

Key ministers back in new Yemen government

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Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh on Thursday named a new ministerial line-up marked by the return of key ministers to replace the reshuffled cabinet of former prime minister Abdel Kader Bajammal.

A presidential decree said the important portfolios of interior, defence, foreign affairs, oil and information would be unchanged.

The new government will be led by premier-designate Ali Mohammad Mujawar, electricity minister in the outgoing cabinet.

The finance portfolio goes to Nooman al-Dhahiri, former head of the inland revenue. He takes over from Seif Mahyub al-Assali who becomes commerce and industry minister, replacing Khaled Rajeh Sheikh.

No reasons have been given for the replacement of the government led by Bajammal since 2003.

Yemen is one of the poorest countries in the world, however, and major donor countries, concerned that the reform process has stalled, stepped up pressure on Sanaa by linking aid to tangible change.

Saleh, who first took office as leader of what was then North Yemen in 1978, survived a 1994 civil war with the former communist south and Al-Qaeda-inspired violence in Osama bin Laden's ancestral homeland.

Government forces are also battling followers of the rebel Zaidi tribal leader Abdul Malek al-Huthi in the state's mountain regions.

The tribe led a rebellion against government forces in 2004 and 2005 that left hundreds dead.

The Zaidis are an offshoot of Shiite Islam dominant in northwestern Yemen, but form a minority in the mainly Sunni country.

The rebels reject as illegitimate the regime which seized power in a 1962 coup known as the September 26 revolution, overthrowing a Zaidi imamate.