

Lawyers protest at Iran arrests

From Liz Thurgood
in Tehran

A group of prominent Iranian lawyers has accused the government of grave legal improprieties and warned that they will seek help at an international level if the cases of 29 young men held for political offences are not sent to court soon.

The letter, which appeared in the local press yesterday, follows a series of conflicting reports on Iranian prisons and the treatment of prisoners.

The letter followed an attack by militant Moslems on several hundred demonstrators who staged a sit-in outside the Ministry of Justice for the past week to protest against the arrest of a young Moslem guerrilla, Mohammad Reza Sa'adati.

Two demonstrators were wounded by stray bullets and another two stabbed before Islamic militiamen fired shots into the air to disperse the crowd. None of the wounded required hospital treatment.

According to the letter from the Iranian Association of Jurists, whose ranks included some of the bravest opponents of the Shah's regime, Mr Sa'adati is one of 29 political prisoners who have not been formally charged, given the right of defence, or been allowed visits by lawyers and relatives. Mr Sa'adati, a member of the Mojahaddeen-e-Khalq guerrillas, was arrested on April 26 on suspicion of spying for the Soviet Union.

Reminding Iran's new Minister of Justice, Dr Ammad Sadr Haj Sayyed Javadi, of his own struggle against the Shah, the IAJ accused the Government of repeating "bitter experiences" and "violations" of the past. "The voices of these men will reach the world and those responsible for the defence of human rights will take up their cases," concludes the letter.

Not only is the letter potentially embarrassing to a government that claims to be "revolutionary" and has promised to safeguard human rights, but it coincides with allegations that the regime is using torture to extract information from its prisoners.

Two Kurds earlier this week called a press conference to allege being "threatened with death, blindfolded, whipped, kicked, and fastened with chains to a radiator" inside Qasr, Iran's largest prison. Abdollah Dabestan and Abbasin Rouhollah said they were arrested after being found in possession of Kurdish literature.

The letter members of the Mojahaddeen guerrillas complained to Iran's Human Rights Commission, which before the Shah's removal in January was made up of almost every Cabinet member—that their colleague, Mr Sa'adati, had been tortured. Ayatollah Khamenei, head of Tehran's central Imam committee denied such an accusation.

The Sa'adati affair, as it is now known has been complicated by a recent Mojahaddeen statement alleging that a North American was involved in the guerrilla's arrest. The Mojahaddeen have said that Mr Sa'adati was trying to gather information from the Russians on CIA activities in Iran when he was arrested in the company of Mr Vladimir Fensinko, first secretary at the Soviet Embassy. The US embassy has strongly denied any role in the whole business.

During the past week, 21 lawyers have volunteered to defend Mr Sa'adati should his case ever come to court, and Ayatollah Taleghani, who created an uproar in April by dropping out of sight as a protest against the leadership in Qom, has emerged from months of silence to throw his political weight behind the Mojahaddeen cause.

In a statement, the Ayatollah warned the young guerrillas that "the enemy is bent on destroying you."

UPI adds: Unidentified gunmen kidnapped the examining officer of a revolutionary court in the southern city of Najafabad yesterday amid a protest against lenient sentences passed on two alleged killers. Press reports said the kidnapped official, identified only as a Mr. Khebreh, was pulled out of his house in Najafabad, pushed into a car and driven away by the gunmen.

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