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Ahmadinejad riles powerful allies

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Afterwards he must name his new cabinet to be approved by parliament. The present row shows that Mr Ahmadinejad is not likely to propose compromise candidates, and parliament is unlikely to give his nominees an easy ride.



The death of Neda Agha-Soltan sparked international protests

Deadlock over the appointments could even lead to Ayatollah Khamenei being obliged to introduce some form of emergency powers, which would only further weaken his position.

Indeed, according to a strict reading of the constitution, the government would need a vote of confidence from the Majlis even to continue in office if the latest departures mean that more than half its members have been changed during Mr Ahmadinejad's first term.

Parliament has already shown it can cause big trouble for the president.

According to one member, 200 MPs - a majority - have written to Mr Ahmadinejad asking him to "correct his behaviour so that he follows the leader's opinion seriously".

Parliament has also set up a committee to look into the condition of detainees arrested in the post-election crackdown.

As much as Mr Ahmadinejad and Ayatollah Khamenei try to assert their power, it becomes clearer that they have become prisoners of their own constituency, right-wing conservatives.

Already there are whispers about possibly impeaching the president.

The key of course would be the position of the supreme leader, who would have to authorise such a move.

Equally damaging

Either keeping or ditching Mr Ahmadinejad could be almost equally damaging to Mr Khamenei.

All of this must be deeply satisfying for the opposition, as it continues its campaign to have the presidential election result overturned.

But reports continue to emerge of brutal treatment handed out to some of the many opposition supporters still held in prison. Two more detainees are reported to have died, 24-year-old Amir Javadifar and Hossein Akbari, aged 20.

Iran is approaching the Arbeyeen or 40th day ceremonies to mark the deaths of those killed in the violence that followed the election. In Shia Islam it is a major date, often the spark for huge protests.

Thursday will be the anniversary of the death of Neda Agha-Soltan, the young Iranian woman who has become a symbol of the protest movement.

By all accounts, opposition supporters are as angry and motivated as they were on the day after the election. Now they face a government divided to its very core.

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