

Academic: 'I saw jail as a fact-finding mission'

A FORMER North-East academic jailed as a political prisoner in his native Iran has been freed and returned to the UK, The Northern Echo can reveal.

Reza Molavi, a former head of Durham University's Centre for Iranian Studies, has revealed how he had his passport seized on trying to return to the UK in June 2010, was arrested at his Tehran home the next morning and detained at the notorious Evin Prison.

He was repeatedly interrogated and held in solitary confinement in a tiny cell for four months.

In January last year, he was convicted of aiding a "velvet revolution" and jailed for three years, before being released last October. In total, he spent about 15 months behind bars.

EXCLUSIVE
By Mark Tallentire

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But speaking exclusively to The Northern Echo in London, he refused to condemn the Iranian regime, calling his ordeal a "great opportunity" for "field research".

The 67-year-old now wants to be a bridge between Iran and the West, travelling between the two and teaching university students in his homeland.

He said: "I don't want to become bitter. I want to spread goodwill."

"I want to work to leave them with an impression that they can live with the West in peace and harmony."

Dr Molavi also wants to use his experiences to inform de-



HELD CAPTIVE:
Reza Molavi

bate among academics and policy-makers.

Secret diplomatic cables from April 2008 released through the controversial Wikileaks website suggested a named Durham University academic, not Dr Molavi, sought £273,000 in US funding to develop contacts in Iran.

Dr Molavi claims he twice refused to be involved because

he did not want to be seen as "spying or pimping for some foreign government".

Iranian-born and US-educated, Dr Molavi was in Durham from 2003 to 2010, first as a PhD student and then on the university staff.

He was detained in Tehran in June 2010 having returned home to his ill mother. Plain-clothed agents, who he said were extremely respectful, seized his computers, mobile phones, books and articles and took him to Evin Prison, known to house the regime's political enemies.

There, he was repeatedly interrogated although, he emphasises, never physically abused.

He was kept in a four-metre square cell and it was three months before his wife was allowed to visit him.

However, after being released, he was invited to lecture at Tehran University, given his passport back and allowed to leave the country.

He said: "To me it was all an expedition - a fact-finding mission. I look at it as field research."

"It has given me better understanding of politics in the Middle East and particularly in my home country."

"It gives me the impetus to be of service for peace and harmony - to be a bridge between the Anglo-Saxon countries and my own country."

"And it opened my eyes to how hypocritical and how stupid some of these highly acclaimed professors in Ivy League universities are and how separated they are from reality."



MOTORWAY PLAN: The A1 in North Yorkshire

Plans to reveal details of upgrade

A DISPLAY will take place next week showing land where access roads will need to be created when the A1 is upgraded into a motorway.

Plans to turn the remaining 12-mile stretch of dual carriageway in North Yorkshire into a three-lane motorway were announced at the end of last year by the Government.

The scheme to expand the road between Leeming Bar and Barton will result in a continuous motorway from London to Newcastle.

The Highways Agency has now published additional proposals for where access roads will be needed.

The plans cover the proposed route of the local access road between Scotch Corner and Barton. It will also show which land the Highways Agency will subject to compulsory purchase.

Draft supplementary orders for the local access road between Leeming and Catterick were published in May.

There is now a six-week period for statutory objections, during which the proposals will be on display at a public exhibition at Middleton Tyas Primary School, in Kneeton Lane, Richmond.

The exhibitions will be held on Thursday, from 2pm to 8pm and next Friday, from 10am to 8pm.

Work is expected to start before February and will take three years to complete, at a cost of more than £300m.

The upgrade is expected to cut journey times between London and Newcastle by 20 per cent, save an estimated 100 lives and prevent more than 650 serious casualties over 60 years.

People can find out more by visiting highways.gov.uk

Rowing coach pays tribute to his best team

A LONG-SERVING rowing coach says his current girls' squad is the best he has seen since taking up the sport 50 years ago.

Fred Snowdon paid the tribute to the Durham Amateur Rowing Club girls junior 15s.

The girls won a string of medals in the season just finished, including at Manchester, Durham, Newcastle and Leeds.

They also helped raise £8,000 to buy a new eight boat.

Mr Snowdon, who started rowing in 1963, thanked the girls, their parents and all who had supported the crew through the season.

He put the girls' success down to their commitment and focus, plus the help of supportive parents and good coaches.

The girls will now move up to the junior 16s.



MOVING ON: Veteran Durham rowing coach Fred Snowdon with a photo of his best team

Picture: ANDY LAMB

The Northern Echo

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All of these couples are in the final stage to win their dream wedding! They need YOUR vote to help them win.

To vote for your favourite, simply call 0901 360 followed by the number in pink next to the couple of your choice. For example, to vote for Kirsty & Scott, you would call 0901 360 1049. Or to vote by text, simply send **MARRY** followed by a space then the number of your favourite couple to 80360. So, to vote for Stacey & Naz, you would send MARRY 1048 to 80360.

The couple with the most votes when lines close on July 28 will the winners of this competition! To see photographs of all couples, and read their stories, visit www.northernecho.co.uk/winawedding

Calls cost no more than £1.02 Per Call from a BT Landline. Calls from mobiles and some other networks may cost more. Texts cost £1.00 plus your normal operator text charge. Telephone and text voting lines open 28/06/2013 and close 28/07/2013 at 23:59:59PM. For Full terms visit <http://www.newsquest.co.uk/terms> Service Provided by Newsquest Media Group. Customer Service 0800 280 0896.

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1048

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