
IRAQ'S PARLIAMENT CONFIRMS CABINET MINISTERS, BUT DIVISIONS REMAIN

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Iraq's parliament voted on Tuesday to approve three out of five ministers put forward by Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi, a step toward ending weeks of deadlock between the two largest parliamentary blocs.

The approval of the ministers brings Abdul-Mahdi closer to completing his cabinet, but divisions over who will fill the posts have highlighted the weakness of his position.

Intensifying disagreements between the rival Islah and Bina blocs, led by populist Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr and Iran-backed militia leader Hadi al-Amiri, have prevented the formation of a full government of 22 ministers.

At the heart of the weeks of fierce infighting are the nominations of the ministers of interior and defense - and both posts remain unfilled.

Nuri al-Dulaimi, Qusay al-Suhail and Abdul Ameer al-Hamdani were confirmed to be ministers for planning, higher education and culture, respectively. They were approved after the Islah and Bina blocs agreed to allow a vote on five outstanding ministries - but not the defense and interior portfolios.

The nominees for minister of education and minister of displacement and migration □ the only women to be put forward so far — both failed to get enough votes.

We voted for the ministries which were not shrouded in disagreements, said Sabah al-Ugaili, a lawmaker with the bloc led by Sadr.

Three won confidence, and two did not because we are not satisfied the candidates were fit for the job. Now the ball is in Abdul-Mahdi's court, to replace them with other names □ including the defense and interior ministries.

The deadlock over forming a cabinet has raised the prospect of further unrest as the country struggles to rebuild and recover after three years of war with Islamic State.

The last time parliament attempted to vote on the nominees on Dec. 4, angry MPs disrupted the session, banging on tables and shouting illegitimate before forcing it to end.

Parliament will next meet on Thursday, but it is unclear whether nominees for the vacant posts will be put up for confirmation votes.

In his weekly news conference on Tuesday, Abdul-Mahdi said he expected a vote to take place on Thursday, however the most contentious ministries could be delayed to next week.

Abdul-Mahdi said it was up to the political blocs to propose new names to fill the posts.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iraq-politics-parliament/iraqs-parliament-confirms-cabinet-ministers-but-divisions-remain-idUSKBN1OH1JO>

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