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Five Iranian Arabs detained in Syria for connections to Arab opposition in Iran

(AP) - DAMASCUS, Syria-Syrian authorities have detained five Iranian Arabs on suspicion of having links with an opposition group in Iran, a Syrian Human rights group said Friday.

The Syrian Human Rights Organization said in a statement that the five were detained in the past four days. It identified two of them as Taher Ali Mazraa and Shaker al-Khanji and said the other three were university students.

The report could not be independently confirmed and Syrian officials could not be reached for comment.

The human rights group expressed fear that Syrian authorities would hand over the detainees, suspected by authorities of having links with an opposition group in the southern Iranian province of Ahwaz, to Iranian authorities. It called on the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees to intervene with Syrian authorities to prevent their deportation.

The five - allegedly affiliated with the opposition Popular Democratic Front for the Arab Ahwazi People - may face "imminent danger on their lives" if handed over to Iran, it said.

Syria and Iran are close allies on Middle East issues. However, Syria has overlooked the opposition group in the past.

On April 15, Iranian authorities arrested more than 250 Ahwaz residents following demonstrations to protest alleged government plans to alter the predominantly ethnic Arab composition of the Ahwaz city, the provincial capital, by relocating non-Arabs there.
