hezbollah's alliances prevail. Announcing candidacies was delayed in order to finish negotiations; this is not necessarily a bad thing."

Fakhreddine stressed: "Candidacies have been delayed because the election law requires each candidate to pay 30 million Lebanese pounds (\$20,000), nonrefundable should they choose to withdraw their candidacy.

"In addition, candidates are facing issues in opening bank accounts for electoral campaigns in accordance with the law, and work is underway to resolve this before March 15."



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[800 Iraqi refugees return home from Syria](#)

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Thu, 2022-03-03 23:07

QAMISHLI: Eight hundred Iraqi refugees returned home from northeast Syria on Thursday and hundreds more are to follow, a Syrian official in the region's Kurdish semi-autonomous administration said.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the first group left on buses via the Al-Yarubiyah border crossing.

The Iraqi government has "agreed to the return of (a total of) 800 families," the Syrian Kurdish source told AFP, adding that many of them had sought refuge in Syria after the Daesh group expanded its presence in Iraq.

They had been living in villages bordering Iraq, under the control of the Kurdish-led forces that rule regions of north and northeast Syria.

A senior Iraqi security source said: "We have been checking their identities for security reasons for the past year.

"They've been suffering from the difficult economic conditions in Syria."

Relatives of jihadists, including children, are held in Kurdish-controlled camps in Syria's northeast, the largest of which is Al-Hol with around 56,000 displaced people and refugees.

Since last year, Iraqi authorities have repatriated hundreds of Iraqi families from Al-Hol.

The Daesh group ruled large swathes of Iraq between 2014 and 2017.

Kurdish-led forces backed by the United States seized the group's last territorial bastion in Syria in 2019.



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Drugs, tribes, politics a deadly mix in Iraq border province

[Houthis condemned for storing weapons in housing complex as blasts kill residents](#)

Thu, 2022-03-03 22:42

AL-MUKALLA: Yemen's military has accused the Iran-backed Houthis of storing weapons and ammunition inside or near residential areas, after large explosions ripped through several buildings in a housing compound in the southern city of Taiz.

Abdul Basit Al-Baher, a military officer, told Arab News on Thursday that the blasts that shook Houthi-controlled Huban district in Taiz early on Tuesday were caused by weapons and ammunition stored in the basements and lower floors of several buildings in Al-Saleh residential complex.

"The Houthi militia sealed off the area and even prevented ambulances from reaching the wounded," he said. "Many civilians were killed or wounded in the explosions as fragments of bombs hit their houses outside the complex."

An amateur video posted online showed explosions and large balls of fire rising from the ground floor of three buildings in Al-Saleh.

Other images showed three buildings that had been badly damaged by the blasts.

Yemeni army officials said the Houthis moved weapons, ammunition and drones from military bases in Dhamar and other areas to the residential area in Taiz, and turned the upper floors of Al-Saleh buildings into secret detention centers.

"The ground floors are workshops for assembling and booby-trapping drones, and weapons depots," Al-Baher said, adding that the Houthis had endangered the lives of thousands of people who live in areas of Taiz under their control.

"This is a criminal and terrorist organization that does not care about the lives of civilians."

The Houthis told residents that the explosions were caused by fireworks lit during a wedding in Huban.

A Yemeni news agency reported on Thursday that the Houthis were holding more than 3,000 people who had been abducted from Taiz and other areas at secret prisons in Al-Saleh, and had also turned some flats there into command rooms and hiding places for their leaders.

The explosions in the city are not the first to be linked to secret Houthi weapons dumps. Similar blasts have been reported in densely populated areas of Houthi-held Sanaa, Dhamar and Jouf.

Officials say the Houthis hide weapons and drones in civilian facilities that are on the no-target list of the Coalition to Restore Legitimacy in Yemen.

In May 2019, Human Rights Watch and the Sanaa-based Mwatana for Human Rights said an explosion in April that killed at least 15 children and wounded more than 100 people in Sanaa's Sawan neighborhood was caused by a fire at a Houthi weapons storage facility.

Also on Thursday, in Sanaa, relatives of Yemeni abductees held at Houthi jails organized a rare protest to denounce the sentences handed down to their loved ones by a Houthi-controlled court.

The Mothers of Abductees Association, an umbrella organization for thousands of female relatives of war prisoners, staged the protest outside the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. The women demanded the release of 13 prisoners who had earlier been sentenced to death or jail terms by Sanaa's Specialized Criminal Court.

“We hold Houthi armed groups fully responsible for our sons’ lives as such crimes are imprescriptible,” read one of the posters carried by the women.

The organization said the abductees had been brutally tortured by the Houthis into confessing to crimes and that the father of one of the convicted men died of shock after hearing the court’s ruling.

Meanwhile, dozens of Houthis were killed in more than 23 air raids by coalition warplanes in the provinces of Marib and Hajjah, which have witnessed bloody fighting between government troops and the Houthis over the past 24 hours.

The Arab coalition said on Thursday that the strikes also destroyed 17 Houthi military vehicles.



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