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From the Editor's Desk

I have spent the last thirty years of my life in the United States. Sometimes I still find myself the missing link of the late Charles Darwin's. Why? Because my first 10 years in the States were spent educating, or at least trying to educate Americans on what it means to be Iranian and the geographical location of Iran.

In the early seventies, while in the operating room, an American born physician asked me this question, "is King Hussein of Jordan the Shah of Iran?" I clenched my teeth in anger and responded, "is Charles De Gaul of France the President of the United States?" Acknowledging the ignorance of her question, she apologized. Feeling a necessity to continue with the apology she explained that individuals like her, though highly educated did not receive much education on the geography, history and social and cultural structure of countries in the Middle East or on what continent they rest.

The eighties arrived and my dream to have Americans know all about Iran became a reality. Unfortunately, not in the way I had wished and not in the way the people of Iran deserved. Instead Iran was seen as a terrorist country, the center of terrorism and it's people terrorists and murderers. These sentiments that surfaced as a result of events, which occurred over a decade ago, remain in the hearts of non Persians, of so-called "free" and "civilized" countries. An example of this is evidenced in the treatment of Iranian Americans, holding American passports, passing through immigration. Having a birth place of Iran coupled with an Iranian last name immediately changes the personality of the officer. With rudeness they search your luggage hoping to find narcotics, guns or other weapons. Disappointed not to find anything, with continued rudeness they pass you through.

These characteristics that now describe Iranians had no familiarity to me as a child. Everything I heard about Iranians, from my parents, teachers, radio, television and books described Iran and its people as generous, loving, warm and naive to evils that surrounded us. It was not until I ventured from the tranquility of my hometown, which I learned about the

existence of another world. Reflecting back onto my summers as a child, I remember traveling from my hometown Goutchan, by donkey, horse or carriage to the village. Along the way we would often pass the state patrol (gendarm) driving carriages containing swollen dead bodies. I remember the stench of death and also remember the crowds of people that would follow the carriage to the center of town. Its journey ended in front of the state police station (gendarmerie). The colonel would appear. His shoulders were decorated with gold plated rank buttons, three on each side. On his chest were more medals, all representing his "bravery," Honors bestowed on him for his ridding the town of petty thieves and militants, yet he never left his office. Instead he, from behind his desk, protected from the walls that surrounded him, simply gave the orders to execute. To the people he was an example of power. The colonel would lecture the crowd. Pointing at the bodies he would say, "this is the punishment to a thief and militant, for civil disobedience." He would hold his audience captive for more than two hours. The smell of death would become stronger, the crowd would cover their noses to avoid the stench but were afraid to leave.

On one occasion I was made to watch this spectacle. I listened for a short time and then ran away in fear and anger. Crying I would ask myself who were the real criminals, the militants and petty thieves or those who murdered (executed) them? I never came up with an answer and to this it day still continues to make me suffer emotionally.

Recently, I picked up a Persian magazine published in Germany. This magazine gives you the statistics on recent executions and dismembering of Iranians by the Iranian government. The most recent issue had a chilling effect. On the cover in bold print were the details of the public execution in Teheran of the "Night Owl," (noted for the killing of a number of women). Victim's families were limousined to the execution sites; more than 50,000 people from town rushed to secure a proper viewing space; vendors sold food to the spectators in the early hours of the morning while waiting for the execution. Inside the magazine contained detailed articles on the dismemberment of

human beings and the statistics surrounding these events.

I was not sure of the purpose of this story. Why it made the cover of this magazine perplexed me even more. Perhaps it was simply to inform the readers of the recent executions and punishments by the government. I am left uncomfortable reading headlines and the attraction of 50,000 people at three and four in the morning to witness a murder clothed in the word "execution." Again I am forced to ask myself the same question I asked more than 40 years ago "who is the criminal" and are "we" who cry out for justice like the "criminal?" Why would people want to engage in this spectacle and furthermore why would they want their children to witness this violence. It is sure to remain in their memories forever.

The attitude of Iranians displayed in this article is again so far from the true Iranian. At least the Iranians I remember as a child. These are not the warm loving people I knew. Those people would never have taken pleasure in witnessing the stoning of a young man and woman whose only crime was love. This concept sends a chill through my body and causes my heart and soul to cry in pain. I wipe the tear from my eye with the back of my hand and decide that I should remain silent and say nothing.

Shahrooz Ghahramani



David Sorenson - David Sorenson

From Exotic to Demonic Images of the Iranians in the U.S. Media

by: *Yahya R. Kamalipour, PhD*

An unfamiliar scene is like the baby's world, "one great, blooming, buzzing confusion."

Walter Lippmann, 1922

Introduction:

Indeed, when it comes to the Middle East, it seems that most Americans, perhaps unknowingly and unintentionally, perceive the entire region and its people as "one great, blooming, buzzing, confusion," a dangerous place.

Having been disturbed by the stereotyping not only of Iranians, but of other ethnic groups, for the past several years, I have written and lectured about image and perception vis-a-vis representation of the Middle East, Islam, and particularly of Iran. In fact, my recent book, *The U.S. Media and the Middle East: Image and Perception* (Praeger, 1997; Greenwood, 1995), attempts to explore some of the disturbing ramifications of portrayals of the Middle East by the U.S. media. Of the 16 chapters, written by 22 scholars, five are specifically about Iran and Islam. From this perspective, in this essay, I will briefly illustrate the ways in which Iranians are portrayed by the U.S. media, mainly through motion pictures, and discuss some of the consequences of this often neglected or overlooked matter.

Since the 1979 Iranian Revolution that resulted in the overthrow of the Pahlavi regime, the establishment of an Islamic Republic, and the hostage-crisis, Iranians in Diaspora, particularly those of us residing in the U.S., have been singled out for negative stereotyping by the U.S. media and Hollywood.

In contemporary societies, mass media, particularly the visual media, are extremely powerful. In fact, their collective power surpasses family, religious, educational, and other traditional institutions. According to Jane Campbell (1997), "while teachers and professors struggle to educate themselves and their students about the worlds beyond... they also must face the fact that the daily barrage of images and information emerging from the media may not only underscore but may also counter, reverse, and overturn the enlightenment gained inside the classroom" (p. 178). In this so-called "Information Age," the U.S. media play a powerful and decisive role in the enhancement or destruction of images of other peoples, places, religions, and nations of the worlds. For the first time in human history, the first stories that children hear are told by television not by parents. George Gerbner (1996) writes: "A child today is born into a home in which television is on an average of over seven hours a day. For the first time in human history, most of the stories about people, life, and values are told not by parents, schools, churches, or others in the community who have something to tell but by distant conglomerates that have something to sell" (pp. 28-29).

It is within such a cultural milieu that I would like to share a few disturbing instances of U.S. media portrayals of the Iranians, **Iranians in America:**

First, let me provide a brief profile of the Iranian-

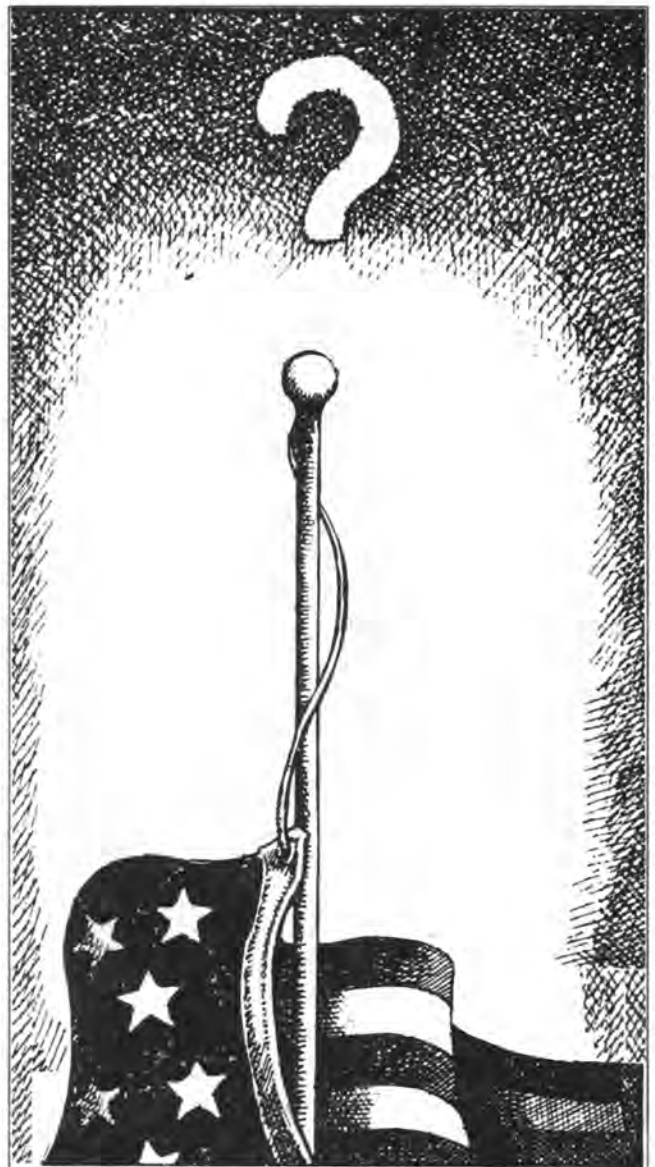
American community in the United States. According to official 1990-91 estimates, reported by the U.S. Census Bureau, over 220,000 Iranians reside in the U.S. However, unofficial estimates suggest that there are over 200,000 Iranians in Los Angeles, California, alone, and, overall, there are nearly 1,000,000 Iranians (first and second generations) in the U.S. According to the Census Bureau, Iranians in America are richer, better educated, and have a lower criminal record than other Americans. Furthermore, proportionally, Iranians have six times as many doctoral degrees as Americans. The average Iranian family in the U.S. is almost 20% richer than the average American household. About 29% of all workers in America hold blue collar jobs. But only 12% of Iranian-Americans hold such jobs (Iranian richer..., 1994). Although successful and contributing Iranians can be cited in practically every profession in the U.S., I single out Dr. Jamshid Ghajar of the Aitken Neuroscience Institute in New York, whose pioneering surgical procedure on head injuries has resulted in worldwide media coverage, as just one example. In fact, *Nova*, a highly respected television series on the American Public Broadcasting System, featured Dr. Ghajar's work in a one-hour episode called "Coma." Nonetheless, during the entire program, there was no mention of him being Iranian!

The Iranians in general and the Iranian-American youth in particular, should take pride in having so many excellent Iranian role models in the U.S. Furthermore, they should be proud of their immensely rich cultural heritage. The problem, for the Iranians, particularly the second generation, is that what they and their American friends or schoolmates are most often familiar with are the negative stereotypical images of the Iranians in the media. In such a milieu, it is common for many Iranians, especially the youth, to reject their own self-identity and heritage in an attempt to "fit in" or to avoid being ridiculed by their friends.

Pre-Revolution Images:

Prior to the Iranian Revolution of 1979, Americans knew very little, if anything, about Iran. If asked, they could not even place Iran on the world map. However, a few had heard of an exotic, faraway, fairy tale land, called Persia. (In fact, many still do not equate Iran with Persia). Persia was also associated with Persian Cats, Persian Rugs, Persian Pistachios, Persian princes, and Persian Melons. Then, and even now, most Americans did not know that Iran is a non-Arab country and that Iranians speak in Persian or Farsi, not Arabic. Prior to 1979, they had not even heard the word "Ayatollah" or "Shi'e Moslems."

Ironically, for the Iranians who resided in the U.S. prior to 1979, that absence of a universal image, was a blessing. By this I mean that they could define themselves individually because they were not yet typecast or stereotyped by the mass media. This is no longer true. In the past two decades, Iranians not only have acquired a negative image but, based on a recent national survey, have been mentioned as one of the most hated nationalities in the U.S.



Post Revolution Images:

The 1979 Revolution, and particularly the hostage crisis, ignited a "war of images" between Iran and the U.S. that still continues. Hostilities between the U.S. and Iranian governments, and the antagonistic media coverage of Iran, have resulted in an image of Iran that conjures hate, terrorism, fanaticism, backwardness, lawlessness, and lack of respect for human life and freedom. In fact, the hostage crisis received more continuous TV coverage than any story in years. It suffices to say that the now popular ABC Nightline news program, anchored by Ted Koppel (initially by Frank Reynolds), was inaugurated on November 8, 1979, at 11:30 p.m., with the title "America Held Hostage" (Koppel & Gibson, 1996). Furthermore, Walter Cronkite of CBS began his evening news program, each day, counting the number of days (day 1, 2, 3 ... up to 444) that hostages were held in the U.S. Embassy in Tehran. Consequently, Iran became a "hot" story throughout the world, and the mass media became the only source of news and information about Iran, hostages, and the Revolution... Commenting about media coverage of the hostage crisis,

Warren Christopher (1985), wrote:

A more serious failing was the tendency to report events outside of any historical framework. At the outset of the crisis, the American people probably knew next to nothing about Iran and its history. While a better perspective on the cultural and political traditions of Iran would not have made the hostage seizure any more acceptable or justifiable, it might have made the episode more understandable and could have encouraged a calmer and more deliberate reaction. In particular, the hatred of the Iranians for the United States could be understood only against the background of gross and prolonged abuses by the Shah and the history of U.S. involvement with him, and this perspective too often was missing" (p. 27).

According to James Bill (1988), Americans did not have information to foresee the Revolution, nor did they have information to understand it. Rather than providing a context and explaining the history of American-Iranian relations, the media focused on sensationalism. Blindfolded hostages were shown on television repeatedly--in fact, this scene was incorporated into the opening collage of many television news programs in the United States. Images were essentially substituted for explanation and reasoning behind the unfolding events in Tehran. In fact, these images have been engraved in the psyche of those Americans who witnessed, mainly through television, that unfortunate event.

Consequently, Iran lost its exotic, faraway, fairy tale image for ever.

The War of Images:

In 1980, Iran and Ayatollah Khomeini received so much TV coverage that a Time columnist dubbed American television "Ayatollah Television" (Naficy, 1997, p. 30).

In concert with television, motion pictures, newspapers, magazines, talk shows, recorded music, jokes, bumper stickers, buttons, dart boards, T-shirts, and toilet paper all trivialized Iranians. As if by magic, Tehran's temperature, Iran's currency, and "Iran," in general, disappeared from the rosters of newspapers and telephone directories. Even the sticker on the Persian Melon was replaced to exclude the world "Persian!" The name Iran became a curse.

According to Hamid Naficy (1997), with the release of the hostages, the "hostage crisis" was transformed into a "hostage industry" (p. 81). Many of the ex-hostages became celebrities, writers, and speakers. The music industry released several anti-Iranian songs, including the relatively popular song, *They Can Take Their Oil and Shove it*.

Hollywood found a new nemesis. Some of its stereotypical and anti-Iranian movies, include: *Peacemaker* (1997) in which a character, apparently without any context, says "f...Iran." In the *The Hitman* (1991), several mobs join together to demolish an Iranian mob operating in Canada. The movie not only reinforces the stereotypical images of Iranians as unreliable, dangerous, cruel, fanatical, yet--as often is the case--makes no distinction



between Iran and other Middle Eastern countries. Belly dancing, an Arabic food, humus, and other cultural representations of the Middle East blend together to portray a region devoid of any diversity--there is no cultural distinction between Arabs and Iranians, Turks and Kurds, or Saudis and Egyptians. In fact, on Friday, May 9, 1997, CBS aired an episode of JAG in which several Hamas [a Palestinian group] terrorists took a Washington hospital under siege. They spoke in fluent "Farsi" (or Persian) not "Arabic."

Not Without My Daughter (1990), a highly controversial and damaging film, is based on the story of an Iranian physician--married to an American--who decides to take his wife and their small daughter to Iran for a visit. Once there, he decides to stay and refuses to permit his wife and daughter to leave Iran. According to Jane Campbell (1997), the film "... only serves to reinforce the media stereotype of Iranians as terrorists who, if not actively bombing public buildings or holding airline passengers hostage, are untrustworthy, irrational, cruel, and barbaric" (p. 180). Echoing Campbell's assertion, a New York Times (1991) movie critic writes,

Though "Not Without My Daughter" exploits the stereotype of the demonic Iranian, an idea with some political currency right now, it is not an exploitation film. It is, however, an utter artistic failure, and its reliance on cultural stereotypes is a major cause (pp. 13-14).

Knowing the highly negative impact of this film on its viewers and, obviously, in an attempt to humiliate and demoralize the Iranian soccer players and their supporters, a French television network aired *Not Without My Daughter* prior to the scheduled Iranian and American soccer competition at the 1998 World Cup.

Madhouse (1990), partially centering upon a wealthy

Iranian who is in the process of divorcing his American wife, is another damaging example. In one of the scenes, the wife, speaking to Ghadir (her Iranian husband) utters such insults as "you goddamn towel heads, sand rats" and so on. Other Hollywood movies that belittle and reinforce the stereotypical images of the Iranians, in a similar fashion, are: *The Naked Gun* (1988), *Under Siege* (1986), *Threads* (1984), *The Final Options* (1983), *Silver Bears* (1978), and many made-for-TV features and docudramas such as *On Wings of Eagles* (1986) and *Escape From Iran: The Canadian Caper* (1981).

Casualties of Image War:

Unfortunately, wars (whether fought by traditional weapons or modern weapons such as mass media) produce casualties. And in the contemporary war of images, the Iranians continue to suffer from a relentless attack from the U.S. politicians and the mass media. For instance, Iranian travelers are often singled out and searched at airports. Iranians face tough restrictions in obtaining visas to the United States either for touring, studying or visiting relatives. Discrimination against Iranians has increased in practically every sector of American society, including the U.S. Justice system. Strangely enough, in divorce cases involving marriages between Iranians and Americans, U.S. attorneys have often used Betty Mahmoudi's book, *Not Without My Daughter*, as "evidence" to prove that Iranian fathers are unreliable; hence, they should be denied any visitation rights with their own children. It is often believed that Iranian fathers may kidnap their children and take them to Iran—a backward, strange, and unruly country, as portrayed in books, newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and movies.

Other discriminatory and offensive incidents are recorded in the following paragraphs:

The *Inside Sports* (March 1998) magazine, in response to a reader who had asked whether the Iranian soccer team would defeat the U.S. soccer team at the World Cup, published the following comment: "Don't worry. From what I understand, Iran's guys can't run very fast with those heavy rifles, bazookas, and grenade launchers slung over their shoulders" (p. 78).

In spring 1997, a San Francisco Bay Area radio talk-show host makes a number of offensive remarks against Iranians shortly after a devastating earthquake in northeastern Iran. Reportedly, in an on-the-air conversation with radio listeners, she comments that not only would she not send a penny to help the earthquake victims, rather, if she had the means, she would bomb Iran off the surface of the earth.

According to Washington Institute for Near East Policy (1997), the U.S. government is to restrict visas to "students from terrorism-supporting states" such as Iran, Iraq, Libya, Sudan, and Syria who intend to study subjects "that could contribute to their countries' efforts to develop missiles and/or nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons." A

Democratic Senator from California, Dianne Feinstein, has said, "I have grave reservations regarding the practice of issuing visas to terrorist-supporting countries and the INS' [Immigration and Naturalization Service] inability to track those who come into the country either using a student visa or using fraudulent documents" (Abrams, 1998). Legitimate security concerns aside, such official statements or policy matters become discriminatory when they intentionally single out only a few countries in the world and imply that every student or citizen of those countries would be a potential terrorist. As a case in point, a *Washington Post* reporter, Thomas Lippman (1995), in an article titled "Bogus Bills?" writes: "Those darn Iranians, will they stop at nothing? Sponsoring terrorism, trying to get nuclear weapons, printing fake \$100 bills."

A Window of Opportunity:

Since the landslide victory of President Mohammad Khatami, in the 1997 Iranian elections, a window of opportunity has opened that may lead to a renewed and productive relationship between Iran and the United States. On January 7, 1998, in his address to the American people, via Cable News Network, President Khatami spoke knowledgeably and "admirably of American civilization, sprinkling his comments with respectful references to the Pilgrims and Abraham Lincoln" (*The New York Times*, 1998). In his interview with Christiane Amanpour of CNN, President Khatami remarked, "I have said earlier that I respect the great American people." He then continued to say that "The American civilization is worthy of respect. When we appreciate the roots of this civilization, its significance becomes even more apparent" (Transcript of interview..., 1998).

On January 30, 1998, Voice of America broadcast President Bill Clinton's annual message to the Moslems, in honor of Eid-e Fetr. In reference to Iran, he said:

To the people of Iran, I would like to say that the United States regrets the estrangement of our two nations. Iran is an important country with a rich and ancient cultural heritage of which Iranians are justifiably proud. We have real differences with some Iranian policies, but I believe these are not insurmountable. I hope that we have more exchange between our peoples and that the day will soon come when we can enjoy, once again, good relations (Clinton endorses...).

So, for the first time in nearly two decades of hostilities between Iran and the U.S., Presidents Clinton and Khatami have begun to exchange friendly remarks. Furthermore, in February 1998, an American wrestler participated in the Takhti Wrestling Cup contest in Tehran, and, in April 1998, an Iranian wrestling team participated in the World Wrestling Cup in Atlanta, Georgia. Ironically, according to *Newsweek* (Iran's soccer diplomacy, April 1998), "When American wrestlers competed in Tehran last February, they were treated like superstars... When the Iranian wrestlers came to America this month, they were detained,

photographed and fingerprinted as potential terrorists in the Chicago airport" (p. 43).

The next milestone in these renewed cultural exchanges took place when the Iranian and American soccer teams competed, quite admirably, at the 1998 World Cup in France, on June 21 in Lyon. As an American put it, "Certainly, ... better political and commercial relations can only lead to better social relations for Persians within the borders of both countries" (Walker, 1998). The key, of course, in building any successful relationship is "mutual respect."

Some Final Thoughts:

It is true that, historically speaking, no cultural group or nation has been spared from the abuses of scapegoating, stereotyping, or animosity at one time or another. But being aware of the consequences of such exploitation, should the mass media and politicians continue to stir up animosity, divisiveness, and hate? The answer, of course, should be a resounding "no."

As we march toward the millennium, it is clearly evident that we now possess an array of highly sophisticated communication and telecommunication technologies that span the entire globe and, indeed, can be used to engender such basic and vital human values as mutual respect, heightened awareness, cultural understanding, cooperation, and sensitivity toward our fellow human beings (Kamalipour, 1996). Unfortunately, as illustrated throughout human history, such noble actions do not take place without promoting, prodding, and active participation in socio-political processes.

For the purpose of this essay, I venture to alter the popular cliché "A silent minority" is a forgotten minority" to "A silent minority is often an abused minority." Hence, it is imperative that we, the Iranian community in diaspora, realize the serious implications of our prevailing stereotypical images in the U.S. and elsewhere as they impact upon our social and political relations within the U.S. and other nations. We live in a world of images--images that can sell as well as enhance and images that can conjure hate and despair.

Although there is no magic formula for creating a positive image for our community and culture, we can learn from the successes of other ethnic communities in the U.S., such as Hispanics, Jews, Blacks, Japanese, and others, to confront the media and politicians in a constructive and organized manner. In terms of politics, of course, our votes and voices count. In terms of media, our letters, telephone calls, emails, and faxes are bound to have an impact when we act in a logical, organized, and collective manner. The fact is that an "Iranian image," whether negative or positive, touches all Iranians regardless of their social, economic, or political orientation. Finally, in 1928, W. I. Thomas and D. S. Thomas said: "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences." That comment still valid. Today, public perception is largely based on

mass media's portrayals of a particular group, nation, religion, or race. Similarly, reality is simply what people perceive to be real--in fact, "reality" may be totally fictitious.

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Yahya R. Kamalipour (PhD, University of Missouri-Columbia) is professor of mass communications and director of graduate studies at the Department of Communication and Creative Arts, Purdue University Calumet, Hammond, Indiana, USA. His published books are: *The U.S. Media and the Middle East: Image and Perception* (Received the 1996 Distinguished Scholarship Award from National Communication Association); *Mass Media in the Middle East: A Comprehensive Handbook* (with H. Mowlana); *Images of the U.S. Around the World: A Multicultural Perspective: Cultural Diversity and the U.S. Media* (with T. Carilli). His forthcoming book, *Religion, Law, and Freedom: A Global Perspective* (with J. Thierstein), is scheduled for publication by Greenwood Press in spring 1999. Kamalipour's articles on media effects, broadcast education, image and perception, and international communication have appeared in academic and popular press in the United States and abroad.



Truth About The Three Iranian Islands of The Persian Gulf

by: A. Pouya

The dispute between Iran and the United Arab Emirates over the ownership of the islands of Great Tonb, Lesser Tonb and Abu Musa has a lengthy historical background. Long before the United Arab Emirates came into existence the same dispute opposed Iran to England, which by

virtue of her forceful domination over the Persian Gulf had occupied those islands and turned them over to her protectorates; the Sheikdoms of Sharjah and Ras Al Khaima, at the beginning of this century. Therefore, the dispute has some legal and historical-diplomatic dimensions that

must be considered in the light of British colonialism's anti-Iran policy as well as the current strained relations between Iran and its antagonists in the Middle East and the West.

In the actual dispute over these three small islands, one side is a country which has been formed more than two thousand five hundred years ago and the other side an entity which is barely a quarter of a century old. In Iranian view, Tonb islands and Abu Musa belong to Iran by her longstanding historical title to it. Iran exerted sovereignty over the Tonbs and Abu Musa until the Arab invasion of Iran in A.D. 623. It took more than two centuries until Iranians could again form their own ruling dynasties in different parts of their country and act independently from Arabs. It was

in A.D. 945 that the Buid dynasty extended the Iranian rule to the Persian Gulf and Oman and captured the islands in question as well. In 1507 the Iranian control over the islands was loosened temporarily due to the Portuguese domination on a part of the waterway. The Portuguese were finally ousted from the entire region in 1622 and the Iranian sovereignty was restored. By this time, however Great Britain became increasingly involved in regular shipping and trade in the Persian Gulf and began to develop political and strategic interests in the area. Later, as a result of the consolidation of British dominance in India and parallel rise of Britain's commercial interests in Persia and Mesopotamia, the control of the security of the Persian Gulf proved all the more essential to imperial British interests against the Russian threat from the north and French influence from occupied Egypt.

One of the significant consequences of the British involvement in the Persian Gulf was the signature of a treaty in 1820 with the Arab tribes of the southern coasts of the waterway that provided for the cessation of acts of piracy and plunder. It was after this event that the southern shores of the Gulf were baptized as Trucial Coasts in lieu of the Pirate Coasts. One of the primary goals followed by the British from the very beginning of their involvement in the Persian Gulf was weakening Iran, through encroachment on the waters, islands and coasts, historically belonging to the Persian Empire. The best way they found for implementing this design was to take the Arab Sheikhs under their wings and encourage them to place claims on a number of Iranian possessions in the Persian Gulf. It was in compliance with this policy that the Sheikh of Sharjah beginning 1864 claimed the ownership of Abu Musa and his example was followed by the Sheikh of Ras Al Khaimah some years later, by claiming the islands of Tonbs. It is interesting to know that over a long portion of the nineteenth century, in all the surveys, prepared by the British agents regarding the Iranian coasts,

Abu Musa and Tonb islands are depicted as Iranian possessions. Even in all the maps published in England until as late as 1891, those three islands are depicted as Iranian.

In view of the foregoing evidence, Tonbs and Abu Musa are unmistakably Iranian islands, yet in 1903 and 1904 the British government encouraged the Sheikhs of Sharjah and Ras Al Khaimah to hoist their flags on those Islands and when Iran reacted to that illegal move and removed those flags, the British government by resorting to threats and ruse, forced Iran to end its physical presence in the said islands. During the period between 1904 and 1971 Iran incessantly and repeatedly protested the illegal occupation of her Islands by those Sheikdoms on behalf of England. However the British whose dominance in the region was challenged by Russians, Germans and French were fearful that Iran may fall under influence of those powers and endanger their absolute supremacy in the Persian Gulf. Moved by such concerns, even when those Sheikdoms were inclined to relinquish their hold on the islands, the British government prohibited them to do so. For example in 1934 the Sheikh of Ras Al Khaimah decided to surrender the possession of Tonbs islands to Iran, but the British intervened and blocked the move.

The three Iranian islands remained under foreign occupation until 1971, when England withdrew her forces from the Persian Gulf. The decision concerning this move had been taken by the Labor government of Harold Wilson in January 1968. Britain had two objectives in the Persian Gulf as its withdrawal from the region drew nearer; first to unite the seven Trucial Sheikdoms to form the UAE; and second to create the independent states of Bahrain and Qatar. Iran asserted that the islands of Abu Musa and the Great Tonb and Lesser Tonb were its historical property, forcefully seized by Bahrain in the past. The British authorities were well aware that after the departure of their forces from the region Iran is well positioned to restore the three islands as well as

Bahrain to its sovereignty. Thus between 1968 and 1971 they adroitly negotiated a package deal with the Shah's regime and as the outcome of those negotiations: a) Iran relinquished its claim on Bahrain and recognized it as a sovereign state; b) Tehran assented to and recognized the creation of UAE; c) Iran repossessed the Tonb Islands but as far as Abu Musa was concerned, Iran and Britain with the consent of Sharjah, reached an understanding according to which the island was going to be placed under the joint administration of Iran and Sharjah. The area of interest of each partner was defined by this agreement, Iran undertaking the charge of the island's defense and security.

Soon after this agreement was reached the Iranian troops landed on the Tonb islands which, as mentioned before, had been palced by the British government under the control of Ras Al Khaimah. On Abu Musa, the Iranian troops were greeted by the deputy ruler of Sharjah and took position in a garrison on the northern side of the Island. After the accomplishment of these operations, the Iranian government recognized the independence of Bahrain, and also that of the UAE and Qatar which just had emerged as independent states. In the words of the British negotiator at the time, Sir William Luce, Iran and Britain at last had "sorted out their differences over the islands."

Except for some negative reactions from Iraq, repossession of the three islands by Iran steered no other objections in the Arab world and the newly independent UAE did not seem at all to be unhappy about the deal. From November 3, 1971, the date of the signature of the Anglo-Iranian agreement on the islands, up to the middle of April 1992, when the Tehran authorities took some foolish and unnecessary steps in the Abu Musa Island, providing pretext to the UAE to claim the ownership of the three islands together, not even a single word of complaint had been heard from the Emirates or any other Arab Countries about the presence of Iran on the three islands, and this in

Three Iranian Islands

spite the 1979 revolution and coming to power of an fundamentalist Islamic government in Iran. In April 1992 the authorities in Tehran, without any apparent justification, decided to expell all the foreign national, working for the UAE in the Abu-Musa island. Later they added insult to injury by not allowing a ship that was transporting about a hundred passengers from the UAE to the island, to disembark its passengers. This action provoked some vehement protests from the UAE and the Tehran authorities, who realizing that a bad mistake had been made, showed willingness to resolve the problem through negotiation and immediately sent a delegation to this end to Abu Dhabi. But at this time other factors, foreign to the dispute, mainly the tension between Iran and U.S., entered the scene and prevented a rapid settlement of the crisis according to the 1971 agreement. One should not forget that after the 1991 war in the Persian Gulf and the Iraqi defeat, the emirates of the region, frightened by the Kuwait's experience precipitated, one after another, to put themselves under the U.S. protection, providing thus tremendous clout and influence for the United States in the entire region. There exists a number of indications, showing that if it was for the UAE itself to decide, the dispute had been resolved long before. But it seems that in Washington the policy makers suddenly realized that the dispute over the islands can be used to create constant troubles for the Islamic regime of Iran in its relations with the neighboring Arab countries, and therefore should be kept alive. The Iranian delegation, sent in 1992 to Abu Dhabi had been given only authority to settle the dispute over Abu-Musa according to the 1971 agreement but when the negotiations started, the UAE unexpectedly raised the question of sovereignty over the Tonb islands too and caused the sudden disrupture of the talks. Since that time, Tehran has repeatedly declared its readiness to settle the dispute through bilateral negotiations with the UAE but the latter, by

renewing its claims on all the three islands and by asking the submission of the dispute to the arbitration of the International Court of Justice, has been steadily shunning any bilateral negotiations. Meanwile, the Gulf Cooperation Council, composed of the U.A.E. and five other Arab states of the Persian Gulf, along with the Arab league, in almost every gathering have backed the unfounded UAE's claims on the islands, creating thus an atmosphere of tension and crisis in the region. There is no need to repeat that the Arab governments' claim that the islands were Arab islands, belonging to the UAE, does not stand close scrutiny. Iran by far is the oldest state in the Persian Gulf and its historical claim over the islands long predates any other state's.

The UAE recently has been sending some mixed signals on her intention about the relations with Iran and the existing dispute between the two countries. On one hand in the wake of Mr. Khatami's election she declared her willingness to settle the dispute through bilateral negotiations and even recommended the United States government to establish improved relations with Iran. On the other hand renewed her claim on the islands by sending a letter to the U.N. Secretary General, protesting to Iran's different activities in the islands as a violation of her so-called sovereignty over the said islands. This is a clear evidence of lack of maturity, independence, and resolution on behalf of the UAE's rulers.

It is an undeniable historical fact that the three islands of Tonb and Abu Musa are the integral parts of Iran. They are Iranian lands under the same title as are Tehran, Shiraz, Isfahan and Neishapour. As a matter of principle for us, the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iran comes above any other consideration and under no conditions, circumstances and pretext that we would approve even the slightest encroachment on sovereignty and territorial integrity. We are of opinion that any support given by any Iranian individual or group to the unfounded claims of

others on our national territories, for the purpose of weakening the clerical regime in place, is a terrible mistake and tentamounts to betraying our people and our country. We also believe that it is not a good idea for the United States or any other power to provide support, even implicitly, to any territorial claims laid on Iran, in the hope of undermining the ruling of the Islamic regime. Such a policy is counterproductive and will ultimately lead to results, totally opposite to the purpose it is designed for. The reason is quite simpic. As soon as the people of Iran feel that their territorial integrity is threatened by foreign forces, they would forcefully rally behind any government, determined to defend the country, be it the clerical government, which presently has monopolized the power in Iran. Thus not only the regime would not be hurt by similar policies, but would be greatly helped to portray itself as the sole defender of Iran's dignity, independence and territorial integrity. This would provide the regime with an excellent means of propaganda and self-justification, probably enabling it to extend its authoritarian rule for some more years, at the expense of the supressed and deprived people of Iran.

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An Interview With

RAMIN NIAMI

by: H. Nia & K. Navi

In appearance he could not have been further from what we expected. After buzzing his apartment and hearing his voice we were sure we were going to meet a short, medium built man, just shy of mid life (of course mid-life today is whatever). Though we had this preconceived notion, the minute he walked into his favorite cafe, we knew it was he and none of my description fit. We extended formal salutations and my anxieties over the interview melted away. We were now just there with Ramin Niami and in his world of

creativity.

Mr. Niami's latest project, *Somewhere in the City*, made its international debut on September 18, in New York City. Persian Heritage was honored to be invited to the events of the evening and more honored to have the opportunity to have met Mr. Niami, through this interview.

Ramin now is a resident of New York with his Australian attorney wife Karen Lobson, who is also his co-producer on this project. Though a U.S. resident, one can tell by his words that he is a product of his

Persian heritage. The soil of Iran remains a part of his soul.

ON EDUCATION...

After my primary education I went to London, to study film. When the revolution in Iran started I returned to Iran and remained there until the borders were open in 1983. In 1985 I moved to the U.S. and continued to make it my home.

Who and what was your biggest inspiration?

I always loved the cinema. As a child I can remember both my mother and grandmother taking me to the theater. My mother was and continues to be a fan of the movies. Still we continue to go together. But, I believe my biggest inspiration to be my uncle F. Farzaneh. He was a film director in Paris.

Can you remember the first film you saw?

No, not really, I was so young. I think it was a western. My father was

in the oil business and belonged to a club that showed movies. In the early part of the day it was geared for the young and later for adults: children were prohibited. Naturally the prohibition sparked my curiosity. More than once I was caught sneaking into the evening movies.

How did your family react to your decision to pursue a career in the arts?

Of course they were apprehensive and concerned, but were also very supportive. They wanted me and my brother and sister to be good at something and if this was my choice, then so be it. I think that their support was also grounded on the fact that my uncle was a director and my mother in fashion; she studied with Jean Patou in Paris. So they knew that creativity ran in the family.

Initially you were involved with documentaries, why?

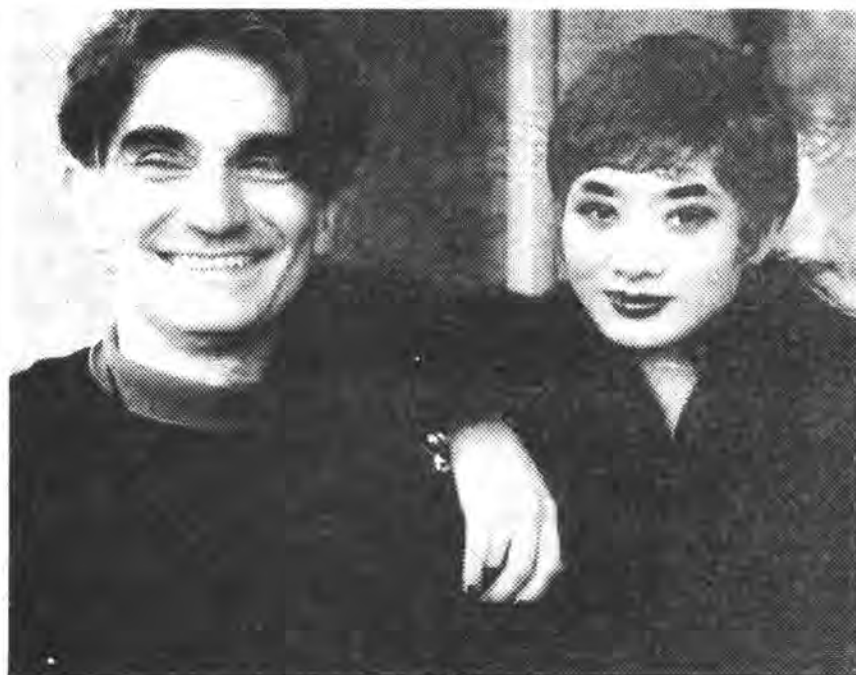
It takes money to make movies. In London grants and other financial support are available for documentaries. It is also a wonderful way to learn film making, I therefore recommend making a documentary to anyone pursuing a career in film.

What was your first documentary?

Right after film school I made Michael, a documentary that dealt with the miners in Wales and the relationship between a father and son. The film was picked by the British Film Institute and shown at most major film festivals. It really opened the door for me.

Why do you think the States are less committed to documentaries? It seems they are shown primarily on the Public Broadcasting Systems rather than on major networks.

Primarily money. Documentaries do not draw a large audience and therefore do not attract sponsors. Without sponsors (i.e. commercials) it is almost impossible to put it together. In fact a friend of mine once said that here in the States it is the program that interrupts the commercial rather than the commercial interrupting the



program. In Europe, T.V. is much more dedicated to information. Therefore documentaries are in demand by the viewers and therefore easier to get financial assistance.

It seems also that Americans do not for the most part enjoy documentaries. Do you agree?

To some extent. Americans look for immediate, rather than long term gratification from entertainment. Documentaries, like classical music, on the other hand, are art forms that you must learn to understand to enjoy. You have to train the viewer. Once you understand them you fall in love with them. Their message is usually long lasting, much like that of a classic film. And what I mean by that is that if someone asks about the subject matter of a sitcom you watched last week (that does not include classic American comedy) most people will not remember. They will remember the message and subject matter of a classic film.

Your documentaries seem to have a central theme, social problems. What initiated this type of subject matter?

Nothing up close and personal, except a deep commitment and interest for those who are different. I mean different to the majority.

Tell us about your documentary "Warrior, the Life of Leonard Peltier?"

I think it was my most important. It was produced with an ex student of mine and dealt with the plight of the American Indian. Leonard Peltier was the leader of the American Indian movement. He became a political prisoner after he was accused of causing the death of two FBI agents. The documentary dealt with these false accusations and the disgrace of the trial. This documentary led to my making the first American Indian music video, with a band called Pura Fe. It was used in a public announcement and ended being a financial success for the American Indian movement.

Why the interest in the American Indian?

Like I stated earlier I have always been interested in race relations and people who don't fit the standard mold.

Another of your documentaries is, In Hiding.

In Hiding, discusses addiction and alcoholism. I made it just after the revolution. It was perfect since there was a ban on alcohol. Because of the ban, people were distilling their own alcohol. Most did not know what they



were doing and ended up dying or going blind.

Does a documentary film make a truthful presentation of the facts or does it reflect the feelings of its maker?

In a perfect situation a documentary should not reflect an opinion. The decision to agree with the subject matter presented should be left up to the viewer. Once, however, you have a camera in your hand you have a power and somewhere your opinion will surface. How strongly it comes through depends on your control; you make the choice about whom and what you are and what you want to say. For instance, if I want to make a documentary about the wealth in New York I can show it from the Park Ave perspective or the East Side. Which is true?

But if you have the power through the control of the camera, aren't you more like the news, presenting a biased version of the facts?

The news is often biased because it is controlled by a corporation and will reflect that corporation's political persuasion or position. Documentaries, however, often normally do not have corporate sponsorship. If the documentary presents a subject matter opposite to those who seek financial support from, it will not be picked up. That leaves you with a decision to continue with the documentary trading personal satisfaction for financial gratification.

On the subject of truth, how do you compare the American made

documentary to that of Europe and the rest of the world?

As I stated earlier documentaries outside the States are in demand and easier to make. Accordingly, some of the best documentaries I have seen have been American productions; they are truly a labor of love.

What are your views on censorship in film making?

Censorship can have two effects. It can make your project easier or more difficult. It is all on in the way you look. In Iran your parameters are clear; films exposing women and showing criteria, funding for the film will be easy. Censorship in the States is not based on the subject matter, but rather on financial hurdles. If investors think they will get a return on their investments, they will not finance it. So it is money and not political views that is the death knoll to the documentary in the States.

On the subject of the Iranian Cultural Revolution. Most outsiders see this revolution as a negative, is there a positive side?

In the history of any country you will see it has ups and downs. For Iran the revolution reflected a period of instability in the government, a government some wanted to overthrow. Was it right or wrong? Again it is all in your perception. Many died during this period. Some viewed their deaths as assassinations, others as executions. But, whenever you have such strong political turmoil, a revolution will usually result. Of course a counter revolution will follow. All revolutions bring change. I

am not a supporter of violence, but do support change. During this turmoil you will usually see a cut in the creative budget. This is a dichotomy, since the creativeness that occurs during and after this time is usually the best.

On immigration?

I see myself as misplaced. I am not living in the country of my roots. It was my choice to leave. I needed to pursue the expectations I had from myself in the world of films. It is the pursuit of a better life, versus political reasons that people leave their homes, rather on an international or domestic level. People must understand that departure from their home does not automatically cut your emotional ties. So while it is our decision to leave, we have also suffered a great deal, leaving home is difficult.

So your move from Iran was difficult?

Leaving your roots, family and friends was very difficult. But it was a little easier for me, because I had to some extent already been introduced to the west. I constantly and still love to read about other cultures and those individuals who are different from the majority.

Let's talk about your latest project, Somewhere in the City. It seems to be a musical, drama — comedy rolled into one.

Yes. Music is a very important part of the film. I wanted the music to speak outside of the film. Each song reflects the theme of the movie that takes place in the East Village, New

York. In that community it is not unusual to walk down the street and hear ten different types of ethnic playing.

The film is based on Maxim Gorkey's classic, *In the Lower Depth*. Tell us about your connection with Gorkey.

I was introduced to his work as a young man in Iran. He was censored because he was alleged to be a communist. Of course this taboo increased my curiosity to read him. When I heard that a student group was arrested for performing *The Lower Depths*, I knew I had to read it. Years later while producing films in New York, I decided to do something that would take me away from the maddening world of making movies. I decided to direct a play. I remembered *The Lower Depths* and read it again. Eventually it became *Somewhere in the City*.

The comedy aspects?

It is a black comedy, the humor is necessary to ease the tragedy of the players lives; the pain from loneliness and poverty.

The drama?

This comes in the realness of the relationship of the players, individuals who despite their situations and persuasion still enjoy life.

The documentary?

Is seen in the environment? It was filmed on the East Side. I wanted to depict a genuine neighborhood.

And the audience reaction to all of this?

Fortunately, they have been reacting to it in a positive way. They are feeling and reacting to the various emotions and especially laughing.

Are the characters in the film representative of your life?

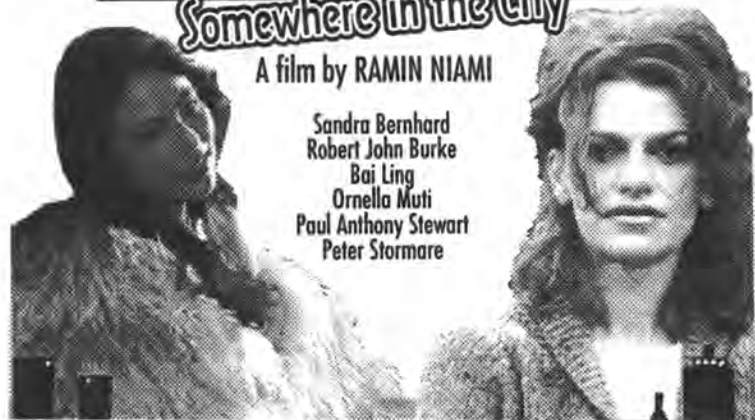
There is much personal influence, but they do not depict any one individual.

Was this film a difficult project, putting together the producer,

Somewhere in the City

A film by RAMIN NIAMI

Sandra Bernhard
Robert John Burke
Bai Ling
Ornella Muti
Paul Anthony Stewart
Peter Stormare



costume designer etc.?

The hardest thing about any film is raising the money for production. We were fortunate to end with twenty-five investors. So in many it was a horrible experience. I went through an enormous amount of humiliation. It seems people with wealth can sometimes enjoy making you feel small when you are desperate for money.

On his collaborator Patrick Dillon.

Years ago someone suggested I read a script written by Mr. Dillon. It was a Romeo and Juliet type script but took place in Northern Ireland. It was a wonderful piece and Patrick is a wonderful man. He is an ex vet and has worked with the United Nations. His pictures are much darker than mine but he has a great sense of humor. Therefore, the collaboration was a success.

On Iran... What is your favorite memory of Iran?

For sure the people's great sense of family and friends. In America, at least in New York, people are more individual and as a result are more lonely. And of course I remember the food and love the literature.

As a stranger to you if I said something negative to you about Iran, how would you react?

If you have a wrong misconception, I would try to educate you on the subject about why and where you are wrong. If I were unsuccessful. I would attack back.

Why do you think so many Americans have a misconception of Iran and Iranians?

Politics. When the U.S. was friendly with the Shah, Iran was great. When relations broke down Iranians and Iran became not so great. Another reason is the media. We all know how powerful it is. For example, right before the war with Kuwait, television fueled the American population. Every night, before the attack, we heard about how bad Hussain was. Then suddenly they made him a criminal, when we knew he had always been a criminal. Support, however, was needed for the war and that was the way to achieve it and it worked. I believe that people, for the most part, are affected by what they see, read and hear. Unfortunately they accept it as truth; no further research is made.

How can this be changed?

By constantly trying to find ways to show the other side. The works of Rostami and Makhmalbaf are examples of films that show the human side of Iranians. More of these movies are needed to combat movies like, *Not Without My Daughter*, which shows a gross generalization.

Unlike *Not Without My Daughter*, the films of Rostami and Makhmalbaf are not shown nationwide, but rather in areas, where people are more diversified and enjoy foreign films.

Yes, this is correct. It is also one of the reasons it was important for me to make a film in which people saw me as an Iranian American film maker,

Ramin Niami

making an American film, rather than another Iranian film maker, making an Iranian film. It is a way for me to get those other movies out to the other audiences you speak of.

If you return to Iran how would you describe your experience in the States?

Tough, but a lot of fun.

Tough in what way?

It is a hard life living in New York. There are no safety nets. If you lose your job you can become homeless so easy. In Iran you have friends and family to catch you. Iranians are more tribal.

Do you think this is more true on the bicoastal areas of the U.S. rather than Middle America?

I can only judge from the area where I live, New York City. Please don't get me wrong, we socialize here, but not to the extent that you do in Iran. But though life has been tough in the U.S., it has also been very exciting. The freedom one has to express oneself is so wonderful.

Do you believe that the freedom of expression is somewhat guarded here?

Yes, but not as a film maker. In our documentary about Peltiere, we met some opposition but nothing that would force us to stop the project.

I want to thank you for allowing us to know you a little better. Your talents, I am sure will continue to be given national recognition. In closing I ask if you have a final thought that you would like to leave with our readers?

Any project that you take on in life must be thought of as a labor of love. With my film there were so many obstacles to overcome, but despite that I continued. I believed in what I was doing and know that it will affect something and somebody. Nothing is impossible, just do it.

And I do hope that you will encourage your readers to see the movie. And I thank you for allowing me to be heard.

PH

YOUR PERSIAN HERITAGE



DARIUS KING OF PERSIA

"I am Persian. Together with the persians, I conquered Egypt. I had this canal dug from the river (Nile) which flows in Egypt to the sea by which one goes to Persia. This canal was dug, as I had ordered."

by: Nasser Ovissi

DID YOU KNOW

Persian Rice gets a headline in the *New York Times*

A mouth watering of Persian rice covers a half page of the *New York Times Magazine* September 27, 1998. Molly O'Neil's food article "The Upper Crust". Her helpful hint to success establishes a fundamental compatibility between the crust and what it coats. The coating must be able to toast without burning, in the time it takes for the food beneath to warm.

ACHIEVEMENTS:

Governor Pete Wilson of California announced the following appointments:

Navid Shariatian, 29, of Los Angeles to the State Board of Accountancy. Mr. Shariatian is associated with the law firm of Kehr Cock: Fox, where he practices corporate: transactional law. He is currently the President of the Iranian American Republican Council of Los Angeles and previously vice president and operational manager for Mark VII Enterprises, Inc.

2) Mr. Bijan Kian to the Board of Directors of State of California Housing Finance Agency. This is the fourth time Governor Wilson has commissioned Mr. Kian to serve in his administration: first as his Commissioner of Economic Development for the State of California in 1994, reappointed in 1995, then appointed as the Director of the State of California Office of Foreign Investment.

3) Mr. Reza Karkia to the California Council on Criminal Justice. Mr. Karkia has served as the Executive Director, University Advancement at California State University, Dominguez Hills since 1994. He is also the past president of the Iranian American Republican Council of Orange County.

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