



Turkish police officers take a selfie picture with mobile phone in the deserted Istiklal Street during a two-day curfew to prevent the spread of the virus.

Curfew ends, strict curbs remain in place

A two-day curfew ends in Turkey’s big cities after legal action was taken against roughly 24,000 people for violating curfew rules

ISTANBUL

Turkey has lifted a 48-hour curfew in 31 provinces across the country as of midnight on April 12 that had been implemented as part of measures to curb the spread of the virus. Nearly 64 million spent the weekend in lockdown in those cities, including Istanbul, Ankara and İzmir, while the Interior Ministry said citizens largely observed the weekend curfew, which began at midnight on April 10. However, the ministry also noted that legal and administrative actions were taken against some 24,000 people who violated the curfew rules. The streets of Istanbul and Ankara were calm, main squares and parks of the cities saw fewer people.

Apparently, residents in the two provinces are heeding calls from the authorities to stay at home in the face of the risks from the outbreak. However, the scene was rather different in the southern province of Antalya. People there swarmed to open marketplaces yesterday to buy fruits and vegetables, ignoring the social distancing rules, even though most of them were seen wearing face masks. The number of confirmed cases has neared 57,000 with around 1,200 deaths. Close to 3,500 people have recovered from the virus and discharged from hospitals. Nearly 380,000 tests have been conducted across the country while some 1,700 patients receive treatment in intensive care units. The strict measures that the

government had gradually introduced gradually to take the outbreak under control, however, will remain in place. For instance, the movements of those under the age of 20 and above 65 and people with medical conditions will continue to be restricted. Schools, malls, cafes, bars, bistros and restaurants also remain closed while nearly all gatherings, including congregational prayers, sports games and other public events such as conferences, panels, exhibitions, meetings, workshops and conventions remain suspended. On the orders of the Environment and Urban Planning Ministry, sanitation teams are frequently disinfecting public places, buildings and public transport vehicles. Supermarkets are not al-

lowing customers in all at the same time as shoppers get in line in front of the stores, staying at least one meter from each other. The government has already restricted intercity travel. Only people who obtain permission from special commissions are entitled to move between the cities. The authorities have also introduced measures for open marketplaces. Accordingly, in marketplaces offering staple foods or cleaning materials, the sale of non-essential items will not be allowed. Vegetables and fruits sold unpackaged in marketplaces must be packaged avoiding customer contact with the items. At least three meters of distance must be left between stalls to reduce the density in marketplaces. All those measures will remain in place and not be relaxed as the country’s fight against the deadly outbreak continues.



A man in the capital Ankara cleans his hands with chemical disinfectant after boarding a bus in the city.

Istanbul, Ankara introduce new public transport rules

ISTANBUL

Turkey’s two largest cities, Istanbul and Ankara, which yesterday came out from a 48-hour lockdown along with 29 other provinces, started the week with new measures for public transport aimed at curbing the spread of the coronavirus outbreak. As part of the regulations introduced by the city’s governor’s offices, commuters and drivers in Istanbul are all required to wear protective face masks during the trip. Passengers are not allowed to use public transport unless they have face masks on. Some drivers for metro-buses wear protective gowns. In order to ensure the

proper implementation of the social distancing rules, inner city transport vehicles will operate at 50 percent capacity, which means only half of the seats will be occupied. The number of standing passengers will not exceed the number of seated travelers. Commuters are also required to take the window seat, leaving the aisle seats empty. According to the new rules, sanitizers will be installed on all public transport vehicles and at all stops. The capital Ankara, the country’s second largest province by population, has also introduced additional public transport regulations, which are designed to help people observe social distancing rules.

The city’s public bus system will operate regularly. On weekdays, the metro will run every seven minutes from 7:00 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. and between 4.p.m to 8.30 p.m. Outside these hours, the metro cars will run every 15 minutes. As it is the case with Istanbul, commuters are required to wear face masks and those who ignore this rule will be fined. The city has imposed another regulation for people traveling with private cars which stipulates that passengers on such vehicles must wear face masks if there is more than one person in the car.

Football club chief recovers from virus

ISTANBUL

Turkish Super Lig club Medipol Başakşehir’s chairman Göksele Gümüşdağ has recovered from novel coronavirus, the club announced yesterday. He has been discharged from hospital after a 21-day treatment. Gümüşdağ, 47, thanked President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Health Minister Fahrettin Koca and others who supported him during the quarantine period. Last week, legend Turkish goalkeeper and the five-time Turkish Super Lig winner Rüştü Reçber was also discharged from the hospital after recovering from virus. “What a nice day, thank God. My husband was discharged after spending a difficult 11 days in the hospital,” his wife Işıl Reçber said on Instagram. “There is a treatment protocol implemented by the Health Ministry. It’s the same in all hospitals, according to the person’s disease level,” she added. Turkey has so far reported 1,198 virus-related deaths, with nearly 57,000 confirmed cases.



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A letter from a martyr, Major Ali Faik Bey

Turkey lost many of her great sons in wars that brought the end of an empire and helped the creation of a modern Turkish republic. The turning point in the history of that tumultuous period in the history of the nation might be the Gallipoli Campaign. One major figure that the Gallipoli Campaign produced was a young officer called Mustafa Kemal, who in the subsequent years emerged as the commander of the Turkish liberation war and the architect of the modern republic. I have no idea when I last spoke with Erdal Kabatepe, an eminent businessman who spent years in various capacities to promote Turkish-American business relations. He first sent a mail out of the blue and later we had a small talk on the phone. He was talking about a book he wrote in Turkish and the English version, which was in the pipeline. “I, Major Ali Faik Bey” was the title of the book. It was not a novel nor was it a straightforward chronicle or a biography. Kabatepe wrote on the life story of an Ottoman officer, Major Ali Faik Bey, who lost his life during the Gallipoli Campaign and whose diaries somehow made its way to Australia and preserved. Major Ali Faik Bey was the grandfather of Kabatepe. “This is the story of a life completely based on facts, mostly composed of well-documented events. The narrative enhancements by the author were meant to provide a connection between the chapters by linking them with ordinary emotions. The real purpose of this work is to bring to light the diaries that Major Ali Faik Bey, died a martyr, kept during his Regimental Commandry in the 1st Balkan War as well as his Battalion Commandry in the Gallipoli War. These diaries have been included in the book along with their verbatim translations,” Kabatepe explained. Unfortunately, while the copies of the diaries could be found by Kabatepe, the original copies are now missing and probably in some private library in Australia where they were taken after the war. Kabatepe was clear in stressing that he was not trying to write history give a voice to the plain facts as they were perceived by his grandfather. “In the process of working on this book, I have observed that many books written on history have broken, became warped versions and have strayed far from the facts of the truth. All I tried to do was to give a voice to the plain facts. Any historian who may use this book as a reference may rest assured that they are not being misled.” Obviously, wars are no joke. Only people with courage, love for humanity and capable of embracing the adversaries can come out of a war becoming friend with the enemy he fought with. I was impressed reading the book written by Kabatepe, which indeed was very much like a letter from his grandfather.



Over 1 million civilians have been displaced in Syria’s Idlib since last October.

Over 100,000 Syrians return to their homes

IDLIB

Hundreds and thousands of displaced Syrians have started to return to their homes in war-ravaged Idlib, after a ceasefire was reached in the province. Mohamed al-Hallaj, director of the Response Coordinators Team, said that over 100,000 Syrians who were staying in camps have returned to their homes. “Over 1 million civilians were displaced since last October. After around 40 days following the ceasefire, some 109,714 civilians, from about 19,500 families, returned to their settlements in Idlib,” al-Hallaj said. Al-Hallaj said that the Assad regime, and regime forces supported by Iran-backed militias, captures civilian settlement by their ground offensives, leaving no choice for other civilians, who are living in camps, to stay where they currently are. The civilians who do not want to go back to areas, controlled by the regime, will continue to reside in camps near the Turkish border, according to al-Hallaj. The civilians who are leaving the camps, are going towards areas cleared by Turkey’s Euphrates Shield and Olive Branch operations, al-Hallaj said. “More civilians will return to their homes as aircrafts do not

take off and attack,” he said. As Europe and the United States struggle to contain the coronavirus pandemic, experts warn that disaster looms in war-torn Syria, where hospitals are unable to meet existing needs and hygiene conditions are dire. In Syria, the regime has closed borders, forbidden movement between provinces and shut schools in an effort to stem the spread of the virus. Official numbers are low with two deaths and 19 confirmed cases, but only 100 patients are being tested daily, with half of the testing carried out in the capital Damascus. Experts accuse the regime of minimizing its death toll for political motives. “Medical staff believe that there are many people who are dying in Syria with the symptoms of the virus,” said Zaki Me-hchy, senior consulting fellow at Chatham House. “But the security agencies ask them or order them not to mention it, especially to the media,” he added. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), less than two-thirds of hospitals were up and running at the end of 2019 and 70 percent of health-care workers have fled since the war began in 2011.

