Doc_Number: EU000205

The New York Times

August 13, 2009

Iran Denies Allegations That Protesters Were Raped in Prison

By **ROBERT F. WORTH**

BEIRUT, Lebanon — The speaker of Iran's Parliament, Ali Larijani, vehemently denied Wednesday that some male and female protesters arrested in the wake of Iran's disputed presidential election were sexually abused in prison.

The accusations of prison rape, first broached by the reformist cleric and presidential candidate Mehdi Karroubi, shocked many Iranians and prompted Mr. Larijani to assign a special parliamentary committee last weekend to investigate.

The accusations have deepened divisions among conservatives and distracted attention from the government's renewed efforts to silence Iran's still defiant opposition through a mass trial of reformist figures. Prosecutors have tried to cast the entire opposition movement as a foreign-inspired effort to provoke a "velvet" revolution in Iran.

Mr. Larijani dismissed the rape accusations as "sheer lies," saying the inquiry had found no evidence to support them. But opposition Web sites were buzzing with new reports of sexual abuse from victims who were too frightened or too ashamed to give their names.

Government officials recently acknowledged for the first time that some detained protesters were tortured. The issue has provoked outrage among many conservatives as well as the opposition, which rejects President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's re-election on June 12 as rigged. On Wednesday, some reformist Parliament members spoke out against Iran's national police chief, Brig. Gen. Ismail Ahmadi-Moqaddam, saying he should be dismissed because of his role in the abuses.

Conservatives have also called for punishment of those involved in the violence against detainees. Parliament assigned a committee to investigate the abuses in July, after it emerged that one of the detainees who died in prison — apparently after being tortured — was the son of an adviser to a conservative presidential candidate, Mohsen Rezai.

Those criticisms have exposed fissures not only among conservatives but also among Iran's branches of government. On Wednesday, a spokesman for the judiciary defended it against accusations that it had been silent during the abuses, in comments to Iran's semiofficial ISNA news agency.

But the spokesman, Ali-Reza Jamshidi, also said the judiciary was not in charge of the detention centers where the abuses took place during the postelection crackdown. And on Tuesday, a group of lawyers complained that the judiciary's independence was being undermined by elements of the ruling

establishment, during a meeting with former President [Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani](#), the agency reported.

The rape accusations appear to be more explosive than the prison deaths, touching an issue that may be even more sensitive in Iran's Islamic culture than in the West.

The allegations first emerged on Saturday, in a letter dated July 29 from Mr. Karroubi to Mr. Rafsanjani. In his letter, Mr. Karroubi said his information had come from officials "who hold sensitive positions in the country," and spoke of women raped so brutally they suffered serious "genital injuries."

He added that the reports were so shocking that "if even one of them is true, it would be a tragedy for the Islamic republic," and that "it would overshadow the sins of many dictatorships including that of the deposed shah" of Iran, whose government fell in the 1979 revolution.

Nazila Fathi contributed reporting from New York.