

'Lebanon can expect Northern Ireland type of peace, growth'

Lebanon can expect a period of peace similar to Northern Ireland after a political settlement on the issue of the country's presidency was reached, according to Rami George Khouri, a well-known journalist and head of a Beirut-based think-tank.

'With the political deadlock having ended, we expect a Northern Ireland type of peace in Lebanon for some time to come,' Khouri told reporters on the sidelines of a workshop on policy and research here Monday.

A period of strife in that Middle East nation has come to an end following the election of Michel Suleiman as president Sunday after the post remained vacant for six months.

All Lebanese political parties signed an agreement May 21 in Doha after five days of intense negotiations to elect Suleiman as president, to form a new national unity government with 11 of the 30 seats in parliament for the opposition, and to adopt a new electoral law.

According to Khouri, with the political settlement in place, the country can now expect some economic development in the times to come.

'We can now expect a Northern Ireland kind of economic boom, which, we hope, will pressurize the politicians into taking good policy decisions,' he said.

He, however, pointed out that some key issues still remained ignored.

'There are still some serious issues that have not been touched,' Khouri told IANS.

'These include the issue of Hezbollah and Israel and relations between Syria and Lebanon. Regional tensions like Iran-US and Iran-Saudi Arabia relations also need to be looked at,' he said.

A Palestinian-Jordanian and citizen of the US, Khouri is the director of the Issam Fares Institute of Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut as well as editor-at-large of the Beirut-based Daily Star newspaper.

He is a co-recipient of the Pax Christi International Peace Award, which was conferred on him for his efforts to bring peace and reconciliation in the Middle East.

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