

Istanbul conference on Somalia opens



Turkey has been at the forefront of giving aid to Somalia and started commercial flights to Mogadishu last year

World leaders and Somali politicians have started talks in Istanbul on how to end decades of anarchy in Somalia.

The two-day talks are hosted by the Turkish government, which has tried to raise Turkey's profile in Somalia since last year's drought there.

Traditional elders, business leaders and civil society groups from Somalia are also due to attend.

They are expected to discuss the end of the transition period of the UN-backed interim government, due in August.

But the government only controls the capital, Mogadishu, and one nearby town, while al-Qaeda linked militants still run many areas of the country.

In recent months, troops from the African Union, Ethiopia and Kenya, as well as pro-government militias, have helped government forces gain territory from al-Shabab but the militants continue to stage attacks in Mogadishu and elsewhere.

Kenya's government has accused al-Shabab of carrying out Monday's bombing in Nairobi, which injured some 33 people.

Who runs Somalia?



Turkey's Deputy Prime Minister Bekir Bozdag said that Mogadishu was now open for business, reports the AFP news agency.

"After a long period of instability and conflict, we now have ahead of us an opportunity for genuine peace and security," he said at the start of the Istanbul conference.

The meeting is discussing how the country will function after the end of the transitional period and will try to agree a common international policy towards Somalia.

Economic issues such as energy, water and roads are also on the table.

This agenda is similar to that of numerous big meetings on Somalia in recent times, says the BBC's Mary Harper.

But she adds that Turkey has had more success than other countries in actually bringing about change on the ground.

During last year's famine in Somalia, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his wife went to Mogadishu - the first visit by a leader from outside Africa for nearly 20 years.

Turkey has since been at the forefront of helping build roads, schools and hospitals there.

However, some Somali politicians have said Turkey has not been transparent about the conference, failing to consult them about who to invite, our correspondent says.

Last week, leaders of disparate Somali factions agreed to a timetable that will elect a new president by 20 August.

Earlier this week, the convoy of Somali interim President Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed came under attack from al-Shabab, after he made a visit to the newly recaptured town of Afgoye, near Mogadishu.

The president escaped unharmed but at least one Somali government soldier was killed and four were wounded in the attack.

The country has been without an effective central government since 1991 and has been racked by fighting ever since - a situation that has allowed piracy and lawlessness to flourish.

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