

# Turkey releases 3 journalists accused of revealing state secrets

Thu, 2020-06-25 20:58

ANKARA: In a surprise move, Turkey on Wednesday released three journalists charged with revealing state secrets in their coverage of the deaths of Turkish intelligence officers in Libya.

However, three others were remanded in custody while they stand trial on charges of revealing the identities of two members of Turkey's intelligence agency.

The high-profile case, with the defendants facing up to 19 years in jail, has been closely monitored by domestic and international press freedom groups following the arrest of the journalists four months ago.

The journalists who appeared in court on Wednesday worked for media outlets supporting the political views of the Turkish opposition, ranging from ultra-nationalists to pro-Kurdish and socialist segments.

Baris Terkoglu, Ferhat Celik and Aydin Keser were released from prison following the court decision, while the other three defendants will remain in jail until the next hearing, which is set for Sept. 9.

"This trial should not exist since the indictment fails to prove its claim of conspiracy by the journalists," said Ozgur Ogret, Turkish representative for the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ).

"But since it exists, all the defendants should have been released on Wednesday to be tried without arrest," he told Arab News.

Another source of controversy was the identity of the intelligence officer being leaked – before any media reports – by an opposition MP, Umit Ozdag, during a parliamentary speech.

Baris Pehlivan, one of the three journalists still behind bars, said during his defense that the group are victims of a "political operation" that was held through the "funeral ceremony of the martyr."

Ogret said the arrest of the journalists was "potentially deadly" because of the pandemic.

"No journalist should be in prison for reporting at any time, but jailing journalists now is a risk to their health and possibly life," he said.

In a report on June 10, the US-based Center for American Progress said that Turkey's censorship "is rapidly reshaping how Turks get their news, with major implications for Turkish foreign policy, political polarization and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's rule."

When Twitter recently suspended more than 7,300 Turkish accounts, arguing that these were part of a network associated with the youth wing of the government, Ankara said in a harshly worded statement that these were attempts to “redesign Turkish politics.”

The government also accused Twitter of acting as a “propaganda machine” with a political agenda.

Meanwhile, Turkey’s court of appeal on June 23 upheld a nine-year prison sentence given to Canan Kaftancıoğlu, the Istanbul chair of Turkey’s main opposition party, over anti-government tweets she posted seven years ago.

Renan Akyavas, Turkey program coordinator at the Vienna-based International Press Institute, said the Turkish government has been suppressing media outlets for a long time.

“Especially when it comes to the most topical and sensitive issues in Turkey’s agenda, journalists from all sides of the political spectrum have been targeted by authorities. The release of three journalists yesterday is at best only the smallest hint of ‘justice,’ given that the other three remain in prison for at least another two months,” she told Arab News.

Akyavas added that the journalists should not have been jailed for reporting on a topic in the public interest.

“A known fact already in the public domain cannot be criminalized. The right thing here would be to drop all charges against these journalists without delay,” she said.

Akyavas said that public pressure on individual cases can influence institutions and decision-makers, “even though the overall landscape on media freedom is still in a terrible state.”



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Committee to Protect Journalists slams Turkey over media rights Turkey jailing more journalists than any other country: Report

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## [Dubai police arrest Instagram 'stars' behind Dh1.6bn international online fraud scam](#)

Thu, 2020-06-25 20:41

DUBAI: Dubai Police have arrested 12 cybercriminals, including Instagram celebrities "Hushpuppi" and "Woodberry," on allegations of fraud involving 1.6 billion dirhams (\$435 million).

Police said the suspects were arrested in a special operation dubbed "Fox Hunt 2" that revealed a hidden online fraud network that was committing crimes outside the UAE.

The crimes include money-laundering, cyber fraud, hacking, criminal impersonating and scamming individuals, police said Thursday.

Those arrested included Raymond Abbas – known on Instagram as "Hushpuppi" – and Olalekan Jacob Ponle, who goes by the social media name Woodbery. They were arrested with 10 other suspects on allegations of fraud involving large sums of money.

[.@DubaiPoliceHQ](#) take down "Hushpuppi", "Woodberry", ten international cybercriminals in a special operation dubbed "Fox Hunt 2" [pic.twitter.com/SGwhxDWrE8](https://pic.twitter.com/SGwhxDWrE8)

– Dubai Media Office (@DXBMediaOffice) [June 25, 2020](#)

Police said they seized more than 150 million dirhams in cash and confiscated 13 luxury cars. They released a video detailing how the arrest took place. The gang is accused of creating websites that look identical to those of well-known companies and banks. Through these platforms, people were deceived to send emails and messages that prompted them to log in or transfer payments to the gang's bank accounts.

Hushpuppi often posts pictures on social media with his luxury cars including a Ferrari and Rolls Royce and a private jet.

“The team has started to track the gang including Hushpuppi, who celebrated his wealth via social media platforms, under a businessman facade, in an attempt to lure victims from all over the world,” Brig. Jamal Salem Al Jallaf, Director of Criminal Investigation Department (CID) at Dubai Police, said.

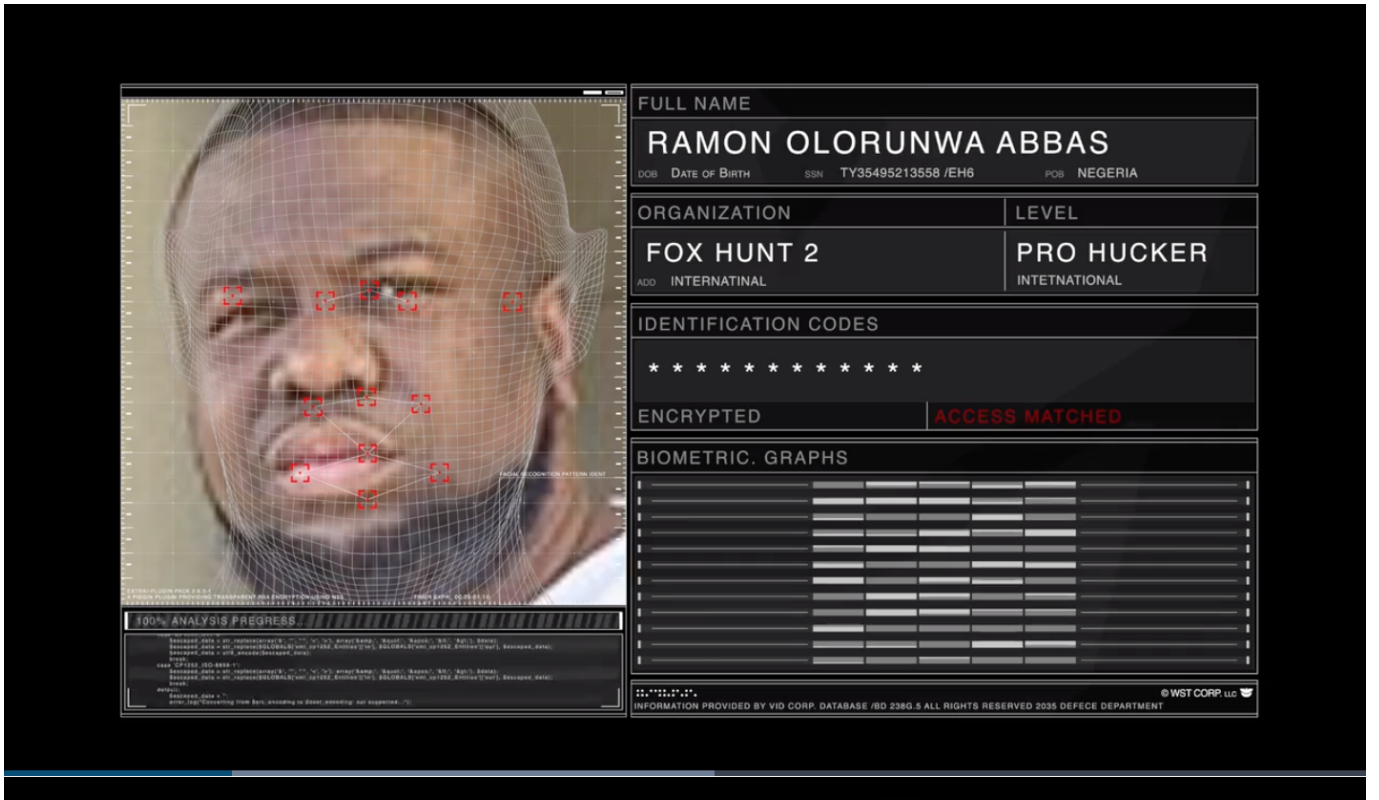
“They were designing and mimicking company and bank websites to steal credit card data and illegally obtain victims’ money before laundering the cash,” he added.

Woodberry was also arrested along with 10 other men in an operation that involved six police teams.

The suspects were caught in a series of synchronized raids by six SWAT teams.

Police confiscated 13 luxury cars, valued at about 25 million dirhams, 21 computers and 47 smartphones during the raid.





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# 'Important parallels' between US, Arab protests: Expert

Thu, 2020-06-25 19:22

LONDON: There are "important parallels" between mass protests in the Arab world and those in the US, as well as "lessons to be drawn" from them, journalist and author Sam Dagher said on Thursday during a webinar attended by Arab News and hosted by the Council for Arab-British Understanding.

However, "the context and circumstances are very different," and "the responsiveness of the system and institutions to the protests are vastly different," said Dagher, author of the book "Assad or We Burn the Country: How One Family's Lust for Power Destroyed Syria."

The main parallels, he added, are that the protests are mostly youth-led, decentralized and leaderless.

Dagher also cited similarities in slogans, protestor tactics of occupying streets and blocking roads, and the "war of narratives" between demonstrators and the government.

In the US, underlying the killing of George Floyd were "inequality, the militarization of policing and law enforcement that often sees communities of color as the enemy, the systematic poverty and huge wealth gap between blacks and other minorities and white Americans, and one of the highest rates of incarceration in the world that affects black people disproportionately," he said.

"Obviously each Arab country had its own circumstances and varying degrees of oppression, but overall the underlying causes were pretty much similar," he added.

The causes include "lack of justice, lack of dignity, the system serving the rulers and their cronies, poverty, lack of economic opportunities, corruption on every level coloring every facet of people's lives, the opportunities and rights that average citizens have depending on their proximity to power, and people muzzled and oppressed for decades by different means, including brutal police-state apparatuses."

While violence is apparent in both regions, the Arab world has seen more protestor deaths, with Iraq alone registering over 700 between November 2019 and January 2020.

"Obviously there were no shoot-to-kill orders in the US, but we all saw the extreme violence that was deployed in some cities to quell the protests," said Dagher.

"The National Guard was deployed, and even (President Donald) Trump was contemplating sending in combat troops, active-duty troops – as happened in several Arab countries – before he was restrained by retired generals and the

Pentagon itself at some point.”

But the “biggest and most important difference” between the two regions “is that the system is responsive in America, at least so far. A month into these protests, we’re seeing some important changes taking place,” said Dagher.

“For the first time, policemen are being accused of crimes, are being fired, are being imprisoned, are awaiting trial. They’re barring the chokehold from being used by police in many cities. They’re talking about even more reforms in some police departments. There’s talk of defunding the police, of moving money away from police to social services,” he added.

“Even now, the unthinkable, people are talking about reparations being paid to black Americans to compensate them for the enslavement and policies that have impoverished them over the decades,” Dagher said.

“We’re seeing an awakening, a real awakening, in America, the Middle East and other parts of the world. People are saying ‘we can’t go back to how things were,’ and I think coronavirus and its consequences are accelerating that process.”



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mourn George Floyd in Texas amid calls for reform

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## [Iraq hit with record-high COVID-19 deaths](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

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Thu, 2020-06-25 15:30

BAGHDAD: Iraq registered nearly 2,500 new coronavirus cases and over 100 deaths on Thursday, setting new records in a country whose health sector had been bracing itself for such a spike.

Hospitals across the country have been overwhelmed over the last week by a jump in cases and deaths, following months of the virus spreading relatively slowly.

On Thursday, the health ministry said it had confirmed 2,437 new cases over the last day, bringing the total in the country to over 39,000 – of whom about half have recovered.

Another 107 people died of coronavirus-related causes, pushing the total death toll to 1,437.

Iraq had so far considered itself spared as the virus spread in other regional countries, including in neighboring Iran where more than 10,000 have died.

But the Iraqi health sector has been worn down by years of war and poor investment and appears to be collapsing under the strain of the virus.

Doctors in coronavirus wards have complained of a lack of personal protective equipment, and say they have been made to keep working even if they showed symptoms of infection.

Tests are also still not widely available, with authorities conducting fewer than a half-million tests in March in a country of 40 million people.

China, the United Arab Emirates and the United States have all donated COVID-related aid to Iraq, which is also seeking emergency funding from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

Some of Iraq's 18 provinces have maintained full lockdowns, but most have eased restrictions to a nightly curfew in an effort to revive the local economy.

Many shops have reopened, with customers and staff alike declining to wear masks or observe social distancing.





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Long-dreaded virus increase hits Iraq as new cases soar Turkish strikes kill civilians in northern Iraq

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## [US imposes sanctions on companies operating in Iran's metals sector](#)

Thu, 2020-06-25 17:27

WASHINGTON: The United States on Thursday blacklisted four steel, aluminum and iron companies operating in Iran's metals sector, as well as sales agents of Iran's largest steel manufacturer it said generate tens of millions of dollars for Tehran's metals industry.

The Treasury Department said in a statement it imposed sanctions on Tara Steel Trading GmbH, a Germany-based subsidiary of Mobarakeh Steel Co, three sales agents majority owned by the steel company, and Iran-based Metil Steel.

The Treasury said the sales agents "generated tens of millions of dollars

annually from the foreign sale of Mobarakeh Steel Company products, providing significant contributions to the billions of dollars generated overall by Iran's steel, aluminum, copper, and iron sectors."

Mobarakeh Steel Co is the largest flat steel producer in the Middle East and North Africa and accounts for 1 percent of Iran's gross domestic product, the Treasury said. It has been designated by the United States under different authorities, including counterterrorism and for operating in Iran's metal sector.

Thursday's action also blacklisted three large aluminum, steel and iron producers in Iran, accusing them of contributing billions of dollars in sales and export of Iranian metals.

The sanctions freeze any US assets held by the companies and generally prohibit Americans from dealing with them.

Thursday's actions did not appear related to a Reuters report published on Wednesday disclosing Iran's production of aluminum powder for use in missiles.

"The Iranian regime continues to use profits from metals manufacturers and foreign sales agents to fund destabilizing behavior around the world," Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said in the statement.

Tensions between Washington and Tehran have spiked since Trump unilaterally withdrew in 2018 from the Iran nuclear deal struck by his predecessor, Barack Obama, and began reimposing sanctions that had been eased under the accord.



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