

British woman held in Iran for watching men play volleyball

Hugh Tomlinson

A British woman has spent almost three months in an Iranian prison after attempting to watch a men's volleyball match, defying a ban on female spectators at male sports events.

Ghoncheh Ghavami, 25, has spent more than 40 days of her custody in solitary confinement in Tehran's Evin Prison, where many of the regime's political opponents are held, prompting outrage from human rights groups.

Ms Ghavami was arrested in June during a peaceful protest as she and several other women tried to enter a stadium in Tehran to watch the Iranian national team play Italy. They were later released but when Ms Ghavami returned to the jail a few days later to collect some personal items, she was arrested again and transferred to Evin.

Her parents, who live in Tehran, received no news of their daughter for several days, except for a raid by police on the family home to seize her laptop.

Assured by the security forces that Ms Ghavami's detention was temporary, however, her relatives kept the arrest secret for several weeks to avoid antagonising the authorities. After a string of broken promises, the family has now gone public. "The authorities kept promising she would be released at

the end of this week, every week. It never happened and the family has lost patience," said Iman Ghavami, her brother. "My parents are working tirelessly to get Ghoncheh out. They are desperate now. We cannot understand why they would treat her like this for something so innocuous."

Amnesty International has learnt that Ms Ghavami may be charged with "spreading propaganda against the state". "We are extremely worried about Ghoncheh's predicament. Her lawyer has had no access to her or any documents about why she's being held," the group said.

Ms Ghavami has protested against the ban on women attending sports events before. She was briefly detained as a teenager after trying to get in to watch the national football team play a World Cup qualifying match in 2005.

A London resident, she returned to Tehran earlier this year, inspired by the promise of change under Iran's new president, Hassan Rouhani. Relatives say she was considering moving back permanently to study.

Mr Rouhani has found it hard to implement the reforms he promised last year. This week, six young Iranians went on trial in Tehran after posting a video online of themselves dancing to the hit pop song *Happy*.



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First robot gets to grips with a dishwasher

Hannah Devlin Science Editor

Scientists have developed one of the first robots that is able to grasp unfamiliar objects, in an advance that could transform factory production lines.

Previously, scientists have succeeded in training robots to pick up specific shapes, but have struggled to make them adaptable enough to operate side-by-side with humans.

Boris, the latest robot, appears to have overcome this challenge after scientists at the University of Birmingham showed he could learn to load a dishwasher without dropping or crushing any kitchenware.

Professor Jeremy Wyatt, who led the project, said the task was chosen not because he believes dishwasher-loading robots are a "social necessity right now", but because it was among the most challenging and varied of manipulation tasks in everyday life.

"Once you can crack that, once you can manipulate an object that you've never seen before, you can do a whole bunch of different things," he said. "Loading a dishwasher is a really hard task."

The robot, which has biceps, metallic hands and a second set of eyes in his wrists, performed in public for the first time yesterday at the British Science Festival in Birmingham.

The team is now working to develop a version of Boris that could co-operate with humans on a factory floor.