

Turkey steps up anti-IS raids

125 suspects arrested

AFP, Istanbul

Turkey yesterday detained another 125 Islamic State (IS) group suspects in a string of nationwide raids, a minister said, following warnings that IS militants were planning attacks over the holidays.

The latest arrests raised to nearly 600 the total number detained over the past week.

"We captured 125 Daesh suspects in simultaneous operations carried out in 25 provinces this morning," Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya wrote on X, using the Arabic acronym for IS.

On Christmas Day, the security forces arrested 115 IS suspects following intelligence warning that the extremist group was "planning attacks during Christmas and New Year celebrations", the Istanbul's prosecutor's office said.

During another nationwide arrest operation on Monday, IS militants opened fire on police in the northwestern coastal town of Yalova, killing three officers and wounding nine others, the interior minister said.

Six IS militants were also killed in the hours-long gun battle in Yalova, which lies on the shores of the Sea of Marmara about 90 kilometres (55 miles) southeast of Istanbul.

A day later, another 357 suspects with ties to IS were arrested in 21 different provinces, the minister said.



An Israeli military excavator demolishes one of 25 residential buildings earmarked for removal in the Nur Shams refugee camp, east of Tulkarem in the northern Israeli-occupied West Bank yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

Mamdani to be sworn in as New York mayor

AFP, New York

Zohran Mamdani, young upstart of the US left, was readying yesterday to take over as New York mayor for a term sure to see him cross swords with President Donald Trump.

After the clocks strike midnight, bringing in 2026, Mamdani will take his oath of office at an abandoned subway stop, taking the helm of the United States' largest city. He will be New York's first Muslim mayor.



His office says the understated venue for the oath-taking reflects his commitment to working people, after the 34-year-old Democrat campaigned on promises to address the soaring cost of living.

But it remains to be seen if Mamdani -- virtually unknown a year ago -- can deliver on his ambitious agenda, which envisions rent freezes, universal childcare and free public buses.

Once an election is over, "symbolism only goes so far with voters. Results begin to matter a whole lot more," New York University lecturer John Kane said.

Turnout at 52pc in first phase of Myanmar polls: junta

REUTERS

Myanmar's junta said slightly more than half of eligible voters cast their ballot in the first phase of a three-stage national election at the weekend, a figure that was markedly lower than the previous two elections.

The election is the first since a 2021 coup and is taking place during a civil war. Analysts expect the military-aligned Union Solidarity and Development Party, led by retired generals, to be returned to power.

The United Nations, some Western countries and human rights groups have said the vote is not free, fair or credible, given that anti-junta political parties are out of the running and it is illegal to criticise the polls.

Zaw Min Tun, a junta spokesperson, told state media that more than six million people, or 52.13 percent of enrolled voters, had voted on Sunday across 102 townships.

"Even in developed democratic nations, there are situations where voter turnout does not exceed 50 percent," Zaw Min Tun said.

ECONOMIC PROTEST

Govt building attacked in southern Iran

AFP, Tehran

Several people attacked and damaged a provincial governor's office in southern Iran yesterday, according to authorities quoted by the justice ministry's Mizan agency, after days of protests over the economy.

"A portion of the provincial governors' office door and its glass were destroyed in an attack by a number of people," said Hamed Ostovar, the head of Fasa city's judiciary, as quoted by Mizan, without specifying how the attack was carried out.

Fasa is located 780 kilometers

south of the capital Tehran, where a spontaneous movement against the high cost of living broke out on Sunday among shopkeepers before spreading to some universities.

Iran's prosecutor general said yesterday that economic protests that had gripped the country were legitimate, but any attempt to create insecurity would be met with a "decisive response".

"Peaceful livelihood protests are part of social and understandable realities," Mohammad Movahedi-Azad told state media after three days of protests by shopkeepers in capital Tehran, which were joined by students across the country.

"Any attempt to turn economic protests into a tool of insecurity, destruction of public property, or implementation of externally designed scenarios will inevitably be met with a legal, proportionate and decisive response."

His comments came days after the Mossad intelligence agency of Iran's arch-foe Israel posted on social media that it was "with you on the ground" in a message to Iranian protesters.

Posting on its Persian-language X account, the spy agency encouraged Iranians to "go out into the streets together".

Trump issues first 2nd-term vetoes

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump scrapped two bills this week, exercising his veto power for the first time during his second term to reject a water pipeline and the expansion of a Native American reservation.

Trump vetoed the bipartisan-backed bills on Monday, the White House announced on social media. Both the Senate and the House would need to pass the bills again by a two-thirds majority to override the president.

One of the bills, "Finish the Arkansas Valley Conduit Act," aimed to complete a decades-long plan to pipe clean water to Colorado's Eastern Plains.

In his letter to Congress explaining the veto, Trump argued it would cost too much, and said he was "preventing American taxpayers from funding expensive and unreliable policies."

The pipeline was initially proposed during John F Kennedy's presidency in the 1960s, and the vetoed bill had received unanimous support from both houses of Congress.

Global 'fragmentation' fuelling world's crises

Warns United Nations refugee chief

AFP, Geneva

The outgoing United Nations refugee chief fears an increasingly fragmented world is fuelling global conflicts and crises, and inflaming hostility towards people desperately fleeing for safety.

Reflecting on his decade at the helm of the UNHCR, Filippo Grandi told AFP that one of the most worrying developments had been how divisions had left the world seemingly incapable of resolving conflicts -- and increasingly unwilling to deal with the repercussions.

"This fragmentation of geopolitics that has caused the emergence of so many crises is perhaps the most worrying thing," the Italian diplomat said in his final interview as UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

"This world is unable to make peace; has become totally unable to make peace."

Grandi meanwhile lamented a "race to the bottom" in terms of countries



tightening laws and practices to keep asylum seekers and refugees out.

He noted "a growing hostility, a rhetoric by the populist politicians targeting and scapegoating people on the move".

Speaking at UNHCR's Geneva headquarters a day before the end of his tenure, Grandi said he had been inspired over the past decade by how regular people worldwide showed kindness and hospitality to people on the move.

"In spite of all the politics, in spite of the real challenges that these movements represent," he said, there is still a "deeply entrenched sense that if somebody flees from danger, one has the responsibility to help".

He also highlighted inspiring moments, including in 2021 when he witnessed former Colombian president Ivan Duque grant legal status to 1.7 million Venezuelans.

And more recently, "at the border between Lebanon and Syria and talking to people who had made the choice to go back just a few weeks after the fall of the Assad regime".



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