

Hariri slams Hezbollah's arms as March 14 steps up rhetoric

Contributed by Elias Sakr, Daily Star
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Future condemns criticism by March 8 against Sleiman's role in Cabinet formation

BEIRUT: Caretaker Prime Minister Saad Hariri lashed out Friday at Hezbollah's weapons as the March 14 alliance stepped up its rhetoric ahead of a planned rally to voice support for the U.N.-backed tribunal and opposition to weapons in the hands of non-state actors.

"Some want to see partnership in all matters but want to monopolize the issue of weapons under the pretext of resisting Israel, and when necessary, they turn the weapons inward, as it happened on May 7, 2008, and on other occasions," Hariri told delegations from the capital at his residence in Downtown Beirut.

"National partnership means partnership between all Lebanese over all issues. No group or party should be excluded. Partnership should not be limited to certain issues, as some people are doing today," Hariri added, referring to the ongoing negotiations to form a new government.

Separately, members of Hariri's Future Movement and its allies also condemned March 8 criticism against President Michel Sleiman's role in the Cabinet formation process, as bickering among March 8 groups over the allocation of shares continue to delay an agreement over the Cabinet's make-up.

Caretaker Minister of State Jean Hogassapian said March 8 parties were attempting to form a Cabinet contrary to constitutional norms by disregarding the president and Prime Minister-designate Najib Mikati's prerogatives in the formation process.

"The president is a patriotic person who has always put Lebanon's higher national interests at the top of his priorities," he said.

Hogassapian lashed out at Hezbollah's weapons and called for restricting the possession of weapons to the Lebanese state.

"We used to support the resistance's weapons in the past when they were pointed against Israel rather than Lebanese parties. But today we demand that all weapons be under the state control. The so-called resistance's weapons no longer exist, since those weapons are used in politics and non-politics," he said.

Echoing Hogassapian, Future Movement official and Tripoli MP Samir Jisr said the alliance's participation in the government would "legitimize Hezbollah's coup."

Jisr said Sleiman's role in the Cabinet formation could not be disregarded and condemned the change in the parliamentary majority.

"What happened in the past period is not a change from one position to another but a change that was preceded by a wave of direct threats to use violence for more than five to six months," Jisr said in an implied reference to Progressive Socialist Party leader Walid Jumblatt's parliamentary bloc decision to side with Hezbollah.

"The Constitution grants the president the right to sign the government decree and this issue is not merely a mechanism — the president must achieve balance [among parties] and act on his convictions, in the interest of Lebanon," Jisr said.

Sleiman, whose signature alongside Mikati is needed to form the Cabinet, continues to bicker with Hezbollah's ally Free Patriotic Movement leader Michel Aoun over his share of portfolios in the government.

Despite Hezbollah's efforts to promptly form a Cabinet ahead of the release of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon indictment, widely believed to implicate Hezbollah members in the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, Baabda MP Alain Aoun dismissed the possibility of the Cabinet's formation over the weekend.

Aoun, an FPM official, said the dispute over the Interior Ministry's portfolio remains unresolved as his party insists on being granted a key portfolio.

"Talks have yet to reach a solution to the disputed issues, to the conflict in demands [over portfolios], and the

disputed size of representation,” Aoun said in reference to the FPM leader’s demand to name, in agreement with Christian allies, all Christian ministers.

The FPM argues that the president, given his “biased positions alongside March 14 parties,” should be granted minimum representation in the Lebanese Cabinet.

The president, a Maronite figure, wants to name Christian ministers, which under Lebanon’s confessional power sharing system would end up at the expense of Michel Aoun’s share with Hizbullah and the Amal movement set to choose Shiite ministers and Mikati to name Sunni figures.