

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.

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- This could potentially plunge the country into political chaos and bring back the Sunni-Shia tensions to the fore.

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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.

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- 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.

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- 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.

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- Since then, Saudis had grown increasingly impatient with Mr. Hariri's soft approach towards Hezbollah's militant activities.

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- Notably, Hezbollah was involved in the Syrian civil war on behalf of President Bashar al-Assad, another Saudi rival.

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- In this backdrop, Mr. Hariri announced his resignation on from Riyadh (Saudi) and blamed Hezbollah and Iran for his decision.

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- Surprisingly, more than a week later he is yet to return to Lebanon and complete the formalities of the resignation.

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- 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 threat to its northern border and attacked Lebanon in 2006 to destroy Hezbollah, but failed.
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- Since then, Hezbollah has amassed weapons from Iran and has got battlefield training in the Syrian civil war.
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- Its political arm has also successfully developed enormous popular influence in Lebanon.
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- Saudi Arabia is naturally concerned about this growing military and political clout of an Iranian proxy.
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- Notably, U.S. President Trump has backed Saudi policies in Lebanon and Riyadh also has the silent support of Israel.
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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.
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- Hezbollah should therefore address the concerns of its coalition partners and work to preserve the delicate political balance.
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- Mr. Hariri should also return home immediately and explain clearly the reasons for his surprise resignation.
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Source: The Hindu

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