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World



Supporters of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad hold his posters during a gathering in his electoral campaign for the June 12 presidential elections, in Tehran, Iran on Friday.

Iran reformists hope for high election turnout

BY ALI ANSARI DARGAZI
The Associated Press

TEHRAN, IRAN — Iran's reformists are hoping a high turnout in the upcoming presidential election would help them oust hard-line President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who they say pushed the country deeper into international isolation and economic trouble.

The outcome of the June 12 vote may decide the direction Iran will take, both in the offer of dialogue from the Obama administration and in the confrontation with the West over its nuclear activities.

Iranian reformists, who seek better relations with the West and easing of social and political restrictions at home, have criticized Ahmadinejad for focusing too much on dealing with the U.S. and Israel, rather than dealing with the faltering economy.

Campaigning officially kicked off Friday, with only 20 days left to enter the 46.2 million eligible Iranian voters to the polls. Reformists' posters across Tehran warn that a low turnout could bring the hard-line president another term in office.

Ahmadinejad's posters, meanwhile, boast of a nuclear Iran and involve his 2005 campaign slogan, "We can" — a reference to the nuclear technology which the West fears masks a weapons program. At a rally in Tehran, Ahmadinejad on Friday compared Iran's enemies to dogs.

"If you retreat, they attack; if you attack, they retreat," he said.

Ahmadinejad claims his government's decision to stand up to the West and enrich uranium turned Iran into a regional superpower and deterred a U.S. attack on Iran after its wars in neighboring Afghanistan and Iraq.

The reformists in the race are Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karubi. Conservative

candidate Mohsen Rezaei is not seen as a serious challenger but someone who could siphon conservative votes away from Ahmadinejad and thereby boost the reformists' chances.

Karubi, who has said he wouldn't mind meeting President Barack Obama if it would serve Iran's national interests, urged supporters at a rally Friday to show up at the polls.

"Staying away from the elections doesn't help... If people vote in large numbers, the situation will change," he said.

His campaign manager, Ghulam Husein Karbachi, said a high turnout can definitely oust Ahmadinejad.

If more than 12 million votes are cast, the possibility that Ahmadinejad will not win is over 65 percent," he said.

But if 27 million people or less vote, the likelihood of a change is less than 35 percent.

The math is based on the thinking that hard-liners traditionally have the backing of between 12 million to 15 million Iranians. Any turnout over 30 million could work in favor of the reformists.

A high turnout helped a landslide victory for former re-

formist president Mohammad Khatami in the 1997 and 2001 elections. But in 2005, reformists lost mainly because many of their young, potential supporters abstained.

Reformists complain that state media have done little to promote the election and they accuse the government of supporting voter apathy.

Mousavi supporters also took to the streets Friday, putting up posters and handing out election pamphlets.

Young men with green ribbons tied around their wrists and young women in green headscarves asked passers-by to vote for change.

Mousavi, believed to be the leading of the two reformist challengers, has vowed to "restore the country's dignity."

One of his campaign leaders, Mehdi Rahmandad, said a "high turnout would make Mousavi a definite winner."

His supporters chanted: "Green change for Iran" — a reference to Mousavi's picking green as his campaign color, a symbol of Islam and progress in Iran. Karubi's camp has picked purple for his campaign with the slogan: "Together for change, only for Iran."

DNA expert testifies in Italy trial

The Associated Press

ROME — A police forensic expert testified Friday that a knife prosecutors say might have been used to slay a British student bore traces of the DNA of a U.S. co-defendant in the murder trial in Perugia, Italian news reports said.

Amanda Knox is being tried in a Perugia courtroom for the 2007 murder of roommate Meredith Kercher in their rented apartment in the Umbrian university town. Also on trial for Kercher's murder is Knox's former Italian boyfriend, Raffaele Sollecito. All three were studying in Perugia.

Knox and Sollecito deny wrongdoing.

Defense lawyers challenged the findings of police forensic expert Patricia Stefanoni, who testified for the prosecution for eight hours about DNA found at the apartment.

Prosecutors have alleged that Knox's DNA was found on the handle of a kitchen knife that might have been the murder weapon, while Kercher's DNA was found on the blade of the knife, found at Sollecito's home. Prosecutors also say Sollecito's DNA was found on the clasp of the victim's bra.

The Italian news agency ANSA quoted Stefanoni as testifying that traces of Knox's genetic code were found in a small scratch on the knife's handle, and that the point in which the genetic material was found indicates that the knife "was used to pierce and not to cut."

After Stefanoni testified, Knox's lawyer told reporters outside the courtroom that the defense was considering asking the court to order DNA testing by an outside expert.

"Nothing has changed. Our positions are in clear contrast when it comes to the scientific findings," lawyer Luciano Ghergo said.

Sollecito's lawyer, Giulia Bongiorno, also challenged Stefanoni, restating defense contentions



U.S. murder suspect Amanda Knox (left) walks past an Italian Carabinieri police officer as she arrives for a hearing in the Meredith Kercher murder trial in Perugia, Italy, on Friday. Knox and her former Italian boyfriend, Raffaele Sollecito, are on trial for the murder of Knox's British roommate.

that the clasp was contaminated since it wasn't collected by forensic experts until several weeks after the slaying. She also said it was found some distance away in the room where it was first noticed under a pillow in the bedroom where Kercher's body was found, with stab wounds to the neck.

Prosecutors allege Kercher was stabbed during what began as a sex game.

The trial began in January for Knox and Sollecito, who risk receiving Italy's stiffest punishment, life imprisonment, if convicted of murder. They are also accused of sexual violence.

In a separate trial, an Ivory Coast national, Rudy Hermann Guede, was convicted of the slaying.