



A session of the Iranian parliament

Regime Insiders In Iran Clash Over Mass Candidate Rejections

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Amid public indifference, politicians and media in Iran are hotly debating the disqualification of some sitting lawmakers ahead of the March parliamentary elections.

As of Sunday, around 40 current members of parliament and several former lawmakers or top officials were barred by the interior ministry from running in the elections.

Some lawmakers, including Jalal Mahmoudzadeh, an MP from Mahabad, have openly blamed President Ebrahim Raisi's government for the massive disqualification of its critics. Others such as former lawmaker Ali Motahari have demanded explanations and insisted on their religious credentials. Yet others such as reformist Massoud Pezeshkian said, "The Interior Ministry has accused me of not believing in the Islamic Republic regime."

Mahmoudzadeh said that the government owned Iran Newspaper has been calling in the last four months for the disqualifications of politicians who have been critical of the Raisi administration.

Massih Mohajeri, the editor of the conservative daily Jomhuri Eslami, **has accused the government** of disqualifying critics to silence them and their criticism of the Raisi administration's failures. He claimed that 46 current and former MPs have been disqualified simply for criticizing the the adverse economic conditions and other problems created by this government. Meanwhile, he acknowledged that the Interior Ministry, which conducts the first round of candidate vetting, has significantly tightened the net to reduce the number of candidates who can pass through the qualification process.



Politician Massih Mohajeri

Like many other Iranian politicians, Mohajeri argued that the regime may be attempting to portray the hardliner Guardian Council, which conducts the final round of vetting, as the good cop by having the Interior Ministry do the dirty job. He pointed out that many of those who have been disqualified are regime insiders, indicating that the ruling circle is becoming tighter and smaller.

He stated that the actions of the Interior Ministry resemble the behavior one would expect from totalitarian regimes, such as the one in North Korea. He added that disqualifying this many incumbent MPs constitutes a clear violation of the Constitution. According to him, the result will likely be an even lower turnout than the previous Majles election in 2020, which was the lowest in Iran's modern history.

Mohajeri added that the Interior Ministry has admitted that it has found the critics inside the government to be acting against national security! He asked if more than 40 lawmakers do not believe in the Islamic Republic, what do you expect of them?

Moderate conservative daily Ettela'at which is usually silent about political matters in Iran, warned the government about the perils of **the political purification plan** which is being pursued by Iran's ultraconservatives and pointed out that the disqualification of incumbent MPs and other regime insiders is part of the same process.

Ettela'at wrote that more than 28 percent of those who had registered their candidacy have been disqualified by the Interior Ministry. Ettela'at wrote that the lawmakers who have been disqualified are precisely those who have tried during the past four years to fulfil their responsibilities. What they have done at the Majles is simply pointing out the inefficiency of government officials.

Ettela'at also pointed out that because of the disqualifications, many regime insiders are now concerned about low turnout in the upcoming election. The daily told the ultraconservatives that they can still enter parliament by winning 10 percent of the votes and be proud of a 40 percent or less turnout, but the regime can no longer claim popular support.

According to Khabar Online Website, the Interior Ministry was biased against some of the candidates. The same point was reiterated by the former leader of the centrist Executives of Construction Party Gholamhossein Karbaschi. He further concluded that the government is not looking for a high-turnout election.

As one of the **readers of conservative website Alef pointed out** , "We voted for your friends four years ago. What did we get other than poverty, misery, and rising prices? On the other hand, conservatives do not want political participation. They lost every time the people participated in the elections." Another reader explained why the people are disillusioned: "During the past 40 years you have always called for people's participation in the months before the elections. You forget the people and their problems as soon as the elections are over."

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