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Eerie calm masks Iran tensions

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In the centre of Tehran there are many fewer security forces on the streets. A stadium where Basij militia - an arm of the Revolutionary Guard - were based is now being used for sport again.

But the power of the regime is not far from the surface. On the main avenues black cars with the words special police painted on them move steadily through the traffic, each one containing four or five men in camouflage uniforms.

It has been much quieter these last few days. One elderly witness said she felt it was the calm of the grave.

The Guardian Council, a constitutional body that supervises elections, is due to give its definitive verdict on the presidential poll on Sunday. But the latest remarks by its spokesman Abbasali Kadkhodai are yet another indication that it will be a formality.

He told Irna, the state news agency, that "the election was the healthiest since the revolution... There were no major violations."

The members of the Guardian Council have been following the line laid down by the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. He has said, several times, that the result is fair and will stand.

Mousavi pressure

It all piles more pressure on the opposition and the man who believes he is the rightful winner, Mir Hossein Mousavi.

In a message to his supporters he said his challenge would continue, and urged them to protest within the law. He argues that peaceful protest is a constitutional right.

" When you ask Iranians about the way this might go, a phrase keeps cropping up. They say it might seem quiet to an outsider, but there is fire below the ashes "

But the authorities have effectively banned all opposition gatherings, and have deployed Revolutionary Guards and the Basij militia to enforce their will.

It is looking as if the supreme leader will install President Mahmoud Ahmedinejad for a second term.

Longer-term, the question is whether the fracture in the ruling elite that this crisis has caused will heal.

The religious and political elite in Iran have had many internal disagreements over the 30 years since the Shah was overthrown in 1979.

But never before have they chosen to take them outside the charmed circle at the top of the Islamic Republic in the way that has happened since the election.

A hint of what was coming was on display in the rancorous debates between the candidates before the vote. But that was nothing to what has followed.

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quiet to an outsider, but there is fire below the ashes.

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