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# Iran's Rafsanjani avoids Friday prayers over vote unrest

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**Featured Broker sponsored link** TEHRAN (Reuters) - Iran's influential former president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani will not lead Friday prayers this week to avoid possible unrest over the country's disputed presidential vote, newspapers reported on Tuesday.

Challenging the authority of Iran's most powerful figure Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Rafsanjani declared the Islamic republic in crisis during his last Friday prayer sermon in July and demanded an end to arrests of moderates.

After Rafsanjani's sermon on July 17, clashes erupted between police and followers of opposition leader Mirhossein Mousavi, who says the June vote was rigged to secure the re-election of hardline President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

"To avoid any possible clashes at Friday prayers, he will not lead the prayers this week," the office of Rafsanjani, also the head of the Assembly of Experts, said in a statement, the Etemad daily reported.

The June 12 presidential vote plunged Iran into its biggest internal crisis since the 1979 Islamic revolution and exposed deepening divisions in its ruling elite.

Rights groups say hundreds of people, including senior pro-reform politicians, journalists, activists and lawyers, have been detained by the authorities since the election.

Iranian official media have said at least 26 people died in violence after the poll.

Rafsanjani, an architect of the Islamic revolution, has warned the post-election power struggle would harm the establishment.

Reformist former president Mohammad Khatami, defeated candidates Mehdi Karoubi and Mousavi have denounced Ahmadinejad's new government as "illegitimate." Ahmadinejad was officially sworn in on Wednesday.

In an attempt to uproot the opposition and to end street protests, Iran held two mass trials of moderates, including several prominent figures, charged with offences that included acting against national security by fomenting unrest.

An Iranian Revolutionary Court on Saturday charged a French woman, two Iranians working for the British and French embassies in Tehran and dozens of others with spying and aiding a Western plot to overthrow the clerical rule.

Espionage and acting against national security are punishable by death under Iran's Islamic law.

Rafsanjani is one of the four rotating Friday prayer leaders in Tehran.

(Writing by Zahra Hosseinian, Editing by Samia Nakhoul)

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