

# Diab, the fallen 'technocrat' PM

AFP Nes

Lebanon's prime minister Hassan Diab, who resigned yesterday, six days after the massive Beirut blast, owed his appointment late last year to public anger with the ruling elite, but in the end fell victim to it.

Heading what was billed as a government of "technocrats" -- experts supposedly above Lebanon's complex and murky political fray -- he was tasked with rescuing the country from its worst economic crisis since the 1975-1990 civil war.

Promising a new style of governance, the American University of Beirut (AUB) engineering professor and former education minister described himself as "one of the rare technocrat ministers since Lebanon's independence" in the 1940s.

But anger quickly grew as the coronavirus pandemic only worsened the country's economic collapse and Diab's government, having defaulted on Lebanon's debt, also failed in its negotiations for an IMF bailout.

Then came Lebanon's worst peacetime disaster, the blast sparked by a pile of ammonium nitrate that had languished in a harbourside warehouse for years, which only confirmed the dismal view many Lebanese hold of their leaders, including Diab.

On Monday, after days of angry street protests, the 61-year-old premier caved in to angry calls for his government's resignation, after several ministers had already bolted his cabinet.

"Today we are heeding the people and their demands to hold accountable those responsible for a disaster," he said in a televised address.

"This is why today I announce the resignation of the government."

## Professor to premier

Diab, a father of three, obtained a doctorate in computer engineering from Britain's University of Bath in 1985. He joined AUB as an assistant professor at

age 26 and rose to vice president of the prestigious university.

He served as education minister from 2011 to 2014, a brief experience in politics in a government dominated by Hezbollah and its allies.

An advocate for education reform, Diab once declared that "the solution to most of the economic, social and financial challenges, as well as those linked to unemployment, lies in education in all its forms".

Still little known to the wider public, Diab was appointed premier in December 2019, two

Diab initially praised the protest movement as "historic", writing on social networks that the Lebanese people had "united to defend their rights to a free and dignified life".

After weeks of negotiations he took the premier's post, reserved for a Sunni in Lebanon's power-sharing system, with the support of Shiite movements Hezbollah and Amal as well as the Free Patriotic Movement of President Michel Aoun, a Christian.

The main Sunni bloc and its Christian allies never gave Diab

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their backing, complicating the task ahead for a leader who is not a member of any political party or supporter of any particular group.

## Bombastic speeches

Since then the professor with the carefully combed black hair-do has faced cascading crises as well as growing criticism from the now resurgent popular protest movement.

Many Lebanese derided his bombastic speeches, in which he regularly claimed to be the victim of plots, just as they had laughed at a book he had published as education minister in which he had touted his achievements.

By the admission of his supporters, his "obstinate" character did not help him gain popularity with the protest move-

ment.

After his appointment as premier, a conflict flared between him and the AUB's management. He took legal action against the university to claim financial compensation to be paid in dollars abroad.

The move was decried as tone-deaf at a time when Lebanese citizens were denied access to their foreign currency accounts due to the economic crisis.

Over the months, he drew increasing fire from the protest movement he had once hailed as "historic and awe-inspiring".

In recent days, the Lebanese people took to the streets again and judged that Diab's government, like those before it, has failed them.

Today we are heeding the people and their demands to hold accountable those responsible for a disaster. This is why today I announce the resignation of the government.

HASSAN DIAB



Diab pictured in June wearing a face mask due to the COVID-19 pandemic ahead of an emergency cabinet session

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## Nearly 100,000 children in US tested COVID-19 +tive in July

Huffpost

More than 97,000 children in the US tested positive for the coronavirus in the last two weeks of July, underscoring the difficulty for schools considering if or how they can reopen in the fall, according to a new report.

The findings, compiled by the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Children's Hospital Association, included data from 49 states, Washington D.C., Puerto Rico and Guam. But the report didn't include complete data from Texas -- which has seen a surge in cases -- or parts of New York, meaning the number of infections could be higher.



Paul Adamus, 7, climbs the stairs of a bus before the first day of school on Monday

Officials have long warned that the true coronavirus toll may be much higher than reported due to insufficient test-

ing and the lack of symptoms in many people who are infected.

The US has seen more than 5 million confirmed cases of the coronavirus. Of those, more than 338,000 were children, according to the new study. The results from the last weeks of July show that one-fourth of all of the confirmed infections in kids happened during that two-week period, even though the pandemic has been raging since March. (Those defined as children in the study usually are younger than 19, although some states included people up to age 24.)

The data adds to growing concern for parents and students as the start of the school year ap-

proaches. Many schools and colleges have said they will operate remotely or with an in-person and online hybrid. But other districts have faced pressure from to reopen as soon as possible, including from President Donald Trump.

Some schools have already resumed in-person classes, to mixed results. A high school in Georgia sparked controversy last week after photos showed dozens of students crowding a hallway between classes, many without masks. The school said it would move temporarily online on Sunday after officials said nine people had tested positive for COVID-19.



The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's latest Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report said evidence shows children are at lower risk from developing severe cases of COVID-19.