

PM Abadi says opposed to repeat of Iraq election

by The Region - 13/06/2018 09:34



Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi said on Tuesday he opposed any repeat of the May 12 parliamentary election, and warned that anyone who tried to sabotage the political process would be punished, after allegations of electoral fraud raised tensions.

Parliament has demanded a nationwide recount of votes, drawing calls for the election to be re-run. Abadi said only the Supreme Federal Court could decide whether to re-run the vote, which was won by Shi'ite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr's bloc.

"The matter is exclusively in the hands of the judiciary, not politicians. The government and parliament don't have the power to cancel the election," Abadi told a news conference.

On Monday, Sadr urged Iraqis to unite rather than squabble over a possible re-run of the election, in a message apparently meant to lower the political temperature after a ballot box storage depot caught fire.

Abadi called the fire a deliberate act and said the attorney general would bring charges against those who are trying to undermine the political process.

An Iraqi court ordered the arrest of four people accused of setting fire to the storage site, the judiciary said. Three of them were policemen and one an employee of the Independent High Elections Commission.

Abadi said a preliminary report had provided evidence of gasoline at multiple areas inside the storage site. It also showed that security cameras had been disabled and no locks had been broken, implying it was carried out by someone with access to the storage site.

Iraqi authorities said the ballot boxes had been rescued but the fire has fuelled fears of violence.

Sadr, a Shi'ite Muslim cleric who once led violent campaigns against the U.S. occupation that ended in 2011, has emerged as a nationalist opponent of powerful Shi'ite Muslim parties allied with neighbouring Iran and as a champion of the poor.

He has warned that certain parties are trying to drag Iraq into a civil war, adding that he would not participate in one.

Abadi thanked Sadr for a disarmament initiative he floated after a weapons cache at his Baghdad stronghold of Sadr City exploded, killing 18 people, and said he hoped the cleric would stick to it.

"I welcome Sayed Moqtada's announcement that his followers commit to not having weapons outside the framework of the state. We consider this good," he said, adding that those responsible for the explosion would be brought to justice.

"What happened in Sadr City is very regrettable, it is a crime. Those responsible will receive their just punishment."