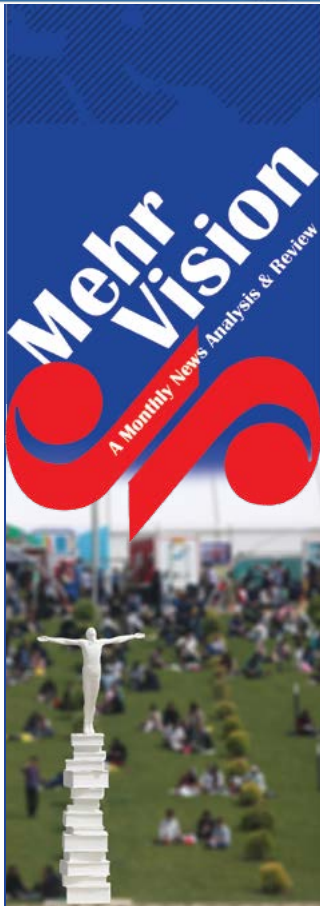


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**Mehr
Vision**
A Monthly News Analysis & Review



**29th Tehran
International Book Fair**



Mehr Vision

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29th TIBF: 'Stop Stalling, Start Reading!'

By: Marjohn Sheikhi

The 29th edition of Tehran International Book Fair with the slogan "Tomorrow Is Too Late to Read" ran from May 4 to 14, 2016 at the Shahr-e Aftab International Exhibition Complex.

Publishers from over 60 countries including Russia, Germany, Italy, China, Sweden, Lebanon, Denmark, Kazakhstan, Belgium and Syria displayed their works on 7,000 stalls and booths to the Iranian booklovers in various fields of humanities, arts, engineering, science, medicine and reference.

This year's edition honored Russia as its special guest, a country whose relations with Iran date back to the 16th century, and which has stood firm alongside Iran in all areas of cooperation from economic, political and security to cultural, tourism and scientific. Iranians are well-informed about Russia, and the Russian language courses in Iranian universities are vastly popular. Russian literature, especially the classical one, is loved and admired by a large population of Iranian bibliophiles. Almost everyone here has read or knows about 'The Three Musketeers', or 'Crime and Punishment' or 'Anna Karenina', all of which among President Putin's favorite titles.

Tehran was the guest of honor for Moscow's 2015 International Book Fair, and it was now time for Iran to return the favor. Seeing as how Russia's contemporary literature had been neglected for the most part, overshadowed by the brilliant bulk of its classics, the 2016 TIBF served as a golden opportunity for Russia to introduce its most recent publications to the Iranian public. The Eurasian country participated in this

year's TIBF with over 1200 titles from 50 publishers, and its delegation consisted of 35 cultural figures including Alexey Varlamov, Viktor Yerofeev, Kanta Ibragimov, Farit Nagimov, Guzel Yakhina, Yelena Usachyova, Aliyona Karimova, Nazim Zeynalov, as well as Russian publishers, journalists and book distributors.

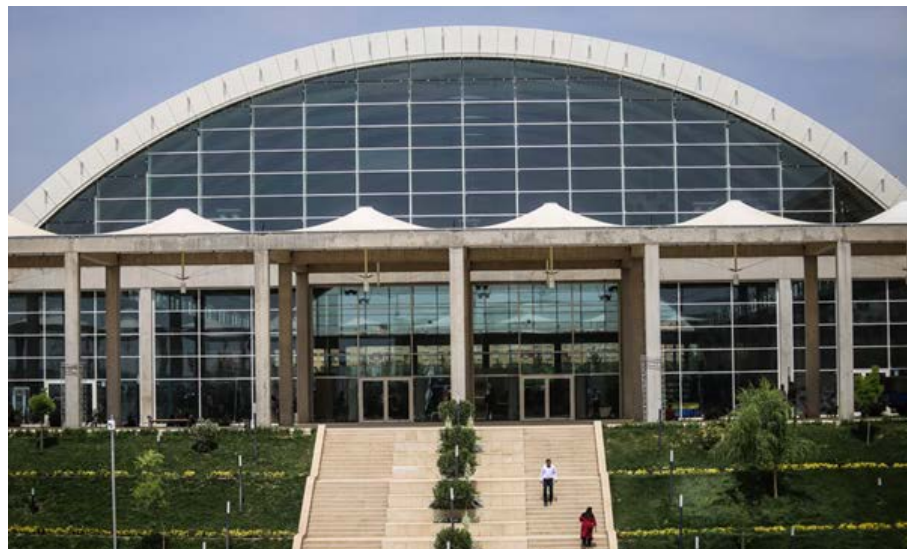
Sergey Kaykin, Head of Russia's International Book Exhibitions and Fairs, was the organizer of "Books from Russia" Russian National Stand in the 29th TIBF, which showcased snippets of Russian culture and science, education and fine arts, architecture and tourism through the prism of book publishing industry.

What marked a major difference in this year's edition of the book fair compared to last years was the change of venue. Iranian book hunters had become accustomed to making a trip to Imam Khomeini Mosalla located in north-central neighborhood of Tehran, but this year, they were to make a rather

long journey to a new location, Shahr-e Aftab, a newly-constructed fairground in southern Tehran. The organizers were concerned that publishers would not turn up and publishers were concerned that visitors would not turn up, but everyone was in for a big surprise as the 29th TIBF received millions of visitors during its 11-day run.

According to Abbas Salehi, the director of the 29th TIBF, one of the major concerns of the publishers and people of culture about the relocation of the fair venue was the possible decline in number of visitors and costumers; "fortunately, with the tremendous help from the media, everyone was taken aback by the visit of millions of people to the fair," Salehi said, adding, "this enthusiastic reception showed that the Iranian community has a unique cultural habit which is the mark of a culture-friendly society."

1518 general publishers, 559 academic publishers, 145 educational, and →



342 children publishing houses helped promote the cultural atmosphere of the country by their participation in Tehran Book Fair.

Another special feature of this year's fair was the particular attention given to its international aspect. According to Salehi, the international section of the fair was more active this year than ever before, and foreign publishers had brought more titles with them to their stands. First edition books had also made a good portion of the presented titles.

"Almost every foreign publisher who attended this year's fair was completely blown away by the number of visitors and the grand venue of the book fair," Salehi said, adding "I hope the 30th TIBF will have an even better international aspect so that a window would open to Iran's cultural diplomacy."

In the international section, each day was assigned to a particular country or city, and given the high capacities of this section, many interesting and informative programs were put on display by international publishers.

"For me, coming to Tehran Book Fair every year is like a cultural ritual," said Sara, a 27-year old English literature graduate, as she hefted a heavy-looking plastic bag full of newly-purchased books. "This venue is much bigger, and may appear to feel less organized due to the fact that bookstands have been scattered around a massive ground. It takes me over half an hour to travel from one pavilion to another, there are free bicycles and shuttle bus rides to use of course, but I'd rather take the traditional way." She laughs as she walks away with her heavy plastic bags.

Nima, a 23-year old student of psychology, said his biggest motivation for deciding to buy books at the fair instead of regular bookstores, was the discount coupons; "Sure, here we have a wide range of titles to choose from and I can almost find every book I need, but the 50 per cent discount makes purchasing books much more pleasurable." His purchased books mostly consisted of psychology textbooks, but among them were also Oriana Fallaci's 'Letter to a Child Never Born', Italo Calvino's 'If on a Winter's Night a Traveler', and Alberto Moravia's 'The Thing and Other Stories'. "I like Italian literature," he shrugs sheepishly.

As a matter of fact, Deputy Culture Minister of Italy also attended the 29th TIBF in the company of the Iranian Culture Minister Ali Jannati. The fair organized 'Day of Italy' on May 7 at the Hall of Nations and displayed a variety of cultural programs to the visitors interested in Italian literature. Italy has been selected as the guest of honor at the next Tehran International Book Fair |

Iran, Russia's cultural ties go much deeper than you think



Interview by: Marjohn Sheikhi

With the 29th Tehran Intl. Book Fair just wrapped up, Mehr News conducted an interview with Sergey Kaykin, head of Russia's International Book Exhibitions and Fairs, who represented Russia stand as the guest of honor of TIBF 2016.

Russian literature with its frequent themes of suffering and sadness has always been wide-read by the Iranian book lovers. Leo Tolstoy, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Anton Chekhov and Alexander Pushkin are as familiar a name to the Iranian readers as Hafiz, Ferdowsi or more contemporary Persian novelists such as Sadegh Hedayat or Simin Daneshvar. But perhaps, it will not be too off the mark to say that Russian contemporary literature has been largely eclipsed and neglected in Iran's intellectual circles. Tehran

International Book Fair 2016 has sought to remedy that.

Now in its 29th edition packed with three decades of experience and reputation, Tehran International Book Fair had chosen Russia as the guest of honor, a country whose vast reservoir of rich literature has long fascinated the Iranian readers with tales of human alienation, great suffering, and philosophical and psychological questions.

Iran-Russia relations date back to the 16th century. Such historical ties intertwined with a long-standing tradition of cultural, political and social interactions give both countries even more reason to step up cooperation in as many fields as possible. It may come as a pleasant surprise for us Iranians to know that Russian President Vladimir Putin, who is one of the most influential people in the world, has listed a book of poetry by Persian poet and mathematician Omar →

Khayyam among his top nine favorite books. Russia also published in 2008 the first edition of 'Khayyam and Putin', a book containing Putin's favorite quatrains written by Khayyam and some of the Russian's interviews with news networks around the globe regarding his admiration for the Persian poet.

"...the history of our countries [Iran and Russia] and the interaction of our cultures goes much deeper and has much stronger roots than specialists sometimes think. This is the guarantee that we will always find a way of solving any problems that arise, because we understand each other," President Vladimir Putin had once said in an interview in 2007.

To find more about Russia's programs for the 29th TIBF, I had a short discussion with the General Director of Russia's International Book Exhibitions and Fairs Sergey Kaykin, who believes that the presence of Russia in Tehran Book Fair can serve as a turning point in the two countries' relations and help them better reach a common understanding on the cultural ground.

◆ Russia was chosen as the guest of honor for the 29th Tehran International Book Fair. How did that decision come about?

Officials of the two countries held several rounds of talks for nearly one year until they arrived at the decision to further boost cultural ties between Tehran and Moscow by giving the publishers more room to introduce their works, and allow the two nations a chance to get better acquainted with each other's culture. As a result of the negotiations, Iran attended the 2015 Moscow's International Book Fair as the special guest and now it was our turn to bring snippets of Russian culture to this ancient land.

◆ So what did you think of Iran's presence at 2015 Moscow Book Fair?

Iran had a very interesting participation at the fair. It had a very organized schedule with various interesting cultural programs. They had compiled a list of Iranian contemporary writers and their literary works for the specialists interested in this

field. Furthermore, they had a list of foreign works translated by Iranians as well.

But Iran's programs were not limited to merely books, rather there was a number of special programs designed for visitors interested in Iranian culture. Some symbols of Iran were put on display; but perhaps the most praised were lavished upon Iranian traditional music that was performed during the four-day event. Other interesting programs included a traditional performance of Persian marionette, or 'Kheimah-Shab-Bazi, and 'Naqqali', an epic narration inspired by Ferdowsi's Shahnameh (Book of Kings).

During the fair last year, Iran and Russia signed an agreement on exchanging stands in one another's exhibitions. That is, every time there is an international exhibition in Moscow, Iran's stand will be secured and in turn, Russia can have a stand in Iran's international exhibitions, all without any costs.

◆ And what about Moscow's special programs at Tehran's Book Fair for introducing Russian culture to Iranian visitors?

We came to the festival with a full schedule of programs running for ten days. We held several lectures on Russia's contemporary literature, introducing a number of key authors and books, as well several 'round tables' for discussing the issue of mutual translations, and the two countries' prospects of the book industry development. In order to have a permanent program for introducing Russia to Iranian people, a center has recently opened in Iran called 'Visit Russia' which gives useful information about the country's culture and if visitors at the fair plan to visit Russia, they can coordinate their trip with this cultural center.

◆ How many publishers did Russia bring to this year's Tehran book fair, and on what areas are the presented books mainly focused?

Russia participated in the fair with 50 publishers, all selected from the biggest and the best, from publish-

ing house 'Eksmo' which is the leader of Russian book market, offering the widest range of classical and modern fiction in the Russian language, to the smallest which is 'Aleteia', a publishing house in St. Petersburg. The highest number of books were offered by five publishing houses. The books were mainly in the fields of industry, aerospace and railway, and special lectures were given on those topics during the fair. Another major part was dedicated to Russian language textbooks for those university students who are studying Russian language in Iran. Another part was related to children literature and contemporary literature. Sadly, Russia's contemporary literature have been widely neglected in Iran, so we made sure to include special programs for introducing it to Iranian reading public.

◆ What do you think the current biggest challenge facing the publishing industry is in Russia?

The number of active publishing houses and bookstores in Russia has declined in recent years and on other hand, the people have become less invested in reading.

◆ Why the decline in interest, though? What is to blame for that?

Well, that question is not very easy to answer. I think people nowadays have less time for reading. Either that, or even when they do get some free time, they have now more options on how to spend it, such as going to the theater, the cinema or surfing the internet. All these factors may lead to a decline in interest in reading books. Although I think the decreasing number of bookstores are more to blame. Last year, Russian government implemented a plan in support of promoting book reading and started constructing bookstores in parts of the country where it seemed to have insufficient number of bookstores so that people's interest in books would be rekindled.

Sergey Kaykin is the Head of the General Directorate of International Book Exhibitions and Fairs in Russia |

Multi-award winning photographer says how his book changed people's minds about Iran

Interview by: MarJohn Sheikh

In an exclusive interview with Mehr News, Turkish-born Australian-Armenian artist and photographer Nuran Zorlu said his travelogue 'Persia to Iran' has changed the perception of Iran on lots of people's minds.

'Persia to Iran', a travelogue by Australian artist and photographer Nuran Zorlu, introducing Iran's many treasures including UNESCO heritage sites to people outside of the country, was published in 2015 by the Iranian Cultural Center in Australia with a print run of 2,000 copies.

The book gives a breathtaking account of Iran's world heritage sites as photographed and documented by master photographer and educator, Nuran Zorlu, who set upon a 20-day journey to Iran to take shots of the country's multi-religious history, including Islamic mosques, Christian churches and ancient empires.

'Persia to Iran' has been registered in the National Library of Australia and currently sits in the shelf of Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull.

Mr. Zorlu is visiting Iran and made an appearance at the 29th Tehran International Book Fair currently underway in Tehran. We conducted an interview with him on the phone on Wednesday while he was in the historical city of Shiraz, sitting right before Persepolis Apadana, where the king received tributes from all the nations in the Achaemenid Empire. He was planning to fly to Mashhad next, and from there to Golestan to visit Gonbad-e Kavus as the most imposing ancient monument in the city. 'I love Iran,' he said, 'I like to visit every corner of your country.'

The following is Mehr News Agency's interview with the multi-award winning photographer on his views on travel photography and how 'Persia to Iran' came to be.

Mr. Zorlu, please tell us about how



you got into travel photography.

Having a big fund in geography and sociology, it made me explore different cultures; therefore, I started taking my camera when I travelled and consequently I found myself in the travel photography to document what I see in cultures, in history and in the current time.

◆ **Where did the idea of writing 'Persia to Iran' come from?**

The idea of the book 'Persia to Iran' started to take shape in my mind after I went to meet Iran's cultural attaché in Australia. It should be noted that I am an exhibiting photographer and not an author. Two or three years ago, I went to Iran's embassy to ask for advice on whether I could take a tour to Iran. The newly-appointed cultural attaché was introduced to me by the ambassador I had met in the past during an exhibition I had in 2011 in Sydney as part of a big festival where Iran was among my featured works. I invited the Iranian ambassador of the time to my exhibition which he kindly accepted and eventually he introduced me to Mr. Mohsen Aboutalebi, then the cultural attaché in Iran's embassy in Canberra. We developed a very good relation, because he served the embassy last in Ar-

menia, and with my heritage, we had a few common things to discuss. Then in another exhibition in New South Wales Art Gallery, which is a very important place for art, I talked about my Iranian experience through a 1-hour Power Point presentation, and showed the presentation to the ambassador and Mr. Aboutalebi at the time. Eventually when I went to meet Mr. Aboutalebi for asking for a tour of Iran, he suggested that I should write a book with my photos and narrative. I had never thought about it before, and a year later, I published the book after 10 months of organizing the pieces and putting the bits of information together. I am proud to say that the Iranian embassy sponsored the book which I am very grateful for them.

◆ **The travelogue 'Persia to Iran' is not just a journey through locations, but also through time. Can you tell us about the process and how you went about shooting the ancient sites?**

As I said, I am a great fan of sociology especially two of its disciplines including demography and organizations like religious structures; I also like ethics and esthetics. And when I combined four of the fields together, I suddenly →

started to find a love of history and I started documenting ancient sites.

◆ **You've been to Maku, Urmia, Isfahan, Tehran...; Out of all the shots you've taken of these places, which one is your most favorite?**

It's like you're asking me which one is my most favorite child (laughs.) It's very hard to choose one because when I put it together, everywhere gives me a different feeling. In Isfahan I was quite taken by how beautiful and old it was. Shiraz is like the soul of Persian identity and Tehran is the capital but the thing is that the ancient city of Yazd is where I came to be most comfortable with. So if I have to choose one city as my most favorite, it would be Yazd.

◆ **So can you tell us about the steps that went into shooting those sites?**

I just came here as a tourist with a camera and I organized my trips. Having an Armenian background, I am familiar with lots of people around here. And I made so many friends in Iran. I organized my trip in order to go to Urmia first and then around Iran.

◆ **What was your most challenging shot?**

The biggest challenge in taking photographs of historical sites is the presence of too many tourists. In my photos, I'd like to exclude people because I want to give them a sense of timelessness. Because when you have people in the photo, their presence gives off some reality of time, but I'd like to show the photos without time.

◆ **How long did your journey take?**

I was in Iran for 20 days and spent 18 days taking the photos for my book. I traveled quite far to take all those photos.

◆ **Do you have any interesting memory of your interactions with the locals during your journey to Iran?**

Yes, I actually have many interesting memories of Iran. Iranian people are probably one of the warmest and friendliest people I've met. Many people are there to help me and if I tell them, 'I'm sorry I've been taking your time,' they usually say, 'don't mention it, it's our duty to help our guests.' One particular memory I have of Kerman that I'm probably never going to forget. I was meant to go to Mahan (35km south of the city of Kerman) which is actually home to a beautiful pilgrimage shrine of the Sufi saint Shah Nur-ed-Din Nematollah Vali. I needed to catch a taxi to go there; But it was Friday and lots of places were closed, and nothing was working in its full capacity as it was a weekend; so I asked this man with a little daughter, 8 or 9 years old, same as my daughter was as that time, for help. Then I started speaking with very little Farsi I knew because he didn't know any English, and at the end I just discovered the taxi stand was half an hour walk away from where I was. But 5 minutes later his entire family turned up and just picked me up and brought me to the taxi stand. The experience filled me with such a good feeling because I was just a stranger and they were never going to see me again, but they went

out of their way to help me.

◆ **Iranian people are known for their hospitality.**

Yeah, I can definitely second that one.

◆ **What is your advice for people who want to get into travel photography?**

Perseverance is the key in travel photography, but travel photography by itself means nothing if you just concern yourself with taking photos of beautiful places, beautiful locations and beautiful people when they fail to accomplish anything of substance. What I do with my photography is to discover the historical and cultural elements in it. Photography is a language and travel photography is another aspect of it. You have to find something you love and admire, and you have to study it closely before you can start taking photos of it. As I told you, photography should be treated as a kind of language with the intention to communicate meanings. Just how authors use language to write, photographers take photos to express an idea, but if you don't say something with your photos, they don't mean anything.

◆ **I understand that you have been born in an Armenian family in Turkey and now live in Australia. How does your background influence your work and the way you see the world through the camera?**

My background is Armenian and I belong to one of the ancient cultures in the history of the world. I'm actually sit-



ting in front of Persepolis right now as I am talking to you, at the ceremonial hall entry, and as you know, on the southern staircase there are carved designed showing images of representatives of different countries holding gifts. Each section of this stairway is dedicated to one of the nations, and I have counted 18 different nations, and Armenian people was one of them. I think given my background, I am much more interested in history than an ordinary person might be, and I try to bring that keen interest in history into the shots I take.

◆ **How has your previous knowledge of Iran changed after you took on this ‘pilgrimage’ to get a first-hand experience of this historical, culturally-rich country?**

My philosophy is to expect nothing. So I have a minimal expectation when I come to witness or experience something new. I cannot read from the books or see it from the photographs or films because they all have a bit of angle. But my view of Iran has always been on the nicest side, because I have always been familiar with Iranian people back in Australia. Like Iran, Australia is a multi-cultural nation, where lots of different ethnicities live together. It happens that one of my best friend is actually Iranian, therefore I enter Iranian homes quite regularly. My connection to Iran is not an ordinary one. I have always known that Iranian people are very hospitable, and when I came here and saw how people are eager to help you without knowing you or expecting anything from you, I found that completely out of this world. I don't think any other culture I have encountered so far is as friendly and hospitable as Iranians. And about the historical elements I found that whatever is left in this ancient culture is being nicely-protected by the country's cultural heritage department. I have this vast interest in heritage programs and like to preserve the cultures. I believe that every culture needs to live on its own and not according to what other people dictate to them, and I found that in Iran that aspect is actually very unique. It's a very beautiful place to be in that regard.



◆ **What kind of image did you intend to present of Iran? Did you want to make the photographs as close to reality as possible or perhaps with a touch of epic and grandeur?**

Bit of both, actually. As a travel photographer, I didn't come to Iran with any particular expectations. I put in my book whatever I experienced, nothing fabricated, nothing made more epic than what it actually was. With my images, I just leave the decision to people. But I can tell you this one that after the book, the perception of Iran has changed on lots of people's minds, especially in my close surrounding. I'm going to take a tourist group here tomorrow and next year, I'm planning to bring other photographers with me to Iran.

◆ **You have been to the 29th Tehran International Book Fair. What do you think of it?**

I have to admit the fair is by far one of the biggest of its kind I have seen, and I have been told by the director of the fair that there are over 2,000 bookstands! it is really, really huge! I actually find putting an organization together like that is very difficult. I didn't have a chance to see all of the stands of course, I was only in the Main Hall. I found interesting translations of the classics there. And there were some western titles there as well that I was not expecting to see. The presence of some of the classics on the bookstands really mesmerized me, as

well as the sheer diversity of books and the different titles. I am aware that not every book is allowed to be displayed in the Fair, but the amount of variety I saw was amazing.

◆ **Can anyone buy your book ‘Persia to Iran’ in the fair, and is it available? How about it in original English version?**

It's not available in Iran yet, but I am talking to a few agencies to help with translation of the book into Persian. I do not predict what would happen to the final outcome, but I would be very pleased to find a publisher to publish the book actually. The book is not accessed yet in English either, but I am taking some measures to market it elsewhere other than Australia where the book is available to the public.

Nuran Zorlu is a multi award-winning photographer with a Master of Photography from AIPP. His photographs have been selected as a finalist in prestigious awards such as ‘Head On’ and Sydney Morning Herald’s ‘Shoot the Chef’, and published in many international magazines including Vogue, Marie Claire, and Harper Bazar. He takes tours and conducts photography workshops in Australia and Eastern Turkey. His photographic work of historically significant sites in Iran, that especially relate to UNESCO heritage protection program, have been featured at the Art Gallery of NSW and in Istanbul |



Politics

US curbed nuclear deal in 2005: Jack Straw

Interview by Hamid Reza Gholamzadeh

In an exclusive interview with Mehr News Agency, former UK Foreign Secretary Jack Straw talked about a host of issues including JCPOA, ISIL, Yemen and of course Brexit.

The Kazakhstan's capital city of Astana was hosting the 13th Eurasian Media Forum on April 20-22 where many world figures attended as speakers. Former British FM Jack Straw was also among speakers and on the sidelines of the event, sat with Hamid Reza Gholamzadeh of Mehr News Agency's English edition to respond to a number of questions in an exclusive interview. Here is what he had to share:

◆ **NYTimes published a report recently saying that Europeans are dissatisfied with US regulations – sanctions on Iran's missile program as well as visa waiver rule – and as MEP Marijetje Schaake has put it "Europe is being taken hostage by American policy; We negotiated the nuclear deal together, but now the U.S. is obstructing its execution." You believe that US administration is pro-JCPOA and it is Congress which is curbing it... do you really think that Obama and his team have done enough to push the deal forward or US is taking JCPOA hostage to put pressure on Iran's missile program?**

I am completely clear that administration of President Obama fully supports BARJAM (JCPOA) and wants to see it implemented; so president Obama and Secretary Kerry invested huge amount of political capital in the BARJAM. As you know, President Obama even had to face down in direct opposition in Congress from BiBi Netanyahu. So currently they strongly in favor of the deal. The problem has arisen between this US administration during the last 9 months of its life of presidency and the Congress are hard for election. Democrat president got Republican Congress, that is important and it is very frustrating. In my view – and I don't

speak for British government – it is very frustrating for the UK as well. Both of us have interests in Iran, and are doing what we can to seek resolution to this.

I'm very concerned about it and many people come to me who are involved or want to be involved in trade with Iran and they are also concerned.

◆ **During Saadabad negotiations back in your time, you and other European officials didn't recognize Iran's right to have centrifuges, while Iran was fully committed to NPT and Additional Protocol; why? And don't you think that if you had accepted it, the deal might have reached years earlier?**

All of us accepted Iran's right to a civil nuclear program. I personally accepted Iran's right to run some centrifuges for low enrichment program. We gained the interim agreement in October 2003 that was agreed in Tehran, and we had two more agreements in Paris and Brussels. But we were very close to final agreement; and when I saw Dr. Zarif at the beginning of 2014, on a Parliamentary delegation, he acknowledged that what stopped the deal in 2005 was not about centrifuges; it was our inability to get agreement from the Americans for concessions like aircraft spare parts, etc.

◆ **You have talked of the role Wahhabism has played in forming extremism and terrorist groups such as ISIL; can you elaborate on that?**

Wahhabism was a homegrown movement within Sunni Islam to I quote 'purify Islam' and you see that in other religions. I said it is a perversion even from Wahhabism, but it seems to me that to deal with this virus that has infected the mindset of these men, you need to take military action to eliminate them, but you still have to deal with the problem in their mind, and to challenge them theologically; I mean in a very direct way, because what they claim is that the more extreme you are in terms of day to day behavior, the closer you are, they say, to the Almighty and everyone not believing



like them is an infidel and it is not only about Christians, it is about Shias as well. They celebrate violence and suppression of women. I don't see enough challenge, intellectual and theological challenge, against this. Another issue, is lack of what we would call in Europe a reformation within Sunni Islam. I think there are differences between Shiism and Sunnism which are striking in all sorts of ways. I'm very stroked by sorts of parallels between what we had in Europe and there was in Iran. The fact that in 16th century, in Iran and also in England, the leaders break away from a supernatural authority over their religion, and started to develop religious practice and theology to fit in their national culture and identity. So the Safavid in Iran did that and Henry VIII in England. The second thing is because there is an authority structure in Church of England, and also in Shiism, the Ayatollah. The theology of the church requires them to move with the time, to keep with science and to for example encourage literature and books like this. Look at the vibrancy of intellectual life, but also in Iran filmmakers and people like that can go to workshops or so. I know it is a bit of generalization, but there is a shortage of such intellectual figure in some Sunni countries.

◆ **UK is one of main sources of arms sale to Saudis who reportedly are supporting ISIL with their weapons and you said that 'there are supports from elements in Saudi Arabia for ISIL in Syria.' Do you think that London's selling of weapons to Riyadh can be justified if they are supporting terrorists?**

I'm quite sure no arms that we have sold Saudis have gone to ISIL. The system →

that we have in the United Kingdom for export licenses for arms is very very tight. I cannot comment on particular sales as I haven't seen the licenses. But I can tell you from my period in government in five years I was in charge of granting license to these exports, we looked at the applications very carefully, and turned down some, and they are all reported to a committee in House of Commons.

◆ **President Obama just visited your country, paying probably his farewell visit as president to UK; it seems Brexit is main topic in the meeting; what's your take on this trip? What outcomes do you expect?**

I think what he said was very helpful. And I think it will assist the campaign against Brexit. Let's say I'm strongly in favor of Britain remaining inside the EU as I see very little advantages in leaving and very big disadvantages and it increases generally the risks to the future of the UK in all sorts of way. So it was very helpful I can say, and I noted there are some politicians on the other side who complained about Mr. Obama's right to offer his opinions; yet these people like Boris Johnson every day are telling other people what to do! Just as we are entitled to comment on events and policies in the United States, and we do all the time, they are also entitled to comment on us. I hope very much that we will win; it looks so, but there is still two months to go.

◆ **For more than a year now, Saudis have been invading Yemen, killing women and children and destroying their infrastructures... without making any success even if we assume that they are fighting for a good reason. Why Europeans and particularly UK are still silent on the issue?!**

This silent war shows relativism of news reporting across the world. It is a difficult country to get into, precisely because it is one of the poorest countries in the world and the region. Western states don't have much of stake in it. That becomes sort of reinforced as people don't know a great deal about it. Everybody I speak to believes that it has been a disaster and there has to be a political settlement. Of course there are people in GCC who do support this action against Yemen, but there are also people who have serious reservations about the situation

in Yemen.

◆ **So do such things matter in UK export licenses for arms sale that you said?**

You asked me questions about licensing for arms; I don't know quite certainly that none of arms we sold Saudis have gone to ISIL; I don't know sitting here this morning about the situation of Saudi forces or UAE forces' use of those arms in Yemen. I think it is being considered to a parliamentary committee in England.

I think there is a general problem about a lack of information and understanding about Yemen. One example is that Houthis who believe in seven Imams, are considered as Shias who believe in 12 Imams.

◆ **Your idea about leadership of Mr. Jeremy Corbyn in Labour Party?**

As you know, he and I were together on parliamentary delegation to Iran in January 2014; he is a nice man, very interested in world affairs, I didn't actually support him; I supported a different candidate, Yvette Cooper, for leadership who I thought was better qualified. Now, he is leader and everyone in Labour party is concentrated on winning upcoming elections of Scotland, London mayor and municipalities elsewhere. We have Sadiq Khan who is Labour candidate for mayor of London, who if elected, will be the first Muslim mayor of London. And further we have referendum on Brexit. So, Mr. Corbyn was elected democratically and we all get on with it.

◆ **How do you see the relations between Iran and UK after the nuclear deal? In**

which areas do you see more potentials for cooperation?

Signing of BARJAM, there has been a big change in approach of government overall, and government has now said they want to open and improve relations with Iran and I'm delighted about that. I want to see reopening and flowering of the relationship; I believe there should be beginning of political and cultural cooperation. In terms of business, the prime minister very wisely appointed Lord Norman Lamont as UK trade representative. That's very important because Lord Lamont, like me, has been a long standing supporter of Iran and spoke out for Iran when it was unpopular to do so. Now we are gradually increasing our diplomatic representation in Tehran. In terms of trade, Britain is very good in oil and gas, and also in manufacturing and obviously in services of all kinds like investment, legal services and so on. That's why it is very important to us to get the Americans out of the way and have the Americans clear these obstacles out of the way.

I'm a member to British-Iran Chamber of Commerce which is led by Norman Lamont; and there is a great British Iranian diaspora, particularly in London; and they had a tough time during the period of sanctions. I don't have any formal role in relations, but people come to me for advice.

Jack Straw served as UK foreign secretary in Tony Blair's cabinet and was one of three European FMs conducting first rounds of nuclear talks between Iran and the EU3 |



American analyst:

'Iran ordered to pay compensation to victims of Israeli false flag'

Interview by: Marjohn Sheikhi

American political analyst and social activist Stephen Lendman, in response to the recent Supreme Court ruling against Iran, says while 'Israeli high crimes go unpunished, Iran is ordered to pay compensation to its victims.'

"Unjustifiable US hostility toward Iran persists," says American author and radio host Stephen Lendman, in response to a recently issued order by US Supreme Court against Iran on the transfer of about \$2bn of frozen Iranian assets to the families of victims of the 1983 bombing in Beirut; a ruling which, as FM Zarif would say, "cannot stand in any serious civilized court of law."

Lendman believes that last year's nuclear deal between Iran and the 5+1 group of countries, with the US at the forefront, has in fact changed nothing in Washington's desire to replace Iranian sovereignty with "puppet governance it controls."

"Regime change remains firm bipartisan policy," he adds.

Lendman offers a brief account of what really had happened in the 1983 bombing of Marine barracks in Beirut and how things proceeded from there: "In October 1983, during Israel's first Lebanon war, slaughtering thousands, including at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps, the Beirut Barracks were attacked, killing 241 US marines.

Iran, Syria and Hezbollah were wrongfully blamed for a Mossad false flag. Israel wanted anti-Arab sentiment stoked to enlist US support for its regional aggression.

In September 2007, US District Judge Royce Lamberth ordered Iran to pay over \$2.6 billion to 1,000 family members and a handful of survivors.

In 2012, Congress passed legislation, granting victims of the attack the right to be compensated from frozen Iranian funds.

On April 20, the Supreme Court ruled Tehran must pay families of victims and



survivors nearly \$2 billion in compensation - including victims of other attacks wrongfully linked to Iran.

America's Supreme Court is stacked with conservatives and neoconservatives - not a civil libertarian Brennan, Douglas or Thurgood Marshall permitted to sit on the court today.

Writing for a 6 - 2 majority, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg supported flagrant injustice, saying 'the victims of Iran-sponsored terrorist attacks will be permitted to (sue for compensation) against (its) assets.'

Israeli high crimes go unpunished. Iran is ordered to pay compensation to its victims. Injustice is served."

Lendman also believes that the US Supreme Court ruling against Iran is "entirely political, ignoring clear facts, and showing hostility toward Iran continues."

This isn't the first time the American courts have held Iran responsible for attacks that have nothing to do with the country, namely the ruling by a New York City judge that Iran should pay more than \$10.5 billion in damages to the families of those killed in the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, based on the fact that Iran had 'failed' to defend claims that it aided the September 11 hijackers in a court hearing that actually never existed. 'The height of absurdity', Foreign Minister Zarif has called it, while adding the Supreme Court ruling is 'highway robbery'.

"The ruling authorized the grand theft

of illegally frozen Iranian assets, and Zarif is entirely right," says Lendman. "To me, it shows negotiating with America is a waste of time. It routinely breaches what it agrees to and when a new president succeeds Obama, the nuclear deal could be rescinded - an illegal act if it happens, but who'll hold America accountable?"

On Tuesday, Iran's Foreign Ministry summoned the Swiss ambassador to Tehran to protest over the ruling. In the meeting that followed, Mohammad Keshavarz-zadeh, General Director for the Americas at the Iranian Foreign Ministry, deemed the ruling a blatant violation of mutual contract obligations such as the 1955 treaty between the two countries, as well as US international legal commitments on the judicial immunity and inviolability of the assets and properties of the Islamic Republic of Iran. He further called the ruling 'contrary to accepted practices of international law' which guarantees governments' judicial immunity.

But Lendman believes that summoning the Swiss envoy will not change anything; "The only chance for change is from the grassroots in America, revolutionary change against a vile system harming so many to benefit so few," he added.

"I don't see any spirit in my country to do anything positive. The level of public indifference and ignorance are appalling," he lamented.

Stephen Lendman received a BA from Harvard University and an MBA from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania. Supporting progressive causes and organizations, he began writing in summer 2005 on a broad range of issues. Topics regularly addressed include war and peace; social, economic and political equity; and justice for long-suffering peoples globally - notably, victims of America's imperial wars, Occupied Palestinians and Haitians. In early 2007, he began hosting his own radio program. Currently he hosts the Progressive Radio News Hour on the Progressive Radio Network |



Democracy US justification to commit crime in ME

Interview by Lachin Rezaian

An American writer, journalist and political analyst said the US abuses 'Democracy promotion in Middle East' as a pretext for all types of murder and mayhem it has perpetrated against the people of Iraq, Libya, Syria, etc.

Regarding the recent ruling by the United States Supreme Court sentencing Iran to pay nearly \$2 billion to American victims of terrorist attacks, Iranian officials and media condemned the act calling it a mockery of international law and a new threat to any improvement with relation to the implementation of JCPOA.

Iran has warned the ruling increases the distrust between Tehran and Washington, proving the true face of the US, which is called unreliable.

Mark Glenn believes the move represents that despite all the resources that have been committed towards creating the illusion that United States has somehow had a change of heart with regards to the Islamic Republic of Iran, nothing of the sort has taken place.

In an interview to Mehr News, American political analyst Mark Glenn answered the questions on the issue:

◆ Does the recent US court ruling question the credibility of the US justice system? Why US did an act which can have a considerable impact on its nuclear deal with Iran, reached after years of talks, amid the days of JCPOA implementation?

Here in America, the illusion exists that somehow there is 'separation of powers' between the Legislative (Congress), the Executive (White House) and the Judiciary, which is made up by the Court System. This 'separation', which we are told is there to insure 'balance' of power so that private interests are not able to wield undue influence for reasons that are specific only to them, is, as intimated earlier, merely an illusion. Much like the phrase 'bringing Democracy to the Middle East,' which the United States uses as justification for all types of murder and mayhem she has perpetrated against the people of Iraq, Libya, Syria, etc, 'separation of powers' is a form of linguistic black magic and deliberate deployment of deception and

duplicity intended to create the appearance of something that in fact does not exist.

Having said this, the recent decision handed down by the US Supreme Court declaring Iran 'guilty' of involvement in the 1983 bombing of a US Marine barracks in Lebanon, resulting in the appropriation of \$2 billion of seized Iranian funds is/should be instructive to everyone. What it represents is the US Supreme Court--again, which the world is told is an 'independent' branch of the US Government--being used for political purposes. It should be noted that no criminal trial was held in determining Iran's 'guilt' in this terrible affair, but rather that a summary judgment from the presiding judge in was/is the entire basis upon which Iran has been found 'guilty'. The obvious question that must be asked and answered is why no criminal trial was convened, if indeed all the evidence was there of Iran's participation in this event.

◆ Some Iranian officials have called US recent court ruling as an 'international banditry', how do you evaluate this?

'International banditry' is indeed a good word to use. Here in America, when one wants to convey the idea that the court system and the appearance of law are utilized in adjudicating a certain pre-determined outcome, the term 'Kangaroo court' is used. In this case, it must be remembered, again, that it was nearly 20 years before a civil complaint--not a criminal complaint--was brought against the Islamic Republic of Iran for this act, was heard in a small US District Court where other cases involving relatively minor legal controversies are held, and that a summary judgment was issued from the bench rather than a jury issuing its verdict.

It is also important to remember the date when the first civil complaint was issued--Oct. 3, 2001, a mere 3 weeks after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, when anti-Islamic hatred was running at a fevered pitch in America, and in the aftermath of then-President George W. Bush issuing his infamous speech in Congress declaring a 'crusade' against Islamic terrorism, wherein he named Iran as part of the 'Axis of Evil'.

It is safe to conclude therefore that →

pro-Israel/anti-Iran forces obviously sought to capitalize on the tragic events of 9/11 and the anti-Islamic fury that had gripped America by throwing together a civil case against Iran where in the Islamic Republic was declared 'guilty' of the murder of over 200 US Marines, a verdict that then could be waved in the faces of Americans who knew nothing about the events in Beirut in 1983 nor the 'banditry' that had just taken place in the US District Court, and in a very sly and deceptive manner, the murder of 3,000 Americans on 9/11 would be paired up with the murder of over 200 US Servicemen in 1983.

◆ Is the move in violation of the US obligations according to the Joint Comprehensive plan of Action (JCPOA)?

Whether it is legally and technically a violation of the JCPOA is immaterial to the fact that what it represents is prime efface evidence that despite all the resources that have been committed to-

and Zionist imperialism that received a mortal blow when the people of Iran kicked out the American puppet Pahlavi and established the IRI that exists today close to 4 decades later.

◆ What is the best reaction on behalf of Iran towards the issue? Are there any ways to have that money back?

In my opinion, the first thing that Iranians need to do in dealing with this recent abrogation of justice is to recognize it for what it is--again, prime efface evidence that the United States cannot be trusted, despite whatever theatrics are employed in creating the mirage that a warming of relations has begun between the 2 countries. From there, Iran should take her case internationally, but not necessarily to the UN or to the ICC, as both are tentacles of American/Western/Zionist imperialism, and therefore the chances of getting justice are slim to none, to say nothing of the detrimental effect that would result from having ei-

trovsky, who described in his book 'By Way of Deception--The Making and Unmaking of a Mossad Officer', how Israel knew the bombing was about to occur, but deliberately refused to warn the Americans, to wit--

"In the summer of 1983, this same informant told the Mossad about a large Mercedes truck that was being fitted by the Shi'ite Muslims with spaces that could hold bombs. Now, the Mossad knew that because of its size, there were only a few logical targets, one of which must be the US compound. The question then (within Mossad) was whether or not to warn the Americans to be on particular alert for a truck matching the description. Admony, in refusing to give the Americans specific information on the truck, said, 'No, we're not there to protect Americans.' At the same time, however, all Israeli installations were given the specific details and warned to watch for a truck matching the description of the Mercedes. At 6:20 a.m. on October 23, 1983, a large Mercedes truck approached the Beirut airport, passing well within sight of Israeli sentries in their nearby base and turning left into the parking lot. A US Marine guard reported with alarm that the truck was gathering speed, but before he could do anything, the truck roared toward the entrance of the four-story reinforced concrete Aviation Safety Building, used as headquarters for the Eighth Marine Battalion, crashing through a wrought-iron gate and exploding with such a terrific force that the building was instantly reduced to rubble...The loss of 241 US Marines, most of them still sleeping in their cots at the time of the suicide mission, was the highest single-day death toll for the Americans since 246 died throughout Vietnam at the start of the Tet offensive on January 13, 1968. The general attitude at Mossad about the Americans was: "As far as the Yanks go, we are not here to protect them. They can do their own watching. They wanted to stick their nose into this thing, so let them pay the price."



wards creating the illusion that United States has somehow had a change of heart with regards to the Islamic Republic of Iran, that nothing of the sort has taken place. The US is just as committed to subduing Iran, to subverting her sovereignty and of making her like any other vassal state as she was when she engineered the overthrow of Mohammed Mossadegh in 1953. The Iranian Revolution of 1979 remains a thorn in the eye of the United States and Israel and thus both are determined to wipe that 1979 Revolution off the map as a means of salving the wounded ego of American

ther body reaffirm the previous decision handed down by the US Supreme Court. Rather, Iran and her governing bodies should use this in showing the hypocrisy of the US and the West and to use it in building political support both within Iran and in the region, given that the US is desperately trying to divide not only that nation but as well the entire Islamic world.

And finally, in underscoring just how much more to this story there is than what has been revealed publicly, I think it is important to consider the testimony of a former Mossad agent, Victor Os-

Mark Glenn is an American author and journalist in Idaho who has co-founded Crescent and Cross Solidarity Movement. He regularly writes on different topics on *The Ugly Truth* |

Prominent scholar Chossudovsky:

Offshore tax havens 'extensions of global banking system'

prominent scholar has said release of Panama Papers reveals the sheer vastness of the mechanisms by which global banks and institutions provide for their customers to hide corrupt money.

Professor Michel Chossudovsky gave an interview to correspondent of Mehr News English Service, who asked him about recent release of a long list of political as well as celebrity personalities who had allegedly been involved in money laundering attempts.

Mr. Chossudovsky believed that the number of such offshore havens was not limited to Panama and exceeded 50 centers scattered around the world. He also believed that the process by which illicit money is laundered was proposed by big banks and financial institutions for their clients which suggest them profits of evading taxes and other questions otherwise asked in a healthy banking system:

He begin with a general view of the Panama Papers; "I think that if we want to understand the Panama Papers we have to start looking at structure of offshore banking, which is essentially an extension of the Anglo-American banking system. All major Wall Street and London banks including JPMorgan Chase, Goldman Sachs, all the European banks, Deutsche Bank, they all have branches in these offshore havens whether it's in Caribbean or Switzerland, etc. Essentially, to discuss the issue of who has an account in there, is a non sequitur, is irrelevant. We have to point to the fact that who controls these offshore institutions on the major financial institutions that we know of and what they are involved in, they are involved in money laundering, extensively money laundering which means the laundering of the proceeds of organized crime particularly the drug trade, the trade of weapons, and so on so forth; of course it is an offshore haven to evade taxation and this is something which is so wide-spread and it's also built in to the legal structures of Western countries in neighbors Large corporations primarily not only individuals



to evade taxation by having a subsidiary in tax haven and it is a practice which has become routine; Britain has the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man, which are tax havens for insurance companies; it has the British Virgin Islands, it has the Cayman Islands, it has Panama, when not looking at an isolated event, they are more than 50 offshore havens spread around the world but largely in Switzerland, Luxembourg, Channel Islands, the Caribbean and essentially these are extensions of the Anglo-American banking system so we should be looking at the relationship to large banks, to central banks and so on and the issue which is raised by Panama Papers from my stand point that has not constituted stunning of offshore banking, it simply constitutes a list of individuals who have accounts in these offshore banks and then using that information as a means to smear or to destroy the reputation of particular individuals, whether it's the prime minister of Iceland or whether it is directed against politicians in the Russian Federation and so and so forth, the avenues for depositing funds in offshore banks are so extensive that even if you look into usual let's say financial magazines or online, they will say why don't you open an offshore bank account in the Cayman Islands and we will issue you an ATM card and with the ATM card you will be able to access your account,

then millions and millions of people have accounts in there; so we are not talking about something which is peripheral, and if we want to examine the broader issues of tax evasion and money laundering and dirty money, we have to point at the main offenders which are the large banking institutions when they open up shop in the Cayman Islands they may change the name of the institution, they may have a partner there, but they are very visible in those financial markets, very visible indeed, and they encourage the customers to open up accounts in what they call private banking and private banking is often offshore banking and in this environment money moves from one offshore haven to another and it is particularly of use for evasion of taxes but evasion of taxes by wealthy individuals certainly politicians, but largely corporation evade taxes by using offshore havens and they do it within the context of an exciting legal fabric which they themselves influence, and then you have the criminal syndicates, the entities, the mafia cartels both in London and America, Europe, of course United States, Japan and China, they also have accounts in these offshore locations and what do they do, they launder money, and they bring in dirty money which are the proceeds of drug trade, they deposit it in a bank accounts, no questions asked, and then they will invest in real estate, let's say real estate of Florida, then you have the whole mechanism of money laundering.

◆ I understand that as far as we have such mechanisms like offshore banking there are still chances for such corruptions like money laundering, tax evasions and like, right? So, is it something to be dealt with internationally or in national level, I mean international laws should be changed to meet these problem or national laws should consider this?

Well I think that at the heart of this is the Western banking system and it's important to have both national and international laws which control or eliminate these entities, because in effect what →

Interview by Parnaz Talebi

these entities do is that they protect fraudulent activities as well as organized crime, but the problem is that the banks which making billions of dollars through these money laundering operations and can I mention because there have been many cases of banks like City Group, have being involved in drug money we have known it for years. And when it happens when there is lawsuit they used to blame it on the employee. But in effect, we are talking about many large sums of money accruing, the narcotics strain of money sometimes is estimated to amount to 200 billion dollars a year. That laundering process is the transformation let's say of narco-dollars, drug money into clean money, which then can be invested in other things like the hotels and so on. The problem is that the big banks are complicit in this process because they may see the process, they also received the proceeds of Third World leaders' depositing money from different illicit sources. I should mention that the international financial institutions, IMF and World Bank, are also complicit, because for some countries, take the case of Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Mexico, the proceeds of the drug money is also used to repay the countries' external debt. This is well documented, and what the IMF will do is say we have to respect confidentiality, no questions asked to allow for this money to ultimately reach the creditors of these countries and there is very big debate on that, so that in effect, the Panama papers are really giving us information which is trivial in nature, because they are giving a list of individuals having accounts in an offshore location, while they avoid to discuss the facts, that these offshore locations are used by the major financial institutions of western countries but also of Japan, China, and so on to loan vast amounts of money and also to capture the global criminal economy. But I should also mention that the dividing line between what is criminal and what is legal is very difficult to establish. Because now the criminals invest in legal activities.

◆ **Professor you have a good history about money laundering, money corruptions and dirty money in some countries, I want to ask you which countries do you think are the best and the worst in fighting corruption and such dirty money?**

Well this is a very important question, because if you read the reports of west-

ern watch organizations, even the media, there will always points to a certain number of countries, Columbia, Mexico, Russia, and so on but nobody mentions the US mafia, the British mafia, the French mafia. They talk about the Italian mafia, etc. but in effect the main source of corruption comes from the core of the financial establishment to processes of co-optation when they invest in developing country, they will give bribes to the officials, but yet the coverage in the financial media will largely focus on the people receive the corruption money, rather than the people who give the corruption money. So we have such double standards: you can't have corruption without people at very high level who are willing to pay money in favors. The process of political co-optation, the process of regime change, all, even the founding of NGOs, we find that many NGOs which are supposed to be very progressive, focusing on the oppositions to a particular government or to a particular policy or agenda, they are founded by Wall Street, by major foundations. Now the question is what the dynamics behind it is. If we look at the politicians in the US or in any other countries the level of corruption is more or less normal, and there is honesty in politics anymore! And under those circumstances politicians can be purchased in various ways and then coopted, and the cooptation comes precisely from multibillion dollar conglomerates coming from of banks, defense establishments, from the companies producing weapons. It also comes from the big pharmaceutical companies which coopt the politicians and so on.

When we discuss the issue of offshore banking, we have to understand that that is really part of the banking structure which claims legality but which in practice is very much integrated by criminal elements, implying the laundering of dirty money. Dirty money can actually get cleaned and we are no longer within the stereotype of organized crime as presented in Hollywood movies, the Italian or Irish mafia. The criminal syndicates are in effect sometimes instruments of global capitalism. So in effect what we have is a globalization of crime and criminalization of economic activities. And the lines between organized crime and organized capital are not easy to establish because many families from criminal syndicates that are now legitimate businesses. I'll give you an example: Much of the textile

industry in Thailand comes from proceeds from the opium trade in northern Thailand and then is reinvested in legitimate undertakings. As I mentioned, much of the real estate boom in southern Florida is ultimately tied in to the recycling of drug money through laundering process so it becomes clean, it goes to the Bahamas or the Cayman Islands, then it comes to Florida and with that money they buy hotels, or invest in real state. And of course, the most notorious example is Las Vegas which is a multi-billion-dollar casino complex which initially started out as an organized crime and today it's owned by respectable corporations, so there's been a transition where criminal syndicates, in a sense, become legal syndicates, and they no longer have to indulge in the kinds of scenarios that we had in the 1930s in Chicago.

◆ **Which countries in your view have been more successful in preventing and fighting corruption?**

It's a very difficult question to answer. We'd have to examine very specifically the policies and so on. I would say the certain countries which are a little bit aloof of these procedures, such as Scandinavian countries, but it's very difficult to give an answer to that. The problem is we're no longer dealing with national entities. The structures of trade and finance are integrated to such an extent that they also integrate the patterns of corruption, money laundering and offshore banking. The areas of corruption are such that it really now forecloses the possibility of democracy, because if politicians can be purchased by criminal syndicates or by corporations to act on their behalf rather than on behalf of the population, then we are no longer within the realm of independent governments acting on behalf of people, rather we are in the realm of governments which are acting on behalf of their corporate sponsors. And I think the United States is pretty much moving in that direction; there is very little independent policy-making, it is largely policy on behalf of defense contractors, making weapons, big oil companies, the big banks, the big pharmaceutical companies, and so on. So in effect, through lobbying process, these politicians are co-opted. That is also the part of a broader issue, let's say, of offshore banking, because the process of co-optation implying money pay-offs, invariably will use the avenues of offshore locations to hide this undeclared →

wealth. One of the more latent examples is the Prime Minister of Malaysia who had a deposit of \$600m in his bank courtesy of Saudi Arabia, which was supposed to be a gift to PM Najib Razak, which raised a big controversy in Malaysia, but that is Prime Minister Najib Razak which raised a big controversy in Malaysia. But I think we have to look at the fact these pay offs to politicians are something which are in essence routine while on the other hand I think what is revealing is that Panama papers do not actually target personalities in the United States; interestingly enough, they target individuals in different countries like Iceland, Russia and so on, but people in the US like politicians who have accounts in offshore locations are simply not mentioned. Most wealthy people in the US as well as politicians will have accounts overseas. Some may have registered for tax purposes while others not and this is something which is so widespread and as it was mentioned in the Panama Papers, they reveal something like 11 million names of individuals. But out of those 11 million, they chose only a handful for political purposes rather than actually pointing at the architects of these tax heavens. The architects are the major British and American banks as well as Canadian banks. They are all in the tropical Caribbean tax heavens. People who go there can see with their own eyes and in fact the banks in the head offices and in various branches will encourage clients to open accounts in offshore locations. And they will advertise that as I have records of a sample catalogue which suggests this. The advertisement, which is published in online newspapers, says "Why don't you open an account in an offshore location no questions are asked where your money comes from." And this is a standard procedure. And we really have to address the broad structural context; namely the fact that the major financial institutions are routinely involved in money laundering including the laundering of drug money, providing a framework for tax evasion as so on. Responsibility does not lie with the customers of these offshore locations; it resides with the presidents and CEOs of these mega banks. There is ample documentation to that affect as I started this already in the 1990s or even in the late 1980s as how the drug money is used under Paris Club or London Club agreements. And in that regard also the fact that the International Monetary Fund is

involved in regulating the banking system while they have not regulated the banking system in a way that which would avoid the process of laundering dirty money.

◆ **Thank you very much professor, it was great. If there is anything you want to add, I'm open to it.**

I just want to mention that I worked on this issue quite a number of years back and I'm just saying that it is more of a political-economic issue and I think we need to look at the data. Another important thing is the role of the intelligence because the US intelligence has been linked up with drug trade. In other word, if you look at Afghanistan which now produces more than 90 per cent of the world's heroin, which is estimated to amount to 200 billion a year; that trade initially started with the CIA back in the late 1970s as it financed the so-called Soviet-Afghan war and it allowed for the recruitment of Al-Qaeda Mujahedeen which was a CIA project and it used the proceeds of drugs to finance it. Now today, this multibillion dollar industry is protected by the US military and the US intelligence, the narcotics goes out, the opium goes out, sold, and is transformed into heroin and sold in western markets. It is also backed by the banks, because otherwise you still have to launder money. I think it is interesting to point out that since the surge in opium production in Afghanistan, there has been a dramatic surge in cases of addiction to heroin in the US, and in fact there is a certain causality. Heroin has always existed in the US, but not on a massive scale, and in fact large part of it is sold in other markets, especially in EU markets, but the thing is we have a multibillion drug trade which hinges on protection at the level of intelligence agencies, but also on avenues for laundering drug money which is very very large, and for that they need the complicity of the large banks and the locations in offshore havens, but they are part of, and let say, branches of western banks.

◆ **Professor, considering the fact that US military and intelligence are involved in dirty money, we don't have any American names in Panama Papers. So, do you see any political motivation behind the release of the list, for example a motivation by US to damage the name of Russia or other countries, especially there has been evidence that Soros Foundation had been funding the**

Panama Papers.

Well, a number of foundations which are behind the Panama Papers is a consortium of journalists, they receive money from Ford Foundation (with known links to CIA), and they have support from Rockefeller Foundations, and from other foundations. When Wall Street funds critical journalism it is not to support an analysis of Wall Street role in offshore banking, Wall Street and City of London are the main architects of offshore banking, tax havens, and money laundering. The consortium of journalists is found by foundations which are linked precisely to Wall Street. And what they want is to divert attentions from the fact that ultimately they are the people who are responsible for these tax havens. Big banks and institutions fund the consortium of journalists to focus what they want which is to smear politicians for particular reasons, and given the prevalent dynamics of co-optation and corruption – which characterizes the world today – we can see that this is something which has been selective in its impacts and purpose. Now, I should mention something from my own writing on this, exactly three years ago, it was April 5, 2013 the same consortium of journalists released some names, and they chose exactly the same day for their second release and it has very little to do with an understanding of these offshore banking institutions, it is not only the Panama, there is 50 of them; I am not sure, perhaps the figures may change, the Cayman Island was set to be one of the largest banking markets in the world in terms of deposits after London, New York, and a couple of other places and so, in the realm of electronic banking, this money moves from one place to another, so in effect, it escapes the counting process which may apply in certain countries with regard to money laundering and criminality and other various restrictions, but the money laundering procedures implemented by various governments are absurd, because they don't really look at how the banks themselves will money around and how will themselves create for transactions between offshore locations and headquarters in London or New York.

Michel Chossudovsky is a Canadian economist and author. He is a professor of economics at the University of Ottawa and the president and director of the Centre for Research on Globalization |

Iran better to engage with West using structures consistent with its heritage, culture

Interview by Lachin Rezaian

A British energy consultant warned that Western financial approach is either to attempt to gain ownership of Iran's sovereign resources or to place Iran into debt.

The internationally acknowledged energy consultant Chris Cook addresses in this exclusive interview to Mehr News Iran's future on attracting considerable foreign investment, economic prosperity during post-sanctions era and the country's withdrawal from economic stagnation occurred during sanctions.

◆ **Here is the full text of his answers to Do you think the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) can enable Iran to attract considerable foreign investment and reanimate its dormant oil fields?**

Definitely not in Dollars - in the absence of miracles - but possibly in Euros. At current market prices, I think that the development of new fields will not offer sufficient returns on investment to cover the perceived risks of the proposed Iran Petroleum Contract as I understand the IPC. However, reanimation of existing fields is possible on a case by case basis since the risks in respect of existing fields are much lower than for new production and therefore returns on investment demanded are lower, leaving more scope for agreement.

◆ **How can Iran take advantage of economic prosperity during post-sanctions era?**

I think that there are difficulties with both the conflicting 'Reform' and 'Resistance' policy approaches as I understand them.

In relation to 'Reform' I think Iran should take great care in engaging with either Dollar-based or Euro-based markets and the financing and funding of inward investment based upon them. In my opinion Western market economies are unsustainably weak and fragile, and



Iran would be unwise to allow claims over Iranian sovereign assets to support Western banking systems. In relation to 'Resistance', while this approach protects Iran from contamination during market/system breakdown, it does little to encourage or enable new investment in Iran using domestic resources. My colleagues and I advocate a 'Resilience Economy' approach whereby Iran may engage internationally and obtain financing and funding through the following mechanisms, where Iran in fact leads the way:

Energy Swaps - such as oil swaps (as with the Caspian Oil Swap); gas for power (as with Armenia); oil for products, and in particular technology for gas/power;

Prepay Energy Credits - a simple funding mechanism whereby international customers may simply pay forward for energy production.

◆ **How much it takes for Iran to recover from economic stagnation occurred during sanctions imposed by US and EU? What factors can accelerate Iran's economic restoration to happen ASAP?**

I think that Iran's isolation from global markets represents a historic opportunity not to repeat the mistakes made by other global market economies in the last decade or so. In my view, the West is well aware of the sheer scale of the commercial opportunity Iran represents, but the Western financial approach is either to attempt to gain ownership of Iran's sovereign resources or to place Iran into debt. Iran has the opportunity to re-engage with the West financially as

an equal, using the structures & instruments which are entirely consistent with Iran's heritage and culture.

◆ **Why do some foreign investors hesitate to enter the Iranian market, what are the potential risks to their involvement? Do you think the circumstances are conducive to foreign investment in Iran in a new era?**

I have bad news and good news. The bad news is that Iran's legal and financial infrastructure is in need of a complete overhaul. Firstly, by way of example, there are some seven types of Company under Iran's Commercial Code and yet not one of them is suitable for either Consortium working, particularly across borders. Secondly, overseas investors are uncomfortable with the current means for commercial dispute resolution, and many observers consider that simple but effective means of dispute resolution such as mediation and arbitration are urgently necessary. But the good news is that the simple but effective risk and production sharing agreements and instruments outlined above may be introduced with minimal changes to Iranian law.

Chris Cook is a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for Security and Resilience Studies at University College London. Chris was director at the International Petroleum Exchange IPE. IPE is known for trading Brent Crude until 2005. Chris Cook was originator of the Iranian oil bourse!



Chinese Ambassador Pang Sen:

China, Iran have sights firmly set on enhancement of cultural ties

*Interview by: Marjohn Sheikhi,
Hamidreza Gholamzadeh*

Speaking to Mehr News on the sidelines of the 4th Chinese Spring Festival held on March 3, 2016 in Niavaran Palace Complex in northern Tehran, Chinese Ambassador to Tehran, Mr. Pang Sen, said China and Iran have planned many events for enhancement of cultural cooperation.

Chinese New Year, also known as Spring Festival in China, is the most important festival for the Chinese people and is when all family members get together, just like Nowruz in Iran and Christmas in the West. The Spring Festival falls on the 1st day of the 1st lunar month, which was February 8 this year, and represented by a zodiac animal sign, Monkey, which Iranian people are well familiar with. The similarities in which Iranian and Chinese people celebrate their New Year as well as the different traditions and costumes they observe gave the Chinese Embassy in Tehran and Iran-China Friendship Group the initiative to hold the two festivals in conjunction with another. This year, the festival was held for the first time in a much larger space with even more people – Chinese and Iranians – in attendance.

On the sidelines of the fourth Chinese Spring Festival held on March 3, 2016 in Niavaran Palace Complex in northern Tehran, Chinese Ambassador to Tehran, Mr. Pang Sen, told Mehr News that China and Iran have their sights firmly set on enhancement of cultural cooperation between the two nations. Following is Mr. Sen's interview with Mehr News:

◆ **What programs has the Embassy planned for introducing Iranian and Chinese cultures to one another?**

The embassy has organized many events over the past year for further tightening the knot in the two countries' cultural relations; experts and scholars are constantly visiting each country; we also have library exchanges, concert troupes and film producers. I think the cultural exchange will be beneficial to enhance mutual understanding between our two peoples.

During the visit of China's President to Iran, we signed a memorandum of understanding between the two countries and also made plans for cultural exchange programs between our two countries. They have mapped out many, many specific areas for cultural exchange. And this year, I believe the joint committee of cultural exchange between our two countries will also meet probably in the latter half of the year to have further discussion about ways to expand our bilateral exchange.

◆ **Are there any specific programs for Iranian Muslims in China during the New Year as well as for Chinese Muslims in Iran during the Spring Festival?**

I think there are exchanged between our two countries so far as religion is concerned. Not long ago, a Chinese delegation came to visit Iran and they also made a visit to Qom. They had a discussion on how to increase our mutual understanding and cooperation.

◆ **What do you think of the Iranian New Year, Nowruz?**

The New Year festivities both in China and Iran are a lot similar in their concept and a demonstration of their rich culture, and as such, are the most important annual events for the two nations. Both China and Iran have a long history and we share a lot of things in common, so while we celebrate Chinese Spring Festival, we also hold it in conjunction with Nowruz so that our people can better know each other and learn from each other.

◆ **How do you evaluate the impacts of such cultural programs like the ones planned for the Chinese Spring Festival held in conjunction with Iranian Nowruz on the improvement of relations between the two countries' peoples?**

The scope of our cooperation is not necessarily limited to economic area; we also put great emphasis on full enhancement of cooperation and relationship between China and other countries along this scope, and cultural exchange is one of the important factors of this initiative that helps to enhance mutual understanding and friendship. This way, people get to know each other better and that will lay a more solid foundation and pave the way for cooperation in other areas.

Pang Sen is the Chinese Ambassador to Iran since 2014. He had previously headed the Beijing's delegation to the 5+1 talks on Iran's nuclear case

Iran's sustained prosperity must be built on non-oil economy

Interview by Lachin Rezaian

A recognized expert on international business told Mehr News that Iran should learn from foreign technologies and expertise, but not to become dependent on either, to take advantage of economic prosperity during post-sanctions era.

Since the final nuclear deal was sealed on July 14, 2015 analysts believed that Iran will face a boom in its economy after years of imposed sanctions. During the post sanctions era, a number of high-ranking officials accompanying many foreign investors, businessmen and trade officials, have visited Iran to allocate a share of Iran's market after the removal of sanctions.

For Iran as an oil-dependent country, the decreased prices, as well as the effects of long-standing sanctions is a risk to its economy boom. In fact, Sustained economic prosperity must be built on the non-oil economy, says Research Director of International Business at the India, China & America Institute Dr. Dan Steinbock.

Iran's efforts to come out of the current economic situation and the willingness of some Western investors to expand their presence in Iran's marketplace has been hampered by new political hurdles. Dr. Steinbock believes the measures against Iran's economic prosperity, especially in the US, seek to undercut the JCPOA implementation and weaken the post-sanctions climate.

Following is the full text of Dr. Steinbock's interview to Mehr News Agency:

◆ Do you think the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) can enable Iran to attract considerable foreign investment and reanimate its dormant oil fields?

The JCPOA is necessary but not sufficient for Iran to attract foreign direct investment (FDI). More is needed. Today, the rivalry for International FDI is more intense than ever before, due to



stagnation in advanced economies and deceleration in emerging economies. As a result, Iran must push investment promotion, upgrade competitiveness, improve the business environment, and communicate its unique advantages, and so on.

Another external constraint – the plunge of energy prices – may also slow Iran's growth potential. When sanctions were enacted, oil prices still hovered above \$100 per barrel; today, after a tentative rebound, they are around \$45.

Moreover, even if the weight of external constraints – such as the JCPOA and oil prices – will diminish, there are internal constraints that may slow Iran's ability to achieve rapid economic growth. These constraints are well known by Iran's leading policymakers and they can overcome by more effective long-term policies, strong anchor companies and organizations to ensure significant GDP growth. Furthermore, there are several macro factors – including political, currency and interest rate risks – that can both favor or hinder FDI flows to Iran.

Nevertheless, economic forces favor the inflow of FDI to Iran; whereas some political efforts remain that seek to un-

dercut the potential for such progress.

◆ How can Iran take advantage of economic prosperity during post-sanctions era?

The short answer is by realizing its economic output potential. In the West, the conventional wisdom is that in 2015-16 the sanctions effect may keep Iran's growth still around 0.5% to -0.5%, whereas in 2016-17 real GDP growth will climb to 4%-5.5%. Externally, the necessary condition is that the JCPOA is sustained and oil prices will not decline further. The sufficient internal condition is that Iran can begin those structural reforms that are vital for its inclusive growth.

In the long-term, the key question is, whether Iran can use its resources – world's 4th-largest proved crude oil reserves and the world's second largest natural gas reserves – to diversify its industrial structure and to speed up economic modernization; that is, urbanization, infrastructure investments, agricultural productivity, and so on.

First, Iran should execute its goal to change its oil contract model to allow international oil companies to participate in upstream phases, including production. However, Iran should retain

ownership. The point is to learn from foreign technologies and expertise, but not to become dependent on either. Dependency is not development. Second, sustained economic prosperity must be built on the non-oil economy. As a result, Iran should accelerate its efforts in competitiveness, which requires upgrading current efforts and higher productivity across industries.

◆ **How much it takes for Iran to recover from economic stagnation occurred during sanctions imposed by US and EU? What factors can accelerate Iran's economic restoration to happen ASAP?**

A rebound has begun but there is a medium-term way ahead. Amid the global crisis, Iran fell 20 positions in Global Competitiveness Indicators. The good news is that Iran has already been able to catch up and is now 74th. A moderate goal should be to catch up another

as; in Iran's case, in oil and gas fields. Today, Iran's R&D expenditure per GDP is around 0.12%, which puts it into the same league with Philippines and Indonesia. To join the emerging economies, the investment should increase dramatically, up to 0.70-1.00%, which is typical to India and Turkey. Over time, greater competitiveness and innovation ensure Iran's economic independence.

◆ **Why do some foreign investors hesitate to enter the Iranian market, what are the potential risks to their involvement? Do you think the circumstances are conducive to foreign investment in Iran in a new era?**

With sanctions, foreign investment plunged to just \$80 million in 2013, returning to \$2.5 billion last year. In the past, these projects have been in heavy industrial sectors, such as oil and natural

China and Asia to the Middle East, Africa and the Americas – as well as with the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the BRICS New Development Bank.

The willingness of some Western investors to expand their presence in Iran's marketplace has been hampered by new political hurdles. In contrast to the terms of the JCPOA, Iran has so far been able to repatriate only a fraction its frozen oil revenues abroad, while new legal obstacles have been enacted in the US and visa barriers against Europeans eager to visit Iran and the US. Reportedly, these measures seek to undercut the JCPOA implementation and weaken the post-sanctions climate. Secretary of State John Kerry has said that the US is not standing in the way of post-sanctions business with Iran, but the execution hurdles seem to suggest otherwise. In the long-term, the way to ensure the terms of the JCPOA is for Iran to rally the other signatories of the JCPOA (China, France, Russia, UK, plus Germany and the EU) and the international community behind the JCPOA execution.

With adequate foreign investment, Iran is well-positioned to accelerate economic growth - as long as these adverse external and internal obstacles can be overcome.

Dr Steinbock is the founder of DifferenceGroup (<http://www.differencegroup.net/>). He is an internationally recognized expert of the multipolar world. He focuses on international business, international relations, investment and risk among the major advanced economies and large emerging economies; as well as multipolar trends in stocks, currencies, oil and commodities. Altogether, he analyzes some 40 major world economies and a dozen strategic nations, across all world regions. His commentaries are released regularly by major media in all world regions. In addition to advisory activities, Dr Steinbock has served as research director at the India, China and America Institute (USA) and visiting fellow at the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies, SIIS (China) and the EU Center (Singapore). Currently, he is working on a project about "China and the multipolar world economy" for SIIS, and another on global innovation rivalry with a leading US think-tank |



10 positions to restore the 2012 level of competitiveness. But the real objective should be an improvement of still another 10 rankings, which would put Iran among India, Turkey, Philippines, and Russia; that is, large and medium-size emerging economies.

This kind of accelerated growth is possible. In the postwar era, it has happened mainly in emerging Asia. However, it does require dramatic improvements in institutions, efficiencies, labor markets, business sophistication and foreign investment. Over time, it also requires focus on innovation in the economy's key are-

gas, metals, coal and automotive. What is needed is more FDI diversification into consumer sectors and financial services. A moderate goal would be to double FDI in 2016 to \$5.5 billion, the peak level in 2003. But if Iran seeks BRIC-style growth, it should seek FDI increases by magnitude.

FDI from advanced West is no longer the only option. Iran and China have outlined a plan to broaden relations and expand trade up to \$600 billion over the next 10 years. Iran's efforts to attract FDI are well aligned with China's 'One Belt One Road' initiative, which seeks to spread economic development from

All US breaches of promise

by: *Abdolhamid Bayati*

Post-JCPOA conduct by west especially the US reveals these countries have been well in track of the past despite a comprehensive deal with Iran which makes them committed to a series of obligations.

Barack Obama's remarks on last Friday touched upon mainly Iran and the JCPOA implementation, where he acknowledged that part of sanctions against Iran had been removed. However, he said that months would pass before foreign companies would develop a confidence on safe transactions with Iran. He did not comment about possible US permit which would make possible transactions in dollar, though.

The remarks indicated that despite recent months of positive view about the necessity of a US commitment to JCPOA, personally Obama would not have a commitment to ease trade with Iran and US businesses still would feel pressures not to engage in trade with Iran.

For example, US sanctions on Iran's air transportation have effectively forestalled finalizing of the deal with Airbus which would provide Iran with 118 brand new planes.

An article in the Guardian reported that now EU major companies fear a US punitive measure should they enter in a grand-scale exchange with Iran:

"European companies still fear being caught up in what remains a complex US sanctions web. He said while the US treasury has offered substantial clarifications, they reveal a number of possible practical complications for EU companies," the report said.

"A week after the lifting of sanctions against Iran, major European banks are still reluctant to handle Iranian payments as they remain wary of being the first to test the reaction of US authorities. Despite guidance issued by the US, the continent's big banks still err on the side of caution... Sanctions compliance departments in big banks are busy digesting a 50-page guidance provided by the US treasury's office of foreign assets control (OFAC) – some say the text is so complicated it may deter businesses from returning to Iran, while others fear it may be open to interpretation," it read further.

"The general mood is to wait and let the others risk first. Smaller European banks or those in China and Russia that are not concerned about the US market, however, are

more likely to lead the way. Banks are particularly worried about US primary sanctions related to terrorism and human rights violations that remain in place. A businessman from Switzerland who visited two major Swiss banks this week said he was told they were waiting for other banks to try first and see the reaction of the Americans. Banks are worried about interpretations of these guidance, so they're still waiting for others to test the water," the report said.

Breaches of promise by the US

US breaches of the promise is by no means limited to JCPOA. Seyed Hossein Mousavian, former diplomat and a nuclear negotiator addressed in early February the Cleveland Council on World Affairs during 'The Road for Peace,' a conference held by the Council. Mr. Mousavian believed that the JCPOA provided an excellent platform for both the US and Iran to improve the relations; however, four negative issues counterbalance recent improvements in bilateral ties after four decades of mistrust:

"First was exactly the sanctions by the US just after the implementation of JCPOA for alleged Iran's violation of the treaty by test-firing missiles. Why Iranians cannot trust the US; there are a lot of reasons. I will not go to the history of the mistrust, but mention just some of them to give you an idea of the Iranian problems. It began by the overthrow of the democratically elected cabinet of Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddeq in 1953; and installing a dictator monarch," Mousavian told the meeting, "after revolution, Saddam invaded Iran to disintegrate the country and the objective was not really about the regime change. The US supported the invasion, despite Saddam used chemical weapons, he received from the US all cutting-edge technologies of arms and weapons. Iran in some occasions showed the good will to resolve the problems with the US, but all attempts failed. In 1989, US warship downed an Iranian passenger jet, killing 290 civilians instantly."

"Iranians are concerned also with US unilateral support for Israel in undermining the Palestinians' rights. With proliferation issues, the US has cordial and strategic relations with those countries which proliferated nuclear weapons such as Pakistan, India, and Israel, which have refused to join the NPT and developed the bomb; but the US on the other hand imposed sanctions on Iran which is a member of the NPT and does not have a nuclear war-



head. Here, double standards are obvious," he detailed.

New cases of breach of promise

It was for the first time that an Iranian official Dr. Ali Akbar Salehi, the Head of AEOI who in last May suggested that the US had been in an erratic path which would have sent signals that the country would 'welsh on' the Lausanne statement provisions, to quote the popular phrase of the time. Few days later, Ali Akbar Velayati was the second Iranian official to reiterate the issue, in an interview to Leader's official website, believing that 'promise breaching literature' of the US officials' remarks was evident about the number of centrifuges of Iran according to Lausanne statement.

Among the host of issues where the US has failed to live to its promises are Congress objections to JCPOA, missile-related sanctions and those related to human rights issues, inspections of Iranian military centers, keeping oil prices low, sabotage on nuclear research for civilian use, and the famous 'fact sheet' about the JCPOA.

Iran's response

With just few months after implementation of JCPOA, the US cases of undermining the deal have been quite a lengthy dossier. Iranian officials, on the other hand have warned that Tehran would consider a complete rollback to the previous state of affairs in its nuclear program, undermining, in retaliation, of its commitments in the JCPOA. However, Tehran has not embarked on a concrete action and has not carried out drastic measures. From Tehran's view, any failure of the JCPOA would be blamed on the west; from a western side, however, they will have their media empire to advertise the view that Iran is the major contributor to this failure. Under such circumstances, Germany had advocated revival of trade with Iran; other countries which would welcome an economic détente with Tehran should wait to see how the US would settle its problems with Iran, and whether it will manage to maintain its now weakened coalition against Iran |

The imam of Washington mosque has sat in an interview to Mehr News to talk about a host of issues including ISIL, Saudi Arabia and the new situation in the Middle East.

Earlier this month, Hamid Reza Gholamzadeh of Mehr News English Service and Mohammad Mazhari of Mehr News Arabic Service invited Imam Abdul Alim Musa, Imam of Masjid al-Islam in Washington and a prominent US-based Muslim leader. The imam was visiting Iran to participate in an important event in Tehran and our interviewers grabbed the time and opportunity to talk to imam to find the living witness to the most part of the contemporary history of Muslim movements in the mainland US.

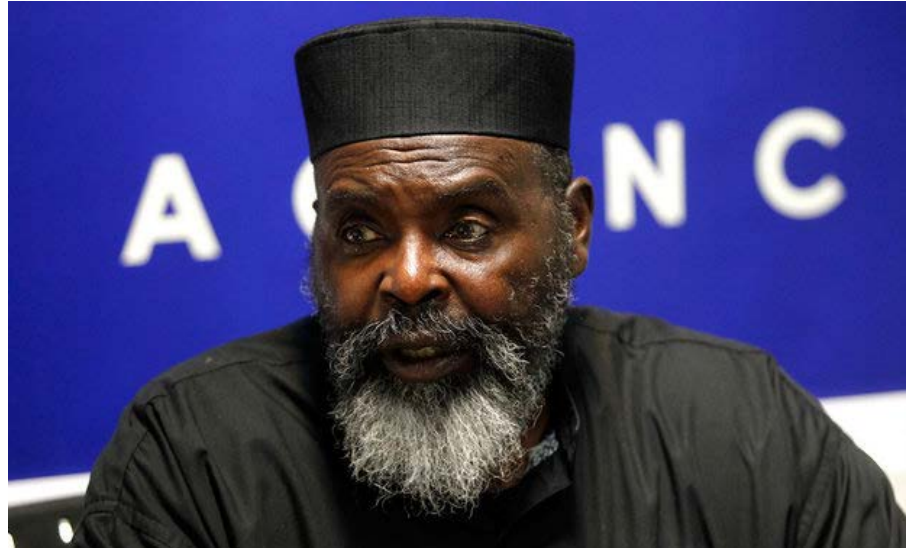
Mr. Musa believed that the region now was the scene for rise of new players when the ISIL had given birth to an unprecedented unity among the world who unanimously condemn ISIL and Saudi Arabia for its role in fostering the lunatic fanatics of the group who would not spare any horrific acts of terror to advance their extremely horrendous reading of the Islamic Scriptures. With ISIL going, Saudi Arabia was, he believed, in a state of disarray, since its policies anywhere in the region had been backlashing:

◆ **We hear cases of suppression against Muslims in United States, we heard that there is legality for all religions in the United States but we can see some actions against Muslims and some races in the United States?**

In the United States of America those statements about constitutional guarantees, freedom of press, speech and religion, are in the constitution but are not reality in life. There's been a war against Islam in a heavy way for the last over 35 years, a war or open warfare against the Islam in the United States. In the beginning it's a subtle war, it's a war of lies and misrepresentations in the news. Before, in America there were not many Muslims, there was Saudi Arabia giving money to people for mosques and things like this; but it was not political. After the Revolution in Iran, Saudi Arabia gave money specifically, it was because of anti-Iranian, antirevolutionary, anti-progress. The Wahhabist doctrine was very prevalent in the United States.

Washington mosque imam:

Iran 'a rising power' in ME



The US crashed, right after the Revolution, our Islamic movement in America among blacks, because it was sympathetic to the Revolution in Iran. They did want an internal force organized inside the America that was sympathetic to the Islamic Republic of Iran. As time went on, this began to level off, because of a constant low-level struggle against Islam. As Islam grows around the world, the Zionist and the American governments pick up more enmity and hatred against the Islamic Movement. If you talk about the two basic types of Muslims, immigrant Muslims who came from Pakistan, India, and Iran, they come there and want to immigrate to America, they wanted to be part of the America. They did not want to challenge America, they did not want to say anything against it. They liked America. We are different. We accepted Islam, because we don't like America the way it is, it is unjust, it is criminal, all of us accepted Islam, which is real, but it is also a vehicle for change. Immigrants come there and want to see the America like that in the films, in the TV, we know how America is; therefore, we want to change it to make it better place. After 9/11, we believe this was a designed incident to justify attacks against Islam and Muslims, because most of the 13 of the people who were there were from Saudi Arabia. We know that that has nothing to do with us, but the other thing is that after 9/11, the

only people that could leave the US and could get even on a plane was from Saudi Arabia. We know where these things come from. But they use 9/11 to go to war, to crush the Muslims, to invade Iraq, Afghanistan, to spend billions of dollars on terrorism. But they call us the terrorists. So, there is no freedom of religion.

◆ **You said that you want to change the America. What is your plan or agenda to do this?**

There is a saying that if you see an injustice going on, stop it with your own hand, even with military force. If you can. If you don't have military force, speak out against it, if you cannot speak out against it, at least feel bad about it. That is the weakest kind of faith. In America, we don't have military power. But we have the ability to speak, educate, train people about the reality of Islam. That is our approach, so we teach and preach and we do prevention of vice and promotion of virtue in practice. We cannot prohibit much wrong, but we enjoin good on people. This is our level right now in the US.

◆ **There are two topics which are somehow related to each other; we have ISIL and its affiliates and Islamophobia, within the US and also now worldwide as well, which is mostly promoted by the US by the military industry moguls; there was a document**

going back to 2012 showing that the US, according to the chief of NSA, the US willfully allowed ISIL to establish itself. ISIL was formed in 2014 two years after the NSA knew that the ISIL was going to be established. According to a person in charge of the NSA, they allowed the ISIL to weaken Assad regime. So, talk about what ISIL is doing and what the US is assuming to do?

First, deal with your own internal ISIL. We have Salafists right here. They have the same ISIL who came to mosques not long ago and were carrying guns openly. They were provoking us to fight until the Americans had snipers around. So, we fight the ISIL who are black Americans like us, we have been very skillful in America, because we were inside the America. The same thing ISIL does to Iran, internationally; Saudi Arabia tries to provoke Iran to fight, everything in Turkey and Syria, all of that is to provoke Iran to a fight. When they enter into a fight, they are going to bring NATO in, they bring the US in, and that gives them justification to fight Iran directly. However, Muslim response to provocations had largely nonviolent; in Bahrain, they've responded violently, but Muslims did non-violently: in Pakistan's bombings and killings of innocent people, especially Shi'ites, in Afghanistan; the harassment of Hezbollah; the eastern provinces of Saudi Arabia; Boko Haram, African ISIL, paid and funded by Saudi Arabia, just like Taliban was years ago. They all want to provoke us into a fight. Right now, Saudi Arabia has built the road to its own destruction. It is incoherent; our ISIL in America is incoherent. Everything it is doing is suicidal. It is actually lowers gas and oil prices, but it actually spends billions of dollars in Europe, on ISIL, to give them all kinds of weapons, but it's dropping the oil price to try to choke Iran and other places, but it's choking itself, its policy of killing people all over the world has developed on an alliance now that happened in early years. In early years in the war Iran was all by itself, all Arabs were against Iran. Now Syria didn't help Iran but it was neutral. But now we have a new strategic alliance in the region which is different than before. We have a strategic alliance from Iraq, Russia, Iran and Syria. Before Iran was by itself, on the other side, Turkey, Egypt all those

countries were on the other side. But today, there is more of power to Iran. We feel that ISIL are so, I guess the English word is obnoxious, they smell so bad, their behavior is so bad, nobody likes ISIL. Now, in the West, Iran used to be public enemy number one. Now ISIL is number one enemy, number two enemy is Saudi Arabia. How can Saudi Arabia do that to those people in Yemen, how can they bomb them! ISIL is the number one enemy. Saudi Arabian policy has been belligerent everywhere.

The whole world's politics right now is shifting and Iran has been shifting from the back to the front. Iran is the new regional leader, not Iraq or Saudi Arabia. [On the other hand,] Russia gears a technical parity with the west. Anything they give to ISIL, Russia can give to us. Because Russia gears technical parity. We don't have technical parity with the West. We don't have fourth and fifth generations of weapons. Only America, Russia and the Zionists have fourth and fifth generations of weapons. What I mean to say is that the ISIL has been the entity that have unified the world against Saudi Arabia that kills innocent people, stealing artifacts, killing Christians, everything. So, back to original question, how do we see ISIL in the world today, we see ISIL is a desperate move on Saudi Arabia to try to take the growing power of the Islamic Republic. But, it is missed on every level.

I feel that for Iran to step into the next step of leadership, it has to one of two things. One, national unity. These little groups in Iran right now, some in Parliament, some in other places in order to lead the world, we have to have unity. Unity needs cooperation. What part should Iran play in this world? Iran is on the rise, you can't stop it. ISIL is on the decline, don't worry they'll be gone sooner or later. Iranian Diplomats, the parliament have their own ideas, they have unity of ideas and unity of cooperation. If we don't encourage unity, Allah will do what he said in Quran: you don't leave up to the expectations I would change or exchange you for somebody else in your place. So in a long run, ISIL is a blessing. Years ago we all talked about unity and unity. ISIL produced international unity. All countries are being united against ISIL. This is happening right in front of our eyes.

◆ The situation in the region is that Saudi tries to make into a sectarian conflict, will they be successful?

I don't think so. It is less sectarian now that it was before. For many years, Saudi tried to fuel conflict between Sunnis and Shi'ites in Iran and Iraq. It made Sunnis not support Iran against Iraq. Although Quranically Iraq violated every principle in the Quran.

◆ Does the public opinion know what Saudi Arabia is doing?

The Westerners know. They say the Saudi Arabia's policy is incoherent. They say Saudi Arabia is trying to start a war with Iran, Saudi Arabia is making the whole region unlivable, Saudi Arabia supports ISIL, and these are the western news in recent days. They say Saudi Arabia spent \$1.5bn last year, along with UK and US, and has been giving many weapons to ISIL. The rest of weapons are used against Yemen.

The Quran has a statement: "And the disbelievers planned, but Allah planned. And Allah is the best of planners." (3:54). The situation we have right now in the world; we didn't plan it. We didn't organize it. The position of Iran, Saddam fought against the Islamic Republic, a few years later, the United States came and removed Saddam, not Iran. The Taliban, when I was in Pakistan years ago, in Mazar Sharif captured and killed 12 Iranian diplomats and two of them got away. And Iran wanted to go to war with Afghanistan but it didn't. A few years later, came the Americans, they got to the Taliban. You didn't do it, the Americans did. You and I could not manipulate it this way. A Providence helped organize this. We believe ISIL is a passing phenomenon. Saudi Arabia created it. The US has bombed them for two years and not one ISIL is killed. Russia bombed for two weeks and they are almost finished. That makes the America look so stupid. America lost in Afghanistan, it lost in Iraq, and it came in with big bravado and slipped out the back door. I believe Iran has put a jinx on America, unbeknownst to all involved.

The American power has been in a declining trend. Now China is big while America has been rendered small; the de-industrialization of America. America has the same symptoms of the Roman Empire, the British Empire, all the same

symptoms before they die. Everything that is alive has four basic stages: we are born, we grow, we decline and then we die; whether it's a nation or an individual or a tree or an organization. So America was born, it developed on its Constitution. No matter how many crimes it committed, it stole lands from Indians, worked us to death as slaves, it grew. It won its wars: WW I, WW II. Those were colonial wars but America was so far away. In WW I, from 1914 to 1917, Europe was fighting but America was resting. When everybody else was tired, America came in and stole everything. Same thing happened during the WW II. 1939 to 1941, Europe and Asia were fighting but America was not. America came in, no bombs had been dropped on America, and that was the dawn of America's growth and expansion period. Now in the last 35, 40 years, America can't do anything right. It hasn't won any wars. With all the killings in Afghanistan,

tiate with Iran. That proves that Iran has independence.

◆ **Is there any ways Iranians could help Muslims in the United States?**

In America, we are separated from what we call the circuit of speakers that are controlled by Saudi Arabia. We have told certain things to people for decades they know they are true. But if they have a gathering of 40- or 50,000 Muslims in a conference in America, we are not allowed to speak. We used to, a long time ago but when Saudis started to paying them money that means they isolate us, they try to cut us off. As news agencies, there are a lot of good issues right now not only on Muslims and Islamophobia, but you have immigration issues, the Mexican, Latino population. Their population is much more than the blacks now. You can hear people like Donald Trump talking. He says 'oh we're going close the borders, we're going do this.' In

difference because generally those who have the money and the power and the position will win. And it does not make any difference who wins since policy makers are the same. The president might have only 5 percent of his own ideas if he is lucky. Generally, whoever is elected, they say they plan to do this and that but they never do it because they cannot do it. The American President Obama cannot do anything because they block whatever he decides to do. And everybody thought if they got a black president it would be better but it was worse. They could oppress us more because they could say 'you are not oppressed because you have a black president.' We have more oppression now than the time of George Bush because if he had caused oppression people could call him a racist but if Obama oppresses they say alright you have a black president, you have a black attorney general, and you have a black representative everywhere so how can you be oppressed? You cannot fix the problem because people who are millionaires and billionaires run the country. They are going to arrange everything for them to get more money. The middle class in America used to be very powerful after the World War II. The middle class in the US had two cars, a nice house. They do not have it now. Whoever you bring as the president including Donald Trump, it won't work. They are mad. Democrats bring Sanders and say he is for the people. Is this all over? He says Hillary Clinton is a nice lady and I support her. This is what the system says. They bring people like Sanders to the people who are made into the system. He tells people that 'I am going to help you, I love you'. And people say great. Similar to the time they brought Obama in. All black people who hated the system jumped into the street because of the black president. And many black people rushed to Washington DC for the inauguration ceremony but I went to California because I could not stand it. Because I knew it was a lie. Now my black friends know it is a lie, too. He cannot help people. It is similar to the Roman Empire and the time of Juliet Cesar. It is all about decline and you cannot help it.

◆ **You mentioned earlier that Saudi Arabia has taken up a stance which leads to its self-destruction. Can you**



it lost. With all the stuff in Iraq, again it lost. It's declining. Despite all of the sanctions and boycotts against Iran, Iran is still here. Iran is on ascendency while America is on the decline. Nobody, except Iran, in this region is independent. Everybody is a puppet but not Iran. The proof of it is the negotiations with the 5+1. In WWI there was no negotiation. America and England dictated to Germany because they won. In WWII the victors dictated to Japan and Germany, because they won, clear and simple. You don't negotiate when you win. You negotiate when you are dealing with equal people. Does America negotiate with any other country? No, it had to nego-

another 20 years, white people will be a minority all over America. There will be a minority immigrants, Mexicans or another Latinos, blacks, all of us are growing.

◆ **The next question pertains to the upcoming presidential elections of the US. We hear all the time that US authorities talk about democracy. Can we consider the electoral system in the US to be based on Democracy?**

No. The whole system is a criminal system. They used to have the popular vote and now it has changed to electoral system. One US candidate got more votes than Bush but he lost due to the electoral system. Anyway, it makes no

elaborate on that?

Everything in Saudi Arabia's policy is suicidal. Saudis created the ISIL and spent millions of dollars to train and arm them. Those same people at first worked for them but the work that they did was to shoot Jordanians, Syrians and to kill everybody. They made everybody hate them. When you hate ISIL you would naturally hate the ones who created it as well which is Saudi Arabia. When you spend the most money on weapons and everything else, it drops oil prices to the lowest level in twenty years. So when it needs money the most, it drops the oil prices that destroys the economy of Venezuela and hurts the Iranian economy and everything else. If they wanted they could extract petrol and process it into petrol chemical fertilizer spreading it all over the desert. They could also desalinate the water and take the salt out of it. Iran, however, is becoming more independent. All the food is mainly produced in Iran. Everything in Saudi Arabia comes from somewhere else. The other thing is its relationship with the region. It sent troops to Bahrain. 80 per cent of the people in Bahrain are Shias. Bahraini people were asking for democracy. But Saudi Arabia sent troops there to fight against democracy on behalf of the US. Everything that Saudis have done, you will see that it has built its own road to decline.

◆ What is the public opinion of Saudi Arabia and its behaviors in the West? And what would they think of alliance between western powers and Saudi Arabia?

Before, anything Saudis did was right; but now not only the public opinion in America, in Europe, but public opinion in other Arab countries has change. Now Yemen keeps telling these countries 'why are you so quiet?' 'Why can Saudi Arabia can do this to us?' Saudi Arabia's policy of bombing and killing of the innocent people and children has brought about its increasing decline. Everything the public thinks about Saudi Arabia, they think about bombings in Yemen, people dying in Hajj, they think about ISIL, they are associating terrorism and ISIL not with Hezbollah, not with Hamas, but with Saudi Arabia. Years ago, we couldn't get anybody to talk against Saudi Arabia, all Muslims got money from Saudi Arabia. All the government was in the hands of those who cooperated [with Saudis]; now Saudi Arabia is

going crazy for another reason; it knows how dirty the Americans are; what does their intelligence service feel about Iranian-American cooperation? Saudi Arabia and Turkey, need a war because they have failed in every point and they believe that the US might dump them like all dictators; the US dumped the Shah; the US dumped the dictators in South America. Saudi Arabia feels that America is on the verge of dumping them and bringing in some democratic Saudis and supporters of democracy; this is why they are so panicked; because they are panicked, they don't know what to do. They have gone crazy because, as a verse in Quran have said, the corrupters shall gone crazy and strayed.

◆ In a program about two sides of Islam, they said that nobody knew ISIL; so, how does it come to claim the western Muslims to come to fight in ISIL's cause? Who is responsible for the coming of these fanatically-minded fans of ISIL to the region?

They say that young people living in Europe come to do what the America does. If 10 Americans join ISIL, 9 of them are intelligence operatives trying to sabotage inside the group. If in Europe and Britain, young people join, again, nine of them is MI6 operatives. They infiltrate all groups for sabotage. All jihadi [terrorist] groups are made by the government in America. They are not real groups. They do not go to ISIL from all over the US, unless America itself sends them. That is a psychological warfare waged by the US; why all people hate ISIL? Because they destroy artifacts in Syria and historical sites which are few thousand years old; Christians have a long history in the Middle East. All the People of Book had been living in the region for thousands of years. ISIL kills Christians and turns young girls into prostitutes. This makes Americans angry. We would not be happy that ISIL is far from us; but they have changed the environment; the European media as well say that the trend has changed; but the change had already been in our favor; we should be patient and need time to find. In Africa, Boko Haram kills people. In Nigeria, it is known as a government killing Sheikh Zakzaki's circle members; in demonstrations however, Christians and others came out, because Zakzaki's case had unified everybody. When I first met the Sheikh, maybe 33

years ago, there were few Shias in Nigeria, now they are thousands; so, the things are going our way; we have to prepare ourselves to living in hardships; all Muslim countries will manage to do this.

◆ Wouldn't you think that you are optimistic about everything?

You know, Quran says 'patience is half the faith;' we should be patient and optimistic. You look at the history of black fight for their civil rights. I remember the history of Iran since 1950; the Revolution of 1979 was not an overnight revolution, and years of efforts and social movements were behind the event which culminated in a revolution. You remember the Constitutional Revolution; you remember the boycott on Tobacco Riots led by Mirza Shirazi; you remember Sheikh Fazollah Nouri in also in the Constitutional Revolution. Dr. Mohamad Mossadegh in the nationalization of oil in 1951. Not all historical important events are the product of a single event, but a long process had been behind all these events. In America of 1960s, we have long history of black rights. Some of my friends had been killed during the era where people were being killed in America for being black. These events require patient since they are long and time should pass to show themselves clearly in the course of history. I am optimistic and patient, because without being patient, I would not achieve anything special. In retrospect, no one would imagine doing a revolution which toppled Shah of Iran at that time when I had been watching politics of Iran and at the same time been engaged in black rights civil movements in America. In America we have been having a long process and change over all centuries, we have blacks' killing and burnings. We have civil rights movements. I am happy and optimistic because I was one of those who survived the conditions. We need to be optimistic. Fidel Castro of Cuba once said, 'revolutionaries are optimists;' it is true since as revolutionaries, we could not do anything without being such. This is true and as well unjustified optimism. Since there is no reason behind the optimism, but after all, it is optimism and provides people with hope of the future. I could not help not being optimistic, since it gives us strength to face the future events with more vigor and spirit of battle |

Belgian political analyst:

Brussels attacks direct result of Western governments' policies

Interview by Parnaz Talebi

Belgian political commentator believes that what European Union is suffering from today in Brussels is the price they all pay for the interventionist policies of western imperialist governments. "We, in Europe, reap what our governments have sown," Kris Janssen reaffirmed.

In an exclusive interview with Mehr News Agency, political commentator on Middle Eastern politics specialized in Syria and Iran Kris Janssen, underlined that the EU terrorist attacks the most recent one being the Brussels triple attacks are direct results of imperialist policies of the Western countries serving Western political goals "being the total destruction of the resistance front against Zionism and Western imperialism and the struggle for independence and dignity of the free people in the Middle East."

◆ **First of all tell us about the atmosphere in Brussels. How is the situation after the triple terrorist attacks?**

After the terrorist attacks of Tuesday, 22nd of March, in Brussels the Belgian people are in full shock as this is the first time they are confronted on such a large scale with what we could describe as a real war situation. We watch these atrocities on television taking place far away and the Belgian public don't really pay much attention to it as it doesn't have a direct effect on their daily lives. Even with the terrorist attacks in Paris in November 2015 there was some upheaval but, although nearby, the reactions from the people were not really based on the same level of emotion as what happened this week in Brussels. One can say that the Brussels events was a direct hit in the heart of Belgian society. Even when the terrorist attacks in Paris did not have the same impact on the Belgian society as the Brussels attacks, it is clear that what happens 'far away' (taking into account that distance has become a very relative



concept in this era) as for example the war in Syria, does not really influence public opinion. The hard truth is that the Belgian public, and in a broader context the whole of Europe, has no clue what is really going on in Syria. This total ignorance is the result of a continuous media manipulation in which the real state of events and truth becomes distorted to serve Western political goals, being the total destruction of the resistance front against Zionism and Western imperialism and the struggle for independence and dignity of the free people in the Middle East and the rest of the world. In this context the freely elected President of the Syrian Arab Republic, H.E. Bashar al-Assad, has been demonized in our media representations in a frantic and almost pathological way as a butcher murdering his own people while the Syrian people and government have shown strength, steadfastness and dignity in the past 5 years of bloodshed and enormous human, economical and cultural losses. The Lebanese resistance front Hezbollah has been appointed as a terrorist organization. The Yemeni people are under daily aggression of the Western backed Saudi army. The Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi has been killed in cold blood.

And the Islamic Republic of Iran has been the victim of vicious sabotage and unjust sanctions for decades also because of its independent and righteous policies and its steadfastness. Because of the manipulations of the Western media organizations, unfortunately the European public have a complete flawed and erroneous worldview and as such they are, even after the tragic events in Brussels of this week, not capable to place these attacks in the correct context of what is happening in the rest of the world.

Also in this same context I want to stress that the real perpetrators and supporters spreading extremism and terrorism, driven by a Salafist doctrine (Saudi Arabia), a neo-Ottoman dream of the revival of this past empire (Turkey) and the financial and logistical endless support to the Muslim Brotherhood (Qatar) are not only ignored by our governments and media but we are willing to do and actually are doing good business with these undemocratic despotic leaders who are on a large scale violating human rights in their own countries and carrying out absolute aggression and interference against other nations and people as for example Yemen and Syria.

◆ **How do you analyze the attacks of**

Brussels? What are the possible causes of the event?

What happened in Brussels this week or in Paris in November 2015 is a direct result of the policies of the Western governments. For years, the American and European governments have been organizing and planning, under the cover of a so called 'Arab Spring' and support of 'democratic reforms', coup d'états or putsches against governments and peoples who refuse to bow down and kneel to this blackmail or dare to follow an independent course in implementing real political reforms to improve the life of their populations, and not to serve the interests of the post-colonial Western world. Every country which stands up against this aggression and injustice should according to this doctrine be destroyed by military force, suffocating economic sanctions, political tyranny and oppression or even military campaigns if necessary. We have seen throughout recent history several examples of the implementation of this doctrine: Syria, Iran, Libya, Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, etc. These operations, with the purpose to destroy all forms of opposition to Western hegemony, do not only serve directly Western policies but are also intrinsically linked to the objectives of the Zionist State of Israel by attempting to destroy or weaken the members of the resistance, e.g. Syria, Hezbollah, Iran and everyone who poses a potential threat to Israel.

On the other hand, as explained above, our Western governments are shamelessly dealing, politically and economically, with the real supporters of terrorism and promulgators of extremist ideologies which are inspiring and brainwashing young people who are in a vulnerable situation and who are receptive to these extremist and violent ideas and ideologies as a result of well-planned propaganda and a loss or lack of personal self-identification.

Our media, theoretically independent but in reality a powerful tool serving the authorities, have not done anything to inform or rectify public reception during all these years. They have only, in various forms, supported the official government line and have not criticized or even informed the public of the dangerous tactics and lethal policies of extremist governments, specifically Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey. This has led to a carte blanche for them to spread their extrem-

ist ideas and teaching into the hearts of European nations and these easily influenced young people and adults.

As a result, thousands of brainwashed youngsters and adults became ruthless murderers and terrorists and traveled to Syria to slaughter the Syrian people and destroy the country in the twisted name of Islam as propagated by the afore mentioned rough States. Now the time has come that some of them start to return to Belgium and other European countries and are walking around freely in our capitals and cities. What happened in Brussels is the price we all pay for the interventionist policies of our imperialist governments. We, in Europe, reap what our governments have sown.

◆ How this tragedy would affect the European Union and its policies regarding the terrorism?

The main goal of the European governments in concordance with their American ally has always been to destroy every form of resistance against Western hegemony. If historical reasons have led us to a situation where these governments have to sleep with the devil to reach their goals, they will not deviate from their path to get what they want to. Yes, they are weeping crocodile tears now and they are showing passionate solidarity with the victims and families of the victims from this attack. But in reality they could have avoided this situation by changing their interventionist policies years ago and ideologically fought off the real dangers threatening our society. Of course they will raise security levels and show compassion and empathy. But is this genuine? Are they really willing to root out evil by changing their policies? They could have done so years ago.

◆ Europe countries seems to turn into a new target for the terrorist groups, what's your idea on this?

From a strategic point of view Europe is weak with regard to security in comparison with the United States. European States do have capable security services but they are not integrated very well. They all follow their own agenda. These agencies do have some structures of cooperation but in the end they all put their own interests and objectives before. The United States in contrast has a more unified structure which translates

itself in the Homeland Security department which acts as an umbrella and coordination center for different security initiatives. The US has learned its lesson after the 9/11 attacks. This makes the US a much more difficult target for carrying out terrorist attacks. Also the political differences between the EU states with regard to for example refugee policies makes it a more vulnerable target. Let us not ignore the huge potential of hundreds of thousands of immigrants but also youngsters and adults belonging to following generations of historical migrant waves in Europe in the past. A lot of these youngsters and adults are in difficult social and economical situations and are dealing with cultural identity crises. These people represent an easy prey for the extremist organizations.

◆ Would the consequences of the attacks affect the refugees?

Public opinion in Europe towards the ongoing refugee crisis can be defined as rather schizophrenic. On the one hand the perception is that we should help these people because, as a result of the afore mentioned media manipulations, most people think they are the victim of brutal 'regimes' (in this psychological war our Western media consistently names opposite governments as for example the Syrian government a 'regime' to stress the negative connotation) who are slaughtering their population. The European public does not realize that the refugee crisis is the result of our own imperialist policies. But, contradictory, public opposition against this refugee flow is also growing because of cultural frictions and clashes as well as a perceived but also real pressure on our social welfare systems and labor market. In short, yes the Belgian people are in total shock after the terrorist attacks in Brussels but they are not able to place these events in the true context of world politics.

Kris Janssen is a political commentator on Middle Eastern politics, specialized in Syria and Iran as well as Syrian - Iranian relations. He is the Author of several articles and interviews published by newspapers and press agencies in Iran and Syria and broadcasted by several radio- and television stations in the Middle East and Russia. He has also studied 3 years in Cairo, Egypt (Arabic language and Middle Eastern affairs) |



Culture



Leader's Nowruz message for Iranian New Year

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Khamenei has named the new Iranian year 1395 as the 'Year of the Resistance Economy: Action and Implementation.'

The following is the full text of the message issued by Ayatollah Khamenei, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, on the occasion of Nowruz.

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

O Conqueror of hearts and sight,

O Planner of night and day,

O Transformer of power and circumstances,

Change our condition to the best of conditions.

Greetings be upon Siddiqat al-Tahirah, Fatimah al-Marziah, the Holy Prophet's (God's greetings be upon him and his household) daughter. And greetings be upon Allah's Great Representative

(may our souls be sacrificed for his sake and may God hasten his reappearance)

I would like to congratulate all Iranian families and each and every Iranian - wherever they are in the world - on the occasion of Nowruz.

Dear compatriots, happy New Year!

In particular, I would like to congratulate the dear families of the martyrs, the dear disabled war veterans, their honorable families and all self-sacrificing individuals, and I commemorate the memory of our great martyrs and our magnanimous Imam (R.A.).

The year that has just begun - the year 1395 - is blessed with the auspicious name of Hazrat Zahra (S.A.) both in its beginning and in its end. Both the beginning and the end of this year are marked by the birthday anniversary of that great personality - corresponding with the lunar months. Therefore, I hope that God willing, the year 1395 will

be an auspicious year for the people of Iran by the blessedness of Hazrat Zahra (S.A.) and that we will learn lessons and benefit from the spirituality, instructions and life of that great personality.

Just like all other years, the year that came to an end - the year 1394 - was a mixture of the sweet and the bitter, of peaks and troughs. This is the nature of life. The previous year involved events ranging from the bitterness of the Mina incident to the sweetness of the 22nd of Bahman rallies and the February 26 elections. As for the JCPOA experience, it contained hopes and concerns that continue until today.

All these were among the events of the year and all years are like this. All years and days of one's life include opportunities and threats. Our skill lies in benefiting from opportunities and turning threats into opportunities.

The year 1395 is ahead of us. In this →

year as always, there are both opportunities and threats. Everyone should make efforts so that we can benefit from the opportunities of this year in the real sense of the word and so that at the end of the year, the country will witness a tangible difference compared to the beginning of the year.

There are certain hopes for the year 1395. When one looks at the prospects and the circumstances, one witnesses certain hopes. Of course, we should work hard in order to fulfill these hopes. We should work day and night and try hard in a ceaseless manner.

The main point is that the people of Iran should do something to liberate themselves from vulnerabilities in the face of the enemies' threats and enmities. We should do something to avoid being vulnerable in the face of the enemies' threats. We should reduce our vulnerability to zero.

I believe that the issue of the economy is the first priority. When we take a look at priorities, we see that the issue of the economy is the most urgent and essential one. If the people, the administration and different officials can – by Allah's favor – adopt correct, timely and proper measures, then we can hope that this will influence other issues – such as social maladies and moral and cultural issues – as well.

On the issue of the economy, what is

important and fundamental are the issue of domestic production, the issue of employment and eliminating unemployment, the issue of economic dynamism and the issue of combating recession. These are the issues that the people are faced with. These are the things that the people feel and demand. The statistics and statements of the officials themselves show that these demands and requests of the people are legitimate and sensible.

If we want to resolve the problem of recession, domestic production and unemployment and if we want to manage the issue of inflation, the cure for all these things lie in the framework of economic resistance and the economy of resistance. The economy of resistance includes all these problems. With the economy of resistance, we can fight against unemployment, we can fight against recession, we can manage inflation, we can stand up against the enemy's threats and we can create and benefit from many opportunities for the country. The condition is that effort is made on the path of the economy of resistance.

The report that our brothers in the administration delivered to us shows that they have carried out many tasks. However, such tasks are only preliminary tasks which are related to issuing directives and edicts to different organi-

zations. These are preliminary tasks. The task that needs to be continued is taking action, putting things into practice and showing the results to the people on the ground. This is what constitutes our responsibility. By Allah's favor, I will discuss this issue in detail with our dear people during the [Mashhad] speech.

Thus, the name that I want to choose for this year is, "The Resistance Economy: Action and Implementation". The economy of resistance, action and implementation- this is a straight and enlightened path and the road towards what we need.

Of course, we do not expect that this action and implementation will solve all the problems in the course of one year, but we are sure that if action and implementation is carried out in a systematic and correct manner, we will be able to witness the results at the end of the year.

I thank all those people who worked and continue to work hard on this path. Once more, I send my greetings to the people of Iran and I congratulate them.

And I ask God to bestow His peace and blessings on Muhammad (S.A.W.A.), on his household and on the Imam of the Age (God's greetings be upon him and may our souls be sacrificed for his sake).

Greetings be upon you and Allah's mercy and blessings |



Most visited cities during Nowruz

Many choose the New Year's holidays to visit various Iranian cities due to the pleasant climate of the Spring and beautiful natural landscapes. Here's a guide to some of the holiday destinations mostly picked by Nowruz tourists:



Lorestan's Shirz canyon astonishes tourists

By: Hossein Azari

Shirz canyon hosts numerous tourists who get surprised to see the exemplary natural attraction in province of western Iran during Nowruz holidays.

Shirz valley is located 45 km to the north east of the city of Kuhdasht capital of Kuhdasht County, Lorestan Province, Iran and with its pristine tourist attractions, wonderful springs and waterfalls as well as fruitful trees has turned into one of the most beautiful promenades in the west of the country.

The natural attraction is located in a

region called Olad Ghobad and comprises of a beautiful landscape, springs with plenty of flowing water, sharp rocks in addition to abundant wild fruits.

The springs join Seimareh River as the main branch of Karkheh River. The untouched and beautiful area of Shirz region depicts greatness and glory of soaring mountains in the eyes of visitors before combating their fatigue with the sweet melody of gurgling water.

The strait is a few kilometers long with a small river passing through it which has created alluring waterfalls before joining Sei-

mareh River at the entrance of the valley.

The gorge is replete with fruit trees including grapes, figs and pears which reside between two amazing mountains where magnificent caves are seen suggesting human habitation in the area in old times.

The untouched area, which evokes a sense of wonder in visitors, hosts local people as well as tourists who visit the region on holidays in order to reduce daily fatigue next to waterfalls and under shade trees.

Lorestan was chosen as the capital of geotourism in Iran in view of its great potentials and offers good capacities with regard to tourism including scientific Geoparks, Shirz canyon as well as the biggest landslide in the world dating back to 11 thousand years ago |



Meshgin Shahr, a horn of plenty for tourism

By: Samad Habibi

A host of natural beauties and attractions have bestowed upon the city an aura of history as well as making the city a magnet of many lovers of nature.

The city is located beyond Mount Sabalan (4848m), the heights peak of Zagros in its northwest flank, seen from Ardebil, the provincial capital of the province also with similar name. Drive 90km west, you reach Meshgin Shahr, whose name had been called differently; famously and surprisingly enough, the city is home to famous author of old Persian allegorical work of 13th century Iran, 'Marzbān-Nāma,' Sa'd-al-Din Varāvini, since an old name ascribed to the city is Varavi or Varawi (in different spellings), Urami or Ourami, Meimand, and Khiav.

Historically, Meshgin Shahr is home to 224 sites and monuments, spanning from ancient to modern times of Safavid era where the city had been ruled by the dynasty's local lord.

The sites and monuments give the city relative preference by tourists over other cities of the province. The pristine nature of Mount Sabalan and the climatic conditions coming from the mount are sources of diverse natural attractions including wildlife reserves, gorges, green outskirts hosting local nomads, and eye-catching waterfalls. Only second to Damavand Mount, Sabalan has a



beautiful natural lake in its peak which has been formed by water from melting of snow trapped in the conic structure of an old volcano now inactive.

Sabalan range, stretching 115km in west-east direction, creating a natural border with East Azerbaijan province, feeds also several rivers (Qarasou and Ahar Chayi) which provide water for agriculture in Ahar plain in northern side and in southern side, it feeds tributaries of Talkhe Roud (Aji Chayi).

Ascend to Sabalan is through north-east route which is also most popular and trodden route as well; other tracks in south and west is a challenge for the uninitiated and fit the tastes of more

professional mountaineers. The Mount has been registered in National List of Natural Sites, and the ownership of the Peak from the height of 3,600m and the stretch of land with an area of 6,200 hectares has been given to Department of Environment.

The city is flanked by the river Khiav Chayi in its east, flowing northerly from Sabalan heights. A suspension bridge of modest height (80m) and of steel structure opened in summer of 2015. It is 325 meters long and has been the biggest such project across the province in tourism. In a short time, the bridge has stolen the spotlight in tourism social networks and many swarmed the city to cross the bridge and enjoy the experience.

Among its host of historical monuments, the city has Shahriri monument in a track of land of 400 hectares in northwest of Pirazmian village, 31km east of Meshgin Shahr beside Qara Sou River. The site has a military fort, a temple, and a twin hill. Archeological investigations trace the site to 3,500 years ago and some others still go deeper into history to ascribe it to 7,000 years ago. Site is host to a sophisticated civilization. The site is thought to having been a place for an ancient observatory, one of the earliest indeed.

Stone-carved figures, inscriptions, ancient graves, long history, and unique features have bestowed upon Pirazmian →



unparalleled stature among the historical sites of the city and even the province. According to archeologists of the Cultural Heritage Organization, the temple had been possibly built in 1,450BC; they also trace the twin hills of the site to 7th millennium BC. Before the first millennia and in Neolithic period, the site had been settled as part of the highly advanced civilization of the region. Qahqaheh Fort in Yaft rural district, Muradlou County is located in Chanchuba and Qara Ağaj, 80km north of Meshgin Shahr. It is 1,200 meters above sea level in Qara Dağ ('Black Mountain'); high fortifications and rocks surrounds the fort, turning it a naturally supported. Deep precipices elevates the fort as if carved out by human craft. Historical events of the fort are related to Safavid rule, but the fort itself had been built earlier than the dynasty in pre-Islamic period. Entrance to fort is from northern side, since it had been used for military purposes. Two towers dominate the entrance, which is 2.5 meters, made of stone and a crescent arch still standing. The fort served the Safavid rulers in a manner Tower of London served the monarchs of Britain to imprison, however this prisoners had been of royal family. Notable among them had been Esmail Mirza, son of Tahmasb I, and Esmail II, Tahmasb's

second eldest son. Khan Ahmed Guilani, Guilan governor, rebelled in 975 AH (1566 AD) and was imprisoned accordingly, in the fort. He even composed a poem and dedicated to Tahmasb I.

Sheikh Heidar Tomb in Meshgin Shahr was built by decree of Esmail I. It is a cylindrical structure circular from outside but dodecagon from inside. The basement and the upper floor has a diameter of 10.5m and height of 18.5m.

The tomb or mausoleum has been registered in the National Heritage List in 1920. The façade of the cylindrical building is decorated with turquoise tiles which bear Quranic verses in Kufic script. About the date of construction of the tomb overriding theories have been suggested; Donald Wilber for example believed that the building was conceived in 7th-8th AH and during Safavid era, it was completed and decorated with tiles. The inscription of the tomb has been badly damaged and intentionally destroyed and thus no information sheds light to the exact date of construction. Only recently did the latest decrypting of the inscription however give a plausible date of conception. It is 731 AH (1331 AD) and during the reign of the last Mongol ruler Abu Saeid Bahador Khan.

Shirvan Valley (Shirvan Deresi in local

dialect) is one of the 11 wildlife refuges. It is a deep and wide gorge with rocky natural walls with stones resembling unknown figures. From south, the valley is delimited by Sabalan heights, from the east it leads to Lahroud-Shabil road, from the west, it leads to yet another wildlife refuge of the region, Houshang Field (Houshang Meydani in local dialect). From the north, Qilchiqlou village highlands encloses the valley. The wildlife refuge is habitat of many species of fauna such as wild hog, fox, wolf, brown bear, wild goat, Armenian wild sheep, partridge, turtledove and ringdove, and other migratory birds.

Qaynarja Spa waters, a natural source of mineral boiling water with healing properties has only recently been improved in terms of facilities, swimming pools, restaurant, and other accommodations. Shabil Therapeutic Spa Water Complex has a temperature of 49 degrees Celsius is also a popular tourist resort in all seasons of the year. Qotur Suyi, 49km from Meshgin Shahr and 24km from Lahroud, is very hot water containing calcium sulfate and very effective for skin lesions healing. Other spa waters are spread in the region which attract locals as well as tourists from around the country |

Sand therapy on world's tallest sand dunes in Kerman

By: Marjohn Sheikhi



World's largest sand dunes in Rigan County in Kerman Province have given Nowruz visitors to this part of the country a chance for sand therapy and participation in 'sand sports'.

Rigan County is located in the east of Kerman Province and situated on the path

of one of the main roads in the country. History in this part of Iran is very rich and indicates the existence of wealthy civilizations. It is said that Rigan's history began simultaneously with Bam, another city in Kerman and a world heritage site registered in UNESCO's list, which emerged at

least at the time of Achaemenians (6th to 4th centuries).

There are many historical monuments in Rigan including Shah Khorshid (Sun King) Tomb belonging to the daughter of Bahman, who is the son of Esfandiyar, which dates back to the Safavid era. The tomb is →



the only historical site in Rigan registered as Iran's national monuments and attracts a great number of tourists during the New Year holidays.

The world's highest sand dunes are another tourist attraction of Rigan. Each year, due to seasonal winds, the height and length of these dunes increase even more. The dunes are one of the most exquisite and natural landscapes in Rigan,

and quite unique in their kind.

The sand dunes are located 12 kilometers from the center of Rigan and are easily accessible to visitors. Most tourists travel to this part of Kerman Province for therapeutic effects attributed to the sands. According to the medical staff present in Rigan, sand therapy can over time relieve muscle and joint pain, as the sand gradually transfers the heat to the person's body

and thus eases pain.

Sargari and Tahgari waterfalls, flowing springs, Amygdalus scoparia blossoms and the 350-year old cemeteries are other attractions of Rigan County.

With over 50 historical monuments and castles, Rigan County is one of the oldest civilizations in Kerman Province. Some parts of the Silk Road can still be spotted in several regions of Rigan |



Abbasabad, Pearl of Mazandaran

By: Hossein Azari

Abbasabad village with its historic and unspoiled attractions shines as the pearl of Mazandaran province and has opened its arms to tourists.

Due to containing more than 135 registered historical monuments, Behshahr county has been called 'the Pearl of Mazandaran' while its Abbasabad village possesses great importance for its unique heritage and tourism attractions in the heart of the forest.

Built at the order of Shah Abbas Safavid in the southeast of Behshahr in the midst of the Jungle, Abbasabad complex marks Iran's most prominent non-desert garden which comprises of a lake, a palace, towers as well as showers while

a mansion in the middle of the lake has given it outstanding beauty.

The lake covers areas of more than 10 hectares with an 18-meter-tall mansion at the center which hides underwater for more than half of the year; nevertheless, in the seasons of drought the whole structure, which has stood the test of time, resides out of the water.

The mansion in the lake is made of bricks and mortar and has basically been the foundation of a now-disappeared palace turning the Historic area of Abbasabad in Behshahr to a must-see place in Mazandaran Province.

There exists a big 140-hectare garden next to Abbasabad's lake which involves leisure facilities like restaurant as well as tea houses bringing a more convenient

visiting experience to the tourists.

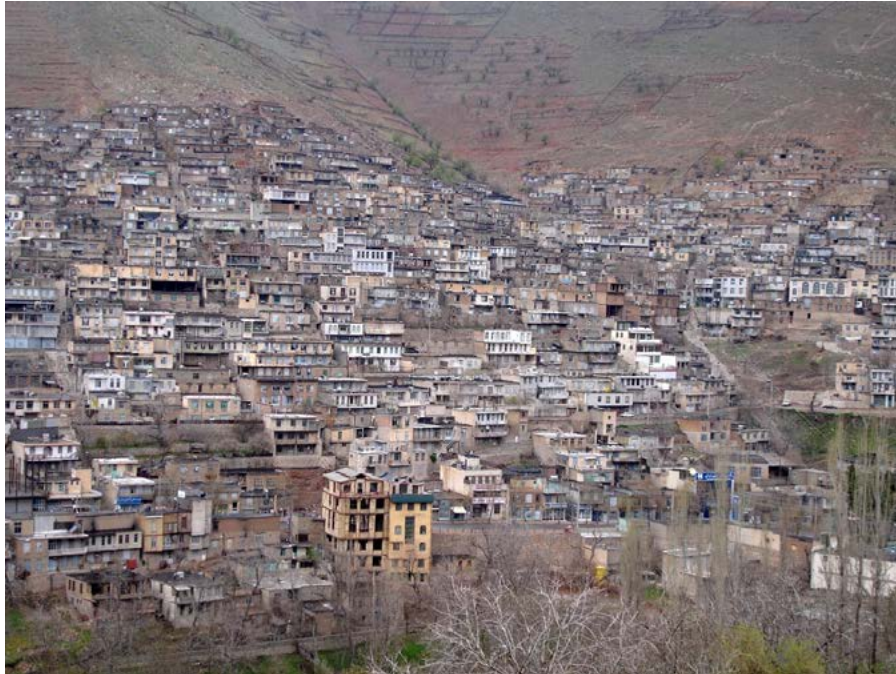
The irrigation mechanisms created during the Safavid dynasty in this region are extremely unique which greatly contributed to the registration of the site on UNESCO's World Heritage List.

Two brick towers are also observable in the southwestern part of the historic garden. Each having a diameter of 7 meters and a height of 14 meters, the two towers are located at a distance of approximately 186 meters from each other.

Being easily accessible by vehicle, in addition to a resting area, ancient relics, sweet water and pleasant weather have made the region a must-see place for tourists to visit.

In short, Abbasabad is a green garden on the edge of a natural lake that is as a stratified garden in the division of Iranian gardens. To arrive at the green set of Safavid Shah, you should deviate from Behshahr-Gorgan road to the village of Al Tappeh, after passing through the village, you will arrive at the most outstanding non-desert garden of Iran. Abbasabad dam, reservoir and the river behind dam, garden, palace, bath, water mill and 2 old towers are noteworthy places to visit in the area. Due to convenient roadway, possibility to stay, historic buildings and good weather, Abbasabad remains a good choice for traveling to the green north of Iran |

Paveh, legacy of Uramanat's euphoria



By: Hossein Azari

Paveh county, with its evergreen and untouched nature, marks one of Iran's most beautiful tourist attractions.

The Paveh county, located northwest of Kermanshah, has three cities, namely Paveh, Bayangan, and Nowsud which all possess tourist attractions, natural beauty in addition to hospitable people, and there is something unique about this area; unrivaled staged (stair shaped) architecture.

Upon arrival at the historically ancient city of Paveh which dates back to three thousand years ago, one is

astounded and amazed at how the local people living in the area have managed to skillfully construct their homes in the shape of many long and wide stairs within the foothills of the mountain. These buildings have been built in such a way that the roof of a house is the patio (balcony) of the house built just a few meters above it. The county, together with a mountainous area of Kurdistan province, is called Uramanat the most famous characteristic of which is villages that are unparalleled in terms of architecture, lifestyle, and agricultural methodology as they are integrated with nature by incorporating steep-

slope agriculture.

The language spoken by the people of Paveh is called Hourami (Gooran), which is one of the most ancient and noble languages of Iran echoing voices of love and kindness.

Paveh city marks one of the most important habitats of certain edible plants which are unique to the region as well as that its forest cover, rushing rivers and exhilarating fragrance of spring flowers thrill every passer with all the beauty and freshness.

The route to the city is replete with winding and tortuous mountainous roads while the road contains numerous hills, springs and fountains, forests and farmlands located in the foothills which are quite beautiful and invigorating.

Due to these eye-catching natural landscape as well as various caves, waterfalls and streams, Paveh has been called the 'Bakhtaran (western) Paradise'.

Seyed Abdullah and Pir (Old) Ismaiel Memorial Shrines are located in the Hajar and Spreez villages which attract eager visitors all year round.

Paveh people's clothing and costumes have an air of authenticity; furthermore, they make all of their own clothing and footwear while women also make splendid hand-woven pieces of clothing.

Paveh with several water-flowing rivers named Sirvan, Lyleh, Markhil and Paveh-Rood is one of the most water-rich areas in western Iran.

Roaring springs, warm weather, extensive garden, beautiful forests, beautiful temples and caves are landmarks of Paveh County which attract numerous tourists.

Other noteworthy attractions of Paveh include the Boll Waterfall, Key-Khosro Fortress, Ghal'a Fortress as well as Manav Fortress |



Tehran and its 2,000 tourist spots

By: Marjohn Sheikhi



Deputy of Tehran Municipality says the Iranian capital has over 2,000 tourist attractions that will take 35 days' time to visit all of them.

Tehran was first chosen as the capital of Iran by Agha Mohammad Khan of the Qajar dynasty in 1796, which means a span of over 230 years. A bustling metropolis of 14 million people (2015), Tehran is Iran's largest city and urban area, and the largest city in Western Asia.

The residence in the city goes back to 7,000 years old as indicated by the discovery of the 7,000-year-old remains of a woman unearthed in Tehran in November 2014. Coupled with having been the capital city for over 230 years, Tehran has witnessed a remarkable presence of tourists from all over the country in recent years, eager to see for themselves the historical textures, the modern complexes and renovations in the large metropolis.

According to Mayor of Tehran, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, regions 1, 12 and 20 are home to the most number of historical attractions in Tehran. Region 1 is considered as a historical and religious region, region 12 is the heart of the old Tehran and region 20, with its many historical and entertainment sites, is the

main destination of tours around Tehran.

Statistics-wise, there have been about 2,511 tours around the city by March 25 this year, and Azadi Tower, Milad Tower, Jurassic Park and the Birds Garden have been met with the most enthusiasm from tourists.

According to Ghalibaf, tourism in Tehran has created over 10,000 job opportunities; "this year, Nowruz tourists visiting Tehran will meet with a completely different face of Tehran. This year, Tehran has become even more spectacular than what it was in the previous year," he said, citing the quietude of the capital and lack of air pollution during the New Year holidays as the reasons why Nowruz is the best time for visiting Tehran.

Mayor's Deputy, Naser Amani, mentioned Chitgar Lake as a new opportunity in the area of tourism in Tehran. The artificial and recreational lake located in the north of Chitgar Park,

north-west of Tehran, was opened in 2013 and is expected to reduce Tehran's air pollution. The total area of this complex is about 250 hectares; 130 hectares across the lake, and the rest of it goes for the coastal zone and resorts. In addition to natural recreational spaces, sports and cultural environments have been provided and Visitors are offered free services and facilities on site.

He also referred to various river valleys as another noteworthy tourist attraction sites which have undergone renovation and now serve as resorts with the efforts of Tehran Municipality in the last few years |



Chinese Spring Festival, Iranian Nowruz: More in common than you think

By: Marjohn Sheikhi



On March 3, 2016, Niavaran Palace Complex in northern Tehran was the scene to a grand traditional festival of mixed Chinese-Iranian roots to celebrate the Chinese Spring Festival and the coming Iranian Nowruz.

As civilizations with deep historical roots and rich cultural traditions, Iran and China have a lot in common. The Chinese New Year, also known as Spring Festival, which fell on February 8 this year and the fast approaching Iranian New Year, also known as Nowruz, on March 20, provided the best possible ground for investigating the commonalities between these two nations with thousands years of history and bringing their people even closer still. The initiative to hold the Chinese New Year in Tehran started four years ago, but the first three times were limited to the Embassy only and hosted a few people due to lack of space. This year though, the festivity was held at Niavaran Palace Complex in the northern part of Tehran, that with its 9000-square-meter area, tall trees and fresh grass, nice weather and breathtaking scenery, provided a suitable location for actual New Year activities and with even more people – Iranian and Chinese – in attendance.

The festival took off with a brief welcoming speech by Chinese Ambassador

to Tehran, Mr. Pang Sen, who heralded an expansion in the two countries' relations in the new year, following the successful visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping to Iran from January 22 to 23, just after the "Implementation Day" for Iran's nuclear deal.

The activities that followed were a mixture of traditional Chinese Spring Festival and the Iranian Nowruz. There were Chinese performances with Iranian characteristics and also Iranian performers who sang Chinese songs or played Chinese instruments for creat-

ing Iranian music. A troupe called 'Red Dragon' consisted of Iranian performers brought to stage the traditional lion dance seen at Chinese New Year and thought to bring good luck. A Chinese male performer displayed for the audience a kind of traditional opera called 'face-changing' (or 'Bian Lian' in Chinese), moving to quick, dramatic music while wearing a brightly colored costume and masks that changed from one face to another almost instantaneously with a movement of his head. Following that performance, a Chinese musician played a piece of music called 'Animals Happiness' on a traditional string instrument. There was a kung fu Iranian-Chinese troupe whose performance was somehow similar to the video game 'Mortal Kombat' – although purely symbolic, no one really got hurt – and a three-piece Iranian ensemble that performed a classical Persian song on the 'tonbak', the 'tar' and the 'daf'.

Beside these programs, some booths were offering Chinese cuisine with the profits going to charity. There were also Chinese artists presenting their handicrafts for sell, which although a little



overpriced for an average budget, were nevertheless truly beautiful and unique.

The Chinese Spring Festival is as much important for the Chinese people as Nowruz is for the Iranians or Christmas is for the westerners. Ms. Du Xiaoping, Cultural Attaché at the Chinese Embassy in Tehran, who was visiting a handicraft booth on the sidelines of the festival told Mehr News that Iran and China's new years are actually quite similar in many ways; "we both hold this annual event at the beginning of the new year, so our New Year holidays always fall on spring."

"And the traditions are also very similar to Nowruz," she went on to add, "and they are living traditions not something belonging to a museum. Chinese people believe the Spring Festival is the most important time of the year."

"In Beijing which is a big city with a large population, during the Chinese New Year, it could be almost empty," she said with a laugh, "all the Beijingers go outside the city for vacation and meeting their families and relatives. This is very similar to Nowruz holidays in Tehran, I noticed."

That is true. During the New Year

usual traffic jam and the hustle and bustle of a big city.

But the similarities do not end there. Before the Spring Festival, every family in China will have a thorough house cleanup and go for festival items and clothes shopping. That is exactly what every Iranian family will do in the week leading to the New Year. In Persian language, house cleanup is called 'khaneh-tekani' which literary means 'home-shaking'. The process of cleaning up the whole building inside-out, getting rid of old, useless things and making room for new stuff becomes so time-consuming and tiring that at the end of the day you really feel like you have 'shaken' the whole house.

To the outside, Iran and China's relations mostly seem to be focused on economic and political fields, but the thousands of years of history each country is proud of, inevitably draws attention to the two countries' cultural dealings. This in turn, necessitates careful planning on both sides for introducing their culturally rich countries through various events that would appeal to the visitors in a way that would feel at the same time familiar and exotic.



holidays in the capital, the city becomes deserted as not many people travel to Tehran at this time of the year and many immigrants leave to visit their relatives in other cities. It actually becomes quite a pleasant experience to wander about in Tehran with its streets emptied out of cars. Nowruz is probably the only time of the year when you can actually see how Tehran looks like without all the

Chinese Ambassador to Tehran, Mr. Pang Sen, told Mehr News that the embassy has organized many events over the past year for further tightening the knot in the two countries' cultural relations; "experts and scholars are constantly visiting each country; we also have library exchanges, concert troupes and film producers. I think the cultural exchange will be beneficial to enhance



mutual understanding between our two peoples," he said.

According to Mr. Sen, there are also some specific programs for Iranian Muslims in China during the New Year as well as for Chinese Muslims in Iran during the Spring Festival. "Not long ago, a Chinese delegation of religious figures came to visit Tehran and also Qom. They had a discussion on how to increase our mutual understanding and cooperation," he said.

Also, a group of Chinese Muslims studying Islamic sciences at a branch of Al-Mustafa International University (MIU), a theological institute in Gorgan, celebrated their New Year on February 8.

Mr. Sen believed that the New Year festivities both in China and Iran are a "demonstration of their rich culture" and as such, are the most important annual events for the two nations. "Both China and Iran have a long history and we share a lot of things in common," he said, "so while we celebrate Chinese Spring Festival, we also hold it in conjunction with Nowruz so that our people can better know each other and learn from each other."

While the idea of the New Year is almost the same in both Iran and China, the way each country celebrates it is quite different, and holding such joint cultural activities is a good way to introduce all the different ways each nation celebrates the festival |

Women key to world peace

By: Lachin Rezaian

Women can play an important role in establishing peace and its continuation in the world, this was the message conveyed during Iran-Japan joint Symposium on "Women, Peace and Sustainable Development."

Peace begins within the family; the peace that comes out of the family and the heart of human beings can lead to the peace with the world and women have an important role in developing such kind of peace.

Women's key role in establishing peace and security in the world is a fact which has often been overlooked by and hidden from the eyes of many politicians, leaders, officials, media and even women themselves.

Recently, a number of movements, events, conferences and numerous meetings have emerged and held around the world highlighting the participation of women in political, economic and cultural scenes to bring the women into the process of making important decisions.

According to an important research conducted by The Guardian in last year, women do have a positive and significant impact on peace, as encouraging their participation increases the probability of violence ending within a year by 24%.

Advocates for greater female representation say that women are essential because they bring a more comprehensive peace plan to the negotiating table by addressing societal needs rather than solely focusing on what will make the warring parties happy.

To this end, recently, Iranian Foreign Ministry's Institute for Political and International Studies and Japan's Sasakawa Foundation jointly held an event being the first in such a level to address the issue of women's participation in important decision-making processes at higher levels.

Iran-Japan joint Symposium on



"Women, Peace and Sustainable Development" was attended by a number of Iranian and Japanese officials who discussed the cultural commonalities between Iran and Japan regarding the role of women, and how women can balance between work outside and their duties as a wife, mother and a housewife.

Exchange of experiences between the two countries especially in the field of women and family which have been obtained at a high price, is a fact that can lead to solving some of the challenges from a global point of view.

Vice President for Women and Family Affairs, Shahindokht Molaverdi, who is the Iranian side host, delivered speech at the opening expressing hope to reach a framework for cooperation between the two countries in the field of women and family at the end of the meeting.

She said the exchange of scientific, academic and economic delegations, especially the women activist, can help make operational the exchange of experiences between the two countries.

The special guest of the event, Akie Abe, Chairperson of Foundation for Encouragement of Social Contribution (FESCO) and the wife of Prime Minister of Japan Shinzō Abe, also made the remarks on the key role women can play for promoting peace and sustainable development globally.

"I don't believe women should work like men, however I think for women, there are certain ways to work so that they can empower themselves," Abe underlined addressing the participants.

Pointing to the Islamic Republic's

achievements in the field of women and families, Iranian host explained that Islam attaches great importance to the concept of Family and Iran's Constitution insists that all policies and decisions made in the country should work to consolidate the foundations of the family.

Iran's approach to the empowerment of women is a bottom-up approach relying on all-round empowerment, according to the individual and collective empowerment of women, this was an important message conveyed during the meeting.

Women in the Islamic Republic of Iran have seen dramatic growth in participation in all political, economic, cultural and social areas. Over the past thirty-seven years, Iran has made a lot of efforts to improve the status of women and empowering them and always considering them mostly in the development programs.

The head of the Environmental Protection Agency Dr. Masoumeh Ebtekar emphasized the role of women in global peace and sustainable development, cooperation and exchange of experiences and knowledge between Iran and Japan in this field saying Iran and Japan have much in common, especially in the cultural field.

Women and peace, was the basis for future decisions about the role of women and their involvement in making important social, cultural and political decisions during Iran-Japan joint meeting held in Tehran, one major focus of which was raising awareness among policy makers of the pivotal role about what role women play in communities |



Interview by Lachin Rezaian

A Japanese economic expert emphasizing the motherhood experience for women, stressed women need to balance motherhood and work outside home.

In an exclusive interview with Mehr News correspondent on the sidelines of Iran-Japan Symposium on “Women, Peace and Sustainable Development”, CEO of The Good Bankers Co., Ltd in Japan and an award winning economic expert Mizue Tsukushi presented her views on women’s role in developing peace and security in a society, stressing that women are more communicative, they are more helpful and skillful than men in facing struggles in the world.

Noting that women across the world face similar struggles over being included in key decision-making processes, Tsukushi said the conditions for women in Japan is “very much like their counterparts in Iran.”

She said the change of system is directly dependent on the women themselves. It is a long-term approach and has faced some struggles, however women can make changes to improve their own conditions, Tsukushi added.

Pointing to the growth in women’s involvement in different political, economic and cultural positions in Iran,

Mizue Tsukushi:

Women need to balance motherhood, employment

she confirmed they have witnessed a good growth in education and taking responsibility of jobs which were previously in hands of men. “I visited Iran in 1975, women in that time were in very different conditions, and everything has changed for them now. They are now more active, more involved, they are more successful now, however, there is a long road to the ideal status.”

Emphasizing the role of women in provoking peace and security in a society, she said their direct involvement in decision-making processes can lead to having a more secure community.

On involving women in important tasks which belongs more to men, like police officers, she said the government must encourage the women to get involved in more important jobs, especially the ones which used to be attributed to men.

Tsukushi said appointing women as police officers can help reduce insecurity against women in a society. “If women get involved in security jobs, they can help other women, especially those victimized by harassment or domestic violence; they can feel more responsibility to report the cases and sympathize more easily which can make them more serious at least to pursue the cases and help the victims restore their dignity and achieve their legitimate right.

On the role of women in establishing peace globally, she said “Women are more communicative, they are more helpful and skillful than men in facing struggles in the world. They like being closer, they don’t seek power like men do.”

Women hold more ability to understand the situation of other people, she said, and also in nature they are more peaceful than men.

She referred to bonobo’s society as an example, which is a kind of small species of chimpanzee, saying the researchers have found out that the bonobos society is led by women but chimpanzees

are led by males. “Bonobos face few tensions in their society, however, chimpanzees experience more struggles and tension.”

With regard to the question on how to make balance between job and motherhood duties, she suggested a long term basis in the life stage of women.

“Throughout women’s life stages, they dedicate a time to their job and also to their activities in home, as a mother or wife. Although they are sometimes forced to sacrifice work for their kids, however, childhood does not last forever. They will find soon again their time for hard work. Motherhood experience will give a women more insight in understanding the nature of human being, because raising a child is to know about human beings. They will attain more skills for time management and better communication, motherhood is such a value to the growth of women themselves,” she added.

She underlined, “society and good companies know it very well. Please believe me and let me again say to all our young sisters, don’t be so rushed to come back to the workplace, just enjoy the motherhood which is the privilege given to women from our motherhood nature.”

Mizue Tsukushi is the CEO of The Good Bankers Co., Ltd in Japan. Born in 1949, Kagoshima, she studied in Paris University and experienced a period at home as a housewife, she worked for the Swiss UBS Trust and Banking as a Deputy General Manager where she was in charge of institutional clients. In September 2005, she was awarded the Chief Cabinet Secretary’s Awards for outstanding Contributions to Gender Equality. She is also a member of the Japanese National Commission for UNESCO and the special advisory committees for several Japanese ministries such as Ministry of the Environment |

Iranian female singer:

Woman now more comfortable with pursuing musical careers



By: Marjohn Sheikhi

Well-known Iranian female singer Hengameh Akhavan who performed Persian classic songs together with her ensemble 'Bahar' at the 31st Fajr Music festival, believes Iranian women have now more room to partake in musical activities as compared to a few years ago.

The 31st Fajr International Music Festival as Iran's most prestigious music festival kicked off on February 10 with three performances at the Vahdat Hall, two of which were an all-women concert.

The 750-seat opera house, almost jam-packed, was host to the most fa-

mous female singer of Iran's classic songs, Hengameh Akhavan, who is also known as 'Lady Qamar' for her covers of the works by Ghamar-ol-molouk Vaziri, the first professional Iranian female singer whose works were recorded on gramophone disks.

Akhavan led an all-women ensemble on Wednesday that comprised Azadeh Amiri on the Tar (6-string lute), Shima Boloukifar on the Kamancheh (stringed instrument similar to violin), Nazanin Pedarsani on the Tonbak (goblet drum), Marjan Ravand on the Oud (similar to the lute), and Sheida Ghazi on the Ney (end-blown flute), all various types of Persian traditional musical instruments.

Akhavan who was participating in Fajr festival after years of absence from

this music event, performed works by famous classical musicians such as Ali Akbar Shahnaz, Amir Jahed, Morteza Neidavoud, Adib Khansari, Reza Mahjoubi, Aref Ghazvini and Mousa Marufi. But perhaps, her rendition of 'Morgh-e Sahar' ('Bird of Dawn') – a famous Iranian Tasnif [1] composed by Morteza Neydavoud and Mohammad-Taqi Bahar in early 20th century – was met with the most enthusiasm from the audience as it is a song quite well-known even to someone with the least knowledge or interest in Persian classical music. The song which deals with political and social issues written by Bahar during the furor of Persian Constitutional Revolution was first recorded by Moluk Zarrabi and then performed by numerous Iranian singers including Qamar-ol- →

Moluk Vaziri.

The repertoire of melody patterns in traditional Persian art music is organized into systems. The seven main systems are called Dastagh, including Shur, Segah (third place), Chahargah (fourth place), Rast-Panjgah (fifth place), Homayoun, Mahour, and Nava, while the five secondary systems are Avaz, including Abu Ata, Afshari, Bayat-e Tork, Dashti, and Bayat-e Isfahan.

The performance Akhavan and her women ensemble put on stage on Feb. 10 featured two sections: the first part included Afshari avaz belonging to Shur dastgah, with plaintive and gloomy melodies yet very pleasing to the ears; and, the second on Bayat-e Isfahan belonging to Homayoun dastgah, with sometimes happy sometimes plaintive melodies, coming together in a brooding kind of hymn.

But all the informative facts aside, the performance of a female singer on an Iranian stage is quite a rare and special occasion. As women are not allowed to have their singing voices heard by men who are not their immediate relatives. They can however, perform in front of an all-woman audience – as was the case with Akhavan's performance on the first day of Fajr festival – or provide back vocals for male singers in certain cases. But despite the limitations, Ms. Akhavan brought on the stage a powerful, beautiful performance that touched the hearts of some 800 people there who applauded the ensemble even while the piece was still being performed and sang along to the songs with which they were most familiar.

Akhavan who is currently working in the Ministry of Culture as a music expert and also gives singing lessons to interested women, believes that compared to a few years ago, women in Iran are now more comfortable to take part in music activities.

"At present, there are many music academies for women and interested people from all walks of life are able to learn how to sing and play all types of musical instruments without any restriction," she said, while noting that the only limitation is the lack of adequate space for the teaching the large



number of women who are interested in singing, as there is sometimes "not enough space for new students in my classes."

Iran's 'second Ghamar' as described by Iranian vocalist and Master of Persian Vocal Radif [2] Nasrollah Nasehpour, has actually an optimistic view on the future of female singers and musicians performing in Iran; "limits have been removed to a large extent. 20 years ago, as I remember, women had many difficulties in holding concerts. Gradually though, the obstacles started to fade away and women, at least in the capital, have gained more room to express themselves via the music they create."

As it stands, the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance shows more lenience toward female singers performing solo in Tehran than Governors Generals offices do in other provinces. In fact, Iran's current Minister of Culture Ali Jannati had made a comment in 2013 somehow in favor of women singing in public as "some religious authorities have said that so long as solo singing by women does not lead to corruption, it is admissible."

Akhavan believes, however, the main problem for women concerts in Tehran is "shortage of appropriate spaces."

"For instance, you should book Vahdat Hall one year ahead of the date of the concert or often the halls are used

for theater performances rather than concerts. The same problem made us hold most of our performances at Niavaran Cultural Center which makes it a bit difficult for women to commute at night," said Akhavan.

This may be the case. As of now, most women performances are held at Vahdat Hall, and the place is always the scene to one cultural event or another. You can barely find a day on which the 'opera house' is not being used for a musical performance, a theater stage, opening or closing ceremonies of some national or international event. And even when women ensembles find an opportunity to perform, Vahdat Hall has to become fully reserved for female audience only. The male staff all have to step back and no photographers are allowed inside as the musicians perform without hijab. This is actually quite refreshing, to be a part of an all-women community for one or two hours, where virtuoso musicians create beautiful melodies and show despite all limitations, sanctions and lost opportunities, Iranian women can reach the level of mastery in arts just the same as their male counterparts, if not more so.

The 31st edition of Fajr Music Festival came to a close on February 19, 2016, after a ten-day showcasing of the best of national and international musical pieces and promoting the arts and culture of Iran inside and outside the borders.

[1] Tasnif is the Persian equivalent of Ballad and is a composed song in a slow metre. A large number of Tasnifs were composed during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Many of them are based on patriotic themes reflecting the spirit of the constitutional movement of that period.

[2] The Radif of Iranian music is the traditional repertoire of the classical music of Iran that forms the essence of Persian musical culture. More than 250 melodic units, called "gushe," are arranged into cycles, with an underlying modal layer providing the backdrop against which a variety of melodic motifs are set |



Technology

Iranian scientist's breakthrough helps stop 'ticking time bomb'

Interview by: Marjohn Sheikhi

Iranian scientist Sasan Sadrizadeh by designing an efficient operating room ventilation system has helped reduce bacterial infection that "should be ranked alongside terrorism on the list of threats to the human race."

Iranian researcher Sasan Sadrizadeh, at KTH Royal Institute of Technology in Sweden, in collaboration with an international research team, have published promising results on a new design of hospital operating room ventilation by using the most advanced super computers to do mathematical calculation in the field of fluid mechanics to predict airflow field and contaminant dispersion in operating rooms. This can reduce the surgical site infections among the patients undergoing surgical intervention. As many patients died annually due to this type of infections, it is a hope to save the lives of patients who are prone to air-borne infection in hospitals.

What follows is Mr. Sadrizadeh's interview with Mehr News Agency on their recent breakthrough on what he calls a 'ticking time bomb':

◆ You have made a breakthrough by introducing a new method to reduce bacterial contamination in the operating room. Can you explain in detail and in layman's terms the purpose and findings of your research, as well as its significance and application? Where did you get the inspiration for your project?

As you know, the history of surgery is nearly as old as the human race and surgical team were struggling to overcome the three principal obstacles of infection, pain and bleeding. For patients undergoing any surgical intervention, there is always a risk that they will develop some kind of postoperative complication. One of the most challenging postoperative



complication can be surgical site infection. This type of infection may extend within the surgical wound margin after the operating. These infections can be either superficial involving the skin only or they can be more serious and involve tissues, organs and implanted material. Surgical infections are very case-dependent and some patients may be at higher risk of developing postoperative infections due to factors such as age, underlying medical conditions, invasiveness of the surgery and duration of the procedure.

Surgical infection can contribute to higher rates of patient morbidity and mortality, loss of productivity, increased hospitalization time and patient dissatisfaction. These infections can also impose a substantial economic burden on both healthcare provider and the patient.

The infection risk of patients is highly correlated with the concentration of viable airborne bacteria within the operating room environment. It is a general knowledge among the experts in the area of infection control that staff working in the OR are the main source of airborne bacteria. Surgical team members disseminate pathogenic organisms into their surrounding environ-

ment. A person releases about 10,000 skin scales per minute during walking activities, however a small fraction of them is enough to initiate a severe infection.

It has been reported that *Staphylococcus aureus* is the most commonly implicated bacterial pathogen found in the surgical rooms and is one of the important causes of skin and soft tissue infections. Recently, the increasing rate of antimicrobial drug resistance has been a matter of great concern, as many types of Staph bacteria have now become resistant to many antibiotics. The danger posed by growing resistance to antibiotics has been described a global threat, more dangerous than climate change, a "ticking time bomb" that should be ranked alongside terrorism on the list of threats to the human race.

Prevention and treatment of surgical infection is usually managed by:

Drug therapy: Antibiotics

Dilution and evacuation of infectious particles: Using an efficient OR ventilation system

Source Control: Increasing the performance of staff clothing in preventing the shedding of bacteria to the air, Reducing the number and activity of staff in the operating rooms and Work prac- →

tice improvement during a given surgical activity.

In our research, we mainly focused on ventilation efficiency and source control. We used the most advanced super computers to do mathematical calculation in the field of fluid mechanics to predict airflow field and contaminant dispersion in operating rooms. We try to optimize and improve the ventilation efficiency to provide the lowest possible airborne bacteria concentration and thus a reduced rate of surgical site infections. Another part of this research was focused on performance of surgical clothing systems and work practice improvement of surgical team members.

◆ **What were the particular obstacles or difficulties in your research? How did you overcome them?**

Hospital operating rooms are among the most critical working environment and research in this area would be very difficult. Performing any research study during a given surgical procedure may involve several ethical and logistical considerations, and frequently cannot be repeated. The complexity of working environment is another obstacle that makes experimental investigation very difficult and expensive.

Mutual understanding among engineers and surgical staff is a key to making for an easier and more straightforward further development in ventilation principles and infection

control. Currently, there is large gap among the medical and engineering fields and these two areas can barely collaborate.

The control of airborne particles in hospitals and operating room environments requires comprehensive knowledge about the source and transport mechanism of the bacteria-carrying particles. The role of airflow streams as a vehicle for airborne particles should be well understood.

◆ **How long will it take for your findings to become applicable in the hospitals and save lives of thousands?**

Several assessment based on finding of this research is now experimentally put in practice in sham operations. The area of surgery is that much complicated that any small error can end up to a catastrophe and thus it should be well evaluated before using in real surgeries. Therefore more research is needed until it becomes applicable in operating rooms.

◆ **In what direction do you see your research going in the future?**

We work on some advance models of hybrid ventilations to have the benefit of several airflow principals to have the most efficient airflow pattern. Recently many hospitals and industrial companies, active in this research area, show interest to this project and we hopefully can have a broad interdisciplinary collaboration with experts in different area to fasten the research

progress.

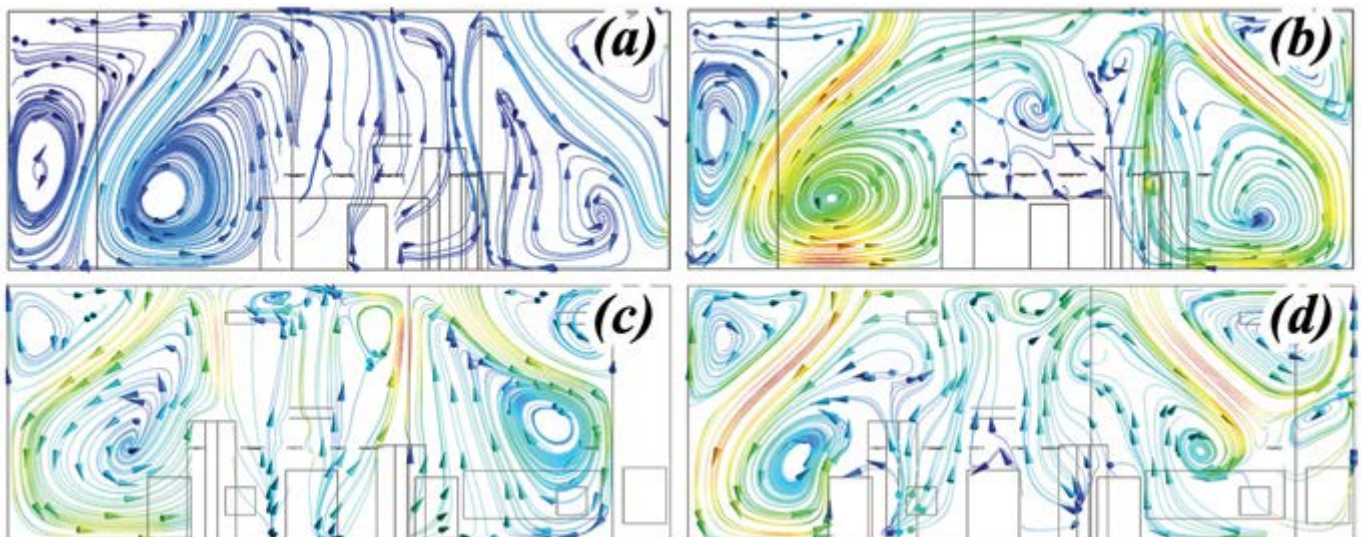
◆ **Beside this recent scientific accomplishment, what other projects of yours managed to receive such wide-spread recognition?**

We work in another method to capture, disable and evacuate the viable particles from the surgical area. This method work independently from operating room ventilation systems and it can be much more efficient than the currently used methods of infection control.

◆ **Will you bring back the results of your research to Iran and apply them to Iranian hospitals? Do you have any plans for joint cooperation with Iranian scientists in this regard?**

It is hard to say in this stage!

Sasan Sadrizadeh is a researcher in Fluid and Climate Technology Division. His research is focused on Design of Hospital Operating Room Ventilation using Computational Fluid Dynamics technique. Sasan received a PhD in Applied Fluid Mechanics in 2016 from KTH Royal Institute of Technology. He graduated in 2012 from Linköping University with a Master of Science in Applied Thermodynamics and Fluid Mechanics. He is primarily interested in studying the Fluid-structure interaction, Fluid-Particle dynamics, the physics and chemistry of indoor air pollution, Heat and Mass transfer using various numerical methods |



This is how different air flows out in an OR with 10 people moving about.

Prof. Jackie Ying

Mustafa Prize further introduces Muslim scientific contributions to world

Interview by: Marjohn Sheikhi

Winner of the inaugural Mustafa Prize "Top Scientific Achievement" Award, Prof. Jackie Y. Ying, Executive Director of the Institute of Bioengineering and Nanotechnology, says the scientific contributions made by Muslim scientists could be more widely recognized by the world through the Mustafa Prize.

On 23 December 2015, the laureates of the first Mustafa Scientific Prize were announced as Professor Jackie Y. Ying from Singapore and Professor Omar Yaghi from Jordan. The Mustafa Prize is a top science and technology award granted biennially to the top researchers and scientists of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) member states, the second largest inter-governmental organization in the world after the United Nations.

Granted to research that has improved human life and made tangible and cutting-edge innovations on the boundaries of science or has presented new scientific methodology, the Mustafa Prize recognizes achievements in the "Life Science and Medical Sciences", "Nano Science and Nanotechnologies", and "Information and Communication Science and Technologies", and "Top Scientific Achievement" categories.

According to Dr. Hossein Zohour, Chairman of the Scientific Committee of the Mustafa Prize, "in the first three categories, the nominees must be citizens of one of the 57 Islamic countries while in the fourth category, the nominee must be Muslim but being a citizen of an Islamic country is not mandatory."

Professor Ying, Executive Director of the Institute of Bioengineering and Nanotechnology (IBN) of A*STAR, has won the inaugural Mustafa Prize "Top Scientific Achievement" Award for "her great scientific and technological contributions and achievements to the synthesis of well-designed advanced nanostructured materials and systems, nanostructured biomaterials and miniaturized biosystems for various interesting applications."

Her research has led to many new materials and systems with unique func-

tionality and size-dependent properties that tackle major challenges in medicine, chemistry and energy.

In an interview with Mehr News Agency, Prof. Ying highlights the importance of scientific awards that are especially tailored for the Muslim world.

◆ **Professor Jackie Ying, you have been chosen as the winner of the first Mustafa Scientific Prize. How were you introduced to this event? What were your expectations, seeing as this was its first round, and have your expectations been met?**

I first heard about the award from the Iran Nanotechnology Initiative Council at a conference in Iran a couple of years ago. I am deeply honored to receive the inaugural Mustafa Prize. The Mustafa Prize is a very special award because it is named after the Prophet. Muslims are taught by the Prophet to pursue knowledge. Knowledge benefits us personally and the society as a whole. Scientific knowledge and breakthroughs impact the people at the global level. Knowledge also validates the existence of God. I hope that through the Mustafa Prize, the scientific contributions made by Muslim scientists will be more widely recognized by the world.

◆ **You have received Mustafa Prize in recognition of your efforts in development of 'stimulus response systems in targeted delivery of drugs' in the field of Nanobiotechnology. Would please tell us a little about your work, its significance in the world of science, and the aspects that you think had led to your work being chosen?**

The glucose-sensitive nanoparticles can auto-regulate the release of insulin depending on the blood glucose levels. This drug delivery system bypasses the need for blood glucose monitoring with finger pricks, and allows insulin to be delivered orally or by nasal passage, instead of through injection. This technology would greatly benefit diabetic patients by helping to prevent hyperglycemic and hypoglycemic conditions and the associated organ damage. I co-founded SmartCells, Inc. to commercialize this novel nanomedicine. This spin-off company was acquired by Merck in 2010, with potential aggregate payments in excess of USD 500 million.



Merck is currently bringing the technology through Phase I clinical trial.

◆ **In your opinion, what is the best aspect of international scientific competitions, such as Mustafa Prize, which are tailored especially for the Muslim world?**

The Mustafa Prize is a remarkable initiative by the Iranian government to recognize Muslim scientists. Science and technology bring about many positive impacts on our societies. It is a common language that brings people together from all over the world.

◆ **In what ways do you think Mustafa Prize could complement the key initiatives of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)?**

It could complement the OIC initiatives by bringing the Muslim scientists together on education and research, and by facilitating technology exchange among the OIC member states and other nations.

Prof. Ying was born in Taipei, and raised in Singapore and New York. She received her B.E. and Ph.D. from The Cooper Union and Princeton University, respectively. She joined the faculty at Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1992, where she was Professor of Chemical Engineering until 2005. She has been the Founding Executive Director of the Institute of Bioengineering and Nanotechnology in Singapore since 2003.

The Mustafa Prize was established in 2013 to recognize leading researchers and scientists of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) member states, as well as Muslim researchers from around the world.



Iranian researcher Dr. Esmaily:

Invisible materials soon to be tangible reality

Interview by: Marjohn Sheikhi

Iranian researcher Dr. Mohsen Esmaily, who has recently made a breakthrough in magnesium lightweight materials and been awarded by the Royal Swedish Academy of Engineering Sciences because of it, believes the world of science will see more than just 'invisible' materials in the next decade.

29-year-old Iranian researcher Mohsen Esmaily, at Chalmers University of Technology, Sweden, has recently been awarded a prestigious scientific prize by the Royal Swedish Academy of Engineering Sciences for his breakthrough in magnesium alloys. For this occasion, we conducted an interview with the young researcher on the details of his findings and the impact of his research on the future of materials science which he defines as "the backbone of every industrialized nation Science," and "of utmost importance for developed countries." What follows is Dr. Esmaily's interview with Mehr News Agency:

◆ **You have made a breakthrough in magnesium lightweight materials. Can you explain in detail and in layman's terms the purpose and findings of**

your research group and research activities, as well as its significance and application? Where did you get the inspiration for your project?

The change in our climate is now a major concern of all nations. The polar ice caps are melting and sea levels are rising due to an increase in the average temperature of the earth's atmosphere and oceans. These issues are of great concern since low-lying countries could be flooded, and extreme weather conditions (as we are now facing in Iran) could cause major disasters and damage. It is now widely-accepted that climate change is related to the combustion of fossil fuels. Carbon dioxide, CO₂, is the gas considered to be mainly responsible for global warming. Thus, a key issue is to reduce fuel combustion and, thereby, reduce CO₂ emissions. In addition, we have an obligation to save our planet and to prevent excessive use of finite resources, which also belong to coming generations, to our children.

Manufacturing lighter components is an effective way to reduce demand on resources, increase energy efficiency, and reduce greenhouse gases emissions. It is obvious that this is already underway in e.g., the transportation industry (cars, airplanes, trains, etc.), where the demand for lightweight prod-

ucts is ever increasing.

The economic benefits of lightweight materials are also tempting. As an example, a weight reduction of just one Kg in a commercial aircraft results in fuel savings of ~ 10,000 SEK (~ \$1150 US) during its life cycle. When taking the air pollution-related diseases and injuries into account, it becomes apparent that any reduction in the consumption of fossil fuels becomes highly cost effective. Thus, there have been significant research initiatives within the lightweight construction materials arena around the globe during the last decade. Countries such as Britain, Germany, USA, Japan, and Sweden have undertaken major national research in this field.

Concerning Magnesium alloys, they are the lightest engineering materials, so when taking the abovementioned issues into account, one can clearly notice the importance of Magnesium alloys. They also exhibit tempting properties, well enough for many engineering applications. However, they corrode fast. Thus, during the last two decades there have been extensive research efforts to improve their corrosion resistance. Developing new alloys or employing new coating systems are two examples of such efforts. But, these methods are rather costly and still the corrosion issue of these materials had not been solved. My research demonstrates that there are possible and cheap approaches to tackle this problem.

◆ **As a result of your research, you have been financially supported by different funding sources and also awarded a prestigious prize from the Royal Swedish Academy of Engineering Sciences. You were the youngest scientist ever who could receive this prize. Can you tell us about the latest prize you have received and what the usual criteria are for being qualified for such a prize?**

This prize is given once a year to a researcher in the field of engineering sciences who has done a cutting edge research that is extremely beneficial for society.

◆ **In what direction do you see your research going in the future? What is the next destination now that you managed to reach such good results in →**

your research on magnesium alloys? Will your future research be also about Magnesium alloys?

My results in the field of Magnesium alloys clearly demonstrate that it is possible to improve materials' properties by performing microstructural design. We have now targeted the properties of new materials. I will largely employ the concept that we discovered in our Magnesium research in my future research.

Magnesium alloys are part of my research. I am researching Aluminum alloys and also composites. And again, the goal is to discover relationships between Materials' microstructure and their properties.

◆ Mr. Esmaily, as an Iranian researcher working on projects in a foreign country, how do you find the experience? Could you also tell us about research strategies in the country where you live?

This is an interesting question, which could be discussed for more than one day. What I have seen and what I have experienced in Sweden is kind of different from many other countries. Research in Swedish universities and institutions are highly relevant to industries. Although basic research is also being conducted at universities, the industrial relevance of most projects defined for students (at all levels) are extremely high.

◆ Can you give us some examples?

Sure. A clear example (that is understandable for everyone) is asphalt/bitumen research. You know that the primary use of asphalt/bitumen is in road construction. Sweden has cold winters. In northern parts of the country, temperature could decrease down to -20°C during winter. You expect to see the asphalts destroyed (and need to be changed) by the end of each winter. However, the life expectancy of asphalts in Sweden is more than 15 years and in some parts more than 25 years! This is related to a research that was done more than 20 years ago, which resulted in development of (not expensive) asphalts that last much longer than what we use, for example in Iran. So, since then, there have been huge savings in money and resources only in the road construction sector. Instead these resources are dedicated to society health care and also to

new technologies, which can effectively promote economic growth. Note that this is only one example of how industrial relevance of research projects being conducted in universities is beneficial for society.

◆ This is very interesting. Dr. Esmaily, what about where you are conducting your research, Chalmers University of Technology, from this point of view?

There are different ranking systems, one is the CWTS Leiden Ranking which measures the collaborative research with industry among more than 700 larger universities around the globe. In this ranking, Chalmers attained the third place among all leading universities in the world in the year 2014. This clearly indicates that Sweden in general, and Chalmers in particular, has a clear vision/plan concerning such university-industry partnerships.

◆ Why Materials Science and Engineering? In what ways can materials science help the realization of humanity's dreams and imaginations in the future?

I am always asked by fresh university students as why Materials Science and Engineering is important, or is it a good subject to choose? Materials Science is a multidisciplinary field of engineering which is placed in the intersection of Chemistry, physics and mechanics. In some growing societies, Materials Science is sometimes under-appreciated, simply because EVERYTHING is made of materials. I believe, it is needed to step back and think what is in your cell phones, in your computers, and what is in all things you are using all the time. If you do that, you realize that it is a really special field. The point is that Materials Science is the backbone of every industrialized nation. This is because materials (metallic materials, polymers, ceramics as well as composites and semiconductors) are the backbone of technology. Materials scientists study various subjects including casting, welding, metal forming, heat treatment, nanotechnology, surface technologies, corrosion and oxidation, mining, and biomaterials. These are used in all engineering components, in cars, airplanes, laptops, mobile phones, medical devices, implants, etc.

Materials Science is of utmost importance for developed countries. I would like to give you some statistics to make this clearer. Only in the field of corrosion and oxidation, corrosion is tremendously costly for every society. In 2008, corrosion cost in Sweden was estimated to be 100 billion Swedish kronor. In the USA, the direct cost of metallic corrosion is \$276 billion on an annual basis. When taking indirect costs of corrosion into accounts the mentioned numbers are increased a lot. Regarding welding, again a figure from Sweden, a measure of the significance of welding for Swedish society has been provided by the Swedish Welding Commission, which estimates that one third of gross national product (GNP) has content associated with welding.

Another example is the lightweight technology that includes a wide range of materials, manufacturing processes, as well as joining/welding techniques. All the sectors are closely linked to Materials Science and Engineering, where the properties/performance of materials are studied in relation to processing parameters and to their microstructures.

So, it is now clearer than ever before that research in the field of Materials Science is crucial, if they are appropriately directed towards needs, problems and also novel technologies.

◆ You mentioned 'novel technologies'. With the current extensive advancements in science and technology, do you think building 'invisible' materials is feasible in the future?

Invisible materials are also linked to Materials Science. 'Invisibility' effect is strongly related to interactions between light and a material. Hence, when light hits the material, it is either absorbed or reflected. Therefore, we are able to see objects. Though, Materials scientists are now producing 'metamaterials' (using nanotechnology) that are able to reflect light in a 'wrong' way. They are, indeed, bending light waves around an object. In fact, it is now being possible to control the interaction between materials and light. Of course, this is something that comes soon, invisible laptops, invisible mobile phones etc. I can tell you that we will see more than invisible materials in the next decade |

34th **Fajr** جشنواره فیلم فجر
International
Film Festival

Tehran, April 20th - 25th 2016

سی و چهارمین جشنواره ی جهانی فیلم فجر

یکم تا ششم اردیبهشت ماه ۱۳۹۵ • تهران



Dossier

34th Tehran's Fajr International Film Festival a hit with local, foreign audience



From April 20th to April 25th, Tehran was host to the country's major global event in the motion picture industry, Fajr International Film Festival, which draw thousands of enthusiastic film lovers every day to Charsoou Cineplex.

In the first press conference of the 2016 FIFF held on March 8 in Tehran, Reza Mirkarimi (Festival Director), Amir Esfandiari (International Deputy of the festival), Alireza Shojanouri (Manager of Film Sessions and Meetings), Reza Kianian (Manager of Festival Palace), and Kayvan Kassirian (Head of Communication and Media) explained about different sections of the festival and then answered press questions.

The director of the FIFF said, "It's not possible to hold an international festival without primarily seeking national goals. We cannot achieve our goals if we neglect our national aims. We've been trying to present the Iranian cinema as a strategic commodity."

He went on to add, "we know that there will be some problems throughout. Some were not even sure whether the festival could be held or not. At first, I tried to set up targeted programs for the festival. Who is the audience? Why do we hold this festival? Are our programs in line with the taste of our audi-

ence? Is this program going to take us to where we want to get?"

Mirkarimi emphasized, "in order to achieve our goal, firstly, we had to study the previous editions of the festival. This happened throughout different meetings. On the other hand, the international section has been separated from the national section and it's been held within a different time span. It seems to me that holding these two sections separately seeks a particular purpose and more movie lovers and researchers will be attracted to this event. We have also been trying to eliminate the luxurious aspects of the festival."

"I daresay the Iranian cinema could be considered international," he said. "This makes our cinema superior to other cinemas, so we don't need to give any privileges to our guests. I had predicted that there would be no need to negotiate with the guests regarding their attendance and not surprisingly they've mostly welcomed our invitations."

The director of FIFF pointed out that in order for the festival to become more scientific and specialized, they have considered inviting particular guests and screening particular films.

"Festivals are organized and held by volunteer organizations worldwide. We've been trying to run such an or-

ganization so that volunteers could get involved in holding such festivals. We will design a website for students and anyone interested in this field. This is how we can have more contact with the young and also reduce the cost of holding a festival like Fajr," he added.

34th FIFF Poster

The poster of this year's edition of Fajr International Film Festival depicts Ezzatollah Entezami in the applauded movie, "The Cow" directed by Dariush Mehrjui.

About the poster, Mirkarimi said, "in many festivals worldwide, it is common to publicize a film festival using a frame with such national impact. Moreover, the portrayal of celebrated figures on such posters could be a way to pay tribute to these actors."

He went on to add, "on the other hand, "The Cow" is an internationally acclaimed film and has also been endorsed by Imam Khomeini. It is worth adding that, this film has paved the way for the Iranian post-revolution cinema."

Mirkarimi also explained about a new award in the festival, saying "we had Mustafa Akkad Award in previous editions of the festival which was allocated to religious and moral values in films. In this edition of the festival, Muhammad Al-Ameen Award will be dedicated to the winners which include religious and moral values for reflection of prophetic ethics and morality."

He added, "we'll have two instructors from talent finding campuses, who will hold their workshops beside Maziar Miri and Dr. Hosseini. Overall, we're going to have 170-200 international guests. We'll have reporters from the important international press as well."

About the Film Market he said, "the 19th Film Market will be held this year. The film market has undergone many difficulties throughout the years, but we've been trying to turn this market into a distinguished market in the region. The number of participants has gone up and more people have asked to take part in the Film Market."

Reza Mirkarimi maintained that in this →

edition of the festival, the focus was on reducing the number of sections; “3 Iranian and 12 international films will compete in Salvation Cinema Section. In every session, a short film, an animation, and a documentary will be screened.” He added.

The director of the festival stated that “we still have Asia and Islamic Countries Section but it is not competitive while there are several awards in the side sections. Golden and Silver Trophies will be granted to the winners including best director, best screenplay, best actor and actress, and best artistic achievements.”

According to Reza Kianian, Iranian acclaimed actor and Manager of the Festival Palace of 34th FIFF, this edition of FIFF has special plans for supporting environment.

“There would be no daily bulletin since we are not going to cut down a single tree for this event. Films and festival information is available on a mobile application for audiences. This edition of the Fajr will be a Green one. No flower would be cut as decoration for ceremonies,” said Kianian.

Jury Panel

The 2016 jury panel for Cinema Salvation Section (International Competition) comprised Majid Majidi and Nasser Taghvayi from Iran, Zeynep Atakan from Turkey, José Luis Guerin from Spain, Ivo Felt from Estonia, Tian Zhuangzhuang from China, and Emmanuel Prévost from France.

The jury panel for Eastern Vista Section (Asia and Islamic countries) comprised Golab Adineh from Iran, Sahraa Karimi from Iraq, Javed Jaffrey from India, Maria Teresa Cavina from Italy and Ismaël Ferroukhi from Morocco.

The jury panel for the Interfaith Section of the 34th edition of Fajr International Film Festival (FIFF) included Seyed Mostafa Mohaghegh Damad from Iran, Magali Van Reeth from France, and Stephen Foerner from Germany.

Retrospection of French Cinema Section

The 34th Fajr International Film Festival (FIFF) also hosted the Retrospection of French Cinema Section in which six highly-acclaimed French films were screened for the movie lovers. The films included ‘The Fear’ (2015), Damian Odoul, ‘Rabid Dogs’ (2015), Eric Hannozo, ‘The Little Prince’ (2015), Mark Osborne, ‘The Measure of a Man’ (2015), Stéphane Brizé, ‘The Clear Stream Affaire

(2014), Vincent Garenq, and Anton Chekhov 1890 (2015), Rene Feret.

Interesting facts

• ‘The Land of the Lion and the Sun’ directed by Russian filmmaker Vladimir Erofeev, depicting Iran as was 90 years ago, was screened for the first time in Iran at the 34th Fajr International Film Festival (FIFF). The 41-minute documentary directed by Vladimir Erofeev, is a 1928 Russian production. ‘The Land of the Lion and the Sun’ has recorded different moments of Iranian people’s social life, the country’s general ambience, women’s clothing in the year 1921, etc.

Sergei Kapterev, screenwriter, director, film scholar, and senior researcher at Moscow’s Institute of Cinema Art, was invited for the screening of ‘The Land of the Lion and the Sun’. Moreover, Mohammad Tahaminejad, Iranian expert and researcher, delivered a speech in the screening session of this documentary.

• Famous Hong Kong director Andrew Lau and Russian director Alexander Sokurov also attended the festival. Sokurov was present during the festival for the screening of his documentary ‘Francofonia’ (2015), which depicts the history of the Louvre during the Nazi occupation and offers a meditation on the meaning and timelessness of art. His documentary was screened in the ‘Special Screenings and Events’ of the festival. Sokurov also delivered a speech for students at the Cinema-Theatre Faculty.

• Nine film titles enjoyed their world premiere screening in the festival. The films include ‘I am a Teacher’ by Sergey Mokritskiy, ‘Habib Al Ard’ by Ramadan Khasrouh, ‘Solomon’ by Zaza Khalvashi, ‘The Martyr’ by Abdul Aleem Taher, ‘The Seed’ by Ifigeneia Kotsoni, and ‘Imaginary Border’.

Winners

International Competition (Cinema Salvation)

Golden Simorgh for Best Film (awarded to the director) + \$ 13,000 Cash Prize (Divided equally between producer and director) went to “Rams” directed by Hakonarson, produced by Grimar Jonsen from Oceland Denmark (Iceland)

Silver Simorgh for Best Director + \$ 3300 Cash Prize went to “Frenzy” directed by Emin Alper from Turkey, France and Qatar

Silver Simorgh for Best Actress + \$ 3300 Cash Prize went to “Breath” directed by Narges Abyar to Actress: Pantea Panahiha from Iran

Silver Simorgh for Best Actor + \$ 3300 Cash Prize went to “Rams” directed by Grimur Hakonarson to actors: Sigurour Sigurjonsson, and Theodor Juliusson

Silver Simorgh for Best Script + \$ 3300 Cash Prize went to “Amama (When a Tree Falls)” directed by and written by Asier Altuna Iza from Spain

Silver Simorgh for Special Jury Prize to Outstanding Artistic and Technical Contribution + \$ 3300 Cash Prize went to Arvand Directed by Pouria Azarbijani from Iran

Silver Simorgh for Best Short Film (Awarded to the director) + \$ 3300 Cash Prize went to “Seeing” directed by Soheil Amir Sharifi from Iran

Eastern Vista

Trophy for best Film (Awarded to the film director) + \$ 13,000 Cash Prize (Divided equally between producer and director) went to “Walnut Tree” directed by Yerlan Nurmukhambetov from Kazakhstan

Trophy for best Director + \$ 3300 Cash Prize went to “Madam Courage” directed by Merzak Allounache from Algeria and France

Special Mention went to “A157” directed by Behroz Nouranjipour from Iran

Interfaith

Interfaith Award Winner: “Zemnaco” directed by Mehdi Ghorbanpour from Iran

Interfaith Award Special Mention Diploma: “Hasti” directed by Kamal Parnak from Iran, “Love Marriage in Kabul” directed by Amin Palangi from Australia and Afghanistan

Muhammad Al-Ameen Section

Winners: “Love Marriage in Kabul” directed by Amin Palangi from Australia and Afghanistan Reflection of Prophetic Ethic and Morality Trophy + Diploma

Art and Experience

Winners: Trophy for Best Feature Film: “Dawn” directed by Laila Pakalnin from Latvia, Estonia, Poland

Trophy for Best Feature Film: “Figura” directed by Ms. Katarzyna Gondek from Poland, Belgium |

'Dawn' brings vintage Soviet cinema to Iran's silver screen

By: Marjohn Sheikhi



The 34th Fajr International Film Festival (FIFF) opened for the press on Tue., screening Laila Pakalnina's 'Dawn' (2015), a visually-arresting Soviet propaganda about lives lost in the whirlwind of political dictatorship and manipulations around the early 60s.

For a film industry as active and prolific as Iran's (nearly 100 features are produced in the country every year), having a well-organized and well-represented film festival is a must. For 34 years, Fajr Film Festival has been shouldering that responsibility. The first edition of the international section of the festival was held in 1982 and it did not take long for the festival to establish itself as a reputable film event. Since its foundation, the FIFF has played a significant part in promoting the Iranian cinema and each year, veteran directors and first-time filmmakers have tried their hands at shaping the motion picture industry in Iran.

For a film festival as old as this, there is always high expectations, high anticipation, and high enthusiasm. There has always been a high turnout for the festival, too, from Tehran audiences who seek out new Iranian film titles that have probably been good enough to have gotten into the screening list. But the international section of the festival was separated in 2014 and there were concerns that not many people would show up to watch foreign titles. The concerns were apparently unfounded. According to the festival's head

of Public Relations, Mr. Kayvan Kassirian, nearly 7,000 people have registered for the FIFF this year to watch the international films handpicked by the festival's director, Mr. Mirkarimi. Taking a look at the 'cinematicket' website to book tickets for today's screening films revealed that almost all of them have already been sold out. It seemed the audience were more enthusiastic to watch Mark Osborne's 'The Little Prince', a 2015 successful animation that has won César Award for Best Animated Film, as even the 11 AM show time for Thursday was sold out within the first hours selling tickets opened.

The festival, however, experienced its first unofficial opening day on Tuesday for the media people, by screening four films that included 'Ice and the Sky' by Luc Jacquet, 'Frenzy' by Emin Alper, 'The Magic Mountain' by Anca Damian, and 'Dawn' by Laila Pakalnina. I went to watch the Latvian production, 'Dawn' ('Ausma'), which according to the synopsis, was going to challenge our views on who is in the right and who is in the wrong, and which had won Best Cinematography in Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival.

This tragicomedy monochrome drama from the Latvian writer-director Laila Pakalnina was so visually beautiful that you could not help but feel awe at every smooth transition from one magical scene to another. There was not much dialogue, which marks a huge difference from typical Iranian films that build characters and shape the relationships between them

mostly through lengthy lines stacked with oftentimes quotable words. But 'Dawn' was not built on silence either; on the contrary, the movie was brimming with sounds of maniac laughter, tolling bells, national anthems, shrieking babies, barking dogs and crackling chicken. For the most part, the camera moves horizontally, but this is not a linear narrative at all. For one thing, there seems to be a lot going on, but for another, it sometimes become hard to decide what is exactly going on. A satirical take on a Soviet legendary figure, Pavlik Morozov, who was murdered by his own family after betraying his anti-Communist father to the authorities, the movie may at times lose the focus of its audience who are not conversant with Soviet history. Although the themes of political propaganda, family betrayals, death and hope for a brighter future, when infused with satire and metaphor, are universally understood. The elements of absurd are artistically entwined with masked tragedy, in a way that death touches the characters that seem to be removed from it, as Karlis, the farm's political boss, would say proudly: "we Bolsheviks never cry."

There is the general idea that films are a window to another country, and that they will give you an insight into that country's culture and history within the compact duration of one or two hours. International film festivals, then, present that golden opportunity to the interested audiences to have a taste of the goings-on beyond their borders.

Reza Mirkarimi, speaking on the opening day of the 34th FIFF on Wednesday, said the screening programs will satisfy every cinematic tastes; "one could actually say there is a panorama of diverse styles, forms and geography in the festival, prominent films from different countries as well as rarely-seen productions, all will be screened for the audience," he said.

'Dawn' is a co-production of Latvia and Poland with an international crew: script and direction: Laila Pakalnina, camera: Wojciech Staron (Poland), art direction: Jurgis Krasons. Cast: Vilis Daudziņš, Antons Grauds, Andris Keišs, Liene Šmukste.

'Dawn' won the 34th FIFF's Trophy for Best Feature Film in Art and Experience Section |

By: Marjohn Sheikhi

'Rams' by Icelandic filmmaker Grimur Hakonarson's, a beautiful humanistic drama about a broken sibling relationship, was opened to an excited Iranian audience in the 34th Tehran's FIFF.

I admit; I actually went to watch the Icelandic drama film 'Rams' in the 34th Fajr International Film Festival for one reason: Iceland. The Nordic island has always held a strange fascination for me, and I always looked upon it as a place as far different from my hometown as it could possibly get. The whole country's population is about 300,000, while Tehran alone is home to a population of around 9 million in the city and 16 million in the wider metropolitan area. You could say, I love peace and quiet, a quality that abounded in Grimur Hakonarson's heartwarming, humanistic drama.

Breathtaking Nordic landscapes and a deeply-rooted rural culture were brought to life with the power of Sturla Brandth Grøvlen's cinematography, perfect production design by Bjarni Massi and Atli Örvarsson's film scores that felt like thousands of feathers softly caressing your soul. 'Rams' tells the story of two estranged brothers living in separate but neighboring houses in a remote farming valley, who have not spoken to each other for 40 years. From the point of view of a traditional Iranian audience, who prioritizes family ties above all else, this seems to be quite a feat, at times even incomprehensible. How can two brothers feel so alienated from one another for such a long time? Gummi (Sigurdur Sigurjonsson) and older brother Kiddi (Theodor Juliusson) only spare passing glances at one other as they participate in a valley-wide competition for best ram. But their distanced relationship is soon to be challenged. When Kiddi's flock shows signs of scrapie (BSE), an incurable and highly contagious virus that attacks the brain and spinal cord, the veterinary authorities order the slaughter of all sheep in the valley. For these two brothers who have maintained an emotional tie with their sheep, the decree comes as a devastating blow. And as the story unfolds in its magical, compelling way, with its strange comic moments that startle a laugh out of you (the audience cooed



Icelandic film 'Rams' a hit with Iranian audience

every time a smart sheep dog carried messages between the two brothers, or when a veterinary official opened the door to investigate the case of some surviving sheep gathered outside only to be hit in the face with a shovel and lose consciousness, you couldn't help but burst into surprise laughter), you start to lose yourself in the quiet, heart-rending narrative as shown through the kind, somber eyes of Gummi, as played by one of Iceland's best actors. They lose the sheep but find each other in a way that no one had predicted. 'Rams' may, at first glance, have nothing in common with an urban citizen such as the audience that had gathered on Thursday at Charsou Cineplex to watch one of titles in the main competition section of the 34th FIFF, but it did resonate with almost everyone there.

"The story is rather common in Iceland and probably in many other places, as well," says Bjarni Massi after the screening of the film. "You can find everywhere people who are living next to each other but haven't spoken to each other for years, sometimes for no particular reason at all. But then, something happens which brings these people back together, as it unites them to fight for what they so deeply care for. And in my opinion, that's the beauty of

this film and life."

Massi tells us about the connection between the two brothers that does not need words to be maintained; "they don't speak to each other, but at the same time they know what the other is thinking. They are connected in such a way that it takes nothing to bring them back together when they have to. This connection is shared between family members no matter where on earth. South or north, east or west, when it comes down to it, we are all the same and it really doesn't matter where we live."

Massi takes the similarity even further as he makes a comparison between 'Rams' and 'The Cow', a 1969 Iranian film directed by Dariush Mehrjui, which also features on the poster of this year's Fajr festival.

"I watched 'The Cow' and found many similar themes running through the movie, like the way he treated his cow, and the relationship between a human and an animal which runs deeper and connects the two on a very intimate and emotional level," he says. "There was also another similar point about 'The Cow', that is its being credited with beginning the Iranian New Wave, and the fact that it was produced with a very close, small group. We did the same →

with 'Rams', a film produced on a small budget and with a small group of people who closely knew one another."

Massi also tells us about two 'crazy' things that happened during the production; "we decided to film the first part of the film which occurs in winter in the northern part of Iceland with its long winters and constant snow. We went there in January and prepared to shoot when it started to rain and all the snow just disappeared! It was crazy!"

They had to come back a month later when the snow had started to fall again, but "this time there was a big eruption under a glacier. It could actually start a big flood down the valley or the wind could blow the plum of ash toward us which could be very dangerous. But this time, we kept going and finished the film. At night, we would sit in the kitchen and watch the mountain out of the window."

"Thankfully no one got hurt," he is quick to add.

"So based on your luck, we should probably expect a volcano eruption outside the theater once we step out," jokes Reza Kianian, an acclaimed Iranian actor and also head of the festival palace.

There was no eruption though, not of a volcanic kind anyway. People left the theater late at night, but all in a good mood. 'Rams' had managed to give the audience something to enjoy and think deeply about. My first experience with an Icelandic film did not disappoint.

'Rams' (Icelandic: *Hrútar*) a 2015 Icelandic drama film written and directed by Grímur Hákonarson was screened in the 34th FIFF on April 21 and 24. The film has won the Un Certain Regard Prize for 2015, the Special Jury Award at the 2015 Transilvania International Film Festival, and the Audience Award at the Tromsø International Film Festival in 2016.

'Rams' won the 34th FIFF's Golden Simorgh for Best Film and Silver Simorgh for Best Actor |

Russian filmmaker Alexander Sokurov:

Film festivals bring to light senselessness of war



Interview by Marjohn Sheikhi

Russia's most distinguished filmmaker Alexander Sokurov believes that film festivals, with their emphasis on shared humanistic and cultural values, shed further light on the senselessness of war.

I never thought I would have one day met Russia's most distinguished living filmmaker in person. But thanks to Fajr International Film Festival currently underway at Charsou Cineplex in central Tehran, I did get a chance to talk to Alexander Sokurov, a Golden Lion winner at Venice for his film 'Faust' (2011), and the director of a one-shot feature film Russian Ark (2002) which was supported by Martin Scorsese. He is also known for his emotional drama 'Mother and Son' (1997) which has brought tears to many eyes through its beautiful portrayal of profound emotional and spiritual ties between an old, dying mother and her young son. I found him at one of the booths reserved for interviews, already deep in conversation with another correspondent, conducted via a translator.

The Russian filmmaker talked about 'Mother and Son', and his special attention to 'ethics' in making a movie; "if you want to make an artistic film, you should

take care that it be something apart from the ordinary life," said Sokurov among reporters at Charous Cineplex. "In every part of the world, the films made about young people are very close to reality, but this realism does not completely answer the existing issues. One should seek the solution in aestheticism. The filmmaker should look for new ideas and pictures to better express his/her intention, and take a step back from presenting a picture of the real life on the screen."

This comes from the director who is known for his extensive use of poetic imagery and spiritual allusions. I find it to be very good advice. The bulk of Iranian cinema is social realism, and the audience seem to be reacting favorably to the films that come the closest to depicting the real life. The more real and lifelike the film and characters, the more praise the audience would lavish on the filmmaker. But cinema should be first and foremost a mode of artistic expression, not a 'mirror held up to nature.'

"If the modern cinema does not pay attention to fine art and subtle aesthetics, it fails to bring anything new to the world," he stressed.

Sokurov once called himself more of a literary person than a cinematographic person, and perhaps it is his vast inter-

est in the world of literature that allows him to prioritize aesthetics over anything else. And if his successful career as a filmmaker is anything to go by, this has worked greatly to his advantage.

In the flurry of activities and commotions surrounding us, I managed to spark a short conversation with the leading director who thinks film festivals present a golden opportunity to bring into light the glaring fact that humanistic and cultural values are shared across borders and under this brilliant light, all wars are rendered senseless, because 'how crazy is that, to war against yourself?'

◆ **Mr. Sakurov, what do you think about the role of cinema in dissolving the barriers of language and culture?**

Cinema itself is the culture and language, with no barriers between them. These are what the cinema consists of. (Points to a mug of coffee on the table) this is coffee but it consists of water, sugar and coffee, so the cinema is the same. It's made of culture and language, besides many other components that shape it into what it is. In essence, language is more than language; it encompasses intonations, emotions, communication, and education.

◆ **So putting that question into the context of international film festivals, how do you see their role in introducing a nation's culture to an audience that is either uninformed or misinformed about it?**

That depends a lot on the auteur. If the auteur sticks to the humanistic values in his works, sure, the film can lend

a lot to giving an accurate picture of a nation's culture to outside viewers. Because where else [could filmmakers do that] if not in film festivals? Such a festival says we have more humanistic and cultural commonalities than whatever divides us. The existing of such a festival says that the war is senseless because we are warring against the same thing that we are also a part of. And isn't it crazy? To war against yourself? In one trench, there are people who are shooting others in another trench, merely because somebody told them to shoot. But who is this somebody that pities people of the same humanistic values against one another?

◆ **Which three films would you recommend to an Iranian audience who knows nothing of Russia and wants to watch some cinema to learn about it?**

Well It's very complicated. We have a lot of good movies in Russia. I would recommend Iranian audience to watch 'Ballad of a Soldier' (Grigory Chukhray, 1959), or 'The Asthenic Syndrome' (1989) by Kira Muratova. It is actually easier for me to pick something from the international cinema than our national cinema, because in the national cinema, there are inner motivations and some national codes that a foreigner cannot understand. For example, I laugh at the 'Ballad of a Soldier' but you will see the movie and ask me what was that? (laughs)

◆ **What about your own top three favorite films?**

I like 'Man of Aran' (1934) by Amer-

ican filmmaker Robert Flaherty, 'Strike' (1925) by Russian auteur Sergei Eisenstein and 'Fighting Soldiers' by Japanese filmmaker Fumio Kamei, which was made in the 40s.

◆ **And what of Iranian movies? Do you have any favorites?**

I do have several favorites, but I won't say what they are (laughs). Because I like Iranian cinematography as it is, as a whole. I don't want to name any specific film as Iranian cinema is something united in my head. I actually know one of the Iranian filmmakers on a personal level but he doesn't like me (laughs).

◆ **And what would you say are the main differences in themes and style between Iranian and Russian movies?**

We have more diversity of genres, and no religious restrictions. And we have a wider historical past. We also keep on thinking that we need more young filmmakers in the Russian film industry, and this is a problem that I don't think exists in Iran.

The 34th Fajr International Film Festival is currently underway at Charsou Complex, Tehran, and will run until April 25, 2016.

Sokurov is participating in the 34th FIFF with his new feature, Francofonia (2015), which will be screened on Sunday and Monday at Charsou Cineplex. Coproduced by the Louvre, this documentary dramatic feature is preoccupied with the Louvre during the Second World War |





Interview by Marjohn Sheikhi

In an exclusive interview with MNA, Iran's Head of Cinema Organization Hojatollah Ayoubi highlighted the role and impact of Iranian cinema, saying it is an indispensable part of the global cinematic trend.

The 34th Fajr International Film Festival is currently underway at Charous Cineplex in the central part of Tehran. On this occasion, Mehr News Agency conducted an exclusive interview with Iran's Head of Cinema Organization Hojatollah Ayoubi and asked his opinion about the current standing of Iranian cinema and its impact on shaping the global cinematic trend.

◆ How do you describe the current standing of Iranian cinema on the global scene? How do you think it is perceived globally and how much impact does it have on shaping the cinematic trend?

I think the world cinema would suffer a great loss without Iranian cinema. Iranian cinema is indispensable, since it offers a quite different view of the things and has a different voice; despite all the restrictions and shortcomings it suffers, Iranian cinema has found a great place in the world cinema. Perhaps it is why no international film festival would feel complete without including a film from Iran in their screening programs. It has an effect on the world which parallels the impact of its monumental poetry and literature on world literature. The literature of the world seems lacking an important part without Iran's brilliant literature. This is true of Iranian cinema as well.

◆ Do you think cinema has a role in dissolving barriers of language and culture?

Definitely it does. Cinema is the shrill voice of nations in a time when picture has

Head of Iran's Cinema Org.: World cinema would suffer great loss without Iranian cinema

dominated over other modes of communication. We live in a world where people have been increasingly suspicious of things and would only believe things shown to them in pictures. They have been relying on their visual senses to communicate with their outside world. Cinema is a language of pictures and images and has now removed the geographical and political borders to connect peoples of different nations through its emotional content. It has helped far-flung communities to come to know people for example in New York City or a remote village in western Iran. Cinema has given birth to a mode of mutual understanding.

◆ And how do you assess the role and impact of international film festivals in introducing a nation's culture, especially Iran's, to an audience that knows little or is generally misinformed about it?

During past 3 or 4 decades, huge amount of money had been invested in efforts to provide the world an image of Iran that is drastically different to its reality, while our cinema opened a window to the reality which was a clear and true image of the country. In the difficult years of the past, Iran had remained a question mark, a complete mystery, for [foreign] audience. Iran's cinema repaired this image and removed the question mark at least to some extent.

◆ In recent years, certain Iranian movies such as Abbas Rafei's 'Oblivion Season' or Hadi Mohaghegh's 'Mamiro' have been very successful in international film festivals. What components do you think an Iranian movie should have in order to increase its chances in winning the accolade in international film festivals?

Iran's cinema has been actively engaged in festivals overseas: 20-50 international awards and more than 1,000 cases of participation annually; such figures propelled Iran to an enviable place in terms of participation in world film festivals. However, what has been seen as lacking, is having a more prominent presence in world film markets. To secure access to global arena, I believe, we have a long way to go. We should improve our distribution sector;

we should help an atmosphere dominate by which our films would find an easy path to world markets, almost a short-cut.

◆ To what genres do you think Iranian audiences react favorably? And have the screening programs of the 34th FIFF been chosen with their tastes in mind?

To be honest, I have invested trust upon Mr. Mirkarimi's artistic tastes who has actually watched the films. I am only aware of the general facts about the screening programs and based on that, I think the arrangement and selection of the movies has sought to present cinema of a specific part of regions, especially Asia and generally the Far East to its audiences.

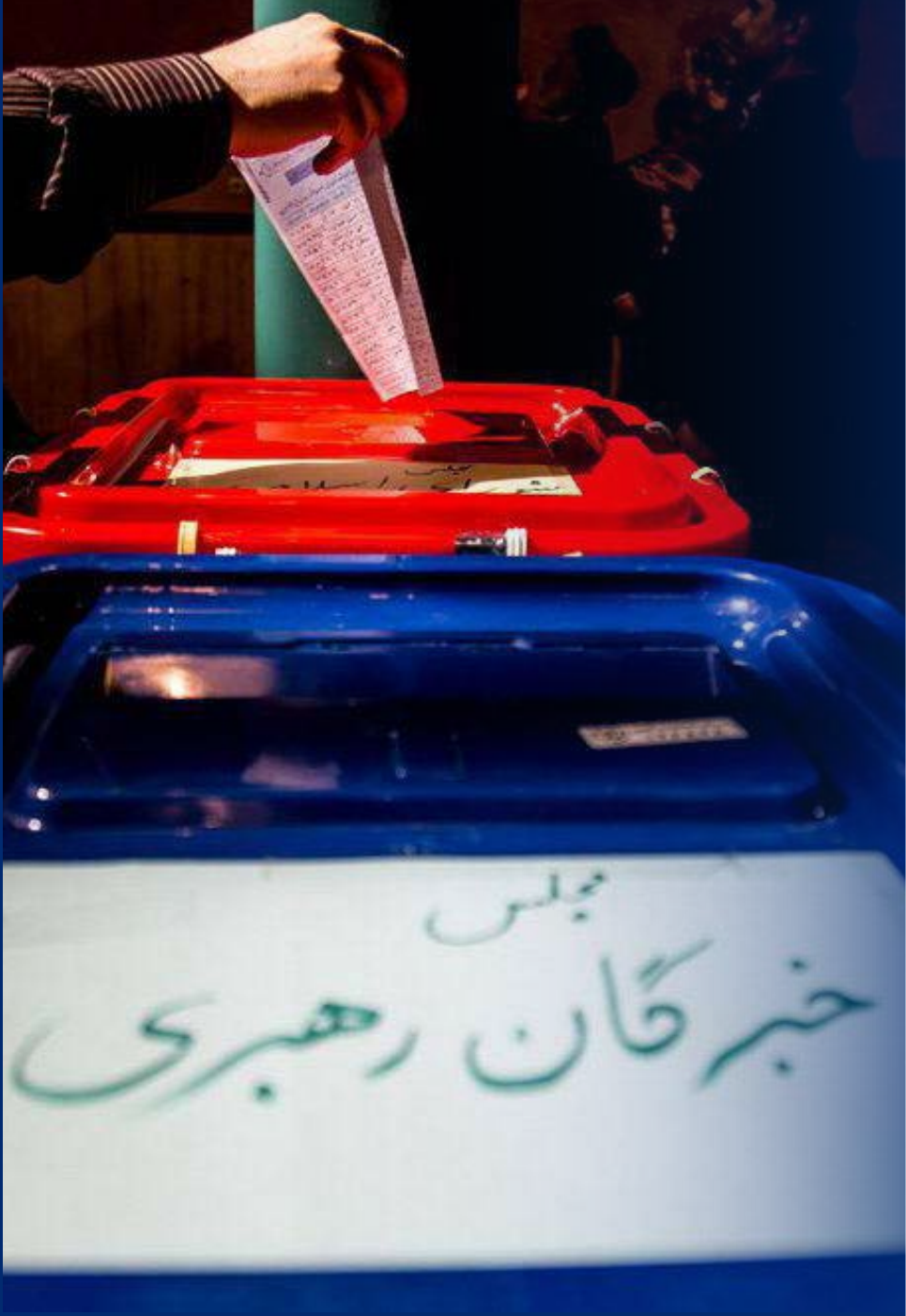
◆ And how would you describe the cinematic taste of Iranian audience?

Iranian audience have a taste for socially strong and moving films of Iranian cinema – realistic drama if you will, and the titles produced of this genre in recent past all seem to have caught the eye of the cinema goers. Nevertheless, high-quality and well-made comedies also have their own audience among the population of cinema-goers.

◆ In what ways do you think the 34th FIFF is different from its previous editions, from a technical, political or social standpoint?

It is natural for a festival to improve itself in the next edition. New ideas are introduced, and the projects that have started in the previous years, get a chance to be completed in the next edition. In terms of structural adjustments, we have had positive changes in bringing in the Fans Club, Darolfunun (a talent campus), and we also extended training workshops. I hope these changes will contribute to the overall evolution of the festival.

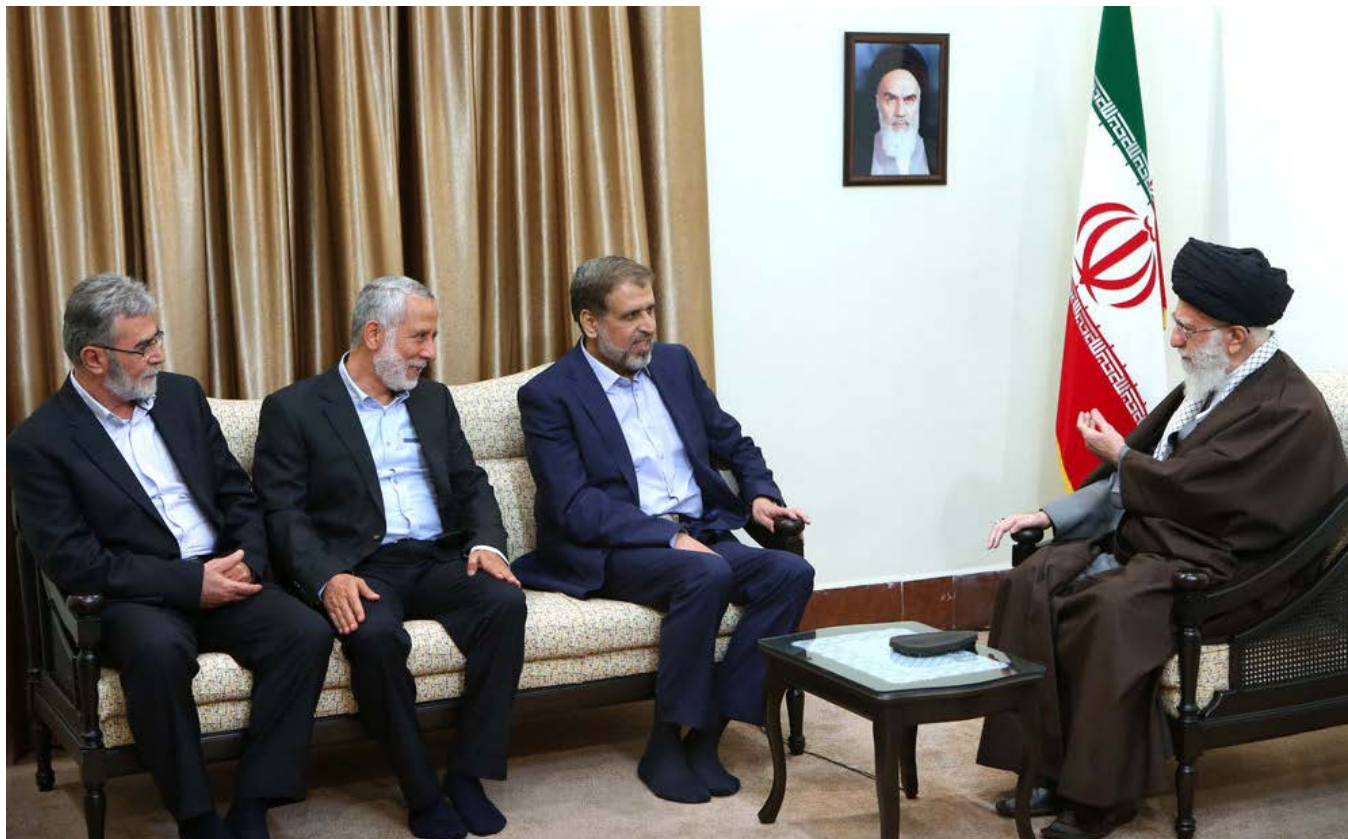
Hojatollah Ayoubi, born 1963, is the current head of Iran's Cinema Organization, as well as the President of ECO Cultural Institute in Tehran since 2009. He has a PhD in Political Science from the University of Lyon 2 in France. He had also held the position of Iran's cultural attaché in Paris |



News in Vision



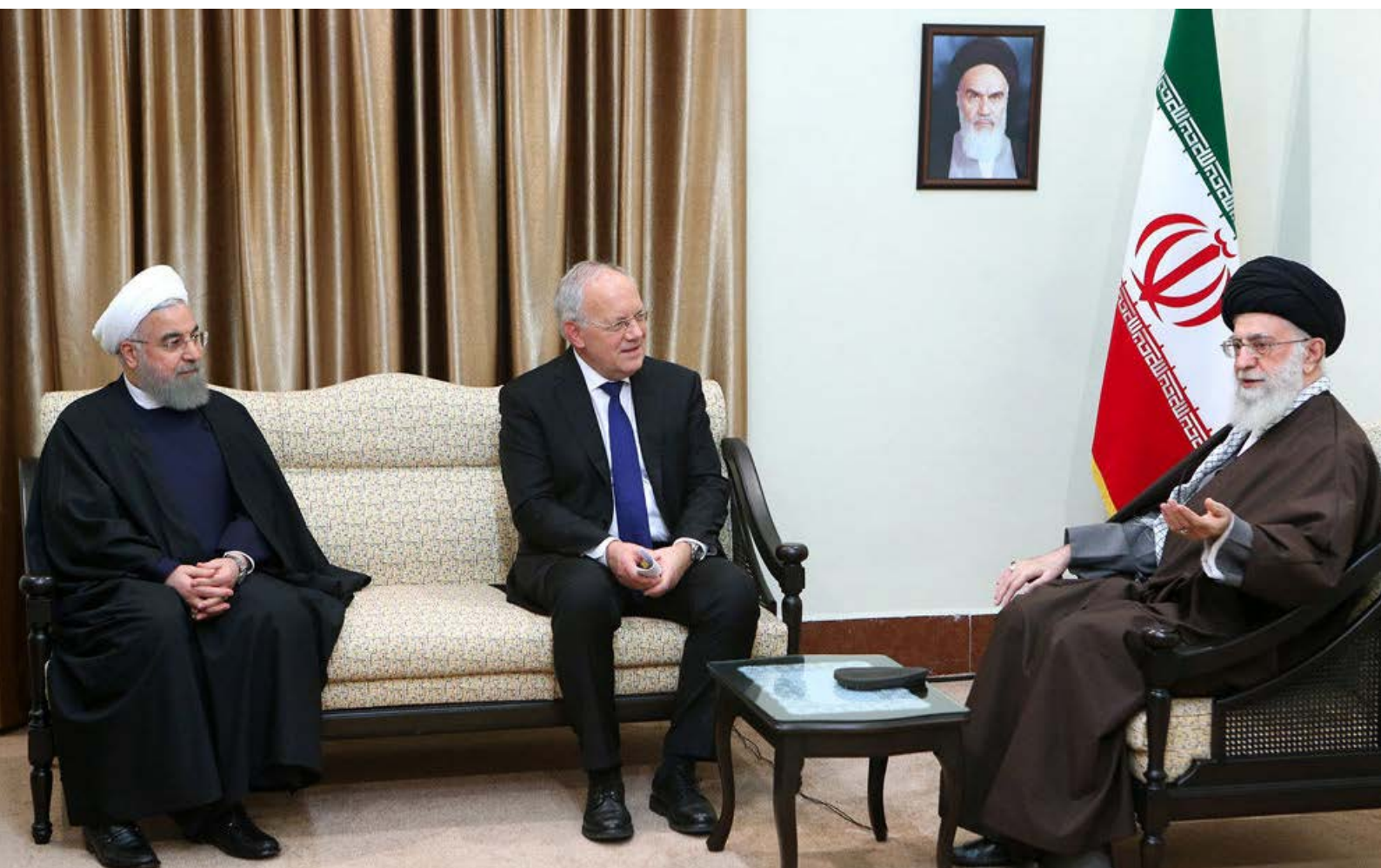
Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei received South Korean President Park and her delegation on May 3.



Leader of the Islamic Revolution received on May 1 the leader of Palestinian Islamic Jihad Ramadan Abdullah Mohammad Shalah.



Leader of the Islamic Revolution met with President of South Africa Jacob Zuma on April 24.



On Feb. 27, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei received the visiting President of Switzerland Johann Schneider-Amman in Tehran.

On April 13, Leader of Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Khamenei received Matteo Renzi, Italian Prime Minister, who was visiting Tehran for economic reasons.



Leader of the Islamic Revolution ayatollah Khamenei received on May 5 a number of country's officials, ambassadors of Islamic countries and various people from all walks of life on the occasion of Eid of Mab'ath or Ascension.

Leader of Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Khamenei, President Hassan Rouhani and Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif casted their votes on early hours of the twin elections in Tehran on Feb. 26.





Leader of Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Khamenei, President Hassan Rouhani and Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif casted their votes on early hours of the twin elections in Tehran on Feb. 26.



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



Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, President of Croatia, arrived in Tehran on May 17 for a three-day visit.



The Iranian team captured the Greco-Roman World Cup title for the fifth time in seven years after defeating rivals Russia in the final on May 20.

International Conference in Solidarity with Aqsa was held on May 15, attended by Iran's Judiciary Chief Sadeqh Amoli Larijani and Dr. Zahra Mostafavi as secretary-general of union of NGOs to defend Palestine in Tehran.



“Conference on JCPOA and Resistance Economy, Opportunities and Capacities” was held on May 14 attended by Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, AEIOI Head Ali Akbar Salehi, Deputy Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi and a number of ambassadors and representatives of Iranian officials in the Foreign Ministry.

The stargazers and astronomers in Iran turned their eyes to the sky on May 9 for a chance to catch a rare sight of Mercury passing in front of the Sun.



First Joint Symposium of Iran-Japan on “Women, Peace and Sustainable Development” was held on May 9 in Tehran.



Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif met and conferred with Turkmenistan's Minister of Foreign Affairs Raşit Öwezgeldiyewiç Meredow on May 7 in Tehran.



The 29th Tehran International Book Fair with Russia as guest of honor was held from May 4 to 14, 2016 at the Shahr-e Aftab International Exhibition Complex.

Iran-Germany Joint Economic Commission's meeting was held May 3, for the first time after 15 years. German Deputy Economy Minister Uwe Beckmeyer was present in Iran in the absence of German Economy Minister Sigmar Gabriel.



President of the Senate of Belgium Christine Defraigne and her accompanying delegation who were visiting Iran for talks on expansion of bilateral parliamentary relations, met with Iran's President Rouhani here on April 30.

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani attended the 3rd Iran Automotive Industry International Conference to unveil a new auto industry achievement here on March 1.





Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini attended a joint press conference in Brussels on Feb. 16.

The first Airbus A350 had a symbolic landing at Mehrabad Airport on Feb. 20 to be presented for the Iranian side following the agreement between Iran and Europe's Airbus to buy 16 A350 jets.





Iranian President Hassan Rouhani met with Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs Lazar Comanescu on March 1.



Top diplomats from Iran, Russia and Azerbaijan held their first trilateral meeting in the Azeri capital of Baku on April 8, exchanging views about a range of issues, including ways to settle the ongoing crisis in the Nagorno-Karabakh region.



A massive celebration attended by public figures and people from all walks of life marked the Islamic Republic National Day here in Tehran on April 1.



Iran's Mohammad Javad Zarif met with his Australian counterpart Ms. Julie Bishop on his tour of Australia on March 16.