

Parliament fills key Cabinet posts in Iraq

Mon, 2019-06-24 23:34

BAGHDAD: Iraq's Parliament on Monday filled three key ministerial positions to end seven months of failed negotiations and political deadlock in the country.

The Parliament approved Najah Al-Shammari as defense minister, Yassin Al-Yassiri as interior minister and Farouq Amin Othman as justice minister. The three were sworn in on Monday.

The election of an education minister was postponed after its candidate was voted down.

In October, Iraq's Parliament voted to confirm Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi's new government while leaving the four Cabinet posts unfilled, a move that underlined the country's deep political divisions.

Parliamentary approval of the three ministers came on the eve of a deadline by Shiite cleric Moqtada Al-Sadr to the prime minister and leaders of political blocs to fill the vacant ministries.

Al-Sadr, one of the most influential clerics in the country, with millions of followers, a large armed faction and a parliamentary bloc, last week threatened to withdraw his support for the government if Abdul Mahdi failed to finalize his Cabinet within 10 days.

In response, Iraq's leader rushed to provide a list of candidates to fill the vacant ministries.

Abdul Mahdi's government resulted from an agreement between the parliamentary Reform coalition led by Al-Sadr and the pro-Iranian parliamentary Construction Coalition led by Hadi Al-Amiri, commander of the Badr Organization, one of the most powerful Shiite armed factions.

The two coalitions agreed to share ministries, support the government and vote for each other's candidates, but a dispute erupted when Al-Amiri and his allies insisted on the nomination of Falih Al-Fayyadh, the current national security adviser, as interior minister. Al-Sadr and his allies within Reform rejected the nomination, saying Al-Fayyadh was backed by Qassem Sulaimani, leader of Iran's Revolutionary Guards.

The vote to fill the three ministerial vacancies is unlikely to end Iraq's political turmoil, analysts warned.

"Now Abdul Mahdi can catch his breath until the next crisis," Abdul Wahid Tuama, an independent analyst, told Arab News.

"Nothing will be changed after the election of these ministers. The

performance of the government will not change and the problems facing the prime minister will not be resolved.

“The most important thing achieved today is that the pressure submitted by Al-Sadr on Abdul Mahdi and the heads of blocs will ease for a while.”



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Iraq parliament](#)

[Baghdad](#)

[Iraq](#)

[Najah Al-Shammari](#)

[Yassin Al-Yassiri](#)

[Farouq Amin Othman](#)

Iraq Cabinet remains incomplete as Parliament defers key appointments
Iraq parliament approves 2019 budget, one of largest ever

[Turkish civil society leaders on trial over 2013 protests](#)

Mon, 2019-06-24 20:58

SILIVRI, Turkey: Sixteen leading Turkish civil society leaders went on trial Monday, accused of seeking to overthrow the government during the “Gezi Park”

protests of 2013 – charges dubbed an absurd sham by critics.

The group includes renowned businessman and philanthropist Osman Kavala, whose detention since November 2017 has made him a symbol of what his supporters say is a crackdown on civil society.

Kavala rejected the “irrational claims which lack evidence” in his opening statement, shortly after the trial began under high security in the prison and court complex of Silivri on the outskirts of Istanbul.

He is accused of orchestrating and financing the protests which began over government plans to build over Gezi Park, one of the few green spaces left in Istanbul.

The rallies snowballed into a nationwide movement that marked the first serious challenge to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s brand of Islamic conservatism and grandiose development projects.

The 657-page indictment seeks to paint the protests as a foreign-directed conspiracy with links to the Arab Spring, which, ironically, the Turkish government supported.

“None of these actions were coincidental... they were supported from the outside as an operation to bring the Turkish Republic to its knees,” the indictment says.

Amnesty International’s Andrew Gardner said the trial “speaks volumes about the deeply flawed judiciary that has allowed this political witch-hunt to take place.

“It is absurdly attempting to portray routine civil society activities as crimes,” he said.

“The idea that Osman Kavala led the conspiracy is utterly outlandish and unsupported by any credible evidence,” Emma Sinclair-Webb, the Turkey director of Human Rights Watch (HRW), told AFP.

One of the allegations is the claim that a map on Kavala’s phone showing bee species actually depicted his plans to redraw Turkey’s borders.

There has been a renewed crackdown on dissidents since a coup attempt in 2016, blamed by the government on US-based Muslim preacher Fethullah Gulen, with thousands arrested and tens of thousands sacked from public sector, media and military jobs.

A respected figure in intellectual circles, Kavala is chairman of the Anatolian Culture Foundation, which seeks to bridge ethnic and regional divides through art, including with neighboring Armenia, with which Turkey has no diplomatic ties.

“I was involved in projects contributing to peace and reconciliation. There is not a single piece of evidence or proof in the indictment that I prepared the ground for a military coup,” Kavala told the court.

Think tank researcher Yigit Aksakoglu was also in pre-trial detention – since November – while six of the rest are being tried in absentia after fleeing Turkey, including actor Memet Ali Alabora and dissident journalist Can Dundar.

The case against Alabora focuses on his appearance in a play featuring a revolt against the ruler of a fictional country.

Others, including architect Mucella Yapici, have already been tried and acquitted for their role in the Gezi Park protests in 2015.

“I am on trial for the second time on the same charges. Peaceful protests cannot be banned. They are a right,” Yapici told the court on Monday.

Erdogan has linked Kavala to US billionaire George Soros, whose efforts to

promote democracy around the world have made him a target for several authoritarian leaders.

Last year, Erdogan said Kavala was the representative in Turkey of the “famous Hungarian Jew Soros” whom he accused of trying to “divide and tear up nations.”

Soros’s Open Society Foundation, which ceased activities in Turkey last year, called Monday’s trial a “political sham.”

“At some earlier stage in Turkey’s descent into authoritarian rule, one might have described this trial as a test of judicial independence... but such exams have already been held, and the failing grades were handed down long ago,” wrote Freedom House, a US-based rights group, this week.

“The point of the coming show trial is quite simply to intimidate Turkish citizens and deter them from exercising their rights,” it added.

The hearing will continue on Tuesday.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Turkey](#)

Turkey unafraid of US sanctions over S-400 deal: Foreign minister EU threatens sanctions over Turkey’s Cyprus drilling

[Jordanian experts divided over](#)

participation in Bahrain workshop

Sun, 2019-06-23 23:24

AMMAN: While Jordan witnessed a number of protest rallies in opposition to the Bahrain Prosperity to Peace workshop, political pundits were divided over their government's decision on Saturday to participate with a low-level delegation headed by the director-general of the Ministry of Finance.

Adnan Abu Odeh, a former adviser to King Hussein and King Abdullah, told Arab News that attending the workshop was important to learn what it was about.

"If Jordan is supposed to be included in this plan, it makes sense for Jordanians to understand it better before making any decision," he said. Abu Odeh said that participation in the June 25 workshop in the Bahraini capital Manama did not mean acceptance or rejection of it. "At present we were invited to learn about it and not to make a decision whether to accept it or not."

Ahmad Shunaq, secretary-general of the National Constitutional Party, said that participation did not mean the surrender of steadfast positions on the Palestinian issue. "We are with Jordan and against any attempts at doubting our intentions. If we are absent, we will allow others to negotiate on our behalf. The ABC of international politics is always to protect the policies of the homeland."

The Islah block in Jordan's Parliament, however, issued a strong statement opposing participation. Coalition head, Abdallah Akileh, said in a statement that Jordan should not attend. "We call on the government not to attend the Bahrain workshop, which is the beginning of a plan to liquidate the Palestinian cause at the expense of Jordan."

Akileh noted that even if Jordanian representation was very low at the level of the director-general of the Finance Ministry, such participation legitimized "the conspiracy against us and our sovereignty."

Veteran journalist and analyst, Lamis Andoni, commented on her Facebook page that the economic workshop is nothing more than a trap. "Economic contracts require that the economic plan is also accepted and that the Palestinian markets are open for foreign investments who will be the big winners in this effort."

Labor rights activist, Mohammad Snaid, also denounced the workshop and Jordan's participation in it. "Our position on the Manama conference is the total rejection of it. This even is aimed at conspiring against the Palestinian cause and Jordan at the same time."

Snaid said: "The US will be led to believe that Jordan's participation means acceptance of the deal of the century, which the people of Jordan reject since we stand side by side with our Palestinian brothers and we will not accept anything that Palestinians will not accept in support of their

inalienable rights.”

MP Mohammad Tharawi said that Jordan is experiencing a pivotal moment and must take its responsibility seriously. “The rights of millions of Jordanians of Palestinian origin in historic Palestine is on our shoulders, they have the right of return and compensation,” he said.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Jordan](#)

[Bahrain](#)

[Amman](#)

[Adnan Abu Odeh](#)

Jordanians protest against Bahrain economic workshopUS economic plan for Middle East peace gets chilly reaction

[US economic plan for Middle East peace gets chilly reaction](#)

Sun, 2019-06-23 18:59

JERUSALEM: The economic component of the Trump administration’s long-awaited Middle East peace plan drew chilly responses from regional allies Sunday, two days before it was to be discussed at a conference in the Gulf.

An Israeli minister called a major piece of the White House's "peace to prosperity" plan "irrelevant," while Jordan and Egypt restated their support for a political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, pouring cold water on Washington's focus on economic issues.

The \$50 billion economic plan, published on Saturday, calls for massive infrastructure projects and job creation for Palestinians. It makes no mention of Palestinian political aspirations – a state in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and east Jerusalem, lands Israel captured in 1967.

The plan does not address the core issues of the conflict: the contested holy city of Jerusalem, sought by both peoples as a capital; the fate of more than 5 million Palestinian refugees and their descendants; and the borders of a future Palestinian state.

American officials say these issues will not be raised at this week's conference in Bahrain. Neither Israel nor the Palestinians will have official representation at the two-day summit. The US delegation is to be led by Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin.

Palestinian Finance Minister Shukri Bishara said on Sunday that Palestinians do not need this week's US-led Bahrain meeting to develop their country, they need peace.

The June 25-26 conference in the Bahraini capital Manama, which the Palestinian Authority is boycotting, will discuss US-led proposals for an economic vision to be presented by US President Donald Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, part of a wider plan to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

While many Arab states are attending the meeting, the plan has drawn rebuke as an attempt to circumvent Palestinian demands for an independent state on lands captured in the 1967 war.

"We don't need the Bahrain meeting to build our country, we need peace, and the sequence of (the plan) – economic revival followed by peace – is unrealistic and an illusion," Bishara said on the sidelines of a meeting of Arab finance ministers in Cairo.

"First of all, give us our land and our freedom."

While the precise outline of the political part of Kushner's plan has been shrouded in secrecy, officials briefed on it say he has jettisoned the two-state solution that envisages an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza.

Kushner told Reuters that the plan, previously dubbed the "deal of the century," could be the "opportunity of the century" for the Palestinians. In an address to Sunday's meeting at the Arab League headquarters, Bishara cited the "bitter experience" of the Palestinians since the 1993 Oslo Accords, including the US decision to cut aid to the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for Palestinian refugees.

"We are careful and skeptical of what is called the deal of the century – or what was called a couple of days ago, the opportunity of the century," Bishara said.

Sunday's Arab finance ministers' meeting was called to discuss the Palestinian budget deficit, which Arab League Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit put at \$700 million for the current year.

The finance ministers said they were committed to activating a financial safety net for the Palestinians of \$100 million a month, agreed upon at previous Arab meetings.

The Trump administration said it did not invite Israeli officials in order to keep the conference apolitical. The Palestinians have refused to attend, saying the US plan adopts hard line Israeli positions and neglects the internationally backed two-state solution.

Speaking Sunday in an interview with Israeli public radio, Cabinet minister Tzachi Hanegbi said one of the proposals in the Trump plan— a land link connecting the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip – was “irrelevant” so long as Hamas controls the latter.

The Trump administration’s outline calls for “a major road and, potentially, a modern rail line” between the West Bank and Gaza, saying this would “reduce the complications of travel for Palestinians” and stimulate commerce.

“It will be relevant when Gaza will stop being a pro-Iranian terror kingdom, meaning it’s irrelevant today and in the foreseeable future,” said Hanegbi, Israel’s minister for regional cooperation and an ally of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The 10-year plan calls for projects worth \$6.3 billion for Palestinians in Lebanon, as well as \$27.5 billion in the West Bank and Gaza, \$9.1 billion in Egypt and \$7.4 billion in Jordan.

Lebanon’s Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri said Sunday that the country will not be “tempted” by money into what he said amounts to giving up Palestinian rights.

Berri said in a statement carried by the state-run National News Agency that although Lebanon is currently dealing with an economic crisis, it would be a mistake to think that billions of dollars could convince the government to abandon Palestinians’ rights as refugees.

Sufian Qudah, a spokesman for Jordan’s Foreign Ministry, said that while Jordan would attend the conference, “no economic proposal can replace a political settlement to the conflict which must be resolved according to the two-state solution.”

*Reuters and AP



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Israel–Palestine peace plan](#)

[peace to prosperity workshop](#)

Arab League renews pledge to give Palestinians \$100m in aid monthly
Lebanon refuses investment at expense of Palestinian cause: Berri

[Some 6,700 Syrian students enrolled in Jordanian universities](#)

Sun, 2019-06-23 20:28

AMMAN: The Secretary General of the Amman based Association of the Arab Universities (AARU) Omar Salamah estimated the number of Syrian refugee students enrolled in the Jordanian universities in the 2018-2019 academic year at around 6,700, majoring in different scientific fields.

Salamah said in a statement issued recently that the AARU has carried out a special project to support Syrian students taking refuge in Lebanon, Iraq's Kurdistan and Jordan.

The project, which is funded by the United Nations along with Turkey, Germany and the Mediterranean Universities Union (UNIMED), is carried out in cooperation with the National Erasmus. It seeks to help partner countries' universities enroll Syrian students in different academic majors through setting specialized units to help and employ them.

He said that the mission of these units is to support Syrian refugee students in resuming their academic and professional lives.

Salamah said that in addition to scholarships, the project offers training courses for Syrian students in various professional and technical spheres, teaches languages and organizes field science trips

and activities to heritage sites in countries that are included in the project.

He highlighted that the AARU keeps in touch with the universities that enroll Syrian refugees to follow up on their academic progress.

Syrian students in Jordan are concentrated in the Yarmouk University, Zarqa University and Al-Zaytoonah University, he added.

The AARU will keep supporting the Syrian students and, in cooperation with Jordanian and Arab universities, will work on offering them with what they need to continue their higher education in an environment that stimulates creativity, he explained.

He stressed the need to provide a suitable environment for teaching and scientific research for Syrian students to harness necessary skills required to get a future job in the host countries or in their own in case they return after the end of the crisis.

Salamah emphasized that the AARU has been contacting international organizations to offer scholarships for Syrian refugees in universities all over the world.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Jordan](#)

[Association of Arab Universities](#)

Syrian students describe life under regime rule
Syrian students face hurdles in entering Saudi universities