

Escape From Woomera

by Sadiq Ali

My name is Sadiq Ali. I am 19 years old. I am from Afghanistan. My province is Ghazni and my village is Sang-e Masha. I came to Australia in February last year. I was in Woomera detention centre till March. On Easter Good Friday I escaped from Woomera, and now I am free. Life in Woomera is like a hell. We have a difficult life in the camp.

I was rejected from the immigration department. When they rejected me first, they said, "The language analysis said that you are not from Afghanistan, we believe you are Hazara". But second time they rejected me they said, "We do not have doubts about your language. Your language is right. You speak Hazargi (Dari), your mother tongue. But you are not from Afghanistan, only your language is from Afghanistan."

In Woomera everyone goes insane. Every day men, women and children cut themselves with razor blades, drink shampoo, and hang themselves. They commit suicide. The ACM who run the camp are very bad with us. They

abuse us and say, "Australia is not your father's country. This is your punishment for coming to Australia."

Last year on 7 June, the ACM guard beat one of the Afghani detainees. When the other detainees tried to protest about their cruelty they brought more than 200 guards into the camp with large sticks, and wearing full riot protection, and they beat us very badly. They hit the faces and heads of detainees with sticks so that nearly everyone was bleeding. They broke the hand of a detainee and he fell down on the ground. They took him to the medical centre and they pressed his broken finger with pliers because they said he was faking. His entire finger became blue, and they had to take him to Adelaide hospital by emergency flight. The ACM guard told the nurses and the doctor that this detainee is a criminal, and if you aren't careful he will kill you. They also captured more than other 40 detainees, I along with them. They used handcuffs and they beat us very badly. After that they searched our rooms two or three times every month until I escaped.

Last year in our holy month of Ramadan they separated us from the other Afghans, but when we try to protest and

streets in protest against a new policy instituted by the National Cereals and Produce Board where they will receive payment in seeds, fuel, and fertilizer instead of cash. In the past, the Board offered a guaranteed minimum payment for the crops of all small farmers. The farmers demand cash, as they need it to pay IMF-imposed school fees.

>> **April 12** >> Taoiseach Bertie Ahern (Prime Minister) had an unfortunate run-in with Secret Agent Whatever of the

Irish division of the Biotic Baking Brigade, which resulted in the second pieing of a head of state in eight months. When pressed for comment, Agent Whatever said, "We have no idea who our next target will be. There is no shortage of corrupt politicians in Ireland. A pie thrown randomly near any government building would have a hard time not hitting some corrupt old git. That's the main reason we have been inactive so far; it isn't really much of a challenge."

>> **April 16** >> Ten million state-employed workers in India strike to protest recently approved liberalization of labour laws, which allow for easier firing. Trade unions are also concerned about the government's plans to speed up the privatization of nationalized industries. In West Bengal, planes and trains in Calcutta are halted by workers, who block access to the airport and railway stations. Most coal miners and dock workers also honor the strike nationwide.

we said to them this is our holy month of Ramadan and we want to stay together because we have a special prayers in this night they dismissed our protest. They used force against us, with four ACM guards for one person. There were 11 unaccompanied minors (under 18 years without parents), and I was also with them. The ACM guard beat us all very badly. They beat me with their knees, with their big shoes they kicked me, they punched me and they smashed me in the ground and after, smashed me against the wall. Not just me, my other friend too, and they used handcuffs and separated us. After that they were doing many bad things

against me until the hunger strike.

In hunger strike all Afghans sat under the sun and were on hunger strike for 15 days. It was very hot and the people were very thin and feeling dizzy. At first the ACM guards laughed at us and we were in very bad condition. The Government sent advisory group. They came. They promised us many things and at last we finished our hunger strike, but the advisory group forget their promises and they failed to do anything for us.

During these hunger strikes, the young man named Mazhi Ali [in an act of self-harm] jumped on the razor wire. At first, the immigration department said that he wanted to escape, but afterwards they change their comments. After the hunger strike, our people, who were working in the camps for one dollar an hour, the ACM finished their works as a punishment. Some days after our strike, they removed us from one compound to another compound, the ACM again began searching our rooms, giving us date-expired food, and their abuse until Easter.

One day the ACM centre manager called our delegate and said to him that at Easter there are people coming to Woomera, and that he must tell the detainees, "Don't do anything." They said, "The Government is sending us more force and if you try anything we'll use force and beat your people. And the protesters are going back after two days but we are always here. If you people try anything it won't be good for you."

But on Good Friday when the people came to Woomera we broke the fence and we came out. We were very scared and it



An asylum seeker leaps to freedom. Woomera, Australia

Pip Sam/Redhopper Productions

was very cold night and we were waiting until 2.00 am, but we were happy. At last after so much struggle we escaped. We were finished listening to the abuse and enduring the beatings of ACM and their guards with their black sticks. And we came to city. Now I and my friend are happy, but we are also sad about our other brothers and sisters that are still there in Woomera and I hope that they will be free soon, and that everything will get better for us too.

But finally we got our freedom, and we are free.

Previously published in *Desert Storm* at:

www.antimedia.net/desertstorm/escapee.shtml

Resources:

» Archived and updated reports from Woomera:

www.melbourne.indymedia.org

» More reflection and analysis on the woomera actions:

antimedia.net/desertstorm

» Website of the Woomera 2002 actions woomera2002.antimedia.net

>> **April 16** >> Italian industry grinds to a halt in the first general strike in 20 years. An estimated 11-12 million workers put down their tools of trade and took to the streets to protest against Government labour reform plans, which reduce the national jobless fund and makes it much easier to fire workers. Temporary employment agencies are occupied, or find their entrances sealed shut with glue. The strike virtually shuts down air, rail and local transport,

hospitals provide emergency services only, and no newspapers appear on the streets, as printers and journalists participate en masse.

>> **April 17** >> A rally of 200,000 coconut farmers in Dharwar, India is organized by the KRRS and the Green Brigade on the occasion of World Farmers' Day. A spokesperson for the KRRS uses the opportunity to issue a demand to Chief Minister S M Krishna: that he spend

“We left our homes because we had no choice but to flee from brutal, dictatorial regimes. Many of us faced imprisonment, torture, or murder, and have already seen our relatives suffer those fates. We have been persecuted for our religious beliefs, our ethnic group, our political opinions, or even the family we belonged to. We would gladly have stayed in our homelands and lived ordinary lives, but that is exactly what it has been made impossible for us to do.”

– appeal from the asylum seekers of Australia, January 2003

some time studying science before introducing genetically modified cotton seed into the state. The spokesperson points out that leading scientists representing 36 nations have submitted a report to the UN recommending the ban of such seeds, and that until Minister Krishna has his level of education, he should refrain from tampering with biodiversity.

>> **April 20** >> In a mass global coincidence, the