

TURKEY POST-COUP PURGE 10,000 more sacked

AFP, Ankara

Turkey has sacked another 10,000 police officers, judges, prosecutors and academics, according to a decree published yesterday, as the state continued a purge within public services following July's failed coup.

A total of 7,669 police were dismissed in the latest swoop on suspected coup plotters or supporters, along with 323 personnel in the gendarmerie, which looks after domestic security.

A further 543 prosecutors and judges were also dismissed, bringing the total of those removed from the judiciary to 3,390, NTV channel reported.

The state's post-coup crackdown on higher education also continued, with 2,346 academics getting the sack, along with 28,000 others in education, including thousands of teachers.

Turkey accuses US-based Turkish cleric Fethullah Gulen and his Hizmet movement of ordering and implementing the failed putsch which left nearly 270 dead, including 24 coup-plotters.

Since then, tens of thousands of people within the judiciary, military, education system and police force have been removed, detained or arrested after being accused of links to Gulen's movement or the coup itself.

Scores of journalists have also been arrested.

Also yesterday, the justice minister said tens of thousands of convicts who were jailed before the putsch had been freed, under an initiative apparently aimed at relieving pressure on prisons which are bursting with coup suspects.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan accuses Gulen of running a "parallel state" in Turkey and has vowed to rid the country of the "virus" of the preacher's influence.



People shop for remaining stocks of insect repellent products at a pharmacy in Singapore yesterday. Many people are covering up and staying indoors to avoid mosquito bites as health experts warned that the outbreak of Zika virus in the tropical city-state would be difficult to contain. Singapore confirmed 38 more locally transmitted cases, bringing the total to 189. PHOTO: REUTERS

Melania Trump sues Daily Mail for £113m

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Melania Trump has filed a \$150 million (£113 million) lawsuit against the Daily Mail and a US blogger, saying they published false claims about her past. A Daily Mail story last month cited a Slovenian magazine's report that a modelling agency Trump worked with in New York in the 1990s also served as an escort business, linking wealthy clients with women for sexual services.

Millions strike in India over reforms

AFP, New Delhi

Millions of public sector workers went on strike across India yesterday protesting against Prime Minister Narendra Modi's plans for greater privatisation and a proposed minimum wage hike they say is inadequate. Up to 150 million workers from sectors including nursing, banking, manufacturing and coal mining as well as hawkers and daily wage labourers are expected to take part in the 24-hour nationwide strike, organisers said.

Uzbek President Karimov has died

REUTERS, Almaty

Uzbek President Islam Karimov has died aged 78 after suffering a stroke, three diplomatic sources told Reuters yesterday, leaving no obvious successor to take over the Central Asian nation of 32 million people. The Uzbek government did not immediately confirm the reports. Earlier yesterday, it said the health of Karimov, who has been in hospital since last Saturday, had sharply deteriorated.

Redress wrongs of war UN chief urges Sri Lanka, calls for restoring accountability of judiciary, security services

REUTERS, Colombo

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon yesterday urged Sri Lanka to do more to redress wrongs committed during 26 years of war with Tamil rebels, including returning land and restoring the accountability of the judiciary and security services.

Ban, on a three-day official visit, praised the efforts of President Maithripala Sirisena's administration since coming to power last year to address some rights abuses committed during the war.

"But more can and should be done to address the legacy of the past and acknowledge the voices of the victims," he told a gathering in Colombo, without mentioning the army or the rebels. "Sri Lanka is still in the early stages of regaining its rightful position in the region and the international community."

Dozens of Sri Lankan nationalists, who back ousted president Mahinda Rajapaksa, on Thursday protested against Ban's visit, demanding he leave the island and stop an investigation into alleged abuses at the end of the civil war.

Rajapaksa's administration crushed the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in 2009. The United Nations and rights groups have accused the military of killing thousands of civilians, mostly Tamils, during the conflict.

Ban said there was still much work to be done "in order to redress the wrongs of the past and to restore the legitimacy and accountability of key institutions, particularly the judiciary and the security services".

"I also urge you to speed up the return of land so that the remaining communities of displaced people can return home. In parallel, the size of the military force in the North and East could be reduced, helping to build trust and reduce tensions," he added.



UN chief chats with Sri Lanka's foreign affairs minister after delivering a lecture in Colombo yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

Syria co-op deal 'soon'

Says Putin on US-Russia efforts; Turkey PM says 'serious' on restoring ties with Syria as offensive continues against Kurds, IS

AGENCIES

Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday said in an interview aired that Moscow and Washington could soon reach a cooperation deal on Syria.

"In my opinion we're gradually heading in the right direction and I don't exclude that we'll be able to agree on something in the near future and present our agreements to the international community," Putin said in an interview with Bloomberg News.

Russian and American officials are holding negotiations in Geneva aimed at reestablishing a ceasefire in Syria and cooperating militarily against the Islamic State and other jihadist groups in the country.

"The talks are very difficult," Putin said.

"One of the key problems is that we insist, and our American partners do not object to this, that the so-called healthy part of the opposition should be separated from the radical groups and terrorist organisations such as Jabhat Al-Nusra."

Russia and US are on opposing sides of the Syria conflict with Moscow flying a bombing campaign in support of Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad and Washington demanding he go.

Any military cooperation between the two sides in Syria could prove a game-changer but many in the US -- which is leading a separate coalition against IS -- are sceptical that Moscow can be trusted.

Meanwhile, Turkey wants to normalise relations with Syria, the prime minister said yesterday, confirming a policy shift after years of supporting rebels opposed to Assad.

"We have normalised our relations with Russia and Israel," Binali Yildirim said in a televised speech.

"Now, God willing, Turkey has taken a serious initiative to normalise relations with Egypt and Syria."

Turkey yesterday renewed air strikes on Islamic State sites in Syria yesterday, extending operations along a 90-km (56-mile) corridor near the Turkish border which Ankara says it is clearing of jihadists and protecting from Kurdish militia expansion.

Turkey's 10-day-old offensive, its first major incursion into Syria since the war started five years ago, has alarmed the West.

The United States has voiced concerns about Turkish strikes on Kurdish-aligned groups that Washington has backed in its battle against Islamic State. Germany said it did not want to see a lasting Turkish presence in an already tangled conflict.

Turkey has said it has no plans to stay in Syria and simply aims to protect its frontier from Islamic State and the Kurdish YPG militia, which it sees as an extension of the outlawed Kurdish PKK group fighting an insurgency on Turkish soil.



Little has changed

Says dad of Aylan Kurdi
AP, Berlin

The father of a 3-year-old boy whose lifeless body photographed on a Turkish beach drew the world's attention to the plight of refugees says little has changed in the year since.

Abdullah Kurdi, a Syrian who now lives in Iraq, lost not only 3-year-old Aylan but also son Galip, 5, and wife Riham, 35, one year ago.

Kurdi was quoted by Germany's Bild newspaper as saying this week that he's glad the photo of his son's body was published to "make clear to people what is happening" but he's upset that more hasn't been done for refugees since.

"Politicians said after the death of my family: never again!" he said. "Everyone allegedly wanted to do something after the photos that had so moved them. But what is happening now? The dying goes on and nobody's doing anything."

Kurdi urged others contemplating the journey that the undertook with his family to rethink their plans.

"I'd like to say to the refugees in the refugee camps that they shouldn't make this journey," he said. "The danger is too great. It's not worth it."

His sister, Tima Kurdi, posted this week on her Facebook page that "we must never forget the price for freedom."

"Please keep (Aylan) and all those who died for the chance of freedom from the shackles of war in our daily prayers," she wrote.

Abdullah Kurdi now lives alone in an apartment in Arbil in Iraq's Kurdish north, in a compound guarded by the local authorities' peshmerga forces.



A man walks at a destroyed building at the site of a blast caused by a fire at a weapon storage in eastern Baghdad, Iraq yesterday. The blast sets off rockets that hit neighbouring districts, killing at least four residents and injuring 14 others, police and hospital sources said. PHOTO: REUTERS

Blast at market kills 12 in Philippines

REUTERS, Manila

An explosion at a packed night market in the home city of Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte killed at least 12 people on Friday and wounded dozens more, officials said, but the cause of the blast was not immediately clear.

The blast tore through a street market outside the high-end Marco Polo hotel, a frequent haunt of Duterte, who was in the southern city of Davao at the time but was not hurt.

Presidential spokesman Ernesto Abella, speaking to CNN Philippines, described the blast as an "unspecified explosion". There was no immediate claim of responsibility.

"There is nothing definite about it but it has resulted in the death of ... at least 10 persons, and injury of about 60," Abella said. Police later said two of at least 30 people taken to hospital had since died, bringing the toll to 12.

Regional police chief Manuel Guerlan said a ring of checkpoints had been thrown around the city's exit points.

Duterte had earlier yesterday shrugged off rumours of a plot to assassinate him, saying such threats were to be expected.

He is hugely popular in Davao, having served as its mayor for more than 22 years before his stunning national election win in May, garnered from the popularity of a promised war on drugs.

His election has prompted a spike in drug-related killings, with more than 2,000 people killed since he took office on June 30, nearly half of them in police operations.

Duterte's son Paolo Duterte, who is vice mayor of the city, told Reuters that his father was nowhere near the scene of the blast which happened around 10:30 pm, and afterwards was safe at a police station.

Davao is located in Mindanao, a large southern island beset by decades of Muslim insurgency. The region is also home to Abu Sayyaf, a rebel group loosely linked to Islamic State and notorious for making tens of millions of dollars from kidnappings.

However, Davao itself is largely peaceful and Duterte has been credited with transforming it from a lawless town to a southern commercial hub for call centres and offshore business processing services.

Courts can't interfere in personal law

Says India's Muslim Board on triple talaq
TNN, New Delhi

Personal laws can't be challenged as that would be a violation of the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution, said the All India Muslim Personal Law Board yesterday in a reply to the Supreme Court on the issue of triple talaq, ANI reported.

The board also said personal laws, which are based on the scriptures and customs of each major religious community in India, can't be rewritten in the name of social reform and that the courts can't interfere in them.

"Courts can't supplant their own interpretations," the Muslim Personal Law Board said.

Last year, the Supreme Court, of its own accord and not based on any petition, began to examine the effect of 'triple talaq' on Muslim women's rights. Many women complain that triple talaq is abused by Muslim men to arbitrarily get a divorce.

The Board also said yesterday that Article 44 of the non-binding directive principles is not enforceable by virtue of the fact that it's a directive. Article 44 says that the state shall endeavour to secure for citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India.

At the last hearing in the Supreme Court in June, the Board said there has already been a court ruling which barred courts from examining the validity of personal law practices.

At the time, senior advocate Indira Jaising, who appeared for two NGOs, said the Board was referring to a very old judgement given by the first Indian chief justice of the Bombay High Court.

TMC now 'nat'l party' in India

PTI, New Delhi

After winning two consecutive assembly polls in West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee on Friday added yet another feather to her cap with her Trinamool Congress being extended the 'national party' status by the Election Commission.

Sources in the poll panel, quoting an order, said Trinamool Congress has satisfied one of the conditions mentioned in the Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968 to be recognised as a national party -- having been recognised as a state party in at least four states.

It is a recognised state party in West Bengal, Manipur, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh.

Now, India has seven recognised national parties -- Congress, BJP, BSP, CPI, CPM, NCP and All India Trinamool Congress.

Recognition as a national or state party ensures that the election symbol of that party is not used by any other political entity in polls across India. Besides, these parties get land or buildings from the government to set up their party offices.

Scottish leader launches new independence drive

AFP, Stirling

Scotland's First Minister Nicola Sturgeon yesterday launched a major new survey on independence, saying the Brexit vote had changed the conditions that existed when Scotland voted against secession in 2014.

"Brexit raises afresh the issue of independence... It would allow us to take control of our own destiny," Sturgeon told lawmakers from her Scottish National Party, which favours breaking off from the rest of Britain.

Centre-left leader Sturgeon said the survey would be conducted through a website and by polling party members, aiming to reach two million people, or around half the electorate.

The results are due by St Andrew's Day on November 30 -- celebrating Scotland's patron saint.

"I believe it is right that our party does now lead a new conversation on independence. It will be a new debate, it will not be a re-run of 2014," she said.

Scots are deeply divided on the issue and a new poll by YouGov published on Friday found 54 percent were against independence and 46 percent in favour.

In Scotland's independence referendum two years ago, 55 percent voted against and 45 percent in favour.

But Sturgeon said she believed support for separation would increase once the effects of Brexit become clear.

She called the Conservative government's failure to prepare for a "Leave" victory in the June EU referendum "reckless and irresponsible" and warned the result would badly damage the Scottish economy.

"I am not prepared to stand by and watch that happen without a battle," Sturgeon said, adding that she would seek extra powers from London for Scotland to preserve EU ties to help businesses and universities.

