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Khomeini heir heckled by Iran regime backers

By Najmeh Bozorgmehr in Tehran

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Islamic vigilantes loyal to Iran's regime prevented the grandson of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, founder of the Islamic republic, from speaking on the 21st anniversary of his death on Friday.

Hassan Khomeini, the 39-year-old grandson of the ayatollah, has become a target of the regime's allies since he emerged as a prominent supporter of the **opposition Green Movement**. He tried to speak at a ceremony on Friday at a shrine dedicated to his grandfather's memory in southern Tehran.

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The local media reported that 50,000 buses had brought some 750,000 "pilgrims" to attend the occasion, although television footage suggested that tens of thousands were present.

But supporters of the regime chanted abuse at Mr Khomeini, shouting that the real grandson of the ayatollah was Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hizbollah, the radical Shia movement in Lebanon. Other cries included "Death to Moussavi", a reference to **Mir-Hossein Moussavi, the opposition leader**, who won the support of Mr Khomeini in last year's presidential election.

Mr Khomeini abandoned his planned address, expressing regret that a "few people" in the crowd were disrupting the ceremony. It is rare for him to be attacked so publicly, although he has been a target for criticism in the radical media.

Mr Khomeini tacitly supported Mr Moussavi against Mahmoud Ahmadi-Nejad, the president, in last June's election. He usually declines to attend any event in which the president speaks. He was absent during Mr Ahmadi-Nejad's address on Friday.

Like many other conservatives, Mr Khomeini tried to distinguish between Mr Ahmadi-Nejad's government and the Supreme Leader, **Ayatollah Ali Khamenei**, seeking to be a critic of the former while loyal to the latter. But Ayatollah Khamenei has expressed his full support for Mr Ahmadi-Nejad.

On Friday, the supreme leader said that western governments and armed Iranian opposition groups had all supported the Green Movement, proving "this path is not right".

The first anniversary of last year's disputed presidential election falls on June 12. The regime has tried to prevent the re-emergence of the mass street protests that followed the 2009 contest by using both intimidation and mercy. Seven prisoners have been hanged recently, but last week Ayatollah Khamenei formally "pardoned" 81 others who had asked for "clemency".

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