

Iraq's Sunni speaker sacked after brawl

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The Iraqi parliament yesterday ousted its Sunni speaker Mahmud Mashhadani after he allegedly ordered his bodyguards to beat up a Shi'ite MP, the assembly's deputy speaker said. Of the 168 MPs who attended the session, 113 voted to replace Mashhadani, Khalid Al Attiya said.

"Following a number of notices from lawmakers about his conduct, inefficient administration of assembly sessions and finally the attack by his guards, the assembly decided to oust him," Attiya said.

He said parliament also gave the National Concord Front, the main Sunni political bloc, a week to propose a new candidate for the post of speaker. "As of now Mashhadani is powerless and he will be on leave. I will take over as speaker until a new speaker is elected," Attiya said.

Mashhadani, known for his loud rhetoric in parliament, set his bodyguards on Shi'ite lawmaker Fariyad Mohammed on Sunday after a heated verbal exchange outside the parliament hall between the MP and his guards. Parliament then decided to send Mashhadani on indefinite leave and had ordered Attiya to take over as the acting speaker but yesterday lawmakers formally ousted Mashhadani.

The latest incident was second such involving Mashhadani. Earlier this year, the speaker had slapped fellow Sunni MP Hussein Falluji near the parliament's cafeteria following a heated verbal exchange.

Mashhadani is of the Salafi school who had a death sentence under executed dictator Saddam Hussein's regime commuted to a 15-year prison term in 2000 after he bribed the judge. A military doctor by trade, the Baghdad native helped create the National Dialogue Council, one of the Sunni parties that belong to the 44-seat Sunni National Concord Front coalition.

Iraq's 275-member parliament was elected on December 15, 2005, as the first to serve a full four-year term after the ouster of Saddam Hussein in 2003. It convened its inaugural session on March 16, 2006, a few weeks after the bombing of the revered Shi'ite shrine in the northern town of Samarra that triggered brutal nationwide sectarian violence that continues to this day.