Turkish government mounts police state crackdown on opposition media

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Early on Sunday, at least 25 people, including journalists and screen writers, as well as some former police chiefs, were detained in nationwide police raids seeking to arrest 32 suspects.

Anti-terror units arriving in the early morning at the headquarters of the daily Zaman in Istanbul encountered hundreds of protesters and failed to arrest Ekrem Dumanli, the daily's editor-in-chief. However, the police came back to the building to arrest him in the afternoon.

Several TV channels broadcast the detention, carried out amid chants from protesters such as "free media cannot be silenced," though a large number of media outlets remained indifferent.

The suspects are accused of "taking over the sovereignty of the Turkish Republic by pressure, threat and terror, establishing an illegal gang, faking documents, restricting people's freedom and libel."

In tweets posted Thursday, the Twitter user "Fuat Avni", who previously had revealed many government-backed police operations, claimed that 400 people, including journalists working at newspapers close to the Gulen movement (supporters of a US-based Muslim leader who has broken with the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan) would be detained in a large-scale operation. After these tweets, hundreds of people began to gather in front of the Zaman daily's headquarters to support the journalists.

"Fuat Avni", who claims to be a member of Erdogan's inner circle, now claims that the operation is to be expanded to include prominent businesspeople, media owners, civil society representatives and more journalists.

The detentions came only two days after Erdogan signed the homeland security bill, a 35-article package, which represents an important step on the way to building a police state in Turkey.

The law allows the police to search individuals' homes or workplaces on the grounds of "reasonable doubt," breaking with previous law that required the presence of "concrete evidence" before police could search people's property, workplaces or cars.

The law imposes serious restrictions over lawyers' access to their clients' investigation files, if their clients are accused of "committing offenses in relation to the Constitution."

According to the new law, lawyers will not have access to state files regarding surveillance and questioning of their clients by police and prosecutors. The new law also allows the government to seize the assets of people and groups convicted of "threatening the constitution or trying to overthrow the government."

In a move foreshadowing a government attempt to stack the judiciary, the new law makes lawyers with two years of work experience eligible to be assigned as judges and prosecutors by the government. Previously, the requirement was five years.

The new law also limits the powers of the Supreme Court of Appeals by removing the court's veto power over the nomination of judges. Current practice allows the Supreme Court of Appeals to accept or reject any name nominated by the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK), a body largely controlled by the government, if it feels the nominee is not qualified for the position.

It was Erdogan's ratification of the new homeland security law that cleared the way for Hadi Saliho?lu, the Istanbul Chief Public Prosecutor, to launch the operation against the journalists. Less than two days before his arrest, an official letter from the Istanbul Chief Public Prosecutor's Office was given to the Zaman editor-in-chief at his request, stating that there was "no official investigation" launched against him. This was only one hour before the ratification of the new law by Erdogan.

Another indication of the political motives of the media crackdown can be seen in the record of the prosecutor and

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the judge involved. Istanbul Chief Public Prosecutor Saliho?lu was appointed to this Office on January 16, 2014, just after the corruption and bribery investigation into top AKP officials began in December 2013.

The task he was charged with was clear: to stop the investigation. He oversaw the prosecution's voluntary abandonment of charges (*nolle prosequi*) after two other prosecutors were taken off the case. He was thus revealed as a judicial tool of the government.

This is also the role of ?slam Cicek, the judge who decided to arrest journalists for "taking over the sovereignty of the Turkish Republic by pressure, threat and terror, establishing an illegal gang, faking documents, restricting peoples' freedom and libel."

He discharged Reza Zarrab, a businessman, and three ministers' children, arrested in the corruption and bribery investigation of December 2013. He is also well-known with his Facebook message to Erdogan, "May God give you a long life."

The latest operation against journalists is an unmistakable sign that state attacks on democratic rights will be intensified and expanded. The ongoing assault on the Gulen movement, under the pretext of "the fight against the parallel structure," is a part of the larger strategy of building a police state. The Gulen movement is an old ally of the ruling Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP) that has recently fallen out it.

During the last two years, the Justice And Development Party (AKP) government has been trying to gain the upper hand on the growing working class and youth opposition against its drive for war and social counter-revolution. It is well aware of growing social discontent and anger over the Turkish government's warmongering foreign policy in the Middle East, but it no longer has the resources to make concessions to the population. Instead of carrots, it is relying ever more heavily on the stick

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