

Protests against jail sentences for journalists in Turkey

Author:

Thu, 2019-02-21 21:27

ISTANBUL: A group of lawyers on Thursday gathered outside Istanbul's main courthouse to protest against an appeal court's upholding the convictions of former journalists and executives from opposition daily Cumhuriyet.

The court on Tuesday confirmed jail sentences against 14 former Cumhuriyet staff including prominent journalists who are charged with "aiding and abetting terror groups without being a member."

They had been free pending the appeals, but after the court verdict eight of them would have to go back to prison and the remaining six – who were given sentences of more than five years, have the option of appealing further to the Supreme Court.

The controversial case against Cumhuriyet – one of the few remaining dailies opposing President Recep Tayyip Erdogan – has sparked concerns over the state of free press in Turkey.

Media supporters

Around 100 supporters of the journalists including lawyers and opposition MPs staged a protest outside the Caglayan courthouse.

Tora Pekin, a lawyer in the Cumhuriyet case, said the latest ruling meant "the end of the free press" in Turkey, in an address to the crowd.

"It is the time to remember what we said from the very beginning of the case: The ruling delivered is the end of the free press that no longer exists even on paper," he said.

Veteran journalist Kadri Gursel and lawyer Bulent Utku, who were initially supposed to remain free given their time served, will also have to go back to prison in line with the laws, Pekin said.

"Gursel is supposed to remain in prison for one or two days to fill the remaining term," Pekin told AFP, adding that the eight were due to return to jail within a week after an arrest warrant.

Turkey is currently ranked 157th out of 180 countries in Reporters Without Borders' 2018 Press Freedom Index.



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Turkey seeks to detain over 300 for alleged Gulen ties Russia tells Turkey to get Assad's 'green light' for safe zone in Syria

[Largest mass grave of 3,500 people found outside Raqqa city in Syria](#)

Author:

Thu, 2019-02-21 21:10

RAQQA: Two feet deep, below a plot of farmland outside the Syrian city of Raqqa, lies a large and deadly legacy of Daesh: A mass grave holding an estimated 3,500 people.

First responders learned of the burial site in the Al-Fukheikha suburb last month, more than a year after US-backed forces captured Raqqa from Daesh and as they closed in on the group's final redoubt of Baghouz further south.

The belated discovery is the biggest example yet of how the violence Daesh sowed will be harvested for years to come, diggers and activists said.

Several dozen mounds of dirt line one side of the Al-Fukheikha plot, marking

the more than 120 bodies already dug up by the Rapid Response Division of Raqqa's civil defense service.

"These are individual graves, but behind us, by the trees, are the mass graves of those executed by Daesh," said Asaad Mohammad, the 56-year-old forensic assistant at the site.

FASTFACT

The belated discovery is the biggest example yet of how the violence Daesh sowed will be harvested for years to come.

"There are some 2,500-3,000 bodies estimated there, plus between 900 and 1,100 bodies in the individual graves, so at least 3,500 total," he said.

Eight other mass graves have already been identified around the northern Syrian city, including one nicknamed "Panorama," from which more than 900 bodies had been exhumed.

Earlier this week, diggers in flimsy medical masks excavated a small bundle wrapped in greying, damp cloth.



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500 bodies exhumed from mass grave in Syria's Raqqa With little aid, Syria's

Raqqa struggles to revive schools

[Qatar Airways flight from Doha to Lagos diverted to Khartoum](#)

Thu, 2019-02-21 18:55

LONDON: A Qatar Airways flight from Doha to Lagos, Nigeria was diverted to Khartoum, Sudan for unknown reasons on Thursday.

According to data from the aircraft-tracking website FlightRadar24, the Qatar Airways jet – a Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner – was crossing Ethiopia when it made a diversion to the north-west.



The plane then landed at Khartoum airport at 12:20 p.m. UTC, according to FlightRadar24 tracking.

The next movement was recorded at 3:43 p.m. UTC, when flight QR1409 was tracked flying south-west, in the direction of Lagos.





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Sudan's economic decline provides fuel for anger against Bashir

Terror funding has 'new face,' warns Saudi Arabia's attorney general

Author:

Wed, 2019-02-20 22:43

JEDDAH: The changing dynamics of terror financing and money laundering posed a growing problem for countries and organizations seeking to halt their spread, a regional conference in Cairo was warned.

Saudi Arabia's Attorney General Sheikh Saud bin Abdullah Al-Mua'jab told the first Middle East and North Africa conference on countering terrorism that new forms of transnational terror funding and money laundering demanded greater cooperation between states and organizations.

The conference, organized by the Egyptian Public Prosecution Office, aims to bolster international unity in the face of the escalating threat of terrorist financing and money laundering operations.

"Saudi Arabia has spared no effort in combating these two crimes," Al-Mua'jab said.

He said money laundering and terror financing are at the "forefront of global criminal phenomena," and often complemented each other.

"One of the most important steps the world has taken through its international and regional systems is to engage in initiatives and agreements to combat terrorism financing and money laundering as the artery of the criminal body that strikes the global economy," he said.

"Saudi Arabia is a key partner in the international coalition against the so-called Daesh terrorist organization and leads, together with the US and Italy, the Counter Daesh Finance Group. It has also implemented laws and procedures aimed at combating money laundering and terrorist financing," he said.

Al-Mua'jab said the September 2018 report of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) on Saudi Arabia had praised the Kingdom's commitment to the recommendations of the group.

"Saudi Arabia has spared no effort in combating these two crimes," he said. "It was one of the first countries in the world to be affected by terrorist acts. Its experience of combating the crimes has been exemplary."

He said measures taken by the Kingdom included the 2017 "Law of Combating Crime and its Financing," regulation of charities and the establishment of a standing committee to investigate money laundering.

The Kingdom's Public Prosecution Office recently released a manual outlining steps to counter money laundering, including measures for seizure and confiscation, tracking of funds and details of international cooperation.

The Saudi Arabian Monetary Authority has also issued a guidebook for Saudi banks to combat money laundering.

A recent Saudi Cabinet meeting outlined strategic objectives for reducing the risks of the two crimes, he said.



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From tourism to terrorism: How the revolution changed Iran

[Jordan's PM appeals for more aid as most Syrian refugees set to stay](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Wed, 2019-02-20 16:52

AMMAN: Jordan's Prime Minister Omar Al-Razzaz appealed on Wednesday to major donors to continue multi-billion dollar funding for Syrian refugees in the kingdom, saying most of those who had fled the eight-year conflict had no intention of returning any time soon.

Razzaz told representatives of major Western donors, UN agencies and NGOs that relatively few refugees had gone back since Syrian President Bashar al Assad's army last summer regained control of southern Syria, where most had fled from.

"The number of refugees that so far returned voluntarily is low and most have no intention of going back any time soon," Razzaz told a meeting to launch a UN-funded government plan that earmarks \$2.4 billion in funding needs for 2019.

Officials say only around 10,000 refugees out of a total estimated at 1.3 million had left since the two countries opened the vital Nassib-Jaber border crossing last October.

Razzaz echoed the UN view that unstable conditions inside Syria, where large-scale destruction, fear of retribution and military conscription has made many reluctant to return.

"We are now entering a new phase of the Syrian crisis, however the impact is still ongoing. The conditions for their return are not present," Razzaz added.

The prime minister warned against donor fatigue in a protracted crisis where the needs of refugees and vulnerable Jordanians were largely unchanged.

Maintaining funding that covers education, health and crucial services for tens of thousands of Syrian refugees and local communities was crucial to ease rising pressures on the debt-burdened economy, he added.

"Aid helped Jordan in staying resilient in a difficult regional setting," Razzaz said, adding the refugee burden had strained meagre resources such as water and electricity, with a donor shortfall covered from state finances. Jordan is struggling to rein in record public debt of \$40 billion, equivalent to 95 percent of gross domestic product, under a tough International Monetary Fund (IMF) austerity plan.

Major donors say more than \$6 billion had been extended to Jordan since 2015, which economists credit for rejuvenating once sleepy northern border towns, while refugee entrepreneurship brought a pool of cheap labor and new skills, triggering a property boom and higher productivity.

The kingdom received around \$1.6 billion last year alone.

"The level of funding to Jordan that still remains is exceptional in global comparison," said UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator Anders Pedersen, adding needs had evolved from the humanitarian aid required early in the conflict to development projects that benefit the economy.



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