

120 Rally in London Against Deportation of Gay Iranian

Some 120 protesters picketed Prime Minister Gordon Brown's residence March 22 in London demanding that Mehdi Kazemi not be deported to Iran, where he fears he'll be executed for being gay.

"There needs to be a fundamental reform of the way the Home Office processes LGBTI asylum applications," said protest co-organizer Peter Tatchell. "The government refuses to explicitly rule that homophobic and transphobic persecution are legitimate grounds for granting asylum. This signals to asylum staff and judges that claims by LGBTI people are not as worthy."

Kazemi went to London to study in 2005, and Iran later charged his boyfriend, Parham, with sodomy and executed him, according to Kazemi's father.

Kazemi then sought asylum in Britain but was rejected. In 2006, he fled to the Netherlands, which detained him and is preparing to return him to the United Kingdom.

The United Kingdom had planned to fly Kazemi back to Iran as soon as he returned to Britain, but after media coverage and political pressure, the Home Office has agreed to review his case one more time before forcing him to go home.

"My father [said] the authorities had executed Parham and that I must not return to Iran, as the authorities would do the same to me," Kazemi said in a recent statement. "Parham was charged with [the] crime [of] being homosexual."

According to Kazemi's father, Parham named Mehdi as his lover prior to his execution.

Iran is known to have executed several teens and men accused of engaging in sodomy, although in nearly all the cases that have been publicized in recent years the individuals were accused of other crimes as well, such as rape.

The International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission has said it believes additional charges are tacked onto sodomy cases to prevent the public outrage that would accompany executions carried out solely for the crime of consensual adult gay sex.



Berlin Mayor Klaus Wowereit has been invited to Moscow Pride with other gay and allied mayors to lend solidarity to the contentious event.

sual adult gay sex. The group also has said that executions solely for gay sex likely are taking place out of the public eye.

According to Britain's Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association, "Deporting gay and lesbian people to Iran is akin to deporting Jews back to Nazi Germany."

Human Rights Watch asserts that it cannot fully document any executions

in Iran in recent years carried out solely for the crime of consensual adult gay sex, although it does acknowledge that men have been sentenced to death for "consensual homosexual conduct."

"It is not known whether [the sentences] were carried out," the group said March 28.

ASIA/PACIFIC Police Reportedly Close Beijing Gay Bathhouses

Beijing police raided and closed two gay bathhouses March 20 and 21, according to a report circulated on Asian gay mailing lists by AIDS activists in China and Malaysia.

The March 26 report said that the city's most popular gay bathhouse, Club Oasis, was raided March 20 and that 70 patrons and employees were taken into custody. It said that the patrons were released 30 hours later but that the staff remained jailed.

The report said that another Oasis bathhouse near Dongsishitiao Bridge was raided March 21 and that the staff, but not the customers, were taken into custody.

The report, which carried the byline of well-known Chinese AIDS activist Wan Yanhai, said a third bathhouse reportedly had met a similar fate at the same time but provided no details.

The report also included a list of other recent alleged police actions against gay men, including a bar raid and temporary closure, raids of cruisy parks and arrests of sex workers tracked down via their Web postings. 10

REX WOCKNER has reported for the gay press since 1985. He has a bachelor's degree in journalism from Drake University and started his career as a radio reporter.

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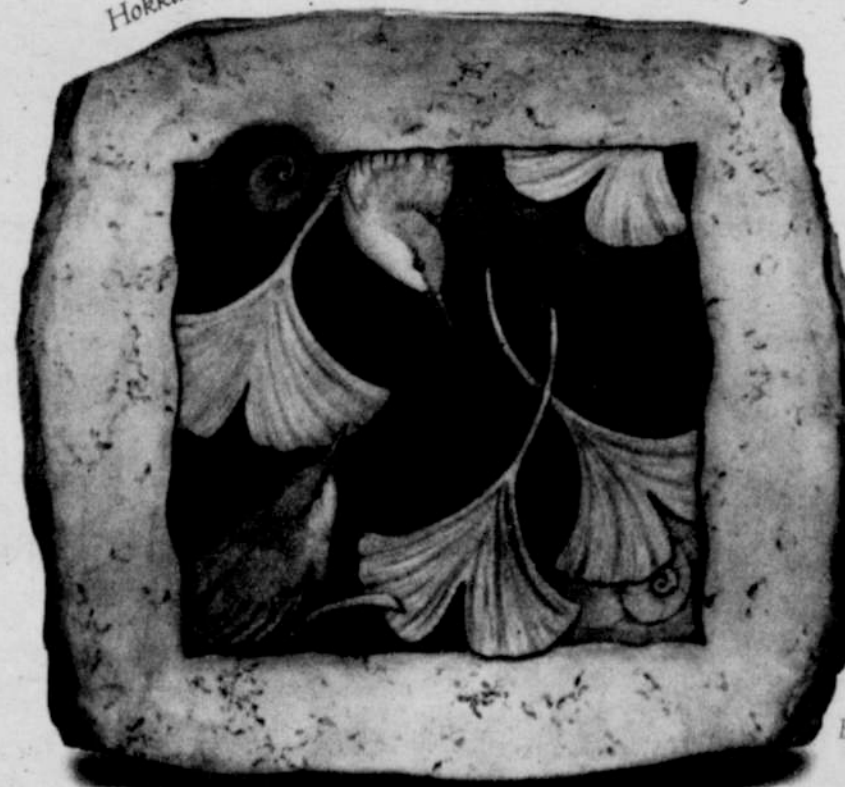
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