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## Iranian Protest Figures Could Face Execution

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By Thomas Erdbrink  
Washington Post Foreign Service  
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TEHRAN, Aug. 25 -- The attorney prosecuting leading opposition figures in [Iran](#) asked a court Tuesday to give them "the maximum punishment," offering the clearest indication to date that the government crackdown against the organizers of protests this summer could include executions.

The defendants, who include former deputy ministers and a former presidential spokesman, are accused of endangering national security in the aftermath of the disputed June presidential election. If convicted, their parties will be banned.

The session was the fourth in a large-scale trial of opposition figures, who belong to parties locked in a power struggle with hard-liners since the 1979 Islamic revolution.

A party connected to the opposition called the trials "a scandalous play."

"This ridiculous show was staged to provide legitimacy for the coup government," the Islamic Iran Participation Front said in a statement posted on the Norooznews Web site.

The request for maximum punishments reflects the determination of a group of Revolutionary Guard Corps commanders, Friday prayer leaders and lawmakers supportive of the government to prosecute their political enemies for disputing President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's election victory.

The group has also called for the arrest of the opposition movement's leaders, including defeated candidates Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi and former president Mohammad Khatami.

One of the defendants in Tuesday's session, former deputy minister of intelligence Saeed Hajjarian, was accused of instigating riots and encouraging illegal gatherings, the semiofficial Fars News Agency reported. Several of the offenses are punishable by death.

"Because of the importance of the issue . . . and creating intense disruption of public security and discipline, I request a maximum punishment," said the prosecutor, whose name was not made public.

Hajjarian begged the court for forgiveness and said he had canceled his membership in the Islamic Iran Participation Front, which is close to Khatami.

"Once again I ask the great Iranian nation who tolerated lots of damages because of our mistakes to forgive us," Hajjarian, who was left nearly unable to speak after a 2000 assassination attempt, said in a statement read by another defendant.

The court case is the first major test for the new head of the judiciary, Sadeq Larijani, who was appointed last

week by Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

"Larijani's decision and strength will determine the course of the system," said Nargess Mohammadi, the deputy head of the Human Rights Defenders, an organization led by Nobel Peace Prize winner Shirin Ebadi. "These people were all major political players. If they are convicted, others within the system might turn their backs on it."

Meanwhile, the director of the vast Behest-e Zahra cemetery in Tehran was fired Tuesday after a parliamentary commission visited to investigate claims that 44 protesters killed in the post-election unrest were buried there in unmarked graves, the Parlemannews Web site reported.

The report did not cite a reason for Mahmoud Rezaian's dismissal, but several Web sites have shown clips of 44 gravestones at the cemetery without names but with burial codes.

On Monday, Rezaian denied that any unmarked graves existed. "Illegal, secret night burials of bodies at this cemetery are rumors and untrue," he told the semiofficial Mehr News Agency.

The reports of unmarked graves surfaced after a controversy in which several detained demonstrators died in prison, leading the supreme leader to shut down the facility. Karroubi, the defeated candidate, met with the commission Monday and presented evidence that prisoners had been raped, according to his party's Web site. His opponents say he fabricated the allegations.

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