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International Liberty Association Newsletter

Churchill House • 120 Bunns Lane • London NW7 2AS

W: www.iliberty.org.uk • **E:** info@iliberty.org.uk • **T:** 020 8452 3481

EDITORIAL

As 2022 gets into its stride, leaving dark Winter behind, we mark in this newsletter our two major milestones of Spring celebration, International Women's Day and Noruz, the Persian New Year, with its symbolism of purification, renewal and regeneration as the balance shifts to greater light from the Spring Equinox.

It is extremely potent in bringing the economic situation in Iran into sharp focus to hear that this year millions cannot afford any of the special foods, new clothes, or gifts for the children that make this period so special and joyous.

But still the celebrations of this ancient festival took place with love at its heart, in prisons and in homes all over Iran, seen as a very powerful protest against the control of the Mullahs, who yet again failed to ban it.

And we pay tribute to the courage of the ordinary people of Iran in continuing to take to the streets day after day to express their opposition to the regime's repressive actions and demand the release of prisoners, especially women, who are most oppressed and discriminated against.

Also to those who take great risks to get information about events in Iran out to the wider world.

We feel deeply for the suffering ... continued on p.2

ONLINE CONFERENCE CALLS FOR UN TO INVESTIGATE THE 1988 MASSACRE OF IRANIAN POLITICAL PRISONERS



A panel of renowned human rights defenders and organisations held a virtual conference on Monday, 28 February 2022, to raise concern over the critical situation of human rights in Iran. The conference took place in

tandem with the opening day of the 49th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, held in Geneva.

The participants, which included former UN judges, ... continued on p.2

BRITISH LAWMAKERS CALL ON UK GOVERNMENT TO HOLD IRAN'S REGIME ACCOUNTABLE



Celebrating Noruz, the new year on the Persian calendar, members of the United Kingdom Parliament and members of the Iranian community living in the UK held a gathering

at the British House of Commons. British lawmakers from both houses of Parliament addressed the event and after congratulating the people of Iran for the ... continued on p.3



Online conference calls on UN to investigate the 1988 massacre of Iranian political prisoners

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special rapporteurs, UN officials, and prominent jurists and human rights personalities, called on the UN to conduct an independent inquiry into the 1988 massacre of 30,000 political prisoners, a crime against humanity that has gone unpunished for more than three decades. Speakers also discussed the deteriorating human rights situation in Iran, manifested by the alarming rise in executions during the presidency of Ebrahim Raisi.

“The 1988 massacre was a premeditated crime,” **Tahar Boumedra**, the former Director of the Human Rights Office of the UN Assistance Mission in Iraq, told the conference. “That fatwa was a death penalty for all the opposition,” he said, referring to a fatwa issued by regime founder Ruhollah Khomeini, in which he called for the eradication of all supporters and members of the MEK.

Boumedra stressed that the International Criminal Court can and must address the 1988 massacre.

Professor Annalisa Ciampi, ad hoc Judge of the European Court of Human Rights and former UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association, called for investigation and accountability for the 1988 massacre and other crimes against humanity, including the brutal killing of protesters in 2019. “The UN



Professor Geoffrey Nice QC, lead prosecutor at the trial of Slobodan Milosevic in The Hague, speaking at the online conference

cannot shirk its responsibility,” Prof Ciampi said.

Sir Geoffrey Nice QC, Lead prosecutor at the trial of Slobodan Milošević in The Hague, said, “There are two certainties regarding the 1988 massacre: First, a crime against humanity has been committed. Second, the international community has not stepped up to its standards and due process of law.”

Lawyer **Hamid Sabi**, one of the organisers of the Iran Tribunal, said “43 years of impunity enjoyed by the regime must end. The 1988 massacre was a grave case of crime against humanity.”

Mr Sabi stressed that the world’s silence has allowed Iran’s regime to continue human rights violations and crimes to this day. He also underlined that enforced disappearances are a concern for the world. Families must

be informed, and it is their right to know, he said.

Professor Jeremy Sarkin, former Chair-Rapporteur of the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID), addressed the conference next and said: “The UN has been slow in dealing with the 1988 massacre of perhaps 30,000 political prisoners. HRC must change that. Justice must be done”.

Professor Eric David, renowned Professor of international criminal law also joined his colleagues in calling for holding the Iranian regime’s leaders accountable for their crimes against humanity. “The current human rights situation in Iran is a crime against humanity. The Iranian regime leaders must be held accountable for countless human rights abuses,” Prof. David stressed.

Editorial *continued from p.1*

of the people of Ukraine, their country suddenly devastated by Russian incursion. Our International Women’s Day coverage highlights the way the women are playing a pivotal role in Iran and in Ukraine, where they have shown their determination to take leadership roles in the resistance and stand and fight to defend their country. We wish them every success in returning Ukraine to peace.

At the same time the International community is continuing to stand with the Iranian people and we highlight two major events calling for regime accountability for its crimes against humanity, in 1988 and to the present. We are pleased to report tribute to David Amess MP and to welcome his successor, Anna Firth MP, vowing to do her best to continue his legacy in supporting the Iranian

people and holding the regime accountable.

There is still much to do, as many governments still do not prioritise human rights and continue to trade and deal with the mullahs in Iran, ignoring their flagrant violation of rights and fundamental freedoms.

With your support, we can and we must and we will, prevail and bring truth and justice to reign supreme in Iran and across the world.



British lawmakers call on UK government to hold Iran's regime accountable *continued from p.1*

arrival of the new year called for the prosecution of the Iranian regime's officials, including the regime's president Ebrahim Raisi for his active role in the Death Commission and ordering mass executions in the 1988 massacre of prisoners. They also called on the UK government to recognise the right of the Iranian people to fight the regime and officially engage with their organised resistance.

The speakers pointed to the crucial role of the regime's Revolutionary Guards in exporting terrorism and suppressing the Iranian people and stressed that the conduct of the IRGC is consistent with the criteria of a terrorist organisation under the Terrorism Act 2000. The British lawmakers demanded a broad designation and boycott of the IRGC and called on British Foreign Minister Elizabeth Truss to work with the Interior Ministry to list and sanction the IRGC.

In his speech, **David Jones MP**, former Secretary of State for Wales and Minister for Brexit, commemorated the late **Sir David Amess**, a great friend of the Iranian people and one of the longest serving members of the UK Parliament and welcomed **Anna Firth MP** who has taken his place in the British Parliament.

Dr Matthew Offord MP said: "We urge the government to adopt a strong policy on Iran that bans the Revolutionary Guards as a foreign terrorist organisation and imposes human rights sanctions including on Ebrahim Raisi,"

"I am the new Conservative representative of Southend West, the same constituency that Sir David Amess previously represented in Parliament," said Anna Firth MP. "I will do my best to continue the legacy of Sir David and work with other Members of Parliament to support the National Council of Resistance and hold the regime accountable for its human rights abuses and destabilising activities in the region and its support for terrorism."

Congratulating the Iranian people for the New Year, **Bob Blackman MP** said: "We learned from the thwarted plot in Paris that the regime routinely uses its embassies, cultural centres, and diplomats in Europe to spread terrorism and carry out terrorist operations, especially by recruiting agents who are paid tens of thousands of euros over several years. Therefore, it is absolutely vital that we close the regime's embassies and cultural centres and expel their ambassadors, diplomats, and agents from Europe and Britain because they are not diplomatic missions, but centres for the spread of terrorism. The Ministry of Interior must also take immediate action to register the entirety of the Revolutionary Guards as a terrorist organisation as a first step."

In his remarks, **Steve McCabe MP** praised the courage of the Iranian women who have led the protests in Iran and have turned into the pillars of resistance against the regime.

Sir Roger Gale MP said: "I have long advocated a firm policy against the criminal regime in Iran because it is a threat to the world and to the Iranian people."

"The actions of the Revolutionary Guards comply with the criteria set out in the 2000 Terrorism Law. The International community needs to reject the religious dictatorship in Iran and stand with the Iranian people."

John Spellar MP said: "We must remember that the regime in Iran conducts internal repression with the spread of terrorism and instability in the region. This is a two-pronged operation of the regime because it can only survive by chaos and killing."

Lord Singh, member of the House of Lords, said: "The continuing protests across Iran and the brutal crackdown and widespread arrests by the regime have shown the world that the Iranian people reject religious tyranny and want a free and democratic Iran. I believe that we in the West and in the international community must recognise and support the Iranian-led Iranian resistance movement, a popular democratic alternative to the demands of Iranian society, and call on Britain to stand with Maryam Rajavi."





CONFERENCE SHOWCASES WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP CAPABILITIES



On 5 March 2022, hundreds of renowned female leaders from around the world joined a conference in Berlin for the occasion of **International Women's Day**.

With remarks by the brave women of Iran and Ukraine, this conference demonstrated the pivotal role of women in the struggle not only for gender parity but also for freedom.

Participants praised Ukrainian women's epic resistance as well as the brave Iranian women and girls who act as pioneers of the struggle against Iran's misogynous regime.

The male-dominated world, particularly the backward thinking religious fanatics in Iran, prevented women from demonstrating their leadership qualities for decades. On the contrary, a new breed of women leaders in the Iranian resistance movement has been upending those old dogmas, embracing traits like empathy, courage, and cooperation to accomplish challenging tasks while refusing to suppress the qualities that make them who they are: women.

The conference, addressed by brave women from Iran and Ukraine, among others, showcased women's power in making meaningful change. The messages of dozens of Iranian women addressing the conference by video from inside Iran vowing to continue their efforts to bring an end to the misogynous regime, along with solidarity expressed by renowned female leaders from across the globe, pointed to the vital role of women in realising a historic change in Iran that will affect the Middle East and beyond.



Ukrainian MP Kira Rudik addressed the conference via a live video link from Kyiv and said:

"My life changed ten days ago after the war came to our country and Russia invaded Ukraine. This was for a reason. Everything we did will make us stronger. Ten days ago, I was a Member of Parliament. It turned out that my

life will never be the same. There are people who want to take our country, our homes from us. I decided not to let this happen. I decided that I will bear arms and defend my country. I got my Kalashnikov and created my resistance unit. I train every day to protect myself and my loved ones.

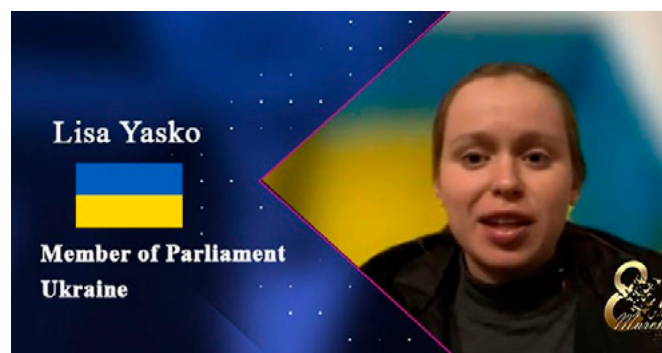
All countries of the world said that we would not stand a chance and Kyiv would fall in 24-48 hours. It's ten days and we are still standing. This happened because of our army and because of the bravery of the resistance. There are people on every inch of Ukrainian soil who will not allow them to take our land.

As a woman, I can tell you about our suffering. Our children are learning what war is and it's terrible. Why do children have to go through this?

Children must go to bomb shelters every day. This is what gives me the courage to train myself every day, to protect myself and my country.

The Russian army is advancing on Kyiv, and they say there will be a siege. We are preparing. We will show that resistance will always be here, and we will not give up without a fight. Resistance is the only way to protect our land.

I'm so proud that here in Ukraine, women are ready to do this and have joined me in my resistance team. When planning to attack Ukraine, Putin only counted the men. He miscalculated. He didn't think the women would fight, would protect their country. We will overcome. We will fight for our values and for our freedom.



Ukrainian MP Lisa Yasko joined Ms Rudik in the call to action and underlining the role of women in the war in Ukraine. She concluded:

"If we lose faith, we will never win. It is very important to keep the faith. To everyone who is listening, don't give up on your country."



RELEASED HOSTAGES TALK ABOUT THEIR ORDEAL



Finally, two dual nationals who were taken hostage by the regime ruling Iran in order to force a settlement of a UK government debt, **Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe** and **Anoosheh Ashoori**, were released and returned home after the money was paid.

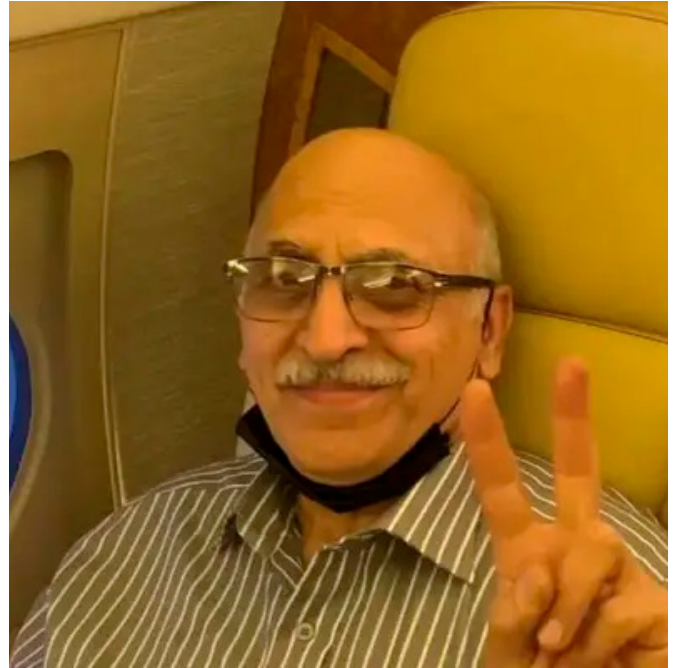
Even though both governments deny the link, the released hostages confirm in various interviews with media that the debt was the real reason for their detention all along. The Foreign Affairs Committee of the British Parliament has promised to examine how their cases were handled by the government when it carries out an inquiry into “state level hostage situations”.

In a news conference after her return to the UK, the former hostage, Nazanin, said that the meaning of freedom is never going to be complete until **Morad Tahbaz** and other dual nationals who are held in Iran are released.

Anoosheh Ashoori, a retired civil engineer, who was arrested back in August 2017 while visiting his elderly mother in Tehran has also spoken about his detention for five years in a prison in Tehran he calls the “valley of hell”.

The 68-year-old husband and father is now learning to live a normal life again after he returned to the UK on the same plane as Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe.

Speaking to BBC News, Mr Ashoori recalled the dire conditions he was subjected to while in jail, where he



shared a cell with 14 or 15 other people.

Mr Ashoori also endured cockroaches, rats and bedbugs and was subjected to solitary confinement, during which he was interrogated for hours at a time.

“Even when I’m awake, for example sitting in the garden, I sometimes say this cannot be true, this cannot be happening,” he said.

“It’s still quite a challenge for me to be easy with being here.”

Appearing on Sky News, Mr Ashoori described Evin Prison as the “valley of hell” – where he not only endured his own suffering but also had to “see the suffering of all the people who are around you.”

He continued: “Each of them in their own different way. Marriages are breaking up. Families are disintegrating.

“And I was reasoning with myself that when I know that I am innocent I am here, so everybody else can be innocent and be there.”

During his trip to Iran in 2017, the 68-year-old was kidnapped off the street, with a bag over his head, and bundled into a van.

On 17 March, he was released alongside Mrs Zaghari-Ratcliffe after the UK paid a decades-old debt to Iran. Both the British and Iranian governments deny any links between the two.

REMEMBERING A VALUED FRIEND AND SUPPORTER

The late **Dr David Girling** thought about the suffering people of Iran for many years. His dream was a world without violence and injustice and for this reason he supported our aims passionately. His priority was others first. He was a scientist and cancer researcher in Cambridge. Born on 1 May 1937, he died on 2

February 2021 leaving a bequest for International Liberty Association for which we would like to show our appreciation.

All of the bequest left for our charity has been used to advance its aims. We hope his spirit continues to shine on in our endeavours to make a better world.





NORUZ IN IRAN BEREFT OF SPLENDOUR



March 20 marks the beginning of the Persian New Year of 1401, known as “Noruz,” meaning the new day.

Noruz, with its splendid festivities, is no longer a harbinger of joy and jubilation for Iranians because of the disastrous policies of the mullahs’ regime. People cannot honour the traditions of their most important national celebration; parents cannot buy any gifts for their children, nor can they invite relatives over, or set up their colourful “Haft Sin (Seven ‘S’)” Table.

“Most people cannot afford to buy what they need on the eve of Noruz. They cannot buy clothing, food, home equipment, etc. This situation provides the clear image of spreading poverty, increasing social distances, and people’s declining purchasing power,” the state-run Etemad daily wrote on 15 March.

Ebrahim Raisi, the regime’s president, blatantly spoke of “eradicating poverty in two weeks!”, early in March.

“Those officials who speak of eradicating poverty in two weeks should visit the market and see the visibly disturbed and ashamed eyes of those parents, whose share from the bustling market is their children’s envy and their own increasing rage,” Etemad daily wrote, mocking Raisi’s hollow promises while referring to people’s outpouring of anger due to their increasing financial woes.

For centuries, Iranians have tried to honour their traditions in Noruz. One of these traditions is serving the Persian dish of “Sabzi-Polo ba Mahi,” or fish with rice and vegetables, which symbolises the everlasting search for peace and love, hours after the spring equinox. Now, with millions under the poverty line, Iranians could only dream of that.

“The costs of celebrating Noruz for a family of four with average to low income have increased, preventing people from obtaining their basic needs,” the state-run Arman-e Meli daily acknowledged on 17 March.

“It seems that people cannot buy fruit. They buy single pieces of fruit. People’s plummeting purchasing power has not only removed the fruit from their food baskets, but also poultry, red meat, and rice,” Tejaratnews quoted Mostafa Daraienejad, head of Tehran’s Nuts and Fruit Sellers’ Union.

The situation is even worse in remote areas in Iran.

Recently, Raisi’s government made a great deal of fanfare about raising salaries and giving New Year’s bonuses to workers and government employees. But, state-run media admitted that these claims were hollow.

According to the regime’s Supreme Labour Council, and as reported by state-run Quds News

on 16 March, the “minimum wage of workers with two children will be 67 million rials a month,” and the “minimum wage of workers with one child will be 63 million rials,” hovering between £190 to £205 a month.

“In a country where the consumer basket of the lower classes is limited to necessities of life due to chronic poverty, an increase in the minimum wage, in the absence of economic growth and prosperity that has increased the production and import costs of these basic goods, injects massive inflation to the country’s economy,” Donayay-e Eghtesad daily quoted Hossein Selahvarzi, Vice President of the Iran Chamber of Commerce on 17 March adding “thus, the cost of people’s minimum necessities and inflation skyrocket.”

“These pathetic plays do not positively affect workers’ lives. These decisions come at an extremely high price for Iranians who must deal with the soaring inflation and unemployment,” he further acknowledged.

Besides, regime officials refuse to even pay the so-called official minimum wage to the workers.

“People cannot tolerate this situation any longer. If the current circumstance continues, we will see a social explosion this year or the next!” state-run Arman-e Meli warned.



NEWS IN BRIEF

PROFESSOR RECEIVES PRISON TIME FOR PUTTING FLOWERS ON GRAVES OF VICTIMS



The Revolutionary Court of Dezful informed University Professor **Arezoo Rahimkhani** and her

husband, **Ramin Biranvand**, on 13 March 2022, that they each received a year in prison for the charge of “propaganda against the state”. They were arrested on 29 June 2021, because the couple had reportedly scattered flower petals on the graves of the victims of the 1981 mass executions in Andimeshk, southern Iran.

IMPRISONED TEACHER DENIED THE SURGERY SHE NEEDS

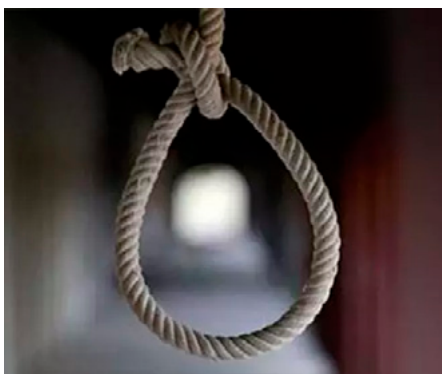


Imprisoned teacher, **Nosrat Beheshti**, returned to jail after prison officials summoned her on 12 March, although her medical leave was not due to expire until 7 April.

Mrs Beheshti had been hospitalised on 11 March due to bleeding and was supposed to undergo an operation to remove her kidney stones on 13 March. The mother of six was arrested in November 2019 for taking part in teachers protests.

A WOMAN WAS AMONG 19 EXECUTED IN SHIRAZ

An unidentified woman was hanged on the morning of Monday, 14 March 2022, in Adelabad prison in Shiraz. At least 19 prisoners were executed in the Central prison of Shiraz between March 9 and 17.



The authorities of Adelabad prison have told another 15 death-row prisoners that their sentences will be carried out before Ramadan.

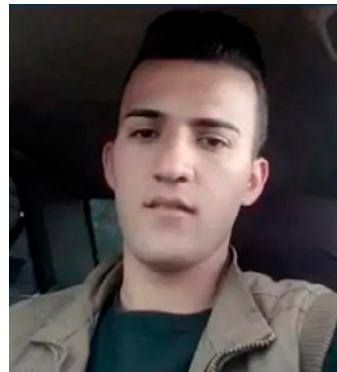
AMNESTY SLAMS IRAN FOR ‘SYSTEMIC’ HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS



On March 29, Amnesty International published its annual report assessing the global human rights situation. In its report Amnesty

International has rebuked Iran for routinely repressing citizens and “systemic impunity” of officials for “past and ongoing crimes against humanity”.

ANOTHER BORDER PORTER KILLED BY REGIME FORCES



On Friday, 27 March, Iranian guards fired at a group of Kurdish porters carrying goods on their backs across the border from Iraq in the Kurdistan region, killing one of them. The victim was identified as 25-year-old **Rostam Khezri** who made his living by

transporting various untaxed products on his back in the border area of Baneh, in the Kurdistan province.

Several border porters have been killed by IRGC forces with impunity.

JOURNALIST SENTENCED TO A TOTAL OF 20 YEARS IN PRISON



The Revolutionary Court of Dashtestan sentenced journalist and political activist **Hossein Roointan** to 20 years in prison and a fine.

According to the verdict, which was issued on 15 March

2022, Mr Roointan has been sentenced to ten years in prison for “acting against national security”, one year for “propaganda against the regime”, 5 years for “blasphemy against the Imams and the prophet’s family”, two years for “offensive statements against the former and current Supreme Leaders of Iran”, and 2 years for “spreading lies and disturbing public opinion”. Moreover, he has been fined 15 million tomans (about £500, i.e. two months salary for a teacher).



PARVIN ETESAMI: A JEWEL IN PERSIAN LITERATURE



Parvin Etesami is the most famous female poet of Iran. Born on 17 March 1907, in Tabriz, she was the daughter of Yousef Etesami Ashtiani (Etesam-al-Molk), a contemporary Iranian writer and translator and Akhtar al-Muluk Etesami.

Etesami had four brothers, her mother died in 1973. Her family moved to Tehran early in her life, and in addition to the formal schooling, she obtained a solid understanding of Arabic and classical Persian literature from her father.

She started writing poems at the age of 8 and her first published works appeared in Iranian magazines in

the early 1920s, when she was just a teenager.

She studied at the Iran Bethel School in Tehran, an American high school for girls where she graduated in 1924.

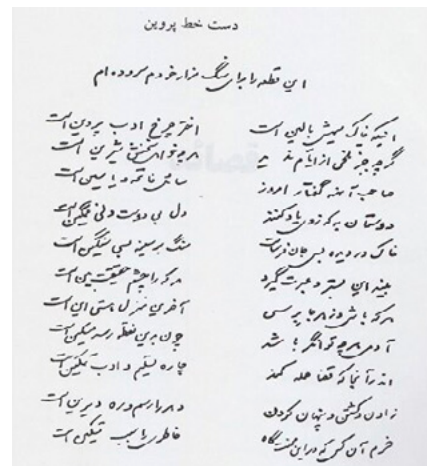
On her graduation she wrote the poem, 'A Twig of a Wish' about the struggles facing Iranian women, their lack of opportunities and their need for education.

In 1926, she received an invitation to become the tutor of the queen of the new Pahlavi court, but she refused.

On 10 July 1934, she was married to a cousin of her father, Fazlollah Etesami, and they moved to the city of Kermanshah, western Iran. But the marriage only lasted for ten weeks and they separated due to differences of interests and personality and she returned to Tehran.



Parvin Etesami's house became an Iranian national heritage site on 19 October 2006



Parvin's handwriting

She was a member of the Kanoun-e-Banovan (Women Association) and supported the reform against compulsory hijab (veiling). In 1936, Etesami was awarded a Medal of Art and Culture by Reza Shah, but she declined.

Etesami was one of the most prominent Persian poets of the 20th century and her collection of poetry consists of 238 pieces.

She died on 5 April 1941 of typhoid and was buried near her father in Qom.

In her short life, Parvin Etesami managed to achieve great fame and her legacy encourages many Iranian women and girls.

**Join us for NoRuz
and Easter feast**
Saturday 7 May 2022
3pm–7pm
at St Mary's Church,
Wyndham Place, W1H 1PP
Please contact ILA by email,
telephone or post to confirm your
attendance. Entrance fee: £10

