



Thailand protesters challenge monarchy as protests escalate

Impunity robs Romania trafficking victims of justice



ANKARA: People wear their protective face masks while walking along a street in Ankara, as Turkey reported 1,648 new confirmed cases of the new coronavirus the highest daily jump in more than a month. — AFP

COVID cases pit doctors against politicians

Turkey experiencing surge in new COVID-19 cases

ISTANBUL: Resurgent coronavirus cases in Turkey are fuelling tensions between doctors who say the official figures underplay the scale of the outbreak and politicians who accuse the country's medical association of undermining efforts to contain it. More than 1,600 new cases and 60 deaths from COVID-19 are now reported daily, well off peak levels in April but rising steadily, with average numbers of deaths now three times the rates recorded between June and August.

Doctors across Turkey wore black ribbons this week to commemorate colleagues who have died, part of protests which also included a social media campaign with a message for the government: "You can't manage it; we are exhausted". Many doctors question the official COVID-19 numbers, saying that although they don't have their own independent nationwide data, the scale of cases they see at a local level does not tally with the

picture presented by the government. "The numbers of just one city, or the numbers unveiled by just one or two medical chambers are



Erdogan's ally accuses association of treason

almost equal to the (official) numbers for the whole country," doctor Halis Yerlikaya told Reuters at a hospital in the southeastern province

of Diyarbakir. "This process is not handled transparently," said Yerlikaya, who is a member of the medics association's central committee. Wearing a black ribbon on his white medical coat, he said doctors wanted to highlight the challenges and risks they faced. "We have tried to convey the voice of our colleagues who caught COVID-19, who are fighting for their lives in hospitals... Therefore we kicked off these protests."

Rebuke

The doctors' campaign prompted a blunt rebuke from President Tayyip Erdogan's parliamentary ally, who accused them of treachery and called for the medics association to be shut down. "The Turkish Medics Association is as dangerous as coronavirus and is disseminating threats," tweeted Devlet Bahçeli of the Nationalist Movement Party, whose alliance with Erdogan's

AK Party sustains the president's parliamentary majority. "The Medics Association which carries the word 'Turkish' in its name should immediately and without delay be shut down."

Health Minister Fahrettin Koca has dismissed the association's criticism of COVID-19 data, saying he has repeatedly highlighted the threat posed by the growing numbers and has not played down the challenges facing hospitals. "I say the situation is troublesome. I say the number of critical cases rose 100% compared to last month," he told journalists on Wednesday. "I unveiled the number of deaths which is 4.5 times more than last month. "But there is absolutely no mistake in the chart that we have released ... in terms of the burden on healthcare." The country of around 83 million people has so far reported about 300,000 cases of COVID-19, with nearly 7,400 deaths. — Reuters

\$13,000 fine for breaking COVID rules in England

LONDON: People in England who refuse to self-isolate to stop the spread of coronavirus could face fines of up to £10,000 (\$13,000, 11,000 euros) under tough new regulations announced Saturday to tackle a surge in cases. Prime Minister Boris Johnson said this week that Britain was seeing a second wave of Covid-19, and introduced new restrictions for millions of people across northwest, northern and central England.

In a further measure announced late Saturday, he said that from September 28 people will be legally obliged to self-isolate if they test positive or are told to by the National Health Service (NHS) tracing program. "The best way we can fight this virus is by everyone following the rules and self-isolating if they're at risk of passing on coronavirus," Johnson said in a statement. "And so nobody underestimates just how important this is, new regulations will mean you are legally obliged to do so if you have the virus or have been asked to do so by NHS Test and Trace."

Currently people who have symptoms or test positive are asked to self-isolate for 10 days. Those who live with someone who either has symptoms or tests positive must self-isolate for 14 days. The new fines will start at £1,000 - in line with breaking quarantine after international travel - and rise to £10,000 for repeat offences and the worst breaches, including businesses that threaten self-isolating staff with redundancy, officials said. In an



LONDON: Demonstrators at an anti-vax rally protest against vaccination and government restrictions designed to control or mitigate the spread of coronavirus, including the wearing of masks and lockdowns, clash with police officers on September 19, 2020. — AFP

incentive to get people to comply, those on low incomes will be able to claim an extra lump sum of £500 if they are unable to work from home during their isolation.

"While most people are doing their absolute level best to comply with the rules, I don't want to see a situation where people don't feel they are financially able to self-isolate," Johnson said. Almost 42,000 people who have tested positive for Covid-19 have died in Britain, the worst death toll from the pandemic in Europe. After a summer lull, cases are rising rapidly again and Johnson warned on Friday of a second wave. "We are seeing it in France, in

Spain, across Europe - it has been absolutely, I'm afraid, inevitable we were going to see it in this country," he said.

New rules limiting social gatherings to six people from different households came into effect this week, and local measures have been introduced across the country. But Johnson has expressed his reluctance to introduce another nationwide lockdown and some of his Conservative lawmakers are increasingly vocal in condemning current restrictions. In London on Saturday, anti-vaccine and anti-lockdown protesters clashed with police in Trafalgar Square. Police said 32 people were arrested. — AFP

Destructive storm hits central Greece

ATHENS: Two people have died as a hurricane-like storm pounded central Greece, flooding streets and homes, the authorities said. Cyclone Ianos, known as a medicane (Mediterranean hurricane), uprooted trees and caused power cuts on the Ionian islands and the western Peloponnese. It swept through central Greece, hitting areas in and around the cities of Karditsa and Farsala.

The body of an elderly woman was found in a flooded house in a village near Farsala, while a 63-year-old man was found dead in Karditsa, fire brigade officials said. The search is continuing for two other people who have been reported missing, the officials added. "We're dealing with a total catastrophe," Nikolaos Gousios, a resident at Farsala, told state TV.

The heavy rainfall turned Karditsa, in one of Greece's biggest plains, into a lake. Video footage showed flooded highways and agricultural land turned into mud lakes and farmers carrying their sheep to rescue. Reuters images captured an overflowing river flooding its banks and damaging roads. A medical centre in the town of Mouzaki partially collapsed. Train connections between Athens and the northern city of Thessaloniki were suspended.

Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said the government will provide economic relief to the affected areas. "Saving human lives is our priority," he said. The fire brigade said it had received more than 2,450 calls for assistance to rescue trapped people, cut down trees, and pump out water from homes and stores. On Saturday, the storm reached the greater Athens region, Attica. There were no reports of damage. Cyclones were first recorded in Greece in 1995 and have become more frequent in recent years. Flash floods in 2017 killed 25 people and left hundreds homeless. —Reuters



KARDITSA: Residents clear mud from a road after the floods caused by the Mediterranean hurricane (Medicane) Ianos in Karditsa, central Greece. — AFP