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Belarus to Hold Next Presidential Election on Jan. 26

By AFP

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Police arrest a protester after the 2020 Belarusian presidential election. **Natalia Fedosenko / TASS**

Belarus will hold its next presidential election on Jan. 26, the country's Central Election Commission announced Wednesday.

Belarus, a key ally of Russia, has been ruled since 1994 by President Alexander Lukashenko. Since coming to power, Lukashenko has eliminated all forms of opposition in the country.

Election authorities said parliament had approved the date of the vote, the first presidential election in Belarus since 2020. Widespread fraud was reported during that race, triggering weeks of mass protests and a brutal crackdown on dissent.

Critics accuse Lukashenko, who earlier said he plans to run for re-election, of presiding over an increasingly authoritarian regime, restricting human rights and jailing political opponents.

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Lukashenko's 2020 challenger, Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, claimed victory but was also forced to leave the country and now operates in exile.

Tikhanovskaya on Wednesday dismissed the upcoming vote as a "sham with no real electoral process, conducted in an atmosphere of terror."

"No alternative candidates or observers will be allowed. We call on Belarusians and the international community to reject this farce," she wrote on X.

Tikhanovskaya's husband, a prominent opposition figure, is still in prison after being jailed ahead of the 2020 vote, when he announced he planned to run against Lukashenko.

Belarus has around 1,300 political prisoners, according to the Viasna human rights group.

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