Lebanon blast

Why in news?

A devastating blast had occurred in central Beirut, Lebanon.

What are possible causes of the blast?

- The initial explosion ignited a fire, while the second one was more devastating enveloping the capital's skyline.
- The blast was caused by the detonation of more than 2,700 tonnes of ammonium nitrate that had been stored at the Beirut port for six years.
- Primary observations point serious **lack of maintaining safety norms** at the explosive storage.
- Large quantities of stored ammonium nitrate are regarded as a major fire hazard, with multiple reported cases across the world.

What is wrong with the timing of the accident?

- In the recent past, Lebanon has been crippled by serious economic woes at the centre of which has been a currency crisis.
- This has caused large-scale closure of businesses and soaring prices of basic commodities resulting in social unrest.
- The blast has occured at the time when a UN tribunal is set to give its verdict in the 2005 assassination of former Lebanase Prime Minister.
- The country has been bracing for the aftermath of the verdict of the case, which has at its core the age-old Shia-Sunni rift.
- Beirut's health-care system, struggling to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, is already stretched.
- Coping with the aftermath of the blast itself would be an uphill task for the country's beleaguered government.
- Prices of essential goods are high, foreign currency is scarce and the GDP is expected to contract 12% this year.
- On the southern border, tensions between Israel and Hezbollah are on the rise, with Israeli Prime Minister warning of military action.

What are the new concerns?

- Residents of Beirut are struggling with long power outages, which are delaying even the rescue efforts after the blast.
- The blast would deepen the country's economic woes as one of its main ports has been destroyed.

What could be done?

- The immediate focus should be on rescuing the wounded and getting the city back on its feet.
- All stakeholders, from the Sunni parties to Shia Hezbollah, should work together.
- Other countries in the region as well as international institutions should offer help to Beirut to withstand this moment of catastrophe.

- Experts say that the world over, the main obstacles in regulating ammonium nitrate is its widespread use in industry and agriculture.
- While a legislative framework exists, repeated examples of misuse and mishaps show that a lot more needs to be done.

Source: The Hindu, Indian Express

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