

Turkey detains more than 700 over alleged links to coup bid

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ANKARA: Turkish authorities detained 729 people in nationwide raids Tuesday over alleged links to a group blamed for a failed coup in 2016, the Ankara public prosecutor's office said.

Officials had sent to authorities in 75 provinces the names of 1,112 people under investigation over suspected ties to US-based preacher Fethullah Gulen and his movement, it said.

Gulen is accused of ordering the attempted putsch, a claim he strongly denies.

Forty-five of those arrested were in the capital Ankara, a judicial source, who did not wish to be named, told AFP.

"We do not know whether the provincial authorities detained or summoned all of the individuals whose names were given," the source added.

The Ankara public prosecutor's office, which leads the coup investigation, said 130 people on the list of suspects were deputy police chiefs still on active duty.

They are suspected of having obtained questions before sitting the 2010 exam to become inspectors, it added in a statement.

Turkish officials defend the crackdown by pointing to what it describes as the Gulen group's "virus"-like infiltration of key institutions, including the police.

Members of the movement are accused of cheating on entry exams to gain access to important public bodies.

Turkish Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu said Sunday that authorities "were planning a big operation" against the movement.

"Devils wouldn't even conduct the tricks that they did," Soylu said, adding that Turkey would "finish them off in this country."

There have been regular raids across Turkey in recent weeks against alleged members of the movement, despite criticism from human rights defenders and Ankara's Western allies over the scale of the crackdown.

Tens of thousands of people have been taken into custody over suspected links to Gulen since 2016 while over 100,000 – including teachers, police officers, and judges – have been sacked or suspended from the public sector.

Turkish Justice Minister Abdulhamit Gul said last month that 31,088 people have been convicted or jailed over suspected Gulen links.



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Turkey orders 1,112 people arrested over Gulen links
Turkey targets military over alleged Gulen links

[Fresh protests in Sudan call for removal of Al-Bashir](#)

Author:

Tue, 2019-02-12 21:34

KHARTOUM: Security forces arrested 14 professors who were gathering to protest outside Khartoum University on Tuesday, witnesses said, as anti-government demonstrations neared the end of their eighth week.

Doctors also rallied outside state and private hospitals in Sudan's capital and other cities against the rule of President Omar Al-Bashir, witnesses added.

Union members, students, opposition activists and others, frustrated with economic hardships, have held near daily protests since Dec. 19, 2018, in the most sustained challenge to Al-Bashir's three decades in power.

Photos posted online on Tuesday showed people holding banners marked with “Freedom, justice and peace,” “No to torturing and killing protesters” and other slogans.

Rights groups say at least 45 people have been killed in the protests since they began on Dec. 19, while the government puts the death toll at 31.

Bashir has blamed the unrest on unnamed foreign powers and showed no signs of bowing to demands to quit. But he and some senior officials have adopted a more conciliatory tone in recent weeks and promised to free detained protesters.

On Sunday, police used tear gas to disperse hundreds of Sudanese protesters who marched on a women’s prison in Omdurman calling for the release of detainees arrested in anti-government protests, witnesses said.

“We are fighters, we will complete our mission,” protesters chanted as women ululated and men flashed the victory sign, according to the witnesses.

The protesters called for the release of women arrested in ongoing demonstrations against Al-Bashir’s rule, the witnesses said.

The march was called by the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA), which is spearheading the protest campaign.

The SPA, an umbrella body of doctors, engineers and teachers, called Sunday’s march a “Rally for Women Detainees.”

“Women are taking the lead in the protest movement,” a female protester taking part in Sunday’s rally said without revealing her name for security reasons.



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Group urges UN to probe Sudan's use of force in protests
Sudan protesters rally against death of teacher in custody

[Two tales of a city: Jerusalem tour guided by a Palestinian and an Israeli](#)

Author:

Tue, 2019-02-12 21:21

JERUSALEM: On a Jerusalem plaza looking up at the Western Wall and the Dome of the Rock, a crowd gathers in front of two guides, listening attentively, a common sight in a city packed with pilgrims and tourists visiting its religious landmarks.

What is unusual is that one of the guides is Palestinian, one is Israeli, and they are taking turns to give their perspectives on the city known to Jews as Yerushalayim and to Arabs as Al-Quds.

"We are in Jerusalem, which is the capital of the Jewish state. We are in one of the holiest places in the world for Christianity. And the keys are held by Muslim families," said Israeli guide Lana Zilberman Soloway, who spoke first as the group reached the Church of the Holy Sepulchre where Jesus is believed to be buried. "And all three coexist at the same time."

Her counterpart, Noor Awad, from Bethlehem in the occupied West Bank just a few kilometers away, took a different view of the status quo, noting that Muslims and Christians from the West Bank or Gaza need Israeli travel permits to worship here.

"For Palestinians, this is the capital of Palestine and the capital of their country," said Awad, 28. "If you don't get that permission, you can't come actually here to pray. So the place is being used, and plays a lot into the two narratives and the conflict we have today."

The two guides heard each other out politely, with the occasional quip or raised eyebrow. Two dozen tourists, mainly foreigners living in the city, peppered them with questions.

The tour operator said its "Dual Narrative" tour was "created in partnership

by Israelis, Palestinians, Arabs, and Jews." The weekly tours have been under way since last October.

Israel considers all of Jerusalem its capital. The Old City and holy sites lie in the mainly Arab eastern half, captured by Israel in a 1967 war and annexed in a move not recognized internationally. Palestinians say the eastern half is occupied land and must become the capital of a future Palestinian state.

At the heart of Old City, the tour came to the hill known to Jews as the Temple Mount and to Muslims as the Noble Sanctuary.

"Where the Dome of the Rock today is standing, Prophet Muhammad ascended to Heaven to talk to God," Awad told the tour party, describing what Muslims consider the holiest spot on earth outside of the two Arabian cities Prophet Muhammad called home.

"That's a very central event, somehow similar to the story of Moses talking to God from Mount Sinai."

For Jews, it is the site of the biblical temple, destroyed by Babylonian conquerors, rebuilt and razed again under the Romans. The Western Wall, a remnant of the foundations built by Herod the Great 2,000 years ago, is a sacred place of prayer.

"All the way down deep underground, underneath the golden dome, 5,779 years ago, God created the world. 4,000 years ago, we believe Abraham came to bind Isaac on that exact spot," Zilberman Soloway said.

Dave Yedid, 26, a Jewish seminary student from Long Island, New York who came on the tour, said: "Exactly what differs in the sort of Jewish Zionist narrative versus the Palestinian narrative is something I'll take home with me."

"I wanted to see those two side by side."



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In Jerusalem's Old City, conflict means buyer and seller bewarePalestinians, Israeli police scuffle at Jerusalem holy site

[Israel warns Iran that its missiles can travel 'very far'](#)

Author:

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Tue, 2019-02-12 17:24

HAIFA: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned Iran Tuesday that Israeli missiles can travel "very far," on the eve of a conference in Poland about peace and security in the Middle East.

Speaking during a visit to a naval base in the northern port of Haifa,

Netanyahu said: "The missiles you see behind me can go very far, against any enemy, including Iran's proxies in our region" – an apparent reference to Lebanon's powerful Hezbollah movement.

"We are constantly working according to our understanding and the need to prevent Iran and its proxies from entrenching on our northern border and in our region in general," Netanyahu added.

"We are doing everything necessary," said Netanyahu, as he inspected Israel's Iron Dome aerial defense system.

Netanyahu has repeatedly said Israel would not allow Iran and its ally Hezbollah to entrench themselves in neighboring Syria where they are backing the Damascus regime against rebels and some extremists.

Israel has carried out hundreds of air strikes in Syria in the past few years against Iranian and Hezbollah targets.

On Wednesday the Israeli prime minister is set to take part in an international conference in Warsaw co-organized by the United States and Poland.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo last month announced the two-day conference saying it would focus on the "destabilising influence" of Iran in the Middle East.

But with few RSVPs coming, Poland and the US have toned down the agenda to focus on ways of promoting peace and security in the Middle East.

During the conference US President Donald Trump son-in-law and adviser Jared Kushner, who has been putting final touches on a "deal of the century" for peace between Israel and the Palestinians, will make a rare speaking appearance.

Kushner may offer hints of the US peace proposal but is not expected to unveil the full deal until after the April 9 election in Israel.



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Syrian state media says Israel artillery strikes Quneitra province US blocks UN statement on Hebron monitors ejected by Israel

[UN warns Daesh losses should not lead to complacency](#)

Author:

Tue, 2019-02-12 20:37

NEW YORK: The UN counterterrorism chief warned on Monday that recent losses by Daesh extremists “should not lead to complacency at any level,” saying the extremist group remains a global threat with up to 18,000 militants in Iraq and Syria.

Vladimir Voronkov also told the Security Council that Daesh is reported to have created a network of cells in various cities in Afghanistan, including the capital Kabul, and is closely linked to its leaders in Syria and Iraq.

He said Daesh’s “center of gravity” remains in Iraq and Syria, where it reportedly controls between 14,000 and 18,000 militants, and its central leadership maintains “an intent to generate internationally directed attacks.”

His briefing on the latest UN report on extremist threats from Daesh and Al-Qaeda comes as President Donald Trump has ordered a US troop withdrawal in Syria, saying Daesh has been defeated, and a potential troop pullout in Afghanistan.

Voronkov, the undersecretary-general of the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism, said the threat from Daesh has increased because of combatants who fought with the group returning home, relocating or being released.

Michele Coninx, head of the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, said Daesh’s dramatic loss of territory “has driven its evolution into a covert and more locally focused network in Iraq, Syria and elsewhere.”

She told the council Daesh aims to undermine stabilization and rebuilding in its former strongholds in Iraq and Syria.

The extremist group “remains one of the international terrorist groups most likely to carry out a large-scale, complex attack in the future,” Coninx

said.

US Deputy Ambassador Jonathan Cohen said the significant military setbacks Daesh has suffered, notably in Iraq, Syria and the southern Philippines, are “a testament” to the work of a global coalition to defeat the extremist group.

But he said: “Much more work remains to be done to defeat Daesh.”

“Daesh is also coordinating with affiliates to plan attacks elsewhere, including Afghanistan, southeast Asia and west Africa,” he said.

Cohen encouraged all countries to adapt to the changing threat from Daesh, praising the coalition for severely degrading its ability to raise funds and finance its operations “through destroying Daesh-controlled energy assets and removing key Daesh commanders responsible for finance.”

The UN’s Coninx stressed that Daesh, along with other extremist groups and their affiliates, have “consistently demonstrated their intent and ability to exploit new technologies and seek innovative ways to circumvent obstacles to its financial, technical and recruitment capabilities.”

As examples, she said her experts noted “an increased use of mobile payment services by terrorist groups” in west Africa, and “the misuse of cryptocurrencies for malicious, criminal and terrorist purposes.”

Russia’s UN Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia said that while Daesh’s income from contraband fuel continues to fall, the extremist group seized a number of oil fields in Syria’s eastern province of Deir Ezzour last autumn which enabled it to sell oil at \$30-\$35 a barrel for a number of months through intermediaries.



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Hundreds flee US-backed Syria battle for last Daesh holdout
Russia jails Daesh pair for 15 years over planned attacks