

Turkey's democratic credentials under the spotlight

Wed, 2020-01-29 02:17

JEDDAH: The fifth hearing of the Gezi Park protests trial resumed on Tuesday, on the same day as the third Universal Periodic Review of Turkey began before the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva.

Analysts called on international organizations to highlight the crackdown on human rights and press freedom in the country.

On Tuesday, 16 critical voices from Turkish civil society, including businessman-philanthropist Osman Kavala, faced life in prison for “attempting to overthrow the government or partially or wholly prevent its functions” as they were accused of playing a role in Gezi Park protests.

In 2013, around 3.6 million people attended the protests in 80 cities across Turkey, according to official statistics.

The trial is seen as part of systematic moves by the Turkish government to restrict civil society and human rights defenders in the country by continuously accusing them of links to terror groups.

Before the trial, Amnesty International's Turkey campaigner, Milena Buyum, said: “This prosecution is a shameful attempt to silence independent civil society, and part of a wider ongoing crackdown on human rights defenders. Osman Kavala should not have spent a single minute behind bars let alone more than two years in pre-trial detention.”

However, the court refused to release Kavala. The hearing was delayed until Feb. 18. A request for a recusal was also rejected.

The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) had ruled that Kavala and Selahattin Demirtas – the former leader of pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP) and a staunch opponent of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan – should be immediately released as they had already faced prolonged and arbitrary detention in violation of the European Convention on Human Rights.

The ECHR ruled: “Any continuation of (Osman Kavala's) pre-trial detention in the present case will entail a prolongation of the violation of Article 5/1 and of Article 18.”

The judicial campaign against the 16 defendants has mostly been justified through anti-terror laws, laws against associations, public order legislation or defamatory accusations on the grounds of “propagandizing for a terror organization” or “insulting the president.”

During the Universal Periodic Review in Geneva, that will continue until Jan 30, an official from the Turkish delegation claimed “everyone has a right to hold demonstrations” in Turkey. However, evidence suggests this is not the case. For instance, according to the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey, since November 2016, all demonstrations have been banned in Turkey's eastern city of Van.

The 2016 failed coup attempt also provided a pretext for the government to increase its repressive measures against dissidents.

In the post-coup period, many opposition journalists, politicians and activists were detained and prosecuted on vague charges and in defiance of

international human rights conventions that the country is obliged to abide by.

FASTFACT

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EuroMed Rights, a human rights network, gave an exclusive interview to Arab News, saying that since the Gezi Park protests, an erosion of basic human rights and fundamental freedoms had been observed in Turkey.

“Today, the judiciary clearly aims to rewrite the events of 2013 as a conspiracy against the government. The hearing against Osman Kavala is an example among others,” an official from EuroMed Rights said.

According to EuroMed Rights, civil society in Turkey today is under constant pressure, and the space available for civic engagement is shrinking, as associations are now compelled to report information about their members – ID numbers, names, occupations – to the Ministry of Interior.

“The two-year-long state of emergency and law no. 7145 (July 2018) intended, among others, to ban protests, public assemblies and restrict movement are in total contradiction with articles 19, 23 and 34 of the Turkish constitution. Such decisions seek to isolate organizations and human rights defenders by criminalizing engagement with independent associations,” the official said. He added: “A strong and independent civil society is the sign of a healthy democracy where citizens can engage with society through independent organizations. A government that weakens civil society willingly decides to remove a diversity of voices from the democratic debate.”

The official from EuroMed Rights also said that, by denying citizens the right to associate, the authorities threatened civil society, which cannot hold the government accountable for decisions and cannot act as an intermediary between the citizens and their representatives.

Experts called on the EU, the Council of Europe and the UN to put pressure on the Turkish government to bring the country back towards international standards.

“This is the only way to ensure the people in Turkey do not see their rights abused,” the EuroMed Rights official added.



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[Egyptian 'super dad' saves girl in train terror](#)

Wed, 2020-01-29 02:06

CAIRO: An Egyptian father dubbed a "super dad" saved his daughter from almost certain death after she stepped into the path of a speeding train.

The incident, which left onlookers stunned, took place after the pair disembarked from a train in the coastal city of Ismailia. Instead of leaving via the platform exit, however, the father and daughter walked across the tracks to take another train.

As the father turned to get his luggage from the platform, he heard his daughter's screams. The young girl had wandered too close to an approaching train. With hardly any space between the speeding train and the platform, the man's only option was to hug his daughter close to protect her.

Terrified passengers looked on helplessly, while some prayed aloud. The girl is believed to have fainted with shock.

Ahmed Akef, who captured the incident on a video that went viral in Egypt, said he heard screams. "It was one o'clock. I saw a man save a girl from certain death."

Ismailia train supervisor Yasser Abdel-Hamid said the girl's shouts had alerted her father, who jumped to save her.

However, Abdel-Hamid criticized social media descriptions of the man as a "super dad," saying the pair had risked their lives by crossing the tracks. Rail authorities are investigating and will view security camera footage of the incident, he said.

Social media users posted a picture of the father, believed to be Haggag Ibrahim, a resident of Abu Haggag in Sharqiya governorate. Ibrahim has so far refused to talk to the media.



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[Rescue mission aids starving lions in neglected Sudan zoo](#)

Wed, 2020-01-29 00:54

KHARTOUM: Four lions in a rundown zoo in the capital of Sudan, wasting away from hunger, are undergoing lifesaving medical treatment from an international animal rescue organization.

The plight of the rail-thin lions in Al-Qurashi Park in Khartoum set off an outpouring of sympathy and donations from around the world. At least five lions, both male and female, once inhabited the zoo. One lioness died of starvation last week.

On Tuesday, veterinarians and wildlife experts from Vienna-based animal welfare group Four Paws International conducted medical checks at the park, which has fallen on hard times for lack of money and attention.

Amir Khalil, head of the Four Paws emergency mission, said he was “shocked” by the poor state of the lions, their cramped quarters and the park’s general disarray.

“I don’t understand why no one was given the task of feeding them or how authorities could just overlook this,” he said, describing two of the remaining four as in critical condition, “dehydrated ... a third of their normal weight.”

Four Paws faces a daunting task and its two-day trip has been dogged by challenges from the start.

When the team arrived late on Monday, customs agents confiscated most of their luggage and essential medicine, citing a lack of prior approval. The group says it’s operating with just a fraction of its equipment, and scrambling to find local alternatives.

Although the group typically carries out rescue missions, it has no immediate plan to transport the animals in Al-Qurashi to better conditions abroad.



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Images of starving lions in Sudan zoo spark global concern
Saudi Arabia lifts ban on Sudan's livestock imports

[Protest coverage: Iraqi channel faces month-long ban](#)

Author:

Wed, 2020-01-29 00:49

BAGHDAD: Iraqi authorities have ordered the closure for a month of Al-Dijla television, which has aired intensive coverage of anti-government protests in recent months, media and police sources said on Tuesday.

“Interior Ministry forces fully shut down Al-Dijla’s offices in Baghdad last night and respectfully asked the staff to leave,” a source from the broadcaster said.

An Interior Ministry official confirmed that security forces had stormed the offices in the Jadiriya neighborhood of east Baghdad late on Monday.

At least 80 employees work at the Baghdad bureau and another 50 work at the

station's headquarters in Amman, from where it broadcasts.

The Al-Dijla employee, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the press, said the main office had been ordered by Jordanian authorities to stop broadcasting for a month.

FASTFACT

Al-Dijlah has provided daily coverage of the anti-government protests sweeping Baghdad and the Shiite-majority south since Oct. 1, despite pressure on its staff.

"The Iraqi government requested from Jordan that it halt the station's broadcasting for a month based on an Iraqi complaint," the source said.

Starting on Monday, the frequency on which Al-Dijla typically broadcasts has showed a still image of its logo.

Al-Dijla has provided daily coverage of the anti-government protests sweeping Baghdad and the Shiite-majority south since Oct. 1, despite pressure on its staff.

Its Baghdad office was raided in the first week of rallies and on Jan. 10, one of its correspondents and his cameraman were gunned down in the southern city of Basra.

Before he was killed, correspondent Ahmad Abdessamad, 37, said he had been threatened by Iraqi armed groups because he criticized powerful neighbour Iran in his coverage.

On Jan. 20, Al-Dijla's leading anchorman Nabil Jassem got into an on-air dispute with the prime minister's spokesman for military issues, Abdelkarim Khalaf.

Khalaf refused to respond to a question from Jassem about the number of casualties in protest-related violence, and the two accused each other of being disrespectful before Khalaf walked off the set.

In reaction to the shutdown, Al-Dijla administrative head Jamal Al-Karbuli tweeted: "Al-Dijla pays the price for truth."

Haidar Al-Maytham, a member of the Iraqi National Syndicate for Journalists, said on Tuesday that authorities had taken issue with Al-Dijla's "politics."

"There are political disagreements and differences of opinion between the channel's administration and Iraqi officials, which led to the decision (to shut it down)," Maytham said.

Major powers and advocacy groups have called on Iraq to do more to ensure media freedom and protect journalists covering the protests



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Iraqi PM promises to boost protection for US embassy

[US honors head of France's Arab World Institute](#)

Author:

Tue, 2020-01-28 02:24

WASHINGTON: Dr. Jack Lang, president of the Institut du Monde Arabe (Arab World Institute) in Paris, on Monday received the inaugural Global Cultural Leadership Award from the National Council on US-Arab Relations.

The honor was recognition for his achievements in expanding knowledge of the Arab region and promoting cross-cultural understanding. It was presented to him at the French ambassador's residence in Washington by the council's Founding President and CEO Dr. John Duke Anthony, board Chairman John Pratt, International Advisory Board member Leo A. Daly III, and Executive Vice President Patrick Mancino.

Lang and a delegation from the institute were in Washington for the opening

of the IMA exhibition "Age Old Cities: A Virtual Journey from Palmyra to Mosul" at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Asian Art.

"What Monsieur Lang and the IMA have achieved in highlighting the rich history and culture of the Arab region is considerable," said Anthony during the award presentation ceremony. "They have done much to showcase Arab contributions to knowledge and understanding that have benefited the world's civilizations and humankind in general.

"Under Monsieur Lang's leadership, the IMA has effectively pushed into new territories in storytelling and technology that help further illuminate the innumerable, extraordinary and myriad impacts that Arabs have had on humanity's endless quest for modernization and development."

Lang was appointed IMA president by French President Francois Hollande in 2013. He was previously a National Assembly member for more than two decades, including stints as France's minister of culture and minister of education. He was also mayor of the city of Blois from 1989 to 2000, and served as a special adviser to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon.

The IMA, which is located on the banks of the Seine in Paris, opened in 1987 as a center dedicated to the promotion of Arab civilization, knowledge and art. It contains unique collections and hosts special touring exhibitions. These include "AlUla: Wonder of Arabia," showcasing Saudi Arabia's Nabataean archaeological treasure, the dates for which were recently extended after it proved to be incredibly popular.

The National Council on US-Arab Relations was founded in 1983 as a nonprofit, nongovernmental, educational organization. It is dedicated to raising awareness and appreciation of the extraordinary benefits the United States has derived from its special relationships with countries in the Arab region, and vice versa. Anthony and the council are working on plans for an Arab Cultural Institute, similar to the IMA, in Washington.



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'Everywhere in Saudi Arabia, you see a cultural revolution:' Ex-French Minister Jack Lang Arab World Institute honors poet Al-Juraifani