

Mostafaei feared arrest in Tehran

Iran stoning lawyer seeks asylum in Norway

OSLO, Norway, Aug 9, (AP): The lawyer defending a woman sentenced to death by stoning in Iran said he has applied for asylum in Norway, but hopes Iranian authorities will allow him eventually to return to his practice. Mohammad Mostafaei told reporters Sunday he chose to flee to Norway after obtaining a one-year Norwegian travel visa. He also cited the Nordic country's prominent human rights profile.

The 31-year-old said he fled to Turkey last week after learning Iranian officials intended to arrest him. He flew to Norway Saturday after being detained briefly in Turkey over an undisclosed passport issue.

Mostafaei maintained a blog that sparked a worldwide campaign to free his client, Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani, who was convicted of adultery. In July, Iranian authorities said they would not carry out the stoning sentence for the time being, but the mother of two could still face execution by hanging for her conviction of adultery and other offenses.

While Mostafaei is applying for asylum, it's unclear whether he will stay in Norway. He said he hopes international pressure will force Tehran to let him return to his practice.

"My greatest hope is that I can go back and continue my work in Iran. If the Iranian authorities will ensure my rights and safety, I'll go back," Mostafaei said through an interpreter. "Right now, I've lost the ability to work on the behalf of my clients. That means I've lost everything. Without that, it doesn't matter whether I'm in heaven or hell."

Late last month, Mostafaei — an outspo-

ken lawyer who also has defended many juvenile offenders and political prisoners — was summoned for questioning by judicial officials at Tehran's Evin prison, released after several hours, then asked to return, which he failed to do. The same day, his wife, Fereshteh Halimi, and her brother, Farhad Halimi, were detained in a possible attempt to pressure Mostafaei to surrender if he wasn't already detained.

The lawyer said he considered turning himself in, but ultimately decided against it because "my wife would never forgive me."

Mostafaei said a friend drove him last week from Tehran to Khoy, in northwestern Iran, about 20 miles (32 kilometers) from the Turkish border. From there he made his way, by foot and on horseback, into Turkey, he said.

Authorities released his wife Saturday afternoon, Mostafaei said. He said he hoped she and their 7-year-old daughter would join him in Norway soon. He acknowledged, however, that "might take some time because the government may try to prevent their departure."

He said once his wife arrives, they will decide together if and for how long they plan to stay in Norway.

He told the press conference Sunday that he did not think his departure would have a negative impact on Mohammadi-Ashtiani's case, since other lawyers were prepared to pick up where he had left off.

And "this will highlight Sakineh Mohammadi-Ashtiani case even more," he

Lawyers begin proceedings to seek appeal

Iran slaps 20-year jail terms on 7 Bahai

PARIS, Aug 9, (AFP): Iran has sentenced seven leading members of its Bahai religious minority to 20-year jail terms, a spokeswoman for the French members of the faith told AFP on Monday.

The United States and the European Union had criticised Iran's detention of the Bahai members, and their reported jailing will revive calls for Tehran's Islamic regime to respect religious freedom.

"On Sunday, authorities orally announced 20-year sentences to the defendants' lawyers," said Sophie Menard, spokeswoman for the Bahai community in France, adding that the group was awaiting confirmation of the terms.

"The lawyers have begun proceedings to seek an appeal, which ought to allow

them access to the written judgements," she explained.

Iran arrested seven Bahai leaders in May 2008 and this year put them on trial on charges of "spying for foreigners" and of cooperating with Israel.

Followers of the Bahai faith, which was founded in Iran in 1863, are regarded in the Islamic republic as infidels and suffered persecution both before and after the 1979 Islamic revolution.

The Bahais consider Bahaullah, born in 1817, to be the latest prophet sent by God and believe in the spiritual unity of all religions and all mankind.

The group now has seven million followers, including 300,000 in Iran — where its members are barred from high-

er education and government posts — and has a large temple in Haifa, in northern Israel, a location that has increased Tehran's suspicions about the group.

"For Muslims, there can't be another prophet or divine messenger after Mohammed," explained Bahai follower Foad Saberian.

"So they consider Bahaullah an imposter and his followers heretics, whereas the Bahai faith has nothing to do with Islam and is an independent religion."

"And if the headquarters of the religion is in Haifa, it's because that's where Bahaullah ended up settling in 1868 after he was exiled to Baghdad then to Constantinople, long before the creation of the state of Israel."

said, adding that he did not think Tehran would dare to allow her stoning sentence to be carried out or to harm her physically in other ways.

"I do not think she will be hurt ... The Iranian authorities have already paid a huge price for the case (and) the international reputation of Iran has already been negatively

affected because of the way it has been handled," he said.

Mostafaei fled Iran on July 29, first by car, then on foot and finally riding over a mountain pass on horseback across the Iranian border to Turkey.

"The most difficult part was that I've never sat on a horse in my whole life," he confided.

"I had to do that for five hours across the mountains where it was cold and snowy ... At the border I had to run across, with police posts on both sides ... and ran the fastest I've ever done," he said.

Mostafaei said he had not been planning to travel on to Norway when he left Iran, and had simply been trying to get away from the

authorities.

His wife Fereshteh Halimi had already been arrested and taken to the infamous Evin prison in Tehran, where she was held in isolation for 14 days, he said.

"The only reason she was arrested was that the authorities wanted me to turn myself in," he said, adding that he had been sick with worry, but had decided it was best to leave.

Mostafaei, who learned Saturday that his wife had been released, was arrested when he arrived in Turkey due to an alleged passport problem and held in custody for six days.

But a human rights group had put pressure on the Turkish government to release him and the Norwegian embassy in Ankara helped buy him a ticket to Oslo.

The lawyer said he was glad to be in the Norway and that he hoped his wife and seven-year-old daughter could soon join him.

Norway has long criticised Iranian death sentences and last month summoned the Iranian ambassador in Oslo to protest Mohammadi-Ashtiani's stoning sentence.

Norwegian Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre said Sunday in a statement he was "very pleased that human rights lawyer Mohammad Mostafaei is now safe in Norway."

The foreign minister lamented that "the pressure on courageous defence lawyers such as Mostafaei is so great that they are compelled to flee," calling on Iran to respect human rights and fulfill its international obligations.

Israeli PM defends raid on Gaza flotilla as lawful

Turkey looked for a fight on ship: Netanyahu

JERUSALEM, Aug 9, (Agencies): Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu insisted Israel acted in line with international law in a raid on Gaza-bound aid ships which killed nine Turks, in testimony Monday before an Israeli panel.

Netanyahu also accused Ankara of looking to gain from a high-profile confrontation between Turkish activists aboard the lead ship and the soldiers who seized the vessels in internation-

al waters.

"I am convinced that at the end of your investigation, it will become clear that the state of Israel and the IDF (Israeli Defence Forces) acted in accordance with international law," Netanyahu told members of the Tirkel Commission. Netanyahu looked at ease as he entered the room, smiling at the hordes of journalists and a few members of the public waiting to hear his sworn testimony.

Sitting in a chair facing the five-member panel and the two international observers, Netanyahu opened his testimony with an explanation of Israel's policy towards Hamas, and of the rationale behind the naval blockade.

He insisted the naval blockade was crucial to Israel's security as it stops vessels from delivering weapons for Hamas, the Islamist movement which rules Gaza and is sworn to the destruction of the Jewish state. Netanyahu said Israel exerted every diplomatic effort to have the ships turn back or dock elsewhere.

But Turkey made no effort to prevent the six-ship flotilla from breaking the blockade, which was organised by the "radical Turkish organisation IHH (Foundation of Humanitarian Relief) which supports Hamas," he said.

"The Turkish government did not consider the confrontation between Turkish activists and Israel to be against its interests," he charged.

Even so, Netanyahu insisted he had ordered troops to make "a supreme effort... to avoid harming anyone."

Netanyahu defended the deadly commando raid suggesting that Turkey had sought the violent confrontation on the high seas.

Netanyahu told the commission that Ankara had rejected Israel's prior appeals to halt the flotilla and refused to intervene despite the prospect of violence between Israeli troops and the Turkish Islamic charity that organized the mission.

"As we got closer to the date it became clear our diplomatic efforts would not stop it," Netanyahu said. "Apparently the government of Turkey did not see potential friction between Turkish activists and Israel as something that goes against its interests."

The six-ship flotilla was trying to deliver aid to Gaza when it was intercepted by Israeli naval commandos enforcing the Israeli-Egyptian blockade of the seaside strip. When troops encountered unexpected resistance on one of the vessels, the Mavi Marmara, they opened fire and killed nine Turkish activists, one of them a dual American citizen.

The bloody crackdown sparked wide international outcry and pressured Israel to loosen the blockade of Gaza, imposed with Egypt after Hamas militants seized control of the coastal territory in June 2007.

Meanwhile, Turkish President Abdullah Gul has approved the nominations of the new top army chiefs, putting an end to the latest power struggle between the government and the military, a news report said Monday.

Gul late Sunday signed off on General Isik Kosaner, the current commander of land forces, as the new army chief of staff replacing general Ilker Basbug who is retiring, the Anatolia news agency said.



Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu sits before testifying in front of a state-appointed inquiry commission into the Israeli naval raid on a Gaza aid flotilla, in Jerusalem, Aug 9. Netanyahu testified Monday before his country's inquiry commission into the bloodshed aboard a Turkish ship that tried to break the Gaza blockade in May 2010, defending Israel's actions and suggesting Turkey had been seeking a confrontation. (AP)

Turkey approves new army chiefs

Five Kurdish rebels killed

DIYARBAKIR, Turkey, Aug 9, (AFP): Turkish armed forces killed five Kurdish rebels in clashes in Turkey's southeast Batman province that also left two soldiers wounded, the provincial government said Monday.

The clashes between the army and members of the separatist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) took place late Sunday near the town of Besiri in a rural area of Batman province, the local government's statement said.

Among the rebels killed was a woman, it added. Earlier on Sunday, a roadside bomb, planted by PKK rebels, killed three Turkish soldiers in the province of Mardin, which borders Batman.

Police in Diyarbakir, the main city in Turkey's Kurdish majority southeast, also last week seized some 90 kilogrammes (198 pounds) of plastic explosives from the Kurdish rebels, local governor Mustafa Toprak announced Monday.

Toprak claimed the PKK wanted to commit "spectacular" attacks with the explosives which he

said were capable of destroying a 10-storey building.

The PKK, listed as a terrorist group by Turkey and much of the international community, took up arms for self-rule in the Kurdish-majority southeast in 1984, sparking a conflict that has claimed around 45,000 lives.

The rebels have significantly stepped up attacks since their jailed leader Abdullah Ocalan declared in May that he was abandoning efforts to seek dialogue with Ankara and the PKK ended a unilateral ceasefire in June.

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Austrian tycoon brokers deal

Israeli jailed by Libya returns home

JERUSALEM, Aug 9, (AP): An Israeli photographer jailed by Libya for five months returned home Monday after an Austrian tycoon brokered a deal for his freedom that involved the delivery of 20 prefabricated homes from a Libyan charity to the Gaza Strip.

Rafael Rafram Chaddad, an Israeli-Tunisian dual national, disappeared in March in Libya, where he was photographing Jewish heritage sites on behalf of an organization that documents the his-

tory of Libya's vanished Jewish community.

His last communication was an email he sent saying he was heading to the Jewish Quarter in the Libyan capital, Tripoli, to photograph a synagogue, according to Pedazur Benattia, whose Or Shalom organization sponsored the photographer's trip. Chaddad was supposed to board a flight to Tunisia the next day but never made it, Benattia said.

Chaddad's whereabouts were kept secret

until late Sunday, when Israel's military censor freed a gag order and announced he had been lifted from a Libyan jail and had landed in Vienna. The gag was imposed because of fears that publicity could endanger Chaddad and prospects for his release.

A crowd of reporters and family members were waiting for him at Israel's international airport outside Tel Aviv when he landed Monday afternoon accompanied by Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, who helped engineer his release.

Court verdict criticised

Ahmadinejad under fire

TEHRAN, Aug 9, (AFP): Iran's judiciary chief Ayatollah Sadeq Larijani has hit out at President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad for criticising a court verdict against the former head of state news agency IRNA, media reports said Monday.

Ahmadinejad used a meeting on Sunday with prayer leaders to denounce as "strange" a court's decision to hand Mohammad Jafar Behdad, who is also the deputy chief of the presidency office, a suspended seven-month jail sentence.

"Such remarks from the president of the country in an official meeting is not justifiable... it is not right," Iran's Shargh newspaper quoted the justice chief as saying.

The outburst was the latest example of souring ties between Ahmadinejad and the powerful conservative camp behind him.

Behdad received the suspended jail term from a judge for writing an article against Ali Larijani, who is the parliament speaker and the judiciary chief's brother.

His article criticised the speaker for congratulating opposition leader Mir Hossein Mousavi on "winning" last year's presidential election before Ahmadinejad was declared the official victor.



Our branches' working hours during the Holy Month of Ramadan

Branch	Sunday - Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Airport 1*	H / 24	H / 24	H / 24
Airport 2*	H / 24	H / 24	H / 24
Hawally	9:30 am - 3:00 pm 8 pm - 11:30 pm	8 pm - 11:30 pm	9:30 am - 3:00 pm 8 pm - 11:30 pm
Salmyia	9:30 am - 2:00 pm 8 pm - 11:00 pm	OFF	9:30 am - 2:00 pm 8 pm - 11:00 pm
Shuwaikh	9:30 am - 3:00 pm	OFF	OFF
Sabahiya	9:30 am - 3:00 pm	OFF	OFF
Mishref	9:30 am - 2:00 pm 8 pm - 11:00 pm	OFF	9:30 am - 2:00 pm 8 pm - 11:00 pm
Qurain	9:00 am - 3:00 pm 8 pm - 1:00 am	8:00 pm - 1:00 am	9:00 am - 3:00 pm 8 pm - 1:00 am
Jahra	9:30 am - 2:00 pm 8 pm - 11:00 pm	OFF	OFF
Stock Exchange	9:00 am - 2:00 pm	OFF	OFF
Ministry	9:00 am - 2:00 pm	OFF	OFF
Avenues 1	10:30 am - 3:00 pm 8 pm - 11:30 pm	8 pm - 11:30 pm	10:30 am - 3:00 pm 8 pm - 11:30 pm
Avenues 2	10:30 am - 3:00 pm 8 pm - 11:30 pm	8 pm - 11:30 pm	10:30 am - 3:00 pm 8 pm - 11:30 pm
Marina	10:30 am - 3:00 pm 8 pm - 11:30 pm	8 pm - 11:30 pm	10:30 am - 3:00 pm 8 pm - 11:30 pm
Muhallab	10:30 am - 3:00 pm 8 pm - 11:30 pm	8 pm - 11:30 pm	10:30 am - 3:00 pm 8 pm - 11:30 pm
Souk Sharq	11:00 am - 3:00 pm 8 pm - 1:00 am	8 pm - 1:00 am	11:00 am - 3:00 pm 8 pm - 1:00 am
Al-Manshar	10:30 am - 4:00 pm 8 pm - 1:00 am	8 pm - 1:00 am	10:30 am - 4:00 pm 8 pm - 1:00 am
Al-Bayraq	11:00 am - 3:00 pm 8 pm - 1:00 am	8 pm - 1:00 am	11:00 am - 3:00 pm 8 pm - 1:00 am
360°	11:00 am - 3:00 pm 8 pm - 1:00 am	8 pm - 1:00 am	11:00 am - 3:00 pm 8 pm - 1:00 am

* The airport branches will be closed from 6:15 pm to 7:45 pm through the first half of the month of Ramadan, and from 5:45 pm to 7:15 pm through the second half of the month.