

Hezbollah says Lebanon government delay risks "slide towards tension"

by The Region - 12/08/2018 14:43



The parliamentary bloc of Lebanon's Hezbollah group said on Thursday that delay in forming a new government risked Lebanon sliding "towards tension".

Lebanon faces political deadlock three months after an election that tilted the balance in parliament towards the Iran-backed Shi'ite Hezbollah.

Soon after the May 6 election, Sunni politician Saad al-Hariri was designated to continue as prime minister and began negotiations with the country's rival parties to form a unity government.

But despite him and other leading politicians warning of political and economic dangers, there is no sign yet of the compromises needed to agree on a new cabinet, with Christians, Druze, Shi'ite and Sunni Muslims jostling for ministries.

"(The delay) has started to risk sliding towards tension ... and we warn of the dangers of this," the group said in a televised statement read out after the weekly meeting of

its parliamentary bloc.

Political rivalry led to years of governmental paralysis in Lebanon and the country did not produce a state budget from 2005 until last year. May's elections were the first in nine years.

The International Monetary Fund has said Lebanon needs "an immediate and substantial fiscal adjustment" to make its public debt - one of the world's highest at about 150 percent of gross domestic product - sustainable.

Hariri will later on Thursday meet caretaker foreign minister Gebran Bassil, head of President Michel Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) party, his office said.

Bassil this week said his party would not give up any cabinet seats, local press reported. The Christian FPM is a Hezbollah ally. Another Christian party, the Lebanese Forces, which opposes Hezbollah's possession of arms, wants more cabinet seats after making gains in parliament in the election.

Hariri earlier on Thursday met Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, and said he hoped a new government could be formed in the coming days.