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## Iran's Mousavi defiant after MPs back Ahmadinejad

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By Fredrik Dahl

TEHRAN (Reuters) - Opposition leader Mirhossein Mousavi called on Saturday for more protests over Iran's disputed June election, two days after lawmakers backed most of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's new government ministers.

But a religious ceremony next week which could have become a rallying point for the moderates was canceled after authorities put pressure on its hosts, Iranian media said.

Nevertheless, Mousavi remained defiant over the poll he says was rigged in favor of Ahmadinejad and urged his supporters to create a wide opposition network using meetings such as family and union gatherings, as well as sporting and cultural events.

"In order to achieve our cause, I do not recommend anything but the pursuit of the green path of hope which you have followed in the past few months ... through small and large gatherings," he said in a statement on a reformist website.

Green was the color of Mousavi's campaign and the huge protests which followed the election.

"It is up to your friends to not betray the confidence ... created in the struggle against the cheaters and the liars," he said, repeating charges of "organized violations and fraud."

Iran's volunteer Islamic militia, the Basij and elite Revolutionary Guards forces put down the protests.

A reformist website published the names of 72 people it said had been killed in the street unrest.

Some 30 died from gunshot wounds, others from baton blows, one had his throat slit, one was thrown from the third floor of a building and one woman was burned beyond recognition, it said.

Authorities put the death toll in post-election violence at 26 and say the dead include Basij militiamen.

Officials reject allegations of rigging in the vote, which plunged Iran into its deepest internal crisis since the 1979 Islamic revolution and exposed widening establishment rifts.

Bolstering Ahmadinejad after weeks of post-election turmoil, parliament on Thursday approved 18 out of the 21 proposed ministers in his new cabinet after reported intervention by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

It will allow Iran's leadership to focus on the nuclear row with the West, which has given Tehran until later in September to take up a six powers' offer of talks on trade benefits if it shelves nuclear enrichment, or face harsher sanctions.

The West suspects Iran of trying to build nuclear bombs while Iran says its program is for peaceful power generation.

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The world powers, the United States, Russia, Britain, China, France and Germany, on Wednesday pressed Tehran to meet them before the U.N.

General Assembly session on Sept 23-25.

While showing no sign of backing down in the row, Iranian officials have in recent days said Tehran is ready to hold talks and will soon present its own "package," without making clear to what extent it addresses the nuclear issue.

State radio quoted Ali Asghar Soltanieh, Iran's envoy to the U.N. International Atomic Energy Agency, as saying it would be handed over to the powers within the next week.

He described it as a "comprehensive package" that would include issues such as nuclear and economic cooperation as well as concerns about the proliferation of atomic arms.

Iran has often said nuclear bombs have no place in its defense doctrine and called on the United States and other countries with such weapons to dismantle them.

Israel, Iran's arch-foe, is believed to have the Middle East's only atomic arsenal. It says an Iranian bomb would be a threat to its existence that it would not tolerate.

Iranian media said a religious ceremony at which reformist former President Mohammad Khatami was expected to speak had been canceled, in what may reflect authorities' concern it could have become the scene of renewed opposition protests.

The Mardomsalari newspaper cited "pressure" on the family of late revolutionary leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini to call off the speeches traditionally held at his shrine near Tehran to mark the seventh century death of Imam Ali, Shi'ite Islam's most revered figure after the Prophet Mohammad.

"The official communique says the Imam's shrine is unable to hold the mourning period in view of the problems it is facing," it said, referring to the annual religious event during three successive nights from next Wednesday.

(Additional reporting by Hashem Kalantari; Editing by Jon Hemming)

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