

Insulting the president is a crime in Turkey

Turkish leaders condemn Charlie Hebdo cartoon of Erdogan

ANKARA, Turkey, Oct 29, (AP): Turkish officials on Wednesday railed against French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo over its cover-page cartoon mocking Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and accused the publication of sowing "the seeds of hatred and animosity."

The cartoon could further heighten tensions between Turkey and France over French President Emmanuel Macron's firm stance against Islamism following the beheading of a teacher who showed caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) for a class lesson on free speech.

Leaders from around the Muslim world added their criticism of what they see as attacks on Islam in the West, while France vowed not to back away from defending freedom of expression.

The cartoons that led to the teacher's death were the same drawings that were at the center of a deadly 2015 extremist attack on Charlie Hebdo's staff.

The cartoons upset many in the Muslim world. But it was Erdogan who led the charge against France

and questioned Macron's mental state. France then recalled its ambassador to Turkey for consultations, a first in French-Turkish diplomatic relations.

"We strongly condemn the publication concerning our president of the French magazine, which has no respect to faith, the sacred and values," Erdogan's spokesman, Ibrahim Kalin, wrote on Twitter.

The Ankara Chief Prosecutor's office launched an investigation into Charlie Hebdo managers over the cartoon, Turkey's state-run Anadolu news agency reported. Insulting the president is a crime in Turkey punishable by up to four years in prison.

Turkey's Foreign Ministry later summoned the French charge d'affaires to protest the cartoon and to demand that the French authorities "take the necessary political and legal steps" against the drawings, which the ministry said "exceed the boundaries of freedom of expression," Anadolu reported.

Erdogan himself said he had not looked at the drawing and had nothing to say about the "dishonorable" publication.

"My sadness and anger does not stem from the disgusting attack on my person but from the fact that the same (publication) is the source of the important attack on my dear Prophet," Erdogan told his ruling party's legislators in parliament.

He went on to criticize France and other Europe nations' colonial past saying: "You are murderers!"

Tensions between France and Turkey have mounted in recent months over Turkish actions in Syria, Libya and the Caucasus Mountains region of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Condemn

"I condemn this incorrigible French rag's immoral publication concerning our president," Turkish Vice-President Fuat Oktay wrote on Twitter.

Macron's stance sparked anti-France protests in Turkey and in other Muslim countries as well as calls for the boycott of French goods.

French government spokesman Gabriel Attal said the country would not back down in the face of what he called "efforts of destabilization, of intimidation."

"France will never renounce its principles and values, and notably the freedom of expression and freedom of publication" Attal said.

"It was hateful comments toward journalists, toward a newsroom, that led to the bloodshed we have seen in recent years in our country," he said, referring to the 2015 attack on Charlie Hebdo that killed 12 people and was the first in a series of extremist attacks on France.

In Egypt, the country's top Muslim cleric called on the international community to adopt universal legislation criminalizing anti-Muslim discrimination and activities.

At a gathering celebrating Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)'s birthday, Sheikh Ahmed al-Tayeb, Al-Azhar's Grand Imam, also condemned the slaying of the French teacher in Paris as "an odious and painful murder."

He said that offending Islam and Muslims has become a tool to mobilize votes. He called the "offensive cartoons" "a blatant hostility against this noble religion and its Prophet."

Egypt's President Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi said that offending the Prophet (PBUH) undermines "high values" many Mus-

lims believe in. "We, too, have rights; right of not to hurt our feelings and not to offend our values," he said.

Speaking at a Cabinet meeting, Iran's President Hassan Rouhani also weighed in on the debate.

Intervention

"If Europe and France are after rights, ethics and culture they have to withdraw from intervention in Muslim affairs," Rouhani said.

Scores of people gathered in front of the French Embassy in Tehran, setting the French flag on fire and chanting "Death to France."

Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan meanwhile, wrote letters to the heads of Muslim states, expressing his concern over the "ridicule and mockery" of Islam's Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and desecration of the Quran in the Western world, especially in Europe.

Khan wrote that "covert and overt discrimination" against Muslims is widespread in Europe.

"I believe the leadership in these countries, often acts out of lack of understanding of the intrinsic deep pas-

sion, love and devotion Muslims all over the world have for their Prophet (PBUH)," he wrote. He urged Muslim leaders to take the initiative to call for an end to this cycle of hate and violence.

About 300 members of Pakistan's radical Jamaat-e-Islami party rallied in the port city of Karachi to denounce Macron. The demonstrators wanted to march toward the Consulate of France but police stopped them.

In the biblical town of Bethlehem in the West Bank, Muslim and Christian leaders led a rare interfaith demonstration to denounce Macron's defense of the publication of the cartoons. About 50 people, including dozens of local officials and dignitaries, gathered in front of the Church of the Nativity, where tradition says Jesus was born.

Greek Orthodox Archbishop Atallah Hanna said the gathering was meant "to send a strong message from the Holy Land that we Palestinians, Christians and Muslims, reject hate speech and racist speeches and call always for brotherhood, peace and love."

News in Brief

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia's confirmed coronavirus cases climbed by 435 as related deaths rose by 15 over the past day, the health ministry said on Thursday.

The death toll now stands at 5,363 as confirmed cases hit 346,482, according to ministry data, which showed the number of recoveries as having risen by 455 to 333,005. (KUNA)

DUBAI: The UAE said on Thursday coronavirus cases increased by 1,312 to 123,764.

Three fatalities were registered as the death toll rose to 488, state news agency, WAM, quoted health authorities as saying. (KUNA)

DOHA: Qatar's health ministry said its coronavirus case tally on Thursday reached 132,150 after 211 people were confirmed as testing positive in the last day.

The number of recoveries in the Gulf state stands at 129,124 after 240 more people were cured, according to a ministry statement. (KUNA)

MANAMA: Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf said the Kingdom of Bahrain made outstanding achievements in the combat against coronavirus pandemic.

During his meeting with Speaker of the Council of Representatives Fawzia bint Abdullah Zainal on Wednesday, Dr Al-Hajraf, now on a visit to Bahrain, highlighted the need of experience sharing among the GCC member countries to make better use of IT and digital systems. (KUNA)

TEHRAN: Iran's daily confirmed coronavirus cases rose to their highest ever since the pandemic emerged by 8,293 on Thursday.

The overall caseload reached 568,896, ministry spokeswoman Dr Sima Sadat Lari said in a press statement, as the death toll climbed by 399 to 34,113. (KUNA)

BAGHDAD: Iraq's coronavirus deaths increased by 45 to 10,815 as the confirmed cases rose by 3,804, the health ministry said on Thursday.

This brings the caseload across the country's provinces, including the Kurdistan Region, to 467,755, read a ministry statement. (KUNA)

CAIRO: The Egyptian Ministry of Health and Population said Wednesday that 153 people contracted the novel coronavirus and 12 others died from the illness over the past 24 hours.

The figures took the overall lab-confirmed cases to 107,030 and the death toll to 6,234, the ministry's spokesman Dr Khaled Mujahed noted in a press release this evening. (KUNA)

ANKARA: Some 77 patients died of the novel coronavirus, and 2,305 people tested positive for the disease in the last 24 hours in Turkey, Health Minister Fahrettin Koca said Wednesday.

Thus, the latest figures raised the death toll and infections since the outbreak of the viral illness in Turkey to 10,027 and 368,513 respectively, Koca was quoted by Anadolu Agency as saying in a press statement. (KUNA)

ALGIERS: The Algerian Health Ministry reported on Wednesday 10 coronavirus fatalities and 320 new infections in the last 24 hours.

The latest figures took the death toll and the caseload in this north African country to 1,941 and 57,026 respectively, Spokesperson for COVID-19 Monitoring and Follow-up Committee Dr Djamel Fourar said during a daily virus update. (KUNA)

AMMAN: Jordan identified 3,087 confirmed coronavirus cases on Wednesday, raising the tally to 61,942, while 32 virus-induced fatalities raised the death toll to 700.

The Jordanian Premiership and Health Ministry said in a joint statement that 1,266 coronavirus patients are receiving treatment at hospitals. (KUNA)



A woman walks over a pedestrian crossing, part of a public artwork by French artist Camille Walala, in London on Oct 27. The British government is sticking to its strategy of tiered, regional restrictions to combat COVID-19 amid mounting political and scientific pressure for stronger nationwide measures to prevent the pandemic from spiralling out of control. (AP)

UK under pressure as COVID-19 epidemic doubling every 9 days

Combat surge to 'rescue Christmas'

LONDON, Oct 29, (AP): The British government is under pressure to develop a national strategy to combat a surge of COVID-19 cases and "rescue Christmas" as scientists warn that the number of people hospitalized with the disease in the UK could almost triple by the end of next month unless something more is done now.

'Threats to our ability to coexist'

KAICIID, UN alliance sign memo to promote dialogue

VIENNA, Oct 29, (AP): King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID) and the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) signed a memo on advancing interreligious and intercultural dialogue.

KAICIID Secretary General Faisal Bin Muammar and UNAOC High Representative Miguel Moratinos signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to cement their partnership for promoting dialogue for the next four years.

Under the MoU, the two organizations will combine their expertise in training and resource development to create online courses on the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies through interreligious and intercultural dialogue.

KAICIID and UNAOC will also cooperate on their respective Fellowship programmes, which have both graduated hundreds of young peace advocates every year through a process of cultural and interreligious immersion and training.

Faisal Bin Muammar, KAICIID Secretary General, said: "COVID-19 is threatening every aspect of human progress, from health, prosperity and economy, to gender equality and opportunities for young people.

"We are witnessing renewed threats to our ability to coexist. It is my hope

Mark Walport, a former chief scientific officer, said Britain only needs to look across the English Channel to see what's coming. Britain's current measures are similar to those in France and Spain, where authorities are struggling to control the virus and daily cases have already far outstripped those in the UK.

"With our current measures ... there's little evidence that there is as much social distancing as there was when we clamped down on the first wave and so we know that the risk is significant that cases will continue to grow," Walport told the BBC.

It is "not unrealistic" that 25,000 people in the UK could be hospitalized by the end of November - up from about 9,000 now, he said.

According to results from a large, ongoing study into the COVID-19 epidemic in England, scientists estimated that there are about 96,000 new cases every day and that the outbreak is doubling in size every nine days.

"The rate of growth we're seeing is really quite rapid," said Steven Riley, a professor of infectious disease dynamics at Imperial College London, one of the leaders of the study funded by the Department of Health.

Riley and colleagues took samples from more than 85,000 people randomly selected across England in late October and found that about one in every 128 people in England is infected with the coronavirus.

They reported that rates were increasing among all age groups, including those most at risk: they noted a tripling of COVID-19 rates in people aged 55 to 64 and a doubling in those over 65.

"Our data shows there's no reason to expect that exponential rise to change for the next few weeks regardless of what we do," Riley warned. "New cases will turn into hospitalizations." He said it was unclear whether recently imposed restrictions in northern England would be enough to stop the spiraling spread of the virus.

Riley said that if politicians were considering more stringent measures, "the (study) results argue for something sooner rather than later," adding that "something needs to change before Christmas."

Dr Paul Hunter of the University of East Anglia, who was not connected to the study, said it was "likely that infection rates now are very similar to and maybe even higher than at the peak in April."

The World Health Organization said for the second consecutive week, the European region accounted for the biggest proportion of new infections, with more than 1.3 million cases or about 46 percent of the worldwide total. The UN health agency also said deaths were also on the rise in Europe, with about a 35 percent spike since the previous week, and hospitalizations and ICU occupancy due to COVID-19 increased in 21 countries across Europe.

Walport's assessment came as two opposition parties called on Prime Minister Boris Johnson to convene a summit of the UK's four nations to develop a coordinated plan for combating COVID-19.

Under the UK's system of devolved government, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales have all developed their own rules to fight the pandemic. Meanwhile, Johnson has implemented a three-tiered regional strategy that applies only in England. That has led to a patchwork of regulations that change from one nation to the next, and sometimes from city to city.

Liberal Democrat leader Ed Davey said the four nations must develop a unified strategy to avoid confusion and deliver a clear message. The Liberal Democrats and Northern Ireland's Alliance Party have written to Johnson asking for a summit.

No visitors

Jerusalem citadel gets major facelift

JERUSALEM, Oct 29, (AP): The coronavirus pandemic may be keeping tourists away from Jerusalem's ancient citadel, but it has created a rare opportunity for the site to launch a massive restoration and conservation project.

In the process, Israeli archaeologists are studying the bastion's medieval past in the hope of learning more about the holy city during the Crusades.

The Tower of David, the Old City's iconic fortress, contains remnants of successive fortifications built one atop the other stretching back over 2,500 years. For centuries, pilgrims, conquerors and tourists visiting the city that is holy to Judaism, Christianity and Islam have passed beneath the stronghold's towers through the adjacent Jaffa Gate.

The Tower of David Museum's \$40 million undertaking, financed in large part by the Clore Israel Foundation, Israel's Tourism Ministry and Jerusalem's municipality, seeks to preserve the ancient site and revitalize the museum a generation after it opened to the public in 1989.

The citadel drew over half a million visitors in 2019, making it one of the city's most visited sites. But after Israel shut its borders in response to the coronavirus pandemic in March, tourist numbers have dropped to virtually zero.

While the citadel stood empty of visitors, restoration work got underway in July. The galleries were gutted of their old exhibits and excavations began in the fortress' courtyard.

"This is the jewel of the crown, because there's no other site in Jerusalem that will tell you, from the finds, from the remains, the full story," Eilat Lieber, the Tower of David's director and chief curator, said Wednesday. She said the museum is embarking on a total redesign of its exhibits with cutting edge media to tell the city's history, and the renovations are slated for completion by early 2022.

The overhaul includes improved accessibility, the construction of a new visitor's center and entrance, and the addition of new galleries and educational space in an unused area beneath an adjacent roadway.

The undertaking has also allowed archaeologists to excavate previously unstudied areas of the fortress, particularly sections dating to the Middle Ages.