



Beirut Explosion

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Why in News

Recently, a **massive explosion** took place in **Beirut, capital of Lebanon**, which left more than hundred people dead and more than 4,000 injured, according to the reports until now.

Key Points

- There were two explosions in the central port area of Beirut which occurred barely within minutes of each other within nearby buildings.
- The blast affected residents living as far as 10 kilometres away from the site and was felt upto 250 Km.
- The blast created **seismic waves** equivalent to a magnitude 3.3 earthquake.
- The blasts were likely triggered by over **2,700 tonnes of ammonium nitrate** that had been **confiscated and stored** by authorities near the port for over six years.
- A **two-week state emergency** has been imposed in Beirut following the blast.

Impact of the Blast

- **Economic:** Lebanon is an **import-dependent country**. The **badly damaged port** facility is Lebanon's largest maritime gateway and it will make **essential items expensive** and **threaten food security** in the country.
 - Lebanon has already been struggling with a huge **economic meltdown**, with the **rapid devaluation of the local currency** and a **volatile exchange rate on the black market** fueling **inflation, shuttering businesses, unemployment** and **poverty**.
 - It had also **defaulted on a Eurobond repayment** in March 2020.
 - It is in talks with the **International Monetary Fund** for a \$10 billion loan program.
 - The blast will pose an additional **financial burden of rebuilding the city**.

- **Political:** Lebanon faced **nationwide protests** against **corruption, economic mismanagement** and **sectarian politics** in October 2019, which forced the **resignation of then-Prime Minister** Saad Hariri.

This blast along with the growing economic crisis can **again cause social unrest**.

- **Health:** The country's health system is **already burdened** with the patients of **Covid-19 pandemic** and the victims of blast will add to this.

International Response

- Lebanon has been offered help by various countries like the **USA, Germany, France, Iran, EU, Turkey etc.**
- Along with giving aid, the President of **France**, Emmanuel Macron has decided to visit Lebanon.
 - This move is seen as a message of fraternity and solidarity from France.
 - Earlier, France's top diplomat had scolded Lebanon's political elite for being too "passive" in the face of an economic crisis and the pandemic.
- Lebanon has also been offered humanitarian aid by its neighbour **Israel**, whom it has bitter relations with.
 - Israel sees **Hezbollah, the militant group of Lebanon as a threat to its northern borders.'**
 - **Hezbollah** is one of the Middle East's **most powerful and successful guerrilla organizations**. It is the strongest member of Lebanon's pro-Syrian opposition bloc who pitted **against the pro-Western government** led by Saad Hariri.

Ammonium Nitrate

- **Ammonium Nitrate (NH₄NO₃)** is a **nitrogen-rich white, crystalline chemical** which is **soluble in water**.
- **Uses:**
 - It is a common chemical ingredient of **agricultural fertilisers**.
 - It is used as an ingredient for the production of **anaesthetic gases** and **cold packs**.
 - It is also the main ingredient in the manufacture of **commercial explosives** used in mining and construction.

- **As Explosive:**
 - It is the main component of the explosive composition known as **ANFO-ammonium nitrate fuel oil**.
 - **Pure** ammonium nitrate is **not an explosive** on its own. For Ammonium nitrate to be explosive a **primary explosive or detonator** like **RDX or TNT** is required.
 - Many **Improvised Explosive Devices** (IEDs) used by terrorists around the world have ANFO as the main explosive.
 - Stored ammonium nitrate is a fire hazard and can explode in two ways.
 1. It may come in contact with some explosive mixture.
 2. Due to the **oxidation process** at large scale, heat may be generated starting a fire and then explosion. This seems to be the **primary likely cause of the incident at Beirut port**.
- **Explosions in Past:**
 - In the majority of terror attacks in India, including those in **Pulwama, Varanasi**, Malegaon, Pune, Delhi, Hyderabad, and Mumbai, ammonium nitrate has been used along with initiator explosives like RDX.
 - There have been **accidental explosions of ammonium nitrate** causing large numbers of fatalities. Eg. China in 2015 and in Texas in 1947.

- **Regulations:**

- **Global:** It is classified as an **oxidising content** (Grade 5.1) under the **United Nations classification of dangerous goods**.

The United Nations Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods categorizes the types of dangerous goods, under **nine classes** like Explosive Materials, Inflammable liquids, Easily oxidising contents etc.

- **India:** In India, the manufacture, conversion, bagging, import, export, transport, possession for sale or use of ammonium nitrate is covered under **The Ammonium Nitrate Rules, 2012**.
 - **The Explosives Act, 1884**, define ammonium nitrate as the “compound with formula NH_4NO_3 including **any mixture or compound having more than 45% ammonium nitrate by weight** including emulsions, suspensions, melts or gels but excluding emulsion or slurry explosives and non explosives emulsion matrix and fertilizers from which the ammonium nitrate cannot be separated”.
 - **Storage of ammonium nitrate in large quantities in populated areas is illegal** in India.
 - For the manufacture of ammonium nitrate, an Industrial licence is required under the **Industrial Development and Regulation Act, 1951**.
 - A license under the Ammonium Nitrate Rules, 2012 is also required for any activity related to ammonium nitrate.



- It is a country in **Western Asia**, bordered by Syria to the north and east and Israel to the south, while Cyprus lies west across the Mediterranean Sea.
- Lebanon was conquered by the **Ottomans** in the 16th century and remained under their rule for the next 400 years.
- Following the empire's collapse after World War I, it came under **the control of French**, from which it gained independence in **1943**.
- Lebanon witnessed **Civil war** from **1975-1990** that was a result of conflict between various factions like the **Christians**, the left-wing **Druze** and the **Muslims** and was interspersed with **Israeli invasions targeting the palestinian** militants in Lebanon.
- The present government in Lebanon is **confessionalist parliamentary democracy**.

Confessionalism is a system of government which apportions seats in its legislature to different groups of people strictly based on demographic composition.

Way Forward

- This tragedy piles yet another layer of hardship on a country already reeling from its worst financial crisis in decades along with an exasperating political turbulence and struggling to contain a burgeoning coronavirus outbreak.
- Lebanon cannot do without containing politically extremist groups functioning in the country and maintaining healthy relationships with the international community.

- It is time that international solidarity comes into action and extends a helping hand towards the country.

Source: IE