

Austin Bahais haunted by executions of family, friends in Iran

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Hovieh Hezari let her husband do most of the talking about last month's executions in Iran of her brother, sister-in-law and 14 other members of the Bahai religious faith.

Hezari, 49, held her arms crossed and looked straight ahead Saturday at the Austin Bahai religious center. Three or four times she shook her head, let out a sigh, or dabbed her eyes.

The Hezaris of 1500 E. Riverside Drive were reflecting on the deaths of their family members and 200 other Bahais executed

in Iran since the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini took control in 1979.

The Hezaris met Saturday with 33 Austin Bahais to pray about the current Islamic holy month, Ramadan, when fanaticism reaches a peak in Iran and heretics are killed.

THE AUSTIN BAHAIS are worried about the futures of all the Iranian Bahais, whom Khomeini considers a threat, said George Miller, chairman of the Austin Bahai group. There are 400,000 Iranian members of the faith, which preaches world peace and acceptance of all religions.



Staff Photo by Zach Ryall
Manouchehr Hezari, left, and his wife, Hovieh, are worried about Iranian Bahais.

Manouchehr Hezari, 61, said his wife's 39-year-old brother was hanged with five other Bahais June 16 because of their religious beliefs, and the man's 32-year-old wife and nine other women were executed two days later.

"We kind of expected this to happen," he said. The Iranian couple had endured nine months of imprisonment before their deaths.

Hezari said the pattern of prison, torture and murder has become commonplace among Iranian Bahais, who are not permitted to leave the country.

"THESE DAYS, the lesser the news we get from home in Iran, the happier we are," said Navid Nadimi, 27, of 102B Cloud View Drive, nephew of the Hezaris and the slain brother. "The news is so bad."

"Every day they have invented a new kind of torture," Hezari said.

After the interview, another Austin Bahai, Ed Kelley, approached the chairman with information received in a Saturday telephone call. Two more Iranian Bahais have been killed, and 5 families and 20 others have been arrested, he said.

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