

Philanthropist covers bills for thousands of poor families in Turkey

Author:

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ANKARA: Long queues in major cities for cheap bread are not the only sign of the financial pains that Turkish households are experiencing after prices skyrocketed in recent months.

Ilhami Isik, a Kurdish intellectual and writer originally from the southeastern province of Batman, has lent a helping hand to 14,000 families by helping clear around 40,000 bills worth TRY6.1 million (\$0.3 million) over the last three years.

“The number of bills keeps growing over years and they come from all over the country, especially from the middle-income and low-income families of Istanbul and southeastern province of Diyarbakir,” Isik told Arab News.

People reach out to him through social media and he shares photos of the bills, requesting philanthropists to come forward and help the poor clear their bills. It is mostly medium-income families and a small number of businessmen who come forward to help.

“Amid rising price of utilities, the bill is not just a bill. It is something that sometimes triggers a divorce, a suicide or causes a child to sleep with an empty stomach. The ability to pay the bill is the main indicator for a family to keep its members alive and healthy for that month,” he said.

Due to the country’s serious economic problems and rising living costs of living in the country, where official inflation rates have reached 21.3 percent, more and more families are calling him for help.

“Sometimes I’m having trouble to find necessary financial means to pay them, but I’ll keep my project going on. We are receiving at least 30 requests per day. It sometimes reaches 50 bills. Families are tearing apart. Children are facing unbelievable traumas due to poverty. Sometimes a bill that I pay discourages a dad from committing suicide when he sees his child freezing in the house after the electricity or natural gas is cut.”

To some, helping people pay their bills may not sound like a sustainable project because, as the saying goes, if they give a man a fish, they have to feed him for a day, but if they teach a man how to fish, they will feed him for a lifetime.

“But my only concern right now is to keep these people alive,” Isik explains. “Finding them jobs is part of a political mechanism. It is the duty of the public welfare authorities to do that. I just want to make sure that these children keep healthy and happy without being under the stress of financial strains. Sometimes a mother calls me and says that they all slept well the

day before because they don't have to be concerned about their bills. It is my only concern."

It is mostly women who reach out to Isik, as men will not take the initiative out of shame.

His social responsibility projects began in 2014, when he spontaneously initiated a countrywide campaign dubbed "Let's Prevent Children From Feeling Cold."

The project lasted two years and Isik provided about 84,000 children, including refugees, with new and clean coats. Several well-known Turkish brands sent him truckloads of clothes in the eastern and southeastern provinces.

Sky-high bills have been on the agenda of households for some time. Over the last two years, electricity prices have increased by 47 percent and gas prices by 42 percent. Electricity prices have increased by 21.9 percent so far this year.

Istanbul and Ankara municipalities have launched social solidarity campaigns, such as "Bill Pending," to help thousands of needy families who are having difficulties in paying their utility bills.

This year, Ankara municipality helped several families to clear their electricity bills. Official sources from the municipality told Arab News that, in 2021, more than 98,000 bills worth TRY4.7 million were paid with contributions from the city's philanthropists.



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[Morocco arrests 25 ‘terrorism’ suspects linked to Daesh: security source](#)

Author:

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RABAT: Moroccan security forces arrested 25 people this month on suspicion of supporting Daesh group and planning “terrorist” attacks in the kingdom, a security source told AFP on Saturday.

The arrests took place in several cities on December 8 as part of “ongoing efforts to fight terrorist dangers,” the source said on condition of anonymity.

Some of the suspects have already been referred to the judiciary, the source added.

Moroccan news outlets had reported a nationwide counter-terror operation on December 8 – the largest of its kind in recent years – but official sources had not confirmed the crackdown.

Reports on Saturday said that during the operations, authorities seized weapons including firearms and ammunition, as well as documents on bomb-making and material “glorifying the Daesh group.”

They said investigations revealed the suspects were planning to carry out “specific” terrorist attacks inside Morocco.

Counter-terrorism police said Friday that they had thwarted a suspected Daesh bomb plot and arrested an alleged supporter of the group, in cooperation with US intelligence services.

The security source told AFP the operation had “no connection” to the arrests earlier this month.

On October 6, counter-terrorism police announced the dismantling of a “terror cell” in the northern city of Tangiers and the arrest of five suspects accused of plotting bomb attacks.

Since 2002, Moroccan police say they have dismantled 2,000 “terror cells” and arrested 3,500 people in cases linked to terror, according to figures published in February.



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[Lebanon imposes curfew for unvaccinated to prevent new holiday outbreak](#)

Author:

Sat, 2021-12-18 21:16

BEIRUT: Lebanese security services have imposed a three-week curfew for unvaccinated residents, with fines for those who break it, from 5 p.m. to 6 a.m. until Jan. 9, 2022, amid rising cases across the country.

The committee that follows up on coronavirus disease preventative measures said it would exclude those "with at least one vaccine dose or a negative PCR test in the last 48 hours and children under 12."

On Friday, the Ministry of Public Health reported 1,912 new COVID-19 cases, mostly in people between 30 and 39 years old, some of whom had received three vaccine doses. In addition, 14 deaths were recorded.

The ministry said: "We have had 22,168 active cases these last 14 days," adding only 34 percent of people had received two vaccine doses, with the lowest vaccination rate recorded in the Bekaa region.

Lebanese Red Cross Secretary-General George Kettaneh said that "ambulance teams transport 80 to 100 cases to hospitals every day, while over 1,200 oxygen concentrators have been distributed."

So far, Lebanon has had 60 cases of the new omicron variant, but Lebanese Health Minister Firass Abiad noted it is "rapidly spreading ... two and a half times faster than the delta variant."

Those who have received three vaccine doses have greater protection against omicron, he added.

Lebanon fears yet another outbreak over the holidays, particularly since the medical sector is exhausted amid shortages in staff, fuel, oxygen, medical supplies and medicines.

Suleiman Haroun, head of the Syndicate of Private Hospital Owners, said: "Hospitals are still able to accommodate patients, but they are of course under a lot of pressure, especially since 80 to 90 percent of COVID-19 beds are occupied."

Haroun added: "We fear the numbers will rise. The majority of cases currently do not require intensive care, but some patients are staying up to three weeks in the hospital."

In a bid to avoid an outbreak over the holidays, the committee that follows up on COVID-19 preventative measures imposed a limit of 50 percent capacity at any venue.

In addition, nightclubs, restaurants and hotels will deny entry to those without at least one COVID-19 vaccine dose or a negative PCR test in the past 48 hours.

Meanwhile, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres will arrive in Lebanon on Sunday to meet with President Michel Aoun, Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri and Prime Minister Najib Mikati, as well as civil society representatives.

Political observers ruled out the possibility of this affecting the work of the Cabinet, which has been paralyzed since mid-October.

The Canadian Embassy in Lebanon has urged Canadian nationals to "exercise a high degree of caution in Lebanon due to an unpredictable security situation and the risk of terrorist attack."

The embassy advised people to avoid certain areas, namely the southern suburbs of Beirut, Tripoli, Baalbek-Hermel, all Palestinian camps and areas

south of the Litani, “due to the presence of armed groups and the risk of violence from organized crime, kidnappings and threat of terrorist attacks.”



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[Rights violations on all sides of Ethiopia conflict, UN says](#)

Sat, 2021-12-18 00:31

GENEVA: All sides in the deepening conflict in northern Ethiopia are committing severe human rights violations and should pull back from their year-old war, the UN said.

An estimated 5,000 to 7,000 people are detained, including nine UN staff, under a state of emergency and its “excessively broad provision” declared by the government last month, the UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, Nada Al-Nashif, said.

“Many are detained incommunicado or in unknown locations. This is tantamount to enforced disappearance, and a matter of very grave concern,” she told a special session of the UN Human Rights Council.

Ethiopia’s Ambassador to the UN in Geneva, Zenebe Kebede, did not comment directly on the accusations of detentions, but said that there was a failure to condemn what he said was a series of abuses by rebellious forces from the northern Tigray region.

“Ethiopia is being targeted and singled out at the Human Rights Council for defending a democratically elected government, the peace and the future of its people,” he said.

Thousands of civilians have died and millions have fled in the conflict between the federal government and rebellious forces including fighters loyal to the Tigray People’s Liberation Front, which dominated Ethiopia’s ruling coalition for nearly 30 years.

Al-Nashif said people had been detained in Oromiya and Benishangul-Gumuz regions this month.

“I also deplore increasing hate speech and incitement to violence by federal and regional authorities, as well as other public figures, particularly targeted against Tigrayans and members of the Oromo community,” she added.

The forum will consider a draft resolution brought by the EU that condemns violations by all sides. If adopted, it would set up an international commission of rights experts on Ethiopia to investigate and report back after a year.

The US called for the resolution’s adoption and for the Ethiopian government to “release all civilians and allow international monitors timely access to detainees.”

Ethiopia’s Zenebe rejected the resolution and said the government would not work with any such commission.

He added that the state-appointed Ethiopian Human Rights Commission had already worked with the UN rights office to investigate accusations of abuses, and was ready to do so again.

That joint investigation published last month found that all sides in Tigray’s conflict had committed violations that may amount to war crimes.

Diplomats expected the vote on the resolution to be close at the 47-member-state forum.

The African Group of countries said that “any politicization of the

investigation process must be avoided” and that the EU had “totally ignored its positions and advice on this delicate situation.”

The proposed investigative mechanism was “counterproductive and likely to exacerbate tensions,” it said, calling for the resolution to be rejected.

In Addis Ababa, Ethiopian government spokesman Legesse Tulu did not respond to requests for comment.



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Ethiopia urged to free reporters held under emergency laws
Tigray rebels retake Lalibela in Ethiopia

[Death toll in Darfur tribal clashes reaches 199](#)

Author:

Sat, 2021-12-18 00:42

KHARTOUM: At least 199 people have been killed in Sudan's restive Darfur in tribal clashes over the past two months, medics said on Friday, urging the government to stop the bloodshed.

The clashes, triggered by disputes over land, livestock and access to water and agriculture, have hit several parts of Darfur since early October.

The independent Doctors' Committee said 199 people have been killed, most of them shot dead.

"There are no concrete steps being taken from any side to stop the violence. The state is absent as well as the justice system and police are nowhere to be found," it said in a statement.

According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the violence has displaced more than 83,000 people.

Darfur was ravaged by a civil war that erupted in 2003 between ethnic minority rebels, who complained of discrimination, and the Arab-dominated government of then president Omar Bashir.

Khartoum responded by unleashing the Janjaweed militia, blamed for atrocities including murder, rape and the looting and burning of villages.

The violence resulted in one of the world's worst humanitarian catastrophes. More than 300,000 people died and 2.5 million were displaced during the conflict, according to the UN.

Bashir, who is wanted by the International Criminal Court on charges of genocide in Darfur, was ousted and jailed in April 2019 after mass protests against his three-decade rule.



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Death toll in Sudan's Darfur tribal clashes hits 138: medics