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# Iran releases foreign Newsweek reporter on bail

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TEHRAN, Iran – Iran released a foreign Newsweek reporter on bail Saturday almost four months after he was arrested following the country's disputed presidential election, as embattled opposition leaders promised to press on with their campaign against the country's rulers.

Maziar Bahari, a dual Iranian-Canadian citizen who was released after posting bail of 3 billion rials (\$300,000), is among more than 100 prisoners put on mass trial as part of the government's attempts to silence opposition protests that President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's June 12 re-election was fraudulent.

The government also waged a bloody crackdown using security forces, but Iran's opposition leaders said Friday that the use of force will not silence their demands for democratic change. The defiant statement by opposition leader Mir Hossein Mousavi and former reformist President Mohammad Khatami sent a message to their supporters that the protest campaign still had energy though street demonstrations fizzled out months ago.

"The use of force and pressure won't force the Iranian nation to deviate one iota from the path it has chosen," said a statement posted on Khatami's Web site. "And those loyal to ... Iran won't give up their ... patriotic responsibilities despite all problems and threats."

Since the violent post-election crackdown, the opposition has been struggling to reinvigorate itself as Iran's government under Ahmadinejad cements its control.

A key part of the government's strategy has been the mass trial of reformist political figures accused of supporting the post-election unrest and seeking to topple the ruling system through a "velvet revolution." The trial has so far produced three death sentences.

The opposition has called the trial a "ridiculous show" and has said that confessions by defendants, including Bahari, were obtained under duress.

In his turn at the stand, Bahari said Western media had attempted to guide events in Iran following the election and he sought mercy from Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Bahari's family and colleagues said his comments likely came under duress. Like other defendants, he has had no access to a lawyer and no specific charges have been announced against him.

Iran's official Islamic Republic News Agency reported Bahari's release, citing the Tehran prosecutor's office. The report did not give a reason for the release, but Bahari's wife in London, who is having a difficult pregnancy and is expected to give birth at the end of October, has pleaded for his freedom.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Lawrence Cannon also made a joint call in September for Iran to free Bahari, who was arrested on June 21.

Newsweek welcomed the reporter's release in a statement posted on its Web site, saying "We are relieved that Newsweek journalist Maziar Bahari is home with his family today."

One of Iran's most prominent pro-reform figures, Saeed Hajjarian, has also been on trial alongside Bahari. Reformist Web sites said Saturday that Hajjarian has been convicted of inciting post-election unrest and sentenced to a five-year suspended jail term. He was released on bail earlier this month after more than three months in prison.

Judiciary officials were unavailable for comment on Hajjarian's reported sentence.

Mousavi and Khatami said a "security climate" imposed by hard-liners to try to silence the opposition has instead undermined people's trust in the ruling system and paved the way for those who want to change the regime.

On Friday, a hard-line cleric sought to head off an attempt to reinvigorate the anti-government movement by warning against a planned opposition rally on Nov. 4 that would coincide with annual state-sponsored demonstrations against the United States.

The cleric, Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, also had an unusual warning for the security forces, telling them any soft treatment of those activists already in detention would be considered treason. "Nobody gives a flower to his murderer," he said in a Friday prayer sermon.

Thousands of people were arrested in the heavy crackdown that crushed the mass protests in support of Mousavi, who claims the presidential election was stolen from him through massive vote fraud. It was the country's worst unrest since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. The opposition says at least 72 protesters were killed, while the government puts the number of confirmed dead at 30.