
IRAQ PARLIAMENT BLOCKS PM'S PROPOSED CABINET RESHUFFLE

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Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdis proposed Cabinet reshuffle failed to get the support of Parliament on Thursday. Iraqi lawmakers told Arab News that the prime minister had not provided the necessary legal justifications for replacing the incumbent ministers.

In the past week, violent demonstrations have broken out in Baghdad and nine southern Shiite-dominated provinces in protest against corruption, high unemployment and poor standards of living.

At least 180 people, including security personnel, have been killed and more than 7,000 injured during the demonstrations, while protesters have set fire to tires from military vehicles and government buildings, according to medical and security sources.

Abdul Mahdi has sought to placate protesters by launching a package of reforms □ which he described as exceptional □ including unemployment benefits, the construction of housing for poor families, the provision of low-interest loans for the poor, and punishment of corrupt officials.

On Wednesday evening, Abdul Mahdi announced three days of national mourning for those who have died in the protests, as well as the release of anyone arrested in the last 10 days who was not implicated in murder or sabotage. He also announced his proposed Cabinet reshuffle.

According to the Iraqi constitution, the prime minister does not have the right to replace any of his ministers without providing legal justification to convince Parliament to ratify his amendments.

On Thursday, the prime minister presented two candidates for the vacant ministries of education and health, while requesting the appointment of new ministers of communications, displacement and migration, and industry. But the request he sent to the speaker of Parliament, which Arab News has seen, did not include any legal justification for that request.

The parliamentary blocs that attended the session on Thursday included Al-Nassir □ led by former Iraqi Prime Minister Haider Abadi □ and Al-Hikmah, led by the Shiite cleric Ammar Al-Hakim. They approved the proposed appointments for the vacant ministries of education and health, but boycotted the rest of the session.

We do not want to be a false witness to what this government is doing, Adnan Al-Zurffai, the head

of Al-Nassir parliamentary bloc told Arab News.

This (proposed reshuffle) is a prosthetic solution that does not address the actual problems. The ministers that Abdul-Mahdi has requested to be replaced have nothing to do with the political scene or the demands of the demonstrators. The corrupt people are still sitting in their offices and no one has touched them.

Abdul Mahdi and the leaders of the political blocs reached an initial agreement in June for a Cabinet reshuffle involving six ministries — oil, electricity, communications, health, agriculture, and industry — due to poor performance or suspicions of corruption. But the majority of those blocs now say that Abdul Mahdi did not discuss his proposed reshuffle — which excluded oil, agriculture, and electricity, but included displacement and migration — with them.

Abdul Mahdi is playing with fire. Even the Speaker of Parliament did not have any information on the alleged Cabinet reshuffle, a prominent Sunni politician told Arab News. The initial agreement was for a real Cabinet reshuffle to depose a number of corrupt and failed ministers, but what Abdul Mahdi did is something else.

All he proposed was to replace unwilling ministers with candidates from political blocs and armed factions that helped him to survive the recent crisis, he continued. He and his allies are doing nothing but working to secure everything necessary to prolong his government. Meeting the actual demands of the demonstrators is their (lowest priority).

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