

Britain: Second Iranian asylum seeker risks death in protest

Harvey Thompson
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An Iranian asylum seeker has sewn up his eyes, ears and mouth to protest being deported by the British Home Office back to Iran, where he believes he will face almost certain death.

Shahin Portofeh, 23, has been living in the Hillfields area of Coventry for the past year. He has been without food or drink for three days. Dr Mohammed Ansari, who examined him said; “He is dehydrated and needs some fluid and food but there is nothing I can do. I have to get the police or some escort to take him to hospital.”

Portofeh has also refused medical treatment.

The young Iranian embarked on his protest when he was told his application for asylum had been turned down and his appeals had failed. He used four stitches to close his mouth, two to shut each eye and one stitch across each ear.

A friend and interpreter of Portofeh’s who declined to be named told Reuters, “I’m standing next to him right now and he is in a lot of pain.”

The interpreter said Portofeh was lying on his bed unable to eat or drink after starting his protest on July 7 in a house he shares with other Iranians. “He says he will do this until he dies,” she said.

Another friend, Massoud Abdalian, said Portofeh “would rather die than have to go back to Iran... He has told me that, if he returns, he will face arrest and possibly execution. He fled Iran to escape from religious and political persecution... It is a desperate situation. It is a protest against the regime in Iran and the harsh regulations of the Home Office.”

Portofeh has written a letter in his native language of Farsi detailing the reasons behind his desperate protest. He says that as a known human rights campaigner it would be very dangerous for him to return to Iran, as it is likely he would be executed. One passage of the

letter reads:

“I am not a lunatic. My protest is not just a matter of staying in England, it is a matter of staying alive. It would still be better to stay here and die than to go back to my country. When I came here I felt like I had been born again but the decision of the Home Office has caused me to do this. It might seem harsh and brutal but I am doing it for everybody fleeing from Iran.”

Commenting on Portofeh’s protest, a Home Office spokesman said, “Such actions would have no bearing on the outcome of the case, which would be decided on its merits.”

In May, Abas Amini, a 33-year-old Iranian Kurd living in Nottingham, made a similar protest. Amini, a communist poet, was subsequently granted asylum in Britain but not before almost starving to death and suffering an infection of the eye. The fact that the latest protest so closely mirrored that of Amini has alarmed many of those working with refugees. The London-based director of the International Federation of Iranian Refugees (IFIR), Reza Moradi, said his organisation did not support such forms of protest. He said the IFIR planned a series of speeches around the country aimed at asylum seekers, urging them not to embark on copycat protests.

Moradi said Portofeh had called him last week after learning his asylum application had been turned down and indicated he would imitate the actions of Amini. “I told him ‘don’t do it.’ I spoke to him for more than an hour. He believes that this is the only way,” said Moradi.

The fact that people already fleeing for their lives have to court severe injury and even death in order to receive the right to asylum indicates just how far basic democratic rights have been eroded in Britain.



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