

Iran official points to more open elections

AFP, Tehran
A senior Iranian official has suggested in an interview with AFP that authorities may be more open than in the past in approving candidates for a looming parliamentary election. "We don't consider ourselves immune from criticism. We may also accept that mistakes have been made in the past," said Guardian Council spokesman Abbas Ali Kadkhodae. "But for the next legislative elections we are trying to reduce our mistakes and respect the rights of candidates."

Kadkhodae was speaking to AFP on the eve of the opening of the registration of candidates for the parliamentary election to be held on February 21.

The Guardian Council, which is under the control of ultra-conservatives, is responsible for organising and monitoring elections in Iran, including vetting candidates. "If we insist on enforcing the law, we'll be able to satisfy as many candidates as possible," said Kadkhodae.

In past elections, the council has faced accusations in Iran, particularly by reformists, of barring candidates more on political than constitutional grounds.

In November, President Hassan Rouhani, a moderate conservative, called on the council to stick to the letter of the law in view of the forthcoming election.

At Iran's last parliamentary election in February 2016, the council authorised 6,229 candidates for the 290 seats at stake -- just over 51 percent of those who sought to stand.

In the interview, Kadkhodae said a higher number of successful candidates should also lead to a "higher participation rate".

The opening of the registration period, which runs until Saturday, comes two weeks after around 100 cities and towns in sanctions-hit Iran saw protests against a shock fuel price hike that turned violent.

Authorities say they have restored calm after "rioting" backed by enemies of the Islamic republic, including the United States, Israel and Saudi Arabia.

London-based human rights group Amnesty International said 161 demonstrators were killed in a crackdown.

But Iran's deputy interior minister, Jamal Orf, said such figures were "exaggerated", in remarks published on Saturday by state news agency IRNA.

For Kadkhodae, the unrest was not a sign of the rejection of the political system of the Islamic republic.

The people would "continue to support the country despite the difficulties, as they have patiently endured the unjust economic sanctions imposed by Western countries," he said.

They would "continue to support the Iranian political system", he added.

Iran's economy has been battered since last year when the United States withdrew from a landmark 2015 nuclear deal and began reimposing crippling sanctions.

The International Monetary Fund expects the country's economy to shrink by 9.5 percent this year.

"Sometimes the participation rate can be low when the people are not happy with the country's economic situation," said Kadkhodae.

Schoolboy kills

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of radiology department. Witnesses caught the accused, Ibrahim, and handed him over to Shahbagh Police Station after the incident.

Abul Hasan, officer-in-charge of the police station, said Ibrahim and Amir were locked in an altercation in front of the DMCH outdoor gate around 6:45am over the matter. At one stage, Ibrahim hit Amir on his head with a cricket bat.

Amir was rushed to the DMCH where doctors declared him dead, he said.

The OC said Ibrahim, 18, was frustrated after he failed in this year's SSC examinations.

Ibrahim used to smoke near DMCH outdoor gate with his friends, the police official said.

Amir had recently complained to Ibrahim's mother about it, said the OC.

As his mother scolded him following the complaint, he was locked in an altercation with Amir, he said.

Ibrahim's father was an employee of the Public Works Department and posted to the DMCH. He died several years ago. Ibrahim and his mother live in a room near the DMCH outdoor gate, said DMCH Assistant Director Nasir Uddin.

He said there was a good relation between the father of the accused and the victim. This is why, the victim had made the complaint.

DMC morgue sources said they found an injury mark at the back of the victim's head.

A case was filed against Ibrahim with Shahbagh Police Station.



Iraqi demonstrators carry a wounded man during ongoing anti-government protests in Najaf, yesterday. Iraq's parliament approved the resignation of the embattled cabinet yesterday, after two months of violent unrest that have left more than 420 people dead. PHOTO: REUTERS

Tunisians march against violence towards women

AFP, Tunis
Several hundred mostly women protesters rallied in the Tunisian capital on Saturday against violence targeting women, urging authorities to act to ensure their rights.

Demonstrators marched through the city centre, waving brooms to symbolise the sweeping away of violence against women.

The march was called for by some 50 local NGOs including the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women (ATFD).

Some protesters beat on drums and others rapped on pans, chanting "Solidarity with women victims of violence!"

The march followed an incident in October in which a newly elected lawmaker was shown in a video that purported to show him masturbating outside a school.

MP Zouheir Makhlouf said he is diabetic and had been urinating into a bottle.

He walked free after being investigated for alleged sexual harassment and public indecency.

The video went viral and sparked Tunisia's own #MeToo movement, with sex abuse victims breaking taboos under the hashtag #EnaZeda.

It was inspired by the huge global movement that emerged in 2017 in the wake of sexual assault allegations against Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein.

Demonstrators on Saturday carried posters bearing slogans such as "Equality between woman and man doesn't kill, violence kills".

"We want to see a real mobilisation by the authorities to end all forms of violence against women and to be firm with perpetrators of such violence," said protester Selma Bhar.

An awareness campaign about sexual harassment on public transport was launched in Tunisia at the end of October.

A law was enacted in July 2017 outlawing sexual harassment in public places and laying down a maximum penalty of a year in prison and a 3,000-dinar (\$1,000) fine.

World's first cell phone

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according to Transport for NSW. Images identified as being likely to contain a driver illegally using a cell phone will then be verified by authorised personnel, authorities said, noting that images captured by the system would be "securely stored and managed."

Over the next three years, 45 portable cameras will be set up across the state, in unknown locations, and

without warning signs, CNN affiliate Sky News Australia reported.

For the first three months, drivers caught out by the technology will receive a warning letter, Transport for New South Wales said in a statement, after which offenders will face a fine of up to \$344, or \$457 in a school zone, and penalty points on their driving license.

"The NSW Government is serious about reducing our state's road

toll and rolling out mobile phone detection cameras is another way we will do this," Andrew Constance, Minister for Roads said in a statement.

Officials said that a trial of the technology earlier in the year had caught more than 100,000 drivers illegally using a phone at the wheel.

Some 329 people have died this year on New South Wales' roads, Reuters news agency reported, compared with 354 people for all of 2018, according

to official statistics.

The state wants to cut the number of road fatalities by 30% by 2021, Reuters said.

Making and receiving phone calls while driving is legal in New South Wales, but using hands-free technology. Other functions, including using social media, video calling, photography, playing audio while driving are only legal if a driver has parked their vehicle outside of traffic.

Century-old dighi

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A side of the waterbody is being filled for establishment of the university campus. Another side of the waterbody will be beautified."

The Daily Star, however, could not reach MP Nizam Uddin Hazari after repeated attempts over phone.

Bangladesh Environment Conservation Act-1995 (amended), states the act of filling up waterbodies without permission from the relevant authorities would be treated as punishable offence.

The law further states that any act that brings change to a waterbody would not be allowed by any means.

Asked, Mohammad Moazzom Hossain, director at the Department of Environment (DoE) in Chattogram, told The Daily Star that they earlier served two notices to the university authorities in 2016 and 2017.

In response to the notices, the university authorities said they were just working to beautify the waterbody, he added.

In the third notice, which has been served recently, DoE asked the university authorities to appear in a hearing at DoE Court on Wednesday.

"Our district office investigated the case. If they [university authorities] fail to come up with logical ground, we will take action as per law," the

DoE official said. Contacted, acting vice-chancellor of Feni University Dr Taibul Hoque said they would clarify their position in the hearing.

Feni University currently runs its academic activities on a temporary campus and recently promised to shift to its permanent campus, which is situated along the waterbody, within a month.

The university got approval from University Grants Commission in 2012 and started its academic operation in 2013. Now it has around 1,000 students, 60 teachers and three faculties.

Meanwhile, Sharif Jamil, general secretary of Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon, told The Daily Star that the country was facing acute ground water shortage as water bodies and wetlands got dried or filled up.

He mentioned that filling up Mohammed Ali Dighi could be disastrous as the Feni river was also in crisis of water because of various man-made hazards.

"If lawmakers do not abide by the law they formulate, it sets a bad example for mass people. The authorities must stop filling up the waterbody and high ups of the government in it if necessary," he added.

Govt running

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implement the basic and important sections of the treaty," said Shantu.

The PCJSS president said the Awami League government, which has been in power for the last 11 years, was also in office when the accord was signed in 1997.

"But the government didn't take any effective measures to implement the unimplemented sections of the treaty, causing serious disappointment and frustration among the hill people," he said.

Mentioning that the present situation of hill tracts area is very bad, Shantu also alleged that the hill people are forced to live in an uncertain future.

"The political party which signed the peace accord for a peaceful solution to the Chattogram Hill Tracts problem now seems determined to make the accord void through calling Jana Sanghati Samity a terror organisation," he claimed.

"In fact, there is no alternative to implementation of the peace accord for resolving the Chattogram Hill Tracts problem."

"Any conspiracy in the name of resolving Chattogram Hill Tracts problem will never bring good results," said Shantu.

Implementation of the peace treaty is now far away, although the hill people have been waiting for this for 22 years, added Shantu.

"The backs of hill people are up against the wall They will now try to fight back. And for that, they will do everything necessary," Shantu warned.

He, however, said it is up to the hill people what they will do in future to realise their demand as all paths for waging lawful movement has been stopped at present.

The treaty was signed on December 2, 1997, between the government and the PCJSS during the first tenure of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, ending bloody conflicts in three hill districts.

Doubt larks over Merkel's coalition after ally loses vote

AFP, Berlin

Angela Merkel faces a rocky political road ahead as she battles to hang on until 2021 as German chancellor, after her junior coalition partner SPD elected a left-leaning leadership duo.

Rank and file Social Democrats late Saturday delivered a humiliating blow to Finance Minister Olaf Scholz's run for co-chair of his centre-left party, picking instead two relative unknowns as their new leaders.

Malta PM to step down over slain reporter case: party sources

AFP, Valletta

Malta's Prime Minister Joseph Muscat will step down on January 18, party sources told AFP Saturday, following mounting criticism of his response to the murder of journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia.

The announcement came as the main suspect in the 2017 car bomb killing, tycoon Yorgen Fenech, 38, was charged with complicity in the murder.

The court also ordered Fenech's assets to be frozen and he was returned to custody.

Party insiders said Muscat would step down once those behind the killing had been charged and his Labour Party had chosen a new leader.

"He always said that he will be leaving soon and he feels that now is the time to go," said one party source.

First however, he wanted to see that the Daphne Caruana Galizia murder was solved under his watch, as he had promised, sources added.

"After the mastermind or masterminds are arraigned in court, he plans to announce that he will be stepping down and that there will be a leadership election on January 18," a party source told AFP.

The sources did not say when 45-year-old Muscat would announce his decision -- or whether it would be via a televised announcement -- but they stressed that he would not stay beyond January 18.

The news came amid mounting pressure from Caruana Galizia's family and protesters on the streets, who have cried foul over his handling of the affair.

The escalating murder investigation has rocked the tiny Mediterranean island and reached the highest rungs of politics, with two ministers and Muscat's chief of staff Keith Schembri stepping down from their posts this week.

Fenech has identified Schembri as the mastermind behind Caruana Galizia's killing, according to sources. Schembri was arrested on Tuesday, but his release on Thursday sparked accusations of a cover-up.

Muscat, who has vowed to resign if links were found between himself and the murder, said Friday he would remain in power, telling reporters he wanted "this case to be closed under my watch".

But Caruana Galizia's family, who have accused the prime minister of protecting his long-time chief of staff have called for him to go.

"We share Malta's shock and anger at the release of Keith Schembri," the family said in a statement.

"At least two witnesses and multiple pieces of physical evidence implicate Schembri in the assassination of our wife and mother."

Undoubtedly grave

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the ACC.

The HC also ordered the graft watchdog body to initiate the next course of action based on the judicial inquiry report under the ACC act-2004 and the ACC rules-2007 after receiving the documents from the chief judicial magistrate.

Rajshahi's CJM Md Mehedi Hasan Talukder submitted the probe report to the HC last month, saying that the inquiry has found five police officials, including three additional superintendents of Rajshahi police and OC Shakil, responsible for manipulating the first information report.

The four other police officials are additional superintendents of police (administration and crimes) Mahmudul Hasan, M Matiur Rahman (DSB) and Abul Kalam Shahid (Puthia circle), and Inspector (investigation) Mohinul Islam of Puthia Police Station.

Yesterday, the HC directed the investigation officer to immediately transfer the case to the Police Bureau of Investigation (PBI) for investigation.

The bench of Justice M Enayetur Rahim and Justice Md Mostafizur Rahman expected that PBI chief Banaj Kumar Majumder would play a special role in supervising the probe.

The court delivered the verdict after a petition was filed by Nurul's daughter Nigar Sultana challenging the FIR of the murder case.

It also asked the inspector general of police to take departmental action against OC Shakil after conducting an inquiry into the allegation brought against him, saying that informant Nigar and multiple people, including Shakil's subordinate policemen and even his mother-in-law lodged different allegations with the IGP.

"While conducting daily judicial proceedings, we are very often noticing that various allegations are brought against law enforcers, including local police officers in different areas, and the victims lodge written complaints with the office of inspector general of police. But the allegations are not disposed of quickly," the HC bench said.

The HC bench hoped that the IGP would take necessary steps to this effect, and the court also believed that the IGP would make the functions of "IGP Complaints Monitoring Cell" more effective and speedy.

The court observed that the police administration of Rajshahi showed irresponsibility and violated the law by publishing the disputed confessional statement of a child arrested in connection with the case through issuing a press release to the media.

It ordered the IGP to take necessary measures in this regard after conducting a departmental inquiry.

The HC bench also directed the Rajshahi police administration to provide Nigar, her family members, witnesses of the case, and plaintiff's lawyers with necessary security.

Barrister Jyotirmoy Barua appeared for the writ petitioner, while Attorney General Mahbubey Alam represented the state.

According to the petition, an

election to Puthia Motor Sramik Union was held on April 24 this year and Nurul contested the election for the general secretary post.

The following day, the polls results showed that Abdur Rahman Patal was elected general secretary of the Sramik Union.

Nurul filed a case with a Rajshahi court on June 9, claiming that he bagged 602 votes against Patal's 520, but the latter was declared elected illegally.

The court on the same day issued an injunction, restricting Patal and three others from taking up the posts of the Sramik Union. The order was imposed on them on June 10.

Nurul went missing around 8:00pm that day, and his body was recovered from SS Brick Field the following day.

Nurul's daughter Nigar filed a murder case on June 11 against eight people, including Patal.

In the FIR of the case, she alleged that then OC Shakil was involved in manipulating the election results in favour of Patal.

Police later submitted an FIR of the murder case to the trial court in Rajshahi, dropping the names of the eight accused.

On September 16, the HC bench led by Justice M Enayetur Rahim directed the CJM of Rajshahi to conduct an enquiry into the alleged manipulation of the FIR by Shakil following the same writ petition.

It also issued a rule asking government to explain as to why Shakil should not be suspended for manipulating the FIR. The same day, OC Shakil was suspended.

Contacted, Nigar said she was happy as the verdict ordered for recording her complaint as the FIR.

Talking to this correspondent over the phone, she said it was painful for her as it took six months to lodge her complaint since her father died.

She expected that PBI would investigate the case without any bias and arrest the killers.

They pretended

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burns to the remains.

"How anyone could subject another human being to such terrible, unprovoked violence is beyond imagination," said former opposition Congress party leader Rahul Gandhi on Twitter.

A woman who tried to stage a one-person demonstration outside the Indian parliament in New Delhi said she was beaten by police after refusing to go home.

"The only purpose of this protest is to ensure that I am not burned to death tomorrow," Anu Dubeey told reporters later, fighting back tears.

"That woman died, other girls have also died. Every 20 minutes, there is a rape in India. I don't want to die. And I can't be a spectator to any more rape cases. I'm tired of seeing such cases over and over again," she said.

According to government figures, more than 32,000 rape cases were reported in 2017, however, experts say that the crime is vastly unreported.