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Panel 9:

The New KRG Cabinet: Visions and Strategies for the Next Four Years

- Dara Rasheed, KRG Minister of Planning
- Alan Hama Saeed, KRG Minister of Education
- Saman Barzinji, KRG Minister of Health
- Kamal Khalil, KRG Minister of Electricity
- Dana Abdul Karim Hama Salih, KRG Minister of Reconstruction and Housing
- Dlawer Ala'Aldeen, President of MERI (Moderator)



The 9th KRG Cabinet was formed in July of 2019. At its inception, the PM committed his new cabinet to a manifesto consisting of 52 critical reforms, designed to fulfill his pledge to

improve services, enhance the rule of law, strengthen government institutions, and address chronic problems that have plagued Iraq for 100 years. All cabinet ministers were tasked, from the outset, with the mandate to prepare their respective ministries for the implementation of that manifesto. In his opening remarks, **Dlawer Ala'Aldeen** stated that, following the debate with the Prime Minister, who described his vision and strategies for the KRG Cabinet overall, this panel would dig deeper into the specific action plans of four key service-related ministries. These include the Ministries of Education, Health, Electricity, and Reconstruction & Housing. The Ministry of Planning, which plays a central role in the overall operation of the government and the expenditure of its budget, would be engaged as well.

Dara Rasheed, KRG Minister of Planning, outlined his ministry's agenda for the next four years, which is designed to secure the involvement of industries such as tourism and agriculture, and will coordinate with other ministries to ensure realistic and economically-focused interventions. However, he observed, the 2014 financial crisis, the budget allocation for the KRG, and any possible repercussions from the current predicaments in Baghdad are all factors and risks that will need to be mitigated in order to achieve the ministry's objectives.

The Ministry of Planning is concerned with enhancing public and private sector partnerships. This would be particularly beneficial in optimising the infrastructure within the KRI by, for example, building highways and privatising public transportation. Rasheed emphasized that, no matter the size of its budget, no government can build a nation's infrastructure alone. Furthermore, these partnerships could secure greater youth employment in the private sector.

The Ministry will enhance its system for ensuring quality control across all sectors. Rasheed explained that, in the future, contract tendering will become electronic to ensure transparency. This will be done in collaboration with South Korea. Job descriptions will also be redeveloped in order to clarify roles and enhance efficiency, a strategy that will be initiated across several other ministries.

Garnering up-to-date information on Iraq's populations is also a priority for the Ministry of Planning. Next year, the ministry's mission will specifically work on improving its processes for data collection.

Rasheed acknowledged that the Ministry of Planning has encountered difficulties in actualizing 2020 objectives due to the financial crisis and the broader situation in Iraq. Additionally, new problems have arisen with the Ministry of Finance, which is not allocating adequately for the budgeting and planning of other ministries.

Alan Hama Saeed, KRG Minister of Education, stated that the four-year roadmap for his ministry is based on what the Prime Minister outlined on July 10th, 2019, regarding the reform strategy. The ministry will be restructured, and a new system for the management of human resources will be introduced. The ministry will also focus on building capacity and developing facilities in order to better support the KRI's one million students and 10,000 contracted teachers. It will invest in improving quality and enhancing performance.

The Ministry of Education is committed to fighting corruption within the educational sector and will invite experts with experience in local settings to review the entire system in order to identify and address existing gaps.

“We have a structural crisis in our system of education ... and we have short, medium, and long-term plans to address them.” - Alan Hama Saeed

Saeed provided statistics to demonstrate that the current capacity and infrastructure of the educational system are not sufficient for its purpose. “We have 1,874,000 pupils; 124,000 teachers, plus 6,010 contracted teachers and 17,000 other lecturers; but we have only 6,805 schools. This is not ideal.” He estimated that the KRI needs 35,000 classes to reduce class sizes. The Ministry has started investing in renovations and the construction of new schools to satisfy its long-term objectives.

It has also begun reviewing the educational curricula to ensure they meet expectations and labour market requirements. The Ministry has invested in English language programs, from the primary level onwards, in order to provide pupils with a strong command of English.

The Ministry of Education has also made investments in quality assurance. Saeed acknowledged his high appreciation for the ministry’s collaborative interactions with MERI, and referred to the amount of effort they jointly invested in drafting new legislation for the system of education. At least one third of this legislation is focused on ensuring the quality and accreditation of educational services. Saeed also expressed the Ministry’s intention to devolve power and decentralize decision-making processes.

Finally, due to the large influx of IDPs and refugees, the Ministry of Education is committed to developing educational tools that promote the values of coexistence and freedom.

Saman Barzinji, KRG Minister of Health, observed that the biggest service sector in any nation is that of health. As such, maintaining the integrity and professionalism of this industry is vital. Barzinji recognised that the health sector in the KRI needs revision and reform to cover serious gaps identified by medical experts, enhance service provision, and win back public trust.

“No one is happy with the health services.” – Saman Barzinji

Unfortunately, Barzinji explained, the ministry inherited a system that is inadequate and leaves patients, staff, and the government dissatisfied. This realization forms the foundation of the current government’s reforms. The Cabinet’s vision includes two components: one is reforming the system, and the other is reforming the services. The ministry has formulated a project that addresses the rights of patients and staff and develops existing infrastructure. Some of these changes require legislation and regulation, but not necessarily funds.

A major problem Barzinji identified is that the KRG is heavily dependent on Iraq’s system and budget, which includes the provision of all drugs and instruments across the country. The KRI does not get its share of the budget or essential materials, such as medicines, vaccines, and instruments. What the KRI receives from Iraq only covers around 43% of

existing need; the KRG has to come up with the rest. Luckily, it has sufficient funds for urgent and life-saving medicines, but those funds are not adequate for a full-fledged healthcare system.

In 2018, over 789 Billion Iraqi Dinars were spent in the KRI; over 80% of this went to salaries, while the rest was dedicated to operational and other needs. Barzinji reminded the audience that the government budget is never sufficient to cover the cost of free healthcare. Citizens must contribute through taxes, insurance policies, or other means. The KRI only secures 17 Billion Iraqi Dinars in income from patients, which is less than 2% of the overall budget. Patients expect to receive free health services, but this is not realistic under these constraints.

Barzinji observed that the private sector did not exist in the “old” Iraq. Now, however, advances in technology are evolving quickly. Private sectors often invest in health systems to incentivize medical tourism. Unfortunately, the KRI has witnessed a mix up and an unhealthy overlap between the public and private sectors. The free market is expanding, particularly in the health field, and borders are now open to imported medicine. This arrangement is causing problems.

Clearly, free healthcare, combined with the KRI’s recent increase in population, have put additional strain on existing fissures within the health services. The Ministry of Health’s strategy is to regulate the private and public sectors. It has enforced the law to ensure that healthcare workers adhere to their obligations in terms of attendance and service at both public and private institutions, without favouring one at the expense of the other. It has also prepared a draft legislation to organise the quality and safety of food and medicine. Barzinji also expressed the intention of the ministry to introduce mechanisms to reduce dependence on the government budget and generate additional income that can be invested in the healthcare system.

Kamal Khalil, KRG Minister of Electricity, argued that all service sectors have been paralyzed by IDPs, and that current need exceeds available capacity. Given the financial crisis, the war against IS, and issues with Baghdad, the KRI received large numbers of IDPs and found itself unable provide sufficient health services, power, and fuel due to a limited budget. Since 2013, the Ministry of Electricity has been providing 23 hours of power per day. However, even if it were to deliver 24 hours per day, Khalil contended, it would not be able to cover everyone. The current need in the KRI is 4,000 megawatts; 3,200 are being provided at present, which is enough for 18-20 hours per day.

However, Khalil argued that the problem is not with the generation of power. The problem is with the contracts, which must be better organized with investors. Additionally, more fuel is needed to power existing plants. For example, plants in Duhok have more production capacity than is currently being optimized due to the lack of fuel. The Ministry of Electricity is in conversation with the PM to solve this.

The KRI also has an opportunity, Khalil noted, to invest in energy and increase its capacity by changing from simple cycle to combined cycle power plants, and by aiming for only environmentally friendly power plants by 2020-2035. However, the Ministry of Electricity’s

priority is to work on existing power plants due to the cost of new infrastructure. In the meantime, power can be better transferred by adjusting the distribution of power lines. Currently, power distribution is a huge issue as there are many regulations that overload the power lines. The Ministry of Electricity would like to see the government change these regulations.

Dana Abdul Karim Hama Salih, KRG Minister of Reconstruction and Housing, identified road infrastructure as a central priority for these next four years. Kurdistan is not what it needs to be, Salih observed, as it is weaker in transportation than neighboring countries. The KRI needs economic stability, and has already spent years attempting to link cities with roads.

For a nation that is mending, Salih added, another critical priority is housing. Housing projects must be controlled, both in terms of quality and price. If housing is being built for economically deprived people in areas where there are no services, he argued, this is a significant problem. He emphasized the need to pay attention to both water and rent.

Three things are currently allotted in the budget, and the Ministry of Reconstruction and Housing has developed an agenda, a vision, and a plan of action under the direction of the PM. Expectations in this region are hard, however. The Ministry had a master plan in previous years that was disrupted by a number of problems arising from the political situation.