

# Turkish journalist's fingers broken in street mob attack

Author:

Tue, 2021-03-09 22:36

ANKARA: Turkish journalist Levent Gultekin has been attacked by a 25-strong group of people following his recent criticisms of the late politician and founder of the country's Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), Alparslan Turkes.

Rights activists and opposition figures on Tuesday called on the Turkish government to name the perpetrators of the assault, which took place in a busy Istanbul street and came in the wake of several similar attacks which had so far gone unpunished.

The freeing of a number of prisoners last year under an amnesty law was slammed for allowing the release of ultra-nationalist far-right gangs – known as the Gray Wolves and banned in several European countries – back into communities.

An investigation has been launched into the assault on Gultekin, which was caught on a security camera near Halk TV, an opposition channel where he was heading to take part in a program. The writer was left with broken fingers.

“These 25 people are probably proud of themselves. I would be very embarrassed if I were them. Attacking one person as a group of 25 people is banditry,” Gultekin said on Halk TV.

And he told Arab News: “I was a bit anxious, but I wasn't expecting an assault of such scale. Turkey's rule of law is under severe strain and those who have close ties with the rulers enjoy immunity.”

Last week, Gultekin criticized Turkes for having spread racism in the country, sparking a social media backlash from several senior members of the MHP.

Separately, MHP deputy leader, Semih Yalcin, called Gultekin “a sick man, an enemy of the Turks, and a separatist who hates those the nation loves, slanders those it values, attempts to defame those it respects, and slams the reputable with hatred and enmity.”

Last year, Yalcin also criminalized the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party by defining its members as “a flock of insects that need to be exterminated.”

The MHP is currently a political ally to Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) for holding the parliamentary majority.

Berk Esen, a political scientist from Sabanci University in Istanbul, told Arab News: “In a worrisome manner, political violence has increased in recent months, due to the ruling bloc's harsh language and retributive policies against its opponents. While growing repression is felt more widely,

journalists have especially been hard hit by this autocratization process in the country.”

In January, simultaneous attacks by nationalistic gangs were carried out in the capital city Ankara against individuals critical of the MHP, including opposition politicians and dissident journalists.

“Although such attacks are carried out in crowded city centers, the perpetrators have either not been caught or released immediately, leading many commentators to think that they have tacit support from the state authorities.

“Due to the politicization of the judicial system, there is little accountability for crimes committed against government critics,” Esen said.

Kemal Kilicdaroglu, the leader of the main opposition CHP, was recently warned to “watch his step” by Alaattin Cakici, a notorious mafia leader politically affiliated with the MHP.

Gultekin said: “This attack doesn’t only target me. Nobody’s life is secure in Turkey. Some 67 women were murdered in the first 65 days of 2021. The rules aim to oblige people for respecting a social order. But when you remove that wall of law, all the evil is also set free.

“As dissident journalists, we are talking and writing for objecting against the wrongdoings. We cannot remain silent and such attacks cannot silence us at all as long as we are willing to live in a better country with more democracy and more freedom of speech,” he added.

Esen noted that there appeared to be a rift within the ruling bloc between the AKP and MHP when it came to state critics.

“The MHP leadership has openly criticized dissident journalists, who were subsequently attacked on the street. Meanwhile, government authorities have openly criticized such attacks on dissidents, preferring to use more subtle mechanisms to weaken the opposition, including long prosecutions and direct pressure on media organs,” he said.



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## [Schools in Jordan closed again amid surge in COVID-19 cases](#)

Author:

Tue, 2021-03-09 21:56

AMMAN: Only a month after schools in Jordan began to reopen, authorities announced on Tuesday that they will be closed again from Wednesday until further notice.

There has been a surge in COVID-19 cases in the country and officials had previously warned that precautionary measures would be strengthened should the disease continue to spread rapidly.

An additional 7,072 cases of the disease were confirmed on Tuesday, raising the total in the country to 442,202. A further 59 people died of conditions related to COVID-19, bringing the death toll to 5,046.

Schools in Jordan began to reopen on Feb. 7 after a nationwide shutdown imposed at the height of the pandemic last year. A gradual resumption of in-person teaching was planned, with kindergarteners returning first, followed by first graders and general secondary (Tawjihi) students, then other grades by March 7. However the second phase was put on hold by authorities who said that high numbers of students and teachers had contracted the virus and spread it to their families.

Jordan, which launched a national vaccination drive in mid-January, has said it initially plans to vaccinate 20 percent of its 10 million population. However progress has been slow, with authorities blaming a lack of vaccine doses.

Minister of Health Nathir Obeidat said that Jordan, in common with many other countries, is facing difficulties in obtaining sufficient amounts of the vaccines, but that more supplies will be delivered this month under contracts with pharmaceutical companies and the World Health Organization's COVAX program. COVAX aims to ensure people in all nations, including developing and middle-income countries, have fair access to vaccines.

In January Prime Minister Bisher Al-Khasawneh told the Jordanian parliament that the government had signed a deal to buy 1 million doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine, and secured an additional 2 million doses through COVAX, with talks under way to obtain more.



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COVID-19 precaution: Jordan limits number of workers in government offices  
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# Israel, Cyprus agree framework for settling offshore gas dispute

Author:

Reuters

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Tue, 2021-03-09 12:46

NICOSIA: Israel and Cyprus have reached an understanding over gas reserves straddling their maritime border, the Cypriot energy minister said on Tuesday, in a key step toward resolving a nine-year impasse over offshore spoils.

Development of the Aphrodite gas field in Cypriot waters has been held up because a small part of it stretches into Israel's maritime zone and another gasfield there. The Cypriot field was first discovered in 2011.

Cypriot energy minister Natasa Pilides said she and her Israeli counterpart Yuval Steinitz had agreed upon a framework to resolve the issue, and guidelines would be passed on to the companies involved in the project.

"The framework will be set out in a joint letter which is being prepared. We are both very satisfied we are now at this point after nine years of discussion," Pilides told reporters as Steinitz, who was in Cyprus to sign a memorandum of understanding on another project, prepared to depart the island.

Steinitz said there was a 'fair chance' of an eventual resolution. "Nothing is certain, but there is a good chance that this might lead us to a solution of this little but significant obstacle in the wonderful relations and cooperation between Cyprus and Israel on energy and on many other issues," he said in comments carried by the semi-official Cyprus News Agency.

Cyprus had in 2019 signed a 25-year concession with Noble Energy, Shell and Delek Drilling for exploitation of the Aphrodite field.

Israel had maintained an agreement was required before work started because part of Aphrodite overlapped on to the Israeli side.

The Aphrodite field holds an estimated 4.1 trillion cubic feet of gas. At stake was about 10% of the deposit, which is a fraction of the gas already discovered in Israel.

Cyprus, Israel and Greece on Monday signed an accord to create a subsea power cable which will cross the Mediterranean and link their electricity grids.



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[Yuval Steinitz](#)

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## [Tunisia set to receive first coronavirus jabs](#)

Author:

AFP

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Mon, 2021-03-08 23:30

Tunis – Mass inoculation in Tunisia starts on Tuesday when the first

coronavirus vaccines arrive in the North African nation using Russia's Sputnik V jabs.

Initially 30,000 doses are due to arrive Tuesday from Russia, followed by 500,000 doses "in coming weeks" said a presidency statement citing "constant diplomatic efforts" to procure them.

Being amongst the last North African nations to start vaccinations, Tunisia has some 11.7 million inhabitants and has recorded 237,704 Covid-19 cases including 8,201 deaths since the pandemic began.

The government had previously announced it was expecting an initial 94,000 doses of Pfizer/BioNTech and AstraZeneca/Oxford jabs from mid-February, but delivery under the UN-led Covax scheme was delayed. Beijing last month also pledged to gift 100,000 doses.

A vaccination campaign is expected to begin in coming days.

Lockdown measures remain in place, although rules have been eased slightly, with an overnight curfew now starting at 10:00 pm instead of 8:00 pm.

For travelers, mandatory quarantine at a hotel has been replaced by self-isolation at home for 48 hours.



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**[No country for minorities: The agony](#)**

# of Iran's ethnic Arabs, Kurds, Balochis and Azeris

Mon, 2021-03-08 22:56

WASHINGTON D.C.: Iran's persecution of political dissidents has been well documented. But the popular conception of the "Iranian people" tends to privilege the grievances of Shiite Muslims and Persian speakers over those of ethnic minorities. Prominence is invariably given to events in Tehran and other urban areas at the expense of happenings in remote provinces.

Overall, non-Persian ethnic groups in Iran make up around 50 percent of the population, yet they are overwhelmingly marginalized.

In recent years, the regime in Tehran and its enablers in the West have assiduously pushed the narrative that the US is the oppressor and the "Iranian people" are the victim. But frequently the narrative is punctured when protests by Iran's oppressed ethnic minorities spin out of control, such as the violent protests that recently rocked the country's impoverished southeast.

Several rights groups reported in a joint statement that authorities shut down the mobile data network in Sistan and Balochistan province, calling the disruptions an apparent "tool to conceal" the government's harsh crackdown on protests convulsing the area.

Outraged over the shootings of fuel smugglers trying to cross back into Iran from Pakistan, local people had attacked the district governor's office and stormed two police stations in the city of Saravan.

A low-level insurgency in Sistan and Balochistan involves several militant groups, including those demanding more autonomy for the region. The relationship between its predominantly Sunni Baloch residents and Iran's Shiite theocracy has long been tense.

Since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, ethnic Kurds, Arabs and Balochis have faced particularly harsh crackdowns by regime security forces. Consequently, more than 40 years on, provinces such as Khuzestan, Kurdistan and Sistan and Balochistan remain some of the most unstable and least developed parts of Iran.





Provinces such as Khuzestan, Kurdistan and Sistan and Balochistan remain some of the most unstable and least developed parts of Iran. (AFP)

Authorities typically claim they are fighting “terrorism” and “extremism” when justifying executions, arbitrary detentions and the use of live ammunition against protesting minorities. Even the most benign of dissident activities – like running a social media page critical of the regime – can carry the death penalty.

“It is a well-known fact that discrimination in Iran is institutionalized through the constitution,” Abdul Sattar Doshouki, director of the London-based Center for Balochistan Studies, said in a report submitted to the UN Human Rights Council Forum on Minority Issues.

“The Iranian regime’s policy in Sistan and Balochistan, and for that matter in other provinces too, is based on racial discrimination, assimilation, linguistic discrimination, religious prejudice and inequality, brutal oppression, deprivation and exclusion of the people who are the majority in their own respective provinces and regions.”

Baloch activists have repeatedly called on the international community and regional powers to press the Iranian government to end its systemic policy of harassment and imprisonment of their local leaders.



The 2018 attack on a military parade in Ahvaz highlighted growing resentment among minority groups at Tehran's repressive tactics. (AFP)

Ahvazi Arabs, the largest Arab community in Iran, face similar repression. Natives of Khuzestan, they live in extreme poverty, despite the region

holding almost 80 percent of Iran's hydrocarbon resources.

The province has never had an Arab governor and the majority of its top officials are Persians with close ties to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). The official language is Persian; Arabic is not taught in schools.

On Tuesday, the Ahwaz Human Rights Organization reported the execution of four additional political prisoners in the infamous Sepidar prison. Among the few who avoided such a fate is Saleh Hamid, an Ahwazi Arab cultural and political activist who was detained by Iranian authorities in the early 2000s for allegedly distributing anti-regime propaganda.

According to the account he gave to the US-based Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC), Hamid traveled to Syria to enroll at the University of Damascus, where he joined the university's Ahwazi Arab Students' Association.

Hamid said the student group primarily promoted Ahwazi Arab culture, but he believes he was identified as a subversive by Syrian intelligence because he was detained at Imam Khomeini airport upon his return from vacation.

He was released after four days but rearrested by plainclothes officers at his father's home in Ahvaz. Hamid spent two months in the IRGC's detention center in Chaharshir before being released on bail. He fled the country before his trial date.

Hamid believes Tehran's policy of persecution is designed to wipe out any ethnic identities that cannot be subsumed under the Islamic Republic's hegemonic ideology. He says the international community, particularly European powers keen to preserve the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, should make the protection of minorities a precondition of any trade agreements with the regime.

"Human rights in Iran are a victim of negotiations on the nuclear file and trade between the EU and Iran," Hamid told Arab News. "When they negotiate, they forget human rights, about the suppression and crackdown. We want human rights cases to be one of the main negotiating points with the regime. There is discrimination in all fields. If you ask an Arab citizen in Iran if he's benefited from the oil, they'll tell you 'nothing but smoke'."

Iranian Azerbaijanis, who make up at least 16 percent of the country's population, are another minority group with a long list of grievances. Although Shiites, many Azeris are viewed by the IRGC with suspicion because of their cultural and linguistic affinities with Turks, in addition to the sense of ethnic kinship they feel with the people of neighboring Azerbaijan.

Proof of the political alienation of Iranian Azerbaijanis came most recently in the form of protests in the northern city of Tabriz during the war between Azerbaijan and Armenia that ended in November. They were angry at Tehran for reportedly sending weapons through its overland border to Armenia for use against Azerbaijan.

Iranian Azeris who speak of their home region as “Guney Azerbaijan,” or south Azerbaijan, are also not allowed to use their mother tongue in educational institutions. Many of them have come to view “reunification” of their historical region with Azerbaijan as the only solution.

The IRGC recently detained and savagely beat an Iranian Azerbaijani activist, Yashar Piri, for writing graffiti demanding greater language rights. The courage shown by Piri was remarkable given that detention, torture or arbitrary execution is the fate that awaits minority-rights activists.

“Persecution of religious minorities is one of the main pillars of this regime,” Masih Alinejad, an Iranian journalist and activist, told Arab News.



Overseas Ahwazis have lobbied governments to take action. (AP)

“For the past 42 years now, the regime has not refrained from resorting to arresting, persecuting, executing and confiscating the properties of these minorities. These minorities have been barred from realizing their full potential and have had limited employment opportunities.

“Sunni Muslim minorities like the Kurds and the Balochis have not fared any better. The regions inhabited by these minorities are some of the poorest and most under-invested by the regime, and these minorities are overrepresented in the execution statistics of the Islamic Republic of Iran. These regions are so poor that many people have to resort to cross-border smuggling of goods in order to eke out a living and feed their families.”

This is certainly the case for Iran’s northwestern Kurds, who make up around 10 percent of the overall population. Concentrated predominantly in the provinces of West Azerbaijan, Kermanshah, Kurdistan and Ilam, many young Kurdish men make a living carrying goods on their backs across the perilous mountain passes of the Zagros into Iraq’s northern Kurdish region.

Known as kolbars, those who survive the bitter cold and sheer drops must also

navigate vast minefields and trigger-happy IRGC border guards.

Like other minorities in Iran, Kurds are not permitted to learn their native tongue on the national curriculum. Suspected membership of one of the many Kurdish opposition groups operating along the border also carries the death penalty.

Activists say the terror of executions and the threat of demographic displacement that Iran's minorities face should be recognized for what they are: crimes against humanity.

They note with dismay that the economic, social and political exclusion of Iran's ethnic and religious minorities never figures in the diplomatic discourse surrounding the nuclear issue and the IRGC's regional meddling.

In the final analysis, the activists point out, the defiance of Iran's minority communities, who are determined to hold on to their identity and traditions, constitutes a much needed check on the absolutism of the Shiite theocracy.

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