

Iraq's senior leaders meet with the aim of forming a government.

A meeting of senior Iraqi leaders is taking place in Erbil in Iraqi Kurdistan with the aim of brokering an agreement for the formation of a government.

There has been a power vacuum in Iraq ever since the Iraqi general election in March, in which no single party won an absolute majority.

The leaders of the country's political parties are present at this meeting – these include Nouri Maliki, the current Iraqi Prime Minister, and Ayad Allawi, his main opponent.

They are hopeful that they will reach an agreement to share power and that they will elect a prime minister, a president and a speaker of parliament and present them to parliament on Thursday 20th Aban (11th November).

This is the first time since the Iraqi general election was held 8 months ago that senior Iraqi officials have come together.

At the start of the session, Masud Barzani, the leader of the Kurdish autonomous region of Iraq, said that getting the leaders together in one place could in itself be considered a success.

Nouri Maliki, the Iraqi Prime Minister, who is now guaranteed to keep his post as prime minister, also said that achieving a national agreement was necessary in order to obtain security and development.

Meanwhile, Ayad Allawi, whose party managed to win two more seats in the election than Mr Maliki's, emphasized the need for power sharing, particularly when decisions were being made.

Now the question is whether Mr Allawi and the large community of Sunnis who support him will be able to take a greater portion of power or not.

The agreement, which is highly probable, envisages that Nouri Maliki will remain as prime minister and that Jalal Talabani, an Iraqi Kurd, will continue as president.

It is possible that the coalition led by Ayad Allawi could gain the position of speaker of parliament and leadership of a national council for fundamental policies.

Mr Allawi is calling for this council to have not a consultative role but for it to have actual power, and this appears to be one of the main subjects of today's talks.