

Iraq asks Saudi Arabia to replace ambassador who slammed Shiite Militia

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Baghdad: Iraq has asked Saudi Arabia to replace its ambassador in Baghdad, stressing that his presence would hamper the development of bilateral ties, authorities said.

Iraqi Foreign Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari, right, meets Saudi Ambassador, Thamer

Ahmed Jamal, spokesman of the Iraqi Foreign Ministry, told the state-run Iraqiya channel that Iraqi senior officials sent a request to Riyadh on Sunday to take appropriate measure and replace its ambassador Thamer al-Sabhan, Xinhua news agency reported.

"The presence of Sabhan is an obstacle to the development of relations between Iraq and Saudi Arabia," the channel quoted Jamal as saying.

“The Saudi ambassador himself made many violations in his diplomatic role in Iraq. He interfered badly in many Iraqi internal affairs and he tried to bring into Iraq the problems between his country and Iran,” said Ahmed Jamal, Iraq’s foreign ministry spokesman. “Today we submitted the letter through our ambassador in Saudi Arabia.”

Previously, media reports said that Sabhan, 49, tweeted about a "terrorist plot" to assassinate him by powerful Shia militia, led by Aws al-Khafaji, which is part of the government-backed Hashd Shaabi, or Popular Mobilisation units, Xinhua news agency reported.

According to Jamal, Sabhan's information about assassination plot was "inaccurate allegations, and such claims are only meant to damage relations between Baghdad and Riyadh."

Many Iraqi Shia politicians and militias have frequently made calls to expel Sabhan because he repeatedly called on the Iraqi government to exclude the Hashd Shaabi units from the military operations to free the predominantly Sunni provinces in order to avoid abuses against the Sunni residents.

Later on Sunday, Sabhan said that the relation between Baghdad and Riyadh will not be harmed and the Iraqi government's call of replacement was probably made under pressure by some political parties and paramilitary Hashd Shaabi units.

Sabhan is the first Saudi ambassador appointed in his country's embassy in Baghdad, which was only reopened last December since 1990 when Iraq invaded Kuwait.

- (IANS inputs)