

guardian.co.uk

By Saeed Kamali Dehghan



The mother of an Iranian blogger who died in custody has accused the authorities of killing her son and launching an intimidation campaign against her family.

Sattar Beheshti was a 35-year-old blogger from the city of Robat-Karim who lost his life while being interrogated by Iran's cyberpolice, accused of acting against the national security because of what he had posted on Facebook. Iran's opposition activists have accused the regime of torturing Beheshti to death. In jail, Beheshti had no access to his family nor to a lawyer.

Beheshti's mother, who has not been named but is pictured with him in one of the only images available of him online, has for the first time spoken out against the state pressure on her family not to speak to the press.

"I have no fears. I can't accept that my son has died by natural causes," she told Sahamnews, a news website close to an Iranian opposition leader, Mehdi Karroubi, who is under house arrest. "My son has been killed. He went to jail standing on his own legs and they gave us his dead body."

Embarrassed by the fury among Iranians over the incident, officials from the judiciary acknowledged in a rare move that he had died in prison and promised a thorough investigation but have since sent out mixed messages about the causes of his death.

Opposition websites also reported that an Iranian prisoner who witnessed the signs of torture on Beheshti's body and spoke about it to prison officials has since gone on hunger strike after being persecuted.

Abolfazl Abedini, a journalist and labour activist, was sent from Tehran's Evin prison, where he was held along with Beheshti, to Zahedan prison in the south of the country after speaking out about Beheshti.

Kaleme, a news website close to the opposition leader Mir Hossein Mousavi, said Abedini was

brought back to Tehran on Friday but had since refused to accept food because of what appear to be the authorities' attempts to silence him over the blogger's case.

Iran's state prosecutor, Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejehi, initially said that wounds were found on Beheshti's body and the judiciary was reported to have arrested a number of people believed to be involved in his case, but some regime officials have ruled out the possibility that he was tortured.

The verdict of the forensic medical examiners is still not clear. An official from the coroner's office was quoted by agencies earlier this week as saying that Beheshti had died of natural causes, but it denied the comments later.

A week after Beheshti's arrest, his family received phone calls from the prison authorities telling them to buy a grave and collect his body. His body received an Islamic washing ritual but the funeral was carried out by security officials and with the presence of only one family member.

Beheshti's mother told Sahamnews that the shroud covering his body was bloody.

"Why didn't they let us wash the body ourselves?" she asked, adding that the security officials had put the family under surveillance, closely watching all their moves since the blogger's death came to light.

She said the authorities had threatened the family with the arrest of Beheshti's sister should they speak to the media.

"Why did they have an arrest warrant for my daughter in their hands? Why do the officials follow us everywhere we go? Why was his shroud bloody?" said the mother.