

## **Polls open in Lebanon's first general election in nine years**

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**A man casts his vote at a polling station during the parliamentary election, in Sidon, Lebanon May 6, 2018. (REUTERS)**

**Beirut:** Polling booths opened in Lebanon on Sunday for the country's first parliamentary election in nine years, a period marked by stretches of political paralysis and war in neighbouring Syria.

Voting is scheduled to last from 7 a.m. (0400 GMT) until 7 p.m. (1600 GMT), with unofficial results expected to start coming in overnight and a formal tally announced in the coming days.

Whatever the result, a new coalition government including most of the major parties is likely to be formed after the election, analysts have said.

Getting a new government in place quickly would reassure investors of Lebanon's economic stability after donors pledged \$11 billion in soft loans for a capital investment programme last month, in return for fiscal and other reforms.

Lebanese are closely watching the performance of Sunni Muslim Prime Minister Saad al-Hariri's Future Movement party and that of the Iran-backed, Shiite Hezbollah group and its allies. Despite some acts of violence and intimidation connected to the election in recent weeks, no major incidents were reported in the immediate run-up to voting.

- Reuters