

Islamists want new PM as Kuwait cabinet resigns after polls

Gulf in the media

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The Kuwaiti cabinet resigned on Monday after parliamentary polls saw radical Islamists make a strong showing and a veteran Islamist MP called for a new prime minister to be appointed.

The ruler of the oil-rich Gulf state, Emir Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah, accepted the resignation but asked outgoing Prime Minister Sheikh Nasser Mohammad al-Ahmad al-Sabah to remain in office until a new cabinet is formed, the official KUNA news agency said.

The resignation -- required by law after an election -- came after a brief cabinet meeting chaired by the premier, a member of the ruling family as is the norm in Kuwait.

The emir is now expected to begin consultations with former parliament speakers on forming a new cabinet within two weeks.

The Kuwaiti ruler can either ask the outgoing premier, his nephew, to form a new government or appoint a new prime minister from the ruling family.

Sunni Islamists won 21 of parliament's 50 seats in Saturday's elections, with the radical Islamic Salafi Alliance making the biggest gains. Islamists from the Shiite minority bagged five.

Senior Islamist MP Waleed al-Tabtabai called in a statement for a new prime minister "who should vigorously fight corruption and reform the administration" to be appointed.

Tabtabai, of the Salafi Alliance, said the outgoing government has been tested and failed and the country cannot put up with more of the same.

Similar calls were made during the election campaign to replace the prime minister and even appoint a commoner to the post.

Since Kuwait introduced a parliamentary system in 1962, the prime minister has been a senior member of the Al-Sabah dynasty. Family members also occupy key ministries like defence, interior and foreign affairs.

Despite having a parliament with legislative and monitoring powers, Kuwait does not have a multi-party system. Political parties are banned although several political groupings operate freely as de facto parties.

The 16-member cabinet must by law include at least one elected MP. Unelected ministers become ex-officio members of parliament and have the same voting rights as elected lawmakers.

A new cabinet is not required to win a vote of confidence in parliament.

Outgoing speaker Jassem al-Khorafi, who retained his seat, called at a news conference on Monday for the appointment of three deputies to the prime minister -- for economic, security and services affairs.

He also demanded the formation of a cabinet able to cooperate with the new parliament.

The Islamic Constitutional Movement, the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood, called for the new cabinet to have a majority of elected MPs.

The outgoing cabinet included only two elected lawmakers.

According to an emiri decree issued on Monday the new parliament will hold its first session on June 1.

The previous parliament was dissolved in March and early elections were called following a standoff between MPs and the government.

Barely one day after the election results, a tribal MP said he plans to grill the interior minister -- if he is retained -- for ordering the security forces to crack down on tribal primary elections.

Fahd al-Azemi said he will quiz Sheikh Jaber Khaled al-Sabah, a member of the ruling family, for "ordering armoured vehicles and special forces to crack down on Kuwaitis."

Security forces used tear gas to disperse hundreds of tribesmen and arrested dozens of them as they sought to prevent primary elections which are banned by law and which the authorities believe encourage allegiance to the tribe rather than to the state.

Kuwaiti tribes won 24 seats in Saturday's ballot, 18 of which went to candidates who were qualified through tribal primaries.