

Turkey declares three-month state of emergency after failed coup

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Ankara: Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has declared a three-month state of emergency following Friday night's failed army coup.

Recep Tayyip Erdogan

Speaking at the presidential palace in Ankara, Erdogan said that the measure was being taken to counter threats to Turkish democracy and wasn't intended to curb basic freedoms.

He said that "all the viruses within the armed forces will be cleansed" and that the declaration could be used to extend the detention of nearly 10,000 people rounded up since the failed coup.

"The aim is to rapidly and effectively take all steps needed to eliminate the threat against democracy, the rule of law and the people's rights and freedoms," Erdogan said after a meeting with Cabinet ministers and top security advisers.

"This measure is in no way against democracy, the law and freedoms. On the contrary it aims to protect and strengthen them," Erdogan added.

The President, who has said he narrowly escaped being killed or captured by renegade military units, suggested that purges would continue within military ranks.

"As the commander in chief, I will also attend to it so that all the viruses within the armed forces will be cleansed," Erdogan said.

Turkey had imposed martial law-like emergency rule in the southeast of Turkey in 1987, allowing officials to set curfews, issue search and arrest warrants and restrict gatherings as the security forces fought Kurdish rebels in the region. The emergency rule was gradually lifted by 2002.

The latest insurrection by some military units was launched late Friday, but security forces and protesters loyal to the government quashed the rebellion.

Erdogan says the pro-government death toll in the botched coup was 246. At least 24 coup plotters were also killed.

Cracking down on alleged subversives in education, Turkey also said yesterday that it would close more than 600 private schools and dormitories following the attempted coup, spurring fears that the state's move against perceived enemies is throwing key institutions in the NATO ally into disarray.

Erdogan's government said it has fired nearly 22,000 education ministry workers, mostly teachers, taken steps to revoke the licenses of 21,000 other teachers at private schools and sacked or detained half a dozen university presidents in a campaign to root out alleged supporters of a US-based Muslim cleric blamed for the botched insurrection on Friday.

Earlier, Erdogan suggested in an interview with the Qatar-based Al-Jazeera TV network that coup plotters might still be active in the weeks ahead.

"I don't think we have come to the end of it yet," the President said.

The targeting of education ties in with Erdogan's belief that the US-based cleric, Fethullah Gulen, whose followers run a worldwide network of schools, seeks to infiltrate the Turkish education system and other institutions in order to bend the country to his will.

The cleric's movement, which espouses moderation and multi-faith harmony, says it is a scapegoat for what it describes as the president's increasingly autocratic conduct.

- With AP Inputs