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## Iran Trial Targets Top Opposition Figures

By [FARNAZ FASSIHI](#)

BEIRUT -- Iran's prosecutors on Tuesday targeted the government's top opponents and called for the elimination of two reformist political parties, in the hard-liners' boldest attempt during mass trials to crush opposition.

The Revolutionary Court held its fourth session of trials aimed at linking the postelection crisis to a plot funded by foreign countries to overthrow the regime. Among the hundreds of defendants are prominent politicians, journalists, lawyers, student activists and feminists who were jailed in a wave of arrests after the controversial June 12 presidential election.

The court proceedings, the first of their kind in nearly two decades, have been criticized abroad and by opposition groups in Iran as "show trials" with coerced confessions, intended to terrorize the public into submission. At the same time, the trials have shocked the nation and galvanized the opposition.

Reading the overall charges against the defendants at the beginning of Tuesday's session, the prosecutor called for a maximum penalty for some of the reformist leaders -- in some cases the charges could carry the death penalty -- and asked the judge to outlaw two major opposition political parties, the Islamic Iran Participation Front and the Mujahedin of the Islamic Revolution Organization. The Participation party is affiliated with former President Mohammad Khatami's reform movement and dominated the government from 1997 to 2005.

The move to outlaw opposition political parties shows President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's government is broadening its case against its opponents, seeking to ensure with legal measures that they will be officially banned from politics, analysts say.

In Iran, political parties must be registered with the government. However, candidates can run without a party, as in the case of prominent opposition leader Mir Hossein Mousavi.

Among the defendants on Tuesday was journalist Saeed Hajjarian, a founder of the Participation party, who is severely disabled after being shot in the head in 2000 by a would-be assassin after his newspaper exposed serial killings of intellectuals. Mr. Hajjarian testified that he would resign from the Participation party, saying it "has derailed, and I no longer see it as an appropriate place for myself."

In Tuesday's court hearing, viewed online, 19 defendants, all well-known, appeared in court sitting in rows facing the judge, interspersed with security guards. Dressed in gray prison garb, most of the defendants looked gaunt and unshaven. Some occasionally turned to speak with one another in hushed whispers. Some took notes; some stared into space and a few dozed off.

Their background was varied but most had been zealot revolutionaries at one time, then transformed into reformists and eventually opposition members harshly critical of President Ahmadinejad. They included a former deputy foreign minister, an ex-government spokesman, a former deputy speaker of parliament and two prominent newspaper editors, and an American citizen, academic Kian Tajbakhsh.

Nine of the defendants took the stand to testify on their roles in the so-called velvet revolution.

Most of those who testified said Mr. Mousavi and Mr. Khatami had masterminded the violence in the streets and the confrontation with the regime.

"I believe that Mousavi started this face-off with the government by insisting elections were rigged. He was delusional from the start and it was his idea to bring people to the streets," said Shahebedin Tabatabae, a prominent member of the reform party and an adviser to Mr. Mousavi's campaign.

Many also pointed fingers at the family of powerful cleric and former President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. His son, Mehdi, was accused of spending \$2 million of public funding to pay for Mr. Mousavi's campaign and creating a Web site devoted to slandering President Ahmadinejad and his government.

In more than an hour of testimony, Mr. Tajbakhsh said that foreign countries, including the U.S., were using academic institutions to train Iranian students and journalists to bring a Western-style democracy to Iran. He referred to the reign of Mr. Khatami as an era when Western influence in Iran grew.

Opposition leaders dismissed the allegations, calling the court hearing a show trial and warning that Iranians don't buy into the government's narrative about the election. "Our people will not tolerate this kind of insults against the great leaders of the reform movement," reformist lawmaker Siroos Sazdar said, according to the opposition-leaning Web site Parlemannews.

Family members of detainees on trial on Tuesday gathered outside the courthouse to protest, according to Web sites. Police tried to disperse the crowd.

Reports of abuse in prisons have surfaced. Cleric opposition leader Mahdi Karroubi published on his party Web site a detailed account of a young man who says he was raped in prison after he was arrested in an opposition rally.

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