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A fortnight after resignation, 2 Muslim MPs return to govt.

7 others have decided not to rejoin the administration

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A fortnight after resigning from their ministerial positions in protest, two Muslim legislators were on Wednesday sworn in to the posts they earlier held.

Parliamentarians Kabir Hashim and Abdul Haleem took oath but seven other former Ministers, who resigned with them, did not assume ministerial charge.

Citing growing instances of Sri Lanka's Muslims being "demonised" and "framed" following the Easter terror attacks, all nine Muslim Ministers had stepped down on June 3. This sudden move came in the wake of a fasting Buddhist monk's demand that three key politicians, including a Minister, resign over alleged links with the Easter bombing suspects.

The resignations sparked anger among critics who accused the country's leaders



Kabir Hashim, who took oath as Minister on Wednesday.

of succumbing to undue pressure from the Buddhist clergy. Soon after, the monk called off his "fast unto death". Days later, senior clergy met the Muslim leadership and reportedly urged them to withdraw their resignations.

UNP members

The two Ministers who took charge on Wednesday are from the ruling United National Party (UNP). The seven others are from the Sri

Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) and the All Ceylon Makkal Congress (ACMC).

All Muslim MPs met on Tuesday and held discussions on next steps. Local media reported that the meeting was "inconclusive". "The two of them were under a lot of pressure from their party and its leadership to re-join as Ministers. We appreciate their need to work within their party," SLMC deputy leader H.M.M. Hareez said.

However, the other former Ministers decided that they would not take up the posts until their concerns are fully addressed. "So many Muslims have been arbitrarily arrested. And our politicians have been accused of several things - let the authorities probe all that and clear any doubts. We have decided that the ministerial posts can wait until then," Mr. Hareez told *The Hindu*.