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Iran cleric says obeying Ahmadinejad like obeying God

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By [Parisa Hafezi](#)

TEHRAN (Reuters) - A senior Iranian cleric seen as President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's spiritual mentor said obeying the head of government was like obeying God, the moderate Etemad-e Melli newspaper said on Thursday.

Firebrand cleric Ayatollah Mohammad Taqi Mesbah-Yazdi believes the authority of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei comes from God, not from the people.

Khamenei presides over a complex political and clerical system as vali-ye faqih, or religious jurisprudent, with the president running the day-to-day governing of the country.

"When a president is endorsed by the vali-ye faqih, obeying the president is like obeying God," the daily quoted Mesbah-Yazdi as saying.

Khamenei swiftly endorsed Ahmadinejad's re-election after the June 12 presidential vote which was followed by the biggest anti-government protests since the 1979 Islamic revolution.

The losing candidates say the poll was rigged, a charge denied by Iran's authorities, including Khamenei, who has accused Western powers of fomenting the vote unrest.

Moderates say 69 protesters were killed in the demonstrations, contradicting the official report of 26 deaths.

Mesbah-Yazdi has long held that democracy and elections are incompatible with Islam. Ahmadinejad's allies deny the president takes orders from the cleric, who is a defender of the supreme leader's absolute power.

"When a president is ... endorsed by the supreme leader and becomes an agent of the leader, the leader's light is also shed on the president," Mesbah-Yazdi said.

Mesbah-Yazdi is a member of a popularly elected conservative-dominated panel of 86 Shi'ite Muslim clergymen with the power to elect and dismiss the supreme leader. But despite its powerful mandate, the Assembly of Experts has never sought to oust a leader in the 30 years of the Islamic Republic.

Mesbah-Yazdi's followers have great sway among Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards and the Basij volunteer paramilitary force.

The Guards political chief Yadollah Javani has called for defeated candidates Mehdi Karoubi and Mirhossein Mousavi as well as moderate former President Mohammad Khatami to be put on trial for inciting election unrest.

LEGITIMACY

Iran's police and security forces quelled the protests and the judiciary has now begun mass trials of than 100 moderates, despite the damage it might inflict on the government's legitimacy and relations with the West.

At least 200 people still remain in jail, including senior moderate politicians, activists, lawyers and journalists.

Defeated candidate Karoubi said on Sunday some protesters, both men and

women, were raped in prison. The abuse allegations, were rejected by authorities, including by parliament speaker and Tehran's police chief.

Many of the detainees were held in south Tehran's Kahrizak prison and at least three people died in custody there and widespread anger erupted as reports of abuse in jail spread.

Last month Khamenei ordered the closure of the "sub-standard" detention center at Kahrizak. Iranian authorities have acknowledged some protesters were tortured at Kahrizak and said its director had been jailed.

Such allegations have created a rift among hardline politicians, many of whom backed Ahmadinejad's election win.

An association of hundreds of former parliamentarians wrote a letter to the Assembly of Experts, urging its head Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani to investigate the post election events. Rafsanjani, a former president, is an ally of the defeated moderate candidates.

The United States, its European allies and Iranian moderates have denounced the mass trials as a "sham."

Among those being tried are French teaching assistant Clotilde Reiss and two employees of French and British embassies in Tehran, accused of espionage and taking part in a Western plot, charges France and Britain say are baseless.

The father of Reiss said on Thursday he hoped his daughter would leave prison later in the day, after France agreed to provide bail for her conditional release.

Iran's display of intolerance of internal opposition has alarmed the West, which had hoped for new talks on what it suspects is an Iranian nuclear arms quest. Tehran denies this.

(Writing by Parisa Hafezi; Editing by Jon Hemming)

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