

Iran court confirms jail, lashes for film maker

Confirmation of Mohammad Nourizad's sentence comes as authorities prepare for the first anniversary, on June 12, of the disputed presidential election

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Tehran: An Iranian court has confirmed a sentence of three-and-a-half years in jail and 50 lashes for a journalist and film maker found guilty of anti-state propaganda and insulting the supreme leader, media reported.

Mohammad Nourizad was arrested late last year after he published on his blog letters deemed disrespectful to Iran's highest authority, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and other senior officials.

Opposition blogs say he has been beaten while in detention in Tehran's Evin jail where he has begun a hunger strike.

The confirmation of his sentence comes as authorities prepare for the first anniversary, on June 12, of the disputed presidential election which brought millions of people to the streets in protest amid concerns about vote rigging.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's government says the vote was fair and blamed foreign powers for stirring unrest.

In a sign the government is clamping down on dissent ahead of likely anniversary protests, two journalists working for moderate newspapers were arrested on Monday night and taken to Evin jail, Sharq newspaper reported.

No immediate reason was given for their detention.

Last week acclaimed film maker Jafar Panahi, a supporter of opposition leader Mir Hussain Mousavi was released from jail on bail after a week on hunger strike.

Panahi, whose case was raised by movie stars at the Cannes film festival, was held for 88 days. Authorities suspected him of planning to make an anti-government film but he has not yet been formally charged.

Thousands of opposition supporters were detained after last year's election. Most have since been freed but more than 80 people have been jailed for up to 15 years. Two people put on trial after the election have been executed.

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