

Lebanon faces chaos after five ministers resign

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Hezbollah and Amal cabinet ministers resigned from the Lebanese government yesterday, Hezbollah's al-Manar TV station said.

The resignation of five cabinet ministers throws Lebanon's political landscape into chaos, although it does not automatically bring down the government. But by quitting, the five Shia Muslim cabinet ministers remove considerable political backing from the country's main sect and could make it difficult for the Western-backed Prime Minister, Fuad Siniora, to govern.

More than eight cabinet ministers would need to resign before the government is considered dissolved. But it would be extremely difficult for Mr Siniora to appoint new Shia ministers to the cabinet, which has to be half-Muslim, half-Christian, because an overwhelming majority of the Shia legislators in parliament belong to either Amal or Hezbollah.

The news came after the failure yesterday of a week-long attempt to agree a Hezbollah demand for a national unity government. The ministers' statement said they had refused "to cover up ... what might damage the supreme national interests."

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