

International

# Turkey ousts Kurdish mayors, launches security operation

## Riot police fire water cannon on protesters in Diyarbakir

**DIYARBAKIR:** Turkey yesterday replaced Kurdish mayors with state officials in three cities and detained more than 400 people for suspected militant links, the Interior Ministry said, a move likely to fuel tensions in the mainly Kurdish southeast. The ministry also said it had launched an operation with some 2,300 commandos against militant fighters of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in southeastern provinces.

The mayors of three major southeastern cities - Diyarbakir, Mardin and Van - are accused of various crimes including membership of a terrorist organization and spreading terrorist group propaganda, the ministry said in a statement. Riot police fired water cannon on small groups of people protesting against the mayors' dismissal in central Diyarbakir, where police sealed off the municipality headquarters with metal barriers, Reuters TV video showed. President Tayyip Erdogan had warned ahead of local elections in March of such a move against elected officials if they were found to have had connections to the PKK.

"For the health of the investigations, they have been temporarily removed from their posts as a precaution," the ministry said, referring to Diyarbakir Mayor Selcuk Mizrakli, Mardin Mayor Ahmet Turk and Van Mayor Bedia Ozgokce Ertan. Police detained 418 people in 29 provinces in a related investigation targeting suspects with links to the PKK, the ministry added. The pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), to which the three mayors belong, said they had been dismissed "on an order based on lies and illegal justifications".

"This is a new and clear political coup. It is a clear and hostile stance against the political will of the

Kurdish people," the HDP executive board said in a written statement. It said the three mayors had been elected with between 53% to 63% of the vote in their cities in March and called for support from other political parties. "This is not just the problem of the HDP and the Kurdish people. It is the shared problem of all Turkey's peoples and all democratic forces," it added.

### Opposition slams dismissals

Veli Agbaba, deputy leader of the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), wrote on Twitter that the dismissals were tantamount to fascism and a blow against democracy, while Istanbul's CHP mayor Ekrem Imamoglu also slammed the move. "Negating the will of the people is unacceptable," he wrote on Twitter.

Imamoglu himself was removed from office over irregularities shortly after coming to power in the March election, but won a re-run election in June. More unusually, Turkey's former president Abdullah Gul and ex-prime minister Ahmet Davutoglu, once allies of Erdogan from his AK Party who have emerged as potential political opponents, said on Twitter the dismissals were out of line with democracy.

The removal of the mayors echoed the dismissal of dozens of mayors in 2016 over similar accusations, part of a purge that began after a failed coup. Nearly 100 mayors and thousands of party members were jailed in a crackdown that drew expressions of concern from the United States and European Union. Erdogan warned before the March elections that HDP mayors could again be dismissed if they, like their predecessors, were deemed to have ties to militants.

### Former president, PM slam the move



**DIYARBAKIR:** Demonstrators clash with Turkish police as they protest against the replacement of Kurdish mayors with state officials in three cities yesterday. —AFP

Erdogan frequently accuses the HDP of links to the PKK, which is designated a terrorist group by Turkey, the EU and the United States. The HDP denies such links. The PKK launched an insurgency against the Turkish state in 1984. More than 40,000 people have been killed in the conflict. The Interior Ministry said recent operations had led to PKK militant numbers falling to their lowest level in 30 years, with the number of fighters in Turkey falling to some 600 from around

1,800-2,000 in the past.

Announcing the new operation against PKK militants, launched on Sunday in the provinces of Van, Sirnak and Hakkari, the ministry published images showing security forces firing machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades. The security forces destroyed 43 caves and shelters used by the PKK, the ministry said, adding that operations would continue until all militants in the areas were "neutralized". —Reuters

## Saudi to host summit to end Aden standoff

**DUBAI:** The refusal of Yemeni southern separatists to hand back control of Aden port has delayed a summit in Saudi Arabia that is due to discuss reshuffling Yemen's ousted government to include the separatists and end the stand-off, three Yemeni sources said. Saudi Arabia called for the meeting after the separatist forces on Aug 10 seized military camps and other state institutions in the southern port city, the temporary seat of the Saudi-backed government of President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi.

The Aden crisis has fractured the Sunni Muslim military coalition led by Riyadh that is battling the Iran-aligned Houthi group, which controls the Yemeni capital Sanaa. Meanwhile the Houthis have escalated cross-border attacks targeting Saudi energy infrastructure. "Forming a new government has been proposed and the alliance supports it, but inclusion of the Southern Transitional Council (STC) is linked to them fully withdrawing first," said a Yemeni official, who declined to be named.

The official said Hadi, who has no personal power base and has long been out of favor with the United Arab Emirates, a coalition member, may be sidelined if a new deputy is named. The coalition declined to comment on non-military matters. There was no response from the Saudi or UAE foreign ministries or government media offices. So

far, the UAE-backed southern forces have refused to quit military camps, while vacating other state institutions, as they believe it would weaken their hand, the sources said. Hadi's government said it would not attend talks until the "coup" ends.

While separatists have a rival agenda to Hadi's government-demanding self-rule in the south-they are part of the Western-backed coalition that intervened in March 2015 against the Houthi movement that ousted Hadi from power in late 2014. The Aden takeover exposed differences between allies Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which supports thousands of southern fighters, Abu Dhabi, which says the alliance remains strong, has urged dialogue but has not asked separatists to cede control.

The UAE in June scaled down its presence in Yemen under Western pressure to end the war and as rising tensions with Iran threatened security closer to home. Abu Dhabi has said the focus should shift from military tactics to a political solution. "Uniting ranks and improving the (Yemen) government's performance is crucial in the next phase," UAE Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Anwar Gargash tweeted on Saturday. Saudi Arabia wants to prevent rival Shiite Iran from building influence near its border by neutralizing the Houthis.

### Hadi vulnerable

The conflict, which has killed tens of thousands and pushed Yemen to the brink of famine, has been in military stalemate for years with the Houthis holding Sanaa and most big urban centers. It has rekindled old strains between north and south Yemen-separate countries until 1990. The Aden ten-



**AL MA'ALLA:** Yemenis drive down a street in Aden's Mualla region. —AFP

sions further complicated United Nations efforts to pave the way for political talks on a transitional governing body to end the war.

The STC has said its forces will hold Aden until the Islamist Islah party, a key component of Hadi's government, and northerners are removed from power positions in the south. "Hadi is incapable of running Yemen due to his age and health. He trusts no one, and this makes things difficult at a critical time," said the Yemeni official.

The official and another Yemeni source said one option being discussed was transferring presidential powers to a new vice president, leaving Hadi, who is 73 and resides in Riyadh, as a figurehead. "It would be good to have a responsible, consensus VP," said a sen-

ior official in the Gulf, while adding that Hadi had to remain to preserve the internationally recognized government. STC accuses Hadi's government of mismanagement, and Islah of being complicit in a Houthi missile attack on southern forces, which prompted the Aden takeover. Islah denies the charge.

The UAE regards Islah as an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, which Abu Dhabi has banned. Riyadh tolerates Islah because it has helped to prop up Hadi. The Houthis, who say they are fighting a corrupt system, point to Aden as proof that Hadi is unfit to rule. "Southern forces are close enough to the sites they vacated to retake them at any moment. They outnumber and out-arm other forces in Aden," another Yemeni official said. —Reuters

## Thousands riot in Papua, parliament building torched

**MANOKWARI:** Riots broke out and a local parliament building was torched in Indonesia's restive Papua region yesterday, as thousands protested against the weekend detention of dozens of Papuan students. Demonstrators took to the streets of Manokwari, the capital of West Papua province, bringing the city of some 130,000 to a standstill as its civic building was nearly reduced to ashes. Some protesters set fire to shops and vehicles, knocked down street signs, and threw rocks at government buildings, according to an AFP reporter at the scene, who estimated several thousand demonstrators were present.

Indonesia's security minister Wiranto, who goes by one name, appealed for calm and said there would be an investigation of the incident that triggered the unrest in Manokwari as well as protests in several other Papuan cities yesterday. "This has clearly disrupted our unity as a nation," he said. The riots marked the latest flashpoint in a region hit by a

decades-old insurgency against Indonesian rule and allegations that its security forces committed widespread rights abuses against its ethnic Melanesian population.

Papua shares a border with independent Papua New Guinea (PNG), just north of Australia. A former Dutch colony, it declared itself independent in the early Sixties, but neighboring Indonesia took control of the resource-rich region following a UN-sponsored independence referendum that was widely viewed as a sham. In Manokwari, three police officers were injured by rock-throwing protesters, authorities said. It was not immediately clear if any demonstrators were injured. Local schools were shut for the day.

Anger boiled over at reports that authorities tear-gassed and detained some 43 Papuan university students in the Southeast Asian nation's second-biggest city Surabaya on Saturday - Indonesia's independence day. Local media and Papuan activists said police in riot gear stormed into a dormitory to force out students who allegedly destroyed an Indonesian flag. Police said the students were briefly questioned and set free. Television footage on Saturday also showed a different group of pro-



**MANOKWARI:** Protesters take to the street to face off with Indonesian police in Manokwari, Papua yesterday. —AFP

testers demonstrating against the students and shouting racial slurs about Papuans.

The unrest comes after two Indonesian security personnel were killed over the past month in clashes with separatist rebels. Last year, the National Liberation Army of West Papua, part of a

grouping of rebels fighting for Papuan independence, killed at least 19 construction workers at a remote jungle camp in Papua. The employees of a state-owned contractor had been building bridges and roads as part of efforts to boost infrastructure in the impoverished region. —AFP

## Chad declares state of emergency in east; ethnic clashes kill 50

**N'DJAMENA:** Chad's President Idriss Deby declared a state of emergency in two eastern provinces on Sunday, authorizing summary shootings to "save the majority", after violent intercommunal clashes left dozens dead earlier this month. The state of emergency will run for three months in the Sila and Ouaddai regions bordering Sudan where 50 people have died since August 9 in fighting between Arab cattle herders and settled farmers, the president's office said. "From now, we will deploy military forces who are going to ensure the security of the population in the region," Deby said while on a trip to Sila.

"We must disarm all the civilians who have weapons in their hands," he said. "If there is still fighting between Arabs and Ouaddaians... you shoot them from each side to save the majority. You have authorization," Deby said. Deby's comments sparked condemnation from the Chad Convention for Human Rights which said in a statement it was "scandalized by the call to massacre civilians". The rights body said in a statement it was demanding "an immediate halt to these abuses and believes that the responsibility for the genocide that is being prepared will rest with President Deby".

Eastern Chad is in the grip of a cycle of violence between nomadic camel herders and sedentary farmers from the Ouaddaian community. Herders have for decades moved their livestock through the Ouaddai region in rotations between summer and winter pastures. Most of the herders' animals belong to the president's Zaghawa ethnic group, and the farmers say they often escape censure when unrest breaks out between the two sides. Similar conflicts between herders and farmers erupt in other African states, notably Nigeria.

Drought and population growth have aggravated the conflict, while an influx of weapons from conflict-stricken neighbors have made it even more deadly. Deby earlier this month blamed the surge in violence partly on an influx of guns to the former French colony from conflict zones in neighboring Libya, Central African Republic and Sudan, where a protest movement ousted the president in April. "The government has created special disarmament units. We take away the weapons, but the next day more arrive," he said. —AFP



**ABECHE:** Farmers shelter under a mango tree to avoid the heat and sun, on the road between Adre and Farchana, in the eastern Chad region of Ouaddai. Chad President Idriss Deby has declared a state of emergency in two eastern provinces after violent intercommunal clashes left dozens dead. —AFP