

HAMBASTEGI

PAPER OF THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF IRANIAN REFUGEES



February 5, 2001

Demand Justice for Ramin Khaleghi

The National Civil Rights Movement, the Campaign Against Racism and Fascism, the IFIR and the Leicester Civil Rights Movement organised a large demonstration on February 3, 2001 in Leicester. Over 350 people joined the march to demand justice for Ramin Khaleghi, despite police blockading the entrance to and exit from the International Hotel, the hostel where Ramin lived and died on January 18.

The demands of the demonstration as well as the ongoing

campaign for Ramin are:

- 1) An opportunity for the Khaleghi family to meet with Barbara Roche, Minister for Immigration and Nationality, to make their concerns known.
- 2) An immediate improvement in the living conditions of asylum seekers in the Leicester 'International Hotel'
- 3) A public inquiry into the circumstances, which led to the death of Ramin, including an investigation into the effect of the Home Office dispersal policy and high refusal rates of Iranian asylum claims.

Australian/Iranian Governments Conspire

According to an article in an internal journal of the Australian Immigration Department, a delegation from the Iranian government recently held talks with the Australian authorities in order to reach an understanding of 'cooperation' regarding the deportation of Iranian asylum seekers. The journal pointed out that during these negotiations, the federal police supplied the Iranian delegation with information on Iranian asylum seekers.

Collaboration with persecut-

ing governments and stepped up anti-asylum practices and policies have resulted in escalated protests against the deteriorating and inhuman conditions imposed on asylum seekers in Australia. Last week, asylum seekers in the Port Hedland Detention Centre held a mass protest. 180 detainees took control of the centre to bring attention to the atrocious conditions and the extremely slow processing of asylum applications. In response, riot police stormed the camp and

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Editorial

Ramin Khaleghi's Murderers Meet Soon

by maryam namazie



Ramin Khaleghi

On February 3, over 350 people gathered in Leicester to protest the death of Ramin Khaleghi, a 27-year-old Iranian asylum seeker, who committed suicide after receiving a refusal notice from the UK Home Office. The protestors held the Islamic regime, which imprisoned and tortured him, and the UK government's policy of refusal and dispersal, responsible for Ramin's death.

While Ramin is yet to be buried, the UK and Islamic governments continue the wheeling and dealing that caused Ramin's death. Their

latest endeavour is a major international conference entitled 'Investments in Iran' at the Landmark Hotel during February 19-20 and a one-day post-conference seminar on February 21 at The Westbury in London (www.ibcglobal.com/iran). Peter Hain, UK Minister of State and Mohammad Hossein Adeli, Deputy Foreign Minister of the Islamic regime, are some of the top-level officials attending the conference.

The conference aims to further legitimise and maintain a regime, which in the past month alone has:

Sentenced Maryam Ayoobi, a 32-year-old woman, to death by stoning

Chopped off Mohammad Ali Aivazkhani's arm in public in Qom

Hanged Alyas Lotfaian, 22, in public in the city of Isfahan

Sentenced Hossein Asna Ashari, 44, to be hanged

Hanged six men aged 20-30

Hanged Hamid Heydari, aged 21

Hanged Hassan Faylom from a crane in central Tehran

Publicly flogged several youths in Isfahan, Mashhad, Booshehr and Hashtgard

Arrested 262 people in raids on New Year's Eve parties for "indecent clothing," consuming alcohol beverages and dancing with members of the opposite sex. Some were flogged (below is picture of one woman flogged)



Sentenced to imprisonment: Saeed Sadr to 10 years,

Akbar Ganji, 10 years, Khalil Rostamkhani, nine years, Ezzatollah Sahabi, four years, Ali Afshari, five years, Mehrangiz Kar, four years and Shahla Lahiji, to four years ...

This conference is being organised at the expense of the many Ramin Khaleghi's both here and in Iran.

It must not be allowed to go ahead as planned. February 19-21 must be transformed into widespread days of protest against the torturers and killers of Ramin and innumerable others.

**Asylum
is a
Human
Right**

SAMPLE LETTER

Demand Justice for Ramin

Date

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On January 18, 2001, the body of Ramin Khaleghi, a 27-year-old Iranian, was discovered in the International Hotel, a hostel housing asylum seekers in Leicester. Ramin had been a political prisoner in Iran for a number of years, before managing to flee to Britain. Yet, the Home Office rejected his claim for asylum, despite medical evidence of torture at the hands of the Iranian police. One week after learning of his rejection, Ramin took his own life. Before that, in late-December, a 26-year-old Iranian asylum seeker, Saeed Alaei, living near Manchester, hanged himself because of depression and fear of refusal (according to his flatmates).

I/my organisation am/is writing to express my/our strong concern over Ramin's and Saeed's death and demand(s) the following:

- 1) An opportunity for the Khaleghi family to meet with Barbara Roche, Minister for Immigration and Nationality, to make their concerns known.
- 2) An immediate improvement in the living conditions of asylum seekers in the Leicester 'International Hotel'
- 3) A public inquiry into the circumstances, which led to the death of Ramin, including an investigation into the effect of the Home Office dispersal policy and the high refusal rates of Iranian asylum claims.

Furthermore, in light of the gross violations of human rights being perpetrated by the Islamic regime, I / my organisation also demand(s) that the 'Investments in Iran' conference organised in London for February 19-21 be cancelled and that all ties to the Islamic regime be severed.

Sincerely,

Name
Organisation (if any)
Address
E-mail

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attacked the detainees. Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock has asserted that he will deport asylum seekers involved in the protests, even if they are granted asylum. He has also proposed the greater use of sedation to stop the growing refugee unrest.

The IFIR-Australian Branch condemns the conspiracy of the Australian and Iranian governments against Iranian asylum seekers and the Australian government's anti-asylum policies. We call on all progressive individuals and institutions to protest and defend the right to asylum.

Conferences

Maryam Namazie will be the guest speaker at the Immigration Aid Unit and Asylum Seekers Welcome and Support Group Annual General Meeting in Manchester on February 6 from 7:00 to 9:30pm. She will be speaking on behalf of the Campaign Against Racism and Fascism on the 'UK State Policy and Practice on Asylum Seekers in a European Context.'

For more information on the meeting, call: 0161 740 7722.

Namazie will also be speaking at a conference entitled 'The Future of Iran: A Study of Social, Economic and Political Issues and Asylum Seeking By Iranians' organised by the Iranian Research and Advice Centre

during February 9-11 at SOAS - London University, Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London WC1.

On February 9, Namazie will be speaking on British Asylum Seeking Policy and its Consequences with representatives from the Iranian Research and Advice Centre, Lawrence Lupin Solicitors and the British Refugee Council.

On February 10, she will be speaking on Issues and problems of Iranian Asylum Seekers internationally.

For more information, call 0207 328 8415 or mail: webmaster@aciiran.com.

international refugee news

Anti-Asylum Legislation

* **Under legislation introduced last week, the Spanish government has the right to deport 'illegal aliens' within 48 hours of their being apprehended;** employers who violate the law face fines of as much as 10 million pesetas (60,100 euros). Spain has just over one million immigrants - an estimated 130,000 of them without

papers. (The Wall Street Journal, January 30, 2001)

* **Australian Authorities will be given greater powers to deport 'rowdy illegal immigrants' or sedate them with "chemical restraints" in a new crackdown announced by the government.** (Agence France Presse, January 23, 2001)

Deaths

* **Five bodies found floating off a Malaysian port are believed to have been**

1, 2001)

* **After recovering two more bodies from the ocean, authorities in the Dominican Republic said there was little hope of finding any survivors among 50 people missing after a boatload of 'illegal migrants' heading for Puerto Rico sank.** (Reuters, January 26, 2001)

* **Spanish rescuers were searching for five 'illegal' African immigrants feared to have drowned when their boat capsized off Tarifa near the Strait of Gibraltar.** The vessel was taking 11 immigrants from the Moroccan coast to Spain. Police retrieved the body of a Moroccan immigrant while five others were rescued alive from the waves. (Deutsche Presse-Agentur, January 22, 2001)

Deportation

* **The Irish Minister for Justice is largely responsible for the "completely unacceptable" delays in determining legal challenges by asylum seekers to deportation orders,** a High Court judge has complained. Justice Kelly noted that several such cases before him had been adjourned up to eight times and one would soon be in the court list for a year. This was "a lamentable record" and contrary to the whole notion of judicial review. (The Irish Times, January 30, 2001)

* **The Kenyan Government was stopped**

Indonesian 'illegal immigrants' whose boats capsized as they tried to slip into the country. They were searching for four or five more bodies west of Kuala Lumpur. (Agence France Presse, February 2, 2001)

* **An investigation was under way today after a suspected 'illegal immigrant' found dead at the French end of the Channel Tunnel.** The man, believed to have been a stowaway from Iraq. (Press Association (UK), February

from deporting four Iraqis. The court also summoned Government officials to present to the court any warrant of arrest to explain why the Iraqis have been held in custody after completing their sentence last May. They were arrested at Elwak near the border of Kenya and Somalia, tried for being in the country illegally and jailed for six months. (The Nation (Kenya), January 30, 2001)

* **The United Nations is concerned about deportations of Afghan "illegal immigrants" from Pakistan amid an escalating refugee crisis as thousands flee war and drought.** With more than 72,000 Afghans seeking assistance at this makeshift northwestern refugee camp in the past two weeks, Pakistan has reportedly begun deporting 'illegal immigrants.' (Agence France Presse, January 30, 2001)

* **Turkish authorities have deported 58 migrants who were detained after attempting to enter Greece and Bulgaria illegally from northwestern Turkey.** Police detained the 47 Iraqis and 11 Syrians and expelled them from Turkey to their country of origin. (Reuters, January 25, 2001)

Detention

* **Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock has seized on the discovery of typhoid in six 'illegal immigrants' as justification for the government's**

mandatory detention policies. (The Age (Australia), February 2, 2001)

* **Two riots involving more than 400 detainees are a forewarning of graver troubles in Australian detention centres if the government kept victimising traumatised 'boatpeople,' refugee advocates have warned.** The Woomera camp in South Australia has been rocked by violent riots which police and security staff quelled using water cannon. (The Australian Associated Press, February 2, 2001)

* **The second mass riot in a week at Australian detention centres was further evidence that security staff needed stronger powers to restrain violent inmates, Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock said.** The Refugee Council of Australia said the government's hard line on detainees would make worse the already-powder keg situation inside detention centres. (The Australian Associated Press, January 31, 2001)

* **Amnesty International says sedatives should not be used to control disturbances in Australian immigration detention centres.** The Immigration Minister, Philip Ruddock, says a review of laws is underway to make it easier for staff to control detainees with sedatives.

(Australian Broadcasting Corporation, January 31, 2001)

* **Detainees at the Australian Maribyrnong Immigration Detention Centre suffer from soaring temperatures, overcrowding, boredom, lack of privacy and the prospect of indefinite confinement.** (The Age (Australia), January 28, 2001)

* **A powerful lobby of labour unions accused the Australian government of treating suspected 'illegal immigrants' inhumanely and urged a review of the policy of mandatory detention.** (The Associated Press, January 29, 2001)

* **The UK Chief Inspector of Prisons last night attacked as "utterly inappropriate" a government scheme to move hundreds of asylum seekers into jails across England and Wales, where they mix with prisoners.** Many of the asylum seekers, who have committed no crime, have been split up from partners and families and placed in jails with some of the worst conditions and highest security levels in the country. The Home Office says the jailing of the asylum seekers is intended to help immigration officials remove failed applicants. However, asylum support groups claim many of those being held are awaiting an initial decision on their claims or are appealing against refusal. (The Independent, 22 January 2001)

* **Prisons**

containing 'illegal immigrants' and asylum seekers whose applications to live in the UK have been rejected will be monitored closely for overcrowding, the Prison Officers Association said. (Press Association (UK), January 23, 2001)

Living Conditions

* **A new report by the UK charity Shelter, Far from Home, outlines how safety is being put at risk as landlords exploit asylum seekers' need for housing.** Its research explodes the myth that asylum seekers are placed in the best housing at the expense of other families. Shelter discovered dampness, overcrowding, poor sanitation, unhygienic cooking facilities and inadequate fire escapes in 154 homes housing 309 people, including 48 children. Chris Holmes, Shelter director, said: 'we have found that the grim reality is many asylum seekers are living in absolute squalor that puts their health and safety at risk. The chaotic system of housing provision is allowing some private landlords to exploit the misery of asylum seekers.' (The Evening Standard (UK), January 31, 2001)

* **More than 500 orphaned child refugees are seeking asylum in Dublin, Ireland. The 505 refugees are mostly are under 15 and not legally able to represent themselves. They are housed in dingy hostels,**

many without cooking facilities, and live on the supplementary welfare allowance of around pounds 75 per week. (The Mirror (UK), January 26, 2001)

* **Scotland, UK is expected to receive up to 15,000 asylum seekers and their families by the end of the year, fuelling concerns over the ability of health and social services to cope.** (The Scotsman, January 29, 2001)

Myths

* **The majority of recent "boat people" arriving in Australia have been incorrectly branded "illegal" by the government according to human rights agencies.** They say the Immigration Minister's choice of language is perpetuating a false image of many of those coming by boat and does not represent their legal rights. According to one advocate: "They are unauthorised arrivals, not criminals, under international law and if they are fleeing persecution are entitled to come here and seek protection. Labelling obviously does not acknowledge that fact." (The Age (Australia), January 28, 2001)

* **Immigrants to the UK earn more money on average than British-born residents and pay into the economy an estimated £2.6bn more than they take out.** A Home Office report on the economic effects of immi-

gration found that immigrant workers help to keep down inflation and increase levels of productivity. It found no evidence to support fears that they damage the employment prospects of British-born residents. (The Independent, 23 January 2001)

Numbers

* **Despite the presence of a 20,000-strong international military mission, the UN Mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina shows the Sarajevo route was taken last year by more than 10 per cent of the 500,000 'illegal migrants' who reached the West.** Despite the funding by the international community of a new State Border Service, officials claim corruption is hampering international efforts to secure Bosnia's borders and close the route through Croatia into Europe. (The Observer (UK), January 28, 2001)

* **Despite continuing European fears about being swamped by foreigners, the number of asylum seekers dropped slightly last year because of a fall in applications from Kosovo Albanians,** according to figures released by the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees. Provisional data provided by governments to UNHCR showed that 452,000 asylum applications were lodged in 25 European countries – 4 percent lower than the 471,000 figure recorded in 1999. In the 15-nation

European Union, the number of applications rose slightly by 0.5 percent to 390,000 from 387,000. The U.N. refugee agency said Britain became the main destination for asylum seekers, knocking Germany from the top spot it has occupied since 1983. UNHCR has criticized the EU for building a "Fortress Europe", saying it keeps out those with a genuine fear of persecution and pushes asylum seekers into the arms of traffickers. Nearly 35,000 Iraqis fleeing hardship and repression under Saddam Hussein applied for asylum in Europe, up 12 percent on 1999. Afghans were the third largest group, with 28,790 applicants, a 22 percent rise. The number of Iranians seeking refuge in Europe more than doubled to 27,000 with the largest increases coming in the second half of the year. Britain became the top European destination for would-be refugees, with an estimated 97,900 applications, or 22 percent of the total. The British government said it received 76,040 individual applications but UNHCR arrived at the higher total because some people arrive with their families. The country still lagged in tenth position in terms of the number of asylum seekers compared to the rest of the population. (The Associated Press, January 26, 2001)

* **A huge increase in the numbers of Iraqis and Iranians seeking refuge in the United Kingdom caused last year's surge in**

asylum applications. Iraqis topped the list with a rise of almost 300 per cent to 7,080 compared with figures for 1999. The number of Iranians also rose by almost 300 per cent to 5,170, putting them in fifth place. Three other countries in which there is unrest are in the top five: Sri Lanka, the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Afghanistan. The number of Sri Lankans rose by 18 per cent to 6,040 and Afghans by 32 per cent to 4,170. Asylum-seekers from the former Republic of Yugoslavia were 3,670 and China 2,650. The figures show that a total of 110,065 asylum decisions were taken in 2000, more than three times the 33,720 decisions in 1999. 23 per cent were granted asylum, exceptional leave to remain or had an appeal against refusal upheld. 4,870 asylum-seekers were removed from the UK between March and September. In an attempt to increase the number of removals, 500 places for failed asylum seekers have been made available at eight jails. The places are being provided while the 900 places in immigration detention centres is tripled by the building of new accommodation at Aldington in Kent, Thurlough in Bedfordshire and at Heathrow airport. (The Times (UK), January 26, 2001)

* **Applications for asylum reached a record level last year but refugee support groups claimed yesterday that thousands of**

applicants had been turned down on spurious grounds by the Home Office. The Immigration minister, Barbara Roche, released figures showing that 76,040 applications were made in 2000, an annual rise of nearly 7 per cent. Only 10 per cent of applicants were granted refugee status, with 12 per cent allowed exceptional leave to remain in Britain and 78 per cent refused. The Refugee Council said that large numbers of asylum seekers were being turned down simply because they had filled out a 19-page form incorrectly. The council said such "non-compliance" rejections had increased by more than 2,000 per cent last year, with 26,630 people being turned down for that reason, compared with only 1,085 in 1999. (The Independent (UK), January 26, 2001)

Protests

* **Two riots involving more than 400 detainees are a forewarning of graver troubles in Australian detention centres if the government kept victimising traumatised 'boatpeople,' refugee advocates have warned.** (The Australian Associated Press, February 2, 2001)

* **Three hundred detainees at the Curtin detention facility outside Derby in northern Western Australia rioted.** Saturday's incident follows a violent riot of 120 at the Port Hedland

detention facility in which riot police subdued the detainees with capsicum spray. The Refugee Council of Australia said the government's hard line on detainees would make worse the already-powder keg situation inside detention centres. Council executive director said: "It's the first principle of psychology - the harsher it is the worse people will behave." (The Australian Associated Press, January 31, 2001)

800 foreigners entered the 11th day of a hunger strike to press the Spanish government for work and residence permits. Scattered among eight churches in Barcelona, Spain's second largest city, most are men in their 20s and 30s from Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe. A tough new immigration law that came into force last week leaves them vulnerable to immediate expulsion. (The Associated Press, January 30, 2001)

* **Conditions at the Maribyrong detention centre in Australia sparked a public protest last week when seven people occupied the roof to demand an inquiry into the death last month of Tongan detainee Viliami Tanginoa, 53, who died after falling - or jumping - from a basketball pole, and a suicide attempt by 17-year-old Ali Kadem, who slit his throat.** The demand was supported by Victoria's Trades Hall Council, which also wants an end to mandatory detention of unauthorised arrivals. (The

Age (Australia), January 28, 2001)

Racism and Xenophobia

* **It emerged that asylum seekers are living in terror of being stoned as they leave their homes on Glasgow's housing estates. Some of those who have fled to Britain to escape persecution are being regularly attacked in the very places where they have been offered sanctuary.** Youths are hurling stones and bottles, and spitting on them, making them too frightened to leave their homes. (The Scotsman, January 30, 2001)

* **The United Nations commissioner for human rights, Mary Robinson, singling out Europe, said: "more can and should be done" to combat racism.** She noted the rise in support for far-right parties, the overall increase in intolerance towards foreigners and the emergence of racist attitudes. Robinson also criticised Europe's political leaders for turning their backs on immigrants at a time when birth rates were falling and the continent needed more people "for the purpose of its economic vitality alone". (Agence France Presse, January 29, 2001)

* **The leaders of all parties represented in the Scottish parliament pledged not to stir up hostility towards asylum seekers.** The party leaders put their signatures to a statement agreeing they were

proud of Scotland's tradition of welcoming and supporting refugees. (The Scotsman, January 26, 2001)

* **Britain's chief police officers said they were concerned at levels of racial tension in areas where asylum seekers have been housed under a government dispersal program.** Their concerns coincided with a decision by Bradford City Council to start eviction proceedings against a group of council estate residents who had subjected asylum seekers to a hate campaign, forcing them to flee their homes. (The Independent, 23 January 2001)

* **Police across Britain are to challenge the "ill-informed, adverse media coverage" of asylum seekers, which they say has contributed to a rise in racial tension and increased risk of public disorder.** "Racist expressions towards asylum seekers appear to have become common currency and acceptable in a way which would never be tolerated towards any other minority," says a report by the Association of Chief Police Officers. (Guardian, January 23, 2001)

* **Police have charged four men with the attempted murder of a Turkish immigrant who was beaten and left in a coma on Christmas Eve.** Doctors say Cumali Sinankili has sustained permanent brain damage. He was confronted by a group of men in Bermondsey, punched, and kicked until he became unconscious. Sinankili arrived in Britain eight years

ago saying he had been persecuted in his homeland for his political beliefs. They named the four men as Rocky Djelal, 20, Barry Coombes, 19, John O'Mahoney, 22, and Peter McDonnagh, 23. All are charged with attempted murder and violent disorder. (The Associated Press, January 25, 2001)

Restrictive Measures

* **A 30-year-old Chinese man was sentenced by a Japanese court to 20 months in prison Friday for trying to smuggle 40 Chinese stowaways into Japan in a fishing boat.** (Agence France Presse, February 2, 2001)

* **United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan has criticised the attitude of European governments to would-be immigrants and asylum seekers. He said some countries had reached the point where they are in violation of the UN convention on refugees.** He specifically accused some countries of forcing airline employees to play the role of immigration officials by screening those boarding their planes. He also criticised the expulsion of asylum seekers without proper examination of their claims, and the long bureaucratic delays which left them unable to work to support themselves for months or even years. (British Broadcasting Corporation, January 31, 2001)

* **A boat carrying more than 50 Middle Eastern people has been spotted off the Australian coast.** It is thought to be carrying at least 53 people. Coastwatch had detected and intercepted four boats containing 345 unauthorised arrivals this month. (The Australian Associated Press, January 31, 2001)

* **Australia had achieved some success in deterring potential boat people from Indonesia, a parliamentary committee heard.** Many vessels had been stopped from leaving Indonesia, the committee was told. (The Australian Associated Press, January 30, 2001)

* **22 would-be 'illegal immigrants' were arrested at the Normandy port seen by increasing numbers of refugees as the new 'golden gateway' to Britain.** The men - 17 Kosovars, 4 Turks and an Albanian - were caught trying to scale the perimeter fence of the ferry terminal at Ouistreham. Their arrests bring to 66 the number of asylum seekers caught at the port so far this year, compared with only six in January 2000, and 105 for the whole of last year. (Daily Mail (UK), January 26, 2001)

* **A "frontier force" should be set up by the Government to guard the borders of the UK against 'illegal immigration,' a House of Commons committee reported.** The committee called for border control staff

to be given access to new technology for detecting clandestine arrivals. It recommended the use of X-ray scanners, ultrasound heartbeat scanners and infrared cameras, heat-sensitive devices, and the carbon dioxide-detecting wands. (The Independent (UK), February 1, 2001)

* **Meeting in Brussels, EU foreign ministers agreed that urgent priority should be given to combating human trafficking, most of which appears to be coordinated from the Balkans.** The International Organisation for Migration estimates that in the first 10 months of last year, over 50,000 'illegal migrants' have passed through Bosnia on their way to the West, with a further 40,000 Chinese nationals in Yugoslavia awaiting transportation into EU countries. With the support of the foreign ministers, the UK is now developing a set of proposed measures to tackle the problem. They include setting up a network of EU police and immigration officials in the region by the middle of this year, aimed to share information and to co-ordinate a rapid response to 'illegal migration.' The UK also wants to see informal arrangements between national police and immigration officials on the EU's eastern borders, as well as in Balkan countries. Other British proposals concern the adoption of tough penalties for traffickers and transport

carriers found to harbour 'illegal migrants,' as well as more assistance for local authorities to ensure the return of 'illegal immigrants.' (British Broadcasting Corporation, January 24, 2001)

Risky Flight

* **Two of four stowaways who slipped into Vancouver Harbour in Canada on a bulk carrier are in the custody of federal immigration officials.** The pair had jumped into the frigid waters off Jericho Beach and attempted to swim one kilometre to shore. The men were taken to Vancouver General Hospital after suffering from severe hypothermia. (The Canadian Press, January 29, 2001)

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