

**Jordan sacks cabinet, appoints new PM after protests**  
**Reuters**  
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AMMAN, Oct 17 — Jordan's King Abdullah today sacked his cabinet and asked Awn Khasawneh, an international jurist, to head a new administration, in a move to placate protesters calling for faster reforms, said officials and palace sources.

The Western-backed king, facing growing pressure from activists inspired by uprisings across the Arab world, dismissed Prime Minister Marouf al-Bakhit, a conservative former army general, said the sources.

Awn Khasawneh (centre), in this 1993 file photo accompanying Jordan's late King Hussein in Amman. — Reuters pic

The king told Khasawneh, 61, and a member of the International Court of Justice, to become prime minister, push through a more representative electoral law and stamp out official corruption, the sources said.

"There is a sense that Jordan could slide into chaos and Khasawneh was brought in to try and solve that," a Western diplomat in Amman told Reuters.

Khasawneh, a former chief of the royal court and a legal adviser to Jordan's team that negotiated the peace treaty with Israel in 1994, is seen as a respected figure above domestic rivalries.

His predecessor Bakhit came to power when pro-reform protesters first took to the streets in February.

Officials say the monarch was disappointed by the slow pace of reforms under Bakhit and was responding to growing public criticism that the prime minister was dragging his feet over the reforms.

Bakhit grew increasingly unpopular with mainstream politicians and a coalition of opposition groups drawn from tribal and Islamist backgrounds who accused him of mishandling domestic problems, including preparations for municipal elections that were to be held this year.

Politicians say the monarch, who has ruled since 1999, has been forced to take only cautious steps towards democracy, constrained by the tribal power base that sees reforms as a threat to its political and economic benefits.

Activists have launched a string of public protests calling for faster reforms and criticising the royal family, rare events in a country where the king has long been revered and held above political tussles.

There has been unprecedented criticism from tribal areas that have traditionally formed the backbone of support for the Hashemite royal family.

Political analysts said the latest blow to the government's credibility were tribal protests in

rural and provincial areas where burning of tyres and closing of main streets raised the spectre of civil unrest.

Bakhit tried to placate activists and show more concern for local demands by setting up more than 150 new municipalities within a week, further straining the deficit-ridden budget.

He was criticised for giving more handouts to people from the country's east Bank and alienating the country's majority population of Palestinian origin.

"Bakhit was a confrontational figure who sought to deepen the divide between the reformist and anti-reformist camps," said political commentator Labib Kamhawi.

The king also brought in Faisal al-Shobaki, a veteran intelligence operative, to become the country's new intelligence chief, replacing replaced Mohammed al Raqqad, said the sources.

The monarch's move sought to limit the role of the security service to external security and end its pervasive meddling in public life, said officials.

King Abdullah has privately said his reformist agenda has been frustrated by conservative politicians who hold extensive power within the security establishment. — Reuters

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