

Turkey records 44,756 new coronavirus cases, highest level yet

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ANKARA: Turkey recorded 44,756 new coronavirus cases in the last 24 hours, health ministry data showed on Saturday, the highest level since the beginning of the pandemic.

Turkey currently ranks fifth globally for most daily cases based on a seven-day average, according to a Reuters tally.

Cases have surged since the government eased measures to curb the pandemic in early March, hitting new record highs over the past consecutive five days.

On Monday, President Tayyip Erdogan announced a tightening of measures, including the return of full nationwide weekend lockdowns for the Islamic fasting month of Ramadan, which starts on April 13.

The total number of cases stands at 3.445 million as of Saturday, the data showed. The latest daily death toll was 186, bringing the cumulative toll to 32,078.



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Turkey's opposition lawmaker Gergerlioglu hospitalized after arrest
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[Turkey's opposition lawmaker Gergerlioglu hospitalized after arrest mistreatment](#)

Author:

Sat, 2021-04-03 21:35

ANKARA: A prominent lawmaker from pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), Omer Faruk Gergerlioglu, was in hospital early on Saturday, a day after police arrested him in his house. He was subsequently transferred to prison.

Video footage showing his mistreatment during his arrest by the police, who did not permit him even to put his shoes on, drew an angry response from rights activists.

'This is a shame on Turkey, I didn't commit any crime,' he said before police detained him.

The politician, who is also a physician and a well-known rights defender, claimed that the security forces threatened to punch him and one of them insulted him while he was having chest pains.

His lawyer shared a report documenting the signs of ill-treatment under police custody.

Gergerlioglu, from the country's third largest party, was recently stripped from his parliamentary status over "terror propaganda" charges on March 17 for sharing a news article advocating peace talks between Ankara and the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) on Twitter in 2016, two years before he became a lawmaker.

The article is still accessible online, and Gergerlioglu said he was exercising his right to freedom of expression with that tweet.

Gergerlioglu attracted the government's anger after he repeatedly spoke about human rights abuses and torture allegations in the country, and about the strip searches in the prisons for female inmates.

“What we are seeing with the case of Omer Faruk Gergerlioglu being stripped of his parliamentary seat on the basis of a harmless tweet is a concerted effort to pay him back for having shone a light on the Erdogan government’s grave abuse of the rights of thousands of people, the human stories of injustice and great suffering,” Emma Sinclair-Webb, director of Human Rights Watch Turkey, told Arab News.

On March 31, Turkey’s Constitutional Court rejected an application demanding the annulment of the revocation of Gergerlioglu’s parliamentary status.

According to Sinclair-Webb, the events around Gergerlioglu’s arrest and transfer to prison strongly suggest that elements of the police and the security apparatus also want to punish him.

“Could it be that it’s because of all the work he has done in shining a light on police abuses, on torture in Ankara and so many other places? There seems to have been a concerted effort not to inform his family where he was being taken, as if someone wanted to give the message, ‘We can treat you as we want now’,” she said.

After the medical treatment, Gergerlioglu was transferred to Sincan F-type 2 prison on Saturday evening.

“He will return by becoming stronger,” his son Salih tweeted, claiming that his father was quickly transferred to the prison from the back door of the hospital without having notified them.

Human Rights Watch called for a full investigation into the events around Gergerlioglu’s arrest.

“But those responsible feel they are protected by a government and courts that unlawfully punished Gergerlioglu in the first place,” Sinclair-Webb said,

Sinclair-Webb added: “The treatment of Gergerlioglu during arrest and transfer to prison is part of a broader pattern.

“We see high levels of very rough policing in Turkey today, police violence toward people such as student demonstrators, but in general a security establishment that feels it has gained the upper hand and is not curbed by laws or regulations that it cannot circumvent. The climate of impunity prevails.”

Last month, a top prosecutor applied to the Constitutional Court with an indictment to shut down the HDP, but the indictment was recently sent back to the prosecutor over procedural shortcomings. It is likely to be re-submitted after making required changes.



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Turkish police detain pro-Kurdish lawmaker who lost his seat
Push to ban pro-Kurdish HDP erodes Turkey's political pluralism further

[From Ethiopia to Yemen, a perilous migrant route to endless misery](#)

Sat, 2021-04-03 20:57

DUBAI: In the latest disturbing development in Yemen, more than 220 African migrants have been kidnapped from outside UN offices in Sanaa and taken to an unknown destination.

Among those missing are 55 women, Al Arabiya, quoting local sources, reported on Saturday. They had previously organized vigils in front of the UNHCR building, calling for an investigation into the deaths on March 7 of dozens of African migrants in an overcrowded detention center in Sanaa.

The migrants are among the thousands of Africans who make the dangerous journey to Yemen, a country wracked by insurgency, extremism, war and hunger.

Desperate for a better life, their goal is to make it to Saudi Arabia and find work there. But in Yemen, where the capital, Sanaa, and the northern part of the country are controlled by the Iran-backed Houthis, they experience unmitigated misery: torture, blackmail, sexual abuse and detention in veritable hellholes.



African migrants who were reportedly smuggled by sea into Yemen, sit on the back of a vehicle on the outskirts of the city of Aden. (AFP/File Photo)

“This has been going on for a long time,” Matt Bryden, director of Sahar Research in Addis Ababa, told Arab News. “The route to Yemen is the primary route for human trafficking and smuggling out of the eastern Horn of Africa, catering mainly to Somalis and Ethiopians. Strangely, the numbers of migrants increased dramatically after 2015 at the start of the war in Yemen. Clearly, the breakdown of governance and border controls due to the conflict in Yemen was exploited by human traffickers.”

Most of the migrants from Ethiopia and neighboring countries are in search of economic stability, although some are escaping political repression. The violence and trauma for which the Ethiopia-to-Yemen route is notorious should deter people from undertaking the dangerous journey, but most of them probably have no idea of the degrading conditions that await them.

Recent data from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) shows that the number of migrants crossing to Yemen from the Horn of Africa dropped from a high of 138,213 in 2019 to 37,537 in 2020, mostly due to the coronavirus pandemic.

“Until the war erupted in Tigray, violence in Ethiopia was mainly in the

region of Oromia,” said Bryden. “However, there’s no indication of large numbers of Tigrayans fleeing to Yemen.”

Refugees from Ethiopia’s Oromo tribe who were held in a detention center in Yemen told Human Rights Watch (HRW) that guards would sexually assault women, girls and boys regularly. A detained Ethiopian woman admitted that she still suffered pain after a guard beat her incessantly for refusing to have sex with him. She told HRW that she witnessed the rape of two of her friends by guards.

The deaths in the Houthi-run detention camp in Sanaa are a horrific reminder of the price African migrants pay for seeking temporary sanctuary in Yemen. HRW has urged the Houthi authorities “to hold those responsible to account and stop holding migrants in abysmal detention facilities.”





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More than 220 African migrants kidnapped by Houthis in Sanaa: Al Arabiya
Houthis use force to break up migrant protest calling for probe into fatal fire

[Coronavirus and financial deterioration strip Lebanon's Easter of joy](#)

Sat, 2021-04-03 20:39

BEIRUT: With the advent of Easter for the Christian sects that follow the Western calendar, Lebanon entered on Saturday a new round of total lockdown

and curfews.

The holiday atmosphere is non-existent for the second year running due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

In addition, the economic crisis has diminished what was remaining of the holiday celebrations, which have been hampered by anti-virus measures.

The lockdown will continue until Tuesday morning.

On Saturday morning, roads were deserted and shops closed their doors, while supermarkets have committed to using an electronic platform that limits the number of customers allowed inside.

Restaurants resorted to providing takeaway and delivery services only.

The Internal Security Forces conducted vehicle and foot patrols and established checkpoints to control violations, stressing the necessity of wearing face masks.

The latest decision by the Ministry of the Interior permitted prayers in churches, provided they do not exceed 30 percent of their capacity, and that they commit to social distancing measures. Worshippers need to obtain a prior permit to traveling to church.

The total number of COVID-19 cases in Lebanon continues to approach half a million, while the death toll has exceeded 6,200.

The last of the politicians who contracted the virus have been Samir Geagea, head of the Lebanese Forces Party, and former Minister Ghassan Hasbani.

Dr. Firas Al-Abyad, director of the Hariri Governmental University Hospital, expressed his fear for an increase in the number of cases during Easter and Ramadan due to family gatherings.

The number of those who have received one dose of the vaccine has reached 149,687 people, with 81,680 receiving two doses.

Tony Bejjani, the owner of a restaurant in Beirut, said: "Easter this year is less than normal, and we have only fasted."

He added: "There are no signs of Easter this year. None of the people I know have gone shopping.

"People do not communicate with each other for fear of contracting COVID-19, nor do they go to mass."

Bejjani added: "People are exhausted economically and psychologically. Our work stopped for two months and 22 days after the New Year's holiday due to the lockdown, and today we had to close again although the holidays are a good season in which we can make up for some of our losses.

"People are afraid and no one is happy. They are waiting for any opportunity

to travel and never return.”

A bank employee with a salary that was relatively fair before the financial crisis said: “There is no joy this holiday. People are forbidden to meet, and if we go to church to pray, only two people are allowed to sit on the same bench.”

She said she “resorted for months to making sweets in my home and selling them through social media because the salary has barely been lasting a week with the deterioration of the Lebanese pound.”

She sarcastically said: “People did not buy regular eggs to color them this Easter after their price doubled, and they also stopped buying chocolate eggs.”

Lebanon has reached a blockage on the political level in the absence of any progress in mediation to resolve the conflict that has been obstructing the formation of the government for over 160 days.

This was the focus of an Easter message that Maronite Patriarch Bechara Al-Rahi conveyed to the Lebanese people.

He criticized again the “ruling group and those surrounding it” and said: “They are manipulating the fate of the nation’s entirety, people, land, and dignity.”

He added in his harsh message to the politicians: “It has become clear that we are facing a plan that aims to change Lebanon in its entirety, including its system, identity, form, and traditions. There are parties that adopt a methodology of demolishing the constitutional, financial, banking, military, and judicial institutions.

“There are parties that also adopt the methodology of starting problems to prevent solutions and settlements. Let everyone realize that a country’s life is not made of quotas.”

As soon as Patriarch Al-Rahi concluded his message, President Michel Aoun tweeted that “fighting corruption is done by naming the corrupt and pointing to them. Generalizing the accusation anonymizes those who are truly corrupt and outrightly misleads the public opinion.”

Aoun’s comment raised many questions in political circles, especially with regard to its timing.

It was later announced that Aoun was heading to meet with Patriarch Al-Rahi on the eve of Easter.



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Lebanon must ration subsidies before reserves run out – finance minister

[US, Bahrain discuss relations with Israel](#)

Fri, 2021-04-02 22:20

LONDON: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken held talks with his Bahraini counterpart Abdullatif bin Rashid Al-Zayani on Friday to discuss bilateral relations and Manama's ties with Israel.

During the call, Al-Zayani told Blinken he looked forward to working together to deepen the strategic partnership between the two countries to serve their common interests, adding that Bahrain takes pride in the close historical relationship it shares with the US that spans more than 120 years.

Al-Zayani praised Washington's strategic role in protect the security and stability of the region, saying that the Middle East region needs coexistence and tolerance to achieve stability, lasting peace, growth and prosperity. He wished Blinken success in leading US diplomacy and achieving its desired political goals, Bahrain News Agency (BNA) reported.

Al-Zayani also praised the strength of US-Bahraini relations and the development and growth it was witnessing in various fields. He also said he appreciated the efforts made by the American community in the kingdom to enhance relations and bilateral cooperation in various fields. Blinken stressed the Biden administration's keenness to consolidate relations and push them to more comprehensive levels, and said he appreciated Bahrain for hosting the US Naval Forces Central Command, and its prominent role in supporting US efforts to combat terrorism and its financing. "Secretary Blinken and the foreign minister discussed Bahrain's historic opening with Israel and ways to capitalize on progress made at the first US-Bahrain Strategic Dialogue held in December," US State Department spokesman Ned Price said in a statement. The talks come after Bahrain announced it had appointed Khalid Al-Jalahma as head of its diplomatic mission to Israel on Tuesday. The Israeli foreign ministry said that a team from Bahrain would arrive in Israel in the coming weeks to make the necessary arrangements for the Bahraini embassy. Bahrain signed a US-brokered deal with Israel last year to normalize relations. The Abraham Accords were also signed by the UAE, Sudan and Morocco. Previously, only Egypt and Jordan had diplomatic relations with Israel, signed in 1979 and 1994, respectively. Price said the two sides also discussed joint regional security initiatives throughout the Gulf. "Secretary Blinken outlined key policy objectives, including continued progress on human rights, and commended Bahrain for its successful efforts to combat human trafficking," Price added. They also discussed US efforts to reach a political solution to the war in Yemen, international efforts being made to address the dangers of the Iranian nuclear file, and other regional and international issues of common concern, BNA said.



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