

ISTANBUL (Xinhua) – Turkey's main opposition party on Wednesday called for lawyers in the country to monitor the ballot boxes during the re-run of the mayoral election in Istanbul on June 23. The Republican People's Party (CHP) initiated a campaign, dubbed "One ballot box, one lawyer," with a view to preventing possible irregularities and wrongdoing during the voting and counting processes, the party said in a press release. "I invite all lawyers to fulfill a mission at the ballot boxes during the election," Canan Kaftancıoğlu, head of the CHP in Istanbul Province, was quoted as saying.

There are people who worship Allah to gain His Favours, this is the worship of traders; while there are some who worship Him to keep themselves free from His Wrath, this is the worship of slaves; a few who obey Him out of their sense of gratitude.

Amir al-Momeneen Ali (AS)

In 'Year of Shame'

Amnesty Slams Saudi Regime's Arrests, Torture, Mass Execution

RIYADH (Press TV) – Amnesty International has released a report marking the first year since the Saudi regime launched a campaign of suppression against women's rights activists, detailing how the kingdom indulged in arrests and torture of activists as well as mass executions in "the year of shame."

"Today marks the first anniversary of the arrests of several prominent women human rights defenders in Saudi Arabia, after a shameful year for human rights in the Kingdom in which activists, journalists, academics, and writers were targeted," the rights-group said in a report.

Ironically, the arrest of female activists followed a widely-hyped decision by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to lift a ban on women's driving. Among those detained were some of the proponents of the ban's removal.

The arrest of some of the kingdom's "bravest women activists" came while the kingdom should have instead "celebrated hand in hand steps that should have served to advance the rights of women in the country," said Amnesty's Middle East Research Director, Lynn Maalouf.

The report named some of the arrestees as Loujain al-Hathloul, Iman al-Nafjan, and Aziza al-Yousef, whom it called Saudi Arabia's "leading women's rights cam-



Women's rights activists hold signs as they take part in a demonstration organized by Amnesty International outside the Saudi embassy in Paris, France, on March 8, 2019.

paigners," adding that al-Hathloul was still in custody alongside several other female activists.

"Then they went on to detain those who still dared to stand up for these women, advocate for women's rights in the country, or even express any questioning of the authorities' policies," it added.

In April, the kingdom stepped up its clampdown on critics, arbitrarily detaining over a dozen journalists, writers, academics and family members of women's rights defenders.

"Women activists also detailed accounts of their torture, ill-treatment, and sexual abuse to the court, and many of them now face

a prison term for their peaceful activism and speech," Maalouf said.

The previous year also saw escalation of the kingdom's crackdown on dissent.

Citing the escalation, the report said the Public Prosecution had called for the execution of religious clerics and Shia activists on trial before the country's "counter-terrorism" court "for charges related to exercising their peaceful rights to freedom of expression, association, and assembly."

This includes prominent religious cleric Sheikh Salman al-Awda, who faced 37 charges, including his affiliation with the Egyptian opposition party Muslim Brother-

hood and calls for government reforms, Amnesty noted.

Mass executions

In late April, the authorities carried out a mass execution of 37 men, the majority of them from Saudi Arabia's Shia minority, after unfair trials, the body said.

At least 15 men executed last month were sentenced to death based on "confessions" they said were extracted through torture, including a young man who was convicted of a crime that allegedly took place while he was under the age of 18.

So far this year, the Saudi authorities have executed at least 110 people.

Saudi Arabia has controversially widened the scope of its so-called counter-terrorism law to include opposition to the kingdom's policies at home and abroad and its treatment of the Shia population.

The kingdom, which is dominated by Wahhabism, an exceptionally intolerant ideology, is accused of exercising radically-discriminatory policies against its Shia minority. In early 2016, it notoriously executed the country's leading Shia cleric, Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr.

The kingdom's Shia-populated Eastern Province is under tight security control and has witnessed prolonged "security" raids, including wholesale demolitions and intermittent bloodshed.

Yemeni Forces Shoot Down Saudi Coalition Drone in Sana'a



The file photo shows the wreckage of a Saudi drone shot down by Yemeni forces in an undisclosed location.

SANAA (Dispatches) – Yemeni army forces have intercepted and targeted an unmanned aerial vehicle belonging to the Saudi-led military coalition, as it was flying in the skies over a region in the country's western-central province of Sana'a.

Yemeni air defense forces and their allies shot down the U.S.-built MQ-1 Predator combat drone with a surface-to-air missile late on Tuesday, an unnamed Yemeni military source told Arabic-language al-Masirah television network.

The unmanned aerial vehicle was brought down as it was on a mission in the skies over Dian area in the Bani Matar district of the province, the source added.

Yemeni soldiers and fighters from Popular Committees intercepted and shot down an MQ-1 drone in the Hamdan district of Sana'a province on March 23.

Meanwhile, Yemeni troops and Popular Committees fighters thwarted on Tuesday, an infiltration attempt by Saudi-backed militiamen loyal to former Yemeni president Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi in the Khabb wa ash Sha'af district of the country's northern province of al-Jawf, killing and injuring scores of the mercenaries in the process.

Yemeni army soldiers and their allies also targeted the position of Saudi-paid militiamen on the outskirts of al-Sadis military base in Saudi Arabia's southern province of Najran. A number of Saudi mer-

cenaries were killed and wounded as a result.

On April 19, the media bureau of Yemen's Houthi Ansarullah movement announced in a statement that Yemeni air defense forces and their allies had shot down a Chinese-built medium-altitude and long-endurance Wing Loong drone with a surface-to-air missile.

The statement issued on April 19 added that the drone was struck as it was on a surveillance mission over Bani Muadh area in the Sahar district of Yemen's northwestern province of Sa'ada. It was armed with air-to-surface weapons.

Saudi Arabia and a number of its regional allies launched a devastating campaign against Yemen in March 2015, with the goal of bringing the government of Hadi back to power and crushing the Houthi Ansarullah movement.

According to a December 2018 report by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), a nonprofit conflict-research organization, the Saudi-led war has claimed the lives of over 60,000 Yemenis since January 2016.

The war has also taken a heavy toll on the country's infrastructure, destroying hospitals, schools, and factories. The UN said in a report in December 2018 that over 24 million Yemenis are in dire need of humanitarian aid, including 10 million suffering from extreme levels of hunger.

Security Forces Defuse 20 Landmines, Rescue Lives in Afghanistan

KABUL (Dispatches) – Up to 20 rounds of landmines have been unearthed and foiled in Afghanistan's southern province of Kandahar, the country's Ministry of Interior Affairs said Wednesday.

The landmines and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) have been planted by anti-government militants for terrorist activities, in Shah Wali Kot district's Charchenar village, where engineering teams of provincial police discovered them, the ministry said in a statement.

Taliban militants usually use landmines and IEDs to target security forces, but the lethal homemade weapons mostly take lives of civilians.

On May 9, four children were

killed and five others wounded by landmine explosion in the northern Faryab province, while on May 11, seven children lost their lives and two others injured in a mine blast in the country's eastern Ghazni province.

In an earlier incident, three bomb explosions struck Afghanistan's eastern city of Jalalabad, killing at least three people and injuring 20 others, local officials say.

Attaullah Khogyani, spokesperson for the governor of Nangarhar, said on Monday that the blasts were caused by explosives placed in the crowded market square in the capital city of the troubled province, which is on the border with Pakistan.

There has been no immediate

claim of responsibility for the attack. But the Taliban militant group has been active in the province. The Daesh Takfiri terrorist group is also present in the troubled region.

"The nature of explosions is not clear, but it could be IEDs," Nangarhar provincial spokesman, Attaullah Khogyani, was quoted by AFP as saying, using the acronym for improvised explosive devices.

"So far we can confirm three people have been killed and 20 wounded," he added.

In recent years, Daesh has established a foothold in eastern and northern Afghanistan. The terrorist group has mostly been populating Nangarhar, from where it has carried out high-profile brutal attacks at major population centers across

the country.

On Tuesday, fighting between prisoners and Afghan policemen during a drug search operation in the country's largest prison left four prisoners dead and several injured, a government official said.

Violent clashes erupted in two barracks of the sprawling Pul-e-Charkhi prison on the outskirts of Kabul, which houses thousands of inmates, including scores of Taliban militants and members of other hard-line groups.

Nasrat Rahimi, the spokesman for the interior ministry, said four prisoners were killed and 13 prisoners and 20 policemen were injured during the search operation to seize drugs and other illegal substances from the prisoners.

Turkish Court Declines to Free U.S. Consular Employee

ISTANBUL (Reuters) – A Turkish court refused to release an employee of the U.S. consulate in Istanbul on Wednesday, in a trial on espionage charges that has damaged relations with Washington.

Metin Topuz, a Turkish translator for the Drug Enforcement Agency at the consulate, was ordered held at least until his next appearance, which was set for June 28, one of his lawyers, Selman Alibas, told Reuters.

Topuz, who has already been held since his arrest in 2017, is one of three U.S. consulate employees who have been charged in criminal cases that have been major irritants in the relationship between the NATO allies.

Turkey's strained ties with the United States,

including threats of sanctions over Ankara's push to purchase Russian missile systems, are one of the factors contributing to investor fears that have seen its currency plunge in recent years.

Washington and Ankara are at odds over a range of issues including Syria policy, the U.S. refusal to extradite a Turkish cleric that Ankara accuses of plotting a failed coup, and Turkey's plans to buy the Russian missile systems.

Topuz is on trial on charges of espionage and links to the network of cleric Fethullah Gulen, who is based in the United States and blamed by Turkey for plotting the failed 2016 coup. Washington says Topuz is innocent.

The indictment accuses Topuz of being in frequent contact with officers who led a 2013

corruption investigation in Turkey, which the government has described as a "judicial coup attempt" by Gulen's network.

Topuz denies the charges, saying it was not his decision who he came into contact with through his work.

Turkey indicted another U.S. consulate employee in March, also accusing him of links to Gulen's network. A third employee was freed convicted of terrorism but freed in January due to time served during his trial.

Since the abortive 2016 military coup, Turkey has detained 160,000 people and dismissed nearly as many civil servants over suspected links to the coup attempt, according to the UN human rights office.

'Iraq Set to Buy Russian S-400 Missile Systems'

MOSCOW (Dispatches) – The Iraqi government has decided to buy Russian S-400 missile systems, but the exact date of the purchase is yet to be defined, Iraqi Ambassador to Russia Haidar Hadi said on Wednesday.

"As for S-400, there is no road map that would set exact dates and define how we should move toward this [purchasing S-400]. The Iraqi government has made a decision, it wants to buy these missiles", Hadi told journalists at a press conference held at the Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency.

When asked about Washington's possible moves to hinder the purchase, the envoy said there are "relevant diplomatic channels" to solve this kind of problems with Americans.

The plans to purchase the Russian air defense system, announced by Turkey earlier,

triggered a conflict between Ankara and Washington. U.S. officials have repeatedly warned the Turkish government against this move, threatening to block the sale of F-35 fighter jets to their Middle Eastern ally and to stop manufacturing support for the aircraft. The Pentagon claimed that the S-400s are incompatible with NATO equipment and alleged that the Russian systems pose a threat to the F-35s.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said on Wednesday Turkey is discussing with the United States details of a working group Ankara has proposed setting up to look into the impact of its purchase of Russian S-400 missile systems.

Cavusoglu said that stopping or postponing the delivery of the S-400s is not on the agenda.