

The Minister with a Modest House

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LBP 44.5 million is the mere difference between the allocations and compensations granted to former premier Karami's cabinet, which was composed of 30 Ministers, and that of the current cabinet, composed of 14 ministers. This is due to the fact that 12 of the previous cabinet members were parliament members and thus were only paid the difference between the Parliament member salary and the minister salary, which only amounts to LBP 125,000 monthly. This could well be the only benefit reaped from appointing parliament members as ministers.

LBP 9 billion is the budget allocated to the upcoming parliamentary elections, which is to be spent on the salaries of employees involved in the elections, in addition to all logistical costs incurred.

258 meetings were held by the 16 parliamentary committees in 2004, of which 55 meetings were held by the administration and justice council, while the general council of the parliament held 10 meetings during which 96 laws were passed.

625 is the number of judges currently employed in Lebanon, of which 43 judges belong to the Court of Justice and 32 to the Court of Audit.

Ambassadors, emissaries and other visitors to Lebanon may not have heard of the passing away of the ex-Minister of OMSAR and former head of Civil Service Board (CSB), Hassan Chalak, on the 17th of May. Why should they, when the media and politicians chose to ignore it? He was too poor to attract them and too straight to entice them.

Hassan Chalak was the embodiment of what is good in Lebanon, and a testimony to the failure of the Lebanese socio-political system. Born in the isolated Ijde'brine Caza of Koura in 1934 and raised in a humble and hardworking family, Chalak walked miles to the nearest school and later on to his workplace at CSB in 1963. He rose through the ranks until he reached the highest position in CSB in 1992. He was, perhaps, disliked by international organizations, whose fancy words failed to impress him just as his down-to-earth demeanor failed to impress them. Having upheld the law by trying to block their interference and turned down their requests, Chalak became a pariah to politicians. His annual reports, a register of recommendations for administrative reform and violations committed by politicians and the Council of Ministers, were shunned repeatedly. He was even banned for several years from high level meetings.

Hassan Chalak eventually learned that the Lebanese system, which he dedicated himself to improve, is more defiant and resilient than he thought and that the process of administrative reform was impossible without political reform.

In 2005, 362 medals will be awarded to various personalities in Lebanon. Chalak's name did show up on the list of honorees, but it would not have been a tribute worthy of him anyways. Now that the Lebanese are busy with elections and heirs of wealth and feudal leaders, little attention has been paid to this man. For those who think that the Lebanese are corrupt by nature, Hassan Chalak will be a major disappointment. He will perhaps be remembered as the ex-Minister, with the modest house in Ijde'brine. www.iamh.com

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