

# Tunisia says 50,000 joined consultation ahead of new constitution

Author:

Thu, 2022-01-20 23:53

TUNIS: More than 50,000 people have participated in Tunisia's national consultation that will feed into the drafting of a new constitution, authorities said.

President Kais Saied had announced the consultation in December when he extended a suspension of parliament, a move which fueled concerns for the only democracy to have emerged from the Arab Spring uprisings a decade ago.

The consultation will last until March 20. Topics include political, economic, financial, social, health, educational and cultural affairs.

"We are at the fifth day and the number of participants has reached 52,000 – that's good," Technology Minister Nizar Ben Neji said. "We will intensify our awareness campaign."

The electronic platform for the consultations was fully launched on Saturday after it partially opened on Jan. 1.

Tunisians abroad are also able to participate, using their identify card to access the platform and register their remarks.

Authorities say more than three quarters of Tunisia's 12 million population has internet access, while those without will be able to use computers in youth centers across the country.

A constitutional referendum is planned for July 25, 2022 – exactly a year after Saied sacked the government, suspended parliament and said he would assume executive powers.

The president later took steps to rule by decree, and in early December vowed to press on with reforms to the political system.

His intervention was initially supported by many Tunisians frustrated over repeated deadlocks within the fractious legislature.

On Dec. 13, Saied laid out a roadmap for drafting a new constitution, which is set to grant more powers to the executive branch at the expense of the legislature in the North African nation, before elections at the end of this year. Saied won elections in 2019 with a landslide 73 percent of votes.



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## [Shelling on northern Syrian city kills six civilians](#)

Author:

Thu, 2022-01-20 23:38

BEIRUT: Shelling on the Turkish-held city of Afrin in northern Syria killed six civilians on Thursday, the latest in a spate of attacks, a war monitor said.

It was not immediately clear who fired the artillery shells but the attack came from a region where Kurdish fighters and Syrian regime forces are present, said the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

“Six people, including two children, were killed,” said the Britain-based monitor which relies on sources inside Syria for its reports.

Nearly 30 others were wounded, it added.

The shelling came a week after a suicide bomber launched an attack near a military base run by Turkey-backed fighters in Afrin, according to the Observatory.

Turkey and its proxies have seized control of territory inside Syria over several military operations launched since 2016 against Daesh and the Kurdish YPG militia.

In March 2018, they seized Afrin after pushing the Syrian Kurdish forces out.

On Thursday, Kurdish forces marked four years since Turkey launched its push into Afrin in an operation that triggered a wave of mass displacement.

“Recovering Afrin and (securing) the safe return of it’s inhabitants ... is our main priority,” Mazlum Abdi, the head of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, tweeted.

The war in Syria has killed close to half a million people and spurred the largest conflict-induced displacement since World War II, since it broke out in 2011.

Meanwhile, five Roman artifacts from the ancient city of Palmyra, a site damaged during the conflict, were returned to Damascus on Thursday by a private Lebanese museum where they had been on display since 2018.

The limestone statues and carved funerary stones dating from the Roman second and third centuries AD were returned at the initiative of a private Lebanese collector, Syrian antiquities chief Mohamed Nazir Awad said at a handover ceremony hosted by Lebanon’s National Museum in Beirut.

The collector, Jawad Adra, acquired them from European auction houses before Syria’s war began in 2011, Awad said, describing his actions as “a generous initiative.”

The pieces, which had been on display at the Nabu Museum in northern Lebanon, were returning to “their original homeland,” the Syrian regime official added.

During the Syrian conflict, the site of Palmyra, one of the most important cultural centers in the ancient world, fell under the control of Daesh, which blew up some of its major monuments, including the Arch of Triumph.

Syria’s ambassador to Lebanon, Ali Abdul Karim, said talks were underway to arrange the return of other artifacts from the National Museum in Beirut to Syria.



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## [Daesh attacks Syrian prison, frees extremists: Monitor](#)

Author:

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Thu, 2022-01-20 19:58

BEIRUT: Daesh attacked a Kurdish-run jail in northeast Syria on Thursday, freeing fellow militants, a war monitor reported without specifying how many escaped.

A car bomb hit the entrance of Ghwayran prison and a second blast went off in the vicinity before Daesh extremists attacked Kurdish security forces manning

the facility, the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

“A number of prisoners managed to escape,” said the Observatory which relies on a network of sources inside Syria. It did not specify how they managed to break out.

Ghwayran is one of the largest facilities housing Daesh fighters in northeast Syria, Observatory head Rami Abdul Rahman told AFP.

The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces confirmed the rare attack in a statement but did not mention any prisoners fleeing.

“A new insurgence and attempted escape by Daesh terrorists detained in Ghwayran prison in Al-Hasaka in conjunction with an explosion of a car bomb,” it said.

It blamed the attack on “Daesh sleeper cells, who infiltrated from the surrounding neighborhoods and clashed with the internal Security Forces.”

The Observatory said the SDF has dispatched reinforcements to the prison and cordoned off the area.

Aircraft belonging to the US-led international coalition battling Daesh hovered over the facility and dropped flares in its vicinity, the monitor added.

The coalition was not immediately available for comment.

Daesh’s self-declared caliphate, established from 2014, once stretched across vast parts of Syria and Iraq and administered millions of inhabitants.

A long and deadly military fightback led by Syrian and Iraqi forces with backing from the United States and other powers eventually defeated the extremist proto-state in March 2019.

The remnants of Daesh mostly went back to their desert hideouts from which they continue to harass Syrian government and allied forces.





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## [European countries urge Israel to stop construction in East Jerusalem](#)

Author:

Thu, 2022-01-20 02:14

PARIS: The foreign ministries of France, Germany, Italy and Spain urged Israeli authorities on Wednesday evening to stop the construction of new housing units in East Jerusalem.

Earlier in the month, Israeli authorities approved plans for the construction

of around 3,500 homes in occupied East Jerusalem, nearly half of which are to be built in the controversial areas of Givat Hamatos and Har Homa. In a statement, the European countries said that the hundreds of new buildings would “constitute an additional obstacle to the two-state solution,” referring to international peace efforts to create a state for Palestinians.

They said that building in this area would further disconnect the West Bank from East Jerusalem and that these settlements are a violation of international law.

The Israeli ministry of foreign affairs did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment.

Israel captured East Jerusalem including the Old City in a 1967 war and later annexed it, a move not recognized internationally.

Palestinians want East Jerusalem for the capital of a state they seek in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, which abuts the city, and the Gaza Strip. Israel views the entire city as its indivisible capital.

Most world powers deem the Israeli settlements illegal for taking in territory where Palestinians seek statehood.

The four countries also expressed concern about the evictions and demolitions in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah, where residents say they are being displaced.

Earlier Wednesday, Israeli police evicted a Palestinian family from their East Jerusalem home – which they say they had lived in for decades – before a digger tore down the property, prompting criticism from rights activists and diplomats.



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## [Calls grow to restore Houthis to US list of terrorist groups](#)

Thu, 2022-01-20 01:08

AL-MUKALLA: Demands grew on Wednesday for the US to restore the Iran-backed Houthi militia in Yemen to its list of designated terrorist groups.

The government in Yemen joined calls for the reinstatement by authorities in the UAE after Monday's Houthi drone attack on Abu Dhabi in which three people died.

"These criminal acts require designating the Houthis as a terrorist organization," Yemen's Prime Minister Maeen Abdul Malik Saeed said. "The international community has to deal with this group.

More pressure needs to be applied to stop these terrorist crimes that threaten regional and international peace and stability."

Former US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo designated the Houthis a foreign terrorist organization on Jan. 16, 2021, a few hours before the Trump administration handed the White House over to Joe Biden.

The new administration quickly reversed the move, paused a ban on financial transactions in Houthi-controlled areas on Jan. 25, and fully revoked the terrorist designation on Feb. 16.

The revocation was followed by a barrage of drone and missile attacks by the Houthis targeting civilians and energy infrastructure in Saudi Arabia.

On the ground, the Coalition to Restore Legitimacy escalated airstrikes on Houthi military sites and reinforcements on Wednesday as government troops repelled the militia's attempts to seize control of new areas.

"We are carrying out a large-scale military operation to paralyze the Houthis' capabilities in a number of governorates," the Coalition said in a statement carried by El-Akhbariyah TV. "We are monitoring the terrorist leaders responsible for targeting civilians.|"

Earlier on Wednesday, Coalition warplanes destroyed military vehicles carrying Houthi fighters in Marib and struck Houthi gatherings and locations in the province. Thick smoke and large balls of fire billowed over targeted



locations in southwestern Sanaa, including Attan Mountain, which hosts a ballistic missile depot.

The coalition said it had carried out 19 airstrikes in Marib that killed 90 Houthis and destroyed 11 of their vehicles. There was heavy fighting between government troops and the Houthis south of the strategic central city of Marib. Rashad Al-Mekhlafi, a military official at Yemen's Armed Forces Guidance Department, told Arab News the Houthis had mounted several counterattacks on government troops around Al-Balaq Al-Sharqi mountain range in a bid to break a siege on pockets of their fighters on the strategic mountain.

The Houthis failed to achieve their goal of reaching the mountain and were forced into stopping their attacks after suffering heavy casualties. "They have to either surrender or die," Al-Mekhlafi said. Loyalist Giants Brigades troops also engaged in heavy fighting with the Houthis south of Marib.

In the western governorate of Hodeidah, Houthi weapons storages at the naval forces camp were also targeted, the Coalition said early Thursday.

It said the port was being used by the Houthis as a military barracks to threaten regional and international security. Houthis reportedly transferred the weapons from the port to the military camp under commercial cover.

Houthis had also been accused of engaging in sea piracy, attacking civilian ships passing along the Red Sea.

The US special envoy for Yemen, Tim Lenderking, began visits on Wednesday to the Gulf states and the UK. "The special envoy and his team will press the parties to deescalate militarily and...participate fully in an inclusive UN-led peace process," the State Department said.



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UAE embassy calls on Biden administration to support re-designating Houthis as foreign terrorist organization  
UAE calls for UN Security Council session over Houthi attack on Abu Dhabi