

Mr. al-Hoss: there are no rules to political life in Lebanon and I take comfort in the fact that I did my best.

Mr. al-Hoss made a speech, entitled "A period of trial and error within government" at the National Dialogue Party headquarters in Beirut. During his speech, Mr. al-Hoss commented that "the ship is being steered by captains, but the tide is stronger than them". Mr. al-Hoss recounted the path that led him to his political life.

After graduating from the American University of Beirut, Mr. al-Hoss joined the Kuwait Development Fund as a Financial Adviser. He then became the founding member and Chairman of the Lebanese Banking Control Commission and was later appointed Chairman of the Industrial Development Bank. In 1976, he was invited by the newly elected president, Elias Sarkis, to head a government. According to Mr. al-Hoss, this was a very challenging and fulfilling period of his life during which he proceeded to liquidate several banks without causing any loss to depositors. During this period, the country was, and would continue to be, at war till 1990. Mr. al-Hoss was Prime Minister twice during this period. He recounted that although he and President Sarkis, a fellow colleague, were very close, they often disagreed on some issues, namely over the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Fouad Boutros, whom he disagreed with on several points. Until 1977, he replaced the Parliament and undertook many fundamental issues that were of a legislative nature. These included the establishment of the Council for Development and Reconstruction as well as a housing bank, in addition to launching a system to ensure investments against non-commercial risks. He also had to rebuild the ravaged army. He provided officers the option to resign but this raised many questions regarding who of the officers were legitimate and who had rebelled against their posts. President Sarkis often adopted Minister Boutros' opinion and this caused some tension.

In addition, the capital was split into East and West. Radio Lebanon was divided into two stations, one that broadcast from Sanayeh - supporting the national position - and the other from Amchit - supporting the Lebanese Front. There was also the Voice of Palestine, which supported the pro-Palestinian resistance and the Voice of Lebanon which supported the Phalange Party. He tried to merge the Amchit and Sanayeh stations, but failed. At this stage, President Sarkis began censorship of all media in an attempt to curb the biases that were aggravating divisions in the country. At the beginning, Mr. al-Hoss resisted censorship of newspapers but President Sarkis made it clear that there could be no solution without censorship. Armed militias attacked, on a daily basis, the three main newspapers. Others, including Al-Safir, Al-Nahar and L'Orient Le Jour were also raided. Journalists were prevented from entering the Presidential Palace.

The first government Mr. al-Hoss headed was made up of eight ministers. The ministerial statement alluded to the need to abolish political sectarianism, starting within the public administration and the army, to be extended later on to the various arms of political life. This began with several meetings with political and religious figures. During his meeting with Imam Moussa El Sader, he expressed his wish that the government had been made up of ten, not eight, ministers hence allowing for two Shiite ministers and two Sunni ministers. At the time, the demographics of the population allowed for such a make up. This would not be true today.

When they all met to discuss the acceptance of resignations within the army, Minister Boutros suggested that all resignations from Muslim officers be accepted with an equal number of resignations from their Christian counterparts. Mr. al-Hoss suggested that we bear in mind that at the time, two thirds of the army was Christian and one third was Muslim. President Sarkis suggested that the same proportion be accepted from both sides. In June 1977, the same problem arose regarding the Lieutenants. Minister Boutros suggested that all resignations from the "Arab Army" be accepted, and all resignations from the "Lebanese Army" under Fouad Malek be rejected. This problem extended to the pro-Israeli army headed by Saad Haddad; there never was a clear solution to this and it caused a deep rift between the men until Mr. al-Hoss left government in 1980. As a result, 11 of the Muslims (3 Sunni, 4 Shiite and 4 Druze) and 11 Christians were accepted by decree. Due to the blatant sectarianism, President Sarkis announced his intention to resign and asked Mr. al-Hoss to follow suit. He then asked for a

reason, to which he was told that it was customary for a Maronite to be Prime Minister as was the case with Fouad Chehab. Mr. al-Hoss argued that this was a solitary case rather than a custom. During the Cabinet meeting, President Sarkis offered his resignation and asked Mr. al-Hoss to do the same but the latter refused. Ministers Fouad Boutros and Farid Roufael put forward their resignations.

As a backdrop to all these internal disputes, there were also some very important regional developments. Egyptian President Anwar Sadat had visited Jerusalem in preparation for a truce. During an Israeli Cabinet meeting, the Israeli government made serious threats against Lebanon and on the 24th of March 1978, Israel began its offensive in the South. On the 19th of March 1978, the United Nations issued the famous Resolution 425, which has yet to be executed. On the 25th of August 1978, Imam Moussa El Sader left to Libya where he mysteriously disappeared. During this time, the fighting did not stop. Finally, on the 19th of April 1978, Mr. al-Hoss resigned. President Saeb Salam commented at the time that Mr. al-Hoss had entered honestly and left honestly. Again, Mr. al-Hoss was asked to head a new government of national unity. At the time, Kamil Chamoun famously said that he would not accept a government of children and Pierre Gemayel demanded a government that would address the security situation. The situation was worse than ever. France and the USA both issued pleas for a ceasefire in Lebanon. On the 2nd of December 1978, a meeting was held in Baghdad. The situation deteriorated following many countries' refusal to cut off Anwar Sadat and Mr. al-Hoss was asked to meet with him personally. Iraqi President Ahmed Hassan Al-Baker gave Mr. al-Hoss a letter to present to Sadat, in which he pledged an amount of USD 5 billion in aid to Egypt. Mr. al-Hoss proceeded to Egypt on board a private jet along with Sheikh Ahmed Al-Soueidi, the UAE Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmed Iskandar, the Syrian Minister of Information Tarek Aziz as well as the Iraqi Minister of Information. When they arrived, President Sadat did not meet with them and they returned to Baghdad.

In 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon. During that time, Mr. al-Hoss was living in the southern suburbs of Beirut. One night, he heard banging on his door and was taken to meet an Israeli officer who asked him to mediate with the Lebanese government. Mr. al-Hoss refused. After that incident, he was trapped within the confines of the area in which he lived. In 1984, Mr. Karami formed a new government in which Mr. al-Hoss was assigned the post of Minister of National Education. That year, Mr. Karami solicited him to partake in the Eid prayers on behalf of Sheikh Hassan Khaled. Mr. al-Hoss' car fell victim to a roadside bomb, killing his driver as well as a woman standing nearby. Mr. al-Hoss was spared. Soon after this incident, President Rashid Karami was killed in 1987 while onboard a helicopter. Dar-Al-Fatwa held a meeting in the presence of Hussein Hussein, and Takieddine Al-Solh as well as a number of Muslim leaders. This resulted in a request to President Amine Gemayel to appoint Mr. al-Hoss Prime Minister replacing Rashid Karami. Mr. Gemayel agreed and a decree was issued. However, this caused a rift between Amine Gemayel and Hassan Al-Rifaii, who had previously refused this nomination. The rift dragged into 1988. On the 23rd of August 1988, Mr. al-Hoss presented himself to Parliament along with General Michel Aoun who was at the time the head of the army. The press had launched an attack on him and he resigned. President Gemayel refused his resignation.

During that time, president Gemayel shared with Mr. al-Hoss the names of people who had petitioned for Lebanese citizenship, suggesting that he choose some names. On the 24th of September 1988, the President asked MP Pierre Helou to head a temporary government. Muslim leaders met and agreed to boycott any resulting government. On the day of elections, Parliament did not meet to elect a new President and the position remained vacant. President Gemayel issued a new decree requesting the formation of a new government made up of six ministers, headed by General Michel Aoun. This was refused on the basis that the quota for confessional representation was not met. The army split into two camps, and fighting continued between East and West Beirut. In 1989, Mr. al-Hoss met with Hussein Hussein at the Coral Beach on several occasions in an attempt to reach some form of resolution. A temporary solution was finally reached. A close reading of this agreement shows many similarities with the Taef agreement that would come about several years later. On the 5th of November 1989, Renee Mouawad was elected President and Mr. al-Hoss was again asked to form a new government. Later, President Mouawad would be assassinated following a meeting

with several politicians. Parliament was once again convened and elected President Elias Hrawi. Mr. al-Hoss formed a new government and attempted to include General Aoun as minister, but he categorically refused. At that time, General Aoun was stationed in the Presidential Palace in Baabda. The fighting continued. By the end of 1990, Mr. al-Hoss was seriously considering ending his political career and handed in his resignation once again.

Between 1998 and 2000, General Emile Lahoud underwent parliamentary discussions and called on Rafik Hariri to form a new government. Mr. Hariri refused based on a disagreement with President Lahoud, who would later ask Mr. al-Hoss to form a new government. The media affiliated with Rafik Hariri waged a war against Mr. al-Hoss claiming he was not up to the task. Mr. al-Hoss did not respond to these allegations, not wanting to be part of this media war and not condoning the impending counter-attack. It was also at the same time that Parliament had to pass the 1999 budget law. It is a well known fact that the national budget should reflect plans to deal with mounting public debt, which was Mr. al-Hoss' priority. Public debt had reached unprecedented levels and they attempted to address the issue. In parallel, the media had transformed the issue into a public debate along sectarian lines.

Despite all this, the government of that time had many achievements. They succeeded in pushing the Israeli army out of Lebanon and the resistance had achieved local and Arab acclaim. In 2000, Mr. al-Hoss was asked to sign decrees regarding capital punishment, which he refused to do. MP Michel El-Murr signed the decree, but it was later rejected by the President of the Republic. The only failure the government faced was its inability to solve some problems it had inherited. It was unable to address the astronomical public debt that had mounted over the years, which was weighing down the Lebanese economy. This debt also stopped the government from providing any services to the people. However, bad press had made it seem that the government was solely responsible for all of this. The era of that government was also one of major challenges including daily Israeli aggression and three major attacks on Lebanon within one year that badly destroyed the infrastructure. These violations increased expenses significantly and had a negative impact on investment, tourism and the economy as a whole. Unfortunately, Arab and international aid did not pour in to help the country recover and the government was left extremely short of funds. To make matters worse, sectarian politics threatened the very fabric of the nation and politicians ignored the fact that sectarianism is a double edged sword.

Mr. al-Hoss stated: "As God is my witness, I did my best". At the beginning of his time in office, he had launched steps to introduce administrative reform and many of these attempts remained fruitless. Mr. al-Hoss repeated his belief that Lebanon has a lot of freedom but little democracy. Freedoms enjoyed in Lebanon range from freedom of speech to religious freedoms. Freedom to demonstrate was also introduced in 1993. In parallel, political life lost all forms of control and rules. There is not one game in the world that does not have rules, except for the political game in Lebanon! It is a game with no rules. Mr. al-Hoss was always at the service of politics, but never became a "professional" at the game. For a "professional" politician is one whose only aim is to obtain a role in government.

We claim we want to build a democratic country, yet we seek to do so outside the realm of democracy. Mr. al-Hoss stated his agenda as being "Democracy first, Democracy second and Democracy third".

Mr. al-Hoss concluded by saying that our nation has seen much war and fighting. He previously stated back in 1990, that if a man will kill his brother, neither should win, for what man wants to be the one that killed his very own brother? Mr. al-Hoss also stated that he has a clear conscience and quoted the late President Saeb Salam who said of him: "He came in to politics an honest man, and he left an honest man".