

Major challenges await newly elected parliament

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Key facts about Lebanon's 2009 elections

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BEIRUT: Lebanese headed to the polls Sunday in crucial parliamentary elections that will determine the country's future for the next four years. Here are some of the challenges facing the 2009 Parliament:

*HIZBULLAH'S WEAPONS

The role of Hizbullah's resistance army is a major bone of contention. March 14 leaders call for a state monopoly on arms, a demand echoed by UN Security Council resolutions. But Hizbullah has sworn to keep the weapons it says are vital to defend Lebanon from Israel.

* RELATIONS WITH SYRIA

Pulling Lebanon from Syria's orbit has been at the heart of March 14's agenda since

the 2005 assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, while many March 8 leaders maintain very close ties to Damascus.

Syria still faces calls from March 14 and the United Nations to demarcate its border with Lebanon. March 14 leaders also accuse Syria of arming Palestinian groups based in Lebanon.

* HARIRI TRIBUNAL

Establishing an international tribunal to try suspects in Hariri's killing was a key goal of anti-Syrian politicians, who blamed Damascus for the killing. The issue aggravated political conflict with Syrias allies in Lebanon.

Plans for the court were never approved by the Lebanese parliament or president. The Security Council voted in May 2007 to set up the Special Tribunal for Lebanon and it began work in March at The Hague. Hizbullah again questioned the neutrality of an international inquiry into the assassination after the tribunal ordered the release of four pro-Syrian generals held without charge since 2005. - Reuters

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By Agence France Presse (AFP)

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BEIRUT: Key facts about Parliament, voting and the complex power-sharing system in Lebanon, which held a general election on Sunday.

PARLIAMENT:

I Lebanon has a 128-seat unicameral Parliament, where seats are equally divided between Christians and Muslims

I MPs are elected by simple majority to a four-year mandate

I Of the 64 seats allocated for Muslims, 27 go to Sunnis, 27 to Shiites, eight to the Druze sect and two to the Alawite sect.

I Of the 64 seats for Christians, 34 go to the Maronites, 14 to the Greek Orthodox, eight to the Greek Catholics, five to the Armenian Orthodox, one to the Armenian Catholics, one to Evangelicals and one to minority sects

I The speaker of Parliament is always a Shiite

CANDIDATES:

I 587 candidates registered to stand in the race for parliament

I Candidates must be 25 years or older

ELECTORAL DISTRICTS:

I The country of around four million is divided into 26 electoral districts.

VOTER ELIGIBILITY:

I 3.2 million Lebanese were eligible to vote

I Voters in this election were required to be 21 and over

I Serving members of the military could not vote

VOTING PROCEDURE:

I Voting started at 7:00 a.m. (0400 GMT) and closed at 7:00 p.m. (1600 GMT)

I There were 5,200 stations

I After casting their ballot, voters were required to dip their thumb in indelible ink as proof they voted and to avoid electoral fraud

MPs:

I Members of Parliament earn a monthly salary of between 10-11 million pounds (\$7,000, 4,500 euros). - AFP

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