



Iran reviewing mandatory headscarf law amid ongoing protests

Description

IRAN: Iranian authorities said they would review a decades-old law that requires women to cover their heads, as the country struggles to quell more than two months of protests linked to the dress code.

“Both parliament and the judiciary are working [on the issue],” of whether the law needs any changes, Iran’s attorney general Mohammad Jafar Montazeri said on Saturday.

Quoted by an Iranian news agency, he did not specify what could be modified in the law by the two bodies, which are both largely in the hands of conservatives.

The review team met on Wednesday with parliament’s cultural commission “and will see the results in a week or two”, the attorney general said.

President Ebrahim Raisi on Saturday said Iran’s republican and Islamic foundations were constitutionally entrenched.

“But there are methods of implementing the constitution that can be flexible,” he said in televised comments.

Protests began on 16 September after the death in custody of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old Iranian of Kurdish origin arrested by the morality police for allegedly flouting the sharia-based law.

Over the following weeks demonstrators burned their head coverings and shouted anti-government slogans. After Amini’s death, a growing number of women have not been wearing headscarves, particularly in Tehran’s fashionable north.

The hijab headscarf became obligatory for all women in Iran in April 1983, four years after the Islamic Revolution that overthrew the US-backed monarchy.

It remains a highly sensitive issue in a country where conservatives insist it should be compulsory, while reformists want to leave it up to individual choice.

In July this year Raisi, an ultra-conservative, called for mobilisation of “all state institutions to enforce the headscarf law”.

In September, Iran’s main reformist party called for the mandatory hijab law to be rescinded.

The Union of Islamic Iran People Party, formed by relatives of former reformist president Mohammad Khatami, on Saturday demanded that authorities “prepare the legal elements paving the way for the cancellation of the mandatory hijab law”.

The opposition group also called for the Islamic republic to “officially announce the end of the activities of the morality police” and “allow peaceful demonstrations”, it said in a statement.

Iran accuses its sworn enemy the United States and its allies, including Britain, Israel, and Kurdish groups based outside the country, of fomenting the street protests which the government calls “riots”.

Oslo-based non-governmental organisation Iran Human Rights on Tuesday said at least 448 people had been “killed by security forces in the ongoing nationwide protests”.

UN rights chief Volker Turk said last week that 14,000 people, including children, had been arrested in the protest crackdown.

The campaign of arrests has snared sportspeople, celebrities and journalists.

Among the latest figures to be arrested were film star Mitra Hajjar, who was detained at her home on Saturday, according to the reformist newspaper Shargh.

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