

Erdogan may stay in power till 2029



Recep Tayyip Erdogan

Ankara

Turkey will hold a referendum this spring on dramatically expanding President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's powers after a parliamentary vote yesterday backed changes that could leave him in power until 2029.

The government insists the proposals to create an

executive presidency will ensure simpler and more effective leadership, but critics fear they will edge Turkey toward one-man rule.

Hours after the bill was approved, Erdogan said the "real (and) final decision" would be made by the people in a referendum, expected to be held in April.

Parliament approved a new 18-article constitution, which includes the presidency changes, in a final vote which saw 339 in favour and 142 against.

Each article was put to a vote in the 550-seat parliament, where the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) enjoys a comfortable

majority of 317 including the speaker.

At least 330 votes a three-fifths majority were needed to adopt the changes.

Speaking to supporters in Istanbul, Erdogan said he believed they would "move towards the future by working night and day" for the referendum campaign.

The bill would create an executive presidency for the first time in modern Turkey, giving the head of state the power to hire and fire ministers.

It would also abolish the post of prime minister for the first time, with the position to be replaced with a vice president, or perhaps several.

The bill would allow

parliamentary elections and presidential ballots to be held at the same time, with the draft giving November 3, 2019 as the poll date.

Prime Minister Binali Yildirim said the changes would allow for a "sole power that would be strong", meaning a more decisive approach to solving problems.-(AFP)

Egypt working for talks between rival Libya authorities

Cairo

Egypt is working to organise direct talks between the leaders of rival Libyan authorities contesting the war-torn country, its foreign minister said yesterday after hosting a regional meeting.

The UN-backed government in Tripoli has struggled to impose its authority contested by a rival administration in the east of the country.

"A political solution is the only way to resolve the crisis



Sameh Shoukry in Libya," Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry said yesterday before going into a

meeting with foreign ministers from Libya's neighbouring countries.

Following the meeting, attended by ministers from Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Niger, as well as UN envoy Martin Kobler, Shoukry announced plans to hold the direct negotiations.

"We are focusing efforts on bringing Libyan leaders together for a direct dialogue, to build confidence and trust," he said. -(AFP)

Bodies of 2 firemen recovered after Tehran's high-rise building collapse

Tehran

Rescue teams recovered the bodies of two Iranian firefighters yesterday, two days after they were killed while tackling a blaze in Tehran's oldest high-rise.

They were among around 20 firefighters feared to have been killed when the 15-storey Plasco building collapsed on Thursday after a four-hour blaze while emergency services were still evacuating the tower.

One firefighter already died

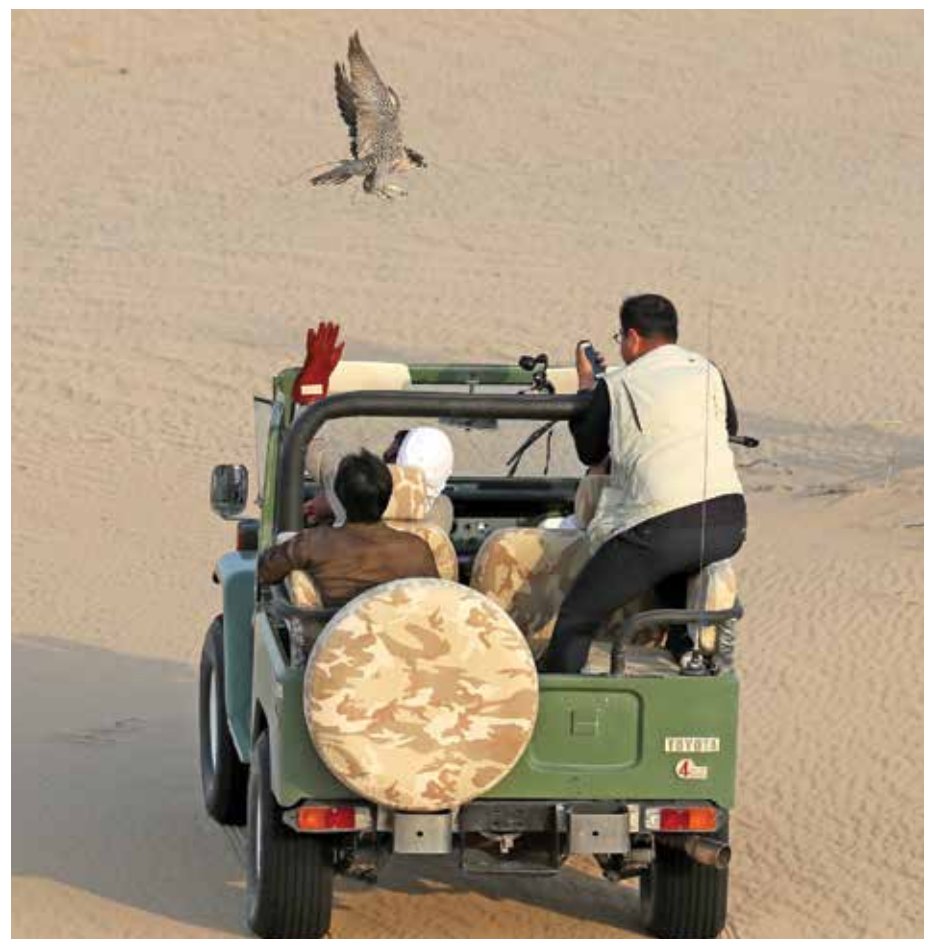


Rescue team working at site in hospital from his injuries.

Smouldering fires and smoke have complicated the recovery effort as sniffer dogs have combed the

rubble.

Tehran's chief pathologist said the degree of the burns had made identification of the dead difficult. -(AFP)



Falconers monitor a falco during a hunting event held at the Al-Marzoum Reserve, 150 kms west of Abu Dhabi. (AFP)