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country.

Offer to France

Among those on trial over the protests are an Iranian who worked at the UK embassy in Tehran, a French-Iranian who worked at the French embassy, and a French national - charged with crimes including spying and plotting to overthrow the government.

On Tuesday, French embassy staffer Nazak Afshar was released from the Tehran prison where she was being held, but remains on trial, French President Nicolas Sarkozy announced.



Frenchwoman Clotilde Reiss is among those being tried

Mr Sarkozy thanked the EU and "other friendly states, such as Syria" for help in her release.

He called for Clotilde Reiss, a French university teaching assistant who is also in prison, to be released without delay.

Iran offered to allow her to live in the French embassy in Tehran for the duration of the trial, French news agency AFP quoted Iran's ambassador in Paris as saying.

There had been no reported response from French authorities, the ambassador was quoted by AFP as saying.

But the French foreign ministry later dismissed his claim, saying Iran had been notified weeks ago that the French embassy was willing to take in Ms Reiss, according to AFP.

Febrile

France has denounced the proceedings against Ms Reiss, but the action was defended by Hassan Qashqavi, a spokesman for Iran's foreign ministry.

"There was no ambiguity in the trial procedures - and there was no pressure to get confessions from the people on trial," he said on Monday.

Reports speak of a febrile atmosphere in Iranian political circles, as the leadership continues to face overt criticism over its handling of the post-election crisis.

One focus of controversy has been the conditions under which remaining the detainees have been held, with damaging claims forcing authorities to act.

The Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamanei, closed the notorious Kahrizak detention centre over allegations of abuse, and both the Iranian parliament and judiciary have established committees to investigate the post-election unrest and the government's response.

Official election results awarded incumbent President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad a sweeping victory in the polls.

He is in the process of selecting a cabinet which will be submitted to parliamentary approval next week.

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