

Turkey's former deputy premier launches party to challenge Erdogan

Author:

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ANKARA: Turkey's former deputy prime minister, Ali Babacan, on Wednesday launched a new political party to challenge his ex-ally President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The 52-year-old former economy minister, who quit the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) in July last year over "deep disagreements" with Erdogan, officially applied to the Turkish Ministry of the Interior to register his party under the name Remedy (Deva).

Since his resignation, Babacan has claimed that Turkey was passing through a "dark tunnel" and has warned about the dangers of "one-man rule" in the country.

Turkey's economic recession, high unemployment rates, and government loss of management over major cities such as Istanbul and Ankara in last year's municipal elections, have sparked the formation of new breakaway parties from the AKP.

At the launch event in Ankara, Babacan called for wide-ranging reforms to strengthen the rule of law and democracy.

The mainly young and female profile of the Remedy party's council not only includes ex-ministers from the AKP but also key names from the business sector, military, and civil society along with managers of multinational companies.

Having presided over Turkey's economy from 2009 to 2015, Babacan blamed the country's economic deterioration on its democratic deficit. He also repeated his opposition to the shift from a parliamentary to a presidential system in Turkey, criticized the crackdown on the media, and lamented the Central Bank's lack of independence.

"Our citizens are worried about their future; human rights violations and curtailing of liberties are making it impossible for our society to breathe. Our women are concerned about living under constant threat. Turkey is such a great country that cannot be restricted to one wisdom and a narrow establishment," he said.

Political analyst Nezih Onur Kuru, from Koc University in Istanbul, said the democratic, professional and technocrat image of the party's founders' council gave Babacan a political advantage.

"Babacan showed a positive performance toward economic development and democratization during his term under the AKP. Therefore, his past records and achievements are very valuable references," he told Arab News.

In promising a cure for the country's political and economic deficiencies via his new party, Kuru added that Babacan still had a high brand value at home and abroad. As a politician coming from a conservative and industrialist family, he also has ties with the Turkish business community.

However, Remedy's success and that of another breakaway party, former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu's Future Party, will depend on their approach to Erdogan's policy style and political alliances.

According to Kuru, the Remedy party will appeal not only to disillusioned AKP voters but also to center and right segments of society and those with no political allegiances.

Babacan's party program also put emphasis on youth unemployment, which had reached 24 percent according to latest statistics.

Babacan gained a master's degree from Northwestern University in Chicago between 1990 and 1992 with a Fulbright scholarship from the US. He has also worked as a financial consultant to top executives of major American banks.

To coincide with the launch of Babacan's new party, Erdogan delivered a speech in which criticized the breakaway parties and said: "Every initiative that is put forward and branded as 'new' once again proves the need and demand for the AKP."



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[WATCH: MTV Lebanese anchor Nabila Awad announces state of emergency, criticizes government for politicizing coronavirus](#)

Thu, 2020-03-12 00:46

BEIRUT: Lebanese people took to social media on Wednesday to call on the government and Prime Minister Hassan Diab to impose a state of emergency and a nationwide lockdown over the coronavirus pandemic.

Diab was also criticized for taking too long to ban flights from Iran, center of one of the worst outbreaks outside of China.

One Twitter user named Jessy said: "Let us declare a state of emergency in the country before it is too late, before we all lose a loved one, and before it all gets out of hand!"

Diab said Wednesday that Lebanon has suspended flights from Italy, South Korea, Iran and China, the countries hit hardest by the coronavirus. The measures came as Lebanon announced its second death from COVID-19 in two days.

Several other users wrote "Lock down the entire country NOW" repeatedly and used the hashtag "Declare a state of emergency" was trending.

Taking it a step further, Lebanese news presenter at MTV, Nabila Awad, took it upon herself to tell it as it is and called on people to act as if there was a state of emergency in Lebanon, asking people to stay at home to avoid becoming infected.

"The government today has certain considerations and does not want to announce the state of the health emergency but here on MTV we want to address this specific issue to our audience and ask them to act responsibly and act as if there is a state of health emergency in Lebanon," she said during a news broadcast.

She called on people to be "responsible" and "stay in their homes as a type of quarantine."

"The issue is really dangerous and from MTV we call on everyone to act as if there is a health emergency," she added.

Social media users praised and thanked Awad for her intervention.

"It is very important to declare a state of emergency. The headline must remain as long (as possible), do not delete it, keep it permanently until the virus is contained. We congratulate you on this important step," Georges Ghorayeb said.

Meanwhile, Sarah Luna Makdissy thanked the channel and said "those who could care less about their health and wants to wander around and keep receiving

planes from Iran, they are free to do so and endanger their lives but they are not free to infect others.”



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Coronavirus claims two with nearly 70 cases confirmed in LebanonLebanon virus death a 'turning point,' warns health chief

[Gazans use epidemic to satirize political and social reality](#)

Author:

Thu, 2020-03-12 00:20

GAZA CITY: Gazans have found in coronavirus an opportunity to ridicule their political and social reality.

Since the emergence of the virus and its rapid spread throughout the world, including the Arab region, activists on social media in Gaza have been

deploying humor to highlight their deteriorating situation.

Fadel Suleiman said that the Gaza Strip is besieged to the point that “the coronavirus does not know how to enter,” in response to several statements issued by the Ministry of Health, which is run by Hamas in Gaza, saying that the enclave is free of the virus.

The majority of the 2 million population of the Gaza Strip live in what has been described as a “big prison,” after Israel imposed a tight siege after Hamas seized control of the Strip by armed force in mid-2007.

Marwa Abu Odeh described the coronavirus as a “blessing,” calling for the authorities in Gaza to close the Rafah crossing with Egypt.

Although the Ministry of Health in Gaza established a quarantine center at the Rafah crossing, which is the only outlet for 2 million Palestinians to the outside world, many have expressed little confidence in its ability to deal with the virus if it arrived.

Manal Ramadan said: “Coronavirus confirms that Gaza is devoid of the Ministry of Health . . . No need to panic.” She followed this post on her Facebook page with a “smiley” emoji.

Gaza hospitals suffer from a lack of capabilities and a permanent shortage of many types of drugs and medical supplies.

Issam Madi said in a post on Facebook: “Fear that the preparations are like the municipality’s preparations for the winter,” referring to the Gaza municipality’s failure to prevent flood losses.

Nahid Nashwan said: “If there was financial support for the affected areas of the coronavirus, the Hamas government would have declared Gaza fully sick.”

Abdullah Abu Sharkh, a retired teacher who was held several times in Hamas prisons, said: “I am terrified in Gaza of the coronavirus epidemic more than Hamas and Zionism . . . I do not fear death by itself, but I reject a stupid and ridiculous death.”

Doa’a Hassni, an activist opposed to the rule of Hamas, commented on a statement by a Hamas Ministry of Education official who had said: “The topic of the coronavirus has taken more than its size.” She responded by saying: “Behave guys, it’s just a virus that won’t be seen with the naked eye.”

Officials in the ministries in Gaza affiliated with Hamas in Gaza believe that the declaration of state of emergency by the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank is exaggerated and does not apply to Gaza, as it is devoid of coronavirus.

Although some people are taking the coronavirus seriously, and are stocking up on masks and sterile fluids that have either disappeared from most pharmacies or whose prices have risen, many others took advantage of the suspension of schools and universities and went to the beach and public parks.

“The Gaza tourist boats thanks the coronavirus,” said an official of the fishermen’s committees in the Federation of Agricultural Work Committees, Zakaria Bakr, commenting on the great demand for these boats to hire.

Yahya Wafi said: “Children and parents are very interested in amusement parks and public parks on the second day of the Happy Coronavirus Feast.”

Others saw school closures putting pressure on mothers. Mohamed El-Jamal said: “My wife says: ‘Within a week, if children didn’t return to schools, I will invent the coronavirus treatment’.”

Many have linked the virus to the deterioration of life in all walks of life in Gaza, due to the blockade, occupation and internal division.

As an expression of this deteriorating reality, Mohamed El-Burai said: “China has the coronavirus . . . We in Palestine have a virus that has conquered us, stole us, sold us and deserted us, and let us hate ourselves.”

Warda Dawood said: “Breaking . . . the infection of the first Gazan of coronavirus, which led to the death of the virus, because of the pressure and frustration that he found inside the poor Gazans . . . Coronavirus warns his fellows to avoid the whereabouts of Gazans.”



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conditions in Qatar spark fear of coronavirus outbreak going out of control

Coronavirus claims two with nearly 70 cases confirmed in Lebanon

Thu, 2020-03-12 00:03

BEIRUT: Preventative measures in Lebanon were increased to limit the spread of coronavirus on Wednesday, after the country recorded an increase in the number of deaths and infections.

Illegal crossings between Lebanon and Syria in Hermel were closed by the military to prevent the transmission the virus to Lebanese territory "in light of the chaos in the health situation in Syria," a Lebanese health official told Arab News.

The Syndicate of Owners of Restaurants, Cafés, Night-Clubs, and Amusements in Lebanon announced the closure of all facilities, with only delivery services still operating. Casino du Liban has closed, whilst services at mosques and churches have been postponed and sterilization procedures put in place across the country. Arab News has learned that media organizations have asked employees to work from home where possible.

The Syndicate of Dentists in Beirut called on dentists to "limit medical work to urgent and necessary treatments only." The Federation of Trade Unions of Independent Interests and Public Institutions said members would stop going to work from Thursday to next Sunday.

A source at the Ministry of Health, Dr. Abdulrahman Al-Bizri, denied Rafik Hariri International Airport was to close, but he warned: "The country will close as part of a plan to combat the spread of the virus and mitigate gatherings as much as possible. University hospitals are cooperating with us and medical and health teams are ready to deal with cases and they are taking preventive measures to protect themselves."

Lebanon's second coronavirus victim, Maroun Karam, 55, died on Wednesday.

According to the minister of health's office, Karam was "not suffering from health problems and it was found that his immune system was very weak. He did not travel but the infection was transmitted to him from a students who came from abroad."

The number of recorded patients in Lebanon is now around 70, along with hundreds of people suspected of carrying the virus in quarantine. The Ministry of Health stated that Rafik Hariri University Hospital in Beirut had 61 confirmed cases, with 9 confirmed cases in other university hospitals.

Rafik Hariri University Hospital said it believed: "The incidence of coronavirus will increase by 30 percent every day." The University Hospital of Our Lady of Aid said that 10 of its employees were infected with the virus as a result of direct contact with an infected patient.

It has emerged, though, that the first case of the virus confirmed in Lebanon (a woman who had recently traveled to Iran) has made a full recovery. At least 37 percent of all cases have come from people who are suspected of having caught the virus abroad.

Former Prime Minister Saad Hariri took to Twitter to urge people to "close the doors in the face of corona (regardless of which) country it comes from, sisterly or friendly, far or near. The safety of the Lebanese should be above any consideration."

In a statement, the head of the Lebanese Forces party, Samir Geagea, called for a "serious health emergency and the most appropriate precautionary measures."

The Saudi Embassy in Lebanon announced that it was "coordinating with Middle East Airlines (MEA) to operate a flight on Saturday morning to King Khalid Airport in Riyadh, and another on Sunday morning to King Abdul Aziz Airport. for Saudi citizens wishing to return to the Kingdom."

MEA announced that after obtaining special permission from the authorities in Saudi Arabia, it would operate 3 trips to and from Jeddah, Riyadh, and Dammam, to secure the return of Lebanese and Saudi nationals to their homelands.

The Kingdom had previously suspended all flights to Lebanon in light of the outbreak.

Meanwhile, the Chinese Ambassador to Lebanon Wang Kejian announced during his meeting with President Michel Aoun that his country was ready "to assist Lebanon in combating this epidemic."

He said that the situation in China "is better than before, as a result of the measures taken by the Chinese authorities to restrict this epidemic and stop its spread."



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Labor conditions in Qatar spark fear of coronavirus outbreak going out of control
Cinemas close in Saudi Arabia over coronavirus concerns

[US urges Tehran to release American prisoners amid virus crisis](#)

Wed, 2020-03-11 02:11

WASHINGTON: The United States on Tuesday called for Iran to release all American prisoners held in the country as the coronavirus outbreak reportedly spreads through its prisons.

“The United States will hold the Iranian regime directly responsible for any American deaths. Our response will be decisive,” US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in a statement.

“Reports that COVID-19 has spread to Iranian prisons are deeply troubling and demand nothing less than the full and immediate release of all American citizens.

“Their detention amid increasingly deteriorating conditions defies basic human decency.”

Iran’s response to the deadly coronavirus outbreak, including temporarily

releasing 70,000 prisoners, was “too little, too late,” a UN rights expert said Tuesday.

Javid Rehman, the United Nations special rapporteur on human rights in Iran, said Tehran was trying to “fudge” its handling of the outbreak, one of the deadliest outside China, where the disease originated.

“The situation on coronavirus is highly disturbing within Iran,” Rehman told reporters at the UN in Geneva.

Iran on Tuesday reported 54 new deaths in the past 24 hours, the highest single-day toll since the start of the outbreak there. That brought the numbers killed in the country to 291 out of 8,042 infected.

The Iranian judiciary’s Mizan Online official news agency cited Asghar Jahangir, the head of Iran’s prisons organization, as saying that “about 70,000 prisoners” had been released in a bid to combat the outbreak.

Iran said in December it was ready for more prisoner swaps with the United States after it secured the return of scientist Massoud Soleimani in exchange for Xiyue Wang, a Chinese-born American held in the Islamic republic.

Decades-old tensions between Tehran and Washington have escalated steeply since 2018, when US President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew from a landmark 2015 nuclear deal and reimposed sanctions on Iran.



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UK minister diagnosed with coronavirus, met with PM Johnson
Total number of coronavirus cases in Saudi Arabia reaches 21