
SWEDISH GOVERNMENT FACES NO-CONFIDENCE CRISIS OVER IT LEAK

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Sweden was in the midst of a political crisis on Wednesday as opposition parties called for three ministers to resign over a botched outsourcing deal that led to one of the largest security breaches in the country.

Prime Minister Stefan Lofven called an emergency cabinet meeting after it became clear opposition parties would likely win a vote of no confidence in the three ministers.

Earlier in the day, an alliance of right-wing opposition parties announced their intention to call the vote following reports last week that unvetted foreign IT workers were granted access to confidential information in Sweden's government and police database in 2015. The security breach arose when the Transport Agency outsourced some of its services to IBM in the Czech Republic.

The foreign IT specialists lacked security clearance but had access to data such as driving licenses and vehicles, including individuals with protected identities.

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"Several ministers have neglected their duties. This must have repercussions," Annie Loof, Center Party leader, told reporters, flanked by the leaders of the conservatives, Liberals and Christian Democrats.

When the head of the anti-immigrant Sweden Democrats said his party would back the no-confidence vote, it gave the vote the required majority to oust the ministers of defense, interior and infrastructure.

"There are only two alternatives, either a new election or he himself (Lofven) resigns," Sweden Democrats leader Jimmie Akesson said.

Opposition parties criticized the minority left-wing government for failing to inform them of the breach despite the defense minister and the interior minister knowing about it in early 2016. The infrastructure minister was in their sights for failing to oversee the Transport Agency.

Lofven said the two ministers also failed to inform him about it, only learning of the breach in January this year. He labeled the Transport Agency's actions "a disaster."

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Lofven could fire the three ministers to avert the vote, he could tender the government's

resignation, or he could call a snap election in addition to the general election scheduled for September 2018.

Lofven's party said he would hold a press conference on Thursday morning to announce his decision. He also threatened to call a snap election in 2014 to avoid a different political crisis.

The loss of three cabinet members would severely hamper Lofven, who has already lost votes in parliament.

aw/bk (Reuters, AP, dpa)

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