

Kenyan President William Ruto announced the dismissal of almost his entire cabinet on Thursday, initiating consultations to form a “broad-based government” in response to the fallout from recent deadly protests.

The East African nation has been reeling after peaceful rallies against steep tax increases last month escalated into violence, with police firing at crowds who stormed parliament, leaving it partly ablaze.

The protests, largely organized online and led by young Gen-Z Kenyans, have plunged Ruto’s administration into crisis, forcing him to abandon the finance bill containing tax hikes. In an effort to defuse tensions, Ruto’s decision to dismiss ministers, including the attorney-general, excludes only the prime cabinet secretary, foreign minister Musalia Mudavadi, and Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua.

The president stated that the dismissals were made after reflecting on public sentiment and appraising his cabinet’s performance. Veteran anti-corruption activist John Githongo commented that the sweeping changes were what Kenyans have been demanding, while Gen-Z protester Hanifa Adan celebrated the announcement on social media.

Community activist Ojango Omondi acknowledged the move as a step towards justice but emphasized the importance of appointing accountable replacements. The protests, which have expanded into a broader campaign against Ruto’s government, have resulted in 39 deaths, according to rights groups.

Despite a reduction in large street protests, public anger persists, with hundreds attending a memorial concert in Nairobi chanting “Ruto must go.” Analysts believe the cabinet shake-up offers a chance for a fresh start but warn of further challenges. Ruto faces the task of forming a new cabinet that balances various interests while addressing popular anger.

Ruto’s administration is also grappling with significant economic challenges, including a high cost of living and massive foreign debt. Recent spending cuts and Ruto’s high-profile trips abroad have fueled public frustration. The crisis has led Moody’s to downgrade Kenya’s debt rating, reflecting Ruto’s diminished capacity to raise taxes and reduce debt.