

Turkey to arrest 82 including mayor over pro-Kurdish protests

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Fri, 2020-09-25 06:44

ANKARA: Turkish authorities on Friday issued arrest warrants for 82 people, including a mayor, over pro-Kurdish protests six years ago, officials and local media said.

The warrants relate to October 2014 protests in Turkey sparked by the seizure by Daesh militants of the mainly Kurdish Syrian town of Kobane.

Police were on the hunt for the 82 suspects in the Turkish capital and six other provinces, the Ankara chief public prosecutor's office said in a statement.

The prosecutor's office did not specify what offences the 82 are alleged to have committed.

But it said crimes committed during the protests included murder, attempted murder, theft, damaging property, looting, burning the Turkish flag and injuring 326 security officials and 435 citizens.

There was also a warrant for the mayor of the eastern city of Kars, Ayhan Bilgen, Hurriyet daily reported.

Bilgen won the city in 2019 local elections representing the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), which is Turkey's second-largest opposition group in the parliament.

Of a total of 65 HDP mayors returned in those elections, 47 have now been replaced by unelected officials, with some detained on terror charges, the party said last month.

The Turkish government accuses the HDP of being a political front for the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party – which has waged an insurgency against the state since 1984 – but the party denies this.

Former HDP co-leaders, Figen Yuksekdag and Selahattin Demirtas, were named in the investigation but both have been in jail since 2016 pending multiple trials.

The government accused the HDP of urging people to take part in the protests across Turkey that left 37 dead.

But the HDP blames Turkish police for the violence.



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Commercial disputes further threaten shaky Turkey-US relations

[Yemen's FM blames Houthis for looming Safer oil tanker disaster](#)

Fri, 2020-09-25 09:15

DUBAI: Yemen's Foreign Minister Mohammed Al-Hadhrami blamed the Houthi militia for the Safer oil tanker's looming disaster as the militia continued to block the United Nation's help to access the damage.

Al-Hadhrami stressed the importance of pressuring the Houthis to allow technicians from the international organization to access the tanker during a meeting with senior British diplomats on Thursday, state news agency Saba New reported.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia warned the UN Security Council that an "oil spot" has been sighted in a shipping lane 50 km west of abandoned and decaying Safer oil tanker off the coast of Yemen. Experts fear it could spill 1.1 million barrels of crude into the Red Sea.

The tanker has been moored near Ras Issa oil terminal for more than five

years. The UN previously warned that it could leak four times as much oil as was spilled during the 1989 Exxon Valdez disaster off the coast of Alaska. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and the Security Council have repeatedly called on Houthi insurgents in Yemen to grant access the tanker for a technical assessment and emergency repairs.

UN humanitarian chief Mark Lowcock said last week that a new UN proposal to assess and carry out initial repairs on the Safer oil tanker was being discussed with the Houthis. "We hope the new proposal will be quickly approved so the work can start," he said.

Meanwhile President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi on Thursday urged Houthis to stop impeding the flow of urgently needed humanitarian aid following a warning from the UN humanitarian chief last week that "the specter of famine" has returned to the conflict-torn country.

His plea came in a pre-recorded speech to the UN General Assembly's ministerial meeting being held virtually because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We are trying to save our country and establish a just and lasting peace," Hadi said, blaming Iran for meddling in his nation.

"The objective is to stop the bloodletting in Yemen," he said.

Lowcock told the UN Security Council last week that famine in Yemen, the Arab world's poorest country, was averted two years ago because donors swiftly met 90 percent of the UN's funding requirements. But the UN's latest figures show that the current \$3.4 billion appeal is less than 38 percent funded.



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How the FS0 Safer is an impending danger to the Red Sea and YemenKSrelief calls on international community to take immediate action on safer oil tanker issue

[UAE's equal pay law for men, women in private sector takes effect](#)

Author:

Fri, 2020-09-25 08:03

DUBAI: A presidential decree mandating equal pay for men and women in the private sector took effect on Friday, state news agency WAM reported.

The new law stated that “female employees shall receive wages equal to that of males if they perform the same work or another of equal value.”

UAE President Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al-Nahyan issued a decree to implement the new legislation, which was first approved by the country’s cabinet in 2018.

The Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization said the new law elevated the country’s regional and international reputation in gender equality.

A World Economic Forum report published earlier this year claimed the UAE was a regional leader in bridging the gender pay gap.

“Congratulations to all the women working in the UAE private sector. This step will undoubtedly boost the social inclusivity of women, support their role in national development, and advance the UAE’s status on the world’s Gender Equality Index,” President of the UAE Gender Balance Council, Sheikha Manal bint Mohammed, said on Twitter.

The UAE ranked 26th globally in the United Nations Development Programmes’ 2019 Gender Inequality Index.



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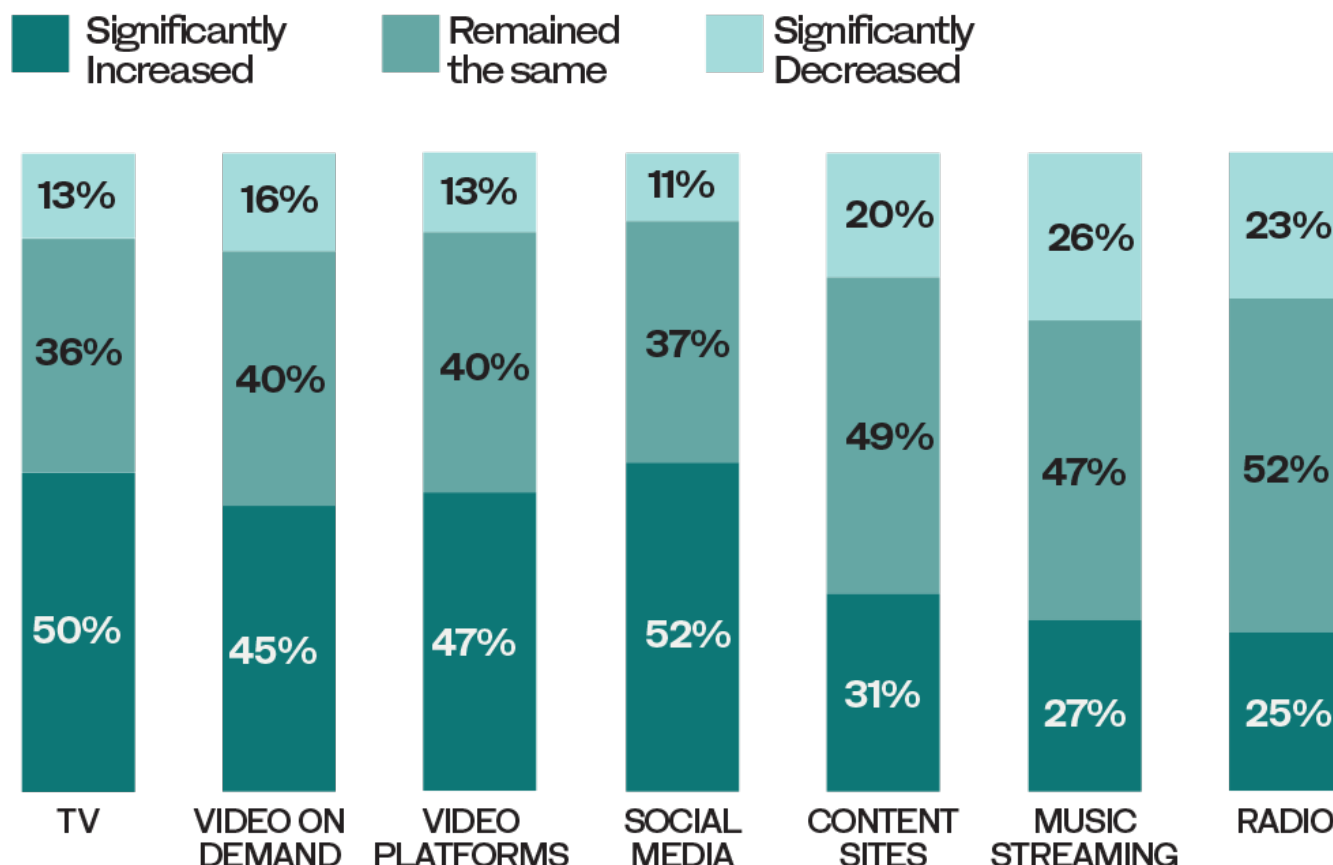
Thu, 2020-09-24 22:26

DUBAI: Temporarily transporting your mind away from the humdrum routine of reality to the more exciting universe offered by television has proven an extremely popular activity during the coronavirus pandemic.

Since March 1, unplanned closures of schools, offices, entertainment services and other public spaces across the world have resulted in more and more people spending extended hours at home in front of screens.

With few sources of accessible entertainment beyond the world of TV shows and movies, streaming services and television networks have predictably experienced an extraordinary surge in viewership in the Middle East, leveraging the opportunity to draw millions of customers into a COVID-free world of leisure.

MEDIA CONSUMPTION IN MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA



Source: CG Ramadan/COVID-19 Research

A prime example is Netflix, which saw its best quarter yet for subscriber growth, adding a record 15.8 million subscribers worldwide during the first few months of the pandemic.

In the UAE alone, the streaming service reported a 26 percent increase in viewership during the month of March, according to the country’s Telecommunications Regulatory Authority.

Similarly, MBC’s Shahid OTT audiences grew threefold during March and April, with the Shahid VIP segment reporting 10 times the audience growth.

Another example is the STARZPLAY streaming service, which recorded strong growth in the number of unique users from 2019, peaking at 141 percent in April 2020 at the peak of the pandemic.

“Compared with March 2019, the number of STARZPLAY app installs in March 2020 increased by 328 percent and in April 2020 by 486 percent. Content consumption in March 2020 increased by 230 percent over the same period in 2019 and in April 2020 by 340 percent,” Maaz Sheikh, CEO and co-founder of STARZPLAY, told Arab News.

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turn to streaming services

“The entire industry benefited during the stay-at-home period and especially during Ramadan, as consumption picked up with more people spending time at home.”

Additionally, the Orbit Showtime Network (OSN) streaming service reported a 900 percent increase in consumption of content across all genres between March 1 and April 26.

With their timely launch of the Disney Plus channel in March, original Disney movies made up 75 percent of the top family films viewed during the same period.

“We’ve seen strong engagement numbers over the past few months. Saudi Arabia specifically saw an average of over five hours of engagement per subscription, per day. Over 50 percent of new downloads have come from Saudi Arabia, followed by the UAE and Kuwait,” Zahra Zayat, senior vice president at OSN, told Arab News.

“We felt from what our numbers showed us that people were hungry for content and they were just grasping everything that was put in front of them.”

A 35 percent increase in screen time was also reported across OSN’s linear channels, with news channels specifically seeing a 250 percent increase in viewing time.

Yet, despite the initial spike, the pandemic did not generate a consistent demand for news, says Zayat.

“The increase was stronger and larger in other areas and genres almost as if people got tired of watching the news and had this fatigue from hearing about the pandemic,” she said, noting the news viewership continued to drop during the summer months.

However, with a larger audience leaning towards “binge-worthy” and “comfort” TV content, spending long hours plonked in front of a screen has quickly become what may be a temporary or long-term habit in many households.

According to Dr. Saliha Afridi, clinical psychologist and managing director of Lighthouse Arabia in Dubai, the trend can be attributed to the fact that many people have chosen television “as their go-to item for distraction and numbing from difficult emotions” during the pandemic period, and more specifically during lockdowns.

“By watching TV, they are transported into the lives of other people and dissociated from their own worries or sadness, creating temporary relief,”

she told Arab News.

Afridi said that many streaming networks retain audience engagement through sophisticated algorithms, such as automatically starting the next episode, which draw in binge-watchers.

However, the impact of binge-watching on viewers during the pandemic can go one of two ways.

“For people who have addictive tendencies and use TV, which is a socially sanctioned addiction, their addiction is most likely worsened during the pandemic where there aren’t many opportunities to do anything else other than stay home and watch TV as a source of entertainment,” said Afridi.

“Others, who are hungry for social connection, outdoor physical activity, traveling, and other entertainment will most likely prefer that over TV once going outside with ease is a possible option.”



Zahra Zayat, senior vice president at OSN. (Supplied)

Moreover, the pandemic has also created new habits when it comes to popular viewing times.

OSN saw a 100 percent jump in viewings between the hours of 3 a.m. and 6 a.m. during the first six weeks of the pandemic, during which many countries in the Middle East were under tight lockdowns and quarantine.

“Historically, the peak time would start at 8 p.m. until 1 to 2 a.m. However, during this time, the peak period was starting at 6 p.m. and ending at 5 a.m.

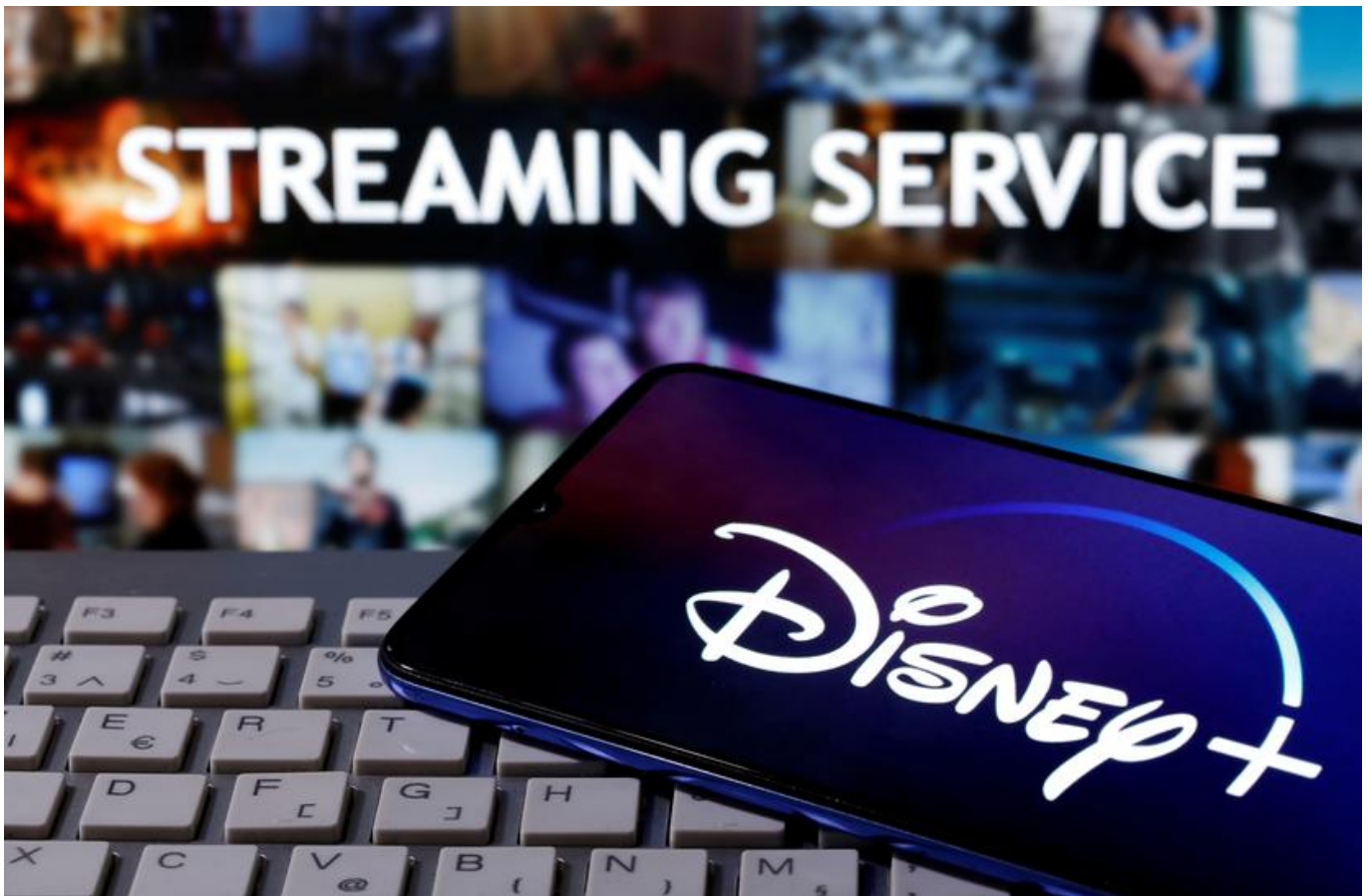
the next day ... so our engagement went up by more than 11 times ... with the maximum appetite coming from Saudi Arabia,” said Zayat.

She said some of the most popular titles were all-time favorite series, including “Game of Thrones,” “Grey’s Anatomy” and “Westworld,” which drew in old and new fans.

Titles like “Aladdin,” “Avengers: End Game” and “The Lion King” also continued to top the most-viewed content on the streaming app.

However, a rise in views was also reported in some of the less popular categories during the pandemic, as some viewers proved more inquisitive and ventured out to genres such as reality TV, cooking shows and documentaries.

Similarly, STARZPLAY streaming services saw a significant increase (20 percent) in the number of total viewing hours, particularly among Saudi unique users, who reported a rise in the number of hours per user, from 11.83 hours in January 2019 to 18.06 hours in May 2020.



A spike in consumption of family content such as Disney classics and Warner Bros. favorites was reported, with Arabic content also growing five-fold in popularity across the MENA region during the first few months of the pandemic. (Reuters/File Photo)

A spike in consumption of family content such as Disney classics and Warner Bros. favorites was reported, with Arabic content also growing five-fold in popularity across the MENA region during the first few months of the pandemic.

“We have also seen a growing appetite for DC content in the region, especially box sets. As per our recent viewership analysis, 42 percent of our viewers are bingeing on DC shows,” said Sheikh, referring to a notable interest in crime-scene investigation shows among DC fans in Saudi Arabia.

The top three most viewed shows among STARZPLAY viewers were “Vikings,” “Power” and “The Big Bang Theory.”

However, while OTT platforms and TV channels may seem to be thriving during the pandemic, one downside has been a drop in advertising revenues during the second quarter of the year, which coincided with the month of Ramadan.

According to media investment company Group M’s mid-year report for the MENA region, which forecasts the future of investments in the Middle East, TV ad spending across all countries will be down 29 percent in 2020 compared with 2019.

Overall, the average time spent on news and movie channels during the first period of the pandemic and Ramadan had risen by 30 percent, while entertainment channels saw an increase of between 20 and 30 percent.

Yet, despite the growth in TV content consumption in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Morocco, investment in the sector dropped by 30 percent compared with last year.

This can only mean one thing: As the pandemic hits somewhat of a plateau, with many offices and schools reopening, the main focus for many TV networks and streaming services is to keep their large “quarantine” audiences hooked and subscriber behavior up – that is unless another wave of infections hits this winter.

Twitter: [@jumana_khamis](https://twitter.com/jumana_khamis)



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Shahid now available on all major Smart TV brands and streaming devices
INTERVIEW: CEO Maaz Sheikh sees business soar as Saudi viewers turn to streaming services

[Fatah and Hamas agree to hold general elections in Palestine](#)

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AMMAN: Palestine's two main political parties, Fatah and Hamas, have agreed to hold general elections within the next six months, they announced on

Thursday.

A press release issued after a meeting held at the Palestinian Embassy in Istanbul said the two delegations had reached "a unified vision."

"We agree that the vision has matured and we plan to move ahead with a nationwide dialogue with the participation of all factions under the patronage of President (Mahmoud) Abbas to take place before the first of October," the statement said.

Jibril Rajoub, secretary general of the Fatah Central Committee, told Palestine TV that the heads of all factions will meet soon in Ramallah and that that meeting will be followed by the issuance of a presidential decree announcing the elections.

The official Palestinian news agency quoted Rajoub as saying that the elections will take place at three stages within six months. "We will have legislative elections, followed by presidential elections and then elections for the Palestine National Council wherever possible."

Hamas' spokesman in Gaza, Fawzi Barhoum, said the meeting in Istanbul confirmed the basis of a new initiative aimed at forging a policy course "based on unity and power-sharing."

Najeeb Qadoumi, a member of the Palestine National Council, told Arab News: "The meeting reflects the feeling among Palestinians that the Palestinian cause is in being liquidated based on the American-Israeli vision and that only through unity and the legitimization of elections can we stand up to this conspiracy against the Palestinian cause."

Gaza-based activist Wael Alloush told the Ramallah-based Ajyal radio station: "The last time elections were held was in 2006. It will be an important but new activity for many Palestinians."

Ammar Dweek of the Independence Commission on Human Rights said that external pressure has forced Palestinians to unite. "The situation has matured for elections because everyone realizes they will be totally isolated without the legitimacy of elections," he said.

Hazem Kawasmi, a member of the board of Al-Marsad (the Arab World Democracy and Electoral Monitor), told Arab News that he has suggested to President Abbas that elections should be based on two constituencies – national and Jerusalem. "The idea is that this would be a one-time activity that will highlight the issue of Jerusalem," he clarified.

Kawasmi expects that Israel would be strongly opposed to that idea, but said, "We will have to fight it on the diplomatic and public relations fronts."

Jamal Zakout, who was the assistant to former Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, told Arab News that he is still skeptical that elections will take place.

"Everyone is waiting for the results of the US elections," he said. "Then they will decide for sure whether or not to have elections here."



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Hamas reveals mediation with Israel over prisoner swap
Fatah and Hamas reconciliation still a long way off