

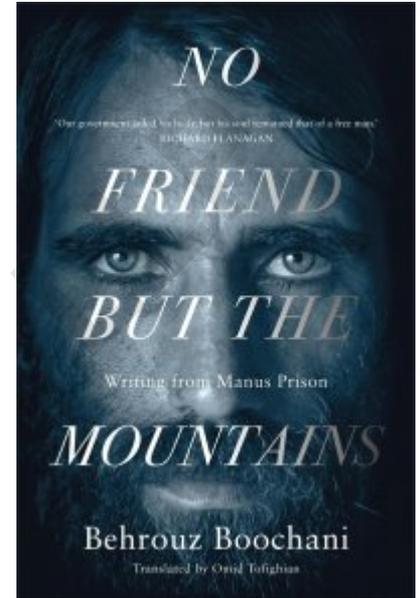
Book written by refugee using WhatsApp wins top Australian literature prize



BBC.com

An Iranian Kurdish writer detained in an Australian prison while seeking asylum (refuge) has been awarded the country's highest literary honour. Behrouz Boochani fled Iran in 2013 and was caught while attempting to make a boat crossing from Indonesia to Australia. He was transferred to a detention center on Manus Island in Papua New Guinea, a place in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Australia follows a strict no-tolerance policy towards asylum seekers arriving by boat.

While in detention he wrote **No Friend But The Mountains: Writing from Manus Prison** in his native language, Farsi mostly through WhatsApp messages sent to the translator, Omid Tofighian. He preferred writing by sending text messages because he was afraid the prison guards might destroy anything written on paper. The book won the **2019 Victorian Prize for Literature** worth A\$100,000 (over Rs. 51 lakh), as well as the **Prize for Non-Fiction** (worth a further A\$25,000) at the Victorian Premier's Literary Awards. Judges described the book as "a stunning work of art and critical theory which evades simple description." The book is written in prose and poetry and it outlines his boat journey from Indonesia, his experiences at the detention on Manus Island.



Facilities at the Manus Island Regional Processing Facility, which was closed in 2017. Asylum seekers have been moved to alternate accommodation on the island and haven't been able to enter Australia.

Despite the honours, Boochani did not attend the ceremony as he is still in temporary punishment in Manus and is unable to enter Australia. Along with many other detainees, he had been granted refugee status in Papua New Guinea but prefers not to stay there.

Determined to shed light on the inhumane conditions faced by refugees and asylum seekers, he uses his phone to write regularly for the UK's Guardian newspaper, tweets about life in detention and has even filmed and co-directed a documentary called Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time.



Written by: Zarir De Vitre. Zarir is a Mumbai based sustainability consultant. He enjoys drinking tea, playing with Lego, and football and basketball.

CURRENTKIDS LLP