

Iraq Parliament blocks PM's proposed Cabinet reshuffle

Thu, 2019-10-10 23:41

BAGHDAD: Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi's 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.

SPEEDREAD

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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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Iraq begins national mourning for protest dead
Calm returns to Iraq, as US condemns violence

[Crime wave in Israel's Arab towns exposes rift with police](#)

Author:

Thu, 2019-10-10 23:31

MAJD AL-KRUM: In the week since three men were killed in a midday shootout in an Arab town in northern Israel, the country has seen mass protests, complaints of police negligence and a public debate about violence in Arab communities that has veered into racist generalizations.

A recent spike in killings within Arab towns has exposed the longstanding mistrust between the marginalized community and Israeli authorities, with each side accusing the other of neglecting the problem.

Arab citizens, who suffer from widespread discrimination, say Israel's vaunted security forces are suspiciously powerless when it comes to combatting violence in their communities. Police say local leaders and

residents must do more to help them impose law and order.

The debate was reignited last week by the shootout in the northern town of Majd Al-Krum, which killed two brothers, Ahmed and Khalil Manaa, and a third man, Mohammed Sabea. Another Manaa brother was wounded and remains in hospital, and a fifth man is said to be on the run. The police have opened an investigation but refuse to provide any details.

"They loved everyone and everyone loved them," Aisha Manaa said as she sobbed and held a picture of her two slain sons, one of whom is survived by a wife and two small children. "How can something like this happen?"

Israel's Arab citizens make up just 20 percent of the population but account for more than half of all murder victims nationwide. At least 71 Arabs have been killed so far this year, nearly as many as in each of the preceding two years, putting it on track to be the deadliest year in at least a decade.

Last month a stray bullet killed a 21-year-old pregnant mother at a wedding outside the northern city of Haifa. Police say a shooting late on Tuesday in Jaljulia, a small Arab town in central Israel, left one person dead and another moderately wounded. Local media have aired surveillance footage from other areas showing masked gunmen firing at each other with assault rifles in broad daylight.

"Children go to school and they are terrified," Manaa said. "We are afraid during the day and during the night. It is not safe anymore."

The police say they are doing everything they can, from stepping up patrols to opening new stations in Arab communities. Police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld said they have confiscated more than 3,500 illegal weapons and arrested more than 2,500 people on weapons charges this year alone. On Wednesday, police announced a major weapons bust in which they seized 200 guns as well as dozens of grenades and explosives.

"The Israeli police can respond to hundreds of incidents, as we do," Rosenfeld said. "But of course we have to make sure that the leaders of the different communities are speaking to the youngsters, are speaking to the local residents, are making sure that at local weddings, you don't have men that are turning up, using weapons and firing openly."

Public Security Minister Gilad Erdan, who oversees the police force, went further, telling a local radio station Monday that "Arab society, and I am sorry to say this, is very, very violent."

"It's connected to the culture there. A lot of disputes that end here with a lawsuit, there they pull out a knife and a gun," he said. He later walked back the remarks, tweeting that the "main responsibility" for fighting crime lies with the government and police, and describing the Arab public as "normative and law-abiding."

The Joint List of Arab political parties, which emerged as the third-largest voting bloc in the Knesset in last month's national elections, slammed Erdan's "racist" remarks, saying "the problem is not in the culture but in

the policies." It pointed to a series of large protests held in Arab towns in recent days condemning both the violence and the police response.

The mutual mistrust is rooted in the Middle East conflict. Arab citizens have close family ties to the Palestinians in the occupied territories and largely identify with the Palestinian cause. In recent years, Israeli police have tried to boost Arab recruitment, but only a small number have joined, and many in the community continue to see the Israeli security apparatus as a hostile force. Many Israelis in turn view Arabs with suspicion, and in recent elections Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other politicians branded Arab citizens as traitors or terrorists.

The two families involved in the shootout in Majd Al-Krum know each other and even visited each other's mourning tents. Mohammed Manaa, the brothers' uncle and a former head of the local council, acknowledges that the community bears some responsibility for the spike in violence. "There's no supervision, neither from the family, nor the local council, nor the government," he said.

But like many Arab citizens, he sees a wide gulf between how Israel responds to threats against the state or its Jewish citizens, and its handling of violence within Arab communities.

"The Israeli government knows every detail about everything that happens inside and outside the country," he said. "They can reach Iran, Iraq, Syria, everywhere, and they can't remove weapons from the Arab towns?"

"They are happy with this situation, this chaos," he added.

Manaa served on Majd Al-Krum's local council for more than two decades, and he would seem to be the kind of community leader who could help the police, but he says he has no idea what led to the shooting. Ali Sabea, whose nephew was killed, said the young men were all friends and that he doesn't know what caused the violence.

The Abraham Initiatives, an advocacy group that promotes coexistence between Jews and Arabs, operates in Arab communities and investigates violent incidents in order to encourage better cooperation among residents, local leaders and police. Ola Najami-Yousef, co-manager of the group's Safe Communities Initiative, said violence in Arab communities is rooted in years of discrimination and neglect by Israeli authorities.

"The lack of investment in the development and growth of Arab society in all fields, whether in construction, infrastructure, education, or economy, all this has led to a society that is very violent," she said. But she said it's unfair to hold the community fully responsible.

The police "aren't doing their job, so they blame the victims," she said. "It's not the responsibility of local leaders or Knesset members to come and collect weapons from the Arab community. That's the responsibility of the police."



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Israel's Gideon Saar challenges lengthy Netanyahu Likud rule
Israeli officials wrap up Netanyahu's pre-indictment hearing

[Foreign hybrids stubbing out Morocco's renowned cannabis](#)

Author:

Thu, 2019-10-10 23:24

KETAMA, Morocco: Morocco's rugged Rif Mountains have long been renowned for their cannabis but traditional varieties are being smoked out by foreign hybrids offering higher yields and greater potency.

The local strain of marijuana, known as Beldiya, is coveted by aficionados but is gradually disappearing from the fields in the North African kingdom.

Nowadays in Ketama, a region in the heart of the northern Rif, a strain called "Critical" is king.

Hicham, a 27-year-old cannabis farmer, says that he grows Critical because "the new imported seeds give a much higher yield."

Major cannabis producers decide what to plant and “hybrid plants have become a market all on their own,” said Moroccan anthropologist Khalid Mouna, who has written a thesis on the economics of Ketama’s cannabis production.

Critical, which Mouna said comes from the Netherlands, is the latest hybrid created in laboratories in Europe or North America to be introduced to Morocco.

With names like “Pakistana,” “Amnesia” and “Gorilla,” hybrids are popular for their potency and affordability.

Critical sells for 2,500 dirhams per kilo (\$252), while Beldiya goes for up to 10,000 dirhams per kilo, local sources told AFP.

Morocco has long been a leading producer and exporter of hashish – refined cannabis resin – even though the production, sale and consumption of drugs is illegal in the country.

A quarter of hashish seizures worldwide originated from Morocco between 2013 and 2017, according to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime.

While Morocco’s cannabis cultivation is falling, the adoption of hybrids means hashish production has remained stable.

In 2003, 134,000 hectares were under cannabis cultivation, falling to 47,500 hectares by 2011 under a large official reconversion program, according to a 2015 study by the French Monitoring Center for Drugs and Drug Addiction (OFDT).

But modern hybrid strains produce five to 10 kilos of hashish per quintal, a traditional unit of weight equivalent to 100 kilos, compared to a single kilo for kif, as local cannabis is known.

“The substitution of hybrids for kif might explain why the production of Moroccan hashish has barely decreased,” the study said.

In Ketama, kif is part of the culture.

Producing it and smoking it are tolerated by the authorities and its cultivation provides a livelihood for 90,000 to 140,000 people in an otherwise deprived region known for its poor soil.

People in the area told AFP that it was mostly traffickers or intermediaries who bought the cannabis harvest for smuggling to Europe or other Moroccan towns.

Hicham divides his time between his cannabis field and a cafe, where he and his friends smoke joints and watch satellite TV – a distraction from unemployment, he says.

In this rural region, job prospects are rare, with one in four young people unemployed, according to official figures.

Hicham and his friends all left school early to support their families, and many have left for Europe in search of work.

Those who stay mostly work seasonally for large cannabis growers, earning about 100 dirhams per day for a month or two at a time.

Most lack the money to get set up and work for themselves.

The high yields of imported hybrid cannabis plants come at a cost however.

The strains require heavy fertilization, which can damage the soil. And their insatiable thirst threatens the region's water supplies, according to the OFDT.

Critical grows in the dry summer, requiring heavy irrigation, while Beldiya is planted in winter, depending only on rainfall.

Some locals complain that major producers enforce the planting of hybrids even in arid areas.

"The traffickers impose it and the people don't have any other choice," says Mohamed Benyahya, a local community figure.

To water their plantations, major producers install solar pumps on the roofs of their mansions.

Not far from Hicham's local cafe, a vast terraced cannabis plantation sprawls up a nearby mountain.

Rows of carefully maintained plants are watered by drip irrigation via a network of pipes connected to a reservoir.

Hybrids like Critical are notable also for high levels of THC, marijuana's main psychoactive chemical.

The adoption of hybrids explains the "rapid and significant increase in the average THC content" of seized Moroccan hashish, according to the OFDT.

For smokers, the effect compared to Beldiya is pronounced. "One makes you think, the other makes you paranoid," says Mohamed, a friend of Hicham.

"European consumers no longer want hybrid cannabis on account of its high THC levels," Mouna said.

"Traditional Moroccan cannabis remains highly coveted, particularly by advocates of legalization."

Cannabis decriminalization remains controversial in the conservative country.

Proposals to legalize cannabis have so far met fierce political opposition.

For Mouna, legalization could help regulate cannabis consumption while also preserving the more traditional and environmentally friendly Beldiya.

And, while Hicham may have switched to growing Critical, he still only smokes Beldiya. “The modern varieties,” he says, “are mediocre.”



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In Morocco, heroin addiction sweeps cannabis corridorMorocco seizes ‘record’ 27.3 tons of cannabis resin

[Turkish police investigate Kurdish leaders, fire water cannon at protesters](#)

Author:

Thu, 2019-10-10 22:19

DIYARBAKIR, Turkey, Oct 10 : Turkish police have launched criminal investigations into Kurdish lawmakers and detained scores of people, accusing them of criticizing the military’s incursion into Syria on social media, state media reported.

Police also fired water cannon and detained dozens of activists in the mainly Kurdish southeastern city of Diyarbakir on Thursday at a protest against the

cross-border assault.

Turkey pounded the Kurdish YPG militia in northeast Syria for a second day on Thursday, forcing tens of thousands of people to flee and killing dozens. Ankara deems the YPG a terrorist group over its links to militants who have waged an insurgency in Turkey.

Police in riot gear fired water cannon and then detained protesters at a rally in front of the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP) headquarters in Diyarbakir, the biggest city in the southeast. A HDP party official said police detained 25 members there, including its Diyarbakir provincial leader.

Earlier on Thursday, authorities began investigating HDP leaders and detained 21 people for criticizing the military offensive online, state-owned Anadolu news agency said.

While most of Turkey's opposition parties have backed the operation, the HDP has called for the offensive to stop, describing it as an "invasion attempt." HDP co-leader Sezai Temelli said on Wednesday the operation was an attempt by the government to drum up support amid declining public backing. Prosecutors launched an investigation against him and HDP's other co-leader, Pervin Buldan, over their remarks about the offensive, Anadolu said.

It said Temelli and Buldan were accused of "carrying out propaganda for a terrorist organization" and "openly insulting Turkey's government." Three other HDP lawmakers were being investigated over similar charges, the news agency said.

The government accuses the HDP of ties to the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) militant group and thousands of its members have been prosecuted for the same reason, including its leaders. The HDP denies such links.

Hours after the operation started on Wednesday, authorities also launched investigations against 78 individuals who criticized the offensive on social media, Anadolu said.

On Thursday, 21 people were detained in the southern province of Mardin for their social media posts. The suspects are accused of "provoking the public to hatred and animosity" and "carrying out propaganda for a terrorist organization," Anadolu said.

Late on Thursday, police detained another 11 people linked to the HDP who were protesting in central Ankara against the incursion, Anadolu reported. Authorities launched similar investigations after each of Turkey's two previous cross-border operations into Syria. More than 300 people were detained for social media posts criticizing Turkey's offensive into northern Syria in January 2018.



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'Operation Peace Spring' continues despite international objections How will Syrian border towns react to Turkey's Operation Peace Spring?

[How will Syrian border towns react to Turkey's Operation Peace Spring?](#)

Author:

Thu, 2019-10-10 01:13

ANKARA: Turkish troops and the Syrian National Army launched Operation Peace Spring in northern Syria on Wednesday afternoon.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said its aim is to "prevent the creation of a terror corridor across the southern border and to bring peace to the area." Turkish armed forces are hoping to establish a safe zone extending 32 km into Syrian territory.

Turkish F-16 jets hit targets in Ras Al-Ain, with the Syrian-Kurdish YPG-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) their main objective.

Ankara opposes the YPG over its ties with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has waged a violent insurgency against the Turkish state for decades. But the YPG has been a key ally of the US in the fight against Daesh. This week, however, the White House announced it was withdrawing special forces from the area ahead of the Turkish operation.

Now the big question is how residents of the Syrian border towns of Tal Abyad and Ras Al-Ain, which will be among the first targets, will react.

The YPG captured Tal Abyad – an Arab-majority town located to the north of Raqqa near the Turkish border – from Daesh in 2015 by the YPG. The fact that the area is predominantly Arab means that the first phase of the operation there is more likely to meet with the residents' approval, according to experts.

The Tal Abyad district belongs to Kurdish canton of Kobane, but is populated by a number of different tribes, in long-established separate zones. The Kurdish minority is settled in the western part of the area.

Four years ago, Amnesty International claimed that the YPG was conducting an ethnic-cleansing campaign against Arabs in some villages of Tal Abyad, while there are still complaints from the local Arabs that the YPG is trying to "Kurdify" the residents through school curricula and the confiscation of properties.

Ammar Hamou, a Jordan-based Syrian journalist, said that people to the east of the Euphrates are divided in their opinions of the operation, but that the majority of Arabs support it.

FASTFACT

Turkish armed forces are hoping to establish a safe zone extending 32 km into Syrian territory.

"As for how the people see the Free Army and Turkey, unfortunately, many consider Turkey's move an occupation and are afraid of the ruthless military operation, especially since there was a bad experience in Afrin," he told Arab News, referring to the ongoing Operation Olive Branch, conducted by the Turkish Armed Forces and the Turkish-backed Free Syrian Army in Syria's majority-Kurdish Afrin district.

According to Hamou, if Turkey is able to ensure that there are no human-rights violations by its forces or the Syrian National Army, then locals may accept the process.

"The success of the safe zone is Turkey's responsibility, and it is a difficult test," he said. "Returning refugees from the east of the Euphrates to the region will be welcomed by the people, but the return of Syrians from other areas such as Homs and Damascus is a demographic change."

Ankara's draft plan for a construction project in the area is focused on building 200,000 houses in the safe zone in northeast Syria, which includes Tal Abyad, in order to settle around 1 million Syrian refugees who are currently hosted in Turkish territories.

There is a significant number of Arab refugees from Tal Abyad currently living in Turkey and they are eager to return to their homeland with the help of Ankara's operation. The tribal system still predominates among the Arab communities in the zone, with tribal leaders maintaining a level of authority over the residents.

Galip Dalay, visiting scholar at the University of Oxford, said the Arab tribes in Tal Abyad and Ras Al-Ain will likely be calculating which side is most likely to win.

"Some local groups who were previously cooperating with the YPG could now side with the Turks, if they think the Turkish army will (prevail). Their pragmatic reasoning will be determinant," he told Arab News.

In Jays, the main tribe in Tal Abyad, the Bou Assaf clan works closely with the YPG, while two other clans – Jamilah and Bou Jarada – oppose it. There are also a number of Turkmen tribes, who, obviously, are in favor of Turkey. The symbolic timing of the operation is also telling: On Oct. 9, 1998, Syria put the imprisoned leader of the PKK, Abdullah Ocalan, on a plane to Moscow, and he was arrested in Kenya a year later.

Soner Cagaptay, director of the Turkish Program at the Washington Institute, said that Turkish troops are deliberately targeting a narrow belt along the Syrian border stretching from Tal Abyad to Ras Al-Ayn, as it is an Arab-majority area. In other words, he said, this is not a Turkish invasion of major Kurdish areas, but a Turkish invasion of Arab areas controlled by Kurds. He added that the "face" of the Turkish incursion will have an Arab component, consisting mainly of Arabs from the area.

"Therefore, Turkish troops will be welcomed more than they would be if they went into Kobane or Kurdish-majority areas along the border," he said. "Some of the residents of this Arab area were driven out when Daesh took over, and many others were driven out when YPG took control, and they were all forced into Turkey."



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Saudi Arabia and UAE condemn 'Turkish aggression' in Syria
Turkish forces launch operation against Kurds in Syria