

Turkey fires 28,000 teachers over coup

Agence France-Presse
Ankara

TURKEY has fired almost 28,000 teachers and suspended more than 9,000 others for suspected links to the failed July coup and Kurdish militants, deputy prime minister Nurettin Canikli said Monday.

Hours after some 18 million children finished their first school day since the July 15 coup bid, Canikli said a total of 27,715 had been dismissed from the profession this summer.

Speaking to reporters in Ankara after a cabinet meeting, Canikli said 'so far 455 teachers have been able to return' to work after investigations proved they had no links to Kurdish militants or the Hizmet (service) movement led by Fethullah Gulen.

Ankara blames US-based preacher Gulen for orchestrating the coup, and has repeatedly demanded that Washington extradite him.

Ankara also claims he is the head of a terrorist organisation running a parallel state in Turkey. Gulen strongly denies all of the accusations.

The Kurdistan Workers' Party has waged a deadly insurgency in southeastern Turkey since 1984. The country has seen a major upsurge in violence since a

fragile ceasefire collapsed last year.

The deputy prime minister said 9,465 teachers remain suspended, while investigations continue into their alleged 'terror' links.

In the aftermath of the putsch bid which left nearly 270 dead including 24 coup-plotters, Turkey launched a massive crackdown, dismissing tens of thousands in the judiciary, police and education system leading to outcry from its Western allies.

The deputy prime minister said those dismissed would be replaced by next month.

'The exam process continues for 20,000 teachers to be chosen. Interviews continue. This will be completed by October 10 and by October 10, 20,000 new teachers will be able to start. This is a number that will meet our needs,' he said.

On the first day of school, students were given booklets produced by the education ministry commemorating 'the triumph of democracy on July 15 and in memory of the martyrs' together with their usual school books.

The education system has come under heavy strain during Turkey's restive summer after 11,500 teachers suspected of links to the outlawed PKK were also suspended earlier this month.