

Lebanon's political Turmoil

Why in news?

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- Recently, Lebanon's PM 'Saad Hariri', surprisingly announced his resignation when he was on a tour to Saudi Arabia.
- \bullet This could potentially plunge the country into political chaos and bring back the Sunni-Shia tensions to the fore. $\mbox{\ \ }$

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How is Lebanon's political set-up constituted?

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• Lebanon has many religions and sects within its borders and has seen many civil wars since its formation.

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- After the end of the 15 years war in 1990, it evolved a complex power sharing arrangement to accommodate all major groups.
- Accordingly, the Presidency was reserved for a 'Maronite christian', the Prime Minister-ship for a 'Sunni Muslim' and the parliamentary speaker's post for a 'Shia Muslim'.

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- Lebanon has also been a checker-board for geo-political games between Iran & Saudi Arabia each operating through their respective proxies.
- Notably, Hezbollah, a shia'ite pro-Iranian group is very active in the country and controls swathes of territory.

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How did the current turn of events unfold?

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• Mr. Hariri, is a Sunni Muslim with close business and political ties with Saudi Arabia.

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- He had formed a coalition with Hezbollah's political wing (which has Iran's support) to form the government about a year ago.
- Since then, Saudis had grown increasingly impatient with Mr. Hariri's soft approach towards Hezbollah's militant activities.
- Notably, Hezbollah was involved in the Syrian civil war on behalf of President Bashar al-Assad, another Saudi rival.
- In this backdrop, Mr. Hariri announced his resignation on from Riyadh (Saudi) and blamed Hezbollah and Iran for his decision.
- \bullet Surprisingly, more than a week later he is yet to return to Lebanon and complete the formalities of the resignation. $\mbox{\sc h}$
- His continued absence has triggered speculation that he was forced by the Saudis to resign and is being held in Riyadh against his will.

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How is the anti-Hezbollah alliance taking shape?

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- Israel saw Hezbollah as a treat to its northern border and attacked Lebanon in 2006 to destroying Hezbollah, but failed.
- Since then, Hezbollah has amassed weapons from Iran and has got battlefield training in the Syrian civil war.
- Its political arm has also successfully developed enormous popular influence in Lebanon.
- Saudi Arabia is naturally concerned about this growing military and political clout of an Iranian proxy.
- Notably, U.S. President Trump has backed Saudi policies in Lebanon and

Riyadh also has the silent support of Israel. \n

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How does the future look?

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• **Possible War** - Saudis would like to see another Sunni leader who takes a confrontational view of Hezbollah to reign Lebanon.

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• It has also asked its citizens to leave Lebanon, signalling potential military action.

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• Given its capabilities and history of resistance, Hezbollah may retaliate if its core interests come under attack.

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- **Hope** While the memories of the brutal 1975-90 civil war are still fresh, another civil war would benefit nobody within Lebanon.
- \bullet Hezbollah should threfore to address the concerns of its coalition partners and work to preserve the delicate political balance. \n
- \bullet Mr. Hariri should also return home immediately and explain clearly, the reasons for his surprise resignation. \n

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Source: The Hindu

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