

Prison becomes 'second home' for Turkish cartoonist

Author:

Wed, 2019-09-18 22:35

ISTANBUL: Renowned Turkish cartoonist Musa Kart says he has spent as much time in prison and courthouses as he has at work since President Recep Tayyip Erdogan came to power.

His latest stint in jail started in April, after an appeals court upheld his sentence of three years and nine months for "helping terrorist organizations."

Released last week pending another appeal, Kart told AFP: "For 15 years, prisons and courthouses have become a second home to me."

Kart, who was recognized last year by the Swiss Foundation Cartooning for Peace, was among 14 journalists and staff from the renowned opposition paper Cumhuriyet convicted in the case.

He was initially arrested in 2016 after Erdogan launched a major crackdown on opponents in the wake of a failed coup.

"I have spent almost the same amount of time in court corridors as I spent in the paper. It is very unfortunate," he told AFP.

Unfailingly optimistic and modest, Kart refuses to be run down by his ordeals, and says he always made an effort to look his best for prison visitors.

"I never welcomed my visitors in a hopeless state," he said. "I would shave, pick my cleanest shirt from my modest wardrobe and welcome them with open arms. We would spend our time telling jokes." His morale was boosted by the knowledge he had done nothing wrong.

"If you believe that your position is right, if you have an inner peace about your past actions, then it is not that difficult to stand prison conditions," he said. Kart has been in and out of trouble since Erdogan took power in 2003.

His first lawsuit came in 2005 over a cartoon portraying Erdogan, then prime minister, as a cat entangled in a ball of wool.

"I have drawn cartoons for over 40 years ... I did it in the past with other political leaders, but I was never the subject of a court case," Kart said.

"The frame of tolerance has seriously narrowed today."

The current case against him claims he contacted members of the Gulen movement accused of orchestrating the failed coup in 2016.

It also says the 14 Cumhuriyet staffers had conspired to change the paper's editorial policy to support the Gulenists, as well as Kurdish rebels and the ultra-left Revolutionary People's Liberation Party-Front.

"Today the accusations of terrorism have gone well beyond a realistic point," Kart said.

"When you take a look at my cartoons, you see how much I am against any kind of terrorist organization and how seriously and strongly I criticize them."

Rights advocates including the Reporters Without Borders have called on Turkey to revise its anti-terrorism and defamation laws, which they claim are abused to silence opponents.

Cumhuriyet – Turkey's oldest daily founded in 1924 – is not owned by a business tycoon but by an independent foundation, making it an easier target for authorities.

The paper's former editor-in-chief Can Dunder fled to Germany after being convicted in 2016 over an article alleging that Turkey had supplied weapons to Islamist groups in Syria.

It has its own internal problems, too – Kart and some of the others actually quit the paper last year over disagreements with the new management.

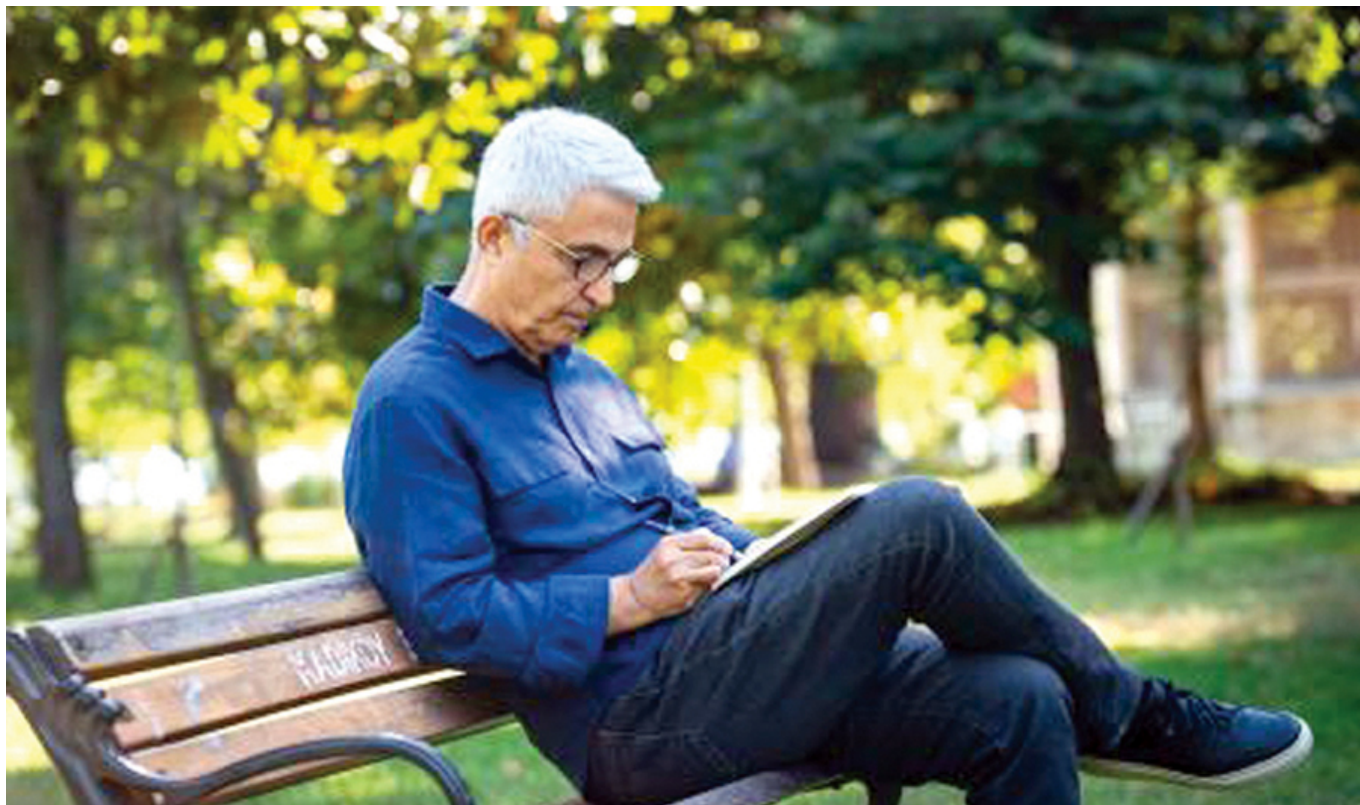
But the case has added to the chilling effect that has infected the whole of the media in Turkey, which has the highest number of imprisoned journalists in the world.

No date has been set for the next appeal, and Kart has no idea how the saga will end.

"Everyone knows that there has been a political shadow hanging over our case," he said.

Whatever happens, he said his focus would remain on drawing.

"Cartoons are really a very strong language because you can find a way to express yourself under any circumstances, even under pressure."



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Turkey accuses US of stalling on Syria 'safe zone' plans
Turkey orders arrest of 223 military personnel over suspected Gulen links: state media

[Palestinians ready for dialogue with any future Israeli leader](#)

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Wed, 2019-09-18 18:56

OSLO: The Palestinians are prepared to engage in dialogue with any future Israeli leader, Foreign Minister Riyad Al-Maliki said Wednesday in Oslo, the day after general elections in Israel ended in deadlock.

"Whoever will be able to form a government, we are ready to sit with him or her in order to restart the negotiations," Al-Maliki told reporters after the elections ended in a tie between Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his main challenger Benny Gantz.

Al-Maliki is accompanying Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas on a two-day

visit to Oslo.

Their trip comes ahead of a meeting next week in New York of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee of donors to the Palestinians, headed by Norway.

The tied vote in Israel raised the prospect of tough negotiations to build a unity government or even the end of Netanyahu's long rule.

Sources in Netanyahu's office told AFP he was canceling a planned trip next week to the UN General Assembly due to the "political context" in Israel.

Al-Maliki on Wednesday reiterated the Palestinian Authority's insistence on a two-state solution for peace, after Netanyahu's deeply controversial campaign pledge to annex the Jordan Valley in the occupied West Bank.

The plan, which would cover around a third of the territory, would not annex Palestinian cities such as Jericho, but they would effectively be surrounded.

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres warned that the plan would violate international law, with his spokesman saying: "Such steps, if implemented... would be devastating to the potential of reviving negotiations and regional peace, while severely undermining the viability of the two-state solution."



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Palestinians would like to see Netanyahu lose in elections
Netanyahu, Gantz deadlocked with nearly all votes counted: Israel media

US consular staffer to stay in Turkey jail on spy charges

Author:

Wed, 2019-09-18 22:15

ISTANBUL: A Turkish court ruled on Wednesday that a US consular staffer would remain in jail while his espionage trial continued, in a case that has added to tensions with Washington.

Metin Topuz, a Turkish citizen and liaison for the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), was arrested in 2017.

He was accused of ties to US-based preacher Fethullah Gulen, who Ankara says ordered an attempted coup in 2016.

In court on Wednesday, Topuz again begged the court for his release.

"What is my crime? Being an employee of the US Consulate?" he said.

But the court said he would stay in jail until the next hearing on Dec. 11, while they tried to locate a witness. Defense lawyers said he gave a fake address in Milan.

"I cannot understand the court extending the jail sentence to wait for an individual who is currently abroad," lawyer Halit Akalp told reporters.

Topuz said he had 3,000 meetings in his 25 years with the DEA, and that prosecutors had simply cherry-picked those with members of Gulen's movement.

Gulen had sympathizers across all branches of Turkish society and government until the coup triggered a massive purge.

"I had face-to-face meetings and telephone contact with individuals appointed by the Turkish republic as an assistant liaison officer and translator," Topuz told the court.

"All the allegations against me are based on telephone contacts with individuals appointed by the Turkish republic."

The case comes at a sensitive diplomatic moment between the NATO allies.

Washington's refusal to extradite Gulen, differences over the Syrian conflict, and Turkey's recent decision to buy a Russian missile defense system have all strained relations between the two countries.

Since the failed 2016 coup, tens of thousands of people have been arrested over suspected ties to Gulen and more than 100,000 people have been sacked or suspended from public sector jobs. Gulen rejects the coup accusations.



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US consular staffer to stay in Turkey detention on spy charges
Turkey jails 24 Istanbul airport workers pending trial after protests

[UN says deal reached on committee for new Syria constitution](#)

Author:

By EDITH M. LEDERER | AP

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Wed, 2019-09-18 19:01

UNITED NATIONS: United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres announced Wednesday that a long-sought agreement has been reached on the composition of a committee to draft a new constitution for Syria, an important step toward hopefully ending the more than eight-year conflict.

The UN chief told a news conference that UN special envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen “is doing the final work with the parties in relation to the terms of reference, and we hope that this will be very soon concluded.”

Guterres expressed hope that formation of the constitutional committee “will be a very important step in creating the conditions for a political solution for this tragic conflict.”

At a Russian-hosted Syrian peace conference in January 2018, an agreement was reached to form a 150-member committee to draft a new constitution. This was a key step toward elections and a political settlement to the Syrian conflict, which has killed over 400,000 people.

There was early agreement on 50-member lists from the Syrian government and the opposition. But it has taken nearly 20 months to agree on the list the United Nations was authorized to put together representing experts, independents, tribal leaders and women, mainly because of objections from the Syrian government.

Pedersen, the UN envoy, told the Security Council in late August that the package to resolve outstanding names and terms of reference and rules of procedure was “nearly finalized, and the outstanding differences are, in my assessment, comparatively minor.”

He said he was “quietly hopeful” an agreement would be announced before world leaders gather next week for their annual meeting at the General Assembly.

An agreement on a blueprint for peace in Syria that was approved in Geneva on June 30, 2012 by representatives of the UN, Arab League, European Union, Turkey and all five veto-wielding Security Council members – the US, Russia, China, France and Britain – remains the basis for ending the conflict.

It calls for a Syrian-led political process starting with the establishment of a transitional governing body vested with full executive powers, moving on to the drafting of a new constitution and ending with elections. The Security Council unanimously endorsed the agreement in a resolution in December 2015 that set a timetable for talks and a cease-fire that was never met.



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Erdogan says 3 million refugees could be returned to Syria safe zone10 pro-Iranian militiamen killed in eastern Syria

Some important facts and figures about Israeli elections

Author:

Tue, 2019-09-17 23:38

JERUSALEM: Polls opened at 7 a.m. for the 22nd Israeli Knesset made up of 120 members. A coalition of 61 seats is needed to set up a government.

The two biggest parties are the Likud, headed by Benjamin Netanyahu, and Blue and White, headed by former Israeli army general Benny Gantz.

No government in the history of Israel has been formed without a coalition with smaller parties. The current election campaign has focused on a huge split within Israel's Jewish population based on the difference between secular and religious Jews.

Soviet-born Avigdor Liberman who heads a small party Yisrael Beiteinu, politically is closer to Netanyahu on the right, but is extremely opposed to the religious parties which insist on a waiver from serving in the Israeli army. This makes it near impossible for Netanyahu to form a 61+ coalition.

The last elections in April were not conclusive and the winner of the largest block was unable to form a majority government.

The number of eligible voters is 6.39 million, among them nearly 1 million are Palestinian citizens of Israel. Among the voters, 14 percent are 24 years of age or younger, and 30 percent are 25-39 years old. The largest demographic of voters is between 30-59, which forms 31 percent of the electorate. One quarter of the eligible voters are over 60 years, according to official figures.

The Central Election's Committee says 10,788 election boxes will be supervised by 3,000 civil servants hired by the Israeli central election committee. Since the last elections in April the number of eligible voters has gone up by 50,000.

Palestinian citizens of Israel hope for a rise in the percentage of voters from last April's 46 percent which brought 10 Knesset members, when they ran

on two sperate lists, to something closer to the 64 percent that voted for the joint list in the 20th Knesset and sent 13 members to the Knesset. The joint list which had broken up last April was reunited in the summer giving their leaders hope that this unity will produce better results.



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Israel exit polls show Netanyahu, Gantz in tight race
Palestinians would like to see Netanyahu lose in elections