

Legislative session collapses, Berri blames March 14

Contributed by Rima Aboulmona, The Daily Star
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BEIRUT: A legislative session to discuss urgent issues collapsed Wednesday because of lack of quorum, blamed by Speaker Nabih Berri on the rival March 14 camp.

“At a time when democracy is blossoming in the Arab world which has recently culminated with a reform decision by Syria and a Saudi Shura Council measure allowing women to vote [in future municipal elections], we believe that the Cedar Revolution … insists on monopolizing power and tries to foil the parliamentary initiative,” Berri told a news conference after the failure to convene the meeting.

Berri adjourned the meeting until 10:00 a.m. local time next Wednesday.

Lawmakers trickled into the Parliament building Wednesday before the legislative session, which was called for by Berri in order to discuss pressing matters.

There were insufficient MPs for a quorum as only 55 of Parliament’s 128-member showing up.

A quorum requires the presence of half of the legislature, plus one, or 65 MPs.

The Hezbollah-led March 8 alliance has 58 lawmakers. Had the seven MPs in Progressive Socialist Party leader Walid Jumblatt’s bloc been in attendance, a quorum would have been achieved.

Despite the absence of the MPs from his bloc, Jumblatt, whose attendance had been in doubt beforehand, was among politicians to arrive at Parliament building in Nijmeh Square, Downtown Beirut.

He joined a private meeting that was already under way at Berri’s office with Prime Minister-designate Najib Mikati, Free Patriotic Movement leader Michel Aoun and Marada Movement chief Suleiman Franjeh.

The widening row over the legality of the Parliament session, which developed into a political tug-of-war between the rival political camps - March 8 and March 14 - comes as Cabinet formation efforts have been blocked by last-minute snags over the distribution of portfolios in a 30-member draft government.

Berri called for Wednesday’s session to discuss, among other things, the renewal of Central Bank Governor Riad Salameh’s mandate which expires at the end of July. Salameh enjoys both parties’ support for a new six-year mandate.

However, Berri’s call triggered a war of words between March 8 and March 14 over the legality of convening Parliament to address vital issues in the absence of a functioning government. Each side has accused the other of exceeding its prerogatives.

Read more: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2011/Jun-08/MPs-trickle-to-Parliament-ahead-of-controversial-session.ashx?#ixzz1OgXr3lpP>