

# Turkey's pro-government papers closing down

Author:

Thu, 2020-01-02 01:39

ANKARA: Pro-government Turkish media outlets are closing since the election of a new Istanbul mayor in June, with two surprise shutdowns earlier this week.

Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu, from the secular main opposition Republican People's Party, took the reins from President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) which, along with its Islamist predecessors, had run the city for the last 25 years.

Newspapers published by the pro-government TurkMedya group were largely financed by Istanbul's metropolitan municipality for decades until the city changed hands, with Imamoglu stopping their funding for impartiality reasons.

Gunes and Star, two TurkMedya newspapers, shut in a surprise decision on Monday, and pro-government outlets make up the bulk of Turkish media.

TurkMedya was said to receive about TRY10 million (\$1.68 million) a month from the municipality under AKP rule, but has been facing serious financial challenges since local elections, and had to close some of its newspaper supplements.

Sarphan Uzunoglu, a media and communications specialist and editor-in-chief at the digital journalism academy NewsLabTurkey, said it was unsurprising that pro-government media outlets were experiencing financial problems.

"Massive purchases by local governments were their primary sources of income," he told Arab News, adding that the shutdowns backed industry rumors that circulation rates were manipulated.

"If you observe the change in the daily circulation of the pro-government Star newspaper between Dec. 2019 and Dec. 2018 you can see there is no significant change, it is still around 100,000 copies per day. In other words, there is no setback that could justify such a dramatic change in the circulation rate," he said. "Turkey's currency crisis is deeply affecting the media industry and all types of media outlets, including the ones which report higher circulation rates, suffer from high paper prices and regular costs. Advertisers do not trust the media anymore primarily due to a meltdown of trust and the lack of clarity regarding the truthfulness of circulation rates."

Uzunoglu said most Turkish newspapers would have died without official advertisements as was the case with the independent and left-leaning newspapers Evrensel and Birgun, which announced they were experiencing hardship because income from official adverts had dried up for months.

“What is more tragic is that, despite the financial resources granted by official and corporate advertisements, pro-government media outlets cannot provide sustainability, and we will hear more news outlets going digital in the coming months due to the financial and democratic crisis of Turkey,” he said.

But he said the products from pro-government media outlets were problematic in themselves.

“These outlets do not meet the expectations of the audience and they have lost the trust of their audience. These newsrooms cannot address society as a product nor as an ideological instrument. This shows that these newsrooms, both politically and commercially, are at the end of the road.”

Orhan Sener, director of the academy at the Journalists’ Union of Turkey, said the downsizing of pro-government papers was a turning point.

“The closure of these media outlets, which have served as a propaganda instrument for the government rather than real journalism, is beneficial for the media sector and public good of the country, except for the unemployment of staff working for them,” he told Arab News.

He said that the shutdowns showed that no outlet could survive in the long-term if they proved to be inefficient and if their sole purpose was to serve as a propaganda instrument for the government.

“They have been a burden in economic and political terms. Government sources couldn’t afford to finance them after the local elections,” he added.



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Turkey newspaper staff provisionally freed as pressure grows for journalists  
New Year nightclub attacker caught in Istanbul, say Turkish media

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## [Hope, grief for Somali family hit by bomb blast](#)

Author:

Thu, 2020-01-02 01:24

MOGADISHU: As wounded men screaming for their mothers were brought into a Mogadishu hospital after a huge truck bomb blast on Saturday, doctors fought to save eight month-old Mohammed Hassan, whose mother was already dead.

The baby had lost too much blood to cry, but on Tuesday, hooked up to oxygen tubes and IV and swathed in bandages – he flexed his uninjured hand, sending a waterfall of tears coursing down the cheeks of his father, Somali farmer

Abdi Abukar Hassan.

"Oh thank God," Hassan exclaimed as his son moved for the first time after his right arm was shredded and his back torn by shrapnel in the bombing, which killed at least 90 people and wounded dozens at a bustling checkpoint. "Look, he is alive now, please let's recite the Qur'an over him!"

Somalia's Al-Qaeda-linked Al-Shabab insurgency claimed the bombing, saying it was directed at Turkish engineers and their government-provided security detail. In a rare admission, the group acknowledged civilian casualties but said they had been "unintentional."

Al-Shabab wants to overthrow the UN-backed but weak government in Mogadishu. The conflict is complicated by layers of clan loyalties and rivalries between regional powers like Qatar and Turkey, which are jostling for power in the Horn of Africa nation.

On Wednesday, Hassan thanked the Turkish-run Erdogan Hospital for its free treatment, saying nurses had told him the oxygen and intravenous tubes would be removed from his baby and he may open his eyes later in the day.

Two Turkish nationals were killed in the explosion, which took place as Turkish engineers visited a construction site near the checkpoint.

Mohamed's grandmother had left her tin shack to help the baby and his mother onto a minibus when the bomb went off. Mohamed's mother was killed instantly.

His grandmother, wounded in the legs, staggered toward the family's home, clutching him and screaming for help before she collapsed.

A neighbor ran out, shoeless, and tried, unsuccessfully, to flag down motorbike taxis fleeing the scene before catching a minibus to the hospital, cradling the baby's bleeding arm attached by only a thin piece of skin. Hassan's aunt called him to break the news.

"My wife, Naimo Mohamud Jeylani, she was very kind. May God rest her soul and take her to paradise," said Hassan, as his six-year-old daughter Khadija and four-year-old Sadaq leaned silently against their father. "Thank God, my son is now moving. I am happy he is alive. Yesterday, I thought he was dead'."



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Somalia's Al-Shabab extremists claim deadly bombing Somalia forces kill 5 rebels who attacked president's house

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## [Algeria's richest man walks free after 8 months in prison](#)

Author:

Thu, 2020-01-02 01:20

ALGIERS: Algeria's richest man Issad Rebrab walked free on time served early on Wednesday after a court sentenced him to six months for tax, banking and customs offenses.

Prosecutors had sought a one-year prison sentence for the 74-year-old head of Algeria's biggest privately owned conglomerate Cevital, who was one of several tycoons arrested in April as part of a sweeping corruption investigation.

The probe followed the resignation of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika after

weeks of mass protests against his 20-year rule.

Rebrab had already spent eight months in custody awaiting trial, more than his sentence, so he was released by the court.

He was fined 1.383 billion dinars (more than \$11.6 million, more than €10.3 million).

Cevital subsidiary Evcon was fined 2.766 billion dinars (€20.7 million). Jordan-based Housing Bank for Trade and Finance, which was also prosecuted, was fined 3.169 billion dinars (€23.7 million).

They were convicted of breaking laws on foreign exchange and fund transfers as well as forgery and false custom declarations.

Forbes magazine lists Rebrab as Algeria's richest man and the sixth-wealthiest in Africa, with a net worth of \$3.9 billion in 2019.

Cevital employs 18,000 people, produces electronics, steel and food, and in recent years it has acquired businesses in France.

While his businesses flourished under Bouteflika's rule, Rebrab had backed the protests that ultimately forced the president to resign in April.

His company has said it was "astonished" by his arrest.



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Algerians protest despite day of mourning for army chief

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## Yemen government calls on World Bank, IMF to end Houthi banknote ban

Author:

Wed, 2020-01-01 23:46

AL-MUKALLA, Yemen: The internationally recognized government of Yemen has sent letters to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, urging them to pressure the Iran-backed Houthis to revoke their ban on the recently-printed banknotes.

The government said that Houthis ban has caused nation-wide economical repercussions including the fall of the currency and the stop of salaries.

"We have told them that Houthi decision would have destructive impact on the national currency," a senior government official told Arab News on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the press, adding that the government turned to the international monetary funds after running out of options to stop Houthis.

"We have no authority over them. The only thing we can do is raising the issue to the international community," the official said.

Houthis have recently banned local traders from trading with banknotes that were recently printed by the central bank in Aden. People under Houthi-controlled areas were given a month to swap their notes with the old ones or replace them with Houthi-initiated electronic riyal.

The Yemeni government said that Houthis, who facing multiple battlefields, aimed to absorb cash from the market to fund their military efforts and other activities.

"Their aim is socking up liquidity from the market and divert it to their military activities. This is a dangerous decision that would leave bad mark on everyone including those who live in liberated areas," the government official said.

Not trusting Houthi procedures, traders said they sent their cash to government-controlled areas such as Marib city, where they replaced their new notes with the old one.

If Houthis-controlled continued confiscating the currency, the Yemeni official warned, the government might be forced into printing more money or a face cash crunch. "We do not want to restore to this option as it would cause

inflation," the official said.

On Wednesday, Yemeni riyal continued to plunge, hovering around 610 to the dollar in the port city of Aden after falling from 602 over the weekend. Finance ministry in Aden said on Tuesday that Houthi ban has obstructed paying public servants in Houthi-controlled areas as local banks refused to disperse salaries due to lack of cash.

In a statement broadcast on the national TV, the ministry held Houthis responsible for disrupting salaries, saying 175,000 government employees would not be able to receive salaries and it would resume paying salaries when rebels revoke the decision.

Similarly, the central bank in Aden warned local companies from complying with Houthi ban or electronic riyal, saying recent regulations by the branch of the central bank in Sana'a are illegal, vowing to take action against local companies that deal with Houthi electronic riyal. In Sana'a, Houthis issued a statement warning traders against complying with calls for civil disobedience in their territories, saying shops and companies that shut down operations on Wednesday were doing their annual count.

Politically, analysts in Yemen think Houthis initiated the ban on the recently printed notes to show they are still politically and economically powerful and can made trouble to the government in Aden.

"This comes in the context of their attempt to show they are in control of the economy and have a say on the central bank decisions," Yasser Al Yafae, a political analyst based in Aden told Arab News on Wednesday.

"They escalated military activities and imposed a ban on the new banknotes to demonstrate they have not been weakened by fighting or economical decisions such as relocation of the central bank to Aden."





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Yemen officials: Houthi militia ban on banknotes stops gov't salaries Traders threaten strike in Houthi-controlled Yemen as rebels ban currency

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## [How GCC countries are forging a food-secure future](#)

Wed, 2020-01-01 23:21

DUBAI: For all their futuristic skylines, multi-lane highways and lushly landscaped public parks, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and other GCC countries cannot overcome a fundamental geographical disadvantage: They are marginal environments.

Marginal environments are areas of the world characterized by high temperatures, poor soil quality and low annual rainfall, and regarded as most vulnerable to water scarcity, salinity and climate change.

Across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, marginal environments are at a huge disadvantage when it comes to producing food due to soil-fertility decline, salinization of soil and water resources, population growth, and climate change.

The good news is that geography is not destiny. GCC countries are pioneering and leveraging agricultural technology to overcome the handicap of their desert ecosystem and increase their domestic supplies of food.

With the increasing incorporation of technology in agriculture, the hope is that marginal environments will one day be able to produce high food yields with minimal resources.

As Mariam Almheiri, the UAE minister of state for food security, noted while addressing the Global Forum on Innovations for Marginal Environments held recently in Dubai, "Today, 1.7 billion people live in marginal environments, including 70 percent of the world's poorest, and it is increasing."

The conference, which brought together 250 decision-makers, scientists and experts in agriculture and food production, heard that many of the already extreme harsh conditions faced by marginal environments may become worse in the near future due to prolonged droughts and extreme temperatures linked to climate change.

"Many of these regions will experience large population growth," Almheiri said. "But solutions to addressing this are now on the horizon. Breakthroughs in technology and bioscience in marginal environments now mean these areas can offer promise."

According to Ayman Sejiny, general manager and CEO of the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) in Saudi Arabia, poverty and food insecurity are endemic in the bank's member states on account of socioeconomic, institutional, environmental and technical hindrances to their agricultural development.

"About a third of the 850 million food-insecure people globally are in IsDB member countries," Sejiny said, adding that the IsDB "invested significantly in agriculture and rural development in the past – and will continue to do so."

Since its inception in 1975, IsDB has funded about 1,000 agriculture and rural development projects, worth a combined \$12bn and accounting for about 12 percent of its total investments.

"But \$1.4 trillion still needs to be invested, and we recognize that the public sector will not be able to find this money on its own. So we have invested in the value chain to support food security," Sejiny explained. "People are getting educated about what's really needed."

IsDB plans to launch ambitious programs to help develop national, regional and global value chains, Sejiny said, adding that global population growth calls for transformative action that can increase productivity and link farmers to sustainable markets.

“Our member countries – which include Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Pakistan and Morocco – have enormous potential for feeding the world and influencing global agricultural value chains,” he said.



Food experts are calling for more technological investment to help feed the growing population. (AFP)

“Together, these 57 countries account for 29 percent of the world’s total agricultural areas and up to 15 percent of the world’s food production, including cereals, horticulture, livestock, fishery and forestry resources.”

The IsDB’s objectives include boosting self-sufficiency by 10 percent, increasing crop yield to five tons per hectare, and improving the livelihood of more than two million farmers and their families.

“If we want to confront climate change and feed the growing world population, we must invest in science, technology and innovation (STI). Greater deployment of STI in agricultural programs for food security would require increased private-sector engagement and stronger public institutional support.”

The International Center for Biosaline Agriculture (ICBA) in Dubai is a leader in conducting applied research to improve agricultural productivity and sustainability in marginal and saline environments.

With an estimated 2,000 hectares of farm soil lost globally every day to salt-induced degradation, the urgency of research, innovation and development in agriculture and food production in marginal environments cannot be overemphasized.

“Increasing droughts pose a serious threat to food production in marginal environments,” said Dr. Ismahane Elouafi, director general of the ICBA. “Farmers feel it much more because they are dependent on that water. What we have today as arable land will most probably change over time. Four billion people are water-scarce and this (number) will grow.”

Noting that just three crops – wheat, maize (corn) and rice – provide nearly 60 percent of total plant calories that humans consume, Elouafi said: “Globally, nine plant species account for 66 percent of total crop production. But the planet is full of plant species, of which 30,000 are edible and 6,000 are cultivated for food.”

The way forward, in her view, is a diversification of agricultural production systems.

Elouafi said that, considering that two billion children are malnourished today and 88 percent of countries face two or three forms of serious malnutrition, a diet transition is vital for the planet and for the human race.

“It is happening, but we see it much more in the north, where people are consuming quinoa and kale,” she said, adding that production of such crops needs to be scaled up and introduced in the south, “where they are needed the most.”

“We are trying to do that, by talking about other crops which are very nutritious, such as millet, quinoa and barley.”

The problems outlined by Elouafi do not, of course, comprise the entirety of the global food challenge. According to Dr. Nina Fedoroff, emeritus professor of biology at Penn State University, smarter agriculture technologies will be needed going forward as food demand is expected to double by 2050 to keep pace with population growth.

“Farm machinery increasingly does everything from planting to harvesting,” she said. “But we can only go so far with technology and we can’t grow our rain crops under glass. We need biology – and genetics – for marginal environments.”

She said that the introduction of insect-resistant crops and gene technology will be key to achieving sustainability in food production. “We don’t have the luxury of millennia to come up with the crops of the future, so we need the modern tools of genetic modification,” Fedoroff said. “Genetically modified crops have been adopted by farmers faster than any in the history of humanity – roughly 18 million farmers in 26 countries. We don’t have the luxury of time because of climate change.”

Gene editing will play a crucial role, Fedoroff said, despite people’s fears and inadequate research.

“We need all of the techniques of genetics, from domestication to plant breeding to the most modern genetic-modification techniques,” she said. “Countries must address the politics of modern molecular genetics, including public acceptance and developing an appropriate regulatory framework, which is not an easy task.”

Fedoroff said none of this can happen without seriously boosting investment in modernizing agricultural research facilities, adding: “There are extraordinary opportunities for this in Africa and the Middle East.”

In this regard, the ICBA is doing its bit by expanding its work with the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (Ifad), besides the IsDB, said Elouafi.

“More areas around the world will turn marginal due to climate change and other factors,” she said. “Resources are the most vulnerable to climate change, so we have to protect them, address the challenges facing people in marginal environments, and diversify crops. But we can only do that through partnership. We need to plan and act together.

“We can’t do it with one hand, we all have to clap together and work together.”



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Innovations, food security take spotlight at Riyadh agriculture expo