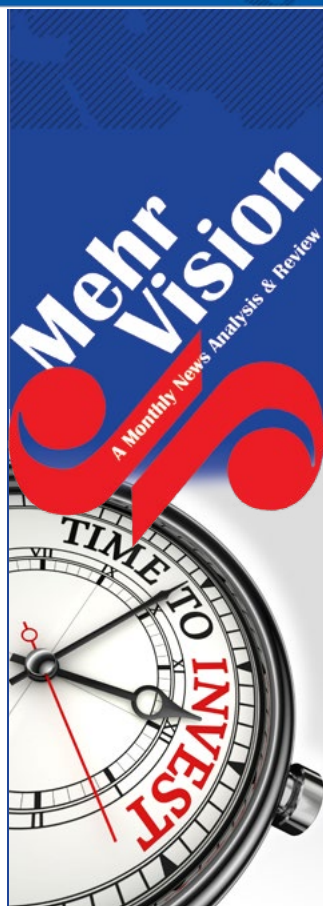


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**Mehr
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Iran Economy after Sanctions



Mehr Vision

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Post-JCPOA: Time to invest in Iran

By: Hossein Azari

Since the implementation of JCPOA on January 16, 2016, Iran has observed a myriad of economic events to be reviewed in the current article.

After several months of negotiations between Iran and the 5+1 group of countries, the promised day finally arrived a few weeks ago on January 16 and sanctions that had engulfed our Iran for many years are now lifted.

The measure will undoubtedly lead to improved relations between Iran and other countries and can greatly affect the country's fate.

Now, in the period following the conclusion of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Iran is faced with many opportunities as the Iranian Foreign Ministry's Director General for Political Affairs Hamid Baeedinejad underlined "the post-JCPOA era provides an opportunity for compensating for the lost opportunities."

Playing an essential role in global energy supply as well as several other strategic advantages like excellent human force will guarantee adequate revenues for the development of the country, while at the same time, guaranteeing national security of the country.

Since the day on which JCPOA was put into operation, numerous countries have expressed willingness to initiate or resume bilateral cooperation with Iran in various areas. Meanwhile, Iranian authorities have always emphasized that the country's priority remains as technology transfer as well as joint production rather than mere import of foreign products.

Over the past few weeks, the country has observed the presence of small and

huge trade and economic foreign delegations from all around the world paying visit to Iran in the hope of participating in the massive Iranian market; so far, several Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) and contracts have been signed between Iranian and foreign state and private sector companies.

On road to the implementation day

It was on January 13 when the head of Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) said Iran is opening a new chapter in international relations and in playing a decisive role in the future of world's energy.

"To prepare to face future conditions, the energy sector's future shall be duly considered," added Ali Akbar Salehi noting, "this means that there must be a strategic vision in outlining the energy sector's long-term plans."

A few days before the implementation of the nuclear deal, former German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder arrived in Iran leading a trade delegation for a three-day visit to Tehran. A visit which ended in a number agreements including an MoU for new railroad cooperation between Islamic Republic of Iran Railways and Germany's Siemens Company.

Also, the Slovenian Economy Minister Zdravko Počivalšek visited Iran as head of an economic delegation hoping that the trip would lead to new and effective steps toward boosting trade ties.

After the meeting with the representatives of 45 Slovenian companies, Iran's Energy Minister Chitchian signed a Memorandum of Understanding to finance Iran's power electricity projects

with the Slovenian Minister of Economic Development and Technology Zdravko Počivalšek.

Furthermore, four of Slovenia's largest companies including one firm active in the realm of oil and gas opened their bureaus in Tehran during the visit.

However, the German and Slovakian groups left Tehran before the implementation of Iran historic nuclear deal giving their place to Slovaks who marked the first foreign delegation to be present in Iran in the post sanction era.

Waiting for the removal of sanctions didn't last any longer than Saturday January 16 when the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) issued its final report on Tehran's disputed nuclear program marking the consummation of the July 14, 2015 nuclear agreement.

"We have stretched our hands toward the world in a sign of friendship and begun a new chapter in our relations with the world after overcoming all the enmities, skepticism and schemes devised against us," President Rouhani told the Iranian nation one day following the implementation day.

Iranian officials set priorities

A few days after the removal of sanctions, Iran's Deputy Energy Minister Houshang Falahatian described the most important investment plans in Iran's power industry for the post-sanction era saying "the most significant scenarios for the expansion of the country's power industry after the lifting of sanctions include consumption management, reduction of energy waste in line with increased productivity, modernization and rehabilitation of existing power →

plants, construction and development of high-voltage substations which pertains to foreign investment."

Managing Director of National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company (NIORDC) Abbas Kazemi described new schemes to expand exports of oil products in the new post sanction era adding "in the current year, Iran has joined the group of countries who export a variety of oil products including diesel oil, aviation gasoline, naphtha, fuel oil, kerosene as well as LPG."

Slovakia gets the show on the road

As mentioned previously, the first foreign team to arrive in Iran after the JCPOA implementation was the 40-member Slovakian delegation who arrived in Mashhad on Monday January 17 headed by the European country's Minister of Finance and Deputy Prime Minister of Slovakia Peter Kažimír.

Upon arrival, the Slovakian minister announced happiness for being the first delegation to visit Iran after the removal of international sanctions expressing readiness to strengthen bilateral relations.

"The trip aims to sign two legal Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) in order to prevent double taxation and to support and encourage mutual investment," said the official adding "we plan to attend sessions with Iranian economic activists with the purpose of developing economic cooperation."

At a separate meeting with the Governor of the Central Bank of Iran Valiollah Seif, the two sides stressed cementing banking ties between Iran and Slovakia calling for establishment of a joint bank account.

The meeting also addressed possible venues for banking cooperation between the two countries including establishment of agencies and branches as well as holding 40-percent participation in the stock of Iranian banks.

Peter Kažimír also evaluated the signing of an MoU between Iranian and Slovakian banks as a positive step towards increasing trade turnover between the two countries.

South Korean firms eye Iran after sanctions relief

Iran holds the world's fourth-largest oil reserves and the second-largest gas



reserves, but international sanctions had stymied progress across its energy sector.

"Iran was one of the major trading partners before the sanctions and had good relations with Korean companies," said Eom Chi-sung, an official at the Federation of Korean Industries adding "as the Iranian government is expected to expand investment in infrastructure, several construction and plant projects are expected to be up for grabs (for Korean companies)."

According to a recent survey by the Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA) on 521 Iranian companies, 90 percent of respondents said they plan to expand trade with Korean companies following the sanctions relief, citing reasonable price and quality of products.

In the past decades, South Korean builders had clinched deals worth US\$12 billion with Iran, but since 2009, there have been few deals due to the economic sanctions that the United Nations imposed for its nuclear program in 2010.

The Korea International Trade Association (KITA) projects that Iran's construction market will reach \$154 billion in 2016, sharply up from \$88.7 billion in 2013.

Also on January 21, in a bid to revive Tehran-Seoul economic ties after the successful implementation of the JCPOA and removal of anti-Iran sanctions, South Korean Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy (MOTIE) issued an official announcement voicing readiness to sign a \$2 billion insurance deal with Islamic

Republic of Iran.

Accordingly the economic officials of both countries are scheduled to meet in Tehran in late February to sign the relevant contracts.

Even more, at a meeting with the South Korean Ambassador to Tehran Kim Sung-ho on January 29, Iran's Deputy Labor Minister and head of the Organization for Technical and Vocational Training Mohammad Amin Sazgar Nejad expressed eagerness towards opening of a new phase in international cooperation between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the world, saying that investigation of possible venues for joint collaboration with other countries in the field of strengthening labor force and vocational training has been put on the agenda of the organization."

Czech Republic seeks venues for boosting ties

Iran's Minister of Industry, Trade and Mines Mohammad Reza Nematzadeh met and talked with Jan Mládek, Czech Republic's Minister of Industry and Trade, on January 17 in Tehran investigating possible grounds for bilateral cooperation in industry and trade sectors.

At the meeting, the officials further enumerated possible venues for cooperation between the two countries including electronics, equipment, machinery as well as vehicle industries.

It was also noted that other suitable areas for cooperation with foreign partners consist of steel, copper, aluminum industries, vehicle manufacturing, machinery and railroad transport among the others.

During a separate session, Iran's Minister of Economy Ali Tayebnia and the Minister of Industry and Trade of the Czech Republic Jan Mládek have signed an economic MoU.

The newly-signed agreement consists of various provisions including formation of a joint commission between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Czech Republic aiming to put into operation the MoU as well as identifying the obstacles on development of bilateral ties, joint collaboration in the fields of industry and mining, construction of compound power plants as well as cooperation in the areas of technology transfer and railroad transit.

Italy in Qazvin city

A visit by Italian ambassador to Tehran to Qazvin province and provincial governor on Tuesday January 20 brought about signing of Memorandum of Understanding in cultural, economic and infrastructural fields.

Mauro Conciatori, the ambassador and Italian Commercial Attaché in Tehran Adolfo Urso sat in a session with Qazvin province economic activists and officials to discuss bilateral trade.

We have a general assessment of Iran's capacities and during visits to different provinces especially Qazvin, we found huge capabilities and grounds for investments which we welcome to participate at," said the ambassador.

Mohammad Ali Qasemi, the deputy-head of Qazvin Center for Investment Services, and Adolfo Urso signed the MoU of economic and cultural cooperation.

Chinese President arrives in Tehran

Let's take advantage of the opportunity offered by the Chinese president's visit to Tehran. China is the biggest trade partner of Iran. This country follows a centralized plan to boost its relations with other countries. If the Chinese president comes to Iran at the head of a 1,000-strong delegation, it means that the Chinese side has been planning this trip in various sectors since months ago. Therefore, it would be expedient for the Iranian side to take decisive steps for the attraction of Chinese capital and implementation of projects in view of opportunities offered by JCPOA.

Chinese President Xi Jinping arrived in Tehran on January 23 on a key two-day visit to hold talks with Iranian officials about opportunities to develop cooperation in politics and trade. He was welcomed officially by Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif.

China has retained for many consecutive years its position as Iran's biggest importer of crude oil and its biggest trade partner. The trip marked the first visit of the highest ranking official from the most major Asian power and one of the five world powers to Tehran after 14 years.

Considering JCPOA as mutual opportunity for new development, upon his arrival at Mehrabad International Airport, Chinese president pointed out "I expect to have interlocution with Iranian officials in regards to bilateral cooperation as well as shared and favorite regional and international issues in order to set the prospect of Beijing-Tehran relations; moreover I

believe that the visit would be a successful one to strengthen further the friendship and bilateral cooperation of Iran and China."

Later on the arrival day, Iranian and Chinese presidents exchanged views on drafting a 25-year compressive plan and promoting trade ties up to \$600bn in ten years.

President Rouhani highlighted the importance of strengthening ties with China, saying "this visit happened in a historic point in time following the implementation of the nuclear agreement and the subsequent lift of anti-Iranian sanctions. I hope that we can sign the final memorandum of cooperation between the two countries today."

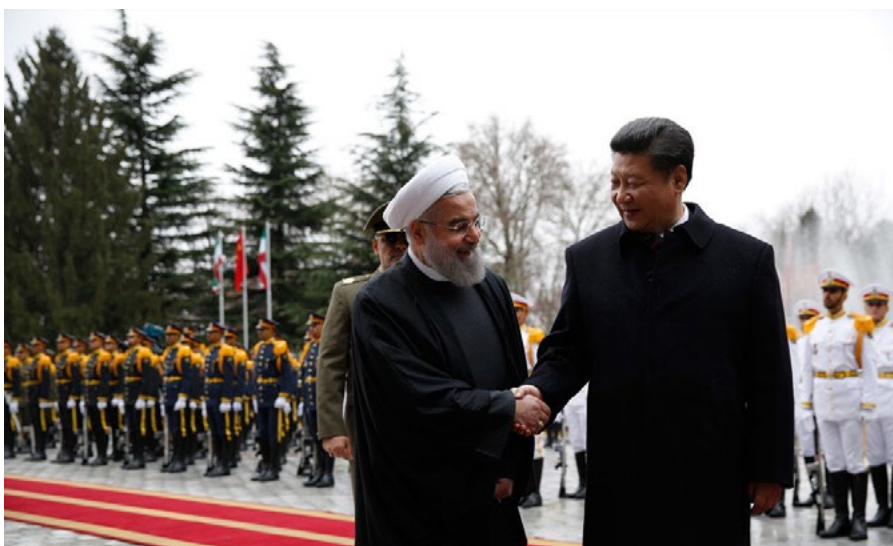
Iran's Hassan Rouhani and China's Xi Jinping also signed JSCSP (Joint Statement on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership). The JSCSP consists of 20 articles, specifying the roadmap of developing and deepening Tehran-Beijing ties in "Political," "Executive Cooperation," "Human and Cultural," "Judiciary, Security and Defense," and "Regional and International" domains.

President Rouhani and President Xi Jinping of China further sat to sign 17 economic MoUs to transform the economic ties to new highs in the upcoming months. The most interesting and perhaps ambitious was to revive Silk Road, the historically used route connecting the Europe and Eastern Asia of the medieval times and by which major goods were transited in the extremities of the Eurasian landmass.

Several other MoUs focused on transportation, banking, trade and business, human resources, culture, customs and import tariffs and media communications and exchange of cultural products between Iran and China.

Iran's Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei also received Chinese President Xi Jinping where he said "Iran's government and nation have always welcomed extensive relations with independent and reliable countries as China; and based on this premise, the recent agreement which secures 25 years of strategic relations between two countries is justified."

Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani and Chinese President Xi Jinping also met and discussed expansion of economic ties between Iran and Chi→



na in the fields of oil, gas, railway and transfer of modern technology and knowledge.

Iran's relations with the United States and Europe make up an important part of the Islamic Republic's foreign relations. The past is a beacon for the future. We are past the peak of change in our trade relations. Since five years ago, the volume of Iran's trade with Asian countries has been higher than the combination of Iran's trade with Europe and North America. It took about 200 years for this major shift to come about. It seems that a return to past times is not logical. Therefore, we must take care not to allow relations with countries like Russia, India, China and other Asian countries be removed from our list of priorities.

Thai FM visits Tehran

Thailand Minister of Foreign Affairs Don Pramudwina arrived in Tehran on Sunday January 24 heading a trade delegation.

A delegation of Thai businessmen and trade officials were accompanying Don Pramudwina in his visit to Tehran to get familiar with trade opportunities in Iran.

Islamic Republic of Iran and Thailand sought expansion of economic ties in post-JCPOA era as the removal of sanctions provide unique opportunities regarding the bilateral trade and business ties.

Britain inks electricity deal with Iran

An official in Iran Power Generation and Transmission Company (TAVANIR) said on January 24 that the first ever deal to build power plant has been signed with British SST company.

The first ever agreement signed will build solar power plant for Iran's Bakhtar Electricity Co., a regional subsidiary of TAVANIR. The total value of agreement is estimated to be \$1mn. Farhad Shabihi, the company's Managing Director told reporters that British company would design, manufacture, install, and operate the solar power plant of 50mW capacity; "the agreement came only two days after the implementation of JCPOA which effectively removed sanctions which had been hitting Iran's economy," he added.

Turkey preferential trade agreement Iran

Head of Turkish Gaziantep's Chamber of Commerce has announced the reaching of 35 billion dollars of trade turnover on the basis of preferential trade agreement between Iran and Turkey.

Speaking at Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries and Mines on Sunday, Ayub Bartek referred to the trade potentials of Iran and Turkey asserting "the two countries share numerous commonalities which need to be taken into mind with regard to transport and logistics in bilateral relations."

He further announced the upcoming visit of a Turkish trade delegation to Iran aiming to increase the trade turnover between the two countries and analyze the existing barriers.

Greek PM visits Isfahan, Tehran

Following the competing atomosphere overwhelming European countries to develop ties with Iran in the post-sanctions era, Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras paid an official visit to Iran, at the head of a high ranking delegation of politicians, economists, industrialists and businessmen on February 7-8 to sign several memoranda of cooperation with the authorities of our country.

The two countries sought to cooperate in many fields, especially in the field of oil and energy, transport, tourism, industry, ports and shipping, academic and cultural cases, holding art festival and etc.

Greece aims to strengthen ties with Iran and boost economic relations after

illegal economic sanctions lift, in a step toward the country's reintegration into the international system and the two countries have recently launched discussions to resume Iranian oil deliveries to Greece two weeks ago.

After Greece's efforts in developing trilateral relations with Cypress and Egypt, the relation with Tehran is highly important strategically for the economically-entangled EU country.

The Greek delegation visited Isfahan one night before arriving in the capital, saying the city was highly significant worldwide due to its historical legacy.

They were received by Rasoul Zargar-pour, the Governor of Isfahan Province while they also paid a visit to Naqsh-e Jahan Square, an important historical site and one of UNESCO's World Heritage Sites.

Iran's first Vice President Es'hagh Jahangiri officially welcomed Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras at S'adabad Palace on Monday January 8 and discussed bilateral issues and cooperation between the two countries.

The two sides inked three Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) for political cooperation, memorandum of development to cancel visa regime and bilateral cooperation roadmap.

The Greek prime minister also referred to the direct flight route between Tehran and Athens, expressing hope the move would establish the flight on a daily basis.

Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras also held separate meetings with Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, Head of Expediency Council Akbar Hashemi Raf-



sanjani, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Khamenei as well as Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Ali Shamkhani and discussed issues of mutual interests along with regional and global developments mainly emphasizing that Athens intends to expand relations with Tehran beyond the normal regulations set for an EU country.

Kazakhstan deploys huge trade delegation to Tehran

A 260-member Kazakh delegation arrived in Tehran on January 7 headed by the Central Asian country's Minister of Investment and Development Asset Issekeshv.

Receiving the Kazakh minister, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif highlighted the close relations between the two countries saying Iranian market is open to Kazakh businessmen while both countries deem significant expansion of bilateral relations.

The Kazakh minister underlined that "we have come to Iran heading a 250-strong delegation of businessmen and industrial bodies for evaluating the grounds for new investment and furthering cooperation with the Islamic Republic."

Issekeshv further maintained that Kazakhstan is keen on boosting mutual cooperation in the fields of tourism, education and culture.

Later on Monday, the Iran-Kazakhstan trade and investment conference was held where Iran's Industry Minister Mohammadreza Nematzadeh said "Iran's strategic geographical location and its connectivity with the Caspian Sea, the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman has offered the country special privileges; by taking advantage of the great status, Kazakhstan could strengthen its relationship with neighboring countries and the world."

During the session with Kazakh officials, it was agreed to form two technical working groups in order to investigate the difficulties of the previously sealed MoUs.

At a separate meeting with Iran's Agriculture Minister Mahmoud Hoojati, the two sides launched talks on new agricultural cooperation between Iran and Kazakhstan.



"The Islamic Republic of Iran can act as an export panel for Kazakhstan," mentioned Hoojati expressing willingness to reinvigorate ties in the area of agriculture.

Issekeshv deemed Iran as a special economic zone and exports hub emphasizing "we have received good proposals from Kazakh firms for the export of meat to Iran; we possess plans to produce Halal meat."

Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev is also scheduled to visit Tehran in late April while the upcoming trip is deemed to commence a new phase in the two countries' relations.

Oil giants in Tehran

Also, representatives of several of the world's oil giants have traveled to Iran on the verge of the removal of international sanctions on January 15.

The visiting representatives held talks with the officials of National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) as well as National Iranian Tanker Company (NITC) discussing venues for boosting bilateral ties.

The two sides dealt with various issues including hiring of Iranian oil tankers, insurance coverage, marine transportation services, repairs as well as spare parts supply.

Meanwhile, NITC Managing Director Ali Akbar Safaei had announced the return of Iranian tankers to the European market in the wake of post sanction adding "relevant negotiations with all world's major oil companies have begun."

Chain of oil talks

The attractiveness of investment in the country's oil industry as well as the removal of international sanctions led foreign companies to seek active participation in Iran's oil and gas industry.

"Foreign firms are expecting to find a slew of business opportunities in Iran as the lifting of sanctions on the oil-rich nation could open up new investments to rebuild its economy," industry officials said after JCPOA implementation.

It was on January 17th that representatives of Azerbaijani oil companies visited Iran Oil Terminals Company (IOTC) expressing readiness to cooperate in manufacturing and overhaul of IOTC's floating balls.

Indeed, the capabilities and experience of IOTC in repairing floating balls in Assaluyeh and Kharg terminals has encouraged Azerbaijani companies to participate in Iranian floating ball projects.

Mohammad Keramati, head of the Research Institute of Petroleum Industry (RIPI), said the country has started a fresh round of negotiations with two international companies active in the field of smartifying oil reserves. The official also said the country has started a fresh round of negotiations with two international companies active in the field of smartifying oil reserves. One of the sides to the negotiations was a Swiss-German company that has international acclaim and experience in building smart inflow control valve (ICV) equipment, he said. Keramati further referred to the RIPI's oil talks with a Norwegian company, say- ➔

ing the company has a lot of experience in the field of horizontal and directional drilling. "Soon, the RIPI will hold further talks with representatives of these two European companies," he said.

Iranian Deputy Oil Minister Roknoddin Javadi also expressed satisfaction towards the removal of cruel sanctions against the Iranian oil industry stating "an opportunity has emerged now for acceleration of development in the country which will exert far-reaching effects on oil industry as well." Referring to the positive outcomes of the lifting of sanctions, Javadi asserted "top priorities of the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) include increasing crude exports, development as well as attracting investment and technology from the global market." Managing director of NIOC pointed out the plan to increase oil output by 500 thousand barrels per day as

of Naples Federico II located in Naples, Italy; "accordingly, the same modern method will be applied to the west of Kermanshah Province."

Meanwhile, on January 26, Managing Director of National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company (NIORDC) Abbas Kazemi referred to the launch of talks between Iran and two Japanese and South Korean oil giants for the implementation of plans to reduce fuel oil production capacity in two of the country's refineries; "so far, several talks have been held with these companies and the two sides have reached primary agreements."

War on oil market

Deputy Oil Minister for International Affairs Amir Hossein Zamaninia emphasized that the country's production and exports capacity of oil will reach

Managing Director for International Relations of the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) Azizollah Ramezani welcomed the idea of the European Union officials travelling to Iran for reinvigorating mutual relations in the fields of energy and natural gas; "gas exports should not be merely limited to neighboring countries or the region asserting and supplying gas to far-reached countries particularly EU-member countries needs to be put on the agenda."

The official further stressed that gas exports to Europe brings about international and political advantages in addition to economic achievements; "currently, Russia is selling gas to Europe via a 3000-kilometer pipeline and so can Iran."

Oil tankers free to EU ports

On January 18, Managing Director of National Iranian Tanker Company (NITC) Ali Akbar Safaei pointed out the official removal of the first sanction on Iran's oil industry in the field of marine transport of crude oil and petroleum products; "Iranian tankers will now travel under the license of British Lloyds international classification institution."

NITC managing director also expressed readiness to return to the European Union's ports and oil terminals saying "soon, a number of Iranian oil tankers will leave for Europe in order to cooperate with the world's oil giants."

"With the issuance of technical certificates, reputable insurance companies will provide Iranian tankers with insurance coverage with lower risks," Safaei emphasized.

Also, the official website of the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) of the US Department of the Treasury announced on January 19 that "all ships belonging to maritime fleet of the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines (IRISL) have been taken away from the eight-year-old sanctions list." IRISL and its subsidiaries had been put on OFAC's list since September 2008.

Airbus to land in Iran

Only a couple of days after the Secretary of Iran's Aviation Companies Association Maghsoud Asadi Samani said "world aircraft manufacturers compete for the Iranian aviation market and Iranian airliners are conducting negotia-



the first stage after the implementation of JCPOA; "No technical obstacles are perceived in rising oil production especially with regard to aging pipelines or oil facilities." Deputy oil minister urged international oil companies to take more explicit and serious measures in this regard.

It was on January 25 that the Head of NIOC Oil and Gas Exploration Hormoz Ghalavand referred to the inking of contract between NIOC and University of Barcelona in Spain on a joint geological and geophysical exploration study; "the study area covers the southern part of the Zagros sedimentary basin located in Hormozgan Province." NIOC's exploration director also pointed out the inking of a similar deal with the University

of one million barrels per day within a few months; "during the sanction years, Iran lost a portion of its oil market with countries like Saudi Arabia conquering the Iranian oil market," he underlined. The official deemed regaining of the lost oil market as the most important plan for the country adding "currently, Iran enjoys numerous customers from various parts of the world."

An official at the European Union has also announced that 15 EU officials will make a 14-day technical visit to Iran. Accordingly, one of the objectives of the Europe Commission is to make efforts to promote the export of Iranian gas via pipeline and LNG shipments within the framework of the project called the European Union's Southern Gas Corridor.



tions with Airbus and Boeing trying to ink contracts with the company offering the best proposal," Minister of Roads and Urban Development Abbas Akhoundi announced that "an agreement has reached to buy 114 aircraft from France's Airbus for national carriers Iran Air, Mahan and Homa."

Iran also held the First International Conference on Iranian Aviation January 24-25 after 35 years where 200 industry moguls, experts, and the heads of prestigious airlines of the world sat to discuss the ways to Iranian markets.

Head of Iran's Civil Aviation Organization public relations office Reza Jafarzadeh told the reporters before the event that "we have excellent conditions to serve passing airlines, to shorten routes, providing air security, and hence have an attractive market for foreign investments; with bans removed from export of planes and plane parts to Iran, now European and American giants (notably Airbus and Boeing) provide a broader and promising prospects for Iran's tourism industry."

Iranian Aviation 2016 provided excellent grounds for cooperation of Iran's aviation and international aviation industry in refurbishing and development of the industry as an important instrument for economic growth.

Later in January 24, Farhad Parvash, Chairman and Managing Director of Iran Air, referred to the resumption of refueling at airports in Western Europe following the lifting of international sanctions maintaining "sanctions had imposed great costs on Iranian airliners to the extent that 15 to 17 thousand dollars were spent on fuel in each flight."

"Iran Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) is conducting talks on direct flights between Iran and the US," maintained the official concluding "daily flights to New York used to take place before the Islamic Revolution and they will hopefully get resumed in near future."

Furthermore, Deputy Minister for International Affairs at the Ministry of Road and Urban Development Asghar Fakhrieh Kashan noted on January 25 that the path for international cooperation has become clear with the removal of sanctions; "French, Chinese and Italian companies have made correspondences expressing readiness to make investments in Imam Khomeini, Mashhad, Shiraz and Ahwaz airports; Italy's ATR Company, Canada's Bombardier Inc. and France's Airbus are among the firms who seek to seal a deal with Iran".

Foreign automakers eager to enter Iran

The lifting of sanctions has provided new money transfer conditions as well as the possibility of opening finance for Iranian automakers enabling them to conduct joint production with their foreign counterparts.

Deputy Industry Minister Mohsen Salehinia announced on January 23 that contracts with foreign automakers will gradually enter the execution phase in a month. He described the latest status of signing new deals with foreign automakers as well as the government's policy in supervising them; "vehicle contracts are not excluded from other industry sectors and extensive negotiations have been held to provide optimized conditions in final agreements."

Salehinia enumerated the provi-

sions of the agreements including establishment of joint firms, formation of new brands, technology transfer, joint cooperation in spare part production, exports of a portion of the products to third-party countries, bilateral collaboration in increasing quality in addition to diversification on the basis of customers' demands leading to their satisfaction as well as training and education.

In brief

To recapitulate, it seems that the new era after the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) will be the era for compensating for the bygone opportunities. Iran promises huge trade opportunities at the present time. The country appears to be a big attraction for companies after a successful conclusion to nuclear talks with six world powers. As sanctions have been lifted, several overseas companies are eyeing business opportunities.

Overseas companies have already started showing interest in the Iranian market. Germany, France and Spain are willing to have business relations with Iran, and airlines in Dubai are starting new routes in accordance with growing demands.

Iran offers tremendous opportunities on paper; with a population of around 80 million, Iran has well-set agricultural and manufacturing industries which contribute to its \$400 billion economy.

Iran's biggest business partner is China, which contributed expressively after European countries withdrew due to sanctions. Most of Iran's biggest partners are from Asia including the United Arab Emirates, South Korea, Japan and India |

President Rouhani's historic visit to Europe sees higher profits

By: Lachin Rezaian

President Rouhani kicked off his first post-sanction Euro trip to Italy and France on January 25, in a bid to drum up economic and business opportunities for the country.

Tehran-Rome and Tehran-Paris relations have gone through many ups and downs in the past, especially after the imposition of West and US illegal sanctions against the Islamic Republic of Iran.

In his first European trip, Rouhani and his 120-strong delegation of business leaders and ministers, seek to provide the grounds and a wide range of opportunities to foster cooperation between Iran and European countries under the so-called landmark agreement JCPOA, officially came into effect on 16 January.

On his first stop on a five-day European trip, President Rouhani arrived in Rome on Monday, January 25, and was initially greeted by Italian Foreign Minister Paolo Gentiloni at the international Rome Ciampino Airport and then was officially welcomed by Italian President Sergio Mattarella.

Iran's President Hassan Rouhani and Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi attended a presse conference on January 26 exchanging views on, and covering a wide range of issues, including the capacity of extensive bilateral cooperation between Tehran and Rome, unfair anti-Iran sanctions hindering the development of bilateral ties, Iran's highly significant situation in terms of security, energy, human resources, human development and geopolitics and Iran's diplomacy as the best way to sustainable peace.

On January 26, both sides signed the contracts in Rome late Monday which was worth up to 17 billion euros (\$18.4 billion) in sectors from energy to infrastructure and from steel to shipbuilding and healthcare.

On the same day, Iranian Minister of Agriculture Mahmoud Hojjati and his Italian counterpart Maurizio Martina,



Italy's Minister of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies inked a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in the field of plant protection, according to which the two countries agree to expand scientific, research and practical collaborations in the areas of supervision, prevention and control of pests and to exchange of expertise and experience, as well as, facilitation of trade of agricultural and horticultural crops through effective and efficient communication between regulatory and quarantine agencies of the two sides.

Iranian President attended Iran-Italy business forum in Rome on Tuesday, January 27, to discuss ways to boost bilateral trade after JCPOA implementation in Rome and to look for paving the way for further and better economic, scientific and cultural cooperation between the two countries.

Rouhani underlined during the meeting that, "We wish to have at least 30 percent of our products exported abroad."

Mr. Rouhani also met with Pope Francis in Vatican and touched upon Iran's nuclear deal with west and its recent implementation, Middle East developments, the political solutions to the

crisis underway in the region and the role of religions in promoting peace and avoidance of violence and extremism. They called all countries to work in a collective attempt to establish peace across the globe.

During the last hours of Iranian delegation's stay in Italy, President Rouhani held a meeting with Iranians in the European country and made remarks regarding Iran's significant role in combating terrorism in the region, Iranian's resilience against Western illegally imposed sanctions and Leader's helpful guidance during insufferable days of nuclear negotiations. He also attended a press conference during which he underlined Iran would pursue close relations with Italy in line with the 14 MoUs which were signed by the two sides' top-ranked officials in scientific, transport and technology fields.

Iran's CBI governor also met and talked with Guido Rosa, member of the Committee of the ABI Presidency for international relations.

Marking the end of President Rouhani's trip to Italy, The Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Italy issued a joint statement and determined a road-map of development of Tehran-Rome ➡



ties in political, economic, cultural, tourism, scientific, and technological fields on January 27.

On second leg of his European trip, President Rouhani arrived in Paris on Wednesday, January 28 and was officially welcomed by Laurent Fabius, French Minister of Foreign Affairs, in Les Invalides Palace of Paris.

President Rouhani held a meeting with Iranians in Paris discussing several regional and international issues, and also with representatives and managers of French business tycoons and great industry managers discussing the economic opportunities in Paris on same evening.

During the high-profile event, where the heads of Total, Airbus, Orange, Peugeot Citroen, and other great industries were attending, Dr. Rouhani said Iran welcomes French participation in its economic sectors which will provide safe profits and receive guarantees. Emmanuel Macron, French Minister of Economy, Industry and Digital Affairs expressed the willingness of France's all great companies active in economic infrastructure, airport, railroad, and energy sectors to participate in Iran's strategic and regional markets.

Afterwards, President Rouhani had a meeting with Director-General of UNESCO Irina Bokova, Total CEO Patrick Pouyanné, Tom Enders and Chief Executive Officer of Airbus Group.

Iran and France sealed a new oil contract in Paris following the recent agreement between the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) and France's Total on selling 150 to 200 barrels of crude oil to

the French company.

Iranian private firm and France's Axens Group also inked an MoU over buying required catalysts for petrochemical and refinery complexes, and agreed to cooperate under a common brand in order to meet domestic needs as well as to exports joint productions to regional countries.

On January 28, President Rouhani and Manuel Carlos Valls, French Prime Minister, attended Iran-France economic session held with other French businessmen and cabinet members to improve relations of both public and private sectors of economy in the two countries which was a good start to extend political relations and consolidate trade in line with common economic interests.

In the meeting, Iran and France signed three MoUs in automaking,

health, and agriculture between private sectors. French prime minister noted that sanctions on Iran's economy inflicted most damage to French economy.

Rouhani and his French counterpart Francois Hollande attended a joint press conference at the Elysee Palace early Thursday January 28 and exchanged views on taking advantage of post-sanction conditions in order to expand joint cooperation and compensate for the lost opportunities. On Thursday evening, Rouhani sat down for talks with Hollande and oversaw the signing of over 20 memorandums of understanding in various sectors, including telecommunications, environment, tourism, agriculture, higher education and transportation.

Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Line (IRISL) and French CMA-CGM Shipping signed an agreement on January 28, extending cooperation into areas of exchange of container space, organizing joint services in international shipping lines, and trade of containers in lines which would benefit both sides' mutual interests.

The European visit was Rouhani's first foreign trip after the nuclear deal between Tehran and the Group 5+1 took effect on January 16.

Delighted over Euro tours economic and political achievements, Rouhani underlined his visit to Europe marks a "new spring" in his country's relationship with the European Union that should help thaw tensions after years of Western sanctions over Iran's nuclear program |



A New Chapter in Diplomacy

By: Mohammad Javad Zarif

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif says the unique opportunity for interaction and cooperation should not be missed today.

President Rouhani's recent visit to Italy and France marked the historic beginning of a new season of economic, political, and cultural cooperation beneficial to both sides, after roughly a decade of being interrupted. Italy and France, as two pillars and founders of the European Union as well as traditional bridges between the West and the Middle East, have often had constructive relationship with Iran, although at times this relationship has experienced ups and downs and even passing crises, still the desire of both sides to overcome the problems and fix the difficulties reflects their deep connections.

Even though the unnecessary so-called nuclear "crisis" and the intrusion of certain third parties created some interruptions in the traditional relations between Iran and Europe, both the warm welcome for President Rouhani, the various and serious high ranking meetings that transpired during this trip, as well as the important agreements that were reached, represent the restoration of economic relations and cooperation in all energy, technology, political, cultural, and even security fields.

Also, President Rouhani's meeting with Pope Francis, marked a mutual commitment to join efforts to create a World Against Violence and Extremism (WAVE). To recall, in September 2013, newly-elected President Rouhani made this initiative at the UN General Assembly as a key foreign policy agenda of Iran; the General Assembly adopted this initiative by consensus and thus sparked the hope for creating a prudent global campaign to fight the menace of terrorism and extremism.

On a broader level, from ancient times Europe and Iran have been each other's civilizational neighbors. With the start of the implementation of the nuclear agreement, which has put an end to unnecessary decade-old tensions, it is now time to focus on more important matters, above all a common search on

how to achieve the mechanisms for Iran and other influential countries to expand their cooperation based on shared interests and the need to confront the common threats.

Indeed, Europe and Iran have common interests in several areas. In light of their historical and traditional bilateral relations as well as other positive sources, such as the existence of complementary economies, mutually-beneficial cooperation in the fields of energy and technology, cultures of Indo-European languages, and other long-standing cultural connections, their sustained cooperation with each other is guaranteed. In addition, through both collective and bilateral mechanisms, it is possible to actively pursue the struggle against the important threats such as terrorism, violence, extremism, drug trafficking, and the like.

The missing link alongside economic and technological cooperation, which should generate sufficient attention, is the necessity for the two sides to increase cooperation in the fight against violence and extremism and to quickly restore peace and stability in the Middle East; the lack of sufficient attention to this is a threat to both Iran and Europe.

Iran, as a country located in the heart of the Middle East and Europe as an immediate neighbor of the region, share legitimate concerns about the continuation of hostilities and bloodshed in the region, especially the crisis of displaced persons in three countries — Syria, Iraq, and Yemen.

Iran for quite some time has proposed and updated two four-point proposals to solve the current crises in Syria and Yemen, a large part of which have been incorporated in Security Council resolution 2254. The common points of these plans include an immediate cease-fire, humanitarian assistance to the non-combatants, facilitating dialogue among the groups from inside of the country and guiding them to form inclusive government of national unity — that would have the potential to restore peace and stability to the region.

After the Vienna 1 and 2 and the New York talks on Syria, and the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2254, a proper momentum toward a just politi-



cal solution in Syria has been generated and the European countries can play an effective role in this connection to strengthen and sustain this process.

Also, confronting the roots and manifestations of structural violence and the effects of extremism, including the fight against poverty and economic inequality, promoting the mechanisms for democracy, avoiding the violent and sectarian conflicts, and opposing unilateral military actions, these are important foreign priorities that can help restore the stability of the Middle East and the European Union can definitely play a positive role in this framework.

Security can never be achieved in expense of insecurity for the others. No nation can truly pursue its interests without taking into consideration the interests of others. No one can combat Al-Qaeda and its ideological siblings, such as the so-called Islamic State, which is neither a state nor Islamic, in Iraq while effectively assisting their expansion in Yemen or Syria. In this regard, European countries by encouraging other countries in the Middle East to accept a political solution for this crisis play a positive role in the region.

A final word: the world community that includes Iran and Europe cannot afford to avoid addressing the root causes of instability in the Middle East any longer. At the same time, this presents a unique opportunity for interaction and cooperation that should not be missed. Peace and stability is the fundamental need of civilization in the Middle East, Europe, and indeed the world. In today's interconnected world marked with growing mutual interdependence, this is not a choice, rather it is an inescapable necessity.

Mohammad Javad Zarif is Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran



All OPEC members face challenges over fall in oil revenue

Interview by Lachin Rezaian

An international oil and energy consultant and analyst said the policy of curtailing oil price has had serious consequences for OPEC member countries themselves, all suffering financially as their oil revenues have fallen by more than half.

Manouchehr Takin underlined OPEC decision makers are facing a dilemma: whether and for how long should the Organization continue its policy and if it does, will it succeed to force out more non-OPEC producers out of the market? "This is by no means certain," he added.

Following the fall of oil prices, OPEC member countries have all faced budget deficits, have drastically cut government expenditure and are experiencing serious economic slow-down or recession with growing unemployment, Takin underlined.

In an exclusive interview with Mehr News, Mr. Takin answered the questions regarding the issue:

◆ **Oil prices continue declining slowly. Do you think they have reached the bottom, or we should wait for the next negative record this year?**

Some analysts (e.g. Goldman Sachs Bank) have suggested that the price of oil (Brent reference price) could go down to \$20 per barrel (\$/bbl). Others are less pessimistic, believing that the price of about \$36/bbl is the bottom of the cycle. Let me explain.

The supply of oil flowing into the world market is still 1 to 1.5 million barrels per day (mbpd) more than the demand. More importantly, the oil market has been experiencing this excess supply condition since late 2014 and the extra oil supply has been gradually filling the storage spaces around the world and even a large number of oil tankers are used for storing oil, anchored at sea or at ports. The total volume of oil stocks is es-

timated to be greater than 3 billion barrels and this is putting downward pressure on the price of oil. Price could begin to improve when the market begins to use the stored oil and this could only happen when the world oil supply-demand balance is reversed, i.e. the flow of supply into the world market becomes less than the demand for oil. Unfortunately, supply is still much greater than demand, though there are some hopeful indications.

Let us look at some details using the information from OPEC Secretariat. On the demand side, the growth is expected to continue. World oil demand increased by about 1 million barrels per day (mbpd) in 2014, by about 1.6 mbpd in 2015 and is estimated to increase by about 1.3 mbpd in 2016. Please note that the IEA (International Energy Agency) data differ slightly from OPEC. They are 1.8 mbpd for 2015 and 1.2 mbpd for 2016. These differences will be clarified as both the OPEC Secretariat and the IEA receive more up-to-date information in the coming months. However, they show that the fall in price resulted in higher oil consumption in 2015 relative to 2014, but by 2016 there will be a more 'usual' growth in world oil demand.

On the supply side, the growth of oil production outside OPEC slowed down in 2015. It was more than 2 million mbpd in 2014 but was reduced to about 1 mbpd in 2015. For 2016 non-OPEC production is actually expected to decline by about 0.4 mbpd. However, oil production from OPEC, in particular Saudi Arabia, has increased. Total OPEC crude oil production was 30.2 mbpd in 2013 and 30.1 mbpd in 2014, but it has gradually been increasing in 2015. It was 31.6 mbpd in the third quarter. In fact the production increase by OPEC has been the main factor which brought the Brent price from \$115/bbl in June 2014 to less than \$36/bbl in December 2015.

The answer to the question 'whether the price of oil has reached the bottom' depends on OPEC policy. Will the Organization curtail its production in the coming months, or will it continue to over-produce. The OPEC production policy has resulted in the collapse of the price of oil and the low price has caused the reduction of oil production outside OPEC, as was noted above. There has also been cancellation of more than \$200 bn of oil industry investment in field projects around the world. This will result in lower oil production in non-OPEC areas in the future. In fact these were the expectations of OPEC ministers when they decided not to limit their own oil output when they met in Vienna in November 2014. However, they had expected much more rapid response to their policy and a more drastic fall in production outside OPEC.

In spite of this relative success for curtailing non-OPEC production, one should note that the policy has had serious consequences for OPEC member countries themselves. All have been suffering financially as their oil revenues have fallen by more than half. They have all had budget deficits, have drastically cut government expenditure and are experiencing serious economic slow-down or recession with growing unemployment. These and other problems are faced by all OPEC countries. The 'rich' like Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait and Qatar had significant financial reserves but their reserves are dwindling and some have been forced to take domestic and international loans. The consequences of the policy have been more damaging and even critical, for those OPEC countries with less foreign exchange reserves, large populations, low per capita income and high dependence on oil. For them, the fall in oil revenue has been critical and many are facing challenging economic and social problems.

One could describe the situation as a stand-off between OPEC and non-OPEC. ➔

Who is going to blink first and how long could OPEC endure? There has been great pressure from within OPEC – many member countries have been pressing for a change in policy. In the similar cases of oil price collapse (1986 and 1998-1999) there was pressure on Saudi Arabia also from outside OPEC, especially from the United States. This time this is lacking and the public opinion in the US and in the other oil importing countries around the world is in favour of a low price of oil.

Saudi Arabia and others prefer to continue until more non-OPEC competitors are 'forced out'. Although OPEC policy has been effective, its impact has not been sufficient to force non-OPEC producers out of the market completely, at least not so far. In fact it could be argued that the low price has made them more resilient (e.g. US shale oil producers). They have lowered their costs and their production could increase again once the price of oil begins to rise.

The dilemma facing OPEC decision makers is whether and for how long should the Organization continue its policy and if it does, will it succeed to force out more non-OPEC producers out of the market? This is by no means certain. More importantly, it is also not certain if OPEC countries can survive a continuation of the drastic loss of their oil revenues. A likely scenario is that OPEC will agree to cut its production, probably sometime in 2016. As on the previous occasions, the Organisation would probably decide to defend a lower oil price than before the oil price collapse. It is also possible that some non-OPEC producers would cut their production in support of OPEC. The historical experience, however, suggests that this is less probable and in any case it would be symbolic and in small volumes. Mexico and Russia did not agree with this idea when they met the Saudi and Venezuelan oil ministers in November 2014 and there have been similar statements by non-OPEC producers since then.

◆ **Iran is trying to lure back international oil companies to develop its vast oil and gas reserves once sanctions are lifted under a deal with world powers, and recently lifting of four of them on Iran's petrochemical industry. Do you think it will have strong effect on the oil**

price? How Iran's presence will affect the market?

The market has already been expecting an increase of Iranian oil exports and that this will begin soon. The current low price is partly due to this expectation. Large quantities of Iranian crude oil are available for delivery on board tankers in the Persian Gulf and in other parts of the world. Iran can also increase its production by 0.5 mbpd within a few months and by another 0.5 mbpd soon after. There are no serious technical constraints in raising production. The limitations could most probably come from the legal procedures for the actual lifting of the sanctions on trading Iranian oil and more importantly, on the international banking system and on Dollar transactions related to Iran. However, most observers of the nuclear agreement believe that additional Iranian oil will enter the

alised and the developing countries. On the other hand, the low price has been damaging to the economy of oil exporting countries as was discussed above. Of course many are surviving the low revenue conditions with belt-tightening, reducing expenditure and other public policy undertakings.

◆ **The IEA said in a monthly report on December that growth in demand for oil will ease next year to 1.2 million barrels per day, from 1.8 million barrels a day this year. Why many oil producing countries, largely OPEC member states, do not reduce production through coordinated efforts to raise prices?**

The larger increase in demand in 2015 was due to the oil price collapse – from about \$115/bbl to less than \$50/bbl. Consumers could afford driving extra miles and use more petroleum products.



world market by spring 2016 and will cause further downward pressure on the price of oil. Iraqi oil exports are also continuing to increase with the progress of its field development projects. Improved security conditions in Libya will result in more oil exports from that country. One could speculate that with all this additional oil, OPEC members will ultimately reach an agreement on cutting their production in defence of price.

◆ **The future of this trend is in favor of what groups or countries? Is it beneficial to consumers or producers? What is the effect of this falling prices on the countries of Middle East, especially Iran?**

The low price of oil is beneficial to all oil importing countries and final consumers are happy everywhere – the industri-

However, no more price effect is expected for world oil demand in 2016 and the growth relative to 2015 will be more from income effect, i.e. the growth of GDP.

In the current conditions of the world market, supply has to be reduced for raising the price of oil, but no individual producer is ready to cut its own production. All world oil producers are losing revenue and in theory they should all share the cut in production, though this is an international issue, requiring diplomatic and geopolitical effort and is by no means an easy task. At present OPEC is the only organised institution of oil exporters that its members are in contact with each other and regularly meet and analyse the world oil market. In the past OPEC has cut its production in defence of price and has also increased its production when price has been too high. At pres- ➔

ent a major cut in production is required. OPEC has to decide on a production ceiling for total OPEC and then allocate quotas to individual member countries. This, however, has been described as 'opening a Pandora's box'. The Islamic Republic of Iran will not be ready to cut its production, having suffered from the imposed sanctions and a low level of oil exports in the past few years. Iran will try to compensate for that loss. Iraq, though presently enjoying an increased level of production, would argue that its oil exports had suffered for decades due to wars and international sanctions and will also try to compensate for that loss. Other member countries will have similar arguments and will demand Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the UAE and Qatar to cut their production. In particular, Saudi Arabia has been benefiting the most from the absence of those countries and had been increasing its production. Other countries will argue that it is only fair that Saudi Arabia cuts its production more than others.

We should remember that price of oil has been determined by market forces and the global supply and demand balance. In the past OPEC has acted within these constraints, has fine-tuned its production and has tried to defend its main source of national income and has also tried to stabilise the market. Technological breakthrough and innovation have increased world oil supply. These were unexpected but were also inevitable. In addition, there have been major developments, though more gradual, in reducing the dependence on oil over the past decades. Consumption efficiency has increased and there has also been substitution of oil by other energies in all countries. The quantity of oil used to produce one unit of GDP has fallen by 60% or more and this trend will continue. As oil exporters, we should be aware that the world demand for oil will not grow for ever and that we should reduce our dependence on oil.

◆ **What will be the effect of offshore development and rig building, having lower costs, on oil prices market and how it can be affected by current oil market situation?**

Generally the development cost of offshore fields is higher than onshore, though for individual projects costs vary over a wide range and no single figure could be given as the cost of offshore

production. Similarly some onshore projects are high cost. The fall in the price of oil has adversely affected all high-cost projects. However, an important point that should be emphasised is that the projects that had already been under development will be continued, especially those with a heavy front end capital expenditure and a long lead time (several years). When most of the heavy investment has been committed and the projects are well advanced, they will be completed and brought into production in spite of the fall in the price of oil. The expenditure is treated as sunk cost. The operating costs are usually much lower and production operations will generate positive cash flow. Such projects will not be cancelled. This was an important factor for the oil industry on the previous occasions of oil price collapse (1986 and 1998). It is still true, but a significant number of oil field projects today have much shorter lead time, relatively less capital cost but higher operating cost. These projects will most probably be cancelled as has already occurred in the case of oil from shale and tight rocks in the United States. The number of drilling rigs in this sector has fallen by more than 50%. These projects have been more responsive to the fall in the price of oil, but these operations could also be resumed and expanded if the price of oil increases, as noted in answer to question 1. These operators have made their operations more efficient. There has also been a fall in the daily rates for rigs and other field services. Thus costs have fallen for shale and tight rock oil and they would need a lower oil price than in the past. There is no agreement on the price at

which shale and tight rock activity will be resumed or expanded - \$50/bbl, \$60/bbl or higher? For the major international oil companies, it had been estimated that a price of \$104/bbl was required to cover their capital investments in 2014. This requirement has fallen to \$81/bbl for 2015 and is estimated to fall to \$66/bbl for 2016 (Wood Mackenzie, Financial Times 28 December 2015).

These figures, though only approximate, nevertheless they strongly suggest that with the improvement in the price of oil, more supply will enter the market and price will not rise back to the \$110/bbl - \$120/bbl range. In other words, the entry of new supply will provide a 'cap' for the price of oil - say \$60/bbl to \$70/bbl.

Lastly, one should always remember that these discussions are based on a continuation of the recent trends in the world economy and politics. Unexpected events, especially political turmoil could obliterate the oil market. In particular, sudden disruption of production operations will cause a spike in the price of oil that could be greater than the prices suggested above.

Manouchehr Takin is an international oil and energy consultant who worked with the Centre for Global Energy Studies in London from its establishment in 1990 until the Centre closed in May 2014. He had previously worked for nine years at OPEC Secretariat in Vienna following a career in oil and mining industry operations with Iran's International Oil Consortium, Amoco, Ultramar, National Iranian Oil Company, Shell, as well as the Geological Survey of Iran and Anglo American mining company |





Politics

American political analyst Colin S. Cavell:

Revolution ongoing in Bahrain until Al-Khalifa dictatorship ousted

Interview by: Marjohn Sheikhi

On the occasion of Bahrain Uprising 5th anniversary, American author and professor of Political Science Dr. Cavell believes the revolution is still ongoing in Bahrain and as the Bahraini people become more adept at revolutionary tactics they will eventually be successful in achieving their stated democratic goals.

In February and March 2011, Bahrain experienced peaceful protests followed by brutal government repression, leaving over 30 dead, with prominent opposition leaders sentenced, Shia mosques and other religious structures demolished and many protesters faced dismissal from jobs. Now five years later and on the occasion of the uprising anniversary, we have reached Dr. Colin S. Cavell, a former Assistant Professor at the University of Bahrain and currently Assistant Professor of Political Science at Bluefield State College in Bluefield, West Virginia, to tell us about the fate of the 2011 uprisings in Bahrain, as the one Arab country that called for reform but never quite achieved it. What follows is Dr. Cavell's interview with Mehr News Agency:

◆ **Two aspects of 2011 Bahrain Uprising sets it apart from the rest of the Arab world; one is the fact that Bahrain's uprising didn't get quite as much attention as some of the other uprisings happening at the same time; and two is the peaceful nature of the protests which were then faced with brutal government repression. Can you elaborate on these two distinctive aspects?**

The peaceful nature of the 'Bahrain Uprising', as you refer to it, is a consequence of those individuals leading the struggle, as well as the generally benign nature of the Bahraini people. And precisely because of the manner in which the Arab Spring unfolded in Bahrain – i.e. its peaceful nature – explains, in part, why the media, especially the western media, did not focus much attention on the democratic uprising in Bah-



rain since its eruption in February of 2011. Western media deliberately stereotypes much of the Arab world as hostile, violent, irrational, superstitious, and chaotic, as this serves US hegemonic goals. Thus, if events on the ground do not play into these western-created narratives, motifs, characterizations, or tropes, then the events are either downplayed or ignored and, hence, become a 'non-story'. But, of course, the Al-Khalifa regime, which rules in Bahrain and oppresses its peoples, did indeed resort to violence – including mass arrests, torture, and killings – to suppress the uprising, actions which the regime was heavily criticized for by the BICI Report [1]. But, because the ruling Al-Khalifa dictatorship is a close ally of the United States Government (USG), the regime's violence is rarely focused on.

◆ **What was the background for the political and civil rights movement in Bahrain? Are the demands still the same or have they gone through changes in the past five years?**

Members of the Al-Khalifa family, as part of the Bani Utbah federation of Arab tribes which conquered Bahrain in 1783, have ruled in some form in the country since 1797. Bahrain has thus arguably been under monarchical rule for 233 years, and therefore, the background of the ongoing political and civil rights movement in Bahrain can be traced directly to the lack of democratic rule in the country. Thus the primary demand of the overwhelming majority of the people of Bahrain is for a say in the formation and functioning of their gov-

ernment; in other words, fundamentally, they oppose monarchy and wish to replace it with some form of democracy where the majority rule is the guiding principle of political organization. Currently, not only is the ruling family part of a minority confessional group – i.e. Sunni Muslims – in Bahrain, but, moreover, only the ruling Al Khalifas enjoy sovereignty in and over Bahrain, its peoples, resources, land, etc. The numerous other demands of the protestors derive directly from this one central demand, for without sovereignty resting with the populace of Bahrain, the country remains a prison nation, where there is no freedom of speech, no freedom of association, no freedom of conscience, no freedom of the press, and no freedom to petition the government for a redress of grievances without fear of punishment or reprisal.

◆ **What were the reasons Bahrain became the one Arab country whose uprising was suppressed? What is left of Bahrain's uprising now?**

The geographic nature of Bahrain, being an island nation off the coast of Saudi Arabia in the Persian Gulf, limits outside intervention into the country from afar thus making it easier for the Al Khalifa dictatorship to impose harsh penalties upon anyone challenging or critiquing their regime. Likewise, Bahrain's proximity to Saudi Arabia, which, in effect, dictates, funds, and enforces the foreign policies of the other Gulf monarchs compels the much smaller Bahraini government to strictly adhere to KSA leadership, or else face the invasion of the KSA's military forces, as head of the Gulf Cooperation Council's Peninsula Shield Forces, as happened in March 2011 to clamp down on the Bahraini uprising. The Al Khalifas have jailed all of the major opposition leaders, subjecting them to torture and other abuses, while engaging in a witch-hunt for individual supporters of the opposition, subjecting them to torture, imprisonment, and sometimes death, even for minor "crimes" such as tweeting their opposition to the regime. Sentiment remains very strong against the Al Khalifa rule and flares up periodically in order to send a message to the re- ➔

gime that the resistance is still very strong and resolute against monarchy.

◆ **What are the conditions of the political prisoners currently held in Bahrain?**

Reports of the disproportionate usage of tear gas to suppress antigovernment demonstrations since 2011 have been widespread. Reports of unlawful detentions and interrogations of suspected activists continue till today, along with the jailing and torture of suspected activists. Former president and co-founder of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR) Abdul-Hadi Al-Khawaja, Human Rights activist, Professor Abduljalil Abdulla al-Singace, Democratic Action Society (Wa'ad) General Secretary Ibrahim Sharif, Haq Movement leader Hasan Mushaima, Secretary-General of the Al-Wefaq political society, Sheikh Ali Salman and many, many other political leaders have been jailed and tortured in Bahrain for a number of years now, deprived of medical care, subjected to sleep deprivation and other forms of manipulation and intimidation. Foreign journalists, non-governmental (NGO) members, politicians, trade unionists, aid workers, and activists, including the United Nations special rapporteur on torture, Juan Mendez, have been denied access to Bahrain's political prisoners, actions which are clear violations of international law. And within the last couple of years, the Bahraini regime has increased its cruel practice of punishing suspected opposition activists by revoking their citizenship, thus making these folks – and by extension, their families – stateless on an island nation, an action which is also contrary to international law. The regime can literally kill you with impunity, because legally you do not exist!

◆ **What were the demands of the Shia majority during the Bahrain Uprising? Were they mostly political, social or economic? What are the discriminations practiced by the monarchy against them?**

Bahrain, so far, has practiced a policy of divide and conquer with its domestic opposition, suggesting to the international community that the domestic opposition within Bahrain has been stirred up and financed externally by Iran, whom they accuse of supporting Bahraini Shia activists. This policy, of course, flies in the face of the fact that much of the domestic opposition in Bahrain, including some of the opposition political leaders, like Ibrahim Sharif, are Sunni confessionalists themselves. Having their reputations tarnished

by the minority Sunni Al-Khalifs, this presumably gives the regime the green light to target Shia activists, their mosques, gathering places, and to desecrate their religious symbols, history, culture, etc. While the regime discriminates against all Bahraini citizens, especially by virtue of the fact that most are prohibited from joining the armed forces, as the Al-Khalifas rely predominantly on foreign national mercenaries to comprise their security forces, the regime takes extraordinary efforts to discriminate against Shia citizens, preventing many from being hired or promoted within the business community or in government jobs, thus creating an additional wedge in the class structure based upon religious division and confessional preference.

◆ **Is revolution still ongoing in Bahrain? What do you think will be the future of it?**

If we understand revolution as the overthrow of the existing social and political system, usually by violence, though possibly revolution through the ballot, then we may say that, at present, the primary form of the Bahraini revolution, has been one mainly of peaceful protests, non-violent civil resistance, and vocalization of democratic demands. Are these actions still ongoing? Yes, of course, and they will continue as long as the Al-Khalifa dictatorship remains entrenched in power. As for the future of the Bahraini revolution, history has demonstrated that oppressive dictators never last forever and, eventually, with time and effort, are overthrown and ousted. As the Bahraini people become more skilled and adept at revolutionary tactics and strategy, eventually, they, too, will be successful in achieving their stated democratic goals.

◆ **What do you think is the greatest threat to Arab democracy? Political fragmentation and immaturity, lack of strong institutions, Arab dictators, economic challenges, or the US?**

At present, the greatest threat to Arab or Middle Eastern democracy, as recent past history has clearly demonstrated, has been imperial interference either from the United States in particular or the United Kingdom to a lesser degree. Whether such intervention comes in the form similar to the 1953 US overthrow of Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh by the Central Intelligence Agency, CIA efforts supporting the 1963 coup d'état against Iraqi leader Abd al-Karim Qasim, US and CIA efforts to counter Egyptian

leader Gamal Abdel Nasser in the 1960s, external support for mujahideen terrorists to oust President Mohammad Najibullah of Afghanistan in the 1980s and 90s, direct support for the NATO bombing and Al Qaeda terrorists who assassinated Libyan leader Muammar al-Gaddafi in 2011, the backing of General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi to overthrow the democratically-elected government of Mohamed Morsi in Egypt in 2013, or current efforts to overthrow the duly-elected government of President Bashar al-Assad of Syria, which include support for the terrorist group ISIL, allowing it to infiltrate Syrian territory and wage brutal and bloody warfare against the Syrian population backed up by a US-directed bombing campaign from the air, all of these examples – and many more too numerous to list here – have taught the peoples of the Middle East that whatever opposition they may face in their countries, it invariably never compares to the steady and directed opposition coming from the imperial hegemon the United States of America. Thus in order to counter the US policy of 'divide and conquer', the peoples of the Arab world and the Middle East in general must perfect the policy of 'unite in order to prevail' to counter this onslaught of external intervention into their territorial integrity and sovereign affairs.

***Dr. Colin S. Cavell**, an American author who earned his Doctorate of Philosophy degree in Political Science from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst is currently Assistant Professor of Political Science at Bluefield State College in Bluefield, West Virginia and Adjunct Professor of Political Science at Holyoke Community College in Holyoke, Massachusetts. Dr. Cavell is also a member of the American Political Science Association (APSA) and the Massachusetts Community College Council (MCCC). He is a former Assistant Professor at the University of Bahrain |*

[1] The Bahrain Independent Commission Inquiry (BICI) report, headed up by Professor M. Cherif Bassiouni, an Emeritus Professor of Law from DePaul University in Chicago, Illinois in the USA, had previously led United Nations investigations into alleged war crimes in Bosnia and Libya. Bassiouni was tasked by Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa to look into the political unrest that occurred in Bahrain and report on them, but only for the period of unrest lasting from February to March, 2011.

Bahraini activist Yousif Al-Muhafdah: **Saudi, UAE enemy of democracy in Persian Gulf states**



Interview by: Marjohn Sheikhi

BCHR Vice-President Said Yousif Al-Muhafdah says the reason the 2011 democratic uprising in Bahrain was crushed was the opposition of Saudi Arabia and UAE to democracy in the Persian Gulf region, as well as US and UK hypocrisy.

Inspired by the widespread 'Arab Spring' movements in countries across the Middle East, Bahraini anti-regime protesters on 14 February 2011 took to the streets in the small Persian Gulf monarchy in a series of protests against the ruling Al-Khalifa family. The mass protests were violently broken up by government security forces, with dozens of protesters killed and hundreds jailed. In the five years since the uprising, Bahraini activist Said Yousif Al-Muhafdah told Mehr News Agency that the pro-democracy movement, although quieter now, is still ongoing while the widespread crackdown against peaceful activists continues.

Said Yousif Al-Muhafdah who serves as the Vice President of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, a non-profit organization based in Bahrain and Denmark, has himself been a target of arbitrary arrests and torture for his human rights work in Bahrain and exiled to Germany as a result.

"People are fighting for their basic human rights, justice, democracy and freedom," Mr. Al-Muhafdah says of the background for the political and civil rights

movement in Bahrain. "There are groups which want the monarchy to remain and other groups which are pushing with their demands that the ruling family leave the power, but we as human rights activists do not care which government background is ruling as long as they respect human rights and implement justice."

What in fact sets the 2011 Bahrain Uprising apart from the rest of the Arab world is the fact that Bahrain's uprising didn't get quite as much attention as some of the other uprisings happening at the same time, and also the peaceful nature of the protests which were then faced with brutal government repression. Al-Muhafdah elaborates on these two distinctive aspects, "well, we are in Bahrain victims of having been born in an oil-rich country and region, and as a result, governments do not want to upset the Saudi regime and many media are owned by the Persian Gulf governments, especially the Arab media and other Western media with economic relations to them, but even with all this complication, we succeeded in telling the world what is going on in Bahrain."

"Of course, when we talk about my people's struggle for democracy, we have to remember that we are not only fighting Bahraini government but all the other Persian Gulf countries except Oman," said Al-Muhafdah on the reasons Bahrain became the one Arab country whose uprising was suppressed. "When we went out in the street

in 2011 and I was one of them, we called for democracy; one month later Saudi and UAE troops came to my country and attacked the protesters and their message was that democracy is not allowed in our region."

According to Amnesty International, after the five years since the uprising, "hopes for progress on human rights and accountability for past and present abuses have faded." Al-Muhafdah describes the conditions of the political prisoners currently held in Bahraini jails as "lack of treatment, solitary confinement, torture, violation against basic right, and collective punishment."

"The demands of the Shia majority during the Bahrain Uprising were mostly political as they were calling for an elected government, freedom, basic human rights, the release of political detainees, and an end to discrimination," said Al-Muhafdah of the current condition of the Shia population in Bahrain and the government's discrimination against them; "since the king of Bahrain assumed power, the discrimination against the Shia became worse than ever; they are not allowed to work in army or in the police department. They are not allowed to work in the Ministry of Intelligence, Foreign Affairs and many other sensitive government ministries. The Al-Khalifa kingdom has also demolished 37 Shia mosques which is a kind of blatant discrimination against them."

But is revolution still ongoing in Bahrain? Al-Muhafdah says yes, although the pro-democracy movement is facing many challenges; "in our case in Bahrain, we have had a strong civil society since 1960 but as I said, we are facing the Persian Gulf countries which are against democracy in Bahrain, as well as the US and UK which have military interest in Bahrain are also against an elected, democratic government in the island nation."

"These Western countries call for democracy in Syria and other countries but not in Bahrain and other oil-rich countries that are buying their weapons. This is what I call blatant hypocrisy," he said of the greatest threat to Arab democracy.

Said Yousif Al-Muhafdah is the Vice President of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights, a non-profit organization based in Bahrain and Denmark. Having worked as the Head of Documentation in Bahrain from 2007 to 2013, he has been arrested on many occasions and spent several months in prison on political charges. In the spring of 2014, Sayed Yousif went into exile in Germany, following continuous judicial harassment and threats to his life. Currently living in Berlin with his family, he continues to work as a human rights defender, promoting awareness throughout Europe about issues in Bahrain |

Tunisian political analyst Rawa Kassem:

'US tried in vain to defeat Tunisian Revolution'

Interview by: Mohammad Mazhari & Mohammad Hossein Azari

Referring to Tunisia's political and security situation after the 2011 Revolution, a Tunisian political analyst reiterated that the US has failed in defeating the movement.

The Islamic awakening movement (aka the 'Arab Spring') was a revolutionary wave of demonstrations and protests, riots, and civil wars in the Arab world that began on 18 December 2010 in Tunisia with the Tunisian Revolution and other Arab states.

Almost five years ago, thousands of Tunisians protestors, thronged to President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, the country's fugitive dictator who had ruled Tunisia since 1987, in an act of defiance that would ripple across the Arab world and form a democratic government arising from the votes of the nation.

Now, five years have passed since the revolution in Tunisia and during the period, numerous challenges have faced the country in economic, security and partly political areas.

In recent weeks, wide protests have been held against the policies of Tunisia in some provinces including al-Qasrain. The protests have spread to the capital of the country, Tunis. In response to the events, Beji Caid Essebsi, the Tunisian President, has deemed it as the people's natural right to protest against government policies adding "ISIL terrorists will no doubt exploit the recent unrest in the country."

In an exclusive interview with Mehr News, the Tunisian analyst Rawa Kassem answered the questions regarding the latest developments in Tunisia and the political and security situation in the country:

Five years after the fall of Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, is Tunisia better off or about the same? Has the political and security situation in the country experienced changes and developments?

The changes in Tunisia over the past



five years can be divided into several parts; the first category pertains to developments of the economy and economic growth and the second to the changes in the security situation. With regard to economic issues, it can be said that after the overthrow of the former dictator, Tunisian authorities failed to offer any new economic gains for the youth in the country. Figures and statistics clearly indicate that the rate of unemployment has increased from 12 to 15 per cent over the previous years. Moreover, the rate of economic growth in the early years of the Tunisian Revolution has been below 15 per cent. Regarding the security situation, the country is facing more challenges after the revolution. In my opinion the only achievement of the Tunisian revolution has been observance of 'freedom'; freedom that became more prominent, especially in the field of media. After the Tunisian revolution, freedom of expression turned into the main elements of the constitution.

◆ Is the revolution over? Has it reached its ultimate objectives? Has the Tunisian Revolution lived up to expectations?

The Tunisian Revolution is not over and it hasn't fulfilled all its aims. As mentioned previously, various difficulties have emerged in the field of economy over the past five years. In contrast, good events have taken place

with regard to freedom for Tunisian citizens. Unfortunately, over the recent months, Neda Tunis as the country's main political party has been dealing with political conflicts instead of focusing on major problems like youth unemployment. In my viewpoint, the massive protests held in recent weeks mark a warning to government authorities that another revolution might take place in an unexpected moment.

◆ How would you evaluate world powers' (including the US) administrations made during the Tunisian Revolution? Did they offer slow or inadequate response to the revolution?

I would like to point out an important issue. Although Tunisia achieved great achievements after the revolution in 2011, some anomalies and challenges emerged in various areas in the country. After the revolution, we found ourselves in front of so many foreign countries such as the US. The American government has always tried to apply various policies and strategies to challenge the traditional and historic role of France in Tunisia. Some existing information suggests that America's most important goal is to establish a military base in North Africa for greater mobility in the region.

◆ What do you think of the future of the revolution?

Tunisians have proven to be able to endure all the hardships of post-revolution. They saved the country from civil war by adopting the policy of 'reconciliation'. You know very well that what happened in Tunisia is totally different from what is now underway in Syria, Libya and other countries. I believe that Tunisia, with its civilized history, can breeze past all the problems and difficulties arriving at 'beach of peace and quiet.'

◆ What do you think is the greatest threat to Arab democracy? Political →

fragmentation and immaturity, lack of strong institutions, Arab dictators, economic challenges, or the US?

It is true that what is currently happening in the Arab world is resulting from the chaos scenario proposed by America's former secretary of state, but we should deny the rich history of tyranny in Arabic countries. Uniform political scene in many countries has led young people to the streets in protest and in pursuit of their wishes. In many Arabic countries, there exist ravages of the economic situation while the country's wealth remains in the hands of tyrants. However, the projects of foreign countries were implemented in the Arabic countries and the emerging revolutions in these countries have been replaced by foreign plots.

◆ Do you esteem that the Tunisia is in need of a "Marshall Plan"; particularly, with regard to the recent protests against unemployment?

The Marshall Plan is a Western plot and Tunisia is a traditional and deep-rooted country. Tunisia possesses various strategies to resolve ongoing

problems and crises and can efficiently make use of these strategies. In my opinion, failed schemes cannot be used again. In addition, it is also necessary to note that the situation in Tunisia is much better compared to the disastrous situation of neighbors. In general, compared to many Arabic countries, the situation in Tunisia is better in terms of unemployment and poverty. I personally believe that the West is in need of a resolution to the crisis in Tunisia since any threat to the Tunisian security exerts a direct effect on Europe's security.

◆ Was the Tunisian Revolution more about political freedoms or economic issues or both?

Popular uprising in Tunisia initially set out to achieve economic growth in the country. Gradually, over the course of time, the demands of protestors from the former dictator increased until they called for serious political reform in areas like freedom and democracy. After some external interventions suppressed the demands of the people, overthrow of the former dictator

of Tunisia turned into the ultimate request of the people. United States of America fully came to realize that the war against Tunisia would be very costly similar to the policy adopted towards Iraq. Therefore, the US opted for a different strategy to stifle the voice of Tunisian people in the bud.

◆ What is the biggest challenge of post-revolution rebuilding in Tunisia?

The biggest challenge facing Tunisia is establishment of a strategic transformation in the country's economic and political fields. Policies need to be adopted that would not end up in demonstrations of thousands of young Tunisians in protest against unemployment. Perhaps the most important challenge is how to increase the economic growth rate to around 6 per cent a year. Other future challenges in Tunisia include application of strategies to tackle unemployment as well as the complete destruction of terrorism.

***Rawa Kassem** is a Tunisian political analyst who writes columns for al-Ahd news agency |*



Velayati:

Iran to solve Saudi issue from position of strength



The head of Strategic Research Center said Iran tries to resolve issues with Saudi Arabia from the position of power.

"Saudi Arabia has been defeated in Iraq, Yemen and Syria and its delusions of grandeur has been shattered. Waves of the Islamic Awakening were steadily infiltrating into Saudi Arabia and [therefore] they were back to violence to stop possible public dissidence as it is important to them not to face instability inside the country," Ali Akbar Velayati said in an interview with Basirat News & Analysis Website.

The following is the full text of the interview:

◆ **It seems that Riyadh's attempts to sever its bilateral diplomatic ties with Tehran comes at a time when we are approaching the day of implementation of Vienna 1 and 2 agreements over the political solution of the Syrian crisis. Do you believe that the move by Riyadh is aimed at derailing the international peace-making efforts to resolve the Syrian crisis? What is the Saudi regime looking for by such provocations?**

Today, the political center of gravity has shifted to our region. In the past, this region and other regions were affected by international developments, and today

the international developments hinge upon the regional developments. Saudi Arabia has always played a fundamental role in creating chaos in the region. Ms. [Benazir] Bhutto during her tenure as [Pakistan's] prime minister, when all countries shrugged off responsibility about rise of Taliban, said that we alone should not blame for the rise of Taliban and the US, England and Saudi Arabia should also be blame for it; the Britons schemed [to create Taliban], the Americans provided military support and the Saudis took care of the financial support. As Bhutto acknowledged this in an interview as an official and also other reasons that confirm the issue, Saudi Arabia has [long] been playing a destructive role in the region. Al-Qaeda, which was also an extremist Salafi group, was created by the Saudis after the Taliban militant group. Based on this, Saudi Arabia has infiltrated into many religious centers in Islamic countries in order to promote Salafist ideology which has led to the creation of [Takfiri terrorist groups including] al-Nusra Front, Jaish al-Islam (army of Islam), Jiash al-Horr, Boko Haram and similar groups in the West, China, Caucasus, Russia, Pakistan, North Africa, Iraq, Syria and Yemen. In general, whenever an extremist group introduces Islam with extremist principles and easily kills people, like Takfiris and terrorists in the

Islamic world, it is linked to Saudi Arabian ideologically.

Some scholars who are affiliated to Saudi Arabia are funded by the kingdom to propagate extremism and also terrorize and kill opponents of the regime under an Islamic cover and this has pushed the world public opinion to take stance against Saudi Arabia. The New York Times recently confirmed this in an article, saying that "ISIL [terrorist group] traces its origin to Saudi Arabia" and Western official and their media outlets accused Saudi Arabia as the fountainhead of Islamic extremism in the world.

Saudi Arabia from the perspective of Western public opinion is condemned and ISIL has been defeated in Syria, Iraq and Yemen. They have been defeated in the battle fields and the delusions of grandeur that the Saudi regime had assumed for itself now has practically been shattered. Before the Saudi aggression against Yemen, everybody considered Saudi Arabia as the Islamic world's top power; a power that has a determining and pivotal role [in the region's developments] and that all should obey the monarchy.

The Saudis presumed that they could make the Yemeni people yield to their demands by attacking Yemen and resorting to merciless [airstrikes]. This is why they are relentlessly destroying this Islamic and ancient country and killing its people. For this reason, the Saudis are condemned by the Islamic world's public opinion.

The Saudis knew that the execution of a cleric [Shiekh Nimr al-Nimr] who only criticized them verbally would have after-effects, but by doing so they were seeking to change the game and prioritize other issues. Therefore, they killed him and has no explanation for no country has such a principle to agree that a religious leader to be executed in the worst of manner.

◆ **How do you see the Saudi regime's provocative act to cease diplomatic ties with Iran as we are approaching implementation days of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) between Tehran and six world powers as well as the Syrian peace talks? Do you this happened quite by accident?**

No, because they [the Saudis] were discontented with the Vienna [nuclear] agreement and expected the Americans and Europeans to throw their weight behind them more fervently. They also expected the Islamic countries to support

the extremist forces and terrorists that enjoy the Saudis' support.

But the Americans have become increasingly frustrated as they have been indirectly defending Saudi Arabia in Syria, Yemen and Iraq for nearly five years. During the ten-month Saudi war on Yemen, the US is providing aerial refuel for the aircraft attacking the country. The US is also supplying the Saudi regime with intelligence regarding gathering centers of [Yemeni] forces. A resolution was passed in favor of Saudi Arabia at the UN Security Council, and during this period a resolution was not allowed to be adopted against them at the UN Security Council.

Facing with the alliance of Russia, Iran, Iraq, Syria and Hezbollah, Saudi Arabia has been defeated in the Syrian war. In Iraq, the Saudi agents which are made up of Takfiris and members of former Ba'athi regime have also faced defeat. Saudi Arabia had pinned their hope on Daesh and al-Nusra Front, but after the killing of leaders of Jaish al-Islam and Jaish al-Horr, the opposition groups have no longer needed military power [to fight] and are weakened in the face the Syrian government; they will be defeated. It should be noted that waves of the Islamic Awakening were steadily infiltrating into Saudi Arabia and [therefore] they resorted to violence to [stop possible public dissidence] as it is important to them not to face instability inside the country. On one hand, they sought to wreak revenge on Iran and the Islamic world in particular. The Islamic World's scholars along with the Islamic countries had asked Saudi Arabia not to do this and not to kill this prominent cleric as this act amounts to crime as well [kingdoms'] stupidity because it does not solve any problems.

It seems that Saudi Arabia's decision-making model is similar to an angry person who has become disappointed with a logical solution to serve its own interests.

◆ **Recently, the Saudis announced the formation of an Islamic coalition against "terrorism" and on January 3 executed Sheikh Nimr. What is your take on such provocative acts?**

This is not the first time that the Saudis have announced the establishment of a military coalition. At the beginning of their war on Yemen, there were talks of an Islamic coalition, but in practice neither Pakistan nor Egypt helped them. Only some

countries like Sudan and Djibouti gave hand to the Saudis. Bahrain [regime has long been also helping Riyadh] as it has no sovereignty and has been reigned by the Saudis. After construction of bridge [King Fahd causeway] which links the Bahrain with [the Eastern region] of Saudi Arabia, the Saudis behave in a way as if Bahrain is part of Saudi Arabia. Surely, Bahrain people are opposed to this dependency and these tyrant and stooge rulers of Bahrain who are the servants of Saudi Arabia. Thus, other true Islamic countries, did not join this coalition despite Saudi pressure. Such talks [of forming collation] are empty rhetoric in practice.

◆ **Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan made a visit to Saudi Arabia days before Sheikh Nimr's execution by Riyadh. Later, both sides announced that they have reached an agreement to set up a "strategic cooperation council" to boost bilateral ties. What is your perspective on this?**

As you know, Turkey also criticized Saudi Arabia [over Sheikh Nimr's execution]. I do not believe that Turkey will ever let its relations with Iran be affected due to Saudi Arabia. Iran and Turkey has good-neighborly relations with Iran and most of the Arab and Islamic countries have criticized the Saudi behavior.

◆ **It seems that the Saudis are seeking an exit from their defeats in the region and are trying to persuade the US, as their ally, to play a more serious role in the Middle East's equation via creation of crisis and fueling the regional tensions. What do you think?**

The Americans will not leave their fate in the hands of the Saudis and the Saudis, in practice, cannot play such a game and cannot tell the Americans what to do and not to do. Colin Powell, former US secretary of state and Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staffs, referred to an important point during the tenure of George W. Bush and said, 'I advise our Saudi friends to stop disputing with Iran, because it [war with Iran] can send Saudi Arabia to the pre-industrial era within hours. At the time, we are unable to prevent the destruction of the Saudi installations by Iran. And the Saudis will not find even a single phone line in order to contact us'. Colin Powell told Saudi Arabia, "Be careful and do not bite more than you can chew and do not beat war drums in the face of

powerful Iran."

Of course, we are not seeking war [with the Saudi regime] and have always been after good neighborly relations with Saudi Arabia.

◆ **Is a US direct military intervention in Syria for resolving the country's crisis probable?**

The Saudis are not within the power to force the US to get involved in Syria and this is Saudi Arabia which is required to accept and implements the US strategy in the region.

◆ **With the regional rifts widening due to Saudi unwise actions, do you believe that relations with Europe would play a determining role in the Middle East developments as the Europeans share similar stances with Iran in terms of joint interests and battling terrorism?**

We do not seek deepening the crisis with Saudi Arabia and are trying to resolve the issue from the position of strength and power. We also do not predict that the crisis will be worsened as the Saudis have an actual picture of Iran's might in their minds.

◆ **The end of regional tensions and creation of a strong relationship with our neighbors has always been a top priority and in line with our regional interests. From this perspective, how do you see the future of the regional crises?**

We hope that the regional crises will be resolved as soon as possible. What we have done over these years has been in line with efforts to end the crises, but given the elements involved in the crises it is not expected that they are resolved in the short and medium term. This is because some want the crises in the region not to end and create crises to in the region and dominate it.

◆ **some argue that the US has resorted to a proxy war in the New Middle East to counter the Russian presence in the region, unlike the Bush era, when the US directly came to the region and created dependent strong governments. Do you think that the proxy war would be the strategy of the US in future of the Middle East?**

The Americans will not stop their interference in our region. They can either be involved in a proxy war or enter directly in the region; it depends on circumstances |

Turkish analysts: **EU, Saudis 'hypocrite' on Syrian migrant crisis**

Interview by: Payman Yazdani, Javad Heirannia, Hanif Ghaffari

Two Turkish scholars and political analysts believe Turkey has been receiving refugees far beyond its economic capacities, hence rejecting the criticism mounted by the EU countries on the country on mismanagement of refugees.

Turkish analysts included retired Ambassador Murat Bilhan and the current Vice-Chairman of Turkish Asian Center for Strategic Studies (Turkish acronym: TASAM) and Özden Zeynep Oktav, Professor of Political Science and International Relations, both from Yildiz Technical University in Turkey, sat in an interview with Mehr News International Service to answer questions on the Syrian refugee-migrant crisis, Turkey's role in the crisis, and the future of the Turkey's attempts to join the EU, among other things:

◆ **Turkey has started a new chapter with the EU in order to join it. How do you assess this process? Do you think that at the end of the day Turkey will be accepted by the EU?**

Bilhan: This is a long story. It started in 1963 and ever since, Turkey has been waiting in the lines to enter the EU as a member. Turkey has been member to all European institutions except the EU. Ever since, Turkey has been a member of all European organizations. At the end of the Second World War, Turkey was included in the Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan, thus it was attached to western system. Turkish-Greek relations in the western orientation system has always been a very important issue. Turkey first in 1963 wanted to become a member.

Oktav: I am not that much hopeful that Turkey will be accepted as a full member.

Bilhan: This point is very important, Turkey's accession to all EU institutions. That included also Turkish-Greek relation in the western-oriented system. There was always both a competition



and a western attitude to take Turkey and Greece together in all these institutions including NATO. This treatment was diverted only in EU. Turkey first wanted to become a member and in 1963 it signed an agreement. Now after 52 years, Turkey has not been accepted yet. But was it the case that only Europeans rejected Turkey? No, because there tide turned, Turkey also began to put distance to EU. So, now only less than the majority of Turkish people want to join the EU, but I think according to public opinion polls 28 percent of Turkish people supported the idea of joining EU. It means only a small minority of Turkish people support the membership idea. Most EU members don't want Turkey almost 50 percent, but not as low as Turkey. Mostly it is agreed that if Turkey becomes a member of EU family, they all would be benefiting. They would have some assets and plus values especially in the field of security. They also think Turkey would be a good market for them with a large population. But now Turkish economy has much room for cooperation and flourishing. Turkish economy now is better than the economy of some of the EU members. Now, they have started to make other reasons to reject Turkey such as cultural differences, life style and some certain freedoms, freedom of expression and human rights.

Oktav: But Turkey has benefited a lot, too.

Bilhan: Yes, you are right. That helped

Turkey also in a way. It pushed Turkey to raise its standards.

Oktav: It helped Turkey to promote its democratic values, economy and security.

◆ **Some refugee tragedies happened just couple of weeks before Angela Merkel, German Chancellor's visit to Turkey that led to some agreements between Turkey and EU. Observers say that Turkey is using the migrant issue as a leverage against EU. What do you think of this?**

Oktav: Nowadays some of the most important issues are the issues of refugees. Till this year, Turkey had not want to be a buffer zone between Syria and EU, but none of the European states minded that Turkey was struggling with the refugee issue. Syrian refugees gradually secretly tried to go to European countries such as Greece, however, their final destination was Germany because they expect to have a German citizenship and welfare. Turkey have never promised the refugees citizenship and it considered them only as guest, so the refugees try to make a better life. After the recent events and tragedies, EU appears to have understood the important role of Turkey. It realized that Turkey is a very important country to cope with the refugee problem not only with the ones coming from Syria, but also from many other countries like Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Iran, Libya and some other →



African countries. Merkel visited Turkey and negotiated a lot of things. Merkel is one of the leaders that has not promised Turkey's full membership. Turkey didn't use this issue as a leverage against Europe. It just wanted to draw the attention of the EU to the refugee issue to let them know how difficult and costly its job of tackling the refugee issue is. Europe understands the crisis and Turkey's role very well; hence, Merkel came to Turkey. The Turkish government knows the EU will not accept Turkey as a full member in the near future. The 3 billion dollars offered to Turkey by EU is a very small amount comparing with its expenditures.

Bilhan: Turkey has spent 8 billion dollars on refugees and this money has come from the tax payers by Turkish people. Turkey just wanted to share this burden with Europeans. Imagine Germany has only taken 80000 refugees as a rich nation, but we as a poorer nation have already taken 2.5 million Syrian refugees. It is injustice. Furthermore, they choose refugees like choosing vegetables. They are choosing qualified Syrians to take them to Europe to use them. Their idea is not to help Turkey or the refugees but they just want to collect educated and rich Syrians to use them. The idea is very hypocritical. Their treatment is not honest. Impartially speaking, I would like to underline

that any criticism in this respect against Turkey is unacceptable. First of all, Europeans should fulfil their humanitarian responsibilities. Thousands of refugees have been drowned in the sea and in some cases it was proven that they have been pushed from the rubber boats to sink and kill the refugees. It is a human tragedy. Responsibility should be shared internationally.

Here is a question. Refugees themselves want to go to Europe. Why they don't want to go to Saudi Arabia and other regional countries despite their close religious friends being there? At least some of these refugees can be supported monetarily by Saudis. Why Saudis don't help them?

Oktav: Saudi Arabia is very much criticized by Turkish TV channels, media and people. They are very rich, they spend a lot but when it comes to refugees they don't spend.

◆ **Turkey has been benefited from bipolar system in the past. It seems that Turkey's strategic status in present unipolar system is not like that in the past. How do you think of this?**

Bilhan: Turkey could not benefit from bipolar system to benefit from both poles like Greece. Turkey was forced to follow only the western route because of historical rivalry between Turkey and Russia. Historically, Turkey

had fought 16 wars against Russia, so it means there was an enmity, hostility and rivalry between Russia and Ottoman Empire. That is why Turkey didn't trust the Eastern Bloc. During Stalinist era in Russia, Russians asked for Turkish territory. They wanted eastern provinces of Turkey and also bilateral control of Turkish straits. Turkey was intimidated by Russian power, therefore Turkey had chosen western umbrella for its security since the end of the Second World War and during the Cold War.

◆ **Considering the Cypriot issue, how is this problem going to be settled in order to pave the way for Turkey's accession to EU?**

Oktav: In Cypriot some negotiations are going on. In fact, Israel doesn't want the issue to be solved. The situation is complicated there due to energy and water project defined for Cypriot. There are lots of barriers in the way of solving the issue including foreign interventions. However, despite all these barriers, there are signs of settlement. New Turkish Cypriot head shows more flexible and softer stance and he supports unity talks. The result of the referendum which is going to be held in March will be very important for the settlement of the problems between Turkish and Greece Cypriot.



Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, in his most recent article published in NY Times, has once more underlined the priority of Iran's foreign policy being friendship with neighbors, peace in the region and international cooperation particularly in fight against terrorism, while denouncing the destructive role of some regional states.

The world will soon celebrate the implementation of the landmark agreement that resolves the unnecessary, albeit dangerous, crisis over Iran's nuclear program. All parties hoped, and continue to believe, that the resolution of the nuclear issue would enable us to focus on the serious challenge of extremism that is ravaging our region — and the world.

President Rouhani has repeatedly declared that Iran's top foreign policy priority is friendship with our neighbors, peace and stability in the region and global cooperation, especially in the fight against extremism. In September 2013, a month after taking office, he introduced an initiative called World Against Violence and Extremism (WAVE). It was approved by consensus by the United Nations General Assembly, giving hope for a farsighted global campaign against terrorism.

Unfortunately, some countries stand in the way of constructive engagement.

Following the signing of the interim nuclear deal in November 2013, Saudi Arabia began devoting its resources to defeating the deal, driven by fear that its contrived Iranophobia was crumbling. Today, some in Riyadh not only continue to impede normalization but are determined to drag the entire region into confrontation.

Saudi Arabia seems to fear that the

removal of the smoke screen of the nuclear issue will expose the real global threat: its active sponsorship of violent extremism. The barbarism is clear. At home, state executioners sever heads with swords, as in the recent execution of 47 prisoners in one day, including Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, a respected religious scholar who devoted his life to promoting nonviolence and civil rights. Abroad, masked men sever heads with knives.

Let us not forget that the perpetrators of many acts of terror, from the horrors of Sept. 11 to the shooting in San Bernardino and other episodes of extremist carnage in between, as well as nearly all members of extremist groups like Al Qaeda and the Nusra Front, have been either Saudi nationals or brainwashed by petrodollar-financed demagogues who have promoted anti-Islamic messages of hatred and sectarianism for decades.

The Saudi strategy to derail the nuclear agreement and perpetuate — and even exacerbate — tension in the region has three components: pressuring the West; promoting regional instability through waging war in Yemen and sponsoring extremism; and directly provoking Iran. Riyadh's military campaign in Yemen and its support for extremists are well known. Provocations against Iran have not grabbed international headlines, primarily thanks to our prudent restraint.

The Iranian government at the highest level unequivocally condemned the assault against the Saudi embassy and consulate in Tehran on Jan. 2, and ensured the safety of Saudi diplomats. We took immediate measures to help restore order to the Saudi diplomatic compound and declared our determination to bring perpetrators to justice. We also

took disciplinary action against those who failed to protect the embassy and have initiated an internal investigation to prevent any similar event.

By contrast, the Saudi government or its surrogates have over the past three years directly targeted Iranian diplomatic facilities in Yemen, Lebanon and Pakistan — killing Iranian diplomats and locals. There have been other provocations, too. Iranian pilgrims in Saudi Arabia have endured systematic harassment — in one case, Saudi airport officers molested two Iranian boys in Jeddah, fueling public outrage. Also, Saudi negligence was to blame for the stampede during the recent hajj, which left 464 Iranian pilgrims dead. Moreover, for days, Saudi authorities refused to respond to requests from grieving families and the Iranian government to access and repatriate the bodies.

This is not to mention the routine practice of hate speech not only against Iran but against all Shiite Muslims by Saudi Arabia's government-appointed preachers. The outrageous beheading recently of Sheikh Nimr was immediately preceded by a sermon of hatred toward Shiites by a Grand Mosque preacher in Mecca, who last year said that "our disagreement with Shiites will not be removed, nor our suicide to fight them" as long as Shiites remained on the earth.

Throughout these episodes, Iran, confident of its strength, has refused to retaliate or break — or even downgrade — diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia. We have until now responded with restraint; but unilateral prudence is not sustainable.

Iran has no desire to escalate tension in the region. We need unity to confront the threats posed by extremists. Ever since the first days after his election, the president and I have indicated publicly and privately our readiness to engage in dialogue, promote stability and combat destabilizing extremism. This has fallen on deaf ears in Saudi Arabia.

The Saudi leadership must now make a choice: They can continue supporting extremists and promoting sectarian hatred; or they can opt to play a constructive role in promoting regional stability. We hope that reason will prevail.

Mohammad Javad Zarif is Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran |

اداره کل فرهنگ و ارشاد اسلامی استان بوشهر
سازمان فرهنگی ورزشی شهرداری بوشهر
انجمن هنرهای نمایشی استان بوشهر

سی و چهارمین جشنواره المللی تئاتر فخری

34th

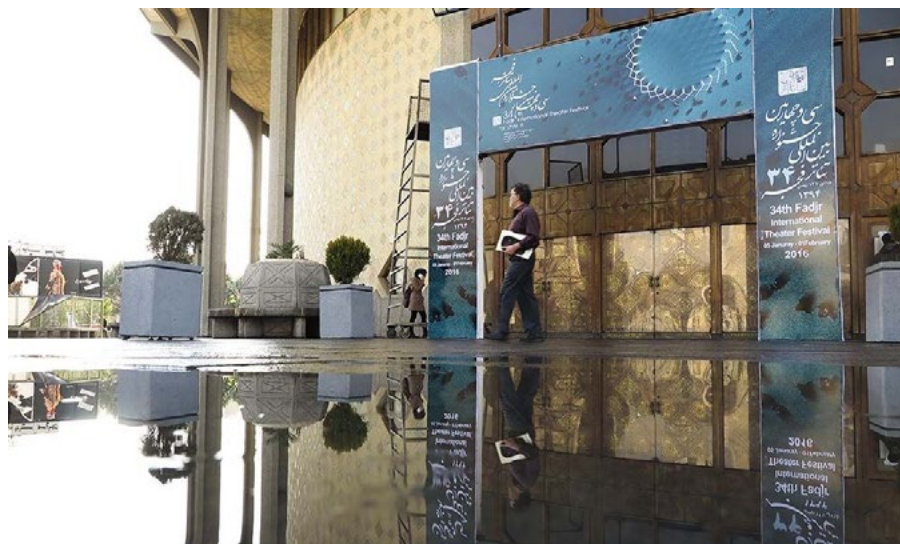


Fajr International
Theater Festival



Culture

Tehran, melting pot of cultures during 34th Fajr Intl. Theater Festival



Tehran was host to one of the greatest cultural events in the country in February, the 34th Fajr International Theater Festival.

This January, all theater stages as well as some outdoor public spaces in Tehran were host to a great cultural event called Fajr International Theater Festival (TITF) with over 300 high-quality plays from 9 foreign countries and various provinces across the country wooing the audience and cultivating their taste in high art.

The highlight of the international section of Fajr Theater Festival which was enjoying its 34th year was the participation of renowned German director Thomas Ostermeier with his stage production of William Shakespeare's masterpiece "Hamlet". The play had three performances on three days at Vahdat Hall, the capital's only opera house, to a completely sold-out event. It did not come as a surprise to anyone that Ostermeier took home the festival's grand prix.

But Hamlet, magnificent and impressive as it was, was not the only noteworthy event of the festival. Norway also participated in the 34th FITF with Henrik Ibsen's controversial, yet beautifully-written play 'Hedda Gabler' by Norwegian director Marianne Roland's troupe. Although the stage was unconventional and the seats were very limited and the translated subtitle was in

English rather than Persian – one could almost think the performance was a private event, the performance itself was powerful and left quite a lingering effect on the audience who had been lucky enough to have secured themselves a seat for this Norwegian production.

Japan's 'The Shadow Game' by Dazzle Dance Company dominated the stage in Vahdat Hall with four performances in two days, each time to an enthusiastic, crowded audience. The art performance which had employed elements of street dance and electronic music and infused it with an interesting plotline was aesthetically beautiful and fluidly moving and would have easily won an award in the section of Best Dancing Moves if the festival actually had one.

As it were, the festival's international section recognized the following categories: Best Makeup Artist (won by Maria Hajiha for 'Crime and Punishment', Iran), Best Music (won by Music band for 'Cenmar Sacrifice Séance', Iran), Best Clothes Designer (won by Ehsasn Falahtapisheh for 'A Journey to the Farthest Away', Iran), Best Stage Design (won by Reza Gouran for 'The Night Sings its Songs', Iran), Best Actor (won by Lars Eiding for 'Hamlet', Germany), Best Actress (won by Soudeh Sharhi for 'Crime and Punishment', Iran), Best Script (won by Amin Ebrahimi for 'A Song for You', Iran), and Best Director (won by Iman

Afsharian for 'Crime and Punishment', Iran).

The festival's Special Award went to 'When We Dead Awaken' based on a script by Henrik Ibsen and directed by Shahab Agahi, Iran, while Thomas Ostermeier snatched the Grand Prix for 'Hamlet'.

While Hamlet was the only foreign performance that was awarded, Farin-dokht Zahedi, one of the juries for the international section was of the opinion that foreign plays should not participate in the competition section of the festival and awards should only be granted to Iranian productions as an incentive to encourage them for producing stage performances that would be chosen for international events.

In any event, all productions were good enough to have been selected for Fajr Theater Festival and the tickets were all pre-sold so quickly and the attending audience were so great in number that many had to sit on the floor or the stairs to watch a particular play. One would think half of the population in Tehran had at least watched a play or two during the festival. For some reason, Iranians love the theater, perhaps even more so than the cinema, and when they are presented with a chance to sit down before a foreign-produced performance, to get introduced to theatre projects from other cultural backgrounds and experience a different kind of performance art, they will rush in without a second thought.

Fajr is the country's leading international cultural event, with sections in theater, cinema, music, poetry and visual arts, organized annually during February to celebrate the anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution. The event has been so far embraced with great enthusiasm and the audience becomes larger and larger each year. Fajr Theater Festival (est. in 1983), in particular, is not only a time for watching great stage productions; it is a golden opportunity to get closely familiar with the theater trend in other countries without having to actually travel there!

Japan's 'The Shadow Game' takes Iranian stage by storm

By: Marjohn Sheikhi



Tatsuya Hasegawa's creative production 'The Shadow Game' went on stage on Sat. and Sun. at the 34th Fajr Intl. Theater Festival, garnering a positive popular reception from the Iranian theater-goers.

You purchase a ticket for a play, but you get so much more. The Shadow Game, written by Koichiro Iizuka and directed by Tatsuya Hasegawa, is not any typical stage performance. In fact, you should probably leave all your previous understanding of traditional theater performance at the door when you go watch this Japanese production. It is a magnificent combination of dance, music and theater. There are elements of video games and anime plot with Japanese commentary all wrapped up in street and contemporary dance styles choreographed by Hasegawa himself. The Shadow Game is as much a balance between dance and performance as its plot is between light and shadow.

The Shadow Game is a perfect example of visual theater and as such, movement is its central organizing principle. The decision to delve into

performance art and bring the elements of street dance onto the stage – where most people believe to be a place of sophistication and high culture – is a risky one, aesthetically and physically, but it is a risk worth taking when the end result is a super performance that exceeds every expectation and manages to communicate ideas and feelings so powerfully and openly that it leaves you breathless even long after the actors have left the stage.

The Shadow Game is at once very 'Japanese' and yet far from the traditional Japanese theater. Its plot is a nod to the manga culture featuring a romantic protagonist in search of his missing beloved, a victim of circumstances who rises to the status of a somewhat anti-hero, and an actual hero seeking to save the world from the dominance of shadows. All these characters are set against the overpowering antagonist – the infection, the black rain, the shadow disease – embodied in a corrupt pharmaceutical company 'Hikari' which is set to bring Tokyo down to its knees by turning the people into shadows and feasting on the 'reflective energy' these shadowy

entities generate.

The plot also infuses elements of role-playing video games as it allows the protagonist to choose between two available options that appear on the screen behind them. Tatsuya Hasegawa, the director of the Shadow Game, expressed his love for video games and said the decision to bring this aspect into his performance was a deliberate move in the direction of presenting a more real-life experience to the audience; "we as human beings constantly arrive at various crossroads where we must choose one way over the other, with each way having its own different consequences. I wanted to bring that aspect of life onto the stage," he said.

But the performance, while maintaining several Japanese elements, is still not considered a typical Japanese play. The focus on dialogue has been shifted entirely to dance (the performers do not utter a single word), and the harmony maintained between the electronic music and the swift, precise body movements and the creative use of stage props such as chairs, umbrellas and for adding more variety to the dance, all set Hasegawa's production →

apart from any traditional play.

"Since we are from a dance company, naturally we put more focus on the dance parts and the narrative was developed to bring the work closer to a play. We also tried to create a balance between these two elements so that the audience would not get bored," he said.

And the audience certainly did not get bored. I watched the play on two consecutive days – the tickets were all sold out – and on both occasions the reaction of the audience was startling. There was standing ovation even before the performance ended and the audience were quite loud in expressing how much they had enjoyed the performance.

The power of the Shadow Game lies in the way it questions the traditional aesthetics, and attempts to push beyond long-held expectations to make room for discussion of such complex issues like light/shadow dichotomy and how the plot moves beyond the appearance of these two apparently opposing elements to get to their essence; that if light has energy, so does the shadow, a kind of 'reflective energy' that can be generated and used in the absence of light.

This dialectical interpretation of light and shadow and the harmonious body movements in the form of hip hop and street dance that in Engelsian terms, depicts the "continual conflict of the opposites and their final passage into one another, or into higher forms"



and is in fact a creative reading of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami which caused the nuclear crisis at Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. The shutting down of almost all nuclear plants in Japan and the subsequent electricity shortage created huge uncertainty for Japan future growth. As a result of this tragic event, around 16,000 people were killed, 2500 went missing and thousands were forced to evacuate in nuclear plant emergency. In the Shadow Game, the shadow infection forces people to evacuate their homes, or they will be turned into a black mass and lose their humanity. It is dark times, people are losing hope, but not all is lost. At least, the aesthetics of the dance and the harmony in the actors' movements with the flow-

ing music promises a way out of the crisis. The search for the missing beloved bears fruition and the shadow king is removed from the game. Tokyo is on the path to recovery now that the shadows have taken their leave.

The Dazzle Company was actually enjoying a second time participation in Fajr International Theater Festival, although 'The Shadow Game' participation in the FITF was its first international exposure. Dazzle's first performance in Iran was during the 30th edition of the FITF in 2012 when Hasegawa staged "Hana to Otori" ("Misty Mansion") with its very complex stage structure comprised of movable paper doors and the combination of hip-hop, contemporary dance and an ancient Japanese form of dance called nihon buyō. The play was highly praised by audience and critics alike and managed to win the Special Award of the International Section of Fajr festival and the Best Stage Designer Award at the gala.

The 34th Fajr theater festival will come to an end on February 1, and The Shadow Games stands a very good chance of bringing more awards for the talented director.

Tatsuya Hasegawa was born in 1977, Tokyo. He is the founder of Dazzle Dance Company. As dancer and stage director, he has choreographed for various well known artists and has appeared in many of their stages. He has been awarded numerous times, both domestically and internationally |



'Becoming Butterfly' on wings of imagination, visual arts

By: Marjohn Sheikhi

While Fajr Intl. Theater Festival is underway in various theaters in Tehran, Zsófia Bérczi's 'Becoming Butterfly' has taken the audience through an existential journey on the wings of imagination and visual aesthetics.

For theater-goers and art enthusiasts, Fajr International Theater Festival is always a golden opportunity to get a taste of theater worldwide. Now in its 34th year, and with quite a long-time experience, the FITF has invited artists from around the world including Japan, Hungary, France, Belgium, Spain, and Germany to present their best stage productions to Iranian audience. One of these plays was the Hungarian production 'Becoming Butterfly', a visual arts performance written and directed by Zsófia Bérczi.

For long the theater has faithfully served the traditions and customs of a well-made play, with sharp outlines and distinct features that make everything easy to grasp and comprehend. The tradition has at times sunk in too deep that the audience would feel apprehensive if the performance was to break away from the familiar norms and bring to stage something with blurred and blending lines, notions that would escape traditional definitions and challenge the very foundation of old, deep-seated expectations.

'Becoming Butterfly' is as much a huge leap from tradition as it could get. And not just for Iranian theater-goers the majority of whom still preferring the old ways and the up-front presentation of realities and the daily life, but also for the Hungarian theater tradition as well. Ms. Bérczi believes her performance is quite unique in Hungary and even across Europe. Her delving into visual arts and abandoning all previously-held and respected theater traditions is a great risk into the right direction.

"The Hungarian theater tradition likes to deal with realism mixed with cynicism. The majority of plays in Hungary are social critiques, as artists would rather show the real life with a look of cynicism," says Ms. Bérczi, "but I personally try to steer clear of political issues and instead present topics on human and environment."

What makes 'Becoming Butterfly' a masterful performance of art and delight is the harmony interwoven subtly with the plot, the movements of the actor and the actresses, the music and the shifting lights on the crème walls surrounding the play.

The play commands all your senses and provokes your imagination. The actors covered head to toe in elastic textiles morph into different shapes, a worm, a tree, an elephant, a whale, and set your imagination reeling. The play



also featured commentary in Hungarian with a Persian voice-over, but it could have also done without it. There was something universal and deep about the play that made it connect with the audience no matter from which country and culture. The concept of the human soul can be grasped by every one of us, as well as our deep-seated desire to move beyond the limits and confinement of our physical bodies toward achieving perfection and freedom. Human beings are always on the cusp of evolving, but so are all other creations, as the play demonstrates. The yearning for reaching a better state of existence is as much potent in an earthworm as is in a human. And it is exactly this very yearning that connects all sentient beings to one another. "Human beings are not the most beautiful creation on earth, but they are the most beautiful dream of all creations on earth." This was one of the most powerful lines in the performance that resonated deeply with the audience. It was like a bright light shining down on our perceptions and fears. It made taking great risks and tackling challenges seem much easier. It allowed us to believe in the therapeutic impact of metamorphosis, in resurrection and the idea of ongoing sentience in the face of death. There is no death, but a transitional stage. Death is but evolution. "One must decide to go through the hardship of pupating as this is the prerequisite flying."

"I chose this play to stage for the Ira- ➔



nian audience as this was the most visual performance that we had. It had the most images, and also I was conscious about the particular way of clothing not only in Iran but in the East," Ms. Bérczi said while referring to the covering of her actresses in the elastic textiles.

"I always wanted to make a performance that is far from human beings, to create another world so different from the one we are living in, but later I realized that this is not quite possible as we are humans and cannot talk about something totally different," explained Ms. Bérczi about her reason for putting her performers into the elastic textiles, "that's why I decided to make something about the human soul, instead. Inside these elastic textiles, the human can morph into different shapes which are all various representations of the human soul."

"Having been invited to Fajr Theater Festival is one of the most important events of my life. The other one was that we celebrated the 10th birthday anniversary of 'Becoming Butterfly' on the Iranian stage," said Ms. Bérczi, while noting that her play has so far been staged in Germany, Armenia, France, Romania, Italy and several other countries.

"But this is my first time in Iran," she said, "and also the first time 'Becoming Butterfly' has participated in an international theater festival."

"In my opinion, most directors try to present the ugliness through a critical eye so as to guide the world toward goodness," said Ms. Bérczi, "but in 'Becoming Butterfly', we focused our attempts on presenting the beauties only."

And she beautifully succeeded. 'Becoming Butterfly' is a brilliant journey through different stages of evolution on the wings of music, body movements and dancing lights.

Zsófia Bérczi was born in 1976, Budapest, Hungary. She studied multimedia art at University of Art and Design Budapest and is currently the founding member and chairman at Living Picture Visual Theatre and Association (2004). She has also directed other plays including "Living Surface", "Octopus Tarot Labyrinth", "Living Morphology", "Morpholand", "JiChing Labyrinth", "Light Spheres", "Wave Space", "The Carpet", etc |

A157 and the price women pay in a man-waged war



By: Marjohn Sheikhi

A157, a war documentary by Behrouz Nouranipour, is a wake-up call to the humanity which is lost amid the humdrum of our daily lives. It is the tragedy of innocent lives ruined in the cruelest way possible in a country where no one has any hopes and dreams left.

You know it is raining, has been raining, for days on end, not from looking at the sky, vast and gray and angry, but from the puddles of mud on downtrodden soil. An inverted sky in a puddle of muddy rain, an inverted narrative of tragedies past and yet to come, inverted lives shut away from the rest of the world in UNHCR white tents erected where the Syrian borders meet Turkey. Here, a warped, twisted version of life is going on; perverted, it can hardly be called life at all. And yet it is all that they have, these little, muddled faces with frostbitten skins and groaning stomachs and tearful eyes; fighting for their very lives, fighting for their next breath. Does 'hope' still reside among the ruins of war and death and suffering?

Anywhere else rain would have

looked beautiful but not here. These people only get the cold sipping into their bones and the mud on their worn-out shoes. Rain isn't a romantic notion for these children robbed so cruelly off their childhood.

"We hate the rain," says a boy around nine or ten years old, "for us, it's just more trouble."

There are 17,000 Syrian refugees living inside some 4,000 tents in this camp, but the camera takes us to one particular tent in which three Kurdish Syrian girls, aged 10, 11 and 15, reside together, with the last two being sisters. They look older, though, world-weary and drawn; pain and tragedy tend to have that effect on unsuspecting, innocent faces.

They have lost both their parents to the ISIL terrorists, been taken hostage to live unbearable, torturous days under constant sexual assault, an unending nightmare that plagues every second of their existence.

She is only ten years old, and she is pregnant. The three of them are. Displaced, orphaned, maltreated, raped and now pregnant. What does a ten year old know about all the horrors that have been done to her? Somewhere far away from here, and perhaps not too far, other chil-



dren her age are playing with their toys and taking cookies out of jars and being completely oblivious to the anguish of little Syrian girls who have lost their everything in a blink of an eye and the world always finds a convenient way to turn a blind eye to the happenings that would upset its delicate stomach on a fine day under the peaceful rays of sun.

But not for Behrouz Nouranipour, no. Not for him. And not for those who had decided to sit down before the silver screen to watch all the horror and tragedies unfold as the girls narrate the story of their lives.

"A157 is the narrative of victims who have unfairly fallen into the cruel clutches of war. I hope the audience would be able to accompany us on this journey of truth toward war," said Nouranipour, the director. "Most think of war as men's game; that it's the men who decide to wage wars but in the end it's always the women and the children who first fall victim to it and have to pay the price."

A157 is a terrible truth that you wish not to see; it brutally takes you out of your comfort zone and forces you to encounter the demons that you know you cannot fight, yet alone win against. It shows you everything you had thought to be true is a lie, and everything you had naïvely wished to be a lie is a horrendous reality.

"War doesn't care how much you love your mother, your father, your sister, when it takes them away from you," the oldest child, Roken, says in a plaintive voice, eyes vacantly looking somewhere past the camera. Her name, which means happy and laughter, is now a cruel reminder of the fact that there is nothing happy about her life anymore. She was hopeful to find her mother, hopeful that she was alive and would return to her and her little sister, and the A157 crew made every effort to find her. At the end, the efforts proved futile. The mother had been killed.

But it wasn't just the mother these children had lost. They had lost their motherland and from here, there was nowhere else to go.

You have a choice to close your eyes, to walk away and pretend that everything is fine, that innocent children are not getting killed, beaten and raped on a daily basis while you peacefully sip your morning tea or as you tuck your own children in at night and think



how much you love them and want them to have a good life. You also have a choice to stay, to see and feel and remember, this is what wars are doing to our humanity. Our humanity is the only thing worth saving, and in many cases, it is the first thing that we throw away to save our money, to keep our semblance of a normal life. We close our borders to these people who are fleeing from the horrors that we cannot even bear watching on TV, calling them potential terrorists and forcing them back into the clutches of death and despair. Some of us had even helped create this nightmare. Some of us pretend that we are trying to make it better. The refugee camps? Oh, they are a joke. Living in a tent, no running water, no heating system, you can barely find anything to eat. There is no entertainment, there is always the constant sense of fear and despair. And this all makes you wonder, what is the United Nations good for anyway? If it cannot stop children from getting raped and pregnant, if it cannot stop people from starvation, if it cannot make a child who has lost her family and her dreams, smile and become hopeful for a better future, then how does it dare call itself United Nations, when nations are falling apart, when humanity has become rotten, when a ten-year-old child unable to cope with the idea of having the child of her rapist inside her, attempts to kill herself time and time again until she finally succeeds?

"I didn't make the ending," says Nouranipour with a lump in his throat and teary eyes, "Sollaf did. She gave the end to A157."

A157 begins with the story of three little girls. It ends with the suicide of the youngest: Sollaf. But we know it doesn't

really end here. A157 is not a tragic movie with an unhappy ending; it's the ongoing reality. We read about the terrorist attacks in the news every day, hundreds of people that lose their lives all around the world, and we become a little sad and a little shocked and a little angry, but it is short-lived and we move on. It is what they call the 'collapse of compassion', our way to cope with overwhelming tragedy and keep ourselves safe from being burned out by compassion for many sufferers. It is easier to keep a safe distance and allow our distorted sense of righteousness color our judgments. You have a choice to walk away, but for the sake of the 10-year old Sollaf who died with the baby inside her, for the sake of the 11-year-old Hilan who miscarried, and for the sake of the 15-year-old Roken who lost her mother only to become one to the child of her rapist, please don't. Don't walk away.

Please stay, watch and allow yourself to feel. Protect your humanity, not your happiness. I hope you all get a chance to watch A157. Maybe the next time you encounter a Syrian refugee on the streets, it helps you have a better understanding of the pain and suffering each one of them has gone through. Maybe the next time you listen to the hateful words of some politician, you can see the other side of the story and make a better judgment. Maybe the next time, you can wrench the shreds of your humanity from the clutches of politics, of media and propaganda, and keep it safe inside.

Maybe most of us cannot help Sollafs and Hilens and Rokens through their suffering, but we can be a human about it. And those of you who are in a position to actually help make this better, please do. After all, there is more to this world than economy, political propagandas, power struggles and presidential elections in the United States. There should be.

Behrouz Nouranipour, born in 1982 in Sanandaj, Kurdistan Province, Iran, has received his Bachelor degree in Cinema at Soore University of Arts. He has directed more than 25 documentaries to this day. His latest production, A157, won the Special Jury Award at the international section of Iran's Cinéma Vérité and received an honorary diploma at the full-length documentary section of International Shahid Avini Award |



'A Letter for Second Thought' unveiled

By: Lachin Rezaian

'A Letter for Second Thought' compiled by Rouh Al-Amin Saeedi was unveiled at Mehr News Agency on Jan. 24.

The book is a collection of nine articles addressing various aspects of Iranian Leader's letter to the Western youth, first published in 2015 and celebrating its first anniversary on Jan. 21.

The unveiling ceremony was attended by Mehr News President Ali Asgari, compiler of the book Rouh Al-Amin Saeedi, President of the Institute for Cultural and Social Studies Ayatollah Zuelm, and the Head of Youth Thought Center Mohamadreza Yaghini.

Mr. Saeedi called Leader's letter a turning point and a new route of communication between thoughtful and liberal people, especially the youth, on an equal stand and based on the spirit of reason and logic, to hold constructive dialogue and to achieve mutual understanding and find ways to eliminate misunderstandings and problems of human societies.

The book, he said, includes nine short articles written by young researchers to address nine main aspects of Leader's letter, each by a young researcher, to take steps, though small,

on the route and answer the questions raised by the Leader of Islamic Revolution.

Going through the lines of the letters, he said, Leader's letters, first of which was published on Jan. 21, 2015 and the second on Nov. 29, same year, urge Western young people not to succumb to the Islamophobic conditioning of their societies, but instead to think for themselves.

In his letter, Ayatollah Khamenei addresses the youth on Islam, particularly the image that is presented to them as Islam. "Many attempts have been made over the past two decades, almost since the disintegra-

tion of the Soviet Union, to place this great religion in the seat of a horrifying enemy. The provocation of a feeling of horror and hatred and its utilization has unfortunately a long record in the political history of the West," he quotes the letter.

He described the letter a new window to the West and to hold dialogue with youth who may have previously been neglected and were not considered important.

One of the considerations in collecting the book, was to include articles written by young scholars, since the Leader's letter addresses the youth.

President of the Institute for Cultural and Social Studies Ayatollah Zuelm said Leader's letter addresses major aspects, including the trust in the western readers who will understand the fact and the belief in positive change of Westerners.

A Letter for Second Thought contains articles which deal with current issues in the world, including orientation towards terrorism and extremism among European youth and why they, so prevalently, join terrorist groups as ISIL, why Islam is introduced as a fictitious enemy of the West, what the history of West and its colonial records are, how to create public awareness in the West, what Islam's place in the global power is, what the foundations of Islamic civilization and values are and what role the media play as a tool to represent the reality |



In memory of Jamalzadeh; Father of Persian prose writing

By: Marjohn Sheikh

January 13 marks the birthday of prominent writer and researcher Mohammad Ali Jamalzadeh who is considered as the father of Persian prose writing.

Mohammad Ali Jamalzadeh was born in 1892 in Isfahan. His worldview was shaped early on by his father who was a prominent and also a cleric and preacher, with his passionate and effective orations that attracted a large following and was instrumental in popularizing constitutionalist ideas such as freedom, justice and the rule of law for the ordinary people and the poor (Taghizadeh, in Jamalzadeh, 1999, pp. 14-15).

In addition to receiving education by accompanying his father to his meetings, sermons and speeches, Jamalzadeh was also educated in Lebanon (a few months before the anti-constitutionalist coup), received his law degree at the University of Dijon in France, and returned to Iran in 1915 before moving back to Europe and eventually settling in Berlin. There, he became a member of Iranian nationalists against the British and Russian interference in Iran.

'Once Upon a Time' was his first and most important collection of short stories published in 1922 which contains the successful story 'Farsi shekar ast' (Persian Is Sugar), which laid the foundation for modern Persian prose. This collection was actually the first collection ever of short stories which featured a manifesto for modernist Persian prose writing, and the six anecdotal stories treat "events of the 1910s in Iran with realism, local color and satirical humor." All these stories, in addition of being pioneers, have a simple, fluid and easily understandable prose which was in line with fulfilling literary democracy as mentioned in the manifesto.

'Persian is (as Sweet as) Sugar' treats the failure among a group of Iranians to communicate successfully among themselves, owing to their different origins, educational backgrounds, and class affiliations.

In the story, when the narrator, an apparently middle-aged, worldwide Iranian just back from Europe, is detained in a customs-house cell, he is met with a number of other 'guests' whom he starts to describe in detailed, everyday language.

"I first caught sight of one of those phony Europeanized types...our 'Europeanized' gentleman had a high collar as high as a samovar pipe...immersed in reading a novel in the dim light."

'Mr. Europe' as he calls him, sat in his little niche during all the commotion the other present in the cell were making, then occasionally he would 'take his watch out and glance at it as if he wanted to know if it were tea time or coffee time.'

Another detainee, 'Helpless Ramazan' after having failed to establish a communication with a cleric as to find out why they have been detained, approaches Mr. Europe, "like a hungry child going to his stepmother for a piece of bread."

But Mr. Europe does not prove to be of much help either. "Revolution without evolution is inconceivable! We young people must assume the responsibility of guiding the public. As for my part, I have written a lengthy article on this sujet in which I have proved with a blinding force that nobody should abdicate his responsibility to others..."

Needless to say, the meek, helpless Ramazan was quite intimidated by the pompous and nonsensical speech, giving himself up completely for lost.

Ramazan then started pounding his fists on the cell door, "For the sake of God and the Prophet I am losing my mind. You've made me partner in a grave with an incredible trio. One, may he drop down dead, is a European, who



stands brooding like an owl in a corner as if he were going to devour you with his evil eye. As for the other two, they do not understand a word of human speech; they are both jinns and I just don't know who would have to answer to God if they took it into their heads and started to strangle poor me!"

When the narrator steps forward and talks to Ramazan, in genuine Persian which he understands, Ramazan is overwhelmed with such joy that he starts kissing the man's hand repeatedly.

"I'll do anything for someone who speaks as you do...God himself has sent you to rescue my soul!" he exclaimed.

At this point the four cellmates are released, and Ramazan comments that "on this particular day every imaginable lunatic is being sent to Enzeli."

Jamalzadeh has played a highly remarkable role in Iran's literary revival. While his works would occasionally come under attack by certain groups as insulting, they were also praised as a great innovation in Persian literature, thus creating a combination of fame and controversy for him.

He was also fluent in French, German and Arabic, which made him an able translator. His translations of Bernardin de Saint Pierre, Moliere, Ibsen, Schiller and Van Loon were published in various Persian periodicals throughout his working years.

After the Islamic Revolution of 1978, Jamalzadeh visited Iran briefly and then returned to Geneva where he spent the rest of his life until 1997 |

34th Fajr Film Festival wraps up

By: Samad Habibi



Milad Tower in Tehran has hosted an eventful night in February 11 where Fajr Film Festival announced winners of Simorgh.

A cold but hazy night of February 11, the avid crowd swarmed the Festival Hall in the Tower. Contrary to expectations, the ceremony started exactly 19 hours local time. Those who had not had a ticket were requesting for one from high-profile guests who had the privilege of being specially favored; the check-in security guards were quite hectic and no one could go inside uncontrolled. This tight checks belied the expectations of many an audience who enjoyed the free pass amid the large rush of crowd to the Hall when 'Lantouri' was being screened earlier during the Festival.

A special row (no. 14) was kindly dedicated to journalists and reporters of mass media. 15 minutes before the ceremony, the gates opened and the audience was allowed to find their seats in the Hall. The prologue was two musical pieces by a 'virtual' band of players whose performance was displayed on the silver screen along with Mohammad Motamedi singing live in the Hall. Surprisingly enough, the message of the Festival secretary Mohammad Heidari

was in form of an epistle (letter) written by Heidari to himself and the audience and read aloud by someone for audience.

The epistle called Heidari himself and the cinema industry managers for 'tolerance, solidarity, cooperation, friendship, and avoiding prejudgments of others.' The most exciting part of the ceremony was when winners came to podium to receive much-awaited crystal Simorgh. 'Mina's Choice' was nominated in 9 and 'Eternity and a Day' was nominated in 10 sections for Simorgh. Ebrahim Hatamikia's 'Bodyguard' was nominated for six sections other than Best Director and Best Film awards, and a general understanding was that the jury members cooperated unanimously to shun him by defying his admired work. In the absence of 'Bodyguard,' Kamal Tabrizi's 'Mina's Choice' was a clear favor by the jury to clinch most of the Simorghs available; however, the contrary was the case the film got a Simorgh only for Best Composer with Mohammad Reza Aliqoli. Its Simorgh was equally divided into 'Mina's Choice' and 'The Daughter,' since Aliqoli was nominated for his compositions in these two films.

Saeid Roustaei's 'Eternity and a Day' set a new record in the history of

the Festival with receiving 9 crystal Simorghs; 'Standing in the Dust' came second. The jury's job was brilliant in equal distribution of Simorgh and in sending the audience satisfied to their homes after the smoke had cleared. The most conspicuous issue was that Hatamikia was absent. He received absentee accolade by Parviz Parastouei, the winner of Best Actor Simorgh for his role as Heidar Zabihi in Hatamikia's 'Bodyguard,' and Hadi Eslami who received the Simorgh for Best Visual Effects, also for 'Bodyguard.' Mohammad Hossein Mahdavian and Mohammad Reza Shojaei, director and costume designer of 'Standing in the Dust,' which won the Best Film Simorgh, criticized the jury's decision to exclude Hatamikia in two sections of Best Director and Best Film sections.

Best Actress Simorgh went to Parinaz Izadyar for her role in 'Eternity and a Day.' Also, Best Supporting Actress was clinched by Shabnam Moghadami for her roles in 'Breath' and 'Spare Part.'

The closing part of the ceremony was films by audience announced by Reza Mirkarimi, the new head of Iran's House of Cinema: 'Eternity and a Day,' 'Bodyguard,' 'Barcode,' 'Standing in the Dust,' and 'A Dragon Arrives!' |

'Iron Head', different taste of technology

By: Lachin Rezaian

Animated feature film Iron Head was released to the public at Azadi Cinema Complex after 3 years of hard work by Iranian talented young and veteran art masters.

Iron Head, produced by Erfan Lolaki and directed by Gholamreza Molla Ahmadi, is an action feature animated film which makes extensive use of computer technologies generating animated images by using computer graphics with high quality.

Going on screen after three years of hard work, Iron Head proved that it's got the one thing that's been missing from Iranian animated movies: highly professional computer technology, a great action plot and interesting imagery characters.

The action takes place in an imaginary territory of animals, including turtles, lizards, snakes and hippopotamus.

A turtle named Lucky has an unusual and big head making him separated from his fellowmen living in a pond. Lucky, the iron head character of the film, tries to overcome his problem with the help of technology.

He is intelligent and tries to create a device for flight and use it while their place is endangered by the two enemies Nish and Dr. Mole, expelled from the pond due to their hostile behavior towards other animals of the pond.

Meanwhile, the greed of the old lizard Dr. Mole to reach a diamond in the pond and provocative words of Nish seeking revenge from the hippos who expelled them from the pond, wages an



imminent war against the animals of the pond using technology and giant robots made by old Mole.

Iron Head is an action movie using computer techniques in drawings of the characters and especially the lighting, the animal characters which are portrayed in an interesting method and the story plot appealing to teenagers and the youth.

The story is different, using a different message. The movie never gets boring, and the story keeps you interested. The movie is full of great moments, but the best is the climactic finale - absolutely unforgettable, when the animals of the pond fire cannon towards the giant warrior robots of Dr. Mole and destroy them.

There are numerous animation techniques mixed together; using computer CG software to create animated movies by a 3D animation motion graphics techniques, utilizing 100% computer-generated imagery, a plot centering on an eclectic mixture of horror, action, science fiction, war scenes, challenge, conflict between good and evil and conveying a moral message that good is always the winner, are among features making the work more conspicuous in the field of animated films, Iron Head producer Erfan Lolaki told in an exclusive interview with Mehr News.

He added all the characters and the space of the movie are designed and modeled by Maya Application. For the texture, "we used Mudbox and Photoshop with nDynamic for special effects," he said.

What makes this animation different is bringing young talented Iranian experts and veteran masters of animation art in a team together, made possible by the help of private investment and without the help of state institutions and agencies in charge of the production of films and animated movies.

Cooperation with dubbing manager Khosrow Khosrowshahi is definitely a turning point for the cinematic work Iron Head.

We could make a movie with the cost of Iron Head, Lolaki said, however he noted, his team seeks growth and development of the art of animation and producing animated feature films which are rarely addressed in the Iranian Film Industry.

The team has used completely an Iranian animated engine designed for the project which well operates in the speed of processing, he said.

The 80-minute movie, Iron Head, maybe experiencing some kinds of weak points, yet it is a good work trying to fill in the gaps in Iran's cinema in the area of animation. The movie is expected to pave the way for the production of more feature animated films.

There are a few times when the movie slows down, but one has to admit that it has one of the most catching opening sequences.

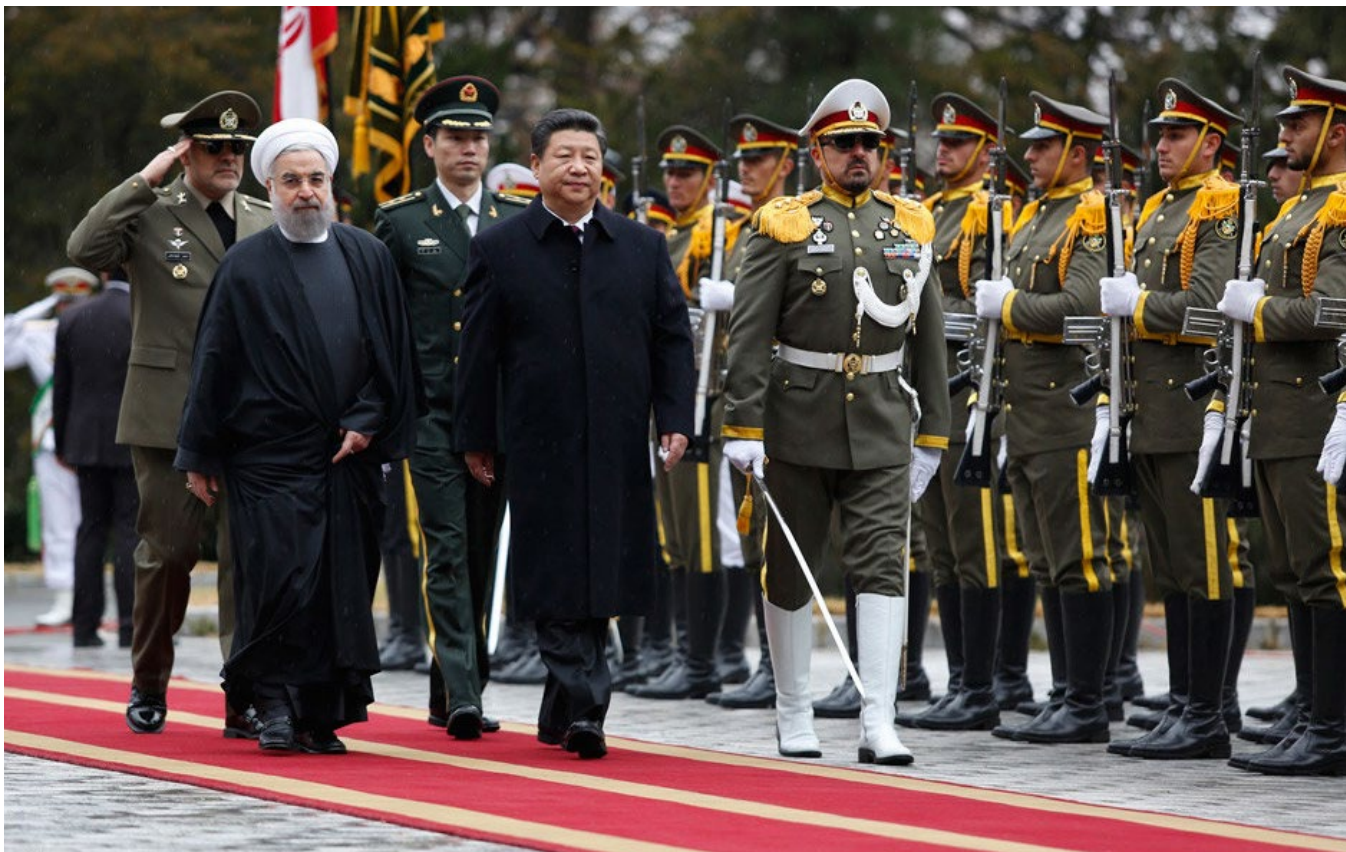
But what's best and most refreshing about this film is its moral message which says, "people are over-indulging themselves in technology to the degree that they are losing themselves." |



News in Vision



Leader of Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei received visiting Chinese President Xi Jinping on January 23.



President Hassan Rouhani at a ceremony here on January 23 welcomed officially his visiting Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping at the cultural and Historical Complex of Saadabad.

Two US military boats carrying 10 armed gunmen were detained by IRGC naval units on January 13, while they entered into Iranian territorial waters near the Farsi Island. They were freed after investigations proved that the trespassing was unintentional and due to technical problems.



On January 31, Leader of Revolution Ayatollah Khamenei granted 'Order of Fath' to IRGC navy commanders who detained American naval forces who trespassed on Iranian territorial waters this month.



President Hassan Rouhani of Iran arrived in Rome on January 25 and was officially welcomed by Italian President Sergio Mattarella at the airport and then in presidential palace.

President Hassan Rouhani who was visiting Italy during his European tour, met with Pope Francis in Vatican on January 26.



**Italian Culture Minister
Dario Franceschini
accompanied Iranian
President Hassan
Rouhani during a
visit to the Colosseum
Amphitheater in Rome,
Italy, on January 27.**



**President Rouhani and
Total CEO Patrick
Pouyanné held a
meeting in Paris on
January 28.**

**Iran's Rouhani
had a meeting
with Tom Enders,
Chief Executive
Officer of Airbus
Group, in Paris
on January 28.**





On January 29, Iran and France paved the way for considerable forward move in their political, economic, cultural and scientific relations in the post-sanctions era by signing several cooperation pacts.



Iranian President Hassan Rouhani delivered a speech at French think tank IFRI on January 29.



Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and his French counterpart Francois Hollande attended a joint press conference at the Elysee Palace on January 29.



Iran's Javad Zarif has met and attended a joint press conference with Danish FM Kristian Jensen on January 4.



Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and his Austrian counterpart Sebastian Kurz met in Vienna on January 17.

Former German chancellor Gerhard Schroeder met with Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif here on January 11.

