

Saturday, 23 March 2013

Clashes rock Tripoli as Lebanese president accepts PM's resignation



Clashes were reported in Lebanon on Saturday as outgoing prime minister Najib Mikati called for a “salvation” caretaker government to take over, a day after he resigned due to a political standoff with the Hezbollah movement.

Lebanese president Michel Suleiman accepted Mikati's resignation amid the government's political deadlock.

Mikati announced he was stepping down after Shi'ite group Hezbollah and its allies blocked the extension of Internal Security Forces chief's term in office and the creation of a body to supervise parliamentary elections.

“I announce the resignation of the government, hoping that this will open the way for the major political blocs to take responsibility and come together to bring Lebanon out of the unknown,” Mikati said.

The government held off agreeing on the membership of the election commission over fears it would ensure that elections scheduled for June are held on the basis of a decades-old electoral law.

Mikati, along with the leader of Lebanon's Druze community, Walid Jumblatt, is said to favor the existing law.

It gives his Sunni community and the Druze disproportionate strength in the parliament, but is vehemently opposed by Lebanon's Christians, who say it fails to give them representative weight.

Attempts earlier this year to approve an alternative election law failed, and both Mikati and President Michel Sleiman have called for election preparations to move forward so the vote can be held on time.

In an interview earlier this year with Al Arabiya English's editor-in-chief Faisal Abbas, Mikati said he took the premier post to defuse tensions between rival political factions in Lebanon, a goal "I can humbly claim that I have achieved," he said.

"Today, with the deterioration in the Syrian situation and the political crisis prevailing, any miscalculated exit might lead to another political crisis," Mikati added in the interview.

*Davos exclusive: Lebanese PM Mikati on economy, regional politics and Syrian crisis