Slain Iranian Protester’s Activist Father Detained by Iran for 2nd Week Following Rearrest

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An Iranian father who became an outspoken critic of Iran’s Islamist rulers after their security forces killed his son in nationwide antigovernment protests last November has begun a second week in the custody of authorities, who rearrested him in response to his ongoing activism.

Iranian security agents arrested Manouchehr Bakhtiari on July 13 at the airport of Iran’s Kish Island as he and his wife Saeedeh (Sara) Abbasi were finishing a visit to Kish in the country’s south and preparing to board a north-bound flight to their home in Tehran, according to family members who spoke to Western-based media outlets. They said Abbasi also was detained for several hours before being released and allowed to fly to Tehran on her own.

Speaking to VOA Persian from Tehran on Monday, Manouchehr Bakhtiari’s brother Mehrdad said Manouchehr’s detention had stretched into a second week.

In an earlier Instagram video posted on July 17, Mehrdad Bakhtiari said Iranian intelligence ministry agents told the family that Manouchehr had been transferred from Kish to a prison in the southern city of Bandar Abbas.

It is the second time Iranian authorities have arrested Manouchehr Bakhtiari since he began speaking out against the Iranian government for its killing of his son Pouya and hundreds of people who joined the November 2019 street protests. Iran’s ruling clerics sparked the demonstrations by announcing a 50% increase in subsidized gasoline prices in a recession-hit economy plagued by mismanagement and U.S. sanctions.

Pouya Bakhtiari, 27, was shot in the head and killed by Iranian security forces in the northern city of Karaj on November 16, as he participated in the second day of the mostly-peaceful protests.

Manouchehr Bakhtiari was first arrested with his ex-wife Nahid Shirbisheh, Pouya’s mother, on December 23, 2019, three days before a public gathering they were organizing at Pouya’s grave in a Karaj cemetery to mark the end of a traditional 40-day mourning period for their son.

They had used Instagram to appeal to the public and journalists to join them at the gravesite. But on the day of the gathering, security forces dispersed mourners who heeded the call and made arrests.

Authorities released [the grieving father](https://www.radiofarda.com/a/iran-father-of-pouya-bakhtiari-uncle-freed-no-reason/30396383.html), whom they had charged with national security offenses, on bail on January 25.

There has been no comment from Iranian officials in state media regarding Manouchehr Bakhtiari’s status since his July 13 re-arrest.

In an interview with VOA Persian on July 17, Mehrdad Bakhtiari said his brother last had contact with family members on the night of July 13 at Kish airport prior to being detained. He said he later learned that authorities had arrested Manouchehr for allegedly stealing a mobile phone.

Manouchehr Bakhtiari and his wife had traveled to Kish as part of a social media campaign against a proposal by cash-strapped Iran to accept massive Chinese investments in key Iranian infrastructure as part of a draft agreement between the two economic allies.

Iranian critics of the proposal, which has yet to be approved by Iran’s parliament or outlined in detail by China, say they believe it will grant Beijing ownership of Iranian natural resources and islands such as Kish. The Iranian government has denied offering such concessions to China.

In one of several mobile phone videos that he posted on his Instagram account from a Kish shoreline on July 12, Manouchehr Bakhtiari held up a flag of Iran predating its 1979 Islamic Revolution and said he seeks justice for all those killed by the nation’s Islamist rulers, as well as justice for Iranian territory, as he put it. In another video, he accused those rulers of trying to sell out that territory to China.

In the weeks before his Kish visit, Bakhtiari had made other public statements criticizing the Iranian government.

In a June 22 Instagram video, Bakhtiari disavowed images, published by Iranian state media earlier in the month, appearing to show him honoring top Iranian military commander Qassem Soleimani, who was killed in a January 3 U.S. airstrike on Baghdad. One such image, seen by VOA Persian, showed Bakhtiari holding up a poster of a smiling Soleimani.

In the Instagram video, Bakhtiari said Iranian authorities had forced him to hold the poster at a memorial for Soleimani in the days after the U.S. attack, while Bakhtiari was still in his first period of detention. [He accused](https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2020/06/23/Father-of-slain-Iranian-protester-blasts-Soleimani-after-attending-memorial) the government of trying to fool Iranians by circulating the images and also denounced Soleimani as a mercenary.

Bakhtiari kept up the pressure on Iran’s government by writing to U.N. human rights officials to urge them to establish a commission to investigate what he called Tehran’s “lethal repression” of the November 2019 protests. The New York-based Center for Human Rights in Iran ([CHRI](https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2020/06/un-must-end-sterile-exchanges-and-investigate-irans-lethal-violence-against-protesters-says-father-of-slain-demonstrator)) posted Bakhtiari’s letter online on June 28.

“Iran’s regime is trying to silence Manouchehr,” Mehrdad Bakhtiari told VOA Persian.

The activism of Manouchehr Bakhtiari and his family and the Iranian government’s attempts to suppress it have captured the attention of the Trump administration. In a [March 11 speech](https://www.state.gov/secretary-michael-r-pompeo-on-the-release-of-the-2019-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/)unveiling the annual U.S. report on international human rights practices, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the Bakhtiari family was “living in fear under house arrest.”

“I want great Iranians like the Bakhtiaris to know America remembers those lost and stands for their freedom,” Pompeo said.