

Turkey widens crackdown on suspects of failed coup, detains 9,000 security officials

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Istanbul: Days after a failed coup attempt against President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the Turkish government has now stepped up its crackdown on the alleged supporters of the conspiracy by removing nearly 9,000 security officials.

Forces loyal to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan quashed a coup attempt.

In addition to this, up to 6,000 members of the armed forces and judiciary have also been rounded off, including three of the country's top generals and hundreds of soldiers, said Justice Minister Bekir Bozdag.

Also, dozens of arrest warrants have been issued for judges and prosecutors deemed to be government opponents.

The wide reach of the government crackdown raised concerns over the future of democracy in Turkey, which has long prided itself on its democratic and secular traditions despite being in a tumultuous region swept by conflict and extremism.

Erdogan's survival has turned him into a "sort of a mythical figure" and could further erode democracy in Turkey, said Soner Cagaptay, director of the Turkish research program at The Washington Institute.

"It will allow him (Erdogan) to crack down on liberty and freedom of association, assembly, expression and media in ways that we haven't seen before and find strong public support within the country," he said.

Prime Minister Binali Yildirim said the perpetrators of Friday's failed coup "will receive every punishment they deserve."

Security forces on Sunday rounded up 52 more military officers for alleged coup links. The state news agency Anadolu said a detention order has been issued for 110 judges and prosecutors in Istanbul alone for their alleged involvement with the group reportedly responsible for the failed coup.

The suspects are being charged with "membership in an armed terrorist organization" and "attempting to overthrow the government of the Turkish Republic using force and violence or attempting to completely or partially hinder its function." The agency said 58 homes of prosecutors and judges have been searched.

Officials say 2,745 judges and prosecutors across the country have been dismissed.

The coup attempt began late Friday with tanks rolling into the streets of the capital, Ankara, and Istanbul as Erdogan was on vacation. Explosions and gunfire erupted throughout the night. It quickly became clear, however, that the military was not united in the effort to overthrow the government. In a dramatic iPhone interview broadcast on TV, Erdogan urged supporters into the streets to confront the troops and tanks, and forces loyal to the government began reasserting control.

- (With AP inputs)