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# Iranian MP claims sexual abuse of protesters has been proved

Comments by member of investigative team are first official acknowledgement prisoners were violated

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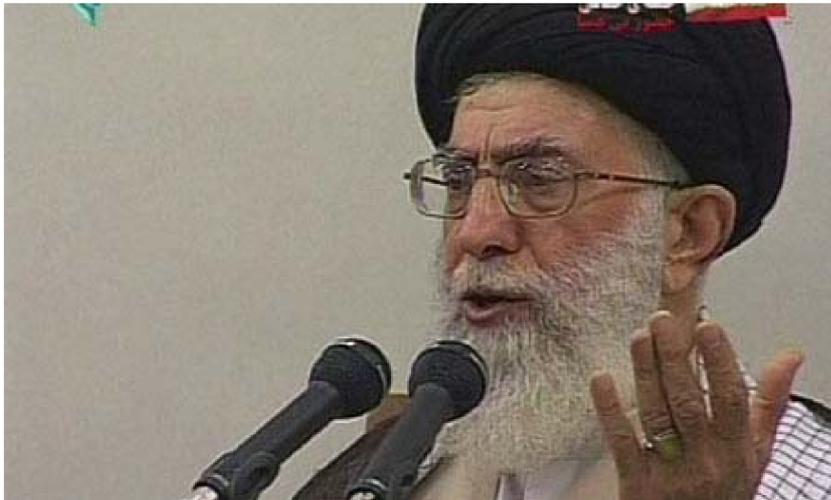
**Mark Tran**

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Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, said the election violence in June was calculated by the country's enemies. Photograph: AP/IRIB

An Iranian MP said today there is proof that some reformists were sexually abused in prison after the disputed presidential election in June.

"Raping of some detainees through baton and soda bottle has been proved to us," the unnamed member of the investigative committee was quoted as saying.

His comments are the first official acknowledgment that prisoners were violated. Until now, Iran's leaders had dismissed such opposition claims as mischief-making.

One of the defeated reformist presidential candidates, Mehdi Karroubi, has alleged that some of those arrested after mass demonstrations were raped.

Yesterday Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, rebuked opposition leaders for calling attention to alleged abuses of detainees.

Without directly naming anyone, Khamenei criticised them for highlighting claims of mistreatment in Kahrizak prison, one of the sites where protesters have been held. "Some ignore defacing of the system while highlighting the issue of Kahrizak," he was quoted as saying by the state Islamic Republic News Agency. "This way of thinking is an open unfairness."

Earlier this month, Iran's police chief admitted that protesters who were arrested after the election had been tortured while in custody in Kahrizak, south-west Tehran. But General Ismail Ahmadi Moghaddam denied that any of the detainees had died as a result and said the head of the detention centre had been dismissed and jailed.

The allegations of prison mistreatment have been a lightning rod for criticism of the regime, with senior Iranian political figures calling for a full investigation.

The latest comments from one of the MPs on the investigating committee are likely to intensify the pressure on the regime as it confronts the gravest threat to its authority since the 1979 revolution that toppled the Shah.

In another sign of the confusion within ruling circles, Khamenei expressed doubt over claims by conservative hardliners that opposition leaders were backed by the west, in direct contradiction to charges set out during recent mass trials.

The comments yesterday came as a surprising contrast to the assertions from other Iranian leaders, including President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, that the US, Britain and others played a direct role in fomenting unrest and violence during the disputed presidential election in June. His remarks come at a time when more than 100 opposition figures have appeared in trials that have been denounced by human rights groups as show trials involving forced confessions.

Speaking to a group of students last night, Khamenei said: "I do not accuse leaders of the recent events of being stooges of aliens, including the US and Britain, since it was not proved for me."

Khamenei also said the judiciary should try the detainees based on strong evidence and not on "rumours" as the basis for prosecution. But Iran's supreme leader, who has come under unprecedented criticism after his backing of Ahmadinejad, added that the unrest was calculated by Iran's enemies "whether or not its leaders know".

In the latest trial on Tuesday, an Iranian prosecutor demanded the "full punishment" for a senior reformist figure, potentially meaning the death penalty. Saeed Hajjarian, a key figure in the pro-democracy reform programme under former president Mohammad Khatami, was accused along with others of a long list of charges. They included acting against national security, stirring up unrest, having contacts with British intelligence and insulting Iran's supreme leader.

Hajjarian, who uses a wheelchair after an assassination attempt that left him disabled, was reported as saying he had "made major mistakes during the election by presenting incorrect analyses. I apologise to the Iranian nation for those mistakes."

Khatami has dismissed the confessions as fabrications, having been obtained under extraordinary conditions. "Such claims are sheer lies and false," Khatami, who backed the main reformist candidate, Mir Hossein Mousavi, in the election, was quoted as saying by the ILNA news agency.