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Beirut was not heaven but hell: In case of Carlos Ghosn

1. Runaway to Heaven



It's been nearly two years since former Nissan CEO Carlos Ghosn fled to Beirut in December 2019. The technique of his escape was so vivid that it attracted the attention of the world.

Beirut was once a French colony and is called 'Paris of the Middle East' because of its scenic nature and swanky streets.

Nowadays it is not as busy as it used to be due to the frequent civil wars. But Beirut is still a popular destination for European tourist.

Ghosn illegally departed from Kansai International Airport in Japan on a Turkish private jet. He arrived in Beirut via Istanbul on New Year's Eve in 2019. He entered into Lebanon with his official passport although his passport was taken by Japanese court. He reportedly entered the country with a French passport and Lebanese ID.

Ghosn was born in Brazil and brought up in Beirut. The Lebanese are good in business. They enjoyed reputation as Phoenician merchants, and travelled all over the world. Ghosn's grandfather also migrated to Brazil, where Ghosn was born. After graduating from a French university, he joined Michelin, French tire manufacturing company. He made his figure at its Brazilian factory. In 1966, Renault, French car manufacturer, headhunted him as senior vice president. These experiences gave him three nationalities and passports of Lebanon, Brazil and France.

The reason why he decided Beirut as his destination was not only that Lebanon was his native country but also there was no extradition treaty between Lebanon and Japan. France and Brazil have such treaties with Japan. In addition, it would be worthy to point out that Ghosn enjoyed the reputation of young Lebanese as the world business tycoon.

He and his wife moved to a tightly guarded residence in Beirut. The residence was originally lent to him by Nissan during his tenure as CEO. The company had requested him to evacuate from the residence as series of his fraudulent activities. However, the judiciary of Japan could not reach the property in Lebanon.

Powerful Ghosn met with President Michel Aoun just after he returned to Lebanon. It is said that the President gave him a warm word (however, the President Office has denied the fact of his

visit)¹. He then claimed his innocence and justify his runaway. He complained about how inhumane his treatment was in Japan under harsh interrogation by Japanese prosecutors and the inability to meet his wife. It is reported by overseas media that the treatment of suspects in Japan is too harsh. He took advantage of it and appealed to the Lebanese people. After that he started new business. He announced that an executive training course would be introduced to revive the deteriorating Lebanese economy².

2. But Beirut was a hell on earth ----

However, the cloud overshadowed Ghosn gradually. Turkish pilots of a private jet who sent him from Japan to Beirut was brought to court for trial in Turkey³. In addition, an American ex-soldier of Green Beret member and his son who supported Ghosn's escape was handed over from the United States to Japan. They are now in trial. The French government has also sent an interrogator to Beirut on suspicion of misappropriating company's money for his wedding at the Palace of Versailles⁴.

In addition to Ghosn's own problems, Lebanon had big problems. Political dysfunction and the COVID-19 fell the country into a serious economic crisis. Traditionally Lebanon is a complex mosaic nation where Christianity, Islamic Sunnis and Shiites oppose each other. At the time of independence, an agreement was signed to share the power by three parties to avoid the conflict. The president, the Prime Minister and the speaker of Parliament are assigned to Christianity (Maronite), Islamic Sunni sect and Shiite sect respectively. However, as a result, each sect had monopolized interests of each post. Nepotism and corruption were prevailing. Politics was always in confusion. Hezbollah, Islamic extremist supported by Iran, gained power. Hezbollah continued battle with Israel. When the domestic economy was healthy, they were in delicate balance.



But economic balance in Lebanon was corrupted at the beginning of last year by COVID-19. Two pillars of the Lebanese economy – tourism and remittances by overseas migrant workers – were hit seriously. Furthermore, explosion by the ammonium nitrate took place in the warehouse at Beirut Port in August last year. It was an unprecedented tragedy with more than 200 dead, thousands of injured, and the collapse of numerous buildings and houses. They believed that the accident was caused by political inaction.

Then Prime Minister Hassan Diab resigned after the accident. Two candidates for new prime minister nominated by the president failed to form a cabinet one by one due to not only power struggle within political parties but also the intervention by the President. After fruitless effort of a year, new cabinet was finally formed in September 2021⁵. However, as shown in the past history, it is doubtful whether new Prime Minister can improve the political and economic instability. Lebanon is now called 'Venezuela of the Mediterranean'⁶. Lebanese economy is getting worse

due to political dysfunction and COVID-19. People laments hyperinflation. Due to a shortage of dollars, government cannot procure the fuel for power generation. It is common that power cut in Beirut is 22 hours a day⁷. The unemployment rate is rising day by day. Many young Lebanese left the country⁸.

How Carlos Ghosn tackles these problems? Needless to say, he lives in a villas tightly guarded. He has a lot of money. He might not anxious about power shortage because he must have his own power generator in his house. But he is unable to go to restaurant or shops in the downtown. His plan to resume his business was missed so far.

Ghosn had to convince that he has returned to heaven in Beirut from hell in Japan. However, ironically, the days of hell have returned to him. He may want to flee abroad again. But when he goes to France or Brazil, he will face the request for extradition by the Japanese government. If he wants comeback in international arena there will be no choice to stay Lebanon or to emigrate other countries. In latter case, Ghosn might offer his money to a dictator of any country as deposit for his safety. However, if the dictator steps down, it will no longer be a safe haven. Now he may be frustrated at his villas in Beirut, remembering his glorious old days.

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¹ Ghosn met Lebanese president after fleeing Japan: sources

2020/1/1 The Peninsula

<https://www.thepeninsulaqatar.com/article/01/01/2020/Ghosn-met-Lebanese-president-after-fleeing-Japan-sources>

² ‘Make yourself invaluable’: Carlos Ghosn offers executive training in troubled Lebanon

2020/9/29 Arab News

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/1741721/middle-east>

³ Turkey sentences three to jail over Ghosn escape

<https://news.kuwaittimes.net/website/turkey-sentences-three-to-jail-over-ghosn-escape/>

2021/2/24 Kuwait Times

⁴ French judges question fugitive former Nissan exec Carlos Ghosn in Beirut

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/1867781/middle-east>

2021/5/31 Arab News

⁵ Lebanon forms government after 13 months

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/1926266/middle-east>

2021/9/10 Arab News

⁶ Report: Lebanon could turn into ‘Venezuela of the Mediterranean’

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/1898076/middle-east>

2021/7/21 Arab News

⁷ Egypt agrees to send gas to Lebanon amid crippling energy blackouts

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/1924986/business-economy>

2021/9/8 Arab News

⁸ Lebanon exodus reaching tipping point as crisis accelerates

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/1920331/middle-east>

2021/8/31 Arab News