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Turkish beekeepers Fehmi Altı, 47, and his father Mustafa Altı, 71, look at their bees in the village of Cökek in Mugla province, southwestern Turkey, on Sept 23, 2021.



Fehmi and Mustafa scrape honeycomb frames to prepare the honey for extraction in their house. — AFP photos

Turkish fires endanger world pine honey supplies

Beekeepers Mustafa Altı and his son Fehmi were kept busy tending to their hives before wildfires tore through a bucolic region of Turkey that makes most of the world's prized pine honey. Now the Altıs and generations of other honey farmers in Turkey's Aegean province of Mugla are scrambling to find additional work and wondering how many decades it might take to get their old lives back on track. "Our means of existence is from beekeeping, but when the forests burned, our source of income fell," said Fehmi, 47, next to his mountainside beehives in the fire-ravaged village of Cökek.

"I do side jobs, I do some tree felling, that way we manage to make do." Nearly 200,000 hectares of forests - more than five times the annual average - were scorched by fires across Turkey this year, turning luscious green coasts popular with tourists into ash. The summer disaster and an accompanying series of deadly floods made the climate - already weighing heavily on the minds of younger voters - a major issue two years before the next scheduled election.

Signalling a political shift, Turkey's parliament this week ended a five-year wait and ratified the Paris Agreement on cutting the greenhouse emissions that are blamed for global warming and abnormal weather events. But the damage has already been done in Mugla, where 80 percent of Turkey's pine honey is produced. Turkey as a whole makes 92 percent of the world's pine honey, meaning supplies of the thick, dark amber may be running low worldwide very soon.

least five or 10 years to get our previous income back". His father Mustafa agrees, urging President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government to expand forested areas and plant young trees.

"There's no fixing a burnt house. Can you fix the dead? No. But new trees might come, a new generation," Mustafa said. For now, though, the beekeepers are counting



Fresh pine honey.

their losses and figuring out what comes next. The president of the Mugla Beekeepers' Association, Veli Turk, expects his region's honey production to plunge by up to 95 percent this year. "There is pretty much no Marmaris honey left," he said. "This honey won't come for another 60 years," he predicted. "It's not just Turkey. This honey would go everywhere in the world. It was a blessing. This is really a huge loss."

'So much loss'

Beekeeper Yasar Karayigit, 45, is thinking of switching to a different type of honey to keep his passion-and sole source of income - alive. "I love beekeeping, but to continue, I'll have to pursue alternatives," Karayigit said, mentioning royal jelly (or "bee milk") and sunflower honey, which involves additional costs. "But if we love the bees, we have to do this," the father-of-three said.

Ismail Atici, head of the Milas district Chamber of Agriculture in Mugla, said the

price of pine honey has doubled from last year, threatening to make the popular breakfast food unaffordable for many Turks. He expects price rises to continue and supplies to become ever more scarce. "We will get to a point where even if you have money, you won't be able to find those medicinal plants and medicinal honey," Atici said. "It's going to be very hard to find 100-per-



Bees hover around the hand of a beekeeper.

cent pine honey," beekeeper Karayigit agreed. "We have had so much loss."

'We must continue'

Looking ahead, the president of the Turkey Beekeepers' Association, Ziya Sahin, suggests selectively introducing the Basra beetle to new areas of Mugla, expanding coverage from the current seven to 25 percent of local pine forests. "If we conduct transplantation of the beetle from one area to another and continue this for two successive years, we can protect the region's dominance in the sector," Sahin said. "There will be a serious drop in honey production if we don't do this," he added, calling this year the "worst" of his 50-year career. Yet despite the pain and the troubled road ahead, the younger Altı has no plans to quit. "This is my father's trade. Because this is passed down from the family, we must continue it," Fehmi said. — AFP

Posing as satire, misinformation spreads online

Hoaxes spread quickly online, be they about celebrities, politicians or anyone else. But falsehoods labelled as satire can slip through the defenses of social media companies, allowing people to peddle fiction as fact, all while making a financial profit. The claims tend to be spectacular: Bill Gates arrested for child trafficking, Tom Hanks executed by the US military, or Pope Francis declaring that a COVID-19 vaccine would be required to enter heaven.

These bogus allegations originated from articles on websites that contain disclaimers that they are satirical. The problem is that many people believe them. In some cases, the claims go viral and are never debunked online, or in the minds of those who have read and shared them.

Claire Wardle, co-founder and executive director of First Draft, a coalition researching online trust and misinformation, said satire and parody tags may be deliberately used to circumvent moderation by social media platforms. "We see bad actors and disinformation agents labeling their content as satire knowing well it is likely to be shared without the satire label," Wardle told AFP.

Platforms face a conundrum because satire has long been considered an important element in political speech, implicitly protected by the US constitution. Using the satire tag can allow someone to avoid being downgraded by Facebook's algorithm, and in some cases, escape the scrutiny of fact-checkers. This has become "a strategic way to make money or sow discord," Wardle said, adding that it can be difficult to separate legitimate satire from content posted by those "who label their information as satire and know it's likely to cause harm."

From fun to politics

During the 2020 US election campaign, the Poynter Institute's fact-checking operation PolitiFact found more than 100 websites publishing political satire out of context, calling it "a common tactic for misinformers who want to make money online". The Gates and Hanks hoaxes originated from "Real Raw News", a site fact-checked several times by AFP, and which has a disclaimer that its content "is for informational and educational and entertainment purposes" and "contains humor, parody, and satire".

Another recent article shared across social media claimed that Walt Disney's body was cryogenically preserved after his death in 1966 and that an effort would be made to revive

him. That story originated from Daily News Reported, which touts itself as "a fabricated satirical newspaper and comedy website".

Social media users often have difficulty separating fact from satire, said R Kelly Garrett, an Ohio State University professor of communications. "If you're not familiar with the news, you see a headline and it sounds like so many other headlines," said Garrett, who has researched the topic. "And the kinds of claims that would have seemed outlandish just a decade ago are becoming more common."

Facebook in April said it would use the satire tag on some pages and posts to help avoid "confusion". Similar instances around the world highlight the problems around satire going viral and being wrongly transformed into purported fact. A claim that French President Emmanuel Macron felt "dirty" after shaking hands with poor people during the 2017 election came from the satirical website Le Gorafi. Ihlaya News, a South African parody website, has been the source of several viral stories fact-checked by AFP, including one saying a student had hacked her university to change her grades.

'Politically charged'

Popular websites such as The Onion in the United States and Canada's The Beaverton have long been recognized for satire and parody. But the conservative-friendly satire site Babylon Bee has tangled with fact-checkers over its articles, including the pope's purported vaccine claim and another that the Islamic State jihadist group had laid down its arms in response to a plea from singer Katy Perry.

As many as 28 percent of Republicans and 14 percent of Democrats believed the admittedly fake stories in the Babylon Bee, Ohio State researchers found in 2019. Then-president Donald Trump retweeted one of its stories in 2020. There was a somewhat lower level of belief in The Onion, with Democrats more likely to accept those false stories as fact.

But Garrett, who led the research, said fact-checking satire may not be an effective way to curb the spread of misinformation. "If you tell people it's been fact-checked it's politically charged," he said. "People think fact checkers have a political agenda. If you tell people it was a joke it's more persuasive." — AFP

Unnamed Myanmar photographer wins Bayeux war reporting prize

The prestigious Bayeux War Correspondents' Awards on Saturday honored work by a range of international journalists including several veteran reporters and-for the first time - an unnamed Myanmar photographer. The jury agreed unanimously to award the photography prize to the Myanmar candidate, its chairman Franco-Iranian correspondent Manoocher Deghati told AFP. The jury wanted to highlight "the conditions in which very young photographers are working" in Myanmar, said Deghati, who himself had to flee Iran in 1985 after receiving death threats. The photographer's work along with several other Myanmar photographers, was on show at Bayeux, the northern French city hosting the prize.

In the written press category, Wolfgang Bauer won for his coverage of the Taleban for Zeit Magazin. It is the second time he has been honored, having won in 2016 for his work in Nigeria. Bosnians Damir Sagolj and Danis Tanovic won in the long-form television as well as the video category for their report for Al Jazeera on the plight of thousands of migrants in northern Bosnia Herzegovina. Margaux Benn was honored in the radio category for her report for Europe 1 on the villages littered with landmines in the area.

Orla Guerin and Goktay Koraltan won the television award for their report for BBC television on the snipers in Yemen targeting children. This report also won the special prize awarded by a jury of high school students. The young reporter's award went to Thomas D'Istria for his report for Le Monde newspaper from Belarus, for which he spent a year undercover. The public jury prize went to Abu Mustafa Ibraheem for his coverage for Reuters of the conflict in Gaza. The winners, who are chosen by a jury of around 40 French and British journalists, receive prizes of between 3,000 and 7,000 euros each. — AFP



A group picture shows winners and jury members during the closing ceremony of the 2021 Bayeux-Calvados Awards for war correspondents on Oct 9, 2021 in Bayeux, northwestern France. — AFP

PANDEMIC SAVIORS, FOOD DELIVERY APPS NOW UNDER FIRE

Meal delivery services became essential during the pandemic, when millions of Americans were under lockdown and restaurants were shut to visitors. But these days the platforms are increasingly finding themselves under fire, with politicians seeking to regulate the industry and restaurateurs accusing the likes of DoorDash, Grubhub and Uber Eats of freeloading. And they are looking for ways to do without them. In just the first nine months of this year, DoorDash has likely filled over 1 billion orders, most of them in the US, where the company is the market leader.

But Mathieu Palombino, founder of the New York-based pizza chain Motorino, calls the boost provided by delivery apps a "big illusion" because more orders don't bring bigger profits to restaurants. "When you receive thirty or forty orders a day, you are happy. But the problem is that it does not translate into profits," Palombino told AFP. Food delivery services can charge restaurants fees of up to 30 percent of the bill for a meal, according to their web sites. To address that problem, in August the New York city council passed a law, capping third-party delivery fees at 15 percent.

"Small businesses should not be pressured into accepting these fees in order to remain viable and competitive," said New York City Councilman Francisco Moya, who initiated the bill. A similar law was passed in San Francisco in June. Food delivery giants have challenged the laws in courts, and some analysts think they have a point. "We believe DoorDash will have a strong legal case against the permanent fee caps," Bank of America said in a research note last month.

DoorDash, Grubhub and Uber Eats argue that the cap is unconstitutional and that restaurants are free to negotiate their commissions with delivery platforms. The

delivery giants also say they have made huge investments during the pandemic that led millions of customers who had never ordered meals online to get started. And DoorDash says that restaurants that used its platform during the pandemic had a survival rate eight times higher than the industry average. The company also says that even before the laws were passed it already offered a 15% fee formula.

Put Palombino, the pizza chain



In this file photo taken on Dec 3, 2020, a Doordash delivery person rides their bike on Church Avenue in the Flatbush neighborhood of Brooklyn in New York City. — AFP

founder, is unconvinced. "The problem is that they have become so established that there no longer is a way back," he said. "If you're not on Seamless (one of the most popular delivery services in New York), you no longer exist." As for the 15

percent commission, Palombino said that a successful restaurant can "only hope" for a profit margin of 15 or 20 percent. "So at the end of the day, they take it all."

'The only real solution'

In court, the food delivery platforms have argued that the cap will trigger higher fees for consumers, who have been relatively spared for now. Collin Wallace, managing director of the marketing firm ZeroStorefront and former head of innovation at Grubhub, says that so far it's the restaurants who have had to bend.

"The only way to get this resolved is going to be by the technology platforms, using the same engineering and innovation they used to get their companies to this point," Wallace said. Some businesses are already trying to get around the all-powerful delivery apps by creating their own platforms. One such start-up, ChowNow, helps restaurants launch their own order-taking applications, so as not to have to pay any commissions at all.

Another company, LoCo, creates delivery cooperatives owned by restaurants, where they get to choose their own commissions, often half of what delivery giants charge, said LoCo founder Jon Sewell. Sewell, himself an owner of a restaurant in Iowa, added that this arrangement also allows restaurants to keep their clients' data to themselves. LoCo has launched franchises in Virginia, Nevada, and Nebraska and is looking to expand further. But Sewell admits that the concept is not easy to sell. "It's difficult to get the people convinced that they need to start to work as a collective." But, Sewell added, "to me, that's the only real solution." — AFP