



SHIMIZU, Japan: Photo shows a house swept down a river at the town of Shimizu in Hokkaido prefecture, after Typhoon Lionrock struck overnight. —AFP

TURKEY POST-COUP PURGES SHAKE HIGHER EDUCATION

FIFTEEN UNIVERSITIES, 1,000 SECONDARY SCHOOLS SHUT

ISTANBUL: With the summer holiday almost over, computer science student Hande Tekiner should be gearing up for a year of cram sessions and late-night homework. Instead, she may have nowhere to return to, as her university was shut after Turkey's failed coup. Authorities have closed 15 universities and around 1,000 secondary schools linked to Fethullah Gulen, the US-based Muslim cleric blamed for the July 15 attempted putsch.

Gulen has denied involvement in the plot and condemned it. The closures

initially saw the cleric as useful in taming the influence of the military and secular elite who had dominated Turkey since the founding of the modern republic. For years Gulen's followers have run schools across Turkey and as far afield as Africa and the United States, blending Islam with an emphasis on science and interfaith dialogue.

The schools helped to open up higher education to Erdogan's voter base - the pious masses often from poorer regions who were traditionally shut out of elite universities in Istanbul

be close to home," said another student from Konya's Mevlana University. "As a girl, my family would never allow me to study in another town." The Council of Higher Education, known as "YOK" in Turkish, provoked widespread outrage when it said students would be placed at new universities based on exam scores, meaning they could end up at a school on the other side of the country. It later relented following a number of social media campaigns, including one under the hashtag "#YOKbizimagduretme" or "YOK, don't victimise us".

Roughly 80,000 people in the military, civil service, and judiciary have been sacked or suspended in the purges. Around half of those have been in education, according to state media. Teachers' unions and some opposition politicians say authorities are targeting educators based on evidence that is tenuous at best - such as having opened a savings account at Bank Asya, a now defunct lender founded by Gulen's followers.

The government has said the investigations and other measures are necessary to prevent another coup. But Kamuran Karaca, who heads one of Turkey's biggest teachers' unions, said the wrong people were being targeted. Since the coup, 88 members of his Egitim-Sen union have been suspended. "All of our members who have been suspended, rather than being supporters of Gulen, are on the contrary people who strive for secular education and a secular life," said Karaca. "We believe they were blacklisted because they deposited their rent in Bank Asya, or took a loan from it, or a relative took a loan from it."

Gaye Usluer, a lawmaker from the opposition Republican People's Party, criticized what she said was a "sweeping" crackdown that has also harmed people who may be innocent. Candan Badem, a Marxist historian, was briefly detained for possessing a book by Gulen in his home, his lawyer told Reuters. He was later released. Badem signed an "Academics for Peace" petition this year that criticized military action in the largely Kurdish southeast. Erdogan denounced the more than 1,000 signatories, which also included US linguist and activist Noam Chomsky, and some Turkish academics were detained over it. —Reuters



ISTANBUL: People hold Turkish National flags as they march from Kizilay to Anitkabir, Mausoleum of Turkish Republic's founder Mustafa Kemal Ataturk during a parade, celebrating the 94th Anniversary of Turkey's Victory Day in Istanbul on August 30, 2016. —AFP

have left about 200,000 students in Turkey in academic limbo, wondering if they can continue their studies and worried about the black mark of a Gulen school on their college record. Tens of thousands of academics and school teachers have also been purged, deepening concern about curtailment of academic freedom and free speech.

"As students at universities that have been shut, we are being victimized, even though those schools were opened with state approval," said Tekiner. The 23-year-old had been due to start her fourth and

charges. Turkey has asked the United States to extradite him but Washington says only a federal court can make that decision. Since the coup, in which at least 240 people died, Turkey has detained about 40,000 people and formally arrested half of them. Rights groups and some in the West fear Erdogan is using the purges to stifle dissent and tighten his grip on power.

Pious masses
Until a public falling-out in 2013, Erdogan and Gulen were allies. Erdogan

and Ankara. Erdogan, himself a graduate of a religious school, has fought to bring religious education into the mainstream of constitutionally secular Turkey and worked to overturn a ban on the headscarf in parliament and universities. But the closure of Gulen schools is troubling for students in towns where there are no other universities. Those from modest backgrounds - and female students from pious families - cannot afford, or may not be allowed, to live away from home.

"The reason I chose my university is to

ELDERLY JAPANESE AMONG 11 DEAD IN TYPHOON ONSLAUGHT

TOKYO: Heavy rain from Typhoon Lionrock flooded towns across Japan's north and left at least 11 people dead, most of them elderly residents at a nursing home who could not escape rising floodwaters, officials said yesterday. The home in the town of Iwaizumi, which only had the ground floor, included people suffering from dementia who were in their 80s and 90s. Police discovered nine bodies there yesterday while checking another facility in the inundated neighborhood. As floodwaters rapidly rose on Tuesday night, all 85 elderly residents and staff at a three-story facility next door were rescued uninjured after evacuating to the top floor, said Iwate prefectural official Reiko Ouchi.

A caretaker at that facility notified the town office about their evacuation to the third floor, noting that the nine residents next door were stuck, NHK TV reported. Ouchi said officials are looking into if and how town officials responded to the call. An evacuation order was not issued. Hiroaki Sato, a senior official at the company that runs the nursing homes, said floodwater poured into the compound in a matter of 10 minutes, making it impossible for the nine elderly residents to escape. The water was at chest-high Tuesday evening.

Despite earlier warnings of the approaching typhoon, only one of the eight staff was on overnight duty, Sato told Kyodo News, adding that a telephone line was cut off due to flooding and she could not reach police or firefighters. "An overnight staff attended the residents, but in the end they all died, including one in (her) arms," Sato told nationally televised NHK news. "I'm so sorry we could not help any of the nine residents," he said, as he bowed deeply in apology, his teary voice trembling. The identity of the victims and other details, including the whereabouts of their caretakers, were not immediately known, said Takehiro Hayashijiri, a prefecture disaster management division.

Authorities found two more bodies in Iwate - one in the same town and the second in another town of Kuji, according to the Fire and Disaster Management Agency. Footage on NHK showed the nursing home partially buried in mud, surrounded by debris apparently washed down in the swollen river. A car by the home was turned upside down. At another nursing home, a rescue helicopter was perched atop a flat roof, airlifting residents, each wrapped in a blanket and carried by their helpers. "We're making a government-wide effort to assess the extent of damage," Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told reporters. The government sent troops to help in the rescue and cleanup effort.

Farther north, on the island of Hokkaido, at least two rivers broke through their banks. The disaster management agency said at least one person went missing in a car that went down with a bridge torn away by the flood. Authorities in the town of Minamifurano reported hundreds of people trapped in houses and shelters by flooding from the Sorachi river, the agency said. Hundreds of others were also trapped in buildings and isolated in several towns in Iwate. Typhoon Lionrock made landfall Tuesday evening near the city of Ofunato, 500 kilometers northeast of Tokyo on the Pacific coast and crossed the main island of Honshu before heading out to the Sea of Japan.

It was the first time a typhoon has made landfall in the northern region since 1951, when the Japan Meteorological Agency started keeping records. The scene of large parts of northern Japan covered with muddy water was a shocking reminder of the major tsunami that struck the same region five years ago. Iwate prefecture, the hardest-hit by the typhoon, is one of the areas still rebuilding from the March 2011 tsunami and earthquake, which left more than 18,000 people dead along Japan's northeastern coast. —AP



JERUSALEM: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (right) chairs the weekly Cabinet meeting at his office in Jerusalem. —AFP

ISRAEL APPROVES 466 SETTLEMENT HOMES

JERUSALEM: Israeli authorities approved 466 settlement homes in the occupied West Bank yesterday, settlement watchdog Peace Now said, despite growing international criticism over such projects. The approvals mostly involved new housing units, but a retroactive green light was also granted to 179 existing homes in the Ofarim settlement. Around 50 new units received final approval, while others were given preliminary authorization at different stages in the review process.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government "continues to plan and build all over the West Bank, while also giving settlers the message that any construction done without planning will be retroactively legalized," Peace Now said. Nickolay Mladenov, the United Nations coordinator for the Middle East peace process, told the UN Security Council on Monday that Israeli settlement expansion has surged in the two months since a key report called for a halt.

The report by the diplomatic Quartet - the European Union, Russia, the UN and the United States - said construction of settlements on land earmarked to be part of a future Palestinian state is killing off prospects for a peace deal based on a two-state solution. In response, Netanyahu's office called criticism of Israeli settlement building "absurd", particularly related to east Jerusalem. The Palestinians see east Jerusalem, occupied by Israel in 1967 and later annexed, as the capital of their future state. Israel sees all of Jerusalem as its capital. "The claim that it is illegal for Jews to build in Jerusalem is as absurd as saying Americans can't build in Washington or the French can't build in Paris," Netanyahu spokesman David Keyes said in response to Mladenov's comments.

Comments on minorities

Meanwhile, Israel's police chief faced a whirlwind of criticism yesterday after he suggested officers would "naturally" suspect minorities, including Israelis of Ethiopian descent, of crimes more than others. Members of the Ethiopian community in Israel, who account for more than

135,000 of the eight million population, called for police commissioner Roni Alsheich to be sacked after his comments on Tuesday. "Ethiopian Jews are Israeli Jews in every way," Alsheich told a lawyers' conference in Tel Aviv where he was asked about police violence against Ethiopian-Israelis. "But every criminology study worldwide shows that immigrants are more involved in crime than others."

He said that young people too were more often implicated in crimes and, that when the two factors were combined, police "naturally" suspected them more than others. Alsheich also mentioned Arab Israelis, who account for more than 17 percent of the population. He accepted, however, that there was "over-policing" of Ethiopian Israelis that must be addressed. The subject is particularly sensitive among Ethiopian Israelis, who have protested against what they see as discrimination and abuse by police.

A spokeswoman for the Israel Association for Ethiopian Jews called for Alsheich to resign, saying his comments were "intolerable." "Not only are we not immigrants as he says, but he also only reinforces stereotypes that portray all young people from our community as delinquents and criminals," Hanna Elazar said. Public Security Minister Gilad Erdan defended Alsheich in a statement, saying his comments did not defend "over-policing" or racial profiling of Ethiopian-Israelis. "He did exactly the opposite and courageously said that there is a problem that the police are addressing," Erdan said.

"We are working with members of the community and their leaders to address the errors of the past." Police spokeswoman Meirav Lapidot however told army radio that the sensitive topic "should have been explained differently." Of the 135,000 Ethiopian Jews in Israel, some 50,000 were born in the country. The community is the result of Israeli authorities eventually officially recognizing the Ethiopian Jewish community as Jews, leading to two waves of immigration in 1984 and 1991. They have alleged discrimination and other types of mistreatment. —Agencies

IS LEADERS KILLED IN IRAQ AND SYRIA

BEIRUT: US-led air strikes have killed several senior figures in the Islamic State group since April, the latest being Abu Mohamed Al-Adnani, described as the "principal architect" of jihadist attacks on the West. Coalition aircraft have also targeted Al-Nusra Front, the former Syrian branch of the jihadist group Al-Qaeda, rebranded in July as Fateh Al-Sham Front. Here is a short list of departed warlords:

Abu Mohamed Al-Adnani

On Tuesday, the IS announced via its news service Amaq that Abu Mohamed Al-Adnani, a Syrian national, had died in Aleppo province of northern Syria and pledged to avenge his death. Pentagon spokesman Peter Cook, used an alternative name for IS, said an air strike near Al-Bab had targeted Adnani, describing him as the "principal architect of ISIL's external operations and... ISIL's chief spokesman." A US defense official who declined to be named linked Adnani to attacks in Brussels, Istanbul and Paris, and said that if true, his death was "a very significant blow for ISIL." The US had offered \$5 million for information that led to him.

'Omar the Chechen'

On July 13, Amaq announced the death of senior IS commander Omar Al-Shishani, also known as "Omar the Chechen", near Mosul in northern Iraq. The Pentagon confirmed that coalition aircraft had targeted the IS leader, but not that he had been killed. Known for ruthless tactics and his thick red beard, Shishani, whose Georgian name was Tarkhan Batirashvili, was one of the most sought IS leaders in Syria, described by US officials who put a \$5-million bounty on his head as the group's de facto defence minister.

IS Anbar chief Abu Wahib

On May 6, another airstrike killed Abu Wahib, "military emir" of IS for the vast western Iraqi province of Anbar, near the town of Rutba. Abu Wahib, a former Al-Qaeda militant and three other IS jihadists died when their vehicle was hit, and Pentagon spokesman Cook said he was considered "a significant leader in ISIL leadership overall, not just in Anbar province." Wahib had appeared in chilling IS execution videos and did not mask his identity despite the clear risk to his security.

Abd Ar-Rahman Mustafa Al-Qaduli

On March 25, US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter announced that Abd Ar-Rahman Mustafa Al-Qaduli, believed to be number two in the IS leadership, had been "eliminated" during a US operation in Syria. Carter also referred to Al-Qaduli as Hajji Imam. The US Justice Department had offered a bounty of up to \$7 million for information leading to Qaduli, identified as the group's finance minister and a key figure behind some foreign plots. On March 31, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said a US drone strike had killed Abu al-Hija, a high-ranking Tunisian IS leader who was heading to Aleppo province on orders of IS chief Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, for whom the US has offered a \$10-million reward.

Al-Nusra spokesman

On April 3, Al-Nusra Front spokesman Abu Firas al-Suri, also known as Radwane Nammous, died when US planes attacked a training camp in the northwestern Syrian province of Idlib. In late July, the former Al-Qaeda affiliate announced it was breaking ties with the jihadist network, and that it would now call itself Jabhat Fateh Al-Sham (Front of the Conquest of Syria). —AFP