BIZCOMMUNITY

Egypt steps up campaign against critical media

The Committee to Protect Journalists is alarmed by a series of investigations into independent Egyptian newspapers on accusations of insulting the president or reporting false news. Some newspapers and media professionals face formal charges in connection to their critical reporting, according to news reports.

"There is a growing trend of targeting independent and critical voices under president Mohamed Morsi's government, which is especially worrying in light of a lack of protection for the press under the new constitution," said Sherif Mansour, CPJ's Middle East and North Africa program coordinator. "Egypt is taking a large step back toward Mubarak-era practices."

Magdi Algallad, editor of independent daily newspaper *LAl-Watan*, was charged with insulting the president-a criminal offense-in connection with published cartoons, according to the newspaper. *Al-Masry al-Youm*, one of Egypt's leading independent dailies, said it is being investigated by the prosecutor-general following a complaint from the president's office, which accused it of publishing false news. The prosecutor-general referred Abdel-Halim Qandil, editor of independent weekly *Sawt al-Umma*, to the North of Giza prosecutor for official investigation, according to news reports. The accusations relate to an article Qandil wrote in October under the title "You are a liar, Morsi."

Under Egypt's legal system, complaints are filed to the prosecutor-general's office, which does an initial investigation into whether there is enough evidence to refer the case to a judge or a local prosecutor for further investigation. Suspects can be detained during this stage of investigation. The judge or local prosecutor can then refer the case to a criminal court for formal charges. The current prosecutor-general, Talaat Abdullah, was appointed by Morsi in November.

Also, the prosecutor-general's office said it referred Bassem Youssef, who hosts a satirical TV news program called *Al Bernameg* on independent channel CBC, to a judge for investigation on accusations of insulting the president by showing Morsi's picture printed on a pillow. Youssef, who has actively criticized Morsi and Islamist groups, is widely called Egypt's Jon Stewart in reference to the host of *The Daily Show* satirical news program in the US. Appearing on CNN two weeks earlier with CPJ board member Christiane Amanpour, Youssef played down risks of prosecution for his commentary.

In December, TV host Mahmoud Saad, who presents a daily news show called *End of Day* at Al-Nahar private TV station, was investigated by a Cairo prosecutor for insult because of an official complaint by Morsi, according to news reports. Saad hosted Manal Omar, an Egyptian psychiatrist who presented a psychological analysis of Morsi on the show. Saad was released on bail after six hours and no further steps have been taken.

The series of investigations and charges are the latest in a long string of attacks on Egypt's independent press. Late in 2012, journalists who covered demonstrations against Morsi and the new constitution were physically targeted in the streets. At least five journalists were struck by rubber bullets in November, and one, Al-Hosseiny Abou Deif, died in December.

Also last month, several independent channels at Egypt's Media Production City were besieged for nearly a week by Islamist supporters of Morsi, according to news reports. The demonstrators staged a sit-in to protest the news channels' critical coverage of Egypt's new constitution, which was passed by referendum despite widespread controversy and allegations by the opposition that it was rushed.

Source: allAfrica

For more, visit: https://www.bizcommunity.com